

Myths

About the origins of Indian crafts

This DES (Design Exploration Seminar) project is on myths about the origins of certain crafts like weaving, pottery, etc in India. The reason why such myths exist is to explain how a practice, an artform came to be. These myths are simply a product of wonder. As M.C. Escher correctly describes that, they who wonder discover that this in itself is wonder. Thus myths are not only gateways to wonder, to imagine, to expand our understanding about a phenomenon but in themselves are wonders.

The Sky girl and the Earth boy

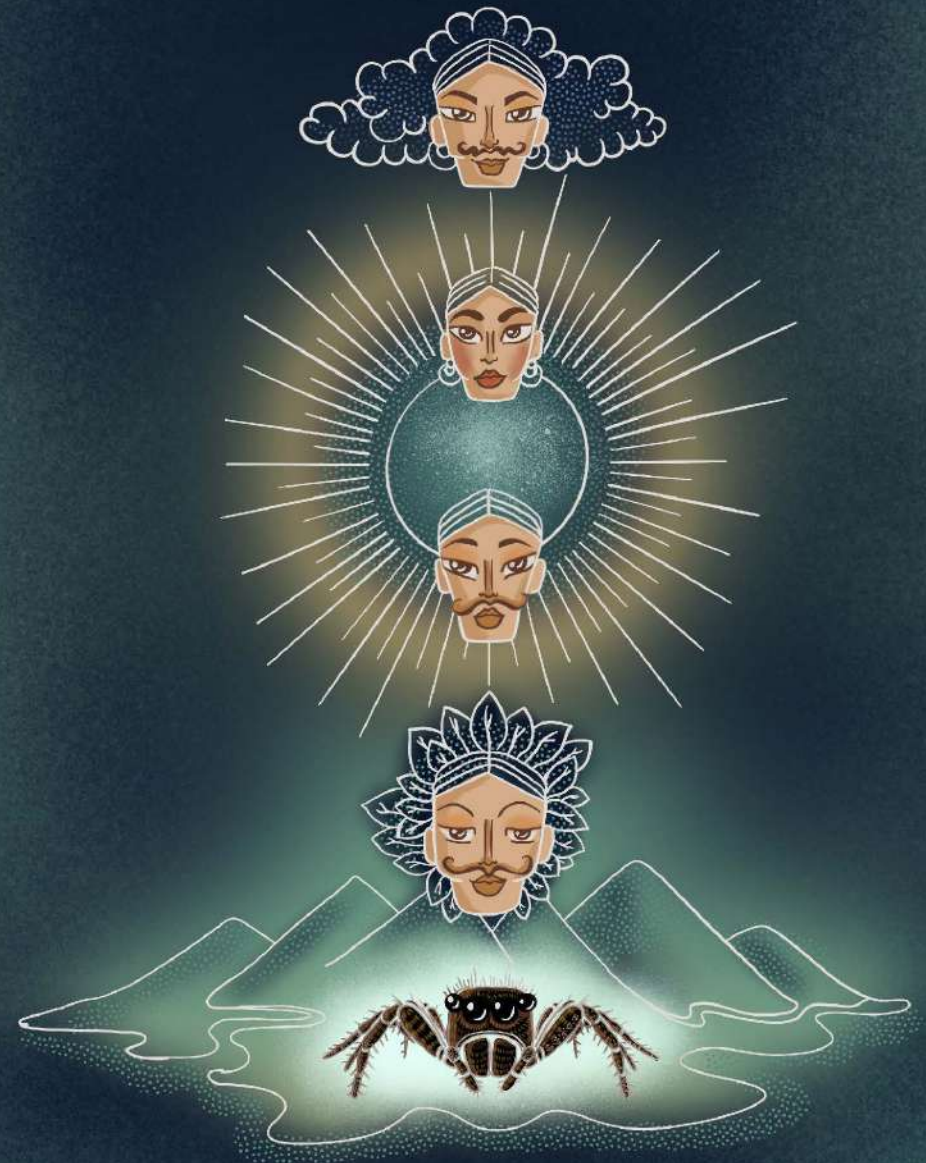
When the sky and the earth came into being,
A union was meant to come along
between the sky girl and the earth boy
Who created every craft, crop or life form.

Raja of the Sky, Lan-Ning-Nan
and Raja of the Earth, Mathum Matta
decided to get their children married
The Sky girl, Chikim-Kainang
and the Earth boy, Kamsan-Laispang
Received from their fathers, many gifts varied.

The blessed couple got everything, every gem!
Except for any clothes to cover them
And thus mathum matta cut his navel off
To offer it to his daughter, in a box
He also added a pumpkin seed
Said, "listen you two, pay heed!"
"Take the box home and open it there
A weaver will come out to weave cloth to wear".

"The seed you must plant and grow into a tree,
Which will bear two fruits, not three.
And these fruits will grow big, so break them open then,
To discover my blessings and love within"
Chikam descended from the sky to earth
And opened the box, at the very first.
Much to her surprise a spider jumped out
Who began weaving cloth without any doubt.

Watching the spider, the girl learnt to weave
And in her garden planted the pumpkin seed.
Which grew to bear two very precious fruits
From one came all sorts of animals
From the other came all the grains of food.
This is how the craft of weaving arrived
And life on earth flourished and thrived!





Hambrumai, the First Girl who wove

The first girl to weave was a girl named Hambrumai. She had learned the art of weaving from God Matai . She would sit by the river and learn her designs form the nature that surrounded her, by watching the waves and the ripples that appeared in the river and by copying the branches of trees, plants and flowers.

But one day, Hairum, the porcupine saw her cloth. Tempted by a richness he'd never seen before, he came to steal it from her cave. The entrance was too small for him and as he tried to push his way in, Hambrumai got crushed with giant sized rocks. Her loom broke into pieces and the river carried them to the plains where people found it and learnt to weave.

The designs turned into butterflies and the patterns she made can still be seen on their wings.

A Weaver's Love

A weaver's love was such, that when
Her lover coiled majestically in her lap,
the detailed designs of his body
Were imprinted in her soul & mind

It was pure magic as she saw
Her lover become a snake
With scales pointy and edgy
From the tail, to the neck, to the jaw.

She wove a cloth day and night.
It looked it like her lover's skin,
And when she wrapped it around
It warmed her heart from within.

A weaver's love was such...





Parvati's First Necklace

One day, long ago, Bhagwan said to Mahadev and Parvati, 'Go to the world and see how it has been made and whether anything is lacking'. Mahadev asked: 'How are we to get there?' Bhagwan told a spider: 'Throw your thread down to the world and let them slide down on it'.

The spider threw its thread down to the world and Mahadev and Parvati slipped down to the earth far below the surface. They went further, and saw Nag Dev, the snake god, who coiled himself around Parvati's arm and neck.

Mahadev said, 'This creature shall be your ornament, you shall wear it around on your head, your neck, your wrists and arms for beauty and adornment.' This is how women began to wear ornaments.

Clay on Fire

In summers, the elephants stuck mud
on their foreheads to cool down
The mud then dried up & fell
in strange shapes, all around!

The primitive humans loved
these unique pieces of clay
Collected and kept them
in their huts made of hay.

One day the heat
set these huts ablaze
The clay inside burned,
but became stronger
Everyone was amazed!

The pouring rain came next
but the mud pieces remained intact
and this is how firing as a process began
believe it or not, but its a fact!





The Illumination

To give lord shiva a lump of mud,
a crab from pataal lok emerged
Shiva stuck it in his hair
and slid into a slumber undisturbed

A darkness came around
after shiva entered his trance
With worry and fear,
his followers began to dance

They finally woke up the god
with the help of scorpions & hissing snakes
Then Shiva created a glowing diya,
forever illuminating the dark void of space

Another chunk of the mud,
he used to create this earth
and floated it into the ocean.
Rudra took the rest of the mud to earth,
to create more lamps in Lord Shiva's devotion.

The First Wheel for Pottery

A grand yajna was held by the gods,
very very long back in time
For which a hathreiya was sought,
since a handmade kumbha was prime.

He started making the pot,
which unfortunately cracked
With no water in sight to fix it,
on his hand he spat.

The pot was contaminated
and the yajna was incomplete
But to help the gods, Brahma,
Vishnu and Mahesh agreed.

Brahma created the first potter,
who then demanded tools to create
Vishnu offered his sudershan chakra
to hold the clay's weight.

Shiva's pindi was used as its circular base
And Brahma's scared thread,
to cut the clay with grace.

This is how the potter's wheel
became the norm
Fashioning clay pots of
various shapes and forms!

