CHAPTER - V
THE 'NUMINOUS' AND THE IDEA OF GOD

5.1. Introductory

'Das Numinose', the Numinous, has achieved the distinction of being a part and parcel of the theological vocabulary ever since it was used by Otto in The Idea of the Holy. Only a few words of rare significance can catch up the imagination of people of a particular field.

'Numinous' is not an absolutely new coinage of Otto. It is derived from the Latin word numen, meaning deity or divinity. From numen is derived numinal or numinous, meaning divine. As far back as 1647 it was used in this sense: 'The Will of a King is very numinous; it hath a kind of vast universality in it.' But the credit to use it in the sense in which it is understood these days, in the religious circle, goes to Otto.

Holiness or sacredness which is a uniquely religious category is complex and has in it a "quite specific element or moment" which sets it apart from the rational." The rational is that which can be conceptualized and the non-rational is that which eludes conceptualization. The holy, for Otto, originally meant only the specific element which is ever non-rational, but in course of time it got mixed up with rational and moral concepts. So the real and original meaning of this term is without its rational and moral elements.
(The non-rational elementary 'moment' in the idea of the holy is universally present in all religions. It is the life-force of a religion.) The Hebrew qadosh or the Latin sanctus—though they bear a sense of goodness in them—originally meant something other than the good. It is by rationalization and moralisation that the primary datum beyond reason came to acquire the rational shade of meaning. This view of Otto's that the words like sanctus, qadosh etc. were originally free from moral import is corroborated by Old Testament scholars.

(Hence it is worthwhile, according to Otto, to designate the extra in the idea of the holy as 'numinous'. He says, "Omen has given us 'ominous', and there is no reason why from numen we should not similarly form a word 'numinous'.") After giving an appropriate name to the non-rational element in our religious experience Otto speaks of the numinous state of mind as sui generis, irreducible to any other state and indefinable. As such, the numinous experience "cannot be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened" in the mind of others.

Kant's noumena are the objects of intellectual intuition which men do not possess. Hence they are just limiting concepts.) Supposing that men had some faculty to know the noumena also, but could not conceptualise them fully nor could communicate the experience— they would be numinous in Otto's sense.

Centuries of philosophical speculation before Kant culminating in his Criticism is a pointer to the fact that God's
existence is hard to be established on rational grounds. So Otto
gives a transcendental argument, on the basis of numinous experience,
for the existence of God.

Jung and James speak of the Numinous and the 'over-
beliefs' respectively, both the terms meaning roughly the same
extra-ordinary nature of religious consciousness. But they explain
this experience in terms of the unconscious or the subconscious
which is another way of saying that this is only subjective. But
Otto takes it as an a priori experience: a priori (hence no
ordinary sensuous) and experience (hence not just subjective fantasy).
That is, the numinous begins with mind, but it does not originate
there.

Otto has already pointed at the indescribability of the
numinous in rational terms. However he wants to indicate it by
appropriate ideograms. This he does by the phrase 'mysterium tremen-
dum et fascinans'.

5.2. Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans

Mysterium tremendum et fascinans, these three words give
in a nutshell Otto's insight into the non-rational element in our
religious consciousness. In spite of its subtlety, the 'numinous'
is not simple. There are various modalities of its appearance in
the human mind.

Religious feelings arise in our mind in a manner
daunting as well as attracting; terrifying, mystifying, leading
to ecstasies, and yet they are beyond our full comprehension. Of these three terms employed by Otto to denote this unique feeling, mysterium is the substantive term of which the other two are attributes. So the numinous feelings are feelings of the 'numen praesens' whom we ordinarily call God who is terrifying (tremendum) and yet fascinating (fasinans) and is mysterious (mysterium) and in that sense never fully knowable all the same.

5.2.1. Tremendum

In his analysis of 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans' Otto starts with the examination of tremendum. Tremendum is the adjective of mysterium which is the substantive. They are in fact the negative and positive aspects of the same feeling. Whereas mysterium has a negative undertone, as something esoteric and unfamiliar, tremendum is the vividly felt impact of it and strongly suggests the positive meaning, the strong negativity of mysterium notwithstanding.

Tremendum, which stands for all that is terrific and stupendous in the numinous feelings, has its own specific determinations or modalities. Otto discusses as many as three of them while dealing with tremendum: (a) Awfulness (b) Overpoweringness and (c) Urgency.

5.2.1(a) Awfulness: Tremor or ordinary fear is a parallel of religious fear which is marked off for its numinosity. The fearful sentiment of protecting the holiness of religious object, kind
of chill running through the marrows at the imagination of its
defilement is the numinous fear. Otto refers to Hebrew words
qiqdish and emah, Latin augustus, German erschauern and thinks that
the English word awe has a sense approximating what he means by
numinous fear. Religious dread is a better designation. This
religious dread, in the beginning, must have started as dread of
ghosts - as a feeling of uncanny, eerie or weird and must have
laid the foundation of religion.

Shuddering is unique in religious dread alone, not in
ordinary fears. The shuddrer applies a unique category of valuation
to its object of terror which implies that one is capable of
numinous experiences. A peculiarly religious fear of Arjuna is
reported by Sanjaya in the Gita:

Hearing Kesava's words, trembling and shuddering,
Clasping his hands, and humbly worshipping,
The bearer of the crown thus spake to Krishna,
Stammering and fearful bowing down to Him.

In fact the theophany of Gita-XI is an excellent
equale of numinous experience and Otto has referred to it many
a time.

Whereas numinous awe is a remarkable fact in the life
of the primitive man, this awe occurs in the life of modern man
also with all its force. The example Otto gives is about the ghost
stories which have a kind of perennial attraction. The dread they
excite are not only described as chilling of the blood - but as
creeping of the flesh also, which is a decidedly non-rational feeling. But intensity is not a sine qua non of numinous fear, it may appear gently without much ado.

The numinous awe is neither an ordinary fear-experience in times of danger nor a pathological fear. It is not a case of being afraid of something which can kill or injure. It is a case of "being confronted with a person such that the last thing one wants to do is to cross his will." The religious man would do anything but affront God the Holy. He is in panic not to violate holiness in any manner, and this is his religious dread.

Some writers have criticised Otto for laying too much emphasis on the fear element of religion and that it is not compatible with divine love. But this is not a proper evaluation of Otto. If he emphasises awe, he does similarly emphasise numinous fascination also. And in developed religions like Christianity, due to the schematization of the non-rational, crude daemonic dreads are not prominent. Awe is there, but there is love of God also. This point is clearly brought out by Wach when he says that the terrifying and alluring aspects are known to the theologians of all religions as Divine Wrath and Divine Love or Grace. So the question of Otto's neglecting one aspect to the detriment of the other does not arise. If the mysterium is tremendum in the sense of awesome, it is fascination also.
5.2.1(b) Numinous Overpoweringness and Subject's Creature-feeling

In the tremendum there is the element of 'might', 'power' or 'absolute overpoweringness'. This Otto prefers to call 'majestas' for the numinous ring of the word. So the fear of the Numen is now coupled with majesty. It is tremenda majestas.

The element of majesty can be nicely exemplified by referring to quite a few Sanskrit terms used in the Bhagavadgītā, Canto XI. Some of them, picked up at random, are: mahat rūpam - colossal figure; ugrarūpam - dreadful form; garīyase - the greatest, anantarūpam - cosmic figure, apratimapraṇabhāvah-unparallelled in power. Though all these terms appear to be conceptualizable, but in fact they elude being conceptualized and stand for the non-rational awareness of something which is majestic beyond all measures. Of these the term ugrarūpam comes very near Otto's tremenda majestas.

It is due to this majesty or overpoweringness that the person having numinous experience feels himself too small and insignificant vis-à-vis the Numen. This is what Otto calls the creature-feeling, which according to him is the fundamental feeling-response to the object of religious awareness: The Numen is grand and the person experiencing it shrinks in self-devaluation and covers under its majesty. This is the first subjective concomitant and effect
of the numinous feelings. To take an analogy, though imperfect: when we have the experience of beauty, we have the experience of joy. 'Joy' is the subjective reaction to the feeling of beauty and both are difficult to communicate in language. However, they are not the same thing. One is the cause and the other effect. Similarly, creature-feeling, though incommunicable, is not a part of 'numinous feelings' but an effect of them though still on the side of the non-rational and a priori. Sometimes students of Otto miss this point.

5.2.1(a) Urgency

Urgency or energy is the third element in the complex feeling *tremendum*. 'It is particularly vividly perceptible in... 'wraith' and it everywhere clothes itself in symbolical expressions vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, *impetus*. In the mysticism of love, this energy of God is the consuming fire of divine love.

5.2.2. Mysterium

*Mysterium*, which is the substantive of the complex ideogram *mysterium-tremendum*, has an esoteric ring about it. Mysterium is the *mysterium*, mystery, in the idea of God. At the non-rational or numinous plane there is the feeling of an awful and majestic reality which at the same time baffles the intellect. The dread is there - but the consciousness that it is not all is also there. This is a peculiar state of mind - of knowing and yet not knowing. Otto tries to denote it with the term *stupor* taken
from the natural sphere. It is blank wonder and astonishment that strikes us dumb. But sometimes some events which stupefy us or fill us with stupor may, afterwards, appear to be quite simple and understandable. Magical tricks, when the tricks are known, lose their stupefying character. Thus stupor is also not the suitable term for the "unknownable" and mysterious in the numinous feelings. Thus the mysterious in the numinous which is ever incomprehensible is "the 'wolly other' (anyad, alienum), that which is quite beyond the sphere of the natural, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny', and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment." The numinous 'wholly other' is not an ordinary mystery - mysterious because of some limitation on the part of our knowing process - it is rather of a completely different kind and character before which we "recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb."

Otto exemplifies this wholly-otherness of the mysterious with the help of our interest in ghost stories. Talks about ghosts interest us because they describe entities wholly other - having no place in our scheme of reality. O.A. Campbell gives an apt example from the grisly dreams of childhood. He says that there must be few among us who cannot recall the state of indescribable terror in which we awakened from some childish dream, so altogether different in kind from any terror evoked by dangers in the 'natural' world and also how well-nigh impossible we found it to believe the assurances of our elders that the grisly forms had no 'real' existence. Among the grown-ups also similar
experiences are there. Horrible nightmares we understand to be dreams only after we 'collect our wits.' Such are the experiences of things wholly other. The point is not that ghosts exist or not, the point is rather that such dreams are terrifying and talks about these interesting. On the existential plane, however, wholly other ghost and wholly other God differ. In the experience of the latter there is creature-feeling which points to the beyondness of the object of experience which the experience of the former lacks, probability being that it is only imaginary.

In mystical experiences the numen is contrasted with the mundane and is described via negativa - neti netyātā. There are mystics, Otto says, who contrast the numen with being itself and say that it is 'nothing'. The negative overtone of mysticism is countered by the positive quality of the religious emotion. Buddhist sūnya, like the 'nothing' of the western mystics, is a numinous ideogram of the 'wholly other' numen.

Otto has not invented the term wholly other. He says, "in India it is 2500 years old, is found in the old holy writings of the Upanisads, and is called in Sanskrit the 'Anyad eva.' In the west it is over 1,600 years old, is found in Augustine and is called here the Aliud valde or the 'Dissimile'. The qualitative Other of the supernatural in comparison with the creature is specially emphasised in it."

Otto's treatment of 'wholly other' in the Idea of the holy is really "disappointingly perfunctory". He should have
devoted more space to it. Though he has compensated for this in his Religious Essays, the notion of the 'Wholly Other' has remained one of the most controversial issues in Otto.

5.2.3. Fascinans

Numen is wholly other and terrifying. This terrifying element is supplemental by a unique element in the numinous experience. This is the fascinans or the element of fascination. The awe of the numen does not repel the person having its experience, the numinous object attracts him towards it. The entire history of religions is a witness to this dual character of numinous awareness: that of terrifying and fascinating. The mysterious numen entrances man, it "captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication, it is the Dionysian element in the numen." 36

Fascinans or wonderfulness is 'graciousness' in the ordinary language and experience. But just as divine awfulness or wrath is not exhausted by ordinary fear, there still remaining an 'over-plus' in it, similarly in the divine wonderfulness there is more than ordinary wonder. 37 Otto stresses on the qualitative difference between numinous fascination and ordinary fascination. There is an admixture of the rational and the non-rational, the secular and the numinous, and all religions indicate the beatitude and bliss of the numinous experience. But no religion or religious description can exhaust the numinous feeling. "Rather by its allpervading, penetrating glow it makes of these very blessings more than the intellect can
conceive in them or affirm of them. It gives the peace that passes understanding, and of which the tongue can only stammer brokenly. Only from afar, by metaphors and analogies, do we come to apprehend what it is in itself, and even so our notion is but inadequate and confused. This and similar statements make it clear that the numinous experience defies adequate articulation. Whatever Otto speaks of them is only a kind of metaphorical indication. He has never claimed that he has exhausted the numinous experience in his description of it.

But nevertheless the experience of the 'wholly other' numen is real and vivid. Fascination, which offsets the fearful aspect of the numinous experience, is explicit in religious longing, longing for God, salvation. Unless one is fascinated one cannot be expected to go in for God headlong as some do, for instance, the mystics. In mysticism, however, the fascination is transformed into the overbounding, the exuberant.

The Holy fascinates us in our public prayers as well as in common worship of congregation. It is this fascination "that in the solemn moment can fill the soul so full and keep it so inexpressibly tranquil." It is the fascination that is responsible for the steadfastness of religious persons in religious matters. Love of God is more than anything, even more than one's own life. It is fascination that lends such enchantment to religious experience. People once attracted by God hardly swerve from the religious way. They get joy unspeakable in it. Otto quotes Luther on rationalised fascination of God: If thou feelst it (bliss) truly in the heart,
it will be such a great thing to thee that thou wilt rather be silent than speak aught of it. The response towards and valuing of the numinous is a priori in man. He always values spiritual things more than the material ones. Even those who possess wealth in abundance do not claim that it is everything. Those with spiritual leanings decry it from afar. Na vittena tarpāniyo manusyah - man is not to be contented with wealth. Yenāham nāmsē suyēm, kim ahō tēna kurēm - what should I do with that by which I do not become immortal? Over and above our rational being there "lies hidden the ultimate and highest part of our nature, which can find no satisfaction in the mere allaying of the needs of our sensorious, psychological or intellectual impulses and cravings." This steadfast apologia of things spiritual is due to man's inexpressible fascination for them. Inwardly he is convinced of the superiority of the spirit. Men have an inkling of it in wonder, some talk about it in wonder, some listen to it in wonder, and still it is not fully comprehensible. We know and we do not fully know it. But we cannot leave it, because it is fascinating.

Fascination is the attraction exerted by the Numinous upon the human self. It feels an irresistible pull toward the numinous. Numinous awe which would ordinarily repel the subject is supplemented by this enchanting quality. Awe and attraction, though opposed to each other, are simultaneously active on the religious mind. M.L. Diamond exemplifies fascination with his personal experience that he was about ten years old when he saw Boris Karloff play the monster in *Frankenstein*. At the first appearance of
the monster he experienced one of the parallels to Otto's account of religious experience. He looked, looked away and then peeped through his fingers. 'The fascination expresses the powerful attraction. It is characteristic of adolescents in relation to sex. 46a

Buddhist 'nirvāṇa' also exercises powerful fascination on the votaries of Buddhism. Otto claims that on this count nirvāṇa is only conceptually negative, but in feeling it is highly positive. A Buddhist monk had told Otto that nirvāṇa is 'Bliss unspeakable. 47 Indeed Nāgārjuna has said,

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\text{Sarvopalambaopasamah prapañcopasamah śivah,}
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\[
\text{Na kvacit kasyacit kascid duarmo buddhara desitaḥ. 48}
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That is, Reality is above intellect; phenomenal world ends up in it; it is absolute bliss; but Buddha never, nowhere and to nobody did instruct this, for it is to be experienced and is beyond the grasp of intellect. This way Buddhist sūnya and Vedāntic Brahman, which is saccidānanda (existence consciousness-bliss), are not different. Otto's view of the Numen as exerting tremendous fascination is close to the view of Vedānta and Sūnyavāda.

Let us now turn to the arousal and development of the numinous feelings into the idea of the Holy.

3.3. Evolution of the Numinous to the Holy

In dealing with the process of schematism we have discussed how Otto has utilised the law of the association of feelings. It is that a like feeling incites its like.
Otto says that the feeling of the sublime, among others, is primarily analogous to the numinous feelings, hence 'the sublime' works as a viable 'schema' of 'the holy'. This important relation between sublimity and numinosity has been used by Otto to explain the original arousal of the numinous feelings in man. Due to the likeness, at some stage of human development, the sense of 'the sublime' might have aroused the dormant numinous feelings in man. But the sense of the sublime itself also must be a resultant feeling following some antecedent feeling. Otto suggests that the feeling of the sublime is "first aroused and disengaged by the precedent religious feeling - not from itself, but from the rational spirit of man and its a priori capacity." Thus, granting the distinction between the rational and the non-rational, we are led to believe that there is evolution in the rational as well as in the non-rational and occasionally there have been sallies from one side to the other. This interplay, the rational and the non-rational, in its most developed form, is the idea of the holy available in major world religions.

Schematism, which is a key principle in the Idea of the Holy in so far as it is a link between the rational and the non-rational, has its roots in Otto's Philosophy of Religion. There Otto talks about the arousing of feelings. He likens this arousing to Plato's principle of 'anamnesis' or recollection. As for the arousal (and not the making) of the numinous, Otto speaks of two means: direct and indirect.
(Direct arousal: The direct awakening of the numinous takes place when one is in contact with the holy situations. Otto thinks that if a man does not feel the numinous while reading the Sixth Chapter of Isaiah in the Old Testament - no amount of teaching can avail am. In the same sequence we could say that Bhagavadgītā, Canto XI also has a strong numinous appeal. The essential thing about the arousal of the numinous is the mind of the person concerned. If it has spiritual susceptibilities, he will have numinous experience at the slightest of numinous stimulation.

(Now about the indirect arousal: Fearful objects are one of the most potent inducers of numinous feelings. Numinous awe, tremendum, perforce starts in man who is in contact with exceedingly horrible places, images or situations.) Awe-inspiring deities of yore successfully evoke numinous excitement even in the mind of a modern man. Otto refers to the religiously more attractive character of the grim pictures of Madonna of old Byzantine art than Raphaelian Madonnas. Durgā, Kālī, Cosmic Figure of the Gītā XI are other examples. Thus when ordinary fear becomes acute, by the law of association of feelings, it stirs the numinous awe and related numinous feelings.

Miracles also are capable of evoking numinous feelings effectively. The marvellous or miraculous, rationally connected with a God, mighty and fearful, can stir not only tremendum, but mysterium also.
Not fully intelligible spoken-words of devotion incite numinous feelings. 'hallelujah', Kyrie eleison, 'Selah', are extremely obscure words and from the standpoint of vocabulary they are 'wholly other' --- that is how they are capable to stir numinous feelings among the devotees.56

Concerning the indirect arousal of the numinous, Otto refers to many things which are either themselves sublime or are expressions of sublimity. Art, architecture, music are specially effective in arousing numinous feelings. Otto stresses on the efficacy of void or emptiness in art and architecture and silence in music in evoking numinous feelings.57

Numinous feelings are a priori through and through. Spiritual experience can be evoked, but not created, from non-spiritual something. Religious dispositions are as old as mankind.

The two processes of development as traced by Otto in the numinous feelings themselves and the final schematized result, a rational-non-rational complex, can be summarised like this :58

1. 'Daemonic dread'  >  'fear of gods'  >  'fear of God'
   'Daemonic power'  >  'Divine power'
   'Dread'  >  'worship'
   'confusions of incoate emotions and bewildered palpitation of feeling'  >  'religio'
'Shudder' > 'holy awe'
'feeling of relative dependence on the Numen' > 'feeling of absolute dependence.'

Numen > God and Deity.

2. 'Ideals of obligation, justice,
goodness' > 'will of the Numen'
'Holy' > 'Good' > 'Holy = Saorosanot'

Numen = Holy and Good.

Thus the a priori numinous dispositions, first manifesting as
daemonic dread, develop through the years into an idea of God who is
Holy and Good. Religion has its roots in the depths of human mind. It
sprouts, grows, branches off into various religions. All religions,
fundamentally, are the same, viz., growth of the numinous feelings. Yet,
due to emphasis on this or that aspect, there creeps in individual
difference in them. For Otto, religion worth its name begins with
Judaism; Christianity perfects it. Islam shows raw numen prominently.
In some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, 'awe' is emphasised. Chris-
tianity, the religion of love, with Jesus not as a prophet but the Son
of God, with holiness apparent in Him, is the perfect religion. Otto's
view of Christianity as the best religion is the conclusion of
his theology.

We have made a study of the 'mysterium tremendum et
fascination' - numinous experience. We have followed Otto in his
explanation of the arousal and development of the numinous feelings.
into the rich idea of the Holy. We shall now put together the results in order to describe Otto's idea of God.

5.4. Otto's Idea of God

Otto's primary concern has been the explanation of the idea of God. By interpreting numinous experience he has attempted to give a transcendental argument for the existence of God. But whenever he speaks of God - he does that with characteristic theistic fervour. The following are some examples:

"God is the Absolute Being, perfect, wholly independent, resting in Himself, and necessary; nature is entirely contingent and dependent." The divine is indeed the highest, strongest, best, loveliest and dearest that man can think of; ..... God is not merely the ground and superlative of all that can be thought; He is in Himself a subject on His own account and in Himself."

"God is spirit": religion cannot represent, or conceive, or possess its highest good and supreme idea, except by thinking in terms of the highest analogies of what it knows in itself as spiritual being and reality. If spirit is not real and above all other realities; if it is derivable, subordinate and dependent, it is impossible to think of anything whatever to which the name of 'God' can be given."

Otto has been speaking of God, Reality, Holy, at various stages of development of his thought, but the fundamental meaning
of the concepts pointing at the personal God of religion has throughout remained the same. While discussing the revelation of the spirit, God, in the world Otto writes with emotion the final sentences of *The Idea of the Holy* thus: "we can look, beyond the prophet, to one in whom is found the spirit in all its plenitude, and who at the same time in his person and in his performance is become most completely the object of divination, in whom dolor is recognized apparent. Such a one is more than Prophet. He is the Son." So with the Son of God on earth — implying the God the Father in Heaven, Otto acquiesces in the Christian concept of God. This is important in itself, but more important is the manner in which he analyses the God-experience and brings "to the interpretation of the religious practices and beliefs of many lands an imaginative sympathy" that is receptive without ceasing to be critical. His whole bias of mind has been towards finding and emphasising the common elements in various religions rather than the ones that divide them. So, we have in Otto's idea of God — richness which religion itself as a phenomenon can be justifiably proud of.

We can discern in Otto a two-tier scheme of deity much in line with the similar scheme of Śāṅkara. Brahmān and Īśvara stand for the same ultimate reality spoken from two standpoints. Brahmān conceptualised is Īśvara; the substratum of the concept of Īśvara is the experience of Brahmān. On Otto we have the Numin and the holy. This is a great similarity between Śāṅkara and Otto, though there are equally great differences.
Otto's theology bears a mark of Kant's Critical philosophy. Kant's epistemology appears in a new form in Otto. What Otto calls Holy is, in a sense, if we use the Kantian terms, the 'phenomenon' and the Numen is its 'noumenon'.

The two terms, the Numen and the Holy, stand in a peculiar epistemological-metaphysical relation in Otto's theology. Whereas the Numen is the Reality — the Holy is more or less an understanding, a kind of rationalised concept, of the Reality which, Otto time and again cautions his readers, is not fully amenable to understanding. The Numen is the ontological entity arousing numinous feelings in men; the Holy is what men think the Numen is. The Numen is the cause of the numinous feelings which are the substratum of the idea of the Holy or God. The famous distinction made by Śaṅkara between Brahman and Īśvara is applicable in case of the Numen and the Holy.

Brahman conceived from the standpoint of worship and lower knowledge is Īśvara. Brahman and Īśvara are the same thing conceived from two different standpoints. Brahman is the Absolute and Īśvara God. In his discussion of the problem of the Absolute and God, Rādākṛṣṇa has stated that God, who is the creator, sustainer, and judge of this world, is not totally unrelated to the Absolute. "God is the Absolute from the human and. When we limit the Absolute to its relation with the actual possibility, the Absolute appears as supreme Wisdom, Love and Goodness. The eternal becomes the first and the last...... We call the supreme the Absolute, when
we view it apart from the cosmos, God in relation to the cosmos. The Absolute is the pre-cosmic nature of God, and God is the Absolute from the cosmic point of view. Ramanujan's is a re-statement of Shankara's concept of the relation between God and the Absolute. If the opponent asks Shankara as to now we can conceive the non-dual Brahman as the Lord ruling the universe and who is its creator, sustainer and destroyer; the absolute unity leaving no room for a second reality; Shankara would answer that this objection can be met with by remarking that permanence—holiness—omniscience—freedom etc. qualities belong to Brahman only in relation to the world and due to the evolution of the germinal principles called name and form, whose essence is Avidya or Nescience. It is due to the limiting adjuncts of name and form that Brahman appears as God. Free of the limiting adjuncts imposed from the empirical (laukika) standpoint Isvara is Brahman. Hence Brahman and Isvara are not two but the same reality looked at from two different standpoints. Otto's distinction between the Numen and the Holy have all the potentiality to emerge as an idealistic philosophy with two-tier scheme of Reality as in Shankara, or, in the west itself, as in Bradley and Rashdall. But he does not develop it to its logical extent. Whereas Shankara emphasises on Brahman as the Ultimate Reality, Otto does not talk about the Numen and leaves it as the 'wholly Other'. He emphasises on the conceptualised Numen, that is the Holy, for salvation and to that extent, from Shankara's standpoint, Otto emphasises merely the empirical and phenomenal as the ultimate.
The Holy, God the Father in Heaven with Jesus Christ as His true manifestation is the highest that Otto has, as a Christian, given himself to think. The Numen is used as a platform to start with. The Numen is non-rational and is the core of religious experience; but the rational, moral and conceptual Holy is the better, for Otto. The more rationalised a religion, the better it is. And Christianity, as the most rationalised religion is the best religion. Although in Śaṅkara as well as Otto the beginning premises are the same, the conclusions they reach are different. The rationalised Numen (i.e. Holy) is the greatest for Otto; but for Śaṅkara the non-rational intuitional Brahman is the Ultimate Reality. Otto has preferred, owing to the pressures of his own religion to remain content with the Idea of the Holy, though the way he has begun analysing religious consciousness clearly demands that the Numen is, at least ontologically, the impersonal ultimate reality and not a personal God. To accept the impersonal absolute is to accept pantheism which is inconsistent with the fundamental principles of Christianity. Hence Otto is not inclined to accept the implications of his premises. These are some observations which force themselves on us, as we look at Numen-Holy problem in Otto from the standpoint of the Brahman-Īśvara problem in Śaṅkara.

In Otto, when the 'Numinous' is rationalised, God is understood to be having all the moral and rational qualities that religions attribute to Him and they are there in absolute measure in Him over and above the non-rational numinous qualities. As God
or Holy, the Numen is conceived as completely permeated and saturated with elements signifying rationality, purpose, personality, morality.

The Numen is 'Wholly Other'. Only ideographically we can say that it is *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. It is tremendous: awful, majestic and dynamic. At the same time, it does not repel its subject but fascinates him towards it. This is the non-rational infrastructure of our concept of God. The idea of God develops when the non-rational feelings are united with rational and moral conceptions. With the help of the feelings which are intelligible and yet similar to the non-rational feelings—the similar feelings working as the links which Otto calls the saemata—the non-rational and the rational are interwoven in the idea of the holy or God.

Thus **tremendum**, of which the earliest manifestation is the daemonic dread, gradually evolves into the holy 'Wrath of God' due to the mediation of the rational conception of justice and morality. In developed religions the element of awe is sufficiently suppressed, but it does not vanish altogether. The feeling of sublimity or exaltedness of the *worshipper* (in many forms of worship of God in various religions) is reminiscent of the daemonic dread of the ancient religions.59 The majesty or overpoweringness of the numen develops into the conception of God as the supreme power and creator of the universe. We ascribe to Him infinity, omnipotence, omniscience etc. qualities. The 'energy' or 'urgency'
of the numinous feelings may be said to develop into the dynamic personality of God conceived by theism. The fascination owing to the schematism with the concepts of blissfulness, love, mercy, pity taken in absolute sense develops into the 'Grace of God'. Obligation, justice, goodness, by schematization, become the will of the numen and the numen their guardian, ordainer and author. Such conceptions charge the numen with ethical content. Holy becomes good and sacrosanct. Mysterium, the substantive element in the numinous feelings, due to its wholly-otherwise, is schematized with the absoluteness of any quality attributed to God. Thus God was absolute goodness, absolute wisdom, absolute kindness, absolute justice etc.

So the holy that is God is apprehended and understood as having attributes in the following manner:

A. **As the Numen** - A 'Wholly Other' reality which is tremendous and fascinating.

B. **As the Holy** - A wrathful and yet graceful God having all the auspicious and holy attributes in absolute degrees.

Starting with the 'wholly Other' upto the holy it is the one and the same Reality viewed from analytical perspective for the purpose of understanding the subtle psychological stages in which a feeling grows into an idea. The objective reference of the feeling as well as the idea is one and the same so that there is no reason to think that the 'wholly other' numen and the absolutely holy God are two
different beings. From the psychologioal standpoint the holy comprises of the numinous and recedes further and further away as we try to grasp it and finally escapes altogether.

With this concept of God in mind Otto sets to look for the Holy in the history of religions. The conclusion he reaches is that the Christian concept of God is the best of all.

Otto is a Christian theologian and he lives up to the standard of his calling. He does not mince his words while speaking in favour of Christianity. So he claims, "... I am indeed sincerely convinced that Christianity is definitely superior to other peculiar forms of religion, not in respect of its casual and accidental features, but in respect of its highly individual and peculiar spirit, not as truth is superior to falsehood but as Plato is superior to Aristotle." That is, all religions are true - but the case of Christianity is different. It is, in a sense, supreme among equals.

This being the trend of his thought - the conclusions he reaches are all too clear. We substantiate them with a few quotations from him.

"In the Gospel of Jesus we see the consummation of that process tending to rationalize, moralize, and humanize the idea of God, which began with the earliest period of the old Hebrew tradition.... The result was the faith in 'the fatherhood of God' in that unsurpassable form in which it is peculiar to Christianity."
"The Cross of Christ, that monogram of the eternal mystery..." 75

About Jesus: "That is godlike and divine; that is verily Holiness. If there is a God and if He chose to reveal Himself, He could do it no otherwise than thus." 76

Starting with a wholly other Numen Otto has reached his concept of God as God the Father in Heaven and His manifestation on the earth as Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

5. Assessment

Illuminating and important as Otto's views on the Numinous are, they are not unanimously accepted by all. They have their share of criticism, sometimes due sometimes undue, from various quarters.

John Oman in his review of the Idea of the Holy holds that Otto's fervour in exposition of the holy often produces more heat than light. 77 His disapproval of Otto's views on the numinous is unreserved. Whereas for Otto the term 'numinous' stands for the basic religious experience, for Oman "The name will serve as well as any other, for it is the mere impression of an awe-inspiring something, the mightier for stirring intense feeling the vaguer it is." 78 Oman agrees to numinous-feelings being primitive religious experience, or even in some higher religions as undifferentiated holy (like undifferentiated contact in matter..."
of sensations). But in itself, it cannot interpret the sense of the holy - it must be related to the existence of the holy object on the one hand and the sacred value on the other. 79 Again, mystrium tremendum et fascinans which is a good ideogram of religious experience for Otto - is a general experience for Oman. Though experienced frequently in religion, it is by no means confined to religion. "Any environment sufficiently great and strange may evoke it. It accompanies all life's high adventures; and it may go as far back as conscious life." 80

But Oman appears to be more concerned with finding fault with Otto rather than trying to understand him properly. He has off-hand branded Otto's concept of holy as 'awesome holy' and concluded that awesomeness is the essence of religion for Otto. 81 This is not a correct interpretation. Campbell's retort to Oman in this regard brings out Oman's biased approach. Awfulness is only an aspect of the Numinous. Campbell says: "But surely it is the merest caricature of Otto's position to put forward this one major aspect as sufficiently defining what Otto means by the numinous? ... What of the other major element or factor.... viz. the fascinans? It seems incredible, but it is sober truth, that Oman consistently writes as if the whole of Chapter VI of Das Heilige on the fascinans aspect of the numinous, not to speak of a multitude of later passages depending upon it, simply did not exist." 82 This is strange, but true, Oman and others who feel that Otto has over-emphasised on awfulness of the Divine have misunderstood his position. The Numen does not only
exert dread but fascinates also. People do not shun the object of religious awe, they are irresistibly drawn towards it. Oman further misunderstands Otto when he equates ordinary fear with religious awe. The two are qualitatively different. Oman's view that any strange environment may evoke numinous feeling strengthens Otto's position rather than weakening it. Only we must take the meaning of the numinous in Otto's complex sense rather than in Oman's restricted sense of fearfulness.

Oman as well as Bennet is unhappy over the separation of the religious from the ethical in the numinous feelings. Bennet particularly says that Otto has made a violent separation between morality and religion. The relation between morality and religion is itself a complex one and has its chequered history. We quite understand that the numinous is exclusively religious and this appears odd in the face of near inseparable connexion of religion with morality. This issue has to be looked at from a broader angle. In the first place, Otto is analysing religious consciousness to find out what is specifically religious in religious experience - and his conclusion is that it is the numinous, sans morality sans rationality. If it is true, there is nothing to be said about it. But in the second place, Otto has given due importance to morality as related to religion. For in the idea of the holy, the developed and schematized numinous feelings, moral concepts are a sine qua non. Thus in fact Otto has not separated away morality from religion - but he has shown where the two meet and also the point where only religion is available in its own right.
Paton, after examining Otto's theory of religious consciousness, gives some appreciative remarks that Otto has done well in rejecting that religion is not theoretical propositions alone and on the other hand in emphasising the element of mystery in it. But he ends with a note of implied dissatisfaction with Otto. He suggests that various strands of religious life are inseparably intertwined. Not only feeling but theoretical arguments and conviction bound up with moral action are to be emphasised. "If religion is of the whole man, it cannot be understood without taking into account his experience as a whole." This again is a conscious or unconscious misunderstanding of Otto. Otto has indeed taken into account man's experience as a whole. It is true that there is an element of exclusiveness and beyondness in the idea of the holy; that mysterium stands for something beyond our understanding, that fascinans stands for something irresistibly attractive and tremendum stands for uniquely awful, so that the idea of the holy and the numinous feelings are unique. This is Otto's central thesis: that religion is not secondary to anything in its own way and does not have to depend on anything for its existence. But Otto has not kept it away from other activities of our life. The idea of the holy is a combination of rational and non-rational. It is worshipped by us. Our whole personality is involved in it. Otto's example of the best religion is Christianity - with the conception of a living God. Then how can we say that Otto has emphasized one aspect, feeling or feeling of the numinous, to the detriment of other aspects of our
mental life viz. knowing and willing, or in other words philosophy and morality?

The weakest point in Otto's religious philosophy is the connexion between numinous feelings and the Numen. J.M. Moore says that the claim that numinous feeling signifies the presence of some particular kind of object, a numen, a God, requires verification. There are many kinds of objectivity and a mere feeling cannot be the discriminating criterion among them. The Numen may be simply imaginary. Paton also says the same thing that no mere emotion can by itself give us knowledge of the existence of God, thereby implying that reason has to be involved in it. But to us both reason as well as numinous experience advocated by Otto — as long as such experience is different from God — will fall short of assuring us about God. The immost reality of anything in the universe is God. Intuition of the Self-awareness type can assure us of His existence. Supreme-existence which is God, and thought-existence or feeling-existence which are mediate, cannot be identified, on the same plane. 'I know God', 'I feel God', etc. are thoughts and feelings about God and not God and hence liable to be doubted and challenged. But in the case of intuition (anubhava) there is no such gap between God-experience and God to be bridged. As it is the immediate awareness of God by the self (which again is God in essence) — intuitive-existence and supreme-existence are fused together. The feeling-content is not ' I know God' or 'I feel God', but ' I am God' — so that last remnants of doubt are dispelled, for
the experiencer. The 'Wholly Other' becomes the 'Wholly Me'. But the difficulty of this is that such experience is private and non-communicable. As far as Otto stresses on the privacy and non-communicability of the numinous-experience he is right, but he does not identify the numinous experience and God due to his theistic (Christian) bias. This has led to the doubts about the passage from numinous experience to the Numinous. This doubt can be dispelled only by identifying the two; but this is unacceptable to Otto, so that a final agnosticism is hard to be avoided in his system.

References and Notes

1. The Oxford English Dictionary, under 'Numinal'.
4. Jones, O.R., in The Concept of Holiness, p.125, has brought together the views of Ruggren, Mowinckel and Fison. All of them agree that the Hebrew concept of the Holy does not necessarily have a moral connotation; it either does not have it at all, or has it in a quite subordinate fashion.

Otto's choice of the term 'numinous' for the central religious feeling is instructive. The Latin word 'Numen' "is the most general....word for supernatural divine power" and in its original meaning is "analogous to the term Bhagawan which comprises within itself unexcelled wisdom, power, strength, dominion, energy and radiance (jñāna, sakti, bala, aisvarya, virya, tapah)"

7. Collected Works of C.G. Jung,
   Vol. 5, P. 294, 308
   Vol. 11, P. 7, 150
   Vol. 12, P. 182-3, 345

James, W., The Varieties of Religious Experience, Pp. 503-4.

8. The Idea of the Holy, P. 13
9. Ibid, P. 14
10. Loc. cit.
11. Ibid, P. 15
12. Otto's rendering of the Gita, XI-35; The Original Gita, P. 31

15. Ibid, P. 38


18. The Idea of the holy, P. 19
20. Ibid, P. 10
21. For instance, Dr S.P. Dubey: "The other basic feeling besides the 'Wholly Other' in the numinous is the 'Creature-feeling.'"

   - Rudolf Otto and Hinduism, P. 23

22. The idea of the holy, P. 23
23. Ibid, P. 24
24. Ibid, P. 13
25. Ibid, p. 26
27. Ibid, P.28
28. Ibid, P.29
29. Campbell, C.A., On Selfhood and Godhood, P.376-7
30. The Self (the fundamental Reality identical with Brahman) is not this, not this Brahadāranyaka Upanishad, IV.5.15.
31. The Idea of the Holy, p.29
32. Loc. cit.
33. Ibid, p.30
34. Otto, Religious Essays, p.78
35. Campbell, C.A. op. cit., p.375
36. The Idea of the Holy, P.31
37. Ibid, P.32
38. Ibid, Pp.33-34
39. Ibid, P.36
40. Ibid, Pp.35-36
42. Catua Upanisad, I.1.27 (Tr.Radhakrishnan)
43. Brahadāranyaka Upanisad, II.4.3. (Tr.Radhakrishnan)
44. The Idea of the Holy, P.36
45. Ṛgveda II.30.6.107.31: \( \text{āścaryavatāśvātāt kaścidenaṁāścaryavadvadati} \) tathaiva cānyaḥ, Ṛgveda II.30.6.107.31: \( \text{āścaryavacchācinamanyasā śrṇoti} \) śrutvāpyenam veda na caiva kaścit. Gītā II.29.
46. Diamond, M.L., Contemporary Philosophy and Religious Thought, P.82
47. The Idea of the Holy, P.39
48. Mulādhārayamikakārikā, 25, 24
49. The Idea of the Holy, p.46
50. Ibid, p.44
51. In the Idea of the Holy also this principle is referred to, e.g., in P.65
52. The Idea of the Holy, P.60-61

In Isaiah VI occurs the tale of the Seraphim uttering "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, The Whole earth is full of his glory."
Isaiah is purported to have said "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. . . . Then a seraph flew to him with a coal taken from the altar and he laid it on Isaiah's mouth and said, "Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thy iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged," Indeed such narrations have a numinous appeal. Ref. The Reader's Bible, Old Testament, P. 913-14

53. The Idea of the Holy, p. 61
54. Ibid., p. 62
55. Ibid., p. 63-64
56. Ibid., p. 65
57. Ibid., Pp. 69-71
58. Based on Ch. XIII, Ibid.
59. Otto, Naturalism and Religion, P. 360
60. The Idea of the Holy, P. 39
61. Naturalism and Religion, P. 282
63. J.W. Harvey, in his Translator's Preface to the Idea of Holy, P. 9
64. Ibid., P. XI
65. Murty, K.S., Revelation, and Reason in Advaita Vedanta, P. 4
66. Radhakrishnan, An Idealist View of Life, P. 273
68. The Idea of the Holy, P. 109
69. Ibid., P. 17
70. Ibid., Pp. 31-2
71. Ibid., P. 110
72. Loc. cit.
73. Otto, Religious Essays, P. 114
74. The Idea of the Holy, P. 82
75. Ibid., P. 173
76. Ibid., P. 170
77. Oman, J., The Natural and The Supernatural, P. 474
78. Ibid., P. 61
79. Loc. cit.
80. Ibid., P. 60
81. Ibid., P. 61
82. Campbell, C.A. op. cit., p. 343
85. Cf. Diamond, M.L. op. cit., p. 81
86. Moore, J.M., Theories of Religious Experience, P. 93
87. Paton, H.J., op. cit., P. 142