Carl Olson

South Illinois University

MYSTIC-HERO IN SEARCH OF LIBERATION

The Indian tradition recognizes many types of heroes. In the *Mahābhārata* one can be a hero by leading the life of a forest recluse or that of a householder. There are also heroes of sacrifice and self-restraint, of battle, and of truth. There are those who are called heroes because they follow the path of Sāmkhya or Yoga (Mbh. 13.75.6ff). The yogin walks the path of heroes by keeping his senses under control (Mbh. 13.142.22). The comprehension of the mystic as a hero figure is something which has not received much notice. In order to understand the mystic as a hero figure, attention must be focussed on the path of the mystic, as it shows itself in autobiographical or biographical materials. I will utilize sources from Theravāda Buddhism, early Jainism, and the monistic and theistic forms of Hindu mysticism[1]. This paper will not only attempt to show in what sense the Indian mystic is a hero figure but also to demonstrate the structure of the pattern which the mystic exhibits on his quest for liberation. Lastly, I will attempt to suggest in what sense the mystic is a creative cultural figure.

1. For my account of the Buddha's life, I have relied chiefly on the *Majjhima Nikāya*, 3 Vols., trans. I. B. Horner (London: Luzac and Company, Ltd., 1967); the *Jataka Tales*, trans. T. W. Rhys Davids and ed. Mrs. Rhys Davids (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1973); *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King: A Life of Buddha by Aśvaghosha Bodhisattva*, trans. Samuel Beal (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968). There are accounts of Mahāvīra's life in the *Kalpa Sūtra* and the *Ākārānga Sūtra* in *Jaina Sūtras* 2 Vols., trans. Hermann Jacobi, Sacred Books of the East Vols. XXII, SLV (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1973, 1968). An example of the monistic form of mystic-hero is Naciketas of the *Katha Upaniṣad* in *The Thirteen Principal Upaniṣads*, trans. Robert Ernest Hume (London: Oxford University Press, 1965). A good example of the theistic mystic as a hero figure is Tukārāma. I have also made use of figures of Caitanya and Māṇikkavācakar to elucidate certain aspects of theistic mysticism.

1. The Pattern of the Hero's Adventure

There is a clearly defined pattern which the hero follows on his adventure.[2] The first aspect of the hero's adventure is his departure. The hero is called to adventure to live, to die, to undertake some historical task, or to achieve mystical illumination. The hero may be called by the gods, or he may be given some kind of sign. Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍava princes are called to adventure by the loss of their kingdom, which was a result of the gambling of Yudhisthira. In the epic poem the *Rāmāyana* of Valmiki, a mortally wounded Jatayu, an incarnation of Garuda, informs Rāma of Rāvaṇa's abduction of Sītā. Often the hero is given some form of supernatural aid to accomplish his departure. Rāma has Hanuman, the son of Vāyu and the general of an army of monkeys and bears, to aid him. Sometimes the hero is given a guide like Beatrice, the Virgin, or Virgil of Dante's work. It must be noted that sometimes the hero, for example Apollo, refuses the call. He may also be unwilling to accept the call, or he may go forth of his own volition. The call to adventure "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."[3]

After the hero either accepts the call or is driven by some benign or malignant agent, as for example Odysseus was driven relentlessly about the Mediterranean Sea by the winds of the angry god Poseidon, the hero must cross the initial threshold of adventure. The threshold is usually extremely difficult to transverse. It is often guarded by a demon or some other fearsome supernatural being. For example, dragons guard both the golden apples of the garden of Hesperides and the golden fleece of Colchis, respectively, in the adventures of Hercules and Jason. Mircea Eliade writes, "There are serpents 'guarding' all the paths to immortality, that is, every 'centre', every repository where the sacred is concentrated, every *real* substance."[4] The hero must pass through some form of door. This door represents "pairs of opposites" or "contraries."[5] Coomaraswamy writes, "It is, then,

2. I must acknowledge my debt to Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). He has clearly formulated the pattern of the hero's adventure. I do not, however, share Campbell's Jungian psychological interpretation. Therefore, I have ignored this aspect of Campbell's work.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 291.
5. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Symplegades," in *Studies and Essays in the History and Learning Offered in Homage to George Sarton on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. M. F. Ashley Montagu (New York: Schuman, 1946), p. 469.

precisely from these 'pairs' that liberation must be won, from their conflict that we must escape, if we are to be freed from our mortality and to be as and when we will: if, in other words, we are to reach the Farther Shore and Other-world...."[6] Sometimes the hero must undergo ordeals before he can cross the threshold of adventure. In the case of Rāma, he has a bridge built across the strait to Lanka, despite the efforts of creatures from the dark depths of the ocean to prevent its being constructed. Once the threshold guardian is defeated, the hero moves into the sphere of rebirth. Often, instead of conquering the guardian of the threshold, the hero is swallowed into the unknown.[7]

The hero must now face and overcome certain trials. This is the second major aspect of the adventure of the hero. The hero may get help from the gods but for the most part he must rely upon his own courage, fortitude, and power. For example, Arjuna goes to the Himalayas to ask for divine weapons to use against the Kauravas; he is given weapons by Śiva and his father Indra. Finally, the hero attains his ultimate goal or boon. The boon may take the form of the golden fleece of Jason, the fire stolen by Prometheus, or the reunion with a lost Sītā in Rāma's case.

Once the hero has obtained his trophy, the final aspect of the hero's adventure commences. It is now his duty to return to society with his elixir. By returning to society, the hero renews or revitalizes the community, nation, or world. There are instances in the accounts of heroes where they have refused to return. Sometimes the return of the hero is supported by the gods and at other times the hero has to flee with his prize. This usually depends on whether or not the hero has won his trophy with or without the blessing of the supernatural beings.[8] The hero may need assistance for his return. In other words, some members of the world may have to rescue him. This general pattern of the hero is also evident among the Indian mystics.

2. The Call to Adventure

The mystic is often called forth to adventure. He is called to seek enlightenment, union, or liberation. The mystic is called from his society. He is called from that which is known to seek the unknown or the mysterious. This call to adventure and the ensuing departure from society takes a number of forms.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 486.
7. Campbell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 91.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

In the story of Naciketas, faith (*sraddhā*) acts as an inner call for the youth to question his father's hypocritical ceremonialism (*Kath. Up.* 1.1.3). The young man reminds to his father that he had not given away all his possessions. Thus Naciketas suggests that his father offer him to the priest as the sacrificial gift. Although his father is reluctant, the young man persists and repeats his suggestion three times to his father. Finally, the father replies "To Death I Give You" (*Kath. Up.* 1.1.4). Thus Vājaśravasa sends forth his son to the realm of Yama.

The prince Siddhārtha is immersed in the pleasures of life of a rāja[9] by his father who feared that the young prince would become an ascetic. Getting his attendant to prepare his chariot for a sojourn along the king's highway, the gods decided to seize this opportunity to show the young prince a sign. While riding along the highway, a *deva* appears by the side of the road as an old man. On seeing this old man, Siddhartha became filled with apprehension, and he asked his charioteer what kind of man has a white head, bent shoulders, bleared vision, and a withered body.[10] The charioteer replied that man was afflicted with old age. On learning what his son had witnessed, the king increased his efforts to prevent Siddhārtha from seeing any unpleasant things. The king's effots, however, proved fruitless. On subsequent days the future Buddha saw a diseased man, a dead man and a monk. The four signs witnessed by Siddhārtha not only caused him sorrow and pain but served to call him forth to adventure.

Like the Buddha in his early life Mahāvīra lived as a householder for thirty years, leading a life of pleasure. Having made a promise to his mother that he would not renounce the world as long as his parents were alive, upon their death, Mahāvīra felt free to ask his brother's permission to become an ascetic.[11] What was the motivation for Mahāvīra's desire to become an ascetic ? *Ākāraṅga Sutra* provides an answer :

> These orders of gods wake the best of Ginas,
> the Venerable Vira: 'Arhat! propagate the
> religion which is a blessing to all creatures
> in the world'.[12]

9. *Buddhist Birth Stories (Jataka Tales)*, p. 165.
10. *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King*, 1.3.211; *Buddhist Birth Stories (Jataka Tales)*, pp. 166–167.
11. *Kalpa Sūtra*, p. 110.
12. *Ākārānga Sūtra*, 2.15.18.

Thus the gods called Mahāvīra to adventure. Renouncing his wealth, power, and social position, Mahāvīra tore out his hair and gave up the pleasurable life of a householder and entered the state of homelessness.

Tukārāma, a poet-mystic from Mahārashtra, India, received a double call. The deaths of members of his family and failure in business filled Tukārāma's heart with sorrow, although his love of God increased. Finally, after numerous adversities, Tukārāma abandoned worldly life. His misfortunes prompted him to follow a mystical path. He expresses this in the following words:

> I had no peace from the world till to-day. I was ever thinking of son, wife, wealth, and business; I was entangled in my vocation. Now my lot, it seems, has changed; it has wound up my affairs. It can see nothing behind or before me, hence my solicitude is born. The reason I look for the way, says Tukā, is that my worldly fortunes have sunk.[13]

Thus Tukārāma's misfortunes served to call him to adventure. His adversities operated much like the four signs revealed to the Buddha. While on his mystical quest, God also inspires him to become a poet. Tukārāma relates this incident thus:

> Nāmadeva came with Pānduranga, and roused me in a dream. 'I appoint you a task, write poetry, do not talk of vain affairs'. Nāmadeva counted his own verses, Viṭṭhala kept the tally; he told me the total he arrived at, a hundred lines. 'What is left undone, you must finish O Tukā'.[14]

This event serves as a second call. This second call adds a further burden upon Tukārāma because he has been called to act as God's agent. Tukārāma has become the instrument through which God speaks.[15]

In comparison to the worldly misfortunes, which served as a turning point in the life of Tukārāma, the experiences of Māṇikkavācakar and Caitanya are somewhat different. The former writes:

---

13. *The Poems of Tukarama* 3 Vols., ed. and trans. J. Nelson Fraser and K. B. Marathe (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1909, 1913, 1915), Abg, 1525.
14. *Ibid.*, Abg. 103.
15. *Ibid.*, Abg. 2706,

Lest I should go astray, He laid His hand on me!
As wax before the unwearied fire
With melting soul I worshipt, wept, and bent myself,
Danced, cried aloud, and sang, and prayed
They say: 'The tooth of elephant and woman's grasp relax not',
So I with love, real intermitting never,
Was pierced, as wedge driven into soft young tree.[16]

Māṇikkavācakar was converted by Śiva's grace. Standing before the saint, Śiva melted his soul and dispelled his sins.[17] There is no clear account of the cause of the change in Caitanya's life. Around 1508, on a trip to Gayā, Caitanya met Iśvara Purī. He took this great ascetic as his *guru*. What actually transpired is uncertain. But it is at this time that Caitanya's mystic trances have their beginning. Śuklāmvara, one of the Vaiṣṇavas in Caitanya's entourage, relates to others the change in the master's behaviour, "Since his return to Gayā, he is thoroughly changed; he no longer cares to comb his beautiful hair....he runs with his hands outstretched and eyes full of tears to catch the Unseen; despising his soft couch and white bed he sleeps on the bare earth; he no longer wears his gold chains, earrings or lockets nor fine kṛṣṇakeli cloth of silk with black borders; he neither takes his bath nor does he eat his usual meals; he no longer worships gods and goddesses, nor does he recite the sacred hymns as prescribed by the Śāstras; but weeps and cries 'Oh my God, do not hide your face from me'.[18] It can be discerned from this behaviour that a dramatic change has occurred in Caitanya's life. He has set forth on a quest for his God. This quest drives Caitanya mad at times.

Once the mystic has been called to adventure, he must cross the initial threshold, which is an extremely difficult task. The threshold of adventure is often guarded by some fearsome supernatural being. These beings protect the treasure from ordinary mortals. And it is only the true hero who is able to overcome their power.

In the scenario of Naciketas, Vājaśravasa sends his son forth to the realm of Yama. Naciketas is able to cross the threshold of adventure without any apparent trouble by the power of his father's words. How is this apparently difficult task achieved so effortlessly? Vājaśra-

16. Māṇikkavācakar, *The Tiruvasagam*, trans. G. U. Pope (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 4.59–65.
17. *Ibid.*, 8.79–82.
18. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Chaitanya and His Companions* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1917), pp. 52–53.

vasa's words are a performative utterance which accomplish this feat. Because Vājaśravasa is a Brahman priest, his words have authority. The authority involved in the act of reciting the words make them efficacious.[19] Words or sound have a creative power in Indian religion.[20] Thus words have a potency by which they are able to create or make something happen. In this case the authoritive words are able to transport Naciketas to the realm of Yama.

Once within the realm of Yama, Naciketas fasts for three days and three nights while waiting for the Lord of Death to return. By fasting Naciketas is experiencing an act of purification. The dead are purified in the realm of Yama (Mbh. 13.111.92f) and the dead are again slain (Mbh. 8.92.10). By being denied sustenance for three days and nights, Naciketas has returned to chaos, a primordial state of formlessness. Thus his former self has been purified by being annihilated.

Prince Siddhārtha, being refused permission to become a world renouncer by his father—who claimed that by giving up his father and his sacred duties the prince would be acting irreligiously[21]—was able to leave his father's kingdom with the aid of the *deva* of the pure abode.[22] After reaching the forest, the prince resisted the entreaties of his father's ambassadors to return home. He also refused to succumb to the suggestion of King Bimbasara to lead a life of pleasure. The Buddha replied in part to King Bimbasara's suggestion, by asking, "A hare rescued from the serpent's mouth, would it go back again to be devoured? Holding a torch and burning himself, would not a man let it go?"[23] The Buddha was able to overcome these obstacles by the force of his determination and fortitude.

While residing in the forest Gautama attempted to overcome the feelings of fear and dread evoked by the forest.[24] Why does the forest evoke feelings of fear and dread? Trees, groups of trees, parks, and forests are places which are given a religious character in the folk religion. They are strange places of solitude and darkness. As such they are places of danger. Their sacred character is closely related to the fear and dread of which the text speaks. Also related to the sacred character of these places are night-time and the phases of the moon. It must

19. Benjamin Ray, "'Performative Utterances' in African Rituals," *History of Religion*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (August, 1973), p. 28.
20. W. Norman Brown, "Theories of Creations in the Rig Veda," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 85 (1965), p. 27.
21. *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King*, 1.5.365.
22. *Ibid.*, 1.5.385.
23. *Ibid.*, 3.2.890.
24. *The Middle Length Sayings*, 1.17.

be noted that in India spirits reside in the trees of the forest, and they appear to be particularly dangerous during periods of darkness.[25]

Gautama's struggle against fear and dread[26] is indicative of the tests that a hero must pass on the way to his goal. Recalling that the forest is the site of the cult of the trees, it is important to note that this cult is generally connected with fertility. The various species of trees are not only married, but barren women also participate in the rite in order to become fertile. It must also be observed that there is a connection between the lunar cycle and the menstrual cycle of women.[27] Of course, connected with fertility is the idea of birth or new life. Thus the forest has ample symbolical value for Buddhism arising out of the fact that Gautama was seeking a new mode of life. If one grants that the forest represents the wilderness, one must agree then with Nancy E. Falk that the forest also symbolizes chaos, which is the primal, unformed reality.[28] Chaos is that place which is uninhabited by human beings. It lies on the outskirts of human lived-in-space. The mystic seeks chaos because by returning to it and becoming master of it he renews his being. In other words, out of the chaos a new man is created.

After being convinced that extreme austerities (*tapas*)[29] could not lead him to his goal, Gautama's strength was renewed after taking some nourishment. Being re-invigorated, Gautama resolved to achieve enlightenment. He proceeded to the *Bodhi* tree and, sitting under this tree, he practised deep meditation. Māra becomes alarmed at someone approaching the threshold of his realm. Māra views the Buddha's attempt to achieve enlightenment as a threat to his domain.[30] Thus a cosmic battle is about to ensue. After failing to convince Gautama that he should gain merit so that he will be rewarded in heaven, Māra sends his hideous army to destroy the Buddha. But their weapons are powerless against him.[31] Realizing their defeat, the army of Māra fled in all directions. In contrast to the Buddha, Tukārāma invited deliberate suffering in order that it might lead him to God. For example, in order to avoid falling asleep, he would tie a cord to the

25. André Bareau, *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha* 2 Vols. (Paris: Ecole Francaise d' Extreme-Orient, 1963, 1970). I: 41; Ananda K. Coormaraswamy, *Yaksas*, 2 Vols. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1971), notes that the Buddha was mistaken for a tree-spirit, I: 17.
26. *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. I, pp. 20–21.
27. Bareau, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 41.
28. Nancy E. Falk, "Wilderness and Kingship in Ancient South Asia," *History of Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (August, 1973), pp. 13–14.
29. *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. I, pp. 243–246.
30. *The Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King*, 3.13.1043.
31. *Ibid.*, 3.13.1082.

tuft of his hair and then tie it to a peg on the wall. If he happened to fall asleep, the pain at the roots of his hair would awaken him. He spent most of the day in the jungle meditating. In the evenings he would go to the temple and carry on his *kīrtans* until very late.[32] Tukārāma's austerities may be summarized in relation to body, speech, and mind. He ceased to take care of his body. Once he fasted for thirteen days and his body was reduced to a corpse.[33] With relation to his speech, he never spoke an untruth. He constantly repeated the names of God. Furthermore, his mind was fixed on the feet of Pāndurang.[34]

Caitanya felt that in the *Kali Yuga* one cannot gain salvation through asceticism alone. One must constantly chant Hari's name to attain freedom.[35] In this age this is equivalent to the Vedic sacrifice. It purifies the soul and enables one to conquer sin and the world.[36] *Kīrtana* possesses a power to convert others. For example, while journeying through the Jharkhand forest, Caitanya, in an ecstatic mood, stumbled on a tiger lying in his path. Upon exclaiming Kṛṣṇa's name, the tiger arose and began to dance and shout "Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa".[37] Dinesh Chandra Sen notes that the atmosphere created by the *kīrtana* is "one of renunciation, of equality for all men, of love that lights its unflickering flame for illuminating the dark corners of life, of pursuing one's highest good, of giving away oneself to the cause of the beautiful, of the sublime, and of the good."[38]

A similar attitude is present in the thought of Tukārāma, who was told by Kṛṣṇa that when one performs *kīrtana* the divine is present.[39] Tukārāma is convinced that one meets God by repeating His names.[40] *Kīrtana* assures the believers that a wonderful power pours into them, which can conduct them to a united life in God.[41]

---

32. *Tukaram from Mahipati's Bhaktalilamrita, Chapters* 25–40, trans. Justin E. Abbott (Publisher Unknown, 1930), Vol. 31, pp. 90–91; hereafter cited as Mahipati.
33. *The Poems of Tukarama*, Abg. 1585.
34. Mahipati, 32.23.
35. *Caitanya-caritāmṛta of Kṛṣnadāsa Kavirāja*, ed. with the commentary. *Gaurā-Kṛpa-tarangini by* Radhagovinda Nath, 6 Vols. (Calcutta: Bhakti-pracana-bhāndan, 1949–50), 2.25; hereafter cited as CC.
36. *Ibid.*, 3.20.
37. *Ibid.*, 2.17.
38. Sen, *Op. Cit.*, p. 195.
39. Mahipati, 30.161.
40. *Ibid.*, 29.49.
41. Jan Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens II: Der Jüngere Hinduismus* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963), p. 182.

3. Trials of the Mystic Hero

Discovering the lack of hospitality due to a Brahman guest, upon his return, Yama grants Naciketas three wishes. Naciketas first asks to be able to return to his father (Kath U. 1.1.10). Next Naciketas asks for knowledge of the sacrificial fire that leads one to heaven (Kath U. 1.1.13). Yama is happy to grant these two boons. Finally, Naciketas asks Yama for knowledge about death. Yama is reluctant to grant this boon, replying that even the gods have doubts concerning death. Yama suggests that Naciketas choose another boon as it was difficult for anyone to understand this abstruse and subtle matter. Naciketas reaffirms his wish adding that no other boon can equal it.

Yama now places obstacles in Naciketas' path by suggesting that he choose wealth, long life, and pleasure. These obstacles represent the classic tests that the hero must overcome to be worthy of the boon. Naciketas refuses to be tempted and trapped by these obstacles and replies that all these things are ephemeral (Kath U. 1.1.26). Convinced of the young man's sincerity, fortitude, and determination, Yama proceeds to relate to Naciketas the secrets of life and death. After having received the knowledge declared by Yama, the youthful Naciketas attains Brahma and freedom from death. The young man is transformed from Naciketas (I do not know) to Naciketas (I do not know).[42] By successfully passing the tests within the abode of Yama, one dies to one's old profane self and is reborn again. Once Naciketas has received the secret treasure from the lips of Yama, he is no longer subject to the sorrows of the ephemeral world.

With the defeat of Māra, the Buddha, proceeds towards *samādhi*. Expelling evil thoughts,[43] the Buddha calms his mind and makes it one-pointed, enabling him to concentrate. He proceeds to attain the four meditations, which are a preparation for the Great Awakening. The significance of the four meditations is related to the suppression of all desires, bad thoughts, secondary mental activities, and sentiments which could distract the mind. The objective is to concentrate and unify the mind on its object.[44] In the *Mahāsaccakasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha attains knowledge of impermanence and knowledge of the four noble truths.[45] The sudden appearance of the knowledge of impermanence hastens and brings about deliverance.[46] In

42. See S. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1969), p. 55.
43. *The Middle Length Sayings*,, Vol. I, p.1 16.
44. Bareau, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I, p. 70.
45. *The Middle Length Sayings*, Vol. I, pp. 248–249.
46. Bareau, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. I. p. 82.

short, it encloses the essence of the enlightenment. Similar to Jason's discovery of the Golden Fleece, the Buddha has now captured his trophy which is enlightenment and liberation.

During his wanderings, Mahāvīra experienced many ordeals. He was attacked by murderers.[47] "Bad people, the guard of the village, or lance-bearers attacked him; or there were domestic temptations, single women or men."[48] He was often beaten by people and set upon by dogs. He suffered pains caused by grass, cold, fire, flies, and mosquitoes.[49] The pangs of thirst were not unknown to Mahāvīra. An image used to depict Mahāvīra's fortitude during these trials is that of an elephant at the head of a battle.[50]

The image of the elephant and the ordeals that Mahāvīra had to endure and conquer are examples of the Jain's comprehension of life as a great battle.[51]. There are not only enemies exterior to oneself, there are also those which are internal. There are six interior enemies: passion (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), pride (*māna*), excessive exultation (*harṣa*), and envy (*matsara*).[52] Thus it takes a hero of infinite strength to win the battle.

> As a hero at the head of the battle is surrounded on all sides, so was there Mahāvīra. Bearing all hardships, the Venerable one, undisturbed, proceeded (on the road to Nirvāna).[53]

Although he was attacked on all sides, Mahāvīra, by virtue of his bravery, was not vanquished by life's hardships. With *tapas* (austerities) as his sword, Mahāvīra was able to defeat his internal and external foes. Having passed numerous heroic trials, Mahāvīra, in the thirteenth year after his renunciation of the world, achieved knowledge and liberation.[54]

It has been noted that Tukārāma was commissioned by God to spread religion. Tukārāma often refers to his words as arrows. In another context he refers to the "swords of words to fight our way

47. *Ākārāṅga Sūtra*, 1.6.5.1.
48. *Ibid.*, 1.8.2.8.
49. *Ibid.*, 1.7.7.1.
50. *Ibid.*, 1.8.3.8; *The Uttarādhyayana Sūtra* in *Jaina Sutras* Vol. II, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), 2.5.10.
51. *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, 3.5.
52. See note in Sinclair Stevenon, *The Heart of Jainism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), p. 245.
53. *Ākārāṅga Sūtra*, 1.8.3.13.
54. *Kalpa Sūtra*, 5.120.

with."[55] His use of images is interesting and it recalls the war-imagery of Mahāvīra's biography. Tukārāma also sees himself at war with the evil forces of life. Tukārāma is the captain of a battleship. The body of this ship is Kṛṣṇa's name. It is Kṛṣṇa who is the commander-in-chief of the army of devotees.[56] Tukārāma is merely his general, ready to "lead an army of bards that follow me."[57]

The war-imagery is also clearly present in Māṇikkavācakar's poems[58] and, to a lesser extent, in the biography of Caitanya. Māṇikkavācakar feels that with the *guru* wielding the sword of wisdom, others are called upon to follow the *guru* in the holy battle.[59] With the ranks of this holy army ever increasing, the victory over the forces of evil cannot be far away. In the biography of Caitanya, there is an indication of a holy war. On his pilgrimage to the south, Caitanya, for example, converts the masses to *bhakti*.[60] He is much like a hero conquering the territory of the unfaithful. His sole weapon is Kṛṣṇa's name.

Ever after his call to compose poetry, Tukārāma's inner struggle continues because he is desirous of union with God. Suddenly Tukārāma has a vision of God. He is initiated in a dream by Kṛṣṇa, who takes the form of a Brahmin and gives Tukārāma a *mantra*. By this *mantra* he becomes immortal.[61] The *mantra* is so powerful that death cannot destroy him.[62] Mahipati relates that the *mantra* was "Ramakṛṣṇa", and that it was given to Tukārāma to save the world.[63] Māṇikkavācakar also has a similar experience. He relates that Śiva came to him as his *guru*.[64]

4. The Return of the Mystic-Hero

The adventure of Naciketas in the *Katha Upaniṣad* does not make it clear whether or not the young man returns with his treasure. It is probably safe to assume that Naciketas returns to the world. My assumption is based on the general scenario of the hero and the initial boon requested by the youth which was to be re-united with his father.

55. *The Poems of Tukarama*, Abg. 718.
56. *Ibid.*, Abg. 2651.
57. *Ibid.*, Abg. 2721.
58. *Tiruvasagam*, 36.4 13–1 .
59. *Ibid.*, 46.2. 5–8.
60. *CC.*, 2.7.
61. Mahipati, 33.149.
62. *Ibid.*, 33.154.
63. *Ibid.* 33.161.
64. *Tiruvasagam*, 10.14.53–56.

Like other heroes, the Buddha returns to society in preference for going to final *Nibbana*. He returns to society to share his trophy. He proceeds to Benares to deliver his first sermon. His duty is to assist others across the life-stream of sorrow and pain.

After Mahāvīra has attained liberation, he was referred to as a *Jina* (conqueror). He is the last of the *tīrthankaras* (makers of the river-crossing). It is important to note that the Jains conceive of life as a great ocean or river, and the currents of these bodies of water are the countless births.[65] Unless one is careful, one may be swept away by the strong current. In order to ensure a safe passage across the river of pain and sorrow, someone must build a bridge. By his own powers of austerities and meditation, Mahāvīra has accomplished this heroic task. He has shown the way to abolish the polarity typical of human existence. Thus it can be truly said of Mahāvīra—as it is written in the *Sūtrakritāṅga*—that " ....some become heroes through their knowledge."[66] Therefore, he is justly called Mahāvīra (Great Hero). Having attained his goal, Mahāvīra, like the Buddha, returned to society to reveal to others the treasure he had found.

It has been stated that Tukārāma's mission was to spread religion. Tukārāma is active in society to achieve this goal. He carries out his task like a hero. There are two types of hero for Tukārāma: the spiritual and the worldly. He proclaims that "Without heroism, misery cannot disappear. Soldiers must become reckless of their lives and then God takes up their burden....He who bravely faces volleys of arrows and shots and defends his master, can alone reap eternal happiness....He alone, who is a soldier, knows a soldier, and has respect for him. They, who bear weapons only for the sake of bodily maintenance, are mere mercenaries. The true soldier alone stands the test of critical occasions."[67] Tukārāma is an example of the mystical hero who is ready to risk all that he has to defend his God.

5. The Structure of the Mystic-Hero's Adventure

It has been shown that the mystic generally exhibits the pattern of the hero. The examples cited have indicated that the mystics do not fit the general pattern to the same degree in each case but enough evidence exists which enables one to speak of the mystic as a hero. The

65. *Uttarādhyayana Sūtra*, 5.1.
66. *Sūtrakritāṅga Sūtra*, 1.12.17.
67. Quoted by R. D. Renade, *Pathway to God in Marathi Literature* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961), p. 210.

biographers of the mystics not only understood their subjects as heroes, but the mystics themselves appear to have comprehended themselves as heroes. It is my contention that the mystics were influenced to some extent by stories or myths about heroes from their own culture, which they interiorized. But consideration of this process is beyond the scope of this paper.

At this point I am interested in the type of structure the pattern of the mystic-hero exhibits. The basic pattern of the mystic-hero conforms to a rite of passage, as defined by Arnold van Gennep.[68] His definition of a rite of passage can be subdivided into rites of separation (pre-liminal), transition rites (liminal), and rites of incorporation (post-liminal). In summary, the mystic-hero exhibits an initiatory structure in the pattern of his adventure.

The call of the hero to adventure corresponds to the rite of separation. It has been observed how faith served as an inner call to Naciketas. The *devas* gave Gautama four signs: Mahāvīra was called by the gods to propagate Jainism. A double call was noted in the case of Tukārāma—he was called to seek union with Kṛṣṇa by his worldly adversities which functioned as a sign, and he was called to be a poet. Māṇikkavācakar was called by Śiva, and Caitanya's life changed dramatically in Gayā.

In the rite of transition, the initiate passes from one reality to another which is unknown. It has been observed that Naciketas passed into the realm of Yama by means of the power of his father's words. Once within the realm of Yama, Naciketas spends three days and night without sustenance. The Buddha not only overcame fear and dread in the forest but he also conquered Māra and his hordes. Mahāvīra suffered many ordeals in his battle against his internal and external enemies. But by means of *tapas* he was eventually victorious. A spiritual struggle was also waged by the *bhaktas* who, by the force of their devotion and practice of *kirtana*, were able to succeed.

Once the threshold of adventure is crossed, the mystic-hero is able to secure his trophy. He is instructed in the secrets of life and death like Naciketas, or proceeds to attain enlightenment, or like Tukārāma is initiated by his God. Once these things happen, there is a radical modification in the religious and social status of the individual.[69] The

68. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 11.
69. Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 112.

initiate experiences a basic change in his existential condition. In other words, the mystic-hero emerges from his ordeal a totally different being from (what he was) before his adventure.[70] Victor Turner aptly expresses this process, as follows:

> The arcane knowledge or "*gnosis*" obtained in the liminal period is felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte, impressing him, as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristic of his new state. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being.[71]

Thus there is a change in status from one ontological level of existence to another.

To pursue this point further, it is important to note that during the transitional or liminal stage the individual is structurally invisible. In other words, the mystic-hero, like other neophytes, is similar to an embryo or a new-born infant: Their condition is characterized by ambiguity and paradox.[72] But once they pass through this condition, they move beyond paradoxes to unity and freedom. The existential alteration of the mystic-hero is not, however, the total extent of the change.

There is also a change in social status. As van Gennep has indicated, the initiate is incorporated into a new social reality.[73] He has passed from his former profane state of ignorance, inequality, and irresponsibility. This new status makes it incumbent upon the mystic to return to society to lead others to enlightenment. In short, it is his sacred duty to return to society.

The mystic-hero has undergone an experience of which the uninitiated are unaware. By returning to society, the mystic-hero hopes to lead others towards the same experience. He attempts to communicate this experience to others which at times surpasses the social tradition to which he returns. In other words, the experience of his adventure is something beyond what has been revealed to his social tradition. Furthermore, by returning to society to share his adventure, the mystic-hero revitalizes the social tradition. In short, he gives it new energy and life.

---

70. Mircea Eliade *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*: *The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), p. x.
71. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*: *Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 102.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
73. Van Gennep, *Op. Cit.*, p. 106.

It has been noted that the mystic exhibits the pattern of the hero, which is essentially an initiatory pattern. What more do we learn about the mystic ? The mystic is not only an exceptional figure in his society because he has obtained liberation; he is also exceptional in the sense that he is a creative figure.

By incorporating within himself the pattern of the hero, the Indian mystic has created a new type of hero. He is not the hero of the battle-field; he is rather the hero who conquers man's inner enemies exemplified by passion, greed, and ignorance. He has triumphed over the eternal flux of phenomenal existence to which even the ordinary hero of war must finally succumb. In short, he has transformed the figure of the hero. He has given the figure of the hero new meaning.

The mystic is thus a creative figure. He is not quite the solitary, world-renouncing, and world-transcending figure many have depicted. He is an historical-cultural human like other men. He, however, seeks to break the limitations of his given situation, and he does this in a creative manner. In conjunction with his own quest for liberation, he utilizes existing cultural elements and creates some new ones. Thus the Indian mystic creates a new type of hero and a new model for others to follow.