Greek, Sanskrit and Tamil: Comparison between Ion (Euripides) and Karna (Mahabharata) on the Mythological Theory of Binary Opposition

Ion is a Greek play authored by Euripides depicting the story of Ion. The Mahabharata is the epic written in both Tamil and Sanskrit languages. The story of Karna is one of the sub plots in this epic. In the Greek play, Creusa who is impregnated by Apollo, the Sun God keeps Ion in a casket together with a breast plate for his protection. In the Tamil myth, Kunti who is impregnated by the SUN god places her son Karna in a casket and lets it afloat in a river to conceal the birth of the child. Regarding the breast plate in this story it is shown that Karna was born with the breast plate glued to his breast. Creusa, the mother of Ion has had an illegal son born to her before marriage and remains with no children after getting married to another person. Kunti too gives birth to a son before marriage and remains with no children after her remarriage. The offsprings of Ion are related with the ancestors of Asians. Thus the Greek myth of Ion related with Asia has resemblance with Karna, the Asian myth.

Keywords: Ion, Karna, Myth, Sanskrit, Tamil

Introduction

Myths are mostly seen as imaginary literatures. Some times myths have also links with history. ‘Ion’, a Greek play written by Euripides consists of the myth of ‘Ion’. The author relates this myth of Ion with the history of the Ionians and Asians. Here the Asian myth, Karna has some resemblances with the myth of Ion. Further, both the myths can be looked with the background of mythological theory called binary opposition.

Ion – Play

Ion - Ιων is an ancient Greek play written by Euripides between 414 and 412 BC. It talks about an orphan Ion who was in search of his origin. Some scholars lay their emphasize on saying that the myth of ‘Ion’ is not only a simple play, but it shows the search of identity of the race of the origin (Jonathan Hall 1997)¹ (Meltzer 2006)². This play highlights many myths of Ion, among which one of the myths of Ion has resemblance with the myth related to Karna of Mahabharata.

¹Although Ion is a relatively obscure mythological figure, Euripides does make several innovations which bring together the two competing versions of Athenian identity. One foundation story highlights the Athenians as Ionians, who were one of the main (but less noteworthy) migratory Greek peoples.
²The story provides convenient justification for Athenian domination over the largely Ionian empire.
The Myth of Mahabharata

Tamil is an ancient classical language which has its first available literature called the Sangam literature. One of the poems of the Tamil Sangam literature mentions about the Mahabharata war as the war between five brothers versus hundred brothers (Tamil Virtual University 1995).

Greatness who gave unlimited food, until those hundred men wearing golden thumpai flower garlands had seized the land and perished in the field fighting furiously against the five whose horses wore swaying plumes!
Puranānūru 2, Poet Muranjiyūr Mudinākanār

Sang to Chēramān Perunchōtru Uthiyan Chēralāthan

Thus this reference mentions about the war that took place between hundred men and five brothers. There is a reference that the Tamil king Chēramān giving food to both the armies. It means in a way that the war has taken place near his kingdom. This Tamil king Chēramān is denoted as ‘Κηπροβότρου - Cerobothra’ in Greek (Wilfred 1912). Besides, another Tamil king Pāndiyan also took part in the war. He is denoted as ‘Πανδίονος – Pandion’ in Greek (Wilfred 1912). He fought on the side of the five brothers (Tamil Virtual University 1995).

The five brothers praised your war skill

Line 775, Mathuraikkānji
Poet Manggudi Maruthanar,
Sang to Pandion Nedun Chezhiyan

The war bull of five brothers

Puranānūru 58, Poet Kāviripooppattinathu Kāri Kannanār
Sang to Pāndiyan Velliampalathu Thunjiya Peruvaluthi

Thus these references are the proof for the relation of the historical Tamil king tradition called Pandion (Πανδίονος) with the myth of Mahabharata. This myth was then written as an epic by a Tamil poet ‘Baratham Paadiya Perun Devanar’ with 12,000 verse, in which only about 830 remains now. ‘Baratham Paadiya Perun Devanar’ means a great poet who had written the epic Mahabharata. He was in black in complexion3 so was he called Krishna and because of his relation with water bodies he was called as Dwaipayana. The other name is Vyasa meaning the divider or arranger of text. So, when he wrote the epic in Sanskrit he was denoted as Krishna-Dwaipayana or Vyasa (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

The sage Krishna-Dwaipayana completed his work in three years, raising from bed very early in the day and purifying himself and performing his ascetic devotions, he composed this Mahabharata.

Section LXII, Advisansavatarana Parva,
Book I, The Mahabharata

3Normally Tamilians are black in colour
And the child of Parasara so born of me in my maidenhood hath become a great Rishi endued with large ascetic powers and known by the name of Dwaipayana (the island-born). That illustrious Rishi having by his ascetic power divided the Vedas into four parts hath come to be called on earth by the name of Vyasa (the divider or arranger), and for his dark colour, Krishna (the dark).

Section CV, Sambhava Parva,
Book I, The Mahabharata

His Sanskrit work consists of over 100,000 śloka or over 200,000 individual verse lines and about 1.8 million words in total. It also ensures the thoughts of Tamil Sangam literature (Tamil Virtual University 1995) (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

Pandya, who dwelt on the coast-land near the sea, came accompanied by troops of various kinds to Yudhishthira, the king of kings. And, O king, when all these troops had assembled, his army, finely dressed and exceedingly strong, assumed an appearance pleasant to the eye.

Section XIX, Udyoga Parva,
Book 5, The Mahabharata

This reference ensures that the historical Tamil king Pandion or Pandyan (Πανδίονος) fought on the side of the five brothers where he fought against a king called Karna (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

Pandya at the time was slaughtering the army of Karna. That force, swelling with cars and steeds and teeming with foremost of foot-soldiers, struck by Pandya, began to turn round like the potter’s wheel. Like the wind dispersing a mass of congregated clouds, Pandya, with his well shot arrows, began to disperse that force, destroying its steeds and drivers and standards and cars and causing its weapons and elephants to fall down. Like the splitter of mountains striking down mountains with his thunder, Pandya overthrew elephants with their riders, having previously cut down the standards and banners and weapons with which they were armed, as also the foot-soldiers that protected those beasts. And he cut down horses, and horsemen with their darts and lances and quivers.

Section XX, Karna Parva,
Book 8, The Mahabharata

This Karna who is one of the warrior in this myth has some resemblances with the myth of Greek Ion. These resemblances can be seen based on the mythological theory of binary opposition.
Binary Opposition

Binary Opposition is a mythological theory which deals with how the opposite units operate a myth (Aimukhambet 2017, p.13). High born versus Low born, Immediate child birth versus having no children for the long time are some of the binary opposition. These can be seen in the myths of Ion and Karna.

Ion and Karna – Characterization

Ion, who is the son of Apollo is the main character in the play. Euripides naming his play as ‘Ion’ shows the important place he has given to this character.

Ion
1476. .... Mother, who was my father?    Ιων

Creusa
1482. By the nightingale's rock, Apollo— Κρέουσα
(1482. Παρ᾽ ἀπρόσωπον πέτραν
Potter Robert 1938)

Karna

Karna is the sub-character in the myth of Mahabharat. He is pictured as son of Sun God (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

Karna, .... Begotten by the Sun himself,...... And that foremost of eloquent men, the offspring of the Sun. Section CXXXVIII, Sambhava Parva,
Book I, The Mahabharata

Here Karna is the son of Sun and Ion is the son of Apollo. Phoibos is the surname of Apollo. Phoibos means ‘the shining or brilliant’, which is frequently applied to Sun. Thus Ion and Karna both are sons of Sun God. In this way both have resemblances in their myths and its shown in the Figure 1.

The binary opposition in modern works of art originates from the system of mythical thinking has been proven in the analysis of the relationship of knowledge mythical and poetic thinking, guided theoretical research. The fact that the binary opposition in contemporary works originates from the system of mythical thinking has been proved, guided by theoretical studies, in particular, the works of the scholars like F. Sossur, C. Levi-Strauss, F. Nietzsche, D. Norman, V. Naidysh, A. Maslov and others, in the course of analyzing the continuity of mythical cognition and poetic thinking. The motives of mythical consciousness show that the dyadic unity of concepts and phenomena of binary-oppositional character is the basis of their relationship with each other.
Background of the Birth - Ion

Even though Ion is the son of Apollo, his birth is not a legal birth, he was born by the abuse of her mother Creusa by Apollo.

Creusa
O my soul, how shall I be silent? [860] But how shall I reveal the hidden bed, and depart from shame?
(Potter Robert 1938)

Kristoussa
ω ψυχά, πῶς σιγάσω;
860 πῶς δὲ σκοτίας ἀναφήνῳ εἰνάς, ἀίδοος δ᾽ ἀπολειφθώ;
(Murray Gilbert 1913)

Thus the birth situation of Ion is related with illegal, religious and forced. Here there is a need to see the background of the birth of Karna.

Background of the Birth – Karna

Even though Karna is the son of Sun God, his birth did not take place under legalised situation. His mother Kunti gave birth to him before her legalised marriage. For this reason she had a boon given by the religious people and was put to test for the boon (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

Thus addressed by the Brahmana, the amiable Kunti (Pritha) became curious, and in her maidenhood summoned the god Arka (Sun). And as soon as he
pronounced the Mantra, she beheld that effulgent deity—that beholder of everything in the world—approaching her.

Section CXI, Sambhava Parva,
Book I, The Mahabharata

O fortunate one, with thee! By this mantra (that I am about to give thee), thou shall be able to summon (to thy side) whatever celestials thou likest. And, by their grace, shall thou also obtain children.' Thus addressed, the girl (a little while after), seized with curiosity, summoned, during the period of her maiden-hood, the god Surya. And the lord of light thereupon made her conceive and begot on her a son who became the first of all wielders of weapons.

Section LXVII, Sambhava Parva,
Book I, The Mahabharata

Thus Kunti tested for the worthiness for granting her the boon, she had a baby from the God without legitimate marriage. Thus the birth situation of Karna is related with religious, illegal and acceptance. In this way, Ion and Karna both have resemblances with some slight variation. The resemblances can be looked based on the binary opposition mythological theory.

Ion and Birth – Binary Opposition

Ion was born to Apollo as his son. This birth is considered to be very high, but was illegal. The people living around do not know about his father Apollo. So his birth was illegitimate in the eyes of common man and this is mentioned in several places in this play.

Ion
Alas! I am low-born. Mother, who was my father?
(Potter Robert 1938)

Ion
309. I am called the slave of the god, lady.

Ion
[325] Perhaps my birth is some woman's wrong
(Potter Robert 1938)

Ion
582……..πατρός τ’ ἐπακτοῦ καὐτός ὃν νοῳ ἐπικεφαλής.
καὶ τοῦτ ἦχον τοῦνιδος, ἀσθενής μὲν ὃν
—
(Murray Gilbert 1913)
Here there is a binary opposition because of illegal birth given by God though his birth is considered high by relating with God but cursed by people around as illegitimate child portraying his birth as very low..

[580] you will not be called ill-born and poor, but well-born and rich. (Potter Robert 1938)

In practical, a human born as a son of God is hard to believe. So here it is argued that he is said to be the son of God only to hide his illegal birth.

—an affliction that happens to girls; [1525] and now you are ascribe the blame to the god and attempt to escape the shame of my birth by saying that you bore me to Phoebus, when your lover was not a god? (Potter Robert 1938)

Karna and Birth – Binary Opposition

Karna’s birth is considered high because he was born to sun God. But his birth is unlawful and the people around cannot accept that his father is sun God. So his birth was treated as being low. It is mentioned in several places in this myth (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

‘O mighty-armed one, thou too must tell us thy lineage and the names of thy father and mother and the royal line of which thou art the ornament.’

Section CXXXVIII, Sambhava Parva, Book 1, The Mahabharata

Thus the lineage of Karna was questioned in the assembly of the Kings. The facial expression of Karna is shown as follows.

Karna’s countenance became like unto a lotus pale and torn with the pelting showers in the rainy season.

Section CXXXVIII, Sambhava Parva, Book 1, The Mahabharata

even as a dog doth not deserve the butter placed before the sacrificial fire.

Section CXXXVIII, Sambhava Parva, Book 1, The Mahabharata

Thus in several places Karna was disheartened. His victory was also rejected due to his low birth, his wishful bride also rejected him as a suitor in marriage.
But seeing Karna, Draupadi loudly said, 'I will not select a Sutra for my lord.'

Then Karna, laughing in vexation and casting glance at the Sun, threw aside the bow already drawn to a circle.

O mother, I was abandoned by thee as soon as I was born. This great injury, involving risk to life itself, that thou didst me, hath been destructive of my achievements and fame.

Thus in several places Karna, a high born, faces humiliation as a low born. Both Ion and Karna, though high born face the disrespect of low born. This resemblance based on the binary opposition of ‘High X Low’ is seen in both these myths as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Binary Opposition – High X Low Born

Mythological Theory of Binary Opposition

Ion and Karna

In this way Ion and karna have similarities in that the Sun God had fathered both of them but of unlawful birth and this we see as mythological theory of binary opposition.

Child and Casket

Birth of the child is an event to celebrate and enjoy. All the relatives of the child such as the mother, father, grand mother and grand father happily celebrate the memorable occasion by sharing and spreading the happiness to others. This is not seen to occur in illegal births. That situation is surrounded
only by sadness and fear and try to hide the event. This situation is also seen in the myth of Ion.

Ion and Casket

Creusa unlawfully eloped with Apollo and gave birth to Ion. This unlawful incident leads to another situation.

[30] of glorious Athens, for you know the city of the goddess; take the new-born baby from the hollow rock, with his cradle and baby-clothes; bring him to my shrine at Delphi, and place him at the very entrance of my temple; [35]
(Potter Robert 1938)

Creusa, in order to hide the new born son from the eyes of her father packed up the new born child in a casket and left that place.

Karna and Casket

Birth of Karna is related with celestials. It was hard to believe at that time. So Kunti, the mother of Karna was afraid of her parents and so she wants to hide the child born to her. (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

And Kunti cast the handsome child into the water. But the child thus thrown into the water was taken up by the excellent husband of Radha and given by him to his wife to be adopted by her as their son.

Section LXVII, Sambhava Parva, Book I, The Mahabharata

And after the birth of this child, the illustrious Tapana granted unto Pritha her maidenhood and ascended to heaven. And the princess of the Vrishni race beholding with sorrow that son born of her, reflected intently upon what was then the best for her to do. And from fear of her relatives she resolved to conceal that evidence of her folly. And she cast her offspring endowed with great physical strength into the water. Then the well-known husband of Radha, of the Sutra caste, took up the child thus cast into the water, and he and his wife brought him up as their own son.

Section CXI, Sambhava Parva, Adi Parva, Book I, The Mahabharata

Thus Kunti kept her new born child safely in a casket and made it to float in the river. Thus myths of Ion and Karna have similarities called parallels in situation such as their father being God, situation of birth and hiding the child in a casket. This resemblances seen in both of these myths is shown in Figure 3.
**Figure 3. Casket – Ion and Karna**

Casket and its Chattels

To protect the baby from the surroundings and as a mark of his forerunners of the origin some specific materials were placed along with the baby in the casket. It is also seen in the myth of Ion.

**Ion Casket and its Chattels**

Due to the illegal birth, baby Ion was kept in a casket with some chattels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ion</th>
<th>Ιων</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1412. Is this vessel empty, or does it cover something?</td>
<td>κενόν τόδ’ ἄγγος ἢ στέγει πλήρωμά τι;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creusa</th>
<th>Κρέουσα</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1413. Yes, your clothes, in which I then exposed you.</td>
<td>σά γ’ ἐνδυθ’, οἷσί σ’ ἐξέθηκ’ ἐγώ ποτε.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Potter Robert 1938)

Thus clothes were kept in the casket along with the baby Ion. There were some other chattels kept along with the baby Ion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creusa</th>
<th>Κρέουσα</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1421. A Gorgon in the middle threads of the robe.</td>
<td>Γοργώ μὲν ἐν μέσοις ἡπρίωι πέπλων.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Potter Robert 1938)
Thus Gorgon was related with the cloth of Ion.

Creusa
1423. And, like an aegis, bordered with serpents. (Potter Robert 1938)

Krēousa
κεκτρασπάδωτα δ᾽ ὀφεσιν αἰγίδος τρόπον.
(Murray Gilbert 1913)

As mentioned in the play, here a special type of garment called aegis bordered with the picture of serpents was found in the casket along with the baby.

Ion
1426. Is there anything else besides, or are you lucky in this only?

Creusa
Serpents; an old gift of Athena, in gold; she tells us to rear children, in imitation of Erichthonius of long ago.

Ion
[1430] Tells you to do what with the gold, how to use it? Explain it to me.

Creusa
1431. Necklaces for the new-born baby to wear, my child.
(Potter Robert 1938)

Krēousa
δέραια παιδὶ νεογόνῳ φέρειν, τέκνον.
(Murray Gilbert 1913)

Along with the above mentioned things, necklaces were kept along with the baby Ion (Kovacs 1999). In addition to this some other things were also present near the baby Ion.

Ion
They are here; I long to know the third thing.

Creusa
I put an olive crown around you, from the tree that Athena first brought out of the rock; [1435] if it is there, it has not lost its green, but flourishes, born from an immortal olive tree.
(Potter Robert 1938)

Krēousa
στέφανον ἐλαίας ἀμφέθηκα σοί τότε, ἤν πρῶτ᾽ Ἀθάνα σκόπελον εἰσηγέκατο, 1435δ᾽, εἶτερ ἔστιν, οὔποτ᾽ ἐκλείπει χλόην, θάλλει δ᾽, ἐλαίας ἐξ ἀκηράτου γεγώς.
(Murray Gilbert 1913)

5The golden necklace represents the snakes Athena put in Erichthonios’ basket and such necklaces were still given to Athenian children as a token of their identity.
Further, an olive crown was kept along with the baby Ion. To sum up, the following things were found to be kept along with the baby.

1. A robe with a Gorgon,
2. An aegis - bordered with serpents
3. Necklaces for the new-born baby
4. Olive crown

These are shown in the Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Baby Ion with the Chattels**

![Ion with Aegis](image)

**Karna Casket and its Chattels**

Due to the illegal birth, baby Karna was kept in a casket with some chattels (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

And on coming to the river Ganga, she beheld a box drifting along the current. And containing articles capable of protecting from dangers and decked with unguents, that box was brought before her by the waves of the Janhavi……. And then he beheld a boy resembling the morning Sun. And the infant was furnished with golden mail, and looked exceedingly beautiful with a face decked in ear-rings.

Section CCCVII, Vana Parva: Pativrata-mahatmya,
Book 3, The Mahabharata

….that child who had come out with ear-rings and coat of mail. And he was gifted with the beauty of a celestial infant, and in splendour was like unto the maker of day himself. And every part of his body was symmetrical and well-adorned. And Kunti cast the handsome child into the water.

Section LXVII, Sambhava Parva,
Book I, The Mahabharata
Thus baby Karna was seen in the casket with ear-rings and coat of mail. Here it is note worthy that these ear-rings and coat of mail were strongly attached with the body of the baby Karna. So it was thought the baby Karna was born with these ear-rings and coat of mail. This coat of mail is equal as breast plate or aegis as in the myth of Ion. It is shown in the Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Baby Karna in the Casket with Aegis**

In the myth of Karna born with these ear-rings and coat of mail fixed in the body of the baby protected the baby and if he removed would cause danger to his life. Thus the babies Ion and Karna were placed in the casket soon after their birth with some chattels. In the myth of Ion there is necklace and in the myth of Karna were found ear-rings. In both of these myths a special type of breast plates. In the myth of Ion the breast plate was kept with the baby in the casket and in the myth of Karna the baby born with ear rings and the breast plate fixed with its body which is shown in the Figure 6.

**Figure 6. Breast Plate in the Myth of Ion and Karna**
In the myth of Karna the garment is seen to save his life and if it removed would cause danger to life (Kisari Mohan Ganguli 1896).

And Indra desirous of benefiting his own son Phalguni (Arjuna), assuming the form of a Brahmana, approached Vasusena on one occasion and begged of him his natural armour. Thus asked Karna took off his natural armour, and joining his hands in reverence gave it unto [paragraph continues] Indra in the guise of a Brahmana. And the chief of the celestials accepted the gift and was exceedingly gratified with Karna's liberality.

Section CXI, Sambhava Parva, Adi Parva, Book 1, The Mahabharata

Thus here the breast plate relates with the binary opposition between life and death. So there is a need to see the aegis - breast plate in the myth of Ion.

Aegis

Aegis was kept with the baby Ion in the casket. There was a description about this aegis in this myth which follows.

Creusa
987. Listen, then; you know the battle of the giants?

Tutor
Yes, the battle the giants fought against the gods in Phlegra.

Creusa
There the earth brought forth the Gorgon, a dreadful monster.

Tutor
[990] As an ally for her children and trouble for the gods?

Creusa
Yes; and Pallas, the daughter of Zeus, killed it.

Tutor
[What fierce shape did it have?]

Creusa
A breastplate armed with coils of a viper.

Tutor
Is this the story which I have heard before?

Creusa
[995] That Athena wore the hide on her
breast.

Tutor
And they call it the **aegis**, Pallas' armor?

Creusa
It has this name from when she darted to the gods' battle.

(Potter Robert 1938)

Thus this **aegis** was defined as Pallas' armor – breast plate. Athena wore this breast plate when she fought with Gorgon. At that time the blood of Gorgon was obtained. The myth explains the extraordinary power of the blood drops.

Creusa
Two drops of blood from the Gorgon.

Tutor
And what power do they have over mortals?

Creusa
[1005] One is deadly, the other heals disease.

(Potter Robert 1938)

Thus Gorgon blood was used to kill Ion. In this way the blood of Gorgon related with Pallas' armor – breast plate that was used to kill Ion. Among the two drops of blood collected from Gorgon, one drop of blood is deadly and another drop heals disease.

In the myth of Karna the breast plate itself is related with the binary opposition of life and death. In this way except for Gorgon blood, the other incidents seem to resemble in both the myth. This binary opposition seen between life and death shown in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Binary Opposition of Breast Plate

Mythological Theory of Binary Opposition

Myth of Ion

Myth of Karna

Binary Opposition (Skill) – Land and Sky

Land and sky are binary oppositions. This oppositions seen in the myths of Ion and Karna.

Ion – Land and Sky

Ion is very efficient in archery, he has the unique skill of shooting a bird flying high in the sky.

Ah, ah! Already the birds of Parnassus have left their nests, (155) and come here. I forbid you to approach the walls and the golden house. I will reach you with my bow, herald of Zeus, though you conquer (160) with your beak the strength of all other birds. Here comes another, a swan, to the rim of the temple. Move your crimson foot elsewhere! Phoebus’ lyre, that sings with you, (165) would not protect you from my bow. Alter your wings’ course; go to the Delian lake; if you do not obey, you will steep your lovely melody in blood.

(170) Ah, ah! what is this new bird that approaches; you will not place under the cornice a straw-built nest for your children, will you? My singing bow will keep you off. Will you not obey? (Potter Robert 1938)
Thus Ion attacked the flying birds accurately from the land with this special skill in archery. This is also seen in the myth of Karna.

Karna – Land and Sky

Karna is a great warrior using his bow and arrow. He can even shoot the arrow towards the moving object hanging on the sky by seeing the image of it being reflected in the water on the ground.

Causing some machinery to be erected in the sky, the king set up a mark attached to that machinery. And Drupada said, 'He that will string this bow and with these well-adorned arrows shoot the mark above the machine shall obtain my daughter.'

Section CLXXXVII, Swayamvara Parva, Book I, The Mahabharata

"And (some amongst) those kings in exerting with swelling lips each according to his strength, education, skill, and energy,—to string that bow, were tossed on the ground and lay perfectly motionless for some time. Their strength spent and their crowns and garlands loosened from their persons, they began to pant for breath and their ambition of winning that fair maiden was cooled. Tossed by that tough bow, and their garlands and bracelets and other ornaments disordered, they began to utter exclamations of woe. And that assemblage of monarchs, their hope of obtaining Krishna gone, looked sad and woeful. And beholding the plight of those monarchs, Karna that foremost of all wielders of the bow went to where the bow was, and quickly raising it strung it and placed the arrows on the string. And beholding the son of Surya--Karna of the Suta tribe--like unto fire, or Soma, or Surya himself, resolved to shoot the mark, those foremost of bowmen--the sons of Pandu--regarded the mark as already shot and brought down upon the ground. But seeing Karna, Draupadi loudly said, 'I will not select a Suta for my lord.' Then Karna, laughing in vexation and casting glance at the Sun, threw aside the bow already drawn to a circle.

Section CLXXXIX, Swayamvara Parva, Book I, The Mahabharata

The above said structure of archery competition is shown in the Figure 8.
This skill of karna made him a great warrior with special skill and talent in the myth. It shows that this myth belonged to the era of archery (Pugazhendhi D 2021, p.15). Even though Karna was master in archery the brides refused to marry him due to his illegal low birth. Thus both Ion and Karna have resemblances in the skill of arrow shooting. This has an important place in the myth of Karna but it is considered as one of the incidents and not given much importance in the myth of Ion. The arrow shooting from the land to the object of the sky is a binary opposition between the land and sky, that which is seen in both these myths.

There are numerous developments in the history of war weapons. Stones and bones were first stage, metal sword were the second stage. The sword can attack the enemy nearby. The third stage in the development of the war weapon was the invention of bow and arrow. It can attack even enemies far off. The development of war weapons such as archery is reflected in the myths of Herakles…….. This clearly shows that both the myths belonged to the era of archery. In both the myth the archery competition determines the life partner. At this point of the myth there seems to be a main difference between them. Even though Herakles emerged victorious, Eurytus did not keep up his word and refused to give his daughter to Herakles as a prize, whereas in the myth of Rama, the father of the bride accepted to give her daughter as a prize for the winner in the archery competition.
**Binary Opposition – Rich and Poor**

Rich and poor are binary oppositions. In the play ‘Ion’ introduces the son of God, Ion as homeless and very poor. Later Ion becomes a king.

where his scepter awaits you, and οὐ σ᾽ ὅλβιον μὲν σκῆπτρον ἀναμένει abundant wealth; although you suffer πατρός, from one of these two conditions, [580] πολὺς δὲ πλοῦτος: οὔτε θάτερον νοσῶν you will not be called ill-born and poor, but well-born and rich. (Potter Robert 1938)

Thus the binary opposition between rich and poor are seen in the myth of Ion. This should be searched in the myth of Karna.

one who is not a king, I will install Karna as king of Anga.'

Thus in the first part Karna lived a life of a son of charioteer and then become a king. In this way the binary opposition between rich and poor seen in the myths of Ion and Karna. It is depicted in the Figure 9.

**Figure 9. Binary Opposition – Rich and Poor**

Mythological Theory of Binary Opposition

*Ion and Karna*

Rich Poor

Thus Ion and Karna, both have similarities called as parallels in both of the myths with the binary oppositions such as 1. High born versus Low born, 2. Life versus Death, 3. Land versus Sky and 4. Rich versus Poor. Some of these are related with their birth. Birth is related with mother. So there is a need to research about the characterization of mother in these myths.
Mother

Mother has a main role in the life of all living beings. This characterization is seen in both these myths.

Mother in the Myth of Ion

The mother is a main character in the play Ion. The name of the mother character is Creusa. There are many binary oppositions that are seen in the making of this character.

Binary Opposition – Human versus Copula

Creusa is a normal woman. But she has illegal relationship with God. Thus a binary opposition, Human versus God is seen in the mother characterization of the Ion myth. Kunti is a normal woman. She has illegal relationship with the Sun God. Thus a binary opposition, Human versus God is seen in the mother characterization of the Karna myth. Thus both Creusa of Ion myth and Kunti of Karna myth have the resemblances in the binary opposition of Human versus God. This illegal connection leads to another binary opposition.

Binary Opposition – Legal, Hidden Bed

Marriage has an important role in fulfilling the purpose of woman being a legitimate wife. Some times man and woman have illegal relationship without the knowledge of their parents and society. Mostly it is not welcomed by their parents and society. The same has also happened in the life of Creusa and she was worried about her hidden bed which is not known to their parents.

Creusa
O my soul, how shall I be silent? [860] But how shall I reveal the hidden bed, and depart from shame?
(Potter Robert 1938)

Κρέουσα
ὦ ψυχά, πῶς σιγάσω; 860 πῶς δὲ σκοτίας ἀναφήνω εὐνύς, αἰδοῦς δ᾽ ἀπολειφθῶ; (Murray Gilbert 1913)

Creusa
when I was silent on this union, silent on the lamented birth.
(Potter Robert 1938)

Κρέουσα
868 σιγάσα γάμους, σιγόσα τόκους πολυκλαύτους; (Murray Gilbert 1913)

Creusa
I will no longer conceal this bed,
(Potter Robert 1938)

Κρέουσα
874. οὐκέτι κρύψω λέχος, (Murray Gilbert 1913)
Thus Creusa censured about her secret marriage. After certain period of time enemies defeated her country and the victorious king married her.

Thus there are some sexual incidents seen in the life of Creusa before and after legal marriage. This binary opposition shall be used in situations between before and after marriage that which is seen in the myth of Creusa.

*Unlawful Marriage of Kunti*

Kunti had illegal connection before her legal marriage.

Hearing this, Kunti said, 'O slayer of foes, a certain Brahmana gave me this formula of invocation as a boon, and, O lord, I have summoned thee only to test its efficacy. For this offence I bow to thee. A woman, whatever be her offence, always deserveth pardon.' Surya (Sun) replied, 'I know that Durvasa hath granted this boon. But cast off thy fears, timid maiden, and grant me thy embraces. Amiable one, my approach cannot be futile; it must bear fruit. Thou hast summoned me, and if it be for nothing, it shall certainly be regarded as thy transgression.'

Section CXI, Sambhava Parva, Adi Parva, Book 1, The Mahabharata

And the Rishi said, 'Those celestials that thou shall summon by this Mantra shall certainly approach thee and give thee children.' Thus addressed by the Brahma, the amiable Kunti (Pritha) became curious, and in her maidenhood summoned the god Arka (Sun). And as soon as he pronounced the Mantra, she beheld that effulgent deity—that beholder of everything in the world--approaching her.

Section CXI, Sambhava Parva, Adi Parva, Book 1, The Mahabharata

Thus the binary opposition related with legal and hidden bed seen in the myth of Kunti. In this way both Creusa and Kunti have resemblances in this binary opposition, legal versus illegal.

2021-4211-AJP
Binary Opposition – Son and Sonless

Giving birth to a son transforms the woman from being a wife to become a mother. The motherhood of a woman is portrayed high only if it happens after a legal marriage. Contrarily in the illegal relationship which leads to secret marriage, the woman if she conceives creates problems. It is also seen in the life of Creusa. Soon after the secret marriage Creusa gave birth to a son. But after the legal marriage she had no children born to her for a long time. This binary opposition operates the play Ion.

Though married a long time [65] they are childless; so they have come to this oracular shrine of Phoebus, in longing for a child. (Potter Robert 1938)
χρόνα δὲ σπείρας λέχη 65ἔτεκνός ἐστι, καὶ Κρέουσα: ὁν σύνεκα ἥκουσι πρὸς μαντεῖ. Ἀπόλλωνος τάδε ἔρωτι παιδῶν. (Murray Gilbert 1913)

Chorus
I see tears and mournful cries and attacks of groaning when my queen knows that her husband is blessed with a child, [680] while she is childless and deprived of children. (Potter Robert 1938)
Χορός ὁρῶ δάκρυα καὶ πενθίμους ἀλαλαγας στεναγμάτων τ᾽ ἔσβολας, ὅταν ἐμὰ τύραννος εὐπαιδίαν πόσιν ἔχοντ᾽ εἰδῆ, 680 αὐτὴ δ᾽ ἀπαίς ἤ καὶ λελειμμένη τέκνων. (Murray Gilbert 1913)

This reference shows the childlessness of Creusa after her lawful marriage. But she had a lawless child before her lawful marriage.

Ion
O my dearest mother! I see you with joy, I am held to your joyful face. They embrace.
Ioν ὁ φιλτάτη μοι μήτερ, ἀσμενός σ᾽ ἰδόν πρὸς ἀσμένας πέπτωκα σὰς παρηκάς.

Creusa
O child, o light dearer to your mother than the sun [1440] — the god will forgive me—I hold you in my arms, unexpectedly found, when I thought you lived in the world below, with the dead and Persephone. (Potter Robert 1938)
Κρέουσα ὁ τέκνον, ὁ φῶς μητρὶ κράτισσον ἕλιον — 1440συγγνώσεται γὰρ ὁ θεὸς — ἐν χεροῖν σ᾽ ἐχω, ἄελπτον εὕρημι ὥν κατὰ γὰς ἐνέρων χθόνιον μετὰ Περσεφόνας τ᾽ ἔδώκουν ναεῖν. (Murray Gilbert 1913)

Thus there is a binary opposition seen between giving birth very soon and not having any children for long time related with illegal and legal marriage in the characterization of Creusa in the myth of Ion. This is to be researched in the myth of Karna.
**Kunti - Son and Sonless**

Kunti had a son immediately with the Sun God before her illegal marriage. After the legal marriage she remained with no children with her legal husband. Thus the characterization of myth of Kunti has binary opposition related with having children and not having children related with illegal and legal marriage. In this way both Creusa of Ion myth and Kunti of Karna myth have binary opposition related with giving birth and not giving birth and that is shown in Figure 10.

**Figure 10. Giving birth versus not giving birth**

**Mythological Theory of Binary Opposition**

**Mother of Ion and Karna**

**Binary Opposition - Leave and Reclaim of the child**

Creusa had an illegal son before her legal marriage. Afraid of her parents she abandoned her child.

Creusa
She exposed out of doors the child that she bore.

Ion
(345) Where is the exposed child? Is it alive?

Creusa
No one knows. This is what I am asking the oracle.

Ion

---

"Кρέουσα τὸν παῖδ᾽ ὃν ἔτεκεν ἐξέθηκε δωμάτων."

"Ἰων
345δ᾽ ἐκτεθεὶς παῖς ποῦ ἢστιν; εἰσορᾷ φάος;"

"Κρέουσα
οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδείς. ταῦτα καὶ μαντεύομαι."

"Ἰων
εἰ δ᾽ οὐκέτ’ ἢστι, τίνι τρόπῳ διεφθάρη;"
If it is no longer alive, how was it destroyed?

Creusa
She expects that wild animals killed the unfortunate one.

Ion
By what sign did she know this?

Creusa
(350) When she came to the place where she had exposed him, she could no longer find him.

Ion
Was there a drop of blood in the path?

Creusa
She says not. Although she went back and forth over much ground.

(Potter Robert 1938)

1

It happened that, as the sun rose, the priestess entered the god’s prophetic shrine; she saw the baby and marvelled that some girl of Delphi had dared [45] to cast her secret child into the house of the god; she was eager to take it away from the shrine; but she let the harsh intent gave way to pity—and the god worked with her, so the child might not be hurled out of his house—she took up the child and raised it.

(Potter Robert 1938)

2

At the end of the play Creusa reclaimed her child.

4

Creusa
[1490] I fitted around you these baby-clothes, the work of my flying shuttle, done when I was a girl, in secret from my mother. I did not offer you milk, nor a mother’s nourishment from the breast, nor did I wash you; you were cast out on the deserted cave, [1495] a victim of the beaks of birds, and a feast for Hades.

Ion
Mother, you dared to do terrible things.

Krēousa
θήρας σφε τὸν δύστηνον ἐλπίζει κτανεῖν.

‘Ιον
ποίω τὸδ’ ἔγνω χρωμένη τεκμηρίῳ;

Krēousa
350 ἔλθος’ ἵν’ αὐτὸν ἐξέθηκ’ σώ ηδ’ ἔτι.

‘Ιον
ἣ δὲ σταλαγμῶς ἐν στίβῳ τὰς αἴματος;

Krēousa
οὔ φησι. καίτοι πόλλ’ ἐπεστράφη πέδων. (Murray Gilbert 1913)

κυρεὶ δ’ ἀμ’ ἰπεύουντος ἕλιου κύκλῳ
προσφήτες ἐξαίνουσα μαντεῖον θεοῦ;

45 λαθραῖον οὐδ’ ἐς θεοῦ ῥίμας δόμον,
ὑπὲρ τε θυμέλας διορίσαι πρόθυμος ἦν:

οίκτῳ δ’ ἁφῆκεν ὀμότητα — καὶ θεὸς

συνεργός ἦν τῷ παιδί μὴ κπεσεῖν δόμον —

τρέφει δὲ νῖν λαβοῦσα. τὸν σπείραντα δὲ

(Murray Gilbert 1913)
Creusa
Bound down by fear, my son, I cast your life away; [1500] unwillingly I killed you.

Ion
And I was about to kill you!

Creusa
Ah! dreadful was my fortune then, dreadful these things also; I am whirled here [1505] and there to misery, and back again to joy; but the wind is changing. Let it remain; the past evils are enough; now let there be a favoring breeze, after troubles, my son. (Potter Robert 1938)

Thus the binary opposition of abandoning the child and reclaiming the child later is seen in the characterization of Creusa in the myth of Ion. It should be searched in the myth of Karna. Karna’s mother Kunti left her baby in the river. That baby was brought up by a charioteer. When the baby became an adult Kunti reclaimed him.

Kunti said, Thou art Kunti’s son, and not Radha’s. Nor is Adhiratha thy father. Thou, O Karna, art not born in the Suta order. Believe what I say. Thouwert brought forth by me while a maiden. I held thee first in my womb. O son, thouwert born in the palace of Kuntiraja. O Karna, that divine Surya who blazeth forth in light and maketh everything visible, O foremost of all wielders of weapons, begat thee upon me. O irresistible one, thou, O son, wert brought forth by me in my father’s abode, decked with (natural) ear-rings and accoutred in a (natural) coat of mail, and blazing forth in beauty. (Murray Gilbert 1913)

Thus both the myths of Ion and Karna regarding their mothers Creusa and Kunti have the binary opposition of leaving and reclaiming their child. This is pictorized in Figure 11.
Figure 11. Leave X Reclaim

Mythological Theory of Binary Opposition
Mother of Ion and Karna

Thus the mothers in both these myths have parallels in the binary oppositions - 1. Human versus God relationship, 2. Lawful versus Hidden Bed, 3. Giving birth versus not giving birth, 4. Abandoning versus Reclaiming the child. In this way the resemblances seen between these two myths can be seen as in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Ion</th>
<th>Karna</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Highborn - Son of Apollo</td>
<td>Highborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Son of Apollo, the Sun</td>
<td>Son of Sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Mother kept the newly born baby in the casket and leave</td>
<td>Mother kept the newly born baby in the casket and leave in the river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Athenas breast plate along with the baby’s casket</td>
<td>Baby with the breast plate in the casket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Life and death depends upon the breast plate</td>
<td>Life and death depends upon the breast plate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Knowledge of archery</td>
<td>Named for his extraordinary skill in archery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Creusa</th>
<th>Kunti</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Unlawful connection with Apollo, the god</td>
<td>Unlawful connection with Sun, the god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Immediate birth of child in unlawful marriage</td>
<td>Immediate birth of child in unlawful marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Childless with the lawful husband</td>
<td>Childless with the lawful husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Kept the unlawful baby in the casket and leave</td>
<td>Kept the unlawful baby in the casket and leave in the river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Recovered the baby in a grown up age</td>
<td>Recovered the baby in a grown up age</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The resemblances seen between the two myths can be categorized as parallels and influences. If the resemblances are occasional and there is no contact between these two then it can be called parallels. If there is any connection in the occurrences between these two then it is called as influence. Here there is a need to search the influential factors in these myths.

**Mythological Theory of Influence**

The Greek play ‘Ion’ mentioned about the possibilities of influence. The myth of Ion is not only related with Greek, but also with Asia.

Priestess (1355) Now take them and find your mother.  
"Προφητίς 1355. λαβών νυν αὐτὰ τὴν τεκούσαν ἐκπόνει."  
 Ion I will go over all Asia and the boundaries of Europe.  
"Ἰων πᾶσαν γὰ’ ἐπελθὼν Ἀσιάδ’ Εὔρωπης θ’ ὄρους."  
(Potter Robert 1938)  
(Murray Gilbert 1913)

This reference highlights the relationship of Asia in this myth along with Europe. Apart from this few, some of the races also had influences in this myth.
Creusa, take your son and go to the land of Cecrops; set him on the royal throne. For he was born from Erechtheus and is fit to rule my land; (1575) and he will be famous throughout Hellas. He will have four sons, from one stock, and they will gave names to the land and the tribes of people who inhabit it. Geleon will be the first; then second . . .

(1580) Hopletes and Argades, and the Aegicores will have a tribal name from my aegis. Their sons in turn, at the appointed time, will settle in the island cities of the Cyclades, and the lands along the shore, which will give strength to my land; [1585] they will colonize the plains of the two mainlands, Asia and Europe, on opposite sides; they will become famous under the name of Ionians, in homage to this boy’s name. (Potter Robert 1938)

You and Xuthus will have children together: [1590] Dorus, from whom the Dorian state will be celebrated throughout the land of Pelops. The second son, Achaeus, will be king of the shore land near Rhion; and a people called after him will be marked out as having his name. (Potter Robert 1938)

These references ensure the influences of certain races like Geleon, Hopletes, Argades, Aegicores, Ionians, Dorians and Achaeus on this myth. Apart from this, the influence of the myth of Karna also needs to be studied. For this the knowledge about the trade relationship between Greeks and Tamilians is to be known.

The Trade between Greeks and Tamilians

Trade took place between Greeks and Tamilians from the ancient times (Pugazhendhi 2020). Greek ships travelled to the Πανδίονος - Pandion or
Pandyan kingdom who fought with Karna and the Κηπροβότρου - Chēramān kingdom who gave food to the soldiers of this Mahabharata mythical war.

Tyndis is of the Kingdom of Cerobothra; it is a village in plain sight by the sea. Muziris, of the same Kingdom, abounds in cargoes from Arabia, and by the Greeks; it is located on a river, distant from Tyndis by river and sea five hundred stadia, and up the river from the shore twenty stadia. Nellcynda is distant from Muziris by river and sea about five hundred stadia, and is of another Kingdom, the Pandion. This place also is situated on a river, about one hundred and twenty stadia from the sea.

Periplus of the Eritheranian Sea (Wilfred 1912)

These descriptions are mapped in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Tamil Nadu as mentioned in Greek Text

It ensures the ancient contact of Greeks with Tamilians. It may also be noted that the ancient Greeks knew about the ‘Κηπροβότρου - Cerobothra’
and ‘Πανδίονος – Pandion’ who were directly related with the myth of Karna. So through this sea trade the myth Ion and Karna might have transformed between Greek and Tamil lands. This shows that the resemblances between these two myths are not occasional or parallels, but influential according to the mythological theory of influences.

Conclusion

The myth of Ion is seen in Greek. The myths of Mahabharata and Karna seen in Tamil and Sanskrit languages. There are some parallels seen between the myths of Ion and Karna. The ancient trade relation between Greeks and Tamilians ensures the influences of these myths with one another similar to so many other myths (Pugazhendhi 2021).

References


