

EDITORIAL

Has modern science wiped out from the field of religion all that is mythical and mystical? Students of world religion know that these factors in religion are not identical. A myth need not necessarily be religious, whereas mystical cannot be divested of its religiousness.

The Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* and the Greek ones, *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are a blend of flight of poetic imagination, legend, myths and high religious ideals. Myths are born not only in the religious climate, but also in the summit of philosophic thought. All philosophers, at one time or another, had to face the inadequacy of language to express their finest thoughts. In the myth of the Den in *The Republic* (ch-8) Plato tries to bring out the inferiority of the sensible world in comparison with the world of ideas as the world of reality. The vision of Er in the *Republic* (ch. 10) seeks to describe the journey of Er after his death and the varied experiences he enjoyed as fruits of his deeds in his earthly life and thereby to confirm Plato's philosophical conclusions concerning eschatology.

Indian philosophers also have profusedly used myths to convey philosophical and religious insights: "In the beginning arose the Golden Germ: he was, as soon as born, the Lord of Being" (RV X, 121, 1). "From blazing ardor (*tapas*) cosmic order came (*rta*) and truth (*satya*); from thence was born the obscure night; from thence the ocean with its billowing waves (RV X, 190). "A thousand headed is the man with a thousand eyes, a thousand feet, encompassing the Earth all sides . . . , when the gods, performing the sacrifice, bound the man as the victim" (RV. X, 90, 1+15).

Sometimes mythical merges into symbolical. In *Chandogya Upanishad* we find that the whole life of man is symbolically a sacrifice. "When one hungers and thirsts and abstains from pleasures these constitute the initiatory rites. And when one eats and drinks and enjoys pleasures, then he joins in the *upasada* ceremonies. And when one laughs and eats and indulges in sexual intercourse, then he joins in the chant and recitation. And austerity, alms giving, uprightness, non-violence, truthfulness, these are the gifts for the priests. Therefore they say He will procreate. He has procreated-that is his new birth. Death is the final bath (after ceremonies)"

(III, 17:1-5)

Myths, legends, symbolisms, rituals allegories and such other literary devices are in a way tools employed by religions to catch hold of the mystical experiences in them. It is in this perspective the present number of **Journal of Dharma** has taken the topic "*myth and mysteries*." Articles as a whole shed some light on this topic although a number of important, useful and related issues are left out of consideration.

The mystical dimension of religion has been subjected to scientific study, ever since science began to make absolute claims of truth. The students of religions have now come in terms with the idea that neither the language of total opposition nor that of perfect complementarity of science and religion is commendable. The methods employed by natural sciences could very well be used to penetrate the nature of that strange spiritual phenomenon known as mysticism. It was usually divided into two types namely, Eastern and Western mysticism for establishing comparative study between them. A little more than a half a century ago Rudolf Otto arrived at the following three conclusions concerning mystical experience. He maintained that mystical experiences in the East and the West show in their similarity an inner relationship of types of human experience and spiritual life which are completely unaffected by differences of climate, of geographical position or of race. Secondly he held that it is false to maintain that mysticism is always just mysticism, is always and everywhere one and the same quantity. Thirdly he affirmed that these variations as such are not determined by race, or geographical situation, but that they may arise in sharp contrast to one another, within the same circle of race and culture.

It remains a mystery why there is such a variety of mystical experiences. Mysticism is sometimes defined as "possessing the infinite in the finite." The finite being infinitely 'many' it seems to account for the plurality of variety and shades of mysticism and therefore any exhaustive account of myths and mysteries will always remain out of our reach.

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