

## **A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF THE SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF CAULDRONS**

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### Abstract:

Mythology is very subtle in a way as a discipline. Slightly it might look just merely just as the collection of several stories; however, it is just the extracted version of the latent of our existence. It even makes sense in this socio-cultural milieu, it becomes truly true by explaining, reasoning and functioning everything is entwined with the life- creation, rituals, culture, spirituality, destruction through natural calamities and so on. This is a chapter which consists of the general introduction cauldron. It talks about the meaning and diverse exhibition of a cauldron across the culture. It intends to pave way for a more detailed analysis of the cauldron, its purposes and symbolic significance in different cultures with reference to their respective mythology in the following chapters and ultimately allows to arrive at the hypothesis of this research. The cauldron as mentioned earlier is often associated with the womb because it is meant to carry something. If one goes a step ahead, the same carrier vessel can be thought of as a significant symbol of creation itself. A study of many mythological stories is necessary to establish this argument. The Celtic mythology specifically abounds in stories relating to cauldrons of regeneration. In the Celtic legendary Bran the Blessed, the cauldron appears as a vessel of wisdom and immortality (rebirth). The cauldron can restore back their life from the corpse of dead warriors placed inside it. The five chapters of this dissertation have been successful in realizing its hypothesis. Having located cauldrons across mythology and identifying them as symbols characteristic of certain common aspects, this project proves how the cauldron may be considered as a potential archetypal symbol.

Keywords: Mythology, discipline, socio-cultural, wisdom,.etc

### Synopsis:

Mythology is very subtle in a way as a discipline. Slightly it might look just merely just as the collection of several stories; however, it is just the extracted version of the latent of our existence. It even makes sense in this socio-cultural milieu, it becomes truly true by explaining, reasoning and functioning everything is entwined with the life- creation, rituals, culture, spirituality, destruction through natural calamities and so on. The myth itself carries an inherited quality of an in detailed and explicit meaning while provoking the multifold at a deeper level.

The cauldron, an image or may be an object pre-existing, appears in mythology, is no assumption and exception to the aforesaid notion. It has several illustrations in society across the globe and serves its purpose of showing and cultivating the different times and realms. Yet, fascinatingly it has never been specified to a critical inquiry to understand the scope of its vibrancy in the region of Mythology.

The reason behind this project, in essence, is to study cauldrons from the world of Mythology in different forms and dive deeper into its understanding the reasons for the repetitive and normal appearance in them, The project, subsequently, asks to analyze the allusive property of a cauldron and conclude that it is a perspective of exemplar of archetypal symbol.

### Hypothesis Statement:

The theorem of this project can be briefly stated as follows:

- These Cauldrons are handily accessible in World Mythology in various forms. Hence an overlapping study of the same is realistic and relevant.
- Cauldron has significance in Mythology as symbols with varying purpose across cultures.
- Cauldrons represent the symbolic representations of the various myths and concern to the cycle of life and not passive objects figuring in them.
- The cauldron is an intended archetypal symbol in Mythology

### Chapter 1. Cauldron: An Introduction:

This is a chapter which consists of the general introduction cauldron. It talks about the meaning and diverse exhibition of a cauldron across the culture. It intends to pave way for a more detailed analysis of the cauldron, its purposes and symbolic significance in different cultures with reference to their respective mythology in the following chapters and ultimately

allows to arrive at the hypothesis of this research.

The origin of the word cauldron can be traced back to the thirteenth century Middle English. As per T. F. Hoad's *English derivation*, it is a loan word adapted to the cauldron in English from Old Northern French or Anglo-Norman Caudron (Norman-Picard Caudron, French Caudron).



Fig. 1a



Fig.1b

Cauldron today is understood as a magical vessel more than a cooking vessel owing to the popularity it has gained in association with witchcraft. (fig. 1c)



Fig. 1c

According to *The Element Encyclopedia Of Witchcraft* by J. Iles, in some forms of Wicca that incorporate aspects of Celtic mythology, the cauldron is associated with the goddess Cerridwen and is used to burn loose incense on a disc of charcoal to make black salt (mostly used in banishing any rituals) and herbs for mixing or rather to burn petitions (paper with wishes written on it and filled with power). Besides this, a cauldron is said to symbolize not only the Goddess but also represents the womb (due to the fact that it holds something) and on an altar, it constitutes earth because it is a programming tool. In New, Age Cauldrons are sold very often or "metaphysical" reserves and also may contain various symbols of powers carved on them. Various mythological stories contribute to establishing this aspect of significance accredited to the cauldron in the western culture.

Cauldron in India is known by the name kamandala and it has a variant form in a kalasha. Kamandalu (in Sanskrit) or kamandal or kamandalam, as stated in *Adi Shankaracharya's ashtotaram*, is an oblong water pot made of a dry gourd (pumpkin) or coconut shell, metal, wood from the Kamandalataru tree, or maybe clay, mostly with a handle and often with a sprout. (fig. 2a. &2b)



Fig. 2.a



Fig. 2b

Ancient Hindu ascetics or yogis often use it as their water storage for drinking. Kamandalu is the name of water-filled, and it is easily carried, is stated in representing a simple and self-contained life. The kamandalu also represented in Hindu iconography, depicting of deities related with asceticism or water. Hence it is viewed as a symbol of asceticism in Hinduism. (fig. 2c)



Fig. 2c. Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva holding a Kamandala

Kamandalu is also used by Jain monks and in reflections of some bodhisattvas. A ripe pumpkin with all the inner plum, seeds and leaving only the outer shell and is used as the kamandalu. Swami Sivananda Radha, in his work *Kundalini Yoga*, interprets this on a spiritual level as the removal of ego from a person. On the other hand, a *kalasha* is a brass, mud or copper pot filled with water and mango leaves placed in the mouth of the pot and a coconut over it. Further, a red, white or at times even yellow thread is tied around its neck or sometimes all around it in an intricate diamond-shaped pattern. The pot may also be decorated with designs. (fig. 3a & 3b)



Fig. 3a



Fig. 3b

A pot When filled with water or rice, it is known as Purnakumbha meaning any inert body which when filled with the divine life force, gains the power to do every wonderful thing that makes life what it is. (fig. 3c)



Fig. 3c Purnakumbha

Completion and significance of the endeavour undertaken fulfilled completely are known as Purna. It is a crucial part in all Hindu rituals. The Purna-Kalasha is recognized as a symbol of plenty and "source of life" in the Vedas. Purna-Kumbha is a prominent Vedic motif, familiar from the time of Rigveda. It is also known as Soma-Kalasha, Chandra-Kalasha, Indra-Kumbha, Purnaghata, Purna-Virakamsya, Bhadra ghata, or Mangala ghata. It is significantly referred to as "overflowing full vase" (purno-Asya Kalasha) in the Vedas. The Purna-Kalasha is considered to be the symbol of the auspiciousness personifying either Ganesha, the barrier of obstacles, or his mother Gauri, the goddess of enrichments or Lakshmi. A kalasha is placed in rituals with all due almighty god provoking in occasions like house warming (gruhapravesa), wedding, daily worship etc. it placed in surroundings of the entrance as the sign of welcome. It is also used in a traditional manner as and while receiving holy personages. Thus, a kalasha as a specifically and systematically decorated pot differs from a kamandala. They also differ in their purposes in the Indian culture.

To sum up, it can be said that, unlike the western cauldrons, their Indian counterparts are quite not associated with the idea of cooking, rather they gain prominence in various rituals and are understood largely as carriage or storage vessel. Also when the former is apparently associated with heat and water, the latter is more close to humidity and water. Yet different from all these is the cauldron in the Japanese and Chinese cultures. Though their cauldrons are akin to the western ones in appearance, their purpose is different from that of the western and Indian ones. They are neither used for cooking nor in rituals, instead, they suggest power in the social context and hell in the mythological context. The very same cauldron has a very philosophical significance in the Buddhist and Jain mythology. Further, the Egyptian mythology mentions the cauldron in association with afterlife rituals while the cauldron of the Celtic and Germanic myths symbolize man's relation with the sea and the netherworld.

However, when studied together one finds a pattern, a common aspect in these variant forms of

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a cauldron coming from diverse cultures. In their own way, each of them has associations with the cycle of life – creation, destruction and regeneration and thereby acquire a magical, sacred and spiritual characteristic. This project intends to identify those aspects and to ultimately establish the hypothesis on the basis of those findings.

## Chapter 2. Cauldron Of Creation:

The cauldron as mentioned earlier is often associated with the womb because it is meant to carry something. If one goes a step ahead, the same carrier vessel can be thought of as a significant symbol of creation itself. A study of many mythological stories is necessary to establish this argument.

A kalasha as explained earlier gains prominence in most of the Hindu rituals. It is because the kalasha symbolically represents creation. It is understood that the vacant pot, symbolizes earth, and the water-filled symbolizes the primordial water from which life began on earth. Therefore, water in the purnakumbha or purnakalasha symbolizes the primordial water from which the entire creation emerged. Further, the grain and other components in the purnakalasha represent the elements and life formed during creation. Equally, it stands for the womb of the Mother Goddess believed to nurture life. While the water is the placental fluid the mango leaves in the purnakalasha are traditionally associated with the deity of love, Kama, representing the pleasurable side of procreation.

During any Hindu ritual, it is customary to invite all the deities to attend the event and bless the devotees. The Kalash provides a place for the deities to be seated – the seats being represented by the leaves. Thus in this small urn, the presence of all gods and goddesses is symbolized which exemplifies that the three aspects of life- creation, preservation and assimilation or destruction can be suggested in just one image or object of a purnakalasha. It is therefore that they are important in fertility rituals; be it for an offspring or a good harvest, the kalasha symbolizes life and abundance.

The episode of *Samudramanathan* in Hindu mythology adds to this significance of a kalasha. A kalasha is supposed to be generated during the Samudra Manthan or great churning of the milky ocean. When the asuras and devas churned the milky ocean, Lord Vishnu appeared bearing a kalasha filled with nectar which blessed everyone with everlasting life. Thus the kalasha also symbolizes immortality. As per Buddhism in Tibet, the kalasha is the treasure vase which symbolizes an endless rain of long life, wealth and prosperity and all the benefits of this world and liberation. (fig. 3d )





Fig. 3d Kalasha in Tibetan Buddhism

The cauldron in the western culture is understood as a cooking pot. Here again, an interesting analogy can be drawn between the process of cooking and creation. To begin with, both require the water and heat principle. Secondly, these prime factors work on the contents to help transform and create something new. Thus, the cauldron is not just a carriage vessel like the womb, but symbolizes the process of creation itself and also preserves the created within. In Celtic Mythology, Cauldrons occurs thoroughly as a symbol. Early Irish literature, has described this in their Mythological cycle the four treasures (or jewels) of the Tuatha Dé Danann are four mysterious magical items which the mythological Tuatha Dé Danann are supposed to have brought with them from the four island cities Murias, Falias, Gorias and Findias, when they are gathered in Ireland. They were accompanied by the Dagda – Danu's son by Bile, The Dagdha, or Good God, who is also known as the All-Father.

Cauldron of the Dhaga is one of the fabulous, magical treasures that they brought with them from which no company ever turn back unsatisfied. (fig. 4)



Fig. 4 Cauldron of the Dagda

The cauldron was called the 'undry' and was said to be bottomless. There is another link between the legends of the Dagda and a Cauldron occurs on the eve of the Second Battle of Magh Tuireadh, The Dagda visited the camp of the Fomorii, where he was forced to eat food which is like a pile and in a cauldron stuffed with enough porridge of milk, flour, fat, pigs and goats for fifty men. Here the cauldron of Dagda represents infinity. It may be compared to the Akshayapatra mentioned in the Mahabharata.

Akshayapatra in essence *inexhaustible vessel* is a utensil from Hindu theology. At the time of exile for Pandavas in the forest, Yudhishtira was low-hearted at his inability to feed the holy sages and others who accompanied him. Thus the cauldron invariably suggests the idea of plenty which in turn implies constant creation.

Similarly, the kamandala is said to represent *Amrita*- the elixir of life- thus a symbol of fertility, life and wealth. It is equally sacred as it appears in association with gods who figure as ascetics in mythology like Shiva and Bramha and also water deities like Varuna, Ganga (the goddess of the river Ganges) and Sarasvati. The kamandala figures in many stories of creation, but interestingly, of rivers. The Steven G. Darian in his work *The Ganges in Myth and History* makes a study of the major rivers of India and their origin. As per his findings, the mythical Sarasvati River traces her creation legends to the creator-god Brahma's kamandalu. There is also a belief that the river Ganges also flow through Brahma's kamandalu. Legends also say that the Ganges' birth was because Brahma washed the big toe of the foot of Vamana and collected the water in his kamandalu, which is now the river Ganges. Another river Silambu, finds Darian, has a similar tale of origin. When Brahma washed Vamana's foot by the water from his kamandalu, one in few drops fell from Vamana's foot on to the earth which turned into the river. Another tale in myth tells about the pilgrimage place Darsha Pushkarini, describes how sage Agastya trapped river Kaveri in his kamandalu when she declined marriage proposal of Agastya. This led to a dearth of food and water in the region and,

knowing this, Kaveri escaped from kamandalu but with a curse of the sage and was finally purified at Darsha Pushkarini. Others tell that angered by Kaveri's confinement, god Ganesha had transformed himself into the form of a crow, pushed Agastya's kamandalu down, rescuing Kaveri and leading to the river's formation. In the Sarada legends of Kashmir (based on oral tradition) narrated by Dr Romesh Kumar, it was said that when Ravana was in a war with Rama, goddess Parvati advised Rama to take her to Uttarakhand far away from the war scene. These stories indicate that as per mythology, many rivers have their origin in the sacred cauldrons and that the continuous flow from the cauldron keeps the rivers full which in turn maintain life on earth and the keep the cycle of creation perpetually.

Conclusively, it can be said that the cauldron irrespective of its form and cultural background, is symbolic of the process of creation. It is therefore that cauldrons are indispensable to initiation and fertility rituals and many other domestic rituals wherein the implication remains the same across cultures. This establishes one common aspect of the cauldron across cultures.

### Chapter 3. Cauldron Of Destruction:

In the preceding chapter, the Cauldron was studied and established as a symbol of creation and plenty. However, there is another dimension to the cauldron. A cauldron that is filled is so to its brim. Therefore, the idea that follows is that there is a need to prevent it from spilling over or overflowing and in some cases from arresting its flow. This is because a cauldron full to its brim represents the balance in the cosmos and any disturbance or turbulence causing it to spill or even an empty cauldron would mean destruction.

The stage of destruction is very central to the cycle of life. Destruction happens when the existing creation becomes polluted and demands a recycling. The existing creation has to be sacrificed to make way for a new and pure one. And this sacrifice happens through the process of destruction. The cauldron is the site where this destruction happens. Yet again the process of cooking in a cauldron can be used as an analogy. In cooking, all the ingredients that occupy the vessel are acted upon by heat and water, in the process of which each of them partially or wholly give up some of their characteristics to blend together and create a whole new product. Similarly, the existing creation and its features are sacrificed and dissolved in the act of destruction so that a whole new life can be created. The fumes that arise out of the cooking pots are symbolic of the emission of impurities in the gaseous form.

Thus, the cauldrons are also associated with hell as per mythological stories from the world over as there is where this act of destruction for purification happens in the case of humans. Besides, the water in the kamadala or kalasha considered sacred also become destructive under circumstances. It is necessary to foreground the idea that in all these circumstances the idea behind such destruction is that of purification or dissolution of evil. For both fire and water are purifying agents and a cauldron that has either of or at times combines both these elements becomes equally symbolic and pivotal in bringing about such an action.

As observed in the previous chapter, the kamandala is the source of water for many rivers in

India on which life depends. Therefore, if the flow of water is arrested at its source, the rivers consequently go dry and this would, in turn, mean the destruction of life. It would ruin the crops and the result would be calamities like drought and famine. A story from the Hindu mythology hints at such an occasion. When Sukra (Sanskrit name for Venus or Montserratian spirit or ghost), the demons' preceptor, tried to prevent the flow of water from the kamandalu by blocking the spout, Mahabali pierced the spout with a stick, blinding Sukra and preventing a famine.

The text *Devi Mahatmya* describes the story of goddess Brahmani associated with a cauldron causing destruction. Goddess Brahmani is one of the Sapta Matrikas – the seven divine mothers or Saptamatis in Hinduism created by goddess Durga to fight the demon named Rakta Beeja. Goddess Brahmani takes her name from Lord Brahma. Vamana Purana shows that the Goddess Brahmani was out from the mouth of Goddess Kali before she engaged Demon Rakta Beeja in the final encounter. It is said that she slay demons by sprinkling holy water from her kamandala. (fig.5 )



Fig. 5 Goddess Bhramani Devi

One common thread available in the mythology of different cultures is the association of the cauldron with hell. Be it the western, Indian, Japanese, Buddhist or Jain mythology, each one of them mentions the punishment of boiling to death in a cauldron.

As per the Garuda Purana, there are many hells representing various kinds and levels of torture and punishments of which seven are important. One of those hells is named *Taptakumbha* consisting of hot (tapa) pots (Kumbha). The pots are full of boiling oil. The sinners are roasted in this pot while they are hung upside down, meanwhile, they are being boiled in oil, vultures tears apart whatever portions of their bodies continue to be exposed. This punishment is called *Kumbhipaka* (cooked in a pot) (fig. 6) and is meant for a person, who cooks animals and birds. It is believed that such a person is cooked alive in boiling oil by Yamadutas in Taptakubha for as many years as there were hairs on the bodies of their animal victims. According to Vishnu

Purana, incest with sister and murderer of an ambassador results in torment in this hell.

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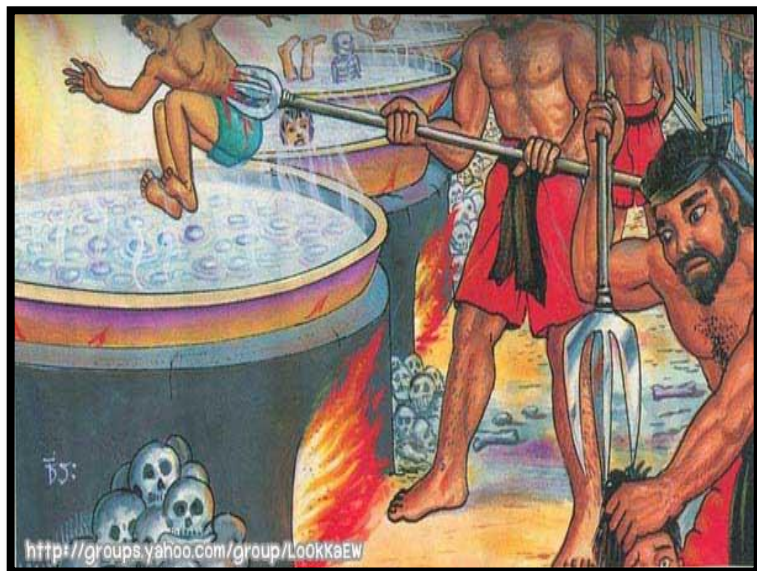


Fig. 6 Kumbipaka

The Chinese mythology and Japanese mythology also mentions the punishment of torture by burning in oil in a cauldron, at times the offender is steamed to death. A carving at the Baodingshan cave, located 20kms northeast of Dazu in China depicts the same idea. (Fig.7)



Fig. 7 Cave carving of hell imagery at Baodingshan cave, Dazu

The same punishment is meant for greed, one of the seven deadly sins as per biblical texts. For the Greeks, a sinful soul is burned in lava. This concept of death by boiling, like any other punishment in hell implies that a sinner must pay for his misdeeds in hell to the extent that the soul is purged and can proceed to the next stage in the cycle of life that is a rebirth. Thus the cauldron destroys the impure life and rejuvenates it in the pure form.

The use of cauldron in the afterlife rituals explains the need to provide for the soul of the

departed in its afterlife journey. Though here again the cauldron seems like a storage vessel, it actually implies the idea of abundance; a water-filled cauldron or one full of grains is believed to help support the life of the soul after leaving the physical body. In *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* which is a comparison of early Scandinavian and Celtic religions, Hilda Davidson remarks that: "*Food was placed in both Celtic and Germanic graves from an early period, and tough cauldrons suitable for cooking over a fire as well as more fragile ones to hold liquor have frequently been found... The heating and cooking of meat on the hearth was in itself an image of the link between man and the Other World.*"

As far as the Egyptians are concerned, the concept of the afterlife has an important role in their religion of the ancient times, and its belief system is one of the earliest known in recorded history. In the conception of the Ancient Egyptians, death was simply a temporary interruption, rather than complete cessation, of life. They held the notion that eternal life could be ensured by means like piety to the gods, preservation of the physical form through mummification, and the provision of statuary and other funerary equipment. It is therefore that they believed that being mummified and put in a sarcophagus (an ancient Egyptian "coffin" carved with complex symbols and designs, as well as pictures and hieroglyphs) was the only means of immortality. Only if the corpse had been properly embalmed and entombed in a *mastaba* (a type of Ancient Egyptian tomb), could the dead live again in the Fields of Yalu (Ancient Egyptian equivalent of heaven) and accompany the Sun on its daily ride.

In the mummification process of the Ancient Egyptians, the practice of embalming takes place in the tent known as '*ibu*' or the 'place of purification'. In preserving the organs of the deceased the canopic jars were crucial to this practice. They were normally either carving from limestone or were of pottery. (fig.8 )



Fig. 8 Traditional Canopic Jars

Canopic jars are from the Old Kingdom were rarely inscribed, and consists of a plain lid. In the

Middle Kingdom inscriptions became more frequent, and the lids were mostly in the form of human heads. By the Nineteenth dynasty, each in the four lids depicted one of the four sons of Horus, as guardians of the organs. (fig. 9 )



Fig. 9 Canopic jars of 19<sup>th</sup> century

Besides this, these vessels had the function of carrying food and water as mentioned before. Therefore, these vessels can be said to be just another manifestation of a cauldron. Here, they symbolize the same concept of death as a means of purification for rebirth and thereby the eternal cycle of life. The Garuda Purana from Hindu mythology, so as the scriptures of the various other cultures mentions this act of provision for sustaining life. Thus it may be said that the belief in an afterlife and the use of cauldron was common to funerary rituals of various cultures.

To conclude, death or destruction in almost every culture is the door to salvation or moksha. One dies to be reincarnated until he is purged of all sins to eventually be free from the cycle of life and reach heaven or the Paradise. It is therefore that this idea of destruction-purification in a cauldron is found in every mythology.

#### Chapter 4. Cauldron Of Regeneration:

This chapter proceeds to study the regenerative dimension of the cauldron. There lie ample mythological stories that evidence the vitality of cauldron in the act of regeneration. Along with analyzing such stories, this chapter also explores the symbolic prominence of the cauldron in spirituality wherein the idea of regeneration is reinforced in a different manner.

In the regenerative stage of the cycle of life, the earlier creation which has been dissolved, destroyed and purged is renewed. Just like the process of cooking in a cauldron, wherein the existing form of the ingredients is destroyed in the vessel and they blend to recreate something new. Yet again, the very process of making of the cauldrons involves melting of the respective metal and recasting to give the cauldron the desired shape. Similarly, a cauldron of mud requires mixing of the mud with water in the right proportion, shaping it on the turning wheel and ultimately baking to solidify it. The cauldron itself is made through the process of regeneration and thus is symbolic of the act.

The Celtic mythology specifically abounds in stories relating to cauldrons of regeneration. In the Celtic legendary Bran the Blessed, the cauldron appears as a vessel of wisdom and

immortality (rebirth). The cauldron can restore back their life from the corpse of dead warriors placed inside it. This scene is believed to be depicted on the Gundestrup Cauldron. (fig. 10 a & b)



Fig. 10 a & b Gundestrup Cauldron depicting Resurrection

Bran is the story told in the Mabinogion, a cycle of Welsh legends. The legends believed to have appeared in either or both of two Medieval Welsh manuscripts the: Red Book of Hergest (Llyfr Coch Hergest), and the White Book of Rhydderch (Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch). In the Welsh legends, however, the very same cauldron is differently known as Pair Dadeni. As per, Proinsias Mac Cana's book, *Celtic Mythology*, this cauldron belonged initially to the giant Llasar Llaes Gyfnewid and his wife Cymydei Cymeinfoll, who lived within the Lake of the Cauldron, in Ireland. Founded by the Irish king Matholwch and were given a place at his court, but soon received the scorn of the Irish for their behaviour. Ultimately, the Irish tried to burn them to death within their Iron House, forcing the giant and giantess to the Island to flee of the Mighty, and they were received by King Bendigeidfran. In return to his hospitality, the Giants gave the cauldron to Bendigeidfran as a return gift. Matholwch is deeply against until Bran offered him compensation in the form of the Pair Dadeni that can bring the dead back to life. Over-joy with the gift, Matholwch and Branwen set their sail back to Ireland to reign. One day in Matholwch's kingdom, Branwen gives birth to his son, Gwern, but Efnysien's insult follows to rankle among the Irish and, as time passes, Branwen is ill-treated, kept in the palace's kitchen and beaten every day. She takes a starling and sends it away and across the Irish Sea holding a message to her brother Bendigeidfran, who then sails from Wales to Ireland to rescue her along



with his brother on his side Manawydan and huge troops of warriors, assembled from the 154 cantrefs of Britain. The Irish tries to make peace and build a house big enough to entertain Bendigeidfrân but hung a hundred bags inside, supposedly should contain flour but actually, they consist of armed warriors. Efnisien, suspecting treachery, reconnoitres the hall and assassins the warriors by crushing their skulls. Later, at the feast, Efnisien, again feeling abused, murders Gwern by setting him fire when he's alive, and, as an outcome, a brutal battle breaks out. Watching that the Irish are wisely using the cauldron to revive their dead, Efnisien disguises among the Irish corpses and is thrown into the cauldron by the oblivious enemy. He breaks the cauldron from within, sacrificing his own self in the process. (fig.11)



Fig. 11 Efnisien destroying Bran's Cauldron

Yet another cauldron which symbolizes regeneration is God Manannan. Manannán mac Lir is one of the sea deity in Irish mythology. He is the heir of the obscure Lir (in Irish the name is "Lear", meaning "Sea"; "Lir" is the common form of the word). He is often known as a psychopomp and has strong annexing with the Otherworld, the weather and the mists among the world in between. He is usually associated with the Tuatha Dé Danann, although most scholars say that he is of an older race of deities. Manannán figures far-flung in Irish literature and also appears in Scottish and Manx legend. He is allied with the Welsh figure Manawydan fab Llŷr. Manannán was associated with a "cauldron of regeneration".

Here, the god Mannan is said to have had a supply of pigs which could be totally devoured but then were alive again on the morrow ready to start a new cycle anew. Similarly, in the Norse Gylfaginning, the boar Saehrimnir also provided the warriors of Valhalla with unending pork. Thus both men and animals according to mythology are believed to have regained life in the cauldron. This potential of the cauldron must have given it the magical quality and subsequently evoked a sense of reverence on the part of people and subsequently became sacred from being just magical in nature. By extension, it establishes how cauldrons came to be part of regenerative rituals usually associated with witchcraft.

Besides these stories, the Japanese and Chinese mythology also contributes strongly to testify the regenerative aspect of the cauldron. In her research paper titled *Cracking Cauldrons and Babies on Blossoms: the Relocation of Salvation in Japanese Hell Painting*, Caroline Hirasawa studies a thirteenth-century Japanese painting to analyze how it affected the conception of hell

and salvation for the people of that culture. She finds that at the bottom of a thirteenth-century painting, a large cauldron cracks into pieces, and as water streams through the fissures and douses flames below, lotus flowers bloom from within the ruptured vessel, three bearing newborn babies. (fig. 12 a & b)

This image plays a critical role in a narrative network composed through fifteen hanging scrolls that illustrate the six realms of transmigration (*rokudo*). These scrolls urge the readers to seek salvation through the grace of Buddha Amida (Sanskrit – Amitayus or Amitabha) so that they may escape the endless cycles of reincarnation in the six realms of transmigration to reside in his paradise. Hirasawa opines that "Cauldrons were shorthand for the entirety of hell in some of the earliest extant examples of hell's pictorialization..." It is a known fact that Buddhism from India travelled to China and Japan and heavily influenced their culture. In the Indian texts, hell is described in detail, but there are no such symbolic depictions of hell in paintings in India. The closest Indian equivalent Hirasawa finds in India is "a severely abraded mural of a wheel of rebirth in Cave 17 at Ajanta from the fifteenth century"

The preceding chapter talks about cauldron's association with hell. But this image of a cracking cauldron is a metaphor for salvation from hell in Japan and China. The essence of hell in these cultures is the unbearable heat, and the most constant symbol of salvation is the cooling of that heat. A rupturing cauldron, therefore, is but one indication of relief from the torturous effects of hell's flames. The sins of the sinners in hell are thus washed away and the newborn babies on blossoming lotuses are symbolic of new life, regeneration or rebirth. The text named *Ubasoku kai Kyo* (Scripture of precepts for Lay Believers) from Japanese mythology mentions the story of a lazy man named Kori who is partial to hunting, eating meat and drinking alcohol – a sin that entails the punishment of boiling to death in the cauldron. Unable to change his ways, he eventually agrees to follow his wife's words in order to avoid hell. She asks him to snap his fingers thrice and say the name of Buddha every time he heard the temple bell. He does so religiously for years however he is condemned to hell after death. While Kori is at the gate of hell, the temple bell goes on he snaps his fingers and calls out Buddha's name habitually.

This impresses the judge of hell and Kori's punishment is remitted. He rises from hell and is sent directly to the Pure Land. This story is also depicted in the painting as Kori emerging on a blossoming lotus along with three babies borne aloft on lotus flowers. Unlike the infants, Kori is shown as an adult and is transported aboard clouds that resemble steam or smoke. Kori the adult is also a reborn child, purified by his brief contact with hell's cauldron and by his intonation of the Buddha. The realm of hell also undergoes a transformation and an agent with a human-like face, unlike the ones of hell, guides Kori towards the paradise of Buddha Amida. Thus the cauldron pictorially teaches the concept of karma, salvation and rebirth.

A similar concept is put forth by the cauldron symbolically in the context of spirituality. In the practice of Kundalini yoga, one focuses on awakening and moving the Kundalini energy, placed in the navel of an individual upwards to the middle of his eyebrows through meditation,

chanting prayers, restraint of breath and yogasana. This exercise converts the latent energy in the spiral form to the straightened, free and active form. Here the cauldron becomes the symbol of wisdom and inspiration. Similarly, an ascetic sacrifices his material attachments in order to gain a whole new perspective on life or to attain supreme knowledge or enlightenment. Thus the revival or regeneration of the inner self of an individual is indicated by a cauldron especially in the form of a Kamandala which in its making itself is suggestive of the idea.

Laurie Rowan Erynn, a student of Celtic myth and religion and author of *A Circle of Stones: Journeys and Meditations for Modern Celts* opines that every individual is 'cauldron-born'. She identifies three cauldrons of Incubation, Motion and Wisdom respectively and opines that the knowledge and activation of these cauldrons are "greater than any domain, it is better than every legacy, it brings one to mastery." The power, pride, prestige, and command available to one who could have all three cauldrons was unequalled within early Irish society. She studies these cauldrons with reference to the *chakras* of the yogic concept. It should be known that the cauldrons are not identical to chakras, and their functioning is also not identical. Rather than "wheels" containing sources of energy, they are containers, clinging or pouring out various substances. Within these cauldrons, one may heat, boil, or brew one's health, talents, feelings, and wisdom or poetry. "

On the basis of this study, a Laurie state holds that the qualities of these cauldrons can be thought of as similar to a triad of yogic concepts in the same process as the cauldrons themselves contain a passing resemblance to chakras. This may get us to common references to Indo-European heritage for these theories of internal energy structures and their functioning. She understands this concept as follows:

"The first of these yogic concepts, *tamas*, meaning in-significance or heaviness, could be connected to the qualities that are also found in the Cauldron of Incubation. Physicality is theoretically "heavier" and denser than we imagined, motion or inspiration. In yogic thoughts it "obscures" the spirit or soul, hiding it within a swathe of flesh and mortal weakness. The Irish Celts dealt with this dichotomy by saying that the seat of poetry was existing in both the body and the spirit. *Rajas* are the concept of energy. Motion and transformation are major ways that energy is passed into or through objects. The Cauldron of Motion moves and changes our emotions, and our emotions are said to "move" us in many ways. Energy is found at in between transitions points between this realm and the Otherworld, between light and night, summer and winter. The Cauldron of Motion always has its significant, liminal point between the physical body, spirit and the illumination of pure wisdom. It is the bridge between. *Sattva* is the concept of illumination or purity. The Cauldron of Wisdom provides illumination and insight through the paths of poetic composition and creativity, exalt a person, "purifying" them of their baser components. "

To sum up one can say across many cultures the cauldron is a symbol of regeneration, both of

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life and soul. In comparatively studying this aspect of a cauldron, what evolves very obviously is the significance of the cauldron at a universal level as established by Laurie in her work. A cauldron, thus, may be said to sum up the belief system of a given set of people regarding life.

#### Chapter 5. Cauldron In Theory:

The preceding chapters of this project explored the availability and significance of the cauldron across mythology from all over the world. This exercise underlined the idea that the cauldron does represent the cycle of life – creation, destruction and regeneration, and myths pertaining to them in many cultures. Within the cauldron are healing, inspiration, wisdom, sustenance – both physical and spiritual, and the very essence of life itself. It may, therefore, be concluded that it is a universal symbol of the cycle of life. However, the question that still remains is the reason for this fixation with the cauldron across cultures. This chapter intends to find an answer to this problem and eventually attempts to arrive at the hypothesis of this study.

The recurrence of the cauldron as a symbolic vessel or image establishes the fact that it is not something passive in these myths to be overlooked. Deriving from the study on cauldrons made in the previous chapters, it can be said that not only the purpose of cooking or boiling and the making of a cauldron but also its the very structure is symbolic of the role it plays in the life of man. Firstly, the circular rim of the mouth of a cauldron may be interpreted as the life cycle represented by the cauldron. And the circle is an archetypal shape acknowledged by a man. Secondly, the hollow inside the cauldron may be seen as the place where wisdom or inspiration exists in the latent form, it has to be set into motion by the heat and water principle. This process earlier explained is as Kundalini experience may be compared to how food is converted to energy in the stomach and sent to different parts of the body.

Here again, the spiral form of the Kundalini energy moving upwards is an archetypal image. Finally, the idea of balance put forth by a cauldron. As explained before, a cauldron is always full to its brim, and that is its right proportion. The tilting or overflowing of the cauldron is considered an ill omen. Here, the cauldron may be compared to the human mind. Just like the cauldron, the human mind also needs to maintain a mental balance. It is therefore that excessive emotions adversely affect one's health be it hypertension, excitement, depression, paranoia. Therefore, one is required to undergo a catharsis so that these excessive emotions are vented out through proper channels, say in the form of tears, perspiration through exercise and such. And thereby the equilibrium of the mind is maintained. Thus the water-filled cauldron suggests balance and health, and while the fire working the contents of a cauldron stands for purification. Conclusively it can be said that the cauldron and its association with other archetypes like a circle, water, fire or heat elevate the position of the cauldron from a mere inactive storage or carriage vessel in mythology, rituals and daily life of man. By extension, it may be said that it is proof enough that the archetypes like water, fire or heat and circle and the symbolic vessel cauldron are on the same pedestal. Yet, the cauldron is one image or object of its kind that has never received the due attention. A symbolic vessel that is closely associated with man's life and the belief system of his culture perhaps may be considered as an archetypal symbol of the

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essence of life.

In the essay, “*Practical Campbell*”, Stephen Gerringer, talking about the pioneering anthropologist Adolf Bastian’s views on archetypes and his concept of *Volkergedanken*, says that, "we never meet these mythic structures in their raw form, but rather cloaked in raiment peculiar to each culture." This is very true of the cauldron; when studied in isolation the cauldrons in their various forms pertaining to different culture project their cultural purpose. However, a comparative analysis as taken up in this project foregrounds the commonality in them. As Anne Baring and Jules Cashford in their work, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, very rightly say that, "... we realize an image is an archetype is because we see it turning up in different cultures and different times; we see a pattern, as well as the particular local instance." Thus, the motive of this enterprise is to put forth the notion that the cauldron can be understood and acknowledge as an archetypal symbol.

Initially understood only as cooking or boiling vessels and preservative vessels, today it is a common sight in paintings and other forms of fine arts. Moreover, the basic shapes of pots and pitchers which are part of our home décor may be seen as inspired from that of the cauldrons. Thus, it is not just the cauldrons that are worshipped, but the form or image of a cauldron in various manifestations continues to be a part of man's life without him being conscious of it. Therefore, it is quite feasible to consider the cauldron as an archetypal symbol.

#### Conclusion:

The five chapters of this dissertation have been successful in realizing its hypothesis. Having located cauldrons across mythology and identifying them as symbols characteristic of certain common aspects, this project proves how the cauldron may be considered as a potential archetypal symbol.

The archetype is one among concepts under scholarly debate. One area of common consent is that it difficult to completely absorb and communicate this concept verbally. Therefore, the motive of this undertaking is to only bring this hitherto passive cauldron under a critical lens and to foreground it as a prospective archetypal symbol. The fact that this very notion is quite debatable, this dissertation leaves the argument open-ended and refrains from making any authoritative statements on the subject.

However, it can be arguably said that the cauldron carries the double-faced aspect of mythology. It remains passive in mythology, ritual and fine arts as just a vessel, but when inspected and scrutinized, it summarizes almost everything about the nature of human life. Thus, it gains importance when it becomes operational in a given cultural milieu.

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