

Book Reviews

***Uncursing the Dark: Treasures from the Underworld* by Betty De Shong Meador, United States of America, Chiron Publications, 1994, pp. 166, \$15.95, ISBN 0-933029-65-9.**

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The work under review has received much acclaim as it is an attempt to give expression to the archetype of the feminine. The essays in this book bear the recordable evidence of being written over a period of twenty-years and each one in its own way subscribes to the archetypal psychology. The author of the text being a Jungian analyst defines archetypes as innate potential patterns which like a constellation gets into a person's psyche forming a recognizable pattern and powerfully shape that person's way of being and perceiving the world. The archetypes are connected to human instinct and are inborn potential patterns just as is instinct. The way instincts draw our attention and shape our behaviour similarly archetype is the expression of instinct by which we comprehend meaning "through the emotions that the instinctual drive mobilises and fantasies that instinct triggers." As per Jung the archetype, "might suitably be described as the instinct's perception of itself or as the self-portrait of the instinct." The author of the text very well explains this drawing the example of a little girl in her own femaleness who might very well see the woman, not the man, in the moon. Similarly, she also states that not every little girl is caught in the web called the archetype of feminine but this pattern of femaleness might very well dominate the way she approaches the world.

Coming to the first section of the book, the essays entitled 'A Blessingway Revisited,' contains the writer's understanding of the Navajo religion as it positions itself to be a religion based on feminine principles, "matter incarnate with divine substance." The writer here talks about her experience of visiting the Navajo civilisation - "a sparsely settled clan of stark red buttes." The Navajo somewhere carved a niche in the writer's heart as from that time onwards she developed 'a compelling attraction' which she hardly understood. Though she knew nothing of the language, little about their myths or religion, and yet was drawn towards Navajo's lifestyle: "women corralling sheep or cooking fry bread or spinning and weaving; a Navajo couple on the seat of a horse-drawn wagon, silently enduring the slow, even pace of their ride". Somewhere the writer felt that the most striking thing about the civilisation was their dependency on nature and its forces and whose centre head is none other than a female god 'Changing woman'.

The belief which encouraged the development of the essays in the second section is the female imagination, an imagination which evolved out of the biological experience

of being a woman- a part of her psyche. The point which the author of the text wants to make is to help confront the females their repressed selves; as she says "repressed in the dark of the conscious, superseded by the predominant masculine imagination which has created and ordered Euro-American culture, those expressions require an active search on the part of the individual woman." As for the author the main reason behind this could be her growing up in a male-imagined culture where her sex, her point of view is neglected and to safeguard herself she adapts to the masculine culture. Through the myth of "Inanna's Descent to the Underworld" and Doris Lessing's *Apocalyptic Vision*" she tries to prove that the first step a woman has to take towards the retrieval of the female imagination is to throw away the robes of cultural imperatives which imposed restrictions over her self. "Stripping bare the trappings her culture has imposed over her natural self" is a task next to impossible but Inanna could do it because she is a goddess and Doris Lessing's heroine too as she lives in her imaginary homeland. The author makes a harmless endeavour to sensitize, create awareness and provide motivation to all the women by setting forth the examples of such descent. Lessing's novel present an account of the process on individuation because for a woman to find her individuality it is necessary to destroy the patriarchal constraint embedded in her psychology.

In section three the author talks about a woman's journey to her psychological development. Here, the woman who meets the goddess comes in contact with her self, "the archetypal design which carries the essential pattern and meaning of her life." When she meets the goddess she encounters herself, this design which forms the matrix of the essential pattern and meaning of her life. Being stripped off the cultural imperatives a woman receives the true gift of individuality. She submits essentially and instinctually to femaleness as the goddess infuses in her a fierce, primordial love of femaleness with the capability to use all her female powers. The next essay on the wounded girl child is a tale of a therapist who discovers herself getting sexually attracted to her women clients. Through the essay the author explores blossoming of the seeds of love of the feminine that the wounded girl child bears and this she does with the help of a fairy tale. The tale is told from the analyst's standpoint but it could be taken into consideration by any other woman. The tale is about two women who are into an intimate relationship. Here, one is a helper and the other comes to seek help on certain problems in her life. The tale also tends to provide a healing touch to the archetype of the feminine self and bears the evidence of the hazards passion carries when the feminine psyche is disturbed. In order to relate to this archetype, the author made a study of the goddess Inanna, the more powerful among the Sumerian goddesses. The poems about Inanna were written around 2500 BCE, but it is believed to be composed at least 1000 years earlier. She carries the remnants of being repressed by patriarchy. In the myth, Inanna descends to the Underworld to meet her older sister, Ereshkigal who reigns there. Inanna, instead of belonging to a highly cultivated, civilised culture seeks resort from her sister, "the initiation of the deep and dark primal chthonic powers" where she insists a divesting of her power, death, decay and resurrection.

Section four deals with goddess Inanna's meeting with Ereshkigal and rotting of her flesh on a peg within the purview of Ereshkigal. Here, on one hand one god dies and another gives birth to a new life. The essay on Thesmophoria describes a ritual where women's menstrual bleeding becomes the focus, a metaphorical lesson in the meaning of descent. By enacting the Thesmophoria the women were holding a psychological content, wisdom, an acknowledgement required to continue life as it is. In this ritual a woman gave over her everything to the sovereign process that keeps life going. This sovereign is none other than a snake. In the descent myth, Ereshkigal is the snake. Considering both the rituals, one of Inanna's descent and the Thesmophoria, they bring up from the darkness of the Underworld the most important element related to matter, without which spirit would not exist. The wheel of fortune may turn any time against an individual dragging that person to his/her downfall. It can be due to any reason- by a turn of faith, by limitation, by illness, death and natural disasters. So, it was believed that these ancient women guarded faith by performing such rituals. The mystery that envelopes this ritual of Thesmophoria tells us that women's creativity comes from below. In order to receive such gifts women must go down. In the noble encounter her beliefs will be shaken and she will return enlarged, expanded. The outcome of such encounter will be her return with gifts of understanding and on her lips will be a song of praise:

*Holy Ereshkigal
Sweet is your praise
Holy Ereshkigal
Sweet is your praise.*

In the concluding section, 'Beyond the Underworld', we find those women who have survived the ordeal of the Underworld and have returned from the darkness to their normal life. The two essays, one "Uncursing the Dark" and the other "Forward into the Past," revolve around the process of detaching loyalty to the fathers in order to restore feminine roots. The former focuses on the historical change from a religion based on the supremacy of nature to a religion based on the spirit entirely different from nature. The second essay builds step by step the long stream of ancestors who attempt to reach back to the Palaeolithic age where they worship none other than a goddess. Interwoven in the essays are certain examples of women catering to all stages. These women are bound by the compelling force of inner images from 'dreams or visions or fertile imaginations' and are capable to follow that path which is entitled the unconscious psyche. On the way they tumble altogether to a new matrix, the archetypal feminine.

In short, this book is an invitation by the author to reorient the attitude towards descent myths and thereby the shadows of life required in order to 'uncurse the dark.' It shows how the recovery of tradition unfolds hidden powers and how the past revisited in search of wholeness can empower.