

## **Use Of Myths By Children In Child Psychotherapy**

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Let me begin this paper by making clear a couple of points regarding its aim.

First of all, it is not a learned account of formation of myths in the minds of little children. I have chosen to write it in a narrative form to bring forth some concepts that we need to discuss. One of these is about our relationship with truth and lies. Thus, in spite of being a narrative, it is not a purely clinical paper.

Secondly, the narrative here is that of an unsuccessful analysis, at least from one point of view. I propose to discuss this aspect towards the end of the paper.

It is my experience that children make use of existing myths while trying to resolve some of their psychic problems. To demonstrate this I propose to present fragments of material from the analysis of a four year old boy. The idea is not only to talk about the boy's problems but also to demonstrate the use of myths made by him and consequently by me to bring about some integration in his personality.

Finally, we shall see how an obscure mythical figure helped us to sum up the tragic end of our experience.

Why are myths so very interesting for children and, in a way, to all of us? Very simply, it is because:

1. Right from birth a human infant is full of unmanageable contradictions some of which he may not be able to resolve. Myths, by their very nature, manage to contain these without appearing absurd. The myth of Trishanku is an example of this. Trishanku wanted to go to heaven without actually dying. He wanted to eat his cake and have it, too. This myth from the ancient Indian Classic, the Bhagwat Puran describes the successful management of his dilemma, which is akin to that of a Borderline patient.

2. Myths have an element of the “fantastic” which is very alluring to children. Children feel myths to be “fantastic stories” that spark off their imagination in which everything is possible. Some of their wildest fantasies can thus be vicariously gratified in these “stories”.

3. Myths touch upon our unconscious world. We all have unconscious fantasies and desires. As Mrs. Klein has shown, these are very powerful and are always active in some form. As we grow up our sense of reality increases, and we suppress them to carry on our daily life. However, none of these fantasies ever dies. Hence, when we come across myths our interest is aroused. The myth of Oedipus is an example of this as Freud demonstrated so clearly.

4. Myths contain wisdom – sometimes simple, sometimes profound. Take the case of any well-known myth such as Krishna killing Kansa or Jarasandha. These kings are first built up as powerful, ambitious, cruel people, well-nigh unconquerable. They are then destroyed by Krishna -a young, “good” person – a God. These stories thus embody a simple wisdom -however powerful “evil” *looks*, it does not win in the end. Simple as this sounds how often our faith in it is lost and how often we need to be reminded of it in our daily life. Myths perform this useful function for us.

I want to make a few more points, which are specific to our Indian situation. Indian children get to hear mythological stories as part of their upbringing. However Westernised an Indian household may be, there is likely to be in it some elderly relative-a grandparent or an aunt or an uncle- who is bound to relate these stories. I have come across children who have heard such stories from an old Ayah i.e. a maid servant, who is an old family retainer.

Also in India, myths are an integral part of social and religious rituals. Some of the stories are recited at various important occasions like say, Pooja Festival in Bengal, Navaratri Festival in Gujarat and Ganesh Festival in Maharashtra. Others like the Bhagwat Puran, are read out upon the death of a family member. This results in a kind of continuity from generation to generation. Grandparents, parents and children have their own relationship with myths that have come down from ancient times and have changed on the way, too. This makes for a certain deep kind of bonding in a joint, extended family

system. This may quite possibly, no longer hold in the Western World where the nuclear family is the norm.

Lastly, Indian myths are interwoven with our two major epics – Mahabharata and Ramayana and also with the most fantastically imaginative Bhagwat Puran. Since these are not a part of an organised religious system they are free from any moralistic burden. The relationship that Indian children have with these myths is therefore far more friendly and benign – far more intimate perhaps, than obtains with their Western counterparts.

Let us now take up the story of this little boy whom I shall call Manish for the sake of convenience. He was brought to me when he was about four years old, originally because he began to get seriously dehydrated, so much so that he might have died. He was hospitalised and restored to life. This was his second experience of dehydration. Manish was an adopted child with a very tragic background. He was born in a far-off village hospital in the Southern state of Karnataka. His real mother had delivered the baby and run away next morning abandoning Manish to the care of the hospital staff. He grew up amongst kind but ever- changing nurses. He had therefore, no experience of a constant mothering person. It was a miracle that he survived and lived on in these conditions in the hospital for the first two years of his life. At this point a wealthy, childless couple from Mumbai happened to visit the hospital, by chance. They noticed the baby and instantly adopted him.

He was brought to Mumbai and went through all the regular medical checkups. After a couple of months in a well-to-do household with stable, consistent mothering, the baby began to thrive. However, in a few months' time he had his first episode of dehydration. At that time too, he had been hospitalised. The dehydration was attributed to stomach infection and earlier malnutrition. When it took place the second time, however, the doctors were not able to determine the cause. Fortunately, one of the doctors in the hospital felt that this was probably psychological and advised the foster parents to seek my help.

The foster parents were sensitive, intelligent people. The father was a scientist and the mother worked in humanities. They were quite well disposed

towards psychoanalysis. They truly loved the child and were willing to do anything possible. There was however, one important problem. They strongly felt that the child should not be told that he was adopted. I was quite uncomfortable about this fact. When I suggested that they should tell the truth to the child, they opposed it vehemently – feeling that Manish would have a breakdown. They added that they had already consulted a Family Therapist who had strongly advised them against it. This Therapist had also informed them that he himself had adopted a child to whom he too, had not revealed the facts. Their belief that truth could lead to horrible consequences, therefore, carried the stamp of authority. I was helpless in this matter because it was a choice they had to make (and they had already made it). This was to affect Manish's development and my work with him, as I was to learn later on.

Manish had two more problems. He was a very fussy eater and that he wetted his bed. Both these continued for a long time even while analysis was in progress. To me it was obvious that water and urine meant something to Manish, which he found difficult to manage.

My impression of Manish when I met him for the first time was that of a frail, delicate little boy with a very sensitive face. Like every child who comes for analysis he was extremely curious about what we were going to do. When I told him that we were going to talk about what he felt and thought and play together he seemed rather pleased. He surveyed my room. I had assigned to him a biggish drawer in which there were simple toys of different kinds and a lot of drawing material with plastecine and a pair of scissors. He seemed quite excited and asked me, "Can I do *whatever* I like?" I said yes, he could but like in every other game we would have some set rules. I explained these rules to him very generally i.e. I told him that I would rather not let either of us be hurt physically, which he appeared to accept quite gladly.

As I said, he seemed quite excited. Over the following months I was to learn that this "uncontrollable excitement" was one more of his problems. On the first day, however, it seemed quite natural that a boy of four should be excited about having a drawer full of toys and drawing material. He first touched all the toys as if making sure I meant what I said. He then got up and touched all the walls of my room. I said then that he was reassuring himself that I meant what I

said that he could use my room to express whatever he felt. He kept quiet and continued to touch things. I could see that his mind was filled up with possibilities of what *could* be done with his freedom and there was a clear sense of excitement in the room.

After a while, quite suddenly, he looked very flustered and before I knew where I was, he urinated in the room. This is a bit difficult to describe because partly it seemed as if he had actually taken out his penis from his shorts and had consciously urinated. Yet, I could not be sure if it was a voluntary act. He then sat down on the chair looking rather crestfallen. I pointed out that he was feeling unhappy that he had peed and was now afraid that I would withdraw my offer. He looked at me and seemed slightly relieved.

I then cleaned him and the room and told him that if he felt like peeing he might tell me, so that I could take him to the toilet. He now looked very worried and said, “I *can't* tell you – I *can't* tell you”. I was to realise in the following months how right he was. The impulse to urinate came up so strongly and so suddenly that he could hardly have time to verbalise it.

I have described the first session in some detail because in it Manish gave me a glimpse of his problems straight away. He had probably felt an intense attachment to me because of what I was offering – my attention, sympathy and of course, a lot of toys. (This was probably very similar to his meeting his foster mother for the first time.) The problem was that in *his mind* with such an attachment were interwoven some strong impulses – perhaps to spoil it all. It is also likely that these impulses represented what he had to contain and contend with before he was offered a stable setting. It is easy to imagine that these impulses were too strong for Manish to handle.

What followed was months of acute distress for both of us. I had to face the fact that he would pee in my room, often on the couch *but* what was different and useful was that every time we *talked* about it. He was never punished or condemned. He always met with an interpretation, which was a new experience for him. However kind his parents were, it was not always possible for them not to show some chagrin. Indeed, it would be quite unnatural if they did not. Thus the first few months were spent in establishing what can be called an analytical

relationship between us. Gradually, he realised that now he had a small place (my room) where, if his impulses came up, he need not fear a terrible disaster.

After a year or so, during which we had already begun to know something of each other, he began to play some elaborate games with houses and/or cars. Mostly a house would get burnt down or a car would bang against a pole and burn. I was struck with this because in the sessions where this happened, Manish did not urinate. I was then able to formulate that the act of urination was now replaced by this “burning houses and/or cars”.

This was quite understandable because urine is quite hot and obviously “urinating” meant, “burning” for Manish. Both, the house and the car represented my room and myself. Because I had, so far, “contained” his pee it was possible for him to find an external representation. This was my first formulation. I began by pointing out to Manish that he did not get the urge to urinate when the house/car game was on. He agreed with me. In the next few months Manish would show signs of considerable distress because his mother would tell him to talk to me about his bed wetting at home, which had not stopped. She would also phone my office to inform me about it. This would make Manish quite unhappy.

Soon the game with house/car began to be more elaborate. After the house/car caught fire Manish would rush to his drawer. Shouting loudly, “ding, ding, ding...” he would bring out a fire engine and fetch it to the burning house/car. He would then say, “Now the fire can be put off”. I realised that the representation had now shifted. I pointed out to Manish that now I was the fire engine whom he called in as a “saviour” when his house/car caught fire. The house/car had begun to represent his home and his bed in the parents’ room. His impulses tended to come out at night, burning his and his parents’ house, and he could call on me to stop this powerful destruction.

This may have been true but the problem became more complex. Soon the fire engine itself began to get caught up in the flames. At such times Manish would look very frightened and distressed. I pointed out that he was quite aware now that he had this terrible problem at home – that however much he loved his parents he also had this strong desire to burn them. This desire had frightened

him. He was also aware that I had come in his life to help him, but he felt miserable at the thought that this very help could meet with the same fate.

This interpretation was correct and produced some relief. He continued with the same game for a few days more without the vehemence and fright that had accompanied it so far. This did not last long. After a few days a new element entered the play. After the fire engine got burned down a hospital van began to appear with the same “ding, ding, ding...” or siren sounds. And sure enough, even this began to catch fire. Manish’s fear and anxiety returned.

I realised that my formulation was now quite inadequate. Was it only a question of destructive impulses? Was it only a question of his parents and myself? The truth was that his real mother had disappeared. Did not this story apply to her, too? Like all little children Manish believed that the loss of his original mother was due to his own impulses (represented by hot urine). Then the first saviours were those nurses that took care of him. They too disappeared one after the other.

I could well imagine Manish’s state of mind here. At the loss of the primary object some saviour did arrive. This is where I think the dual/ambivalent nature of urine came into play. Loss of the mother was believed to be due to “hot” and therefore “burning” part of the compulsive urination. When the saviour arrived the “fire” was put out by her nurturing care represented by the “water”, and therefore “cooling”, part of the urine. Once again, when the first saviour/nurse disappeared “hot/burning” urine was the cause. The next saviour/nurse once again quelled it by “water/cooling” part of urine. But this was a Catch-22 situation. It went on and on for almost two years. The next saviours, the foster parents certainly did not disappear. Their constancy *did* bring in some relief. Externally at least, the burning had stopped, but the *anxiety* remained intact. How was Manish to be sure they too would definitely not disappear? In the same way when I became the saviour there was no guarantee about my permanence. This was why Manish had to device a continuous play with car-house-fire brigade-ambulance and so on.

Moreover, it was clear in the sessions that Manish blamed himself for all these losses. His stance was unmistakable. Both the play and the bed wetting therefore were confused/ merged with strong feelings of anxiety, loss and guilt.

I was caught up in a dilemma now. His foster parents refused to mention adoption fearing a breakdown. My analytical procedure did not permit me to interfere with his outside life. If his foster parents held certain views, I was not to change this. It was *their* job to inform him. I could not take over that role myself. I could only be an analytical object for him.

I had to find a technical solution to this total situation (Joseph, 1985). I had to take into account both his and my problems. I felt that the best way out was to address Manish's sense of omnipotence – infantile omnipotence that made him believe that his fantasies and impulses had actually destroyed a series of caring objects and that they were still capable of doing so. I therefore formulated my interpretations in rather general terms. I would talk about his fear of losing one mother after another. I would also describe his anxiety and anger that were connected with these losses. Manish did take my interpretations seriously but the game of burning objects continued with a deadly, dull regularity. I was not at all satisfied with these interpretations but could not find any better ones. I feared that we had reached a dead end.

It was at this point that the myths began to appear. One day Manish came in and sat down pensively in his chair. I said that he seemed to be thinking of something today. He said, “Yes. Do you know Indra is a God of water? He can bring down any amount of rains. You know, Krishna made a mistake. He should not have lifted the Gowardhan Parwat to stop Indra. I don't think he *understood*”. This is what I meant when I talked about myths being used by a child – that a child could allow his own fantasies to work upon it. I must emphasise here that it was not as if Manish had not understood the story. Indeed, I feel that he had understood it too well and that is why he was able to give it his own interpretation, which I needed to understand.

Let me first give here the relevant details of the story. Lord Krishna, it struck me first, was an adopted child. His real father Vasudev and real mother Devaki were jailed by Devaki's brother, King Kansa. Lord Krishna, their seventh



child, was born in jail. All his previous siblings had been killed by Kansa who feared the prophesy that Devaki's child would kill him. At birth Lord Krishna was miraculously saved and taken to his foster parents – the cowherd King Nand Bawa and his wife Jashoda. Krishna was not consciously aware of this fact till the age of twelve. However, since he was a reincarnation of Vishnu the Creator we can assume that he actually or unconsciously knew about it.

During his childhood Lord Krishna performed many miraculous deeds like killing impossible demons and saving his cowherd parents and their tribe. He certainly is described as omnipotent.

The relevant story here is that the cowherds feared and submitted to Lord Indra who is the God of rains. Once a year, they all gathered and prayed to him, offering lots of gifts. The tribe lived around a huge mountain called the Gowardhan Parbat. Lord Krishna around the age of seven or eight suggested that they should not pray to Indra. Instead, they should worship the Gowardhan Parbat since it was this mountain that, with its green foliage, provided their cows with abundant food and thus sustained their economy. It was the mountain that needed their gratitude.

When the cowherds did this, Indra got furious and sent ferocious clouds and rains. The cowherds were frightened and wanted to revert back to their old tradition. Lord Krishna told them they would all collectively lift the mountain and hide beneath it. This they did. It was a miraculous act. Lord Krishna lifted the great Gowardhan Parbat on the tip of his little finger while the rest of the cowherds supported it by their wooden sticks.

Indra realised that Krishna was the real Creator and withdrew his fury. Ever since, the Gowardhan Parbarat is recognised as a sacred mountain.

I feel that the appearance of this story confirmed my belief about the infantile omnipotence. Manish had now put forward an interesting argument. According to him Indra was an omnipotent God of rains. If one opposed his authority and power, he could get really furious and lash out. Krishna's mistake was in challenging this omnipotence. In his analysis Manish experienced his urinating/burning impulses like Indra's powerful fury. On the other hand he had noticed that I was not particularly afraid of the phenomenon. Nor was I

destroyed by his pee. In fact, I always talked about it, pointing out that the house-car-my room-myself did not really get destroyed. Indeed, I treated the whole thing as a problem- obliquely challenging his – Manish/Indra’s – omnipotence. Manish’s interpretation suggested that I was naïve, that I was underestimating the power of his impulses, like Krishna. In saying this he was at least partly right. So far nobody had understood how overwhelmed he felt. He genuinely believed that he always destroyed his objects.

I therefore began by saying that he felt that I was a simpleton like Krishna. Krishna might gather up a lot of strength to confront Indra but the real need was to understand the nature of Indra’s fury. Similarly, I too needed to get a correct picture of his need to urinate and spoil. This interpretation was accepted but only tentatively. We then saw the story of Indra getting transformed into various forms. Sometimes Indra was asleep and Manish would not burn the houses. At other times Indra would not stop at all. This would give rise to other problems - nobody could move out of their homes. This would happen especially when the heavy, torrential Mumbai rains would force me to cancel a session due to the flooding of roads. He would often ask me if Indra had a chariot or a plain horse. If he had a chariot did he drive it himself or did he employ a Rathi meaning a chariot driver. This was a very important question, I felt. Manish was now wondering about who controlled his/Indra’s impulses. Were they in his hands or were they regulated by someone else – an internal object? When I talked about this to him, Manish insisted that Indra being a big God must have a charioteer (Chauffeur). Manish himself came to the sessions in a chauffeur driven car. I felt that at this point he was not ready to take the responsibility for his own impulses. Subjectively, he felt that he had no control over his urination. This problem was to be resolved by another myth later on as we will see. In the mean time, Indra the God of water had acquired an independent place in his mental life.

There was another important aspect of the Indra story that drew my attention. Manish had been emphasising Indra’s (or his impulses’) omnipotence while pointing out Krishna’s naïveté. I on the other hand wondered about Krishna’s omnipotence. After all he too had employed omnipotent means to counter Indra’s fury. Lifting Gowardhan Parwat with the help of Gwalas or cowherds was also a magical solution. Did not Krishna say, “Confront Indra, but

accept me as an equally omnipotent God”? (And he was a mere child at that time). The only difference was that Krishna was a benign God. Thus one infantile, petulant God, Indra, had to be confronted by another infantile, benign child -God, Krishna. I wondered if Manish was not being put in the same position as those cowherds, that of accepting my greatness as a new saviour. This idea worried me a lot. (It was to raise its ugly head later on, as we shall see).

Working on this story certainly brought about an important change. We had begun with the onslaught of "pee" which contained both, fire and water. Now these were clearly distinguished. Manish was able to use the image of Indra to contain/represent the hot, impulsive, excited onslaught of water. As a result, his uncontrolled excitement in the room reduced a great deal. This helped him to keep the burning aspect of the pee within himself. This was evidenced by the fact that his bed-wetting stopped. This aspect was kept restricted to my room in the play of the house/car/fire engine/ambulance.

As we saw earlier, this does not mean that Manish was now conscious that he himself was responsible for the fire. When he played the game he never knew who was bringing up the fire. He would always say that the fire "comes up" as if it was an act of God. It was all "happening" on its own and nobody in particular was responsible for it. This was why he felt so helpless. How could one stop a deed if one does not know who the doer was? But of course we knew that, at least in my room, it was not at all "happening". Somebody was actually doing it.

I therefore began to show him how actually he was himself setting fire to the house/car, that it was not at all magical. Manish ferociously refused to accept this interpretation at first. However, I seemed to have made some impression on him. After a few months, he began to draw a chariot. In the chariot was a God like figure – first quite ambiguously drawn but later on with quite firm lines. Obviously I assumed that it was Indra. I was quite surprised when Manish told me that it was not Indra but Surya – the Sun God. I was quite at a loss because I could not possibly conceive Surya extinguishing a fire. When I asked Manish what Surya was doing, he did not answer. I let the matter rest there. I must admit that I was quite worried since I could not clearly see the point of Surya's appearance now except in a dangerous way. I thought that I was in for a massive attack of fire once again.

However, I carried on with the daily analysis. I noticed that Surya was not brought in every day. I could not detect any pattern in his appearance. In the mean time, Manish began to behave differently in the room. First of all he began to put back all his toys in the drawer at the end of each session. This was quite a change from his usual habit of leaving the room in shambles which I would have to clean up after he left. Also, he began to talk a lot about all the members of his family – his aunts, his grandparents who lived in another town, his own parents, their habits and whims. A whole world of his daily life was revealed to me. I began to know him much better. He was no longer only a little boy who came to see me for analysis.

Simultaneously, he began to be curious about my family and my life. He asked hundreds of questions regarding *my* parents, siblings, wife, children etc. On the whole I had a feeling that Manish's world was expanding and there were many more people in his mind than ever before.

With all this happening with me, his behaviour at home underwent a dramatic change. All his symptoms disappeared. He appeared to lead a normal healthy life. His mother began to phone me to say that Manish was cured so could we now terminate his analysis. I, however, was not so sure. The issue of *my* omnipotence kept bugging me. I therefore, insisted on carrying on. Luckily the parents left it to my judgement -at least for the time being.

At the end of a session (during this time) while he was talking about my imagined family, Manish suddenly asked me, "Surya would know everything about fire, wouldn't he? *He* brings the fire, doesn't he? Then he would know all about it – even about putting it out". It was then that it occurred to me what he had in mind. Surya, the Sun God, is believed to ride his own chariot with seven horses, exactly as Manish had drawn in his picture. Of the seven horses, five represent the five senses, the sixth the mind, and the seventh, the intellect. Thus, Surya represents, in addition to great strength, a complete control over one's self.

So, on the next day when Manish came, I told him that he had now found out *who* brought in the fire. Surya, the Sun God, was himself – the little son behaving like a God. I had shown him how it was *he* who burnt the house/car. By saying that Surya knew all about fire he meant that now *he* i.e. Manish knew all

about it. Since now he knew who did it he could make efforts to stop it. After all, unlike Indra, Surya did have a full control over his seven horses, I added. And he, Manish, too had full control over his actions and could regulate them if he wished. I also added that perhaps that is exactly what he had been doing lately – cleaning my room, not urinating, talking about his family and generally being quite responsible. Manish did not say anything but only smiled.

I was a bit relieved, for now it made some sense. It was certainly the beginning of his sense of responsibility for his own violent impulses. However, I saw a problem here. If he was Surya and could prevent fire, he still felt himself to be omnipotent. This meant that he could also unleash the fire any time he liked.

Gradually, in the following months it was possible to show Manish that his fire was controlled not because he was a God but because he *loved* his parents and me. His love prevented him from acting out his fantasies. This love was extremely important since both his parents and I played a major protective role in his life. He then need not be a powerful Surya but could be an ordinary loving child and thus prevent himself from destroying what he loved most.

When Manish could accept this view, Surya disappeared from his talks and drawings. The mood in the room changed. In fact it became so calm and quiet that even I began to feel that I could now terminate the analysis. When I suggested this to him Manish vehemently opposed the idea. It was at this juncture that he brought in yet another mythological figure, this time a rather surprising one, of a Pandava brother Sahadev.

The figure of Sahdev from the epic Mahabharata is a rather complicated one. As is perhaps universally known, Mahabharata is a story of an Armageddon between two sets of cousins – Kauravas and Pandavas. In a very, very, large loose sense, the story goes that a hundred Kaurava brothers were the bad ones while the five Pandava brothers were the virtuous and good ones. Each of the Pandava brothers had been given a boon. From his boon, Sahdev knew all - past, present and future. However, this boon carried and operated under a condition - *he could not speak about it unless someone asked him*. Now, this story is not quite clearly stated in the original Mahabharata, but is commonplace in folklore.

The Pandavas who were to inherit a kingdom lost it in a game of dice with Kauravas. The eldest Pandava brother, Yudhishtir, who stood for Truth was also a compulsive gambler. The Kauravas invited him for a game of dice, an invitation he could not refuse. He played the dice and lost everything – his wife, his brothers, his kingdom and was sent to live in exile in a forest for fourteen years. The intriguing factor here is that while playing the dice Sahadev was sitting nearby. Yudhishtir could have asked him about the outcome of the gamble, but so addicted was he to the game, that he (and for that matter anyone else) did not do so.

The gamble was lost. After fourteen years of suffering the Pandavas returned and asked for their kingdom. The Kauravas refused. Then followed a massive war – quite like the World War II – in which large numbers were destroyed. This suffering could have been avoided if Sahdev was asked and allowed to speak.

As I said above, Manish brought up Sahdev when I suggested termination of analysis. He came in and announced, “Shailesh, tell you what, Sahadev knows everything – all about past, present and future”.

Initially I was quite surprised since of all characters from the Mahabharata, Sahadev is the least known to children, let alone be their favourite. I said here that yes, it would seem so but what did that make him feel.

He replied “Well, it would be quite nice to know everything. Then one need not worry”.

Now, since I had been talking about termination and his anxieties about it in the previous sessions, I suggested that Manish felt that I was like Sahadev. Perhaps his experience of me in analysis made him feel that I knew everything about everybody. I added that he was worried that if I went away from his life, he would feel quite helpless.

To this he replied, “But of course you know everything. Otherwise, how come so many people come to see you? And you knew all about my pee, and the houses, and the cars, and the fires, didn’t you?”

This was quite touching for me on the one hand, while on the other, my worst fears had come true. I realised that Manish's new psychic balance was based on my being Sahadev. If he was now capable of giving up the idea of his omnipotence it was only because he could hold on to that of mine. He had to make *me* out to be *both*, omnipotent *and* omniscient.

This took place just before one of my long summer holidays. Manish was quite anxious about these and so was I -with the appearance of this new story. However, when he came back he reported that he had a nice time while away and that he had not once spoiled the bed. Nor had he messed up his room at home. He had not even made any fuss about eating, which was his uniform behaviour during all holidays so far.

I tentatively suggested here that perhaps he now did not require me – the all knowing Sahadev. He functioned without me quite well. So it was not a matter of having an omniscient Shailesh with him. What he needed was the insights he had gained with my help. These insights were not simply given out by me but had been achieved by both of us working together – sincerely trying to understand his emotions.

Manish did not pay any heed to my interpretation. Indeed, he resisted all my efforts to terminate analysis. He also kept on talking about Sahadev quite frequently. This made me wonder about my position. I realised that the Sahadev story had many implications. It was not only a question of knowing the future but also the past, which meant the story of Manish's adoption. No one had yet talked about it. I had no clear idea of what the Sahadev story meant to him as he brought it in so many times.

At this point his parents decided to adopt another child. Manish told me one day that his mother was going to have a new baby. He also added that his neighbour Ramesh's mother too was going to have a baby. There were two ways to have babies, he proceeded to say. One was from the mother's tummy and the other was to get it from a temple. His mother was going to get it from a temple while Ramesh's mother's tummy was becoming big every day.

Obviously, his parents were repeating their old behaviour. Manish was almost eight and a half years old now and was able to understand much more

than before. Though he talked about these two methods, I could see that he did not quite believe in this theory. So I pointed out to him that he must be wondering about his own birth; was he brought from a temple or was he born like his neighbour's child? Manish gave me a cold look and then just clamped down. After that day every time I tried to talk about the "difference" in the two ways of birth or to name it, I met with the same response.

Soon his behaviour in the room began to change. His quiet, thoughtful posture was gone. He began to get hugely excited – just as in the first year of his analysis. He very briefly tried to play the old game of the houses and the cars but could not carry on with it for long. Soon I had to face a new onslaught.

On the day his sister was brought home Manish brought out a doll which he had discarded long ago. He put her on the ground and stepped on her violently. I gave the obvious interpretation that he was angry to have a new sister and wished she were dead. Manish did not want to hear me. He closed both his ears and began to spit on the doll.

From the next day onwards, this spitting became all pervasive. He did not bring out the doll after that day but he began to spit in my room. He spat on all the walls, chairs, couch and the drawers. Finally, he began to spit on me. The atmosphere in the room was so charged that it was impossible to speak. He drowned my voice in a manic laughter. I had no choice but to physically hold him with one hand and put a handkerchief on his mouth with the other. While doing so I would talk about his extreme anger and anxiety about his new sister and the nature of her arrival in his life. If I let go the handkerchief for a moment Manish would start spitting on me. I talked about how he was now tremendously angry with me also, for I had done nothing to prepare him for this new situation.

This kind of behaviour continued for a few weeks. I felt truly helpless. For a while it seemed that the spitting would never stop. But one day Manish brought with him a cricket bat and a rubber ball. He started playing against the wall of my room. He did not answer any of my questions regarding this game. Later on he gave the ball to me and told me to play with him. This I did. The game went on and on in an extremely monotonous manner. It had an obsessive quality about it.



I said here that the rhythm of the game was helping him to calm down. Manish carried on without responding to my statement.

It is extremely difficult for me to recreate in words the deadly atmosphere that existed in my room. An iron curtain had fallen between us. It felt as if the therapeutic alliance that we had built up over the years had fallen apart. At that time Manish's parents decided to terminate the analysis. They could not see any point in carrying it on any further. As far as they were concerned Manish was "cured". He behaved completely normally at home and at school. I tried to explain to them the real problem but they were quite firm. I asked for a few months time for the process of termination.

It was a tragic time for both of us. Manish kept playing the game of cricket. I informed him about his parents' decision. He said he knew about it. When I asked him about his feelings I met with the same stony silence. After a few days, while playing the game of cricket Manish casually asked me, "You really are like Sahadev, aren't you?" At first I noticed that his question made me feel very sad. I knew exactly what he meant. He was suggesting that like Sahadev I was quite helpless now. But soon I began to think. In exactly what way was I experienced to be so helpless? I had not avoided any of his anxieties in the sessions. I had consistently talked about the question that had plagued him ever since his sister was adopted viz. did he come out of his mother's body or was he brought from a temple. I had very clearly stated that this question had been in his mind. Every time I had mentioned this he had gone blank and given me stony silences. So, who really was helpless?

If I looked at Sahadev's plight the problem became clearer. Sahadev was helpless not because he knew but because nobody asked him any questions. This was precisely what Manish had been doing. He could have asked the troublesome question to his parents but he had not done so. In analysis, he could have *thought about* it with me. I had certainly been ready to go into it with him. By discussing his beliefs about his birth I could not have broken any rule nor would I have changed my role as his analyst. In fact, it would have helped him to arrive at a true conclusion on his own even if his parents needed to avoid the problem. I decided therefore, that I should put this squarely to him.

When he repeated after a while that Sahadev knew everything, I pointed out to Manish that people could have asked him questions and then Sahadev could have answered them. But nobody really wanted to know the truth. Wasn't he doing the same now, I added. Manish stopped playing the game of cricket and turned around to face the wall. He put his hands on his ears. It was clear that he too did not want to face the facts.

I could quite understand Manish's fears now. Under his obsessive game of cricket lay the horror of a mind full of debris of lost or destroyed objects. He could not face this debris without the help of his foster parents. He was truly dependent on them now. He knew that I was only a temporary object. He had to live his life with them. If they believed that truth was dangerous it was not possible for Manish to believe otherwise. He was forced to introject them with their beliefs, as internal objects that lie. (O'Shaughnessy, 1990) To terminate the analysis was their decision. If I was helpless it was because I could not change their minds. We had to end the treatment with a heavy heart. I feared that Manish could develop a serious Obsessional Neurosis or a depressive illness but there was nothing I could do.

## **Discussion**

In the beginning of this paper I had said that I was narrating a story of failure but that it needed to be discussed. Was it a failure of the process? I think not. Failure lay in Manish's parents' belief which, came out of their fear – fear of truth. Can one blame them for entertaining such fear? In a way we can sympathise with them. Truth can often be very frightening. The manner in which Manish had avoided asking the necessary question indicated that perhaps they were right. My insistence on baring all facts to the child can be seen by them as my arrogance.

In his paper on Arrogance Dr. Bion (1967) points to this fact. He proposes to look at the Oedipus myth from the point of view of arrogance. He says, "..... I shall rehearse the Oedipus myth from a point of view which makes the sexual crime a peripheral element of a story in which the central crime is arrogance of Oedipus in vowing to lay bare the truth at no matter what cost.

This shift of emphasis brings the following elements into the centre of the story: the sphinx, who asks the riddle and destroys herself when it is answered, the blind Teiresias, who possesses knowledge and deplores the resolve of the king to search for it, the oracle that provokes the search which the prophet deplores, and again the king who, his search conducted, suffers blindness and exile. This is the story of which the elements are discernible amongst the ruins of psyche, to which the scattered references to curiosity, arrogance and stupidity have pointed the way.”

From his parents’ and therefore Manish’s point of view I was leading Manish to face an internal disaster. I was therefore curious, stupid and arrogant. On the other hand psychoanalytical, hopeful view would be that with the help of the kind foster parents and analysis Manish could have gone through his earlier experiences and learnt to live with them in some measure of peace.

Not looking at facts here has another implication too. By not asking the right question to Sahadev, a whole community brought down a massive destructive war. It indicates some kind of perversity. Yudhishtir on one hand stood for Truth while on the other he was drawn towards gambling. Thus not wanting to know is not only due to fear of disaster. It is also due to a fascination for a perversity, a fascination for death instinct – a perversity in which a whole group of people joined hands. In the case of Manish it was equally true that not only his parents but his entire joint family (in which secrets are very difficult to keep) and the professional Family Therapist had joined hands. At the end of my experience of this analysis I was not at all certain if a massive destructive process – a war like disaster - was not set in motion. I did feel that Manish would end up having serious psychotic illness. Thus, while avoiding a disaster, actually, one brings about a bigger and worse one later on.

I feel that I have demonstrated, with some measure of success, the use of myths that children can make in their analysis. Starting from Lord Krishna to Indra to Surya to Sahadev we traversed a lengthy, varied, terrain. As I said earlier, the obscure myth of Sahadev helped us to sum up the tragic end of our experience. The Sahadev saga contained two contrary elements – omniscience and helplessness. By elaborating both these we were able to place our analytical

experience in an understandable perspective. At the very least we had successfully put all the relevant facts on the table.

Manish had made his choice. Whether it was the right one or not, I do not know. In the end, I had one solace, though. He could return to those facts in the future if and when he felt strong enough to face them.

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