

Chapter II - THE MYSTIQUE OF MYTH

Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

– Joseph Campbell.

Chapter - II

THE MYSTIQUE OF MYTH

Myth and legends have existed in the world from time immemorial. Their origin and purpose form an inevitable part of the history of the development of men. Myths embody the primordial man's attempt at explaining the world he lived in, the awesome forces that controlled his life and a desire to find a reason for the good and evil that were his lot. To these questions man found an explanation or an accounting for, in the form of myths. Myths try to give a sense of cosmic orientation and help man discover his ontological place in the universe.

First attempts to seek answers for the eternal questions include personification of the natural and ethical forces and an establishment of faith in ritual and religion. "A galaxy of gods, devils, heroes and monsters emerged as varied as the societies from which they sprang and the appeal of their actions" (Parrinder 1). Myths have been the source of the best works of art and philosophy. Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Homer's *Iliad* and the Hindu religious texts the *Mahabharatha* and the *Ramanaya* are the immortal creations born out of myths.

Yet "myth" is a term that defies an easy, comprehensive definition and pigeonholing. Attempts at the explication of myth and its functions have been innumerable but finding a definition that is acceptable and adequate still eludes the scholars. The reason is, as Mircea Eliade points out, myth is an extremely complex cultural reality which can be approached and interpreted from various and complementary viewpoints (5). In the introduction to his book *Myth*, K.K.Ruthven admits the difficulty of defining myth as it is "obscure in origin, protean in form, and ambiguous in meaning" and adds that the term "appears to resist the intelligence successfully" (1).

Jung, whose theory of the Collective Unconscious gave birth to the recent archetypal or totemic criticism, believed that civilized man preserves unconsciously those prehistoric areas of knowledge which he articulates obliquely in myth (Scott 248). To Northrop Frye, the world of myth is an abstract or purely literary world of fictional and thematic design, unaffected by canons of plausible adaptation to familiar experience. In terms of narrative, myth is the imitation of actions near or at the conceivable limits of desire (136).

Richard Chase prefers the simplest meaning of the Greek word "myth" as a story; myth is narrative or poetic literature (245). These views show that the term myth is still widely interpreted in conflicting ways. The view of Joseph Campbell is worth quoting here as it sums up the innumerable ways of looking at myth:

Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a production of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Müller); ... as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these ... mythology shows itself to be as amenable as life itself to the obsessions and requirements of the individual, the race, the age (*The Hero* 382).

"The Mythical Age" was the name the German novelist Hermann Brech gave to the twentieth-century, a view substantiated by the preoccupations of many poets, dramatists and critics of the recent decades (qtd. in Marudhanayagam 174). Many writers of eminence like T.S.Eliot, W.B Yeats, James Joyce, Robert Graves, and Hermann Melville relied on myth as a means of seeking control and significance amidst the contemporary world of anarchy and futility.

The mythical approach or archetypal criticism, which aims at demonstrating some basic cultural pattern of great meaning and appeal to humanity in the work of art, seems to have derived mainly from two sources. One is the Cambridge School of Comparative Anthropologists like Sir James Frazer, and also Jessie L.Weston, Gilbert Murray, Jane E.Harrison and E.M.Butler. The second source is the bold and the epoch making work

of psychologists like Freud and above all C.G.Jung and to a certain extent the works on the psychology of ritual and myth of Theodore Reik, Otto Rank and Eric Fromm. Myth and mythic criticism came into the limelight with the literary impact of *The Golden Bough*. The author of this pioneering work was Sir. James Frazer, the Scottish classicist and anthropologist. Published originally in two volumes (1890) and later enlarged to thirteen volumes, *The Golden Bough* is a monumental study in comparative folklore, magic, religion and rituals. John Vickery referring to works like Frazer's work, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* and Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious*, remarks that "Out of these and similar books came the controlling ideas of myth criticism, such as the dying and reviving god, the hero's quest, ritual drama, the scapegoat and the cyclical nature of existence" (*Myth and Literature* XI). Sir Edward Tylor's book *Primitive Culture* (1871) too is another significant work which is responsible for the archetypal criticism.

Mythic or archetypal criticism owes more to Carl Gustav Jung, the eminent Swiss psychologist than to any other individual writer. It is founded centrally on Jung's theory of archetypes. In his famous work *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1934) Jung declares:

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the Collective Unconscious (205).

When Sigmund Freud named the mental forms whose presence cannot be explained by anything in the individual's own life as "archaic remnants", Jung called them "archetypes" or "primordial images". The unconscious mind, according to Jung is dynamic and is capable of assuming an intelligence and purposiveness which are superior to actual insight. Jung declares in *Man and His Symbols*, that archetypes create myths, religions and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history. When myths of a religious nature can be a mental therapy for the sufferings of mankind in general-hunger, war, disease, old age and death, myths that demonstrate basic cultural patterns give birth to works of art of great meaning and appeal to humanity (*Archetypes* 68).

Freud's emphasis on the exclusively sexual nature of the libido and the interpretation of dream were theories to which Jung strongly objected. Jung preferred to think of this urge in man as the sum total of all the impulses which includes the racial and individual content, the non-sexual and the sexual content. To Jung, this was the vital force of life and he termed it, the racial unconscious or the collective unconscious or the impersonal unconscious.

Jung's account of the poetic process is more elaborate and systematic. There is simultaneously a personal unconscious of the individual's own repressed self as well as a basic collective unconscious shared by all mankind, in which the primordial images and ancestral patterns of experience are forever embedded and preserved (186). This

primordial experience is the source of the poet's creativeness. The "collective unconscious" manifests itself in the recurrence of certain images, stories or figure called "archetypes" which reflect basic human urges and experiences.

The term "archetype" was derived from the Greek word "archetypes" which means "beginning pattern". Archetype, in literary criticism, means a primordial image, character or pattern that recurs throughout literature and thought consistently enough to be considered a universal concept or situation. The term was adapted by critics from the writings of Jung.

The archetypes contain all aspects of human nature-the light and the dark, the beautiful and the ugly and the profound and the silly. Jung gives a detailed description of the archetypes. What is known as the unconscious has preserved primitive characteristics that formed a part of the original mind. Dreams, myths and fairytales constantly refer to these characteristics -illusion, fantasies, archaic thoughts and fundamental instincts. When these feelings were repressed, neurosis resulted. "As the evolution of the embryonic body repeats its prehistory, so the mind also develops through a series of prehistoric stages" (*Man and His Symbols* 89). The main aim of dreams and myths is to bring back a sort of recollection of the prehistoric or infantile world right down to the level of the most primitive instincts, according to Jung.

Thus the poet's vision to Jung is not a product of fantasy but a primordial or archetypal experience transmitted through "the collective

unconscious". Myths and fairytales are the purest forms of archetypal images which could be seen in all great literature. Apart from this important theory, Jung has also pointed out certain archetypes which recur in literature. They are the shadow, the anima and the wise old man. The "anima" is an archetype that symbolizes the life beyond consciousness, the realm of the metaphysics. Jung says that man's encounter with the shadow could be termed "apprentice-piece" whereas his contact with anima "the masterpiece" as it is the test of courage, a true battle between the spiritual and moral forces of man (*Archetypes* 223-24). The third archetype of the wise old man is often found in literature. He is the revealer or the enlightener who like all archetypes has a positive and negative aspect.

Jung testified that when an archetypal situation occurs, the person experiences an extraordinary sense of release, as though caught up by an overwhelming power. At such moments the person ceased to be an individual and becomes a part of the race, and the voice of all mankind seems to resonate in the individual. An over reliance and such numinous emotions is displayed by the archetypal critic Maud Bodkin in *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934). She analyses Coleridge's poem *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* to reflect archetypal patterns in the readers which leap in response to the effective presentation by Coleridge of an ancient theme. The archetypal patterns commented on by Bodkin are the archetypes of Rebirth and Paradise- Hades which could be considered "as a mode of expressing something potentially realizable in human experience of any time or place" (234-35).

Mention has to be made about the important work by Jessie Weston titled *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) which analyses the different versions of the Grail story and the Fisher King. This work was the major influence behind T.S. Eliot's immortal poem *The Waste Land* (1922). Another English study of significance came from Lord Ragland, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* (1937). In his notes to *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot acknowledges his indebtedness to both Weston and Frazer. These works were instrumental in Eliot finding the universal patterns of man which enabled simultaneous parallels between the rich past and morally sterile present. The legend of the Waste Land has different versions but the main features remain the same.

The land of the Fisher King is blighted by a curse. The crops fail and animals cannot reproduce. The reason is the Fisher King has become impotent because of an injury. The ailing king can be cured only by the arrival of a knight on the quest of the Holy Grail. When the knight on the Quest of the Holy Grail arrives and asks the right questions the King is cured, the waters of the Waste Land flow again and fertility is restored. Weston's analysis of the Waste Land legend links it to earlier cultures. She traces the origin of the romance to the fertility cults and the vegetation ceremonies and mystery religions. Weston comments that the Grail story and fertility cults sprang up from man's awesome response to Nature's ever-recurring process of renewal. "I am firmly and entirely convinced that the root origin of the whole bewildering complex is to be found in the vegetation ritual, treated from the esoteric point of view as a Life Cult, and

in that alone" declares Weston (163). This connection between the ruler and the land forms a relevant background for the understanding of Soyinka's play *Kongi's Harvest*. In the play, the land is ruled over by an epileptic with a lust for power. Soyinka presents the play as a satire on dictatorship.

"The Freeing of the Waters" is another legend discussed by Weston. She traces it to the Tammuz Cult and to the *Rig Veda* (39). The story of Indra the god of rain and Rishyasringa the sage who brings rain is narrated by Weston as stories with curious points of similarity with the Grail legend. Girish Karnad's play *The Fire and the Rain*, is based on the incident from the *Mahabharatha* where the fire sacrifice is conducted to bring rains to the parched land. Karnad successfully uses this motif to highlight the theme of sacrifice leading to regeneration.

The fruitfulness of this method was duly acknowledged by other writers and they too exploited the mythical approach. The famous exponents include James Joyce, W.B Yeats and later C.S.Lewis. Joyce's *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922) are monumental works. Similarly W.B.Yeats used folk-lore and mythology as symbols that can touch man's hidden self and to awaken in him the oldest and profound impulses of adventure and self-fulfilment. Yeats was disillusioned with the anarchy of modern culture and sought to revive the ancient spells and incantations to bring about unity and harmony. Yeats' mythopoeia is found in most of his poems including "Crossways", "The Wanderings of Oisín" and "The Second Coming", to mention a few.

Northrop Frye is responsible for trying to establish a systematic but complex theory of literature based on the archetypal symbols. In his work *Anatomy of Literary Criticism* (1957), Frye illustrates how the fundamental levels of structure of literary system are based on myths. Four narrative categories, the comic, romantic, tragic and ironic correspond to the myths of seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter. He identifies two main symbolic or archetypal patterns- the apocalyptic and the demonic as the myths that inform all literature. Frye's critical works also include *Fearful Symmetry: A study of Blake* (1947).

F.W.Nietzsche, the revolutionary German thinker's views on myth, dream and art anticipated the theories of Freud. In his work *Selbstdarstellung*, Freud acknowledges how Nietzsche's comments agree with the theories of psychoanalysts. Nietzsche said that man repeated in dreams the experience of earlier humanity and that there is a close link between dreams and old kind of drama like mystery plays, both being therapeutic (qtd. in Marudhanayagam 54). To Nietzsche goes the credit of the notion that tragedies and by later extension all works of art are grounded in myth. This theory is expounded in the work *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) which has influenced later writers including Wole Soyinka. Nietzsche popularized the theory that tragedy is Dionysian. He claims, "Dionysus never ceased to be the magic hero ... All the famous figures of the Greek stage ... are only masks of that original hero "Dionysus" (qtd. in Hollingdale 162).

At this juncture a brief account of "Myth criticism" that emerged as a movement in America is very much in order. It could be defined as a method by which the critic demonstrates the basic cultural patterns of great appeal and meaning in a work of art. This school of myth criticism emerged in America during the 1930's. It arose as a reaction to New Criticism and soon brought under its fold the best practitioners of New Criticism. The important critics of this school were Leslie Fielder, Richard Chase, Philip Wheelright, Francis Ferguson, Daniel Hoffman, Stanley Edgar Hymen, Constance Rourke, Kenneth Burke, Joseph Campbell and William Troy. Jung, Maud Bodkin, Northrop Frye are the non-Americans who wielded profound influence on myth criticism in America.

In his critique on myth criticism, Dorairaj points out myth as the multifaceted phenomenon (65). In other words myth criticism occupies a curious position among other methods. It requires close textual reading like the formalistic. It seems psychological as it analyses the work of art's appeal to the reader. Yet it is sociological in its concern for basic cultural patterns as central to the appeal. Myth criticism is also historical in its investigation of a cultural or social past but non-historical in its demonstration of literature's eternal appeal.

Europe that witnessed the two World Wars and their terrible aftermath needed a strong spiritual and moral foothold and found it in the form of myths. T.S.Eliot in *Ulysses, Order and Myth*(1922), championed the cause of myth by calling it the way of controlling and giving significance to the post-war world of moral and spiritual anarchy. This proves the fact that

the study of myth is both historical and psychological. John Vickery comments on the basic tenets of myth criticism thus:

First, the creating of myths, the myth^t hopoeic faculty, is inherent in the thinking process ..., second, myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically. Third not only can myth stimulate the creative artist, but it also provides concepts and patterns, which the critic may use to interpret specific works of literature ... Fourth and last, the ability of literature to move us profoundly is due to its mythic quality, to its possession of *mana* ... (IX).

Joseph Campbell is a popular author on myths and the history of spirituality. His famous works are *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, *The Mask of God* and *The Mythic Image*. An accusation made against Campbell is that his works are inspirational rather than scholarly.

Like all literary schools and movements myth criticism too had its decline and fall. Critics like H.M.Block and W.W.Douglas have questioned the soundness of this approach. A basic objection is that many works of art include symbols which are personal and to interpret them from the point of view of myth criticism is to overrate them. Another charge levelled against the myth critics, is that they are notable more for their ingenuity than for validity. The other objection is that this criticism does not lead to an evaluation of literature so much as to an explanation of fundamental appeal of certain writing. Charles Mooreman charges the myth critics with source

hunting. Righter emphasises that “literary works can stand on their own without the extraneous support of mythical sub-texts” (qtd. in Dorairaj 76). The opponents of this mode have called it otherworldly and anti-historical. But the truth is that the appeal of myth and the power of archetypal criticism remain as valid today as in writers like Soyinka and Karnad, as it was nearly a century ago in T.S.Eliot, James Joyce and Aurobindo.

Just as the theories vary, the functions of myth too are innumerable. Mircea Eliade identifies five major functions of myth in *Myth and Reality*. Myths as experienced by archaic societies constitute the history of the supernatural being’s actions. They also reveal a reality which is both true and sacred. Myth constitutes the paradigms for all significant human acts as it tells how something came into existence or how a pattern of behaviour or institution came into existence. The knowing of the myth enables the understanding of the origin of things which will help in controlling and manipulating them. The ceremonial recounting of myth or performance of the ritual will provide the knowledge. When listening to a myth or taking part in a ritual, the individual is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted (19).

Myth resurrects a primeval reality to satisfy man’s innate religious wants, moral cravings and practical requirements. Eliade quotes Malinowski whose words throw light on the many functions of myth:

Myth fulfils in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; ... Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human

civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation of or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom (20).

Jung sums up the therapeutic value of myth in his book, *Man and his Symbols* (1964). Myths of a religious nature could ease the sufferings and anxieties of mankind in general-like war, disease and death. The second function pointed out by Jung is a creation of sense of exaltation. The narration of a myth or ritual repetition of sacred texts and ceremonies and worship of a mythical figure accompanied by dance, music, hymns, prayers and sacrifice would grip the audience with numinous emotions. As if caught up in a magic spell, the individual would be exalted to identification with the hero. Modern man has learned to do his work without the recourse to drumming and chanting. But too much of reliance on reason and scientific evidence had cost him dearly. Contemporary man pays the price of lack of introspection. He is unaware that with all his rationality and efficiency he is still possessed by powers that are beyond his control. The demons have not vanished instead they have got new names. Restlessness, vague apprehension, psychological complications have led to an insatiable need for pills, alcohol, tobacco, food and above all, a large array of neurosis (71).

The modern man may choose to dispense with the power of archetypes or myths insisting that there is no evidence of their truth. Jung rightly says that since things like primordial reality are invisible and

unknowable things, why should modern man bother about evidences? These are views that would prove helpful in crisis and would give meaning to existence. A sense of wider meaning to one's existence is essential to make man rise above materialism (76).

Joseph Campbell points out four functions of myth in his conversation with Bill Moyers. The first is the mystical function. Because myths open the world to the dimension of mystery and thus to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms. The second function is related to the cosmological dimension of myths with which science is chiefly concerned. Myths or the cosmogony myths reveal the ancient truths about the universe, so that the myths again come through to the individuals. Sociological function is the third function of myths. Certain myths support and validate social order. This is the reason why myths differ enormously from place to place. The fourth function of myth is considered to be the most important by Campbell- the pedagogical function. Myths could teach men how to live the life time under any circumstances (39). One can agree with these views of these exponents of myth and say that both katharsis and what Jung called in *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* the "Participation Mystique" (217) as the essential functions of myth and both these functions are of paramount value to the modern men living in a dehumanised world.

The appeal of myth and the recognition of its values have led the myth critics and thematologists to locate specific myths as "monomyths". The word "monomyth" is taken from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*

(1939). The advocates of myth criticism have identified certain basic myths which recur in literature as universal narrative patterns. The difference of choice is due to special and temporal contingencies. To Joseph Campbell, the fundamental mythic pattern or monomyth is the *rite de passage* or the mythological adventure of the hero that followed the formula of separation-initiation and return. Campbell further clarifies this as the "separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return" (*The Hero* 35). Raglan prefers the celebration of the Dying god as narrated in Frazer. To Roheim the nucleus of myth is the apotheosis of the Primal Father whereas Eliade favours the myth of origin, and the cosmogonic myth (Ruthven 76).

Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) identifies the Quest myth as the monomyth. This myth is by far the most popular and most prevalent and to Frye the source of all literary genres. The best works of the twentieth-century are based on Quest myth. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* are the supreme examples of this central myth. The successful quest has three main stages- the perilous journey, the crucial struggle and the victory of the hero. The central form of this quest is usually bound up with the dragon-killing theme. Frye states that the quest-romance has analogies to both rituals and dreams. When translated into ritual terms the quest-romance becomes the victory of fertility over the wasteland. *The Faerie Queene* and the Grail story illustrate the quest-theme. The better example definitely will be Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The poem is organized around the mythical material drawn from Frazer's *The*

Golden Bough and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. The story of the loss of virility of the Fisher King and the consequent drought in his land and the fertility ritual of older times are woven into the story of the Grail. The aridity of the Fisher King's land could be removed only by a young knight who succeeds in the quest for the grail. Eliot finds a parallel in these myths to the contemporary world's moral and spiritual sterility.

A brief analysis of the works of T.S.Eliot, James Joyce and Sri Aurobindo throws light on the many advantages of the happy fusion of myths with different genres of literatures. T.S.Eliot's poem *The Waste Land* (1922) is the best example of myth imparting order and form to a literary work. The most sensational poem of the twentieth-century becomes a social document of the spiritual malaise of modern men. Eliot aims to present the horror and squalor of life of men caught up in a moral and spiritual waste land. The spiritual sterility is due to the isolation of man from god, the death of the soul, the collapse of moral and spiritual values and the pitiable reduction of human life to a mere naturalistic or animalistic plane. The chaos and the broken images achieve greater meanings through the artistic treatment of Eliot. Eliot achieves this not by making the decay as an isolated phenomenon peculiar to the present age but as an integral part of history of mankind.

Eliot chose the mythical method to establish parallel between the ancient world and the modern world as the problems of men remain the same though separated by time. Eliot's intention was to show how the solutions reached in the past with success could be tried in the present.

The relation between the past and the present was established by Eliot through the technique of parallelism and contrast better termed as the "mythical method". The works of anthropologists like James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and the famous book of Jessie Weston informed Eliot of the recurring patterns in various myths, the resemblance between vegetation myths of rebirth of the year, the fertility myths of the rebirth of the potency of man, the grail legend of purification and the Christian story of resurrection.

These myths form the "objective co-relative" for Eliot which he explains in his essay "Hamlet and his Problems" in 1919 to give artistic expression to his emotions born of the vision of universal chaos and spiritual barrenness of the post-war European Society (145). *The Waste Land* thus embodies simultaneously the parallels between various waste lands. The pathetic condition of modern men who are dead to all finer aspects of life is revealed in the epigraph itself. The Sybil who expresses her death wish is also echoing the desire of the inhabitants of the waste land. Life has degenerated into mere animal existence devoid of the knowledge of good and evil and hence the need for death for spiritual rebirth is conveyed through the myth of Sibyl of Cumae, once a famous prophetess now seeking release from eternal life.

The mythical figure Tiresias the prophet becomes the protagonist of *The Waste Land*. Though he is not a character in the poem, what Tiresias witnesses becomes the substance of the poem. Tiresias who had been the expert consulted by the gods on the relation between the sexes, now

witnesses sinful sexual relationships. The sacredness of sexual relation has become a long forgotten one. Tiresius who recognized the sinful relationship between Oedipus and Jocasta as the reason for the sterility of Thebes, witnesses many such acts in the liberated world of the modern men. Through Tiresius, Eliot reveals the essential horror of such immoral act which is not regarded as a sin at all by the wastelanders. Tiresius becomes the link between the waste land of Oedipus and the waste land of modern civilization.

The message that is conveyed to the living dead of the wasteland of contemporary existence is revealed through the apocalyptic command of Prajapati through the voice of thunder, in the form of the Sanskrit word "Da" repeated thrice meaning-*datta*, *dayadhvam* and *damyata*. The words convey the message that men should learn to give, sympathise and control. These qualities are imperative for the attainment of eternal peace.

Mythical method was chosen by Eliot for its obvious advantages. It helps in finding parallelism between the present and the past and in conveying a sense of continuity of time. The method presented Eliot both the theme and the technique which together have made the poem into the condensed epic of the modern times.

In the famous essay titled "Ulysses, Order, and Myth", published in *The Dial* in 1922, Eliot praised the mythic method used by James Joyce in *Ulysses*. He observes, "In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him ..." (*Selected Prose* 177). Joyce

exemplifies mythic imagination at its best in his novels. *Ulysses* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are novels where myths become the substructure of the literary narratives.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* the mythic method is used by Joyce to juxtapose the past and the present and to bring together the mythical and literary characters together. Through Stephen Daedalus, Joyce re-enacts the mythical action of Daedalus to explore the dynamics of the artists' flight and exile as indispensable elements for artistic growth and integrity. The artist as a young man trapped in an impossible situation which thwarts his growth decides to take flight to save himself.

Daedalus the Greek hero is the prototype of the artist and artisan who built the labyrinth where the Minotaur was imprisoned. When King Minos turned against him, Daedalus and his son Icarus flew out of Crete using the ingeniously fabricated wings. The myth thus symbolises the power of imagination, ingenuity, intelligence and liberation. Flight and exile become indispensable for the development of Stephen Daedalus from a mere human being into a creator. Joyce's hero finally severs his ties with family, country and the church which try to smother his artistic sensibility and like Daedalus flies out of the stifling life in Ireland to Paris.

Joyce has de-contextualized the classical myth and has also re-contextualized it not only in the context of the novel but with reference to his life as well (Dorairaj 106). The theme of exile which lingers in the other works of Joyce is quite evident in *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. The process of de-contextualising the Greek myth and re-contextualising it has

been done by Joyce to make the ancient myth speak anew. The actions of Stephen Daedalus fuse the mythical hero with both the character and the novelist himself. The demythologization is done through three characters- the literary, the historical and the mythical hero who symbolise the tradition of captivity and flight and escape through art.

Series of epiphanies mark the development of Stephen Dedalus which mean sudden spiritual manifestation (*Stephen Hero* 216). The five sections of the novel culminate in epiphany and the vision of the girl illuminates to Stephen the path he must follow. This has been interpreted differently both as the vision of Mother Mary and as the Holy Ghost. The novel ends with Stephen seeking liberation through art, with silence, exile and running as his defence.

Though both Eliot and Joyce are great practitioners of the mythical method their methods are quite diverse. While Eliot used it to highlight how myth imparts order and to see life as a continuum, Joyce sought to work out his own flight from the Irish labyrinth which would enable him to objectify an intense subject matter- the debilitating culture of Ireland. Eliot has adopted the technique of compression and telescoping to turn the spiritual sterility into an eternal problem of man. Joyce follows the technique of elaboration and expansion. In *Ulysses*, Joyce works out the parallel of even the smallest details in the narrative to those of Homer's *Odyssey* thus multiplying the associations of the events of one day in the life of the protagonist to produce a novel of epic magnitude.

Myths contain the basic ideas that govern the entire culture of a nation and in India the political and historical identity of the people has been based on the psychological and spiritual affinity found only in myths. Indian writers for many centuries have drawn on myths. Most languages of India have authentic versions of the two storehouses of myths—the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha*. Myths have become a part of the psychic life of the people in the sub-continent. The moral conveyed through Sanskrit drama is redemptive suffering. When literary drama reacted against this ancient tradition, it chose to draw inspiration from the Western drama.

As myths shape the identity of a culture, writers like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Kailasm decided to restore the nation's identity through myths and legends when India was under the clutches of an overwhelming alien culture- the British regime. Using characters of past history and myth these writers sought to rebuild the nation's identity.

Paradoxically they chose to write in English as English has become the common modern idiom. One reason was to address the educated Indians who were slowly being deprived of their rich cultural heritage. The English language gave a new idiom of interpretation and provided a critical insight into the secrets of the myths. The eternal conflict between good and evil and suffering leading to regeneration are the major themes of India's religious epics which are abundantly used by Indian English dramatists.

Playwrights Aurobindo, Tagore and others incorporated myth in their works in various ways. Myth became the background, theme, character, a moral-symbol in representing India's glorious past before the people of the West. Another aim of these writers was to popularize Indian drama in India as well. The plays of Tagore were originally written in Bengali and later were translated into English.

Sri Aurobindo stands apart by taking inspiration not only from Indian myths but also from Greek, Scandinavian and Syrian history. Unlike Tagore, Aurobindo's plays do not use myths in a symbolical way. The mission of Aurobindo is to interpret the wisdom of the *Vedas* and to propagate his philosophical and religious views.

The predominant concern of Aurobindo's plays is the theme of unity-political, social, religious and above all the unity of being. "In Aurobindonean philosophy unity is one of the key ideas for the manifestation of which myths provide ample scope" (Nandkumar 210). *Perseus the Deliverer* (1907), *Vasavadutta* (1915) and *Rodogune* (1959) are among the best achievements of Aurobindo.

Aurobindo takes up myths and dramatizes them as a whole maintaining originality. They also represent the contemporary life along with the universal ideas of love and unity. In *Perseus the Deliverer*, Aurobindo utilizes the Perseus-Andromeda myth. The main stress lies on Perseus being the liberator of humanity. Aurobindo's Perseus resembles Prometheus in his selfless love but is the son of Zeus himself and is helped by goddess Athene in his work for humanity.

Aurobindo presents Perseus as the symbol of power and knowledge while Andromeda personifies love, pity and compassion. They unite to achieve the perfection of personality. Perseus symbolises Aurobindo's belief that there shall come a day when on earth there shall be nothing but truth, harmony and perfection binding men together. The drama enacted takes place in the inner world of man's mind rather than in the outer world. Aurobindo conveys this idea when he comments in the Prologue to the play "here the stage is the human mind of all times" (2).

Aurobindo's use of myths exhibits his imaginative awareness of the myths' totality of experience. Oriental influence made him stress on the depiction of gentleness, patience and self-sacrifice even when he dealt with European myths. Aurobindo through myths exemplifies the ideals like the evolution of human consciousness, political unity and stability and the power of divine grace that is the source of all activities in the universe.

It is no wonder that dramatic adaptations of myths have received more attention and accolades than the other literary adaptations of myths. A myth, as the Greeks implied, is a little more than the equivalent of a simple plot, albeit a plot traditionally related to the action of gods or heroes its essential quality is that of a basic configuration of actions. The identification of myth with drama and plot as the essence of drama explains why myth so often appears on the stage.

The latter half of the twentieth-century witnessed a cultural resurgence especially in the third world or the colonies. The need to find one's own roots, the requirement to establish one's credentials as an

independent nation and also the need to rid oneself of the past humiliation and subjugation resulted in post-colonial literature. This longing for what Soyinka calls "the quest for racial self-retrieval" (*Art, Dialogue and Outrage* 86) led the writers especially the dramatists to register their protests by a reversion to indigenous theatre traditions of performance or ritual drama.

Soyinka and Karnad are great exponents of myth. As pointed out earlier both the African and Indian world-view are anchored in myth and ritual. As Nigeria is a society where myths have always remained valuable for explaining the unexplainable, Soyinka goes to the great myths of archaic communities especially the ones that constitute the quest for regeneration, for identity and for knowledge. In Soyinka's plays most of the monomyths find expression. In Ogun's history, Soyinka sees the completion of the Yoruba Cosmogony, the god's rite of passage and coming into being. Ogun is the Path finder, the quester who through self sacrifice and regeneration sought to reunite the divine and mortal beings.

Karnad in most of his plays makes use of ancient myths and history to interpret the age-old human situation with reference to the contemporary experience. To Karnad, myths enabled effective story telling. He also acknowledges, "Myths express certain archetypal social relationships. These relationships could be of Father and Son, Husband and Wife, or of brothers ... Secondly, myths have the power to affect us even without our being aware of it" (qtd. in Ramachandran 23). Quest for regeneration through sacrifice, search for identity, completeness of being

and perfection are the recurrent themes of Karnad's plays which are presented through the Indian myths of yore.

Though Soyinka and Karnad are essentially mythopoeic, their chief concern like all great writers is creating social awareness. The moral, social and spiritual aspects of contemporary life are discussed and criticized by these dramatists. The terms "myth" and "reality" may seem incompatible but they are not binary opposites. Moutushi Chakravartee comments on these two terms thus, "By suggestion, myth and reality are antonyms, by implication, they cohere and co-exist" (181). Myths cannot be dismissed as mere fantasies because fantasy is innate to human beings. The fantasies projected by myth reflect both individual and social preoccupations of mankind. Chakravartee asserts that at any rate, fantasy expresses a social truth born of the "Collective Unconscious" or of associated experience. The truth contained in the myths is dependent not necessarily upon physical reality but on a psychic one (181).

Soyinka and Karnad through myths project the different states of human conditions. These human conditions based on the conscious and the sub-conscious thoughts and instincts highlight the concrete reality of existence. The next chapter attempts to evaluate how far the two dramatists succeed in presenting the theme of sacrifice and regeneration which provides a unified view of reality.