

Clifford Hospital, *The Righteous Demon: A Study of Bali*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1984, pp. 304, \$ 32 (Canada).

There are several accounts of the myth of Mahabali (Great Bali). The central aim of the book is to identify the specific *sitz im Leben* of the story of Bali. "While it may be impossible to find a specific *Sitz im Leben* for a particular mythic account, it would be reckless to ignore the question. If we cannot know a specific *Sitz im Leben* we can often discern a more generalized milieu - from a single textual account, from a group of similar texts, from what we know of accounts of parallel myths of the same historical period and, at times, - though considerable caution is needed here - from other parts of the work in which the account is incorporated (p. 17). "Initially it may be defined as a set of symbols which cohere into a more or

less unified cultural complex" (p. 18). The author identifies two milieus for the myths of Mahabali, in the former he represents the forces of evil in nature, and in the latter he represents a man of righteousness and devotion. The second version of myth is as follows :

Long Long ago a king named Mahabali ruled over Kerala. He was generous and kind. Life was very happy for everyone. The Kerala ruled by Mahabali was like heaven and that made the Devas jealous. The result of this was that Visnu descended as Vamana, a dwarf, who begged Mahabali for a gift of the land he could cover in three steps. And the generous king granted his request.

Immediately the Dwarf became so large that he was able with two steps to win earth and heaven. For his third step he placed his foot on the head of Mahabali and pushed him down to *Patala*. But before going down to *Patala*, Mahabali asked Visnu for a boon : he asked for permission to visit his people once a year. This was granted and accordingly the day when Mahabali visits Kerala is Onam in the month of Cinnam.

The author's conclusion of his study of his myth of Bali can be shown from the following two texts :

"With this background in view we may return to Bali. We can see Bali bearing different kinds of relationships to Indian attempts to conceptualize what is significant, valuable, and real. In the earlier phases of the Epic-Puranic texts, Bali represents forces inimical to a central idealized reality of the universe, that of *dharma* (virtue, righteousness, and order). Thus Visnu, often seen as upholding *dharma*, is portrayed in his Dwarf *avatara* as overcoming this disorderly and disturbing force".

"But gradually the focus shifts, and in the period of the middle and later Puranas, the total corpus of Bali presents something of a debate or tension between different foci of significance - *dharma*, *bhakti* and prosperity. In Bali there is an exploration of the relation between these features, of which the total effect is to suggest that although Bali may be good, and a great devotee, that does not necessarily mean that his kingly role is legitimate. The fact that his kingdom is eminently prosperous may even be seen as problematic. But from another viewpoint within the same arena of debate, Bali can be shown as the true devotee who has learned not to be attached to anything. Bali lost his kingdom but found his Lord." (pp. 262, 263)

The story of Bali is a typical example of Old myths getting new meaning in the course of time.