

THE CONSTELLATION ORION

The constellation Orion is known to the Central Australian natives as Nyeeruna, a name which would seem to have some linguistic affinity with Orion.

Nyeeruna is a hunter, but of women only, a baffled and humiliated hunter, kept for ever at bay by Kambugudha (the "V" in Taurus - bull's head), the elder sister of Yugarilya, the Pleiades, whom Nyeeruna is ever trying to capture and possess, but they are so well-guarded by their elder sister that Nyeeruna has never been able to reach them.

Kambugudha always stands naked before him, feet and legs wide apart, her left foot (Aldebaran) filled with fire magic, which she threateningly lifts each time she sees Nyeeruna's right hand (Betelge<sup>na</sup>) endeavouring to put red fire magic into his club, to hurl at her and so gain possession of her younger sisters. Kambugudha dares Nyeeruna with her whole body, and is so contemptuous of him and his vain personal display of feathered headdress and ochred body, string belt and whitened tassel that she has placed a line of puppies only between her and Nyeeruna (a faint waving line of stars between Orion and V in Taurus.)

The puppies' fathers and mothers - all relations of Kambugudha - and her young sisters stand apart on roundabout tracks watching the game. The younger sisters (Pleiades) are very timid and when they see Nyeeruna's body reddened with fire and lust (radiations from nebulae?), fear comes upon them and they change into mingari (Moloch horridus) while Nyeeruna's rage lasts; but Kambugudha never changes her defiant attitude and she too can emit fire from her body, so that the red fire of her anger and her magic is so strong that it can subdue the fire magic Nyeeruna throws out, and when she advances towards him, lifting her left foot, she frightens him so greatly that the fire magic of his arm becomes faint and dies out for a while.

Again Nyeeruna's magic comes back in great force and brightness, and when Kambugudha sees the strong magic in arm and body, she calls to a father dingo (horn of the Bull) to come and humiliate Nyeeruna and Babba the Dingo rushes over to Nyeeruna and shakes and swings him east and west by his middle and Kambugudha points at him and laughs but her frightened little sisters hide their heads under their little mountain devil neck humps until Babba loosens his hold and returns to his place again.

A great portion of the constellations and stars surrounding Orion form part of this great Central Australian myth, Procyon, Achernah, Taurus and others are all ready to help Kambugudha. They resent Nyeeruna's humiliating position and they laugh and are friendly with Kambugudha because of her care for her younger sisters, the Pleiades.

Even Joorrjoorr (Canopus) the owled nightjar, though only on onlooker, laughs his Joorrjoorr laugh as he watches Kambugudha blazoning all her charms before the baffled Nyeeruna, daring him for ever. Kara the red back spider (Rigel) is also redly shining, ready to bite Nyeeruna. All the animals and birds round and about jeer loudly when they see Babba the Dingo debasing Nyeeruna's manhood. Beera the moon also mocks at him whenever he sits down beside Kambugudha and her young sisters during his journeys to the west, and Nyeeruna loses his red fire and no sparks come from his body (nebulae) in his shame and humiliation.

On fine bright starlight nights, the old men of the Central groups watch the game between Kambugudha and Nyeeruna; the little line of star puppies between them brightens and laughs, and Achernan the mother dingo, standing at the end of her long row of puppies, joins in the laugh, and the old men re-tell the old story, and wink at Beera the moon whenever they see him sitting beside Kambugudha and her young sisters and leering and jeering at Nyeeruna's impotence.

Thus the myth has come down through the ages, but its special interest to ethnologists lies in its adaptation and re-adjustment to the real lives of the groups "owning" the myth.

It has been "dramatised" as a performance for men only, and is acted as a comedy or satire before every young initiate. The myth is first recited to them with many unpublishable details and every night during their novitiate the "play" is performed. They see the Nyeeruna actor trying to reach Kambugudha and her young sisters and they watch Babba the dingo disgracing Nyeeruna's manhood before the sisters, and see him crawl away in shame and ignominy. No woman can see or take part in the performance but within an enclosure, just about the distance away in which Nyeeruna and Kambugudha and her sisters "sit down" in the sky, a bush enclosure is made before the play begins and within this enclosure women and girls are hidden and raided at will by all the performers, including Nyeeruna. The women represent Kambugudha and her young sisters and the young novices are taught that they can raid young women at will when they have become men. Nyeeruna is shown throughout in the drama as a "shocking example" to all men.

During the performance songs are sung by the groups owning the special myth, the songs being accompanied by the beating of short heavy clubs on a prepared sand mound (mankind's first drum) the drumbeating and singing being quick and loud or slow and soft as the drama proceeds, the frequent "raiding" of Kambugudha and her sisters being hailed with triumphant drumming and singing.

This performance usually begins when the young boys are considered ready for initiation, and at a period when Nyeeruna is absent from the night sky, and it may last until Nyeeruna becomes visible again.

Night or day every native of the group owning the myth can point out the exact position of Nyeeruna and the other stars and constellations. The young initiates are thoroughly taught Nyeeruna's story which they must never reveal to women. The moral of the story is meticulously explained by the brothers or guardians of each young novice.

The boys must look upon all women as their slaves, to do their will at all times and in all places, to "fetch and carry" for them throughout their lives.

A certain ruthless and savage power is thus instilled into the young novices as they fully grasp - through a wearisome reiteration - the acted story of the constellation, and see it turned topsy-turvy in meaning and application, and when they realise their appalling power over all their womenkind and think of Kambugudha's successful defiance of Nyeeruna's advances, whatever cruelty is inherent in them is given full bent. The myth tells of the dominance of the female, and the drama's lesson for them is the dominance of the male.

The myth and performance (both grossly phallic) cover a wide area of Central Australia and the western border, south towards the Great Plain's northern edge and east and southeast towards the Diamantina, Cooper and other rivers.

There is a religious instinct, though in a debased form, in this myth, as their only religious sentiments centre round phallicism. Totems, legends, initiation, all rites and ceremonies are representations of phallic worship.