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Coming to Terms with Death: Theodicy in Hindu myth and Biblical narrative

Gitanjali Bakshi

“The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, toward it.”

Peter Berger

The following paper analyzes theoretical explanations put forth by two major religious traditions to explain the phenomenon of death. The experience of death is an extremely destructive force within the human endeavor; for centuries people have tried to find ways to avoid its harmful effects. I intend to focus on the power of religious narrative to assuage humankind's endless battle against mortality and to offer insights into the natural world that provide a sanctuary for those who fall victim to poverty, illness and above all death. The paper includes a comparative analysis of the biblical Story of Job and the Hindu myth of Mahishasuramardini. The comparative analysis highlights differences and similarities between the two traditions, and the relative perspective allows for a deeper, more developed insight into the subject.

The aim of this paper is to show how in both the Hindu and Judaeo-Christian religious narrative, the issue of human mortality and the perceived threat to the human endeavor is eclipsed by the grandeur and complexity of nature (and what is there revealed by the Divine). Such a vision can thus affect a “masochistic liberation” from ego-driven anxieties about the mortality and the meaning of life.

The Myth of Mahishasuramardini

A popular myth within Hindu tradition, known as Mahishasuramardini, relates a story about an epic battle between a buffalo-demon named Mahisha and the Hindu Goddess Durga. The narrative wrestles with issues of death and sacrifice through a complex interplay of prose and imagery.

The Birth of the Buffalo-Demon

According to Hindu scripture Mahisha is conceived through the unnatural

union of a sage king named Rambha and a she-buffalo named Syama¹. His unusual pedigree as half brahmin and half beast indicates the duality within human nature, of divine pursuit and atavistic tendencies. Our protagonist clearly possesses a potential for spiritual development but throughout the plot he allows his baser instincts to guide his actions. Blinded by ego and a false sense of pride, Mahisha gradually becomes drunk with power. He is unable to accept his earthly limitations and ultimately he challenges the supremacy of the 'Divine Mother of the Universe'. Within battle the buffalo-demon encounters the destructive and awe-inspiring nature of the Goddess Durga. He recognizes her true form and simultaneously admits his inadequacy in relation to her. The relentless pursuit for immortality finally culminates in Mahisha's submission to the glory and power of Durga.

Mahisha's Rise to Power

According to the scriptures, Mahisha performs rigorous tasks in propitiation of the gods for 10,000 years and earns the respect and favor of Brahma, the divine creator. Brahma offers Mahisha a boon as reward for his penance². In response Mahisha requests immortality. The deity denies Mahisha his wish, as immortality is a gift meant only for the gods. Traditionally, Hindu mythology depicts a relentless conflict between the gods (*devas*) and the demons (*asuras*). Although the relationship between these two categories is more complex than a duality between good and evil (as O'Flaherty posits in her book, "The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology"), there is one clear distinction between *devas* and *asuras*; ultimately, demons must succumb to the forces of death.

The *Devi Bhagvata* depicts the infant Mahisha arising out of the hallowed flames of his parents' funeral pyre³. In other words, the buffalo-demon is born out of destruction, and will ultimately return to this state when he is defeated by the Goddess. The beginning of the myth thus intimates the close relationship between birth, death and re-birth within Hindu theodicy. Hindus believe that ultimate liberation from suffering and union with the divine occurs only once the

¹The myth of Mahishasuramardini has been featured in several Hindu texts. The following narrative deals with versions from the *Devi Mahatmya* (DM) in the *Markandeya Purana*, *Devi Bhagvata Purana* (DBP), the *Vamana Purana* (VP), and the *Kalika Purana* (KP). These texts were written in the 5th and 6th century B.C.

²According to Hinduism an individual may perform physical austerities by sacrificing 'corporeal' needs, in order to harness 'spiritual' benefits (*tapas*).

³According to the *Devi Bhagvata*, Rambha is murdered before the buffalo-demon is born, and in an act of devastation over her husband's death, the pregnant Syama leaps into the funeral pyre after him

endless cycles of birth, death and re-birth (*Samsara*) conclude⁴. Hence, as a demon plagued by his ephemeral nature, Mahisha assumes the role of the 'Tragic Hero' within Hindu mythology⁵. His countless efforts to evade death ultimately parallel Oedipus' struggle with the human condition.

Brahma offers Mahisha another chance. In response the buffalo-demon requests indestructibility against all 'men and gods'. Hence, the only way to surmise his death would be through a woman. The egomaniacal demon believes he has tricked the gods, since no woman could possibly overcome him. As the boon is granted, Mahisha grows in might and vigor. He overthrows the devas and assumes control of the three worlds (heaven, hell and the netherworld). Defeated, the gods retreat into hiding, the universe descends into chaos and the world is submerged in darkness⁶.

Encounter with the Goddess

Outraged by the suffering induced upon them, the gods conspire to overpower the buffalo-demon. They combine their collective energies to create a magnificent and awe-inspiring Goddess. "Thus, parts of all gods had combined to create a deity more powerful than all of them put together-the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts" (Chitgopekar 19). Hindu scripture, particularly the Puranas, identifies this Supreme Goddess as Durga.

In the *Vamana Purana*, Durga is initially depicted peacefully meditating atop a mountain. The splendor and beauty of her divine magnificence is portrayed in relation to nature or "*prakriti*" (Chitgopekar 47-49). "She excels the clouds in her lock of hair, surpasses the moon in her face, eclipses the three fires in her three eyes... (20:3). Hence the poetry describes the glory of the Goddess through the natural world. Within the Hindu *Shakta* philosophy the Goddess Durga occupies a unique role as an independent cosmic force. Her divine power (*para-shakti*) underlies all forms of life and motivates nature's productivity⁷.

Durga is so alluring that she entices the buffalo-demon, and enthralled by her aesthetic magnificence, he asks for the Goddess' hand in marriage. Much to

⁴"The only certainty of life is death; death will always follow birth which will lead to re-birth" (Chitgopekar 15).

⁵The 'Tragic hero' refers to a dramatic method, purportedly invented by Sophocles that poses a central figure/character who is vexed with the burdens and limitations of 'human existence'.

⁶The reversal of hierarchy between Mahisha and the gods displaces divine centrality in the universe and is viewed in Hinduism as a disruption of the cosmic order.

⁷"The Shaktas conceive their Great Goddess as the personification of primordial energy and the source of all divine and cosmic evolution. She is identified with the Supreme Being, conceived as the Source and the Spring as well as the Controller of all the forces and potentialities of Nature." (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakta>)

Mahisha's horror, Durga ruthlessly rejects the proposal and instead challenges the buffalo-demon to a duel, stating that only if he conquers her in battle will she claim him as her husband. Enraged and upset at being challenged by a 'mere' woman, Mahisha lets his ego get the better of him. Immediately he engages in a death-defying encounter with the Goddess.

The Epic Battle

All of the scriptures, especially the *Devi Mahatmya*, include detailed accounts of the epic battle between demon and deity. As battle queen, Durga epitomizes action and energy; the once demure divinity transforms into a ferocious adversary. She is portrayed in scripture with red eyes and flowing hair, quaffing wine and cackling out loud. As Supreme Goddess, Durga transgresses all traditional and worldly boundaries of ethic and gender⁶. Her demure and benevolent traits (*saumya*) as mother are subdued by her frightful and malevolent characteristics (*ghora*) as destroyer. After countless attempts to evade his fatality, Mahisha is eventually defeated. Durga captures the buffalo-demon under her foot, and with her trident, she effortlessly decapitates him.

Yet, "Even though there is such an obvious show of violence in her slaying of demons, she is not considered dangerous" (Chitgopekar 119). Durga must destroy Mahisha so that she can restore the gods to their rightful place in heaven. As slayer of demons, the Goddess Durga destroys in an effort to return creation to a state of order. Originally a nature deity of the Sabara and Santal tribes of north India, Durga has always embodied both the destructive and creative aspects within the natural world (Chitgopekar 65). And as the feminine *Prakriti* or material energy, she exemplifies the importance of creation and destruction within the generative process⁷. Consequently, her role as 'slayer' in Hindu mythology implies that death is a relevant factor in the life-process (Samsara). Hence "...acts of destruction per se are not seen as problematic as long as they produce and restore order to a threatened world" (Chitgopekar 119).

Mahisha's Sacrifice

As she beheads his various forms, Durga strips the buffalo-demon of his illusionary invincibility⁸. "Mahisha is being put to death sequentially in all his

⁶The etymological root for Durga is "'Dur' + 'gam'-difficult of access or approach, impassable, unattainable, the unfathomable, the invincible one, beyond reach" (Chitgopekar 77).

⁷Other than nature, the term *prakriti* also refers to the natural world in Samkhya philosophy. One of the 6 branches in Hinduism, Samkhya believes that the entire universe comprises of two entities- primordial matter or *Prakriti* (feminine) and consciousness or *Purusha* (masculine).

⁸One of Mahisha's supernatural powers was his ability to change his physical form (*maya*).

aspects, and although...he is able temporarily to postpone his own destiny, he can do very little to alter the fundamental realities of his existence" (Berkson 12). The buffalo-demon's decapitation represents his complete submission to the will of the Goddess in a type of mystical union, wherein Mahisha, stupefied by the glory of the Mother of the Universe, accepts the limitations of his own existence¹¹. Within Hindu belief and practice, redemption from death and suffering is ultimately achieved through the eradication of all forms of ego. Particularly in the Shakta tradition, the mystical quest culminates when the individual soul (*atman*) unites with the sacred Other (*Brahman*).

Bound by his limited knowledge, Mahisha underestimates Durga's omnipotence and is blinded by his pride. He forgets that, "Whatever there is, is due to her; whatever works, works because of her. She is the power that makes possible the creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe" (Chitgopekar 49). Hence, although Mahisha cannot evade mortality, he finds meaning in his death. Once Mahisha offers himself as sacrifice to the Goddess, he loses individuality and becomes one with the motionless, eternal being of primordial order.

In Conclusion

The myth of Mahishasuramardini thus provides a window into a Hindu religious perspective on death and suffering; it prepares the reader with questions that I intend to address in this paper. Does nature play a role in religious narrative? What does it reveal about human relationships with the divine? And how does it reflect upon the ethics of theodicy?

Religious Legitimations for Death

In his book, *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger posits that every society engages in the process of world-construction and world-maintenance. The necessity to render a certain degree of order within the workings of our everyday lives is a basic human characteristic. Through ritual and myth, religious traditions renew the authority of a sacred order in the face of chaotic events. The methodology they use to provide explanations for anomic phenomena such as poverty, illness and ultimately death is called **theodicy**. According to Berger, theodicies possess varying degrees of theoretical sophistication (53). While the peasant might resign the occurrence of death to the inexplicable will of God, the theologian provides a more articulate theodicy of divine majesty. Nevertheless, an illiterate peasant

¹¹In Hindu mythology, "beheadings also take place as a punishment and as a way of inducing humility or of transforming the opponent into a devotee" (Chitgopekar 42).

might engage in the act of theodicy as often as a learned theologian. It is one of the most primitive forms of rationalization when confronted with human suffering.

However, beneath these various religious justifications for the human condition, there lies a fundamental belief that defies logical explanation. Religion suggests the existence of a cosmic 'nomos' (order) that transcends the boundaries of the human world and creates an overarching 'sacred canopy' under which civilization can function logically. According to Berger, "Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality" (Berger 32). At the same time this supreme cosmic order goes beyond the limits of human thought and action; it requires an 'attitude of surrender' to a higher spiritual reality that ultimately transcends the boundaries of human understanding.

Theodicy and the Masochistic Attitude

In order to overcome the anguish caused by death and marginality, individuals must eventually accept the boundaries of their personal knowledge and submit to an unfathomable cosmic 'Other'. "In consequence, the pain becomes tolerable, the terror less overwhelming, as the sheltering canopy of the nomos extends to cover even those experiences that may reduce the individual to howling animality" (Berger 55)¹². Many religions include this notion of surrender within their respective theodicies. In his chapter on 'the problem of theodicy', Berger intimates that this tendency to "lose oneself" to a sacred 'Other' exists in every society. And therefore, to a certain extent, the human enterprise involves a denial of the individual self, its wants, concerns and troubles. This implicit self-denial within religious tradition is what the author refers to as the 'masochistic attitude'.

Masochistic liberation induces a "double metamorphosis", whereby the individual reduces him or herself to nothingness and esteems the 'Other' as absolute reality. With the aid of this approach, the individual reaches a state of ecstasy, whereby the individual not only overcomes but welcomes suffering¹³. Engulfed in the presence of the 'Other', the individual is no longer plagued by the anguish of personal experience. The latent masochism within religious behavior, whereby a person submits completely to the will of a seemingly sadistic god, is present within some of the most archaic forms of nature worship and it still persists within conventional religious theory (Berger 57). The story of Job

¹²In both the Hindu myth as well as the biblical narrative, the protagonists (Mahisha and Job) depict a certain animal desperation whilst coming to terms with their death and suffering.

¹³The word ecstasy is derived from its etymological root- ek-stasis, which literally means "standing, or stepping, *outside* reality as commonly defined." (Berger 43)

in biblical narrative offers a Judaeo-Christian perspective on the persistence of masochism within rational theodicy.

The Story of Job

Although faithful to God's precepts, Job falls victim to a harsh and cruel fate. He loses all his wealth and earthly possessions, his children and servants to death, and he is stricken with disease and illness. His suffering becomes so unbearable that his wife entreats him to simply curse God and die. Yet Job remains loyal to his creator and patiently endures without question¹⁴. While lying on his death-bed, Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come to pay their respects. They sit by his side mourning for seven days and seven nights and it is then that Job breaks the silence and curses the day that he was born¹⁵.

Confronted by the veracity of death the protagonist finally expresses his frustration, "How could God the creator and sustainer of life be the purveyor of death in any way" (Thiel 79)?¹⁶. In response to his cries of torment his friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar offer but one explanation: there must have been something that Job did to deserve such a fate. In other words they suggest that a righteous God punishes only the wicked. When forced to defend his innocent suffering Job ultimately questions conventional norms of a just and compassionate God. The Joban paradigm offers an unorthodox approach to Christian theodicy and implicitly challenges certain theories of divine justice. Within the Christian tradition, there are two chief theodicies that provide a religious explanation for the human condition.

A] Theory of Retribution

According to classical Christian doctrine the destructive forces we encounter in life can be explained through a 'Theory of Retribution'. This theory was first propounded by Saint Augustine of Hippo, after he converted to Christianity in 386 A.D. The argument poses a 'legalist relationship' between man and his Creator, wherein God exacts 'divine justice' through an equitable distribution of reward and punishment between the good and wicked respectively. The retributive attitude focuses on moral responsibility and consequently suffering is caused through human vice. "In Augustine's account in On Free Choice and

¹⁴"In all this Job did not sin with his lips." (2:11).

¹⁵The actions enacted by Job's friends within the Bible are extremely similar to traditional funerary rituals. Hence the narrative suggests that they considered Job as good as dead.

¹⁶"For the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes." (3:25-26).

Will, evil acts entail a willful turning away from the divine law toward lesser created goods perversely elevated to the status of God" (Thiel 6). It is for this reason that humans experience suffering. Hence the experience of physical evil is a reaction to the act of moral evil¹⁷. The theory of retribution stresses a doctrine of human culpability over divine malevolence in its explanation for the human condition. Within an orthodox Christian stance innocent suffering does not exist before God. The anguish of poverty, illness and death is a direct consequence of man's inherently evil nature.

In his interpretation of the Genesis story, Paul alludes to this idea of a nascent human sinfulness. He terms Adam and Eve's deliberate rebellion against God's will as the primal sin. In response to their corruption, God relegated them to a life of mortal existence. In the Pauline interpretation of Genesis, death is considered proof of human fallibility. "As all their descendants followed in the footsteps of their parents, "so death spread to all because all have sinned..." (Romans 5:12)" (Thiel 7). Human society thus inherited the stench of demise through their sinful actions. Paul's letters suggested an ensuing theodicy of 'original sin', propounded by early Christian doctrine that advocated universal human fallacy as justification for an inevitable death. According to the doctrine of original sin human beings are born into a state of evil; it is this inherent evil that produces a condition of death¹⁸.

The Poverty of Anthropocentricity

In his interpretation of Job, Peter Berger indicates that what seems to be a question of theodicy is actually a question of anthropodicy. According to Berger, Job's intimations about the persistence of innocent suffering within mankind do not point toward the nature of God. Instead the biblical rhetoric implicates human sin and fallibility as responsible for the human condition. The unsympathetic response offered by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar as well as Job's own impatience, tacitly suggest the reasons behind human anguish. In short the author implies that the justification for God's actions is replaced by an indictment against human morality (Berger 74).

In my opinion, both the theory of retribution as well as Berger's theory of anthropodicy stress the importance of human morality, when in fact the conclusion

¹⁷According to Immanuel Kant, 'Moral evil' refers to voluntary acts of violence that induce harm upon others or oneself. Whereas 'physical evil' suggests suffering that is caused by others or that is beyond human control.

¹⁸Eliphaz alludes to the retributive theodicy of original sin when he asks, "Can mortal man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?" (4:17).

to the story of Job emphasizes the inadequacy of the humanly determined moral world while trying to comprehend divine will. Since God transcends the boundaries of such a world, justifying his actions within a social context would reduce divine work to a humanly perceived understanding of what is right and what is wrong¹⁹. In a way, any interpretation that focuses primarily on issues of morality is idolatrous, because it puts the individual in the center of the religious narrative and gives that individual more credit than he or she deserves.

In his answer to Job's questions about innocent suffering, "God moves the discussion to the natural world, which is beyond good and evil, and so beyond any question of whether the righteous prosper or suffer" (Wilcox 212). The brutal and ravenous hunting scenes within nature suggest the anomalous character of human morality within the created world. Humankind here is not portrayed as the vanguard of creation, like the adage that follows the story of the 'great flood'. Instead nature embodies the various realms of divine construction that lie beyond social conventions. Rather than emphasizing the centrality of moral precepts within the cosmic *nomos*, the story of Job takes a non-traditional approach toward Judaeo-Christian notions of human leadership.

The scenes portray nature as beautiful and part of an ordered universe. The natural world functions consistently and although nature does not work within the laws of human morality it still embodies a sense of beauty and complex structure. Hence even within the apparent amorality of the natural world the narrative implies a creative order or *nomos* that supports it. The story of Job points not so much toward a question of anthropodicy as rather the 'poverty of anthropocentricity'. Ultimately it posits the redundancy of ethics and rational moral thought when we have to explain events that fall beyond the constructs of a 'living human world'.

B] God of Theophany

Traditional doctrines of the covenant and original sin deny innocent suffering by making all suffering the guilty consequence of human sin. Hence within the framework of a retributive theodicy humankind feels abandoned and even condemned by its creator at times when it needs sheltering the most. In order to counter the harsh precepts of the legalist explanation, the Judaeo-Christian tradition replaced the notion of 'divine justice' with 'divine love' to

¹⁹"God would remain a God who requires upright and responsible conduct of human beings; the author attacks the Moral World Order, not morality" (Wilcox 218).

explain the existence of marginal experiences in the presence of an all-powerful and loving God²⁰.

The notion of a 'providential God' gains inspiration from early Israelite belief in a 'God of the Oppressed' or Isaiah's theodicy of God as 'suffering-servant', wherein death and marginality connotes the presence of God in one's life rather than signifying the absence of the divine. "And is not suffering as a means of intimacy with God exactly what one would expect of a God who, in Christian scripture and tradition, took on human form and suffered along with and for the world?" (Ekstrom 96). Thus while the legalist explanation denies the existence of innocent suffering the providential explanation accepts innocent suffering into the fold of divine knowledge. Even the destructive effects of death bring one closer to and not further away from divine purpose. Similarly, in the story of Job the closeness of death enhances intimacy between man and his creator. Job's faith in God, although threatened at first, eventually grows stronger with questioning.

However the God of the Whirlwind is shrouded in mystery and is not contingent on logical explanation. After the four elders have spoken and are unable to come to any conclusion, Elihu, the youngest, chastises them for their lack of faith. He questions Job's endless interrogation in light of God's omnipotence. In an inspirational tirade from chapters 32-38 Elihu proclaims the transcendent nature of the almighty²¹. "It is imperative that Job should be left in ignorance at the end, since the lesson he learns is just that he must trust God, even if he doesn't understand the reasons for his action" (Peak 107). Hence a theodicy that supports the 'God of the Theophany' requires an attitude of surrender on the part of the believer, who must accept the limitations of his being in light of a cosmic wisdom.

Immersed in his personal anguish, Job remains ignorant about the true nature of God. His continued attempt to avoid death and suffering represents the human effort to evade the fundamental frailty of mortal existence. By reducing God's actions to a moral framework, Job makes the mistake of appreciating an anthropocentric worldview with the status of divine justice. This approach only enhances Job's feelings of bitterness. Ultimately, the protagonist is compelled "to acknowledge the harsh reality: Neither the universe nor its ruler accords any weight to human morality as a claim for preferential treatment" (Crenshaw 183).

²⁰"Because life meets us sometimes as beneficent and sometimes as oppressive, we describe the Lord of life as both good and evil, if only to assure ourselves that we are not alone during adversity" (Crenshaw 181).

²¹"Behold, in this you are not right. I will answer you. God is greater than man. Why do you contend against him, saying, He will answer none of my words? For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it." (33:12-14).

The scenes in nature expose the beauty and ruthless abandon of creation. Before his tribulations Job is God's faithful servant. He possesses the courage to face the avoidable evils of an immoral existence. But within mental and physical anguish Job faces the challenge of patience, where he must endure those evils that are ultimately unavoidable. Death is an inescapable symptom of the human condition; it permeates through the entire created world²².

In Conclusion

In light of God's majestic creation Job realizes his relative insignificance and is reduced to 'dust and ashes'. When life itself is an unmerited gift of divine beneficence, the receiver has no right to say when, where or how it should be taken away²³. And only after Job rids himself of his egotistical efforts to solve the problem of evil does he find himself accepting the human condition. "He has become a man of broken and contrite heart, penitent and self-loathing, who, because he knows himself to have nothing and deserve nothing, can most readily cast himself upon God, whose wisdom and omnipotence no longer crush but uphold and uplift him" (Peak 108). Ultimately Job must surrender himself to the will of his Creator. It is within this surrender that he finds a sense of solace and can resign to a happy and correct death.

Final Comparative Analysis

It must be noted that theodicies do not necessarily offer redemption from suffering. At times they offer a sense of meaning to the human condition, rather than a solution (Berger 58). In other words, though humanity might never escape the realities of its mortal existence, it can come to terms with death by finding a place for it within a larger cosmic plan.

In pre-historic agricultural and nomadic societies the phenomenon of death and decay was an important part of the regenerative process. The repetitive nature of fertility rituals within primitive forms of nature worship indicated a cycle of birth, death and renewal as part of a natural progression. Hence nature and creation provided a sacred canopy under which human beings found continuity and even purpose in death.

In the Myth of Mahishasuramardini, Durga signifies both the destructive and

²²"Who shows no partiality to princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands? In a moment they die; at midnight the people are shaken and pass away, and the mighty are taken away by no human hand." (34:19-20).

²³"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away"

creative aspects of the natural world. Her divine imminence within all facets of nature indicates the important point that "In Hindu philosophy, death is not the end of life. The culmination comes when one realizes and accepts divinity in everything" (Chitgopekar 27). As the terrifying and beautiful mother of the universe, Durga challenges conventional standards of Hindu society and exposes the limitations of a human moral world to comprehend ultimate reality.

In the Story of Job, the beauty in nature stands as evidence for a divine and benevolent maker. Through prose and verse the poet depicts the multitudinal facets that make up the physical world "The creator has prepared a well-ordered place for all living creatures, one that makes life both possible and pleasant. In such a world, the proper human response is wonder and praise" (Crenshaw 7). The existence of the created world is contingent upon divine grace. Hence to see creation itself as an act of grace is to accept one's radical dependence on God²⁴.

In both religious narratives, the frailty of the human moral world is revealed through the mysterious grace and ferocity of nature. Whether divinity is seen as imminent or transcendent to the natural world, both Hindu and Christian theodicy suggests that humans have no right to define the true nature of God in anthropomorphic terms. "Here is a universalism that negates every elevation of human beings to the center of things, a position that only one Being can occupy. That single being is the creator and sustainer of everything" (Crenshaw 190) Hence, much like Mahisha, the Joban story calls for the shedding of ego. Ultimately both religious narratives posit complete resignation to the wisdom of God. Immersed in the glory and beauty of creation as a whole, both Mahisha and Job find happiness in their own death.

"It is thus well to keep in mind that the masochistic attitude is one of the persistent factors of irrationality in the problem of theodicy, no matter what degree of rationality may be attained in various efforts to solve the problem theoretically" (Berger 57). Depictions of complete surrender in religious narrative, in this case Mahisha's decapitation and Job's final repentance, illustrate the persistence of masochism while explaining mortality. In the end humanity must accept its inability to explain phenomena that surpass the human realm of existence. Therefore, absolute faith in an absolute God allows for acceptance of the human condition.

²⁴Who has given to me that I should repay him? Everything under the entire heaven belongs to me. (Job 41:11).

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