

THE GARDEN OF EDEN: CREATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract

Creation within man's *psyche* is to be understood as a continuous process of realization of the primordial in the contemporary times. The cosmic events that unfold in the Garden of Eden symbolically reflects man's ever emerging and expanding consciousness out of the primal depths, the duality within one's *psyche* and the challenges of leading a creative way of life. The paper revisits the myth of the Garden of Eden to unearth the complexities of creation and consciousness.

Creation myths illustrate the genesis of human and cosmic existence. The primordial images of creation reappear time and again in the human *psyche* as and when something new is being created pertaining to psychic renewal or transforming life events. The Garden of Eden mentioned in the sacred narrative is not an ordinary garden but a utopian paradisaic one like the Greek Garden of Hesperides, the Western paradise of Buddhism, the Elysian Fields etc. This paradisaic garden "is the imagined locus of our beginning and end, the original matrix and mandala of life, fed by underground sources of living waters" (Ronnberg, 2010, p. 146). For the faithful always yearns to return to this original condition of being in a state of oneness with God in his divine care and protection as it was in the beginning before the fall. In the Book of Revelation, St John describes the heavenly vision of the restoration of Eden and a call to partake in the tree of life whose leaves are supposed to be the "cure for the nations" (Revelation 22: 1-2; Ezekiel 47: 12). Although this return to the paradisaic garden would be a qualitatively different experience, for the "ideas and images representing infantilism at one stage of development represent wisdom at another stage" (Edinger, 1992, p. 97).

Across different cultures and religions, garden symbolizes a sacred space wherein there is a greater possibility to meet the divine. For example, the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed prior to his arrest and crucifixion. Islam conceives of gardens as "states of bliss" and Allah is regarded as the "gardener." Psychologically, it is that sacred space within, where the mystical union of the 'conscious self' with the 'unconscious source' happens. The quaternary arrangement of the garden with a tree, fountain or deity in the centre always reflects designs of wholeness (Ronnberg, 2010, p. 146). The paradisaic garden in several ways depicts "our fantasies of an idealized inner space of potential wholeness and hidden design, or a preconscious state of innocence and harmony" (Ronnberg, 2010, p. 146). That is why the scripture calls the ones who can enter through the gates into the city and feed on the tree of life as 'pure' and 'blessed' (Revelation 22: 14-15). For the gates to one's inner sacred garden is hard to find and so requires ample conscious circumambulations around the garden wall, before the gates to the inner garden is revealed. "Medieval Christianity projected on the Virgin Mother the soul of the paradisaic cosmic garden: inviolate, self-generating and contained" (Ronnberg, 2010, p. 146).

The creation of Heaven-Earth, Day-Night, Sea-Sky, Land-water, Sun-Moon, Fishes-Birds, Animals-Man, Male-Female metaphorically depicts the pairs of opposites within the psyche just as Jung says, "there is no consciousness without discrimination of opposites" (Jacobi, 1953, p. 29). So, in the creation myth, the separation of opposites symbolizes the creation of conscious psyche that differentiates all and perceives the individual entities.

GENESIS CHAPTER ONE

"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep, while a wind from God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). Creation commences out of nothingness ('*Creatio Ex Nihilo*'), for God created it out of a void. Cosmogonic myth across different culture shares the idea of a pre-existent God, by whom the world was created. For example, in Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu sleeps on the cosmic water, out of which all the differentiated phenomena and elements of the universe arise and back into which they must again dissolve (Campbell, 1974, p. 7). The original condition of the earth and the heaven was chaotic as darkness prevailed all over it (Genesis 1:2). Creation from chaos is a very common motif found in

world mythologies. Marie-Louise von Franz elucidated it as “a natural result of our psyche experiencing its own ego-consciousness coming into being as ‘world-becoming...’ our becoming aware of the world and the world coming into existence are one and the same” (George, 2014, p.10). Our unconscious mind is chaotic and undifferentiated in the sense that it does not have the concept of space, time or morality. These concepts hold little importance to the realm of the unconscious. The primeval waters upon which the spirit of the God hovers corresponds to the initial unconscious condition of the psyche. However, the dawning of consciousness (light) brings order to the unconscious state of being. This archetypal image is experienced in the process of an infant’s development into maturity and adulthood as well as “in the life of adults, such as when we wake up in the morning from an unconscious state and order falls into place” (George, 2014, p. 10).

According to Joseph Campbell (1974, p. 313), our mind is likened to a water body rippled by wind. This wind is the spirit/*pneuma* of God that moved upon the face of the water. The aim of yoga is to cause that wind to subside so that a single clear image can appear in the stillness and Self can be realized. It is continually possible to return to the original chaos and let the winds blow again as consciousness is ever emerging out of the unconscious depths.

Marie-Louise von Franz writes, “human unconscious psyche is capable of a *creatio ex nihilo*; the unconscious can suddenly produce a new impulse” (von Franz, 1995, p. 94). A new idea or archetype can get constellated in the *psyche* and break through as the ‘Aha’ experience or ‘Eureka’ moment. Suddenly the light emerges like the first act of creation when “God said, Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3) and the darkness is dispelled in such a creative experience. Jung says, “Let there be light is the projection of that immemorial experience of the separation of consciousness from the unconscious” (Jacobi, 1953, p. 35).

“God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day” (Genesis 1:5). Creation of ‘time’ is immanent in all the cosmogonic myths. The creation of cosmos establishes the world of spatial and temporal constraints.

After creating the heaven and the earth, God gathered the water onto one place and called it ‘sea’ and he called the dry land ‘Earth.’ ‘Land’ is symbolic of consciousness whereas ‘sea’ refers to the unconscious. The division of the water into dry land and the sea depicts the emerging ego-consciousness out of the primeval darkness of the unconscious mind.

Further, God proceeded onto adorn the land by pronouncing it to “bring forth grass, herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so” (Genesis 1: 11-12). According to Philo, God created the universe with perfection, endowing it with sumptuous food and fodder for the generations of species that were about to flock the earth. Every tree yielding fruits had seeds in it to serve the continuity of production of similar fruits to fill the earth with prosperity and abundance till eternity, “for God thought fit to endue nature with a long duration, making the races that he was creating immortal, and giving them a participation in eternity. On which account he led on and hastened the beginning towards the end, and caused the end to turn backwards to the beginning: for from plants comes fruit, as the end might come from the beginning; and from the fruit comes the seed, which again contains the plant within itself, so that a fresh beginning may come from the end” (Yonge, 1993, p. 22). In all its form, vegetation implies fecundity and cyclic death and resurrection pertaining to the pattern of different seasons (winter and spring) and so the vegetation rites across different regions intend to stimulate the cosmic forces in order to maintain this cycle of regeneration of life (Cirlot, 1971, p. 359).

Similarly, God adorned the sky with sun, moon and stars to rule the day and night and be the reason for signs, seasons, days and years (Genesis 1:14-18). Philo says that by the rising, setting and eclipses of these heavenly bodies, “..man conjectures what is about to happen, the productiveness or unproductiveness of the crops, the birth or loss of their cattle, fine weather or cloudy weather, calm and violent storms of wind, floods in the rivers or droughts, a tranquil state of the sea and heavy waves, unusual changes in the seasons of the year...” (Yonge, 1993, p. 25). This relationship between man and the cosmos occupied the minds of great thinkers and mystics across all ages suggesting a sort of interaction between *psyche* and matter. Man as an “image of universe or universal existence” (Cirlot, 1971, p. 196) implies that the basic essence of man and the universe is the same and their boundaries are obscure. Human consciousness is the microcosm in which the cosmic consciousness or the macrocosm manifests itself. As Origen puts it rightly, “Understand that you are another world in miniature and that in you are the sun, moon and also the stars” (Cirlot, 1971, p. 196). Expression of the world occurs in man’s *psyche* and it is the unique disposition of each individual that determines how it will be manifested in the conscious life.

God proceeded on to fill the air with birds and water with aquatic animals and land with both domestic and wild animals and blessed them with the gift of procreation but to none did he give the power of intellect and rational thinking except man who was created in the end in the image and likeness of God. Man as an image of God does not simply exalt his status but defines the essence of his nature in totality encompassing the polarities.

GENESIS CHAPTER TWO

God finished the work of creation and rested on the seventh day and consecrated it. Erich Fromm suggests that this day has profound implications apart from its religious significance for the Jews. Since, work entails a state of change or interference between man and the world around him as opposed to rest that involves tranquility between him and nature. Therefore, day of rest is reserved for experiencing the natural and spontaneous, absolute harmony of man in nature. By not working, one can get away from the order of change leading to the creation of history and thus free himself from the temporal and spatial constraints and return to the paradisaical state of being (Cirlot, 1971, p.77).

Number seven is highly sacred and significant in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and appears throughout the Holy Bible starting from the seven days of creation in the Book of Genesis (Genesis 2:2) to multiple imagery of seven sets of things in the Book of Revelation. As a symbol of completion, number seven marks the milestone year in the accomplishment of man's physical growth and development spanning across ten periods of seven years each from infancy to old age (Yonge, 1993, p. 33). The spiritual significance of the number 'seven' transcends beyond our understanding of its importance in the Bible. It is that cosmic number which is formed by the union of 'three' and 'four' thereby embodying both the spiritual and the temporal symbolizing the 'wholeness' or 'totality' we strive for (Fraim, 2003, p. 287).

Gnostics view the spirit or *pneuma* as the divine spark within the soul that yearns to unite with God so as to restore the soul to its original oneness. Made out of mud—mixture of earth and water, man in his nascent state is a mere matter or biological process that requires the breath of God (air) to assimilate the spiritual power. It is this spiritual power lying latent in the human soul that ignites the minds of great mystics, saints and philosophers to initiate the journey of understanding the soul and the world.

In the book 'Works of Philo,' Philo of Alexandria discusses the symbolism of paradise in the context of the Genesis creation myth. The paradise or the 'Garden of Eden' as it is referred to in the Biblical context, is a place thickly populated with every kind of tree including the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, symbolizing the creation of wisdom that is both human and divine and "... since it was proper, after the creation of the world, to establish a contemplative system of life, in order that man, by the sight of the world and of the things which are contained in it, might be able to attain to a correct notion of the praise due to the Father" (Yonge, 1993, p. 1040). The creation of man with the potentiality to discern the good and the evil reflects the opposites within him. Man is capable of both praise and reprimand, wisdom and folly, courage and cowardice, justice and injustice, virtue and vice (Yonge, 1993, p. 28).

Philo describes the four rivers in the Garden of Eden as the four signs of virtues, "...Phison being the sign of prudence; Gihon being the sign of sobriety, as having its employment in the regulation of meat and drink, and as restraining the appetites of the belly, and of those parts which are below the belly, as being earthly; the Tigris again is the sign of fortitude, for this it is which regulates the raging commotion of anger within us; and the Euphrates is the sign of justice, since there is nothing in which the thoughts of men exult more than in justice" (Yonge, 1993, p. 1042). In Catholicism too, these virtues are regarded very highly and the faithful is required to practice it for one's spiritual growth. Philo writes, "the way to wisdom is called philosophy (a word which means the love or the pursuit of wisdom). And since the creative virtue is endued with philosophy, being both philosophical and royal, so also the world itself is philosophical" (Yonge, 1993, p. 1055).

In the second chapter, Eve is created equal in status from one of Adam's ribs (Genesis 2: 21). The Parental Pair is the foundation of human relationships. Human relationships, it is to be accepted, in all its openness is no longer confined to the tradition of man-woman intimacy based solely on physiology. Even divergence is rooted in masculine and feminine characteristics. Creation, in spite of psychological orientations concerning sexuality, is man-woman duality in principles and seeks each other for completion.

GENESIS CHAPTER THREE

God did not want man and woman to eat of the tree in the midst of the Garden because it was the fruit of mortality (Genesis 3: 3). Carl Jung writes, "the biblical fall of man presents the dawn of consciousness as a

curse and as a matter of fact, it is in this light that we first look upon every problem that forces us to greater consciousness and separates us even further from the paradise of unconscious childhood” (Jacobi, 1953, p. 31). Herein, Jung views the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, not as a curse but as a blessing of transpiring consciousness and a separation from the undifferentiated, unconscious and ignorant state of being.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan provides the “initiative and dynamism...to bring about a new level of development” (Edinger, 1992, p. 80). Temptations per se are a precursor to the expansion of consciousness. According to Campbell, there were ophitic Christian sects in antiquity, worshipping the serpent of the garden as the first appearance of the savior suggesting its correspondence to the Christ of the New Testament (Campbell, 1974, p. 296).

According to Edinger (1992), the concept of sin in Christian theology is equated with an inflation of ego. Theological doctrines of sin, repentance, confession, penance and reconciliation psychologically depicts the relation between the ego and the Self. If ego is in complete identification with the Self, then it is in a state of inflation (sin). Adam and Eve had to first disobey God and later repent in order to be redeemed as “ego’s sin and subsequent penalty are necessary to generate the flow of healing energy or grace from the Self” (Edinger, 1992, p. 56). Ego should experience alienation before becoming the “vessel for the influx of grace” (Edinger, 1992, p. 56) and thus the work of salvation begins, when man becomes conscious of his depravity.

Jung writes, “Catholics have a stillborn unconscious, because the church has already entirely formed, regulated and squeezed the nature of the unconscious” (Jung, 1996, p. 80). Thus the collective psyche has been well protected by the dogmas of the church, psychologically maintaining a dynamic harmony between the ego and the Self. Jung always tried to analyze the Catholic patient with a catholic worldview that may or may not aid the patient, depending on the personal meaning that the patient derives out of the dogmas, leading either to the way of the light or to a hapless state of darkness and meaninglessness, in which case an alternative psychological understanding is required. Jung says, “religious exercises are meditations according to church instruction; their purpose is the rehearsal of the symbols of faith” (Jung, 1996, p.80).

In the Genesis account of the fall of man, it was Eve who was tempted by the serpent. There is a close relationship between the woman and the serpent. Serpent being the instincts is more in touch with the feminine aspect. In the context of Eve as the anima of Adam, she is portrayed as half woman and half serpent like goddess Echidna in Greek mythology. Jung writes, “And that is the secret of the anima, human on the one side and that most paradoxical and incomprehensible thing on the other. On the one side she is an inferior woman with all the bad qualities of a merely biological woman, an intriguing and plotting devil who always tries to entangle a man and make a perfect fool of him; yet she winds up with that snake’s tail, with that peculiar insight and awareness. She is a psychopomp, and leads you into the understanding of the collective unconscious just by the way of the fool” (Jung, 1998, p. 175). Thus it was Eve’s actions that brought a transformation of events in the sacred narrative. Herein, we see how an act of foolishness can sometimes turn out to be a creative journey to explore the realm of the collective unconscious within, like the journey of the fool in the philosophy of Tarot. According to Joseph Campbell (1974, p. 58), Eve and the serpent exemplifies the veiling and projecting powers of *Maya* while Virgin Mary represents the revealing power thus reversing Eve’s effects. It was through Eve that the fall occurred but it was through Mother Mary that the restoration of mankind began.

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Herein, God punished both the serpent and the woman by creating enmity between them and their offspring for the generations to come. Serpent as a symbolism of both instincts and wisdom is something that man always tramples upon unconsciously. Jung refers to the ‘inferior function’ as that aspect of the psyche which man is not aware of. It is like the “Achilles Heel of even the most heroic consciousness” (Jung, 1968, para 430). Barbara Hannah (2006, p. 155) explains how the size of a snake’s head is so tiny as compared to its bulky body consisting largely of nerves and spine symbolizing the lower brain areas in man with which he periodically loses contact. Hence, the appearance of snake in dreams might redirect him to his own body and the hitherto unknown aspects of his own *psyche*, thus wounding man’s ‘heel’ which is symbolic of his hidden vulnerabilities.

Further, Jung writes in his book ‘Psychology of *Kundalini* Yoga,’ “Anima is the *kundalini*...which is represented in the form of a serpent coiled around the spine that lies sleeping in *muladhara*, the lowest chakra” (Jung, 1996, p. 25). Awakening of *Kundalini* means to become conscious of one’s instinctual nature. After eating the forbidden fruit, both Adam and Eve hid themselves amongst the trees of the garden. “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” (Genesis 3:9). Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the voice of God appears when man commits sin (Genesis 4:10; Galatians 5:19-21). If one is sleeping in

sin or the banality of life then he is a “victim of impulses, instincts, unconsciousness, of participation mystique” (Jung, 1996, p. 15). However, if one wishes to transcend it then listening to the voice of God and preparing oneself for an adventurous journey into the depths is required. Dr. Edward Edinger quotes Rivkah Scharf Kluger in his book ‘Ego and Archetype’, that “...Satan is the misery of the world which alone drives man inward, into the ‘other world’” (Edinger, 1992, p. 93).

It was man’s desire to become like the God that cost him his immortality. In the Bible, it is mentioned that, “...each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire; then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). In the ‘Psychology of *kundalini* Yoga’, it is mentioned that, “The *Kundalini* serpent is also a *Devi-Kundalini*, a chain of glittering lights, the ‘world bewilderer.’ By creating confusion she produces the world of consciousness, the veil of *Maya*. It is the anima, the *Devi-Sakti*, which has conceived the world. (This is, of course, a view which corresponds to male psychology. Seen from the woman’s point of view, the animus devises the world.) Siva emanates *Sakti*. *Sakti* begets *Maya*. *Maya* is desire and thereby error: she is the fire of error. The desiring consciousness confronts the purely contemplative consciousness” (Jung, 1996, p. 74). Therefore, the death or loss of immortality in the sacred narrative is not only a physical death but a psychical death arising out of one’s desire or curiosity to explore and assimilate the contents of the unconscious in to the conscious mind thereby enhancing the frontiers of the conscious *psyche*.

The Tree of Life according to alchemy is the navel of the world (*Axis Mundi*). According to Philo, it embodies all the virtues of man that leads to immortality. However, man is prohibited from partaking in the tree of life. Divine wisdom as entangled in the corporeal body is hindered with shadows just like the eye contemplating on a brilliant light (Yonge, 1993, p. 1041). The Tree of Life that offers immortality as represented in mythology and iconography is always guarded by a serpent, dragon, cherubim or so to say threshold guardians or deities. Frightening threshold guardians like the Kongorikishi of Japan, Toth and Horus in the Egyptian myths, Hermes in the Greek mysteries or serpent king in India is a common motif found among Greek, Egyptian, Sumerian, Norse and Indian mythology and are counterparts to the cherubim and the flaming sword at the gate of the garden of Eden to protect the tree of life. This tree is a symbol of spiritual enlightenment uniting the pairs of opposites (heaven and earth). In the Indian Katha Upanishad, this tree is referred to as Brahman the immortal in which rests the world and such a place is described as “the sharpened edge of a razor, hard to traverse” (Campbell, 1974, p. 368.). In alchemy, this tree is the *opus* because it exhibits the “nature of intense inner life and development that follows its own laws and can reveal the evergreen within the individual” (Ronnberg, 2010, p. 130). It is no surprise then that this tree is well guarded as it alludes to the challenges of achieving the goal of “extracting the self from the tangle of unconscious factors” (Ronnberg, 2010, p. 130). While alchemists considered it as a fulfillment of the work, the reality or nature of the psyche is that such moments of union are usually always followed by new cycles of “desiccation and growth” indicating individuation as a dynamic process of separation and integration. In Buddhism, one is urged to pierce through the guarded gate and discover the ‘Bodhi tree—the tree of waking to omniscience,’ having transcended all pairs of opposites like Buddha who is beyond desire and fear, duality and non-duality, heavenly and earthly.

Becoming aware of one’s self or coming to consciousness by acknowledging the depths is not an easy task. It is very challenging and painful. Similarly, creative pursuits require one to look within and nurture the potential ideas stirring up in the unconscious mind. The new knowledge or discovery will be a step forward to the growth and expansion of human consciousness in the individual as well as the collective level. Carl Jung ideates it with creativity and creative minds who try to delve into the inner world and feels their inner turmoil when he says, “Ask those who have tried to introduce a new idea!” (Jacobi, 1953, p. 30). The tree of life bestows immortality symbolically means it is that knowledge or awareness within that must have a living quality so as to remain eternal. It is definitely a challenge to live such a creative life in order to be able to give birth to the old in a new time to bring forth the fruits of creative knowing of one’s self.

CONCLUSION

Creation myths across the world symbolize the dawn of human consciousness. Similarly, the Biblical creation myth reveals images of consciousness emerging out of unconscious state of being. Man’s yearning to return to the paradisaal garden reflects his desire to reunite with the source and have an enhanced understanding of one’s self in its totality. Numbers always have had archetypal meaning and the sacred number seven in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the symbol of completion and manifestation of fullness of the ever growing physical and psychical realities of life.

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Research Paper

Myth of Vamana and Mahabali: Jungian approach to the origin of Onam festival

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ABSTRACT

Festivals celebrate the return of the sacred time and its fabled paradisaical state for the humankind. The harvest festival of Kerala—*Onam*—celebrates the annual return of the King Mahabali, a devotee of Vamana (Lord Vishnu), who represents the virtues needed to rule the land and the hopes for the mass well-being. The three worlds belong to the divinities; the kingdoms belong to the virtues and vices of the kings. The king of the land projects the *psyche* of the people and the status of the kingdom. King Mahabali thus makes nature's facilitations efficacious. Like Vamana who is the preserver, King Mahabali, who is the cultural hero of Kerala, too returns to bless his people with prosperity. The paper presents the interpretation of the myth of Vamana and Mahabali using archetypal amplification and reflects on the origin and ceremonies of the *Onam* festival.

Keywords: myth, harvest festival, rituals, psyche, sacred time.

“Thou shall observe the feast of harvest, the first fruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field” - Exodus 23:16

As dictated by *Yahweh*, the God of the Israelites, God's chosen people were required to celebrate the feast of harvest as an act of gratitude for the blessings that they had received from above in the form of a bountiful harvest. It is one among the three great feasts mentioned in the Old Testament, and hence is deeply rooted in the Jewish and Christian tradition, observed as the feast of tabernacles (*Sukkot*) or Thanksgiving. Since ancient times, in cultures across the world, harvest festivals have been primarily observed as an occasion to express one's gratitude towards the deities/ nature spirits responsible for a bumper crop and favourable weather conditions during the harvest season. Therefore, the harvest rituals and ceremonies focussed more on pleasing and seeking blessings from the sylvan deities such as offering the best of the first fruits of one's labour unto the house of God.

Festivals that celebrate a sacred mythical event should be distinguished from the ones that mark a historical event. According to Mircea Eliade, “a thing in the past is irreversible,

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whereas a mythical event can be repeated by the power of rites” (Eliade, 1963). By reiterating them, one is able to revive what the Gods did at the sacred time of origin. Religious festivals illustrate a collective ‘going back’ to the mythical narrative or time of origin. Hence the entire community goes back to reconstitute and relive the primordial events narrated in the myths through rituals and ceremonies. Thus, it becomes a time to return to the sacred past, the time of absolute beginning, in order to renew and regenerate one’s existence in the world.

Onam, the harvest festival of Kerala, commemorates the annual visit of the legendary Asura King ‘Mahabali’ from the underworld to his former kingdom, the land of Kerala. It is celebrated in the first month of Malayalam calendar (*Chingam*) spanning across ten days, beginning on the day of ‘*Attam*’ and culminating on the day of ‘*Thiruvonam*’ from which the festival derived its name as ‘*Onam*.’ The occasion is celebrated with grand vegetarian feast served on banana leaves, floral art work (*Rangoli/pookalam*), variety of competitive games (boat race, tug of war, martial arts), tiger dance(*Pulikali*), folk dance by women (*thiruvathirakali, thumbithullal*) and by singing a host of ballads embracing the spirit of Mahabali and the golden mythical era.

During the *Onam* festival, the people of Kerala eagerly await the return of their much beloved King, who is an embodiment of virtues like righteousness, peace, happiness, prosperity and bounty. Therefore, the return of the king represents the return of the sacred paradisaal time during which the land yields plenteous harvest. Culturally, the festival is celebrated in full zest by Keralites, bedecked in their traditional outfit, dancing and singing folk songs (called *Onappattu*) extolling the mythical King and his perfect bounteous kingdom. One such song glorifying the mythical period of Mahabali’s reign in Malayalam (and English translation) is as follows:

*Maveli naadu vaaneedum kaalam
Manushyarellarum onnupole
Aamodathode vasikkum kaalam
Apathangarkkum ottilla tha anum
Aadhikal vyadikal onnumilla
Balamaranangal kelkanilla
Dushtare kankondu kanmaanilla
Nallavarallathe illa paaril
Kallavumilla chathiyumilla
Ellollamilla poli vachanam
Vellikolathikal naazhikalum
Ellam kanakinnu thulyamay
Kallavumilla chathiyumilla
Kallatharangal mattonum illa
Marveli naadu vaneedum kaalam
Manushyarellaum onnu pole*

*(In the era of Mahabali’s reign,
Every one was treated equally as one community,
It was the time of joy and contentment
Hazards and perils hit none
There was no fear of disease or death
Infant mortality was never even heard of
Wicked people did not exist*

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*The world abounded with none but benevolent people
There was neither trickery nor robbery
And no-one was fake in speech
Measurements and weights were right and just
There was no sort of lying or cheating
When Mahabali ruled the land
Everyone was part of a single happy community)*

The above mentioned folk song virtually summarises the status of the kingdom during the mythical era. This ideal kingdom is illustrative of the exemplary King Bali, as the king of the land projects the psyche of the people and the status of the kingdom. King Mahabali thus returns to make nature's facilitations fruitful.

Myths transpire in rituals and ceremonies, and so, they mutually clarify and affirm one another. The magico- religious rituals of the harvest festival are intended to enhance the growth of the crops. For example, Swinging, an integral part of *Onam* celebrations for children as well as adults, corresponds to the swinging ceremony as practiced by the Latvians of Russia during the harvest festival. It is performed with the avowed intention to regulate the growth of the crops. According to the theory of homeopathic/ imitative magic, it is believed that the higher the priests/peasants swing, the higher will grow the crops. As a result, the Lettish peasants are known to devote their spare time to swinging, for the higher they swing, the higher will grow the crop in that particular season.

Further, competitive games like boat race and tug-of-war mark the celebrations. Tug-of-war being a pagan fertility ritual, is conducted to ensure the productivity of the soil which in turn would ensure an enhanced yield. For example, amongst the Tangkhuls of Manipur, before sowing the rice and while reaping, tug-of-war between young boys and girls are conducted, keeping in view the productivity of the land and an enhanced yield. This game is also believed to influence the weather conditions. For instance, the Eskimos of North America divide themselves into two parties. One party consists of people born in winter and the other consists of people born in summer. If the summer party wins the game, then a pleasant weather may be expected to predominate all through the winter. Eliade writes, "the contests and fights which take place in so many places in the spring or at harvest time undoubtedly spring from the primitive notion that blows, contests, rough games between the sexes and so on, all stir up and increase the energies of the whole universe" (Eliade, 1958). Thus, all sorts of ritual contests/ competitions like racing, wrestling etc., held during harvest festivals are aimed at spurring the energies of nature, especially the vegetative energy, ensuring enhanced growth of crops.

Finally, the quintessence of all harvest festivals, across different cultures, is the savouring of the grand and sumptuous feast. In addition to singing and dancing, the feasting celebrates the joy of abundance bestowed upon humanity as a product of their hard work and labour. For this reason, oblations are made to the presiding deities. On the occasion of *Onam* festival, oblations are made to 'Vamana', the dwarf incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the *Trikkakara* temple (place of holy foot) in Kerala.

Thus, since primordial times, mankind has been observing the sacred feast of harvest as given in the holy scriptures, beseeching blessings from the almighty for a blessed and fruitful year and expressing gratefulness for the bounteous harvest.

The Myth of Vamana and Mahabali

Mahabali, son of Virochan and grandson of Prahlad- the good Asura, was such a generous and mighty monarch of whom even the Devas were afraid. Mahabali had acquired the power of Indra through his deeds. His kingdom thrived with peace and prosperity. His subjects were a happy and content lot who turned to him with reverence as all their needs were satisfied and there was neither disease nor death in his kingdom. He made sure that there was righteousness, honesty, justice and peace in every part of his kingdom. Everything was perfect and Mahabali's fame spread far and wide across the three realms. The boon of immortality was granted to Bali by Lord Brahma and so he continued to expand the frontiers of his empire. He conquered the three realms: Heaven, Earth and the Underworld. The Devas, especially Indra, who were immensely troubled, feared that Bali would be invincible and would overthrow the gods forever by his power coupled with Brahma's boon. Indra, sought the help of his parents, Aditi and Kashyapa, in changing the fate of their children who had lost heaven to King Bali. They summoned Lord Vishnu to intervene and restore the balance of power. Lord Vishnu agreed to intervene when the time was ripe. In answer to the prayers, Lord Vishnu incarnated as Vamana, the dwarf, went to *Yaga*- the great sacrifice that was being performed by Mahabali, where to all were welcome, to ask for and receive anything they wanted. Shukracharya, the preceptor of Asuras, knew who Vamana really was when he presented himself as a suitor, and therefore, warned Mahabali against promising to grant the requests of the young Brahmana as he could be Lord Vishnu in disguise, who had come to undo him. Besides being a devotee of the Lord at heart, Mahabali was a generous king who could never turn down a request, and so, he did not pay heed to Shukracharya's warnings. Mahabali smilingly bade him to ask for anything that he wanted, like jewels, land, forests etc, without hesitation. Vamana denied all the wealth politely but asked for three paces of land. Looking at Vamana's diminutive stature, Bali said, 'So be it; pace and take it.' The dwarf Vamana suddenly grew in size into a giant Trivikrama and with one step measured the Earth and with another the entire Heaven. As there was no room left for the third step that had been granted, Mahabali humbly knelt under Vamana's foot and offered his head. As Bali sank deep into the underworld, he heard his subjects wailing in grief for their much loved king. Seeing this, Vamana granted Mahabali one last boon. The boon was the permission to visit his subjects on Earth once a year. Thus, Mahabali returned every year during the autumn harvest to visit his people and the land that he had once ruled with much benevolence.

Hypothetical Interpretation

The myth relates the journey of King Bali from being a conqueror of the three worlds to his downfall and descent to the underworld with a boon to return to the land of the living once every year during the harvest season. This annual return of the mythical king is celebrated as the harvest festival in Kerala. Thus King Mahabali brings along with him the magnificence of the sacred mythical time to bless the land and the people. As Mircea Eliade rightly puts it, "By living the myths, one emerges from profane, chronological time and enters a time that is of a different quality, a sacred time at once primordial and indefinitely recoverable" (Eliade, 1963). Every year the myth is relived as the entire community undergoes a period of renewal to rediscover the sanctity of the sacred past. Since the *Onam* festival falls on the first month of the Malayalam calendar, it is also an occasion of new year. New year being the time of renewal, it is imperative that the primordial time of origin is recovered in order to regenerate the chaotic cosmic world within and without. Thus, it is the time when the cosmogony is reiterated implying the beginning of the annual seasonal cycle. The symbolic and sacred presence of the mythical King Mahabali during the time of new year suggests a renewal as he is an embodiment of fecundity and prosperity believed to renew the entire cosmos. Across different cultures, new year rituals intend to re-create the cosmogony periodically which is

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associated with new harvest. Therefore harvest period of each region coincides with their new year.

According to Sir James Fraser (1996), in numerous cultures, one might come across an image of a King/ruler whose fate is to die/be wounded in order to be resurrected/replaced, depicting the fertility rituals intended to keep the kingdom in good health. Alchemy has adopted the motif of a sacrificial king to indicate the renewal of *psyche*. Psychic factors that were hitherto dominant undergoes a radical change in the form of the execution/ immersion/decimation of the 'Old King', resulting in the emergence of a 'New King' implying the dawn of a new and enhanced order of consciousness. Therefore, fatality and regeneration of a king intimates a psychic revival as the union of the conscious and the unconscious leading to the emergence of a radically different and renewed level of consciousness.

According to the ancient Egyptian tradition, a king at his coronation enters into the celestial sphere often assuming the quasi priestly role of mediating between the extraordinary and mundane realms. He is the ruler of the worldly realm yet approximated to the gods. This dual nature of king as both human and god belonging to the earthly and celestial spheres respectively symbolises those essentials within the *psyche* that are partly under the realm of consciousness and partly the unconscious. The king is the one who is equipped with supreme power and skills to lead the masses and function for the welfare of his folks. Psychologically it reflects what is most supreme and dominant within the *psyche* of an individual and the society i.e., the dominant principles that govern the course of the *psyche*. However, the supreme powers of the king will have to eventually end as the monarch loses his power following the collapse of his principles and kingdom. Mythically, the chaotic transition period illustrates the old king's plunge into the underworld, the source of renewal, momentarily hindering the cosmic order until the establishment of the new law and order, depicting the renewal of the land and the people. The myths of death/descend of gods/goddesses/kings/maidens into the underworld are also related to fertility and vegetation. For example, the myths of Osiris, Tammuz, Attis, Adonis, Ishtar, Persephone are all associated with the descend in to the netherworld and the annual return to the earth, bringing along with them the season of bounty when the nature is ready to fill the hearts and minds of people with plenteous harvest, joy and contentment. Thus, King Mahabali too symbolically returns every year during the harvest season to reinstall the fabled paradisaal time of origin and bless the land and the people with prosperity and bountifulness.

According to Devdutt Pattanaik (2011), harvest festivals in India are basically a commemoration of the defeat of *Asuras* by *Devas*. *Asuras* are demons who reign over the subterranean realm. They are earth bound in nature as deities and share much with the serpents in terms of being related to the underworld. Both are in pursuit of *Amrita*, an elixir of eternal life, which is jealously guarded by the *Devas* and are also closely associated with the notion of renewal. The ability to be revived and reborn grants them the virtue to be the deities of the earth; hence they are often linked to the fertility rituals seeking offspring, and also the ones that are performed during harvest. The *Nagas* and the *Asuras* are the reviving energies of the earth, while the *Devas* symbolise the non-terrestrial forces which include the sun, moon, wind, rain and fire. It is through the powers of the former that Lakshmi takes birth and it is the latter that liberates her from the captivity of earth. Thus, both are essential for the maintenance of cosmic balance; none is singularly relevant.

The festivals of harvest are associated with the elimination of *Asuras*. The *Sanjivani Vidya* (the secret of resurrecting the dead) is kept by the *Asuras*, who rejuvenate the earth's fertility.

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The harvesting of crops leads to the release of the earth's bounty, thus becoming a symbolic decimation of the *Asuras*. The eternal cycle of renewal and fertility as mapped in the rhythmic battle between *Asuras* and *Devas* is necessary for the preservation of cosmic balance. In order to maintain the cosmic balance, it was important to curb the *Asura*'s affinity to reign over all the three worlds. In the myth, though Mahabali was a generous ruler, the expansion of his rule beyond the limits of the earth threatened to disturb the cosmic balance. Lord Vishnu sends him into the depths of the underworld and restores the order. *Asuras* misuse the Vedic knowledge in their greed to overpower the outer world rather than using it to discover their inner-self. The goddess Lakshmi, who is the epitome of wealth, is very integral to the *Asuras*' realm because the basic forms of wealth like metals and plants, are rooted in the ground. Hence, all the myths that allude to the decimation of the *Asuras* at the hands of the *Devas* symbolise a liberation of goddess Lakshmi from the clutches of the *Asuras*. One may therefore consider mining, fishing, hunting, farming and harvesting as violent acts. One can extract the metal only after the rock is broke open, likewise the grains are acquired only after being threshed. Therefore, the killing of the *Asuras* is necessary to obtain the wealth hidden in the secret chambers of the earth. That is the reason why almost all the harvest festivals are related to the decimation of *Asuras*. Diwali is an example of an autumn harvest festival where the effigy of the Asura Naraka (the son of Lord Vishnu and Bhudevi) is burned down to mark the celebrations in the Konkan region. Here is an intriguing parallel between Vishnu and the farmer. Vishnu, in this context, is the one who creates as well as destroys Naraka; similarly, the farmer sows the seeds as well as harvests the crop. The cyclical killing of the *Asura* thereby becomes necessary to obtain Lakshmi.

One might find that Vishnu clearly takes the side of the *Devas* in their ensuing battle with the *Asuras*. This act of Vishnu results in making sure that the wealth which emerged from churning of the ocean doesn't go to the underground but keeps on enriching humanity. Vishnu thus becomes an advocate of culture, thereby taking on a worldly incarnation of God. Both *Devas* and *Asuras* pursue Lakshmi as they both yearn for power and prosperity but neither of them are helped with her company for a long time. She departs when the gods and the demons turn disdainful after acquiring wealth and authority, which leads to their fall through Vishnu's intervention. *Devas* are a symbol of the human angst for stability as they become insecure after being wealthy and prosperous. On the other hand, the *Asuras* are a bunch of agitated, impatient beings who are deprived of prosperity and riches which reflect the human necessity for growth.

Unlike Bali's ancestors Hiranayaksha and Hiranakashipu, who used strength and cunning, Bali used generosity to obtain Lakshmi. Lakshmi symbolising wealth, power and prosperity is desired by both gods and demons. Bali aspired to be more powerful than any other *Asura* before him and to restore to the *Asuras* their kingdoms and dignity that they had lost to the gods by reigning over all the three worlds using the boon of immortality granted to him by Lord Brahma. Bali kept on expanding his empire failing to realise that material needs can never be fully satisfied, and contentment ensues only when material and spiritual growth coexist. So great was Bali's generosity that his kingdom lacked nothing. It was perfect in every sense. His subjects were happy and content. There was no death or disease in his realm. Eventually, as the kingdom prospered Lakshmi departed from Indra to be with the noble King Bali. However, such a state of perfection never lasts long. Perfection in the absolute sense is non-existent, yet everyone yearns for it. That was when Lord Vishnu approached Bali in the form of a dwarf and asked for three paces of land. Bali readily agreed. Immediately, Vishnu grew into a giant and with two strides covered both the heaven and the earth, and with no place left to take the third step, Bali offered his head. He was shoved down into the rightful

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place where *Asuras* belonged—the underworld. Bali had grossly over-estimated his ability to fulfil the needs of his subjects. Therefore, Vishnu's incarnation as Vamana (the dwarf) teaches him a lesson/reality that “human desires are infinite while material resources are finite” (Pattnaik, 2011). The dwarf turning into a giant made Bali realise his insignificance and the fact that he could never satiate all human desires. Therefore, being too generous also lands one in trouble as it was Bali's excessive generosity that turned out to be the reason of his doom. One should realise one's limits and restrictions while aspiring to achieve all that they wish for. One last boon granted to Bali by lord *Vishnu* before thrusting him under the ground was the permission to rise above the ground in order to meet the subjects of his former kingdom once every year, marked by the festival of Onam in Kerala, during the prosperous and bountiful season of the harvest. It is also a time to relive and return to the sacred past: a time of bounty and perfection.

A similar myth depicting Lord Vishnu as *Trivikrama*, the conqueror of three worlds with three steps can be found in the sacred literature of Jains. In this myth, King Mahapadma of Hastinapura had a minister called Namuci who had caused great trouble to the Jain monks residing there. Eventually, the monks approached Vishnu to intervene. Vishnu asked the minister to grant three paces of land so that they could build a monastery and live peacefully. To which, Namuci reluctantly agreed. Vishnu grew huge in size and placed his right foot on Mount Mandara. Another account relates that Vishnu took three paces, and stepped on two of heaven's foremost peaks Mandara, Manasottara and then stood on Heaven itself thereby claiming the entire universe. This myth further explains the idea that the three worlds (Heaven, Earth and the Underworld) are the possessions of the divinities while kings/ministers are just the mortal caretakers whose reign over them depends on their credibility. Thus, the myths of harvest festivals across Hindu, Jain and Buddhist traditions share the common theme that culminates in the preservation of the cosmic balance through the defeat of *Asuras* by Lord Vishnu, indicating the cyclical nature of generation, release and renewal of wealth.

CONCLUSION

Festivals are an occasion to return to the sacred mythical past, symbolically indicating the renewal of life and nature. As harvest festivals commemorate a cosmic event, it becomes a time to embrace the spirit of mythical beings/deities responsible for bestowing mankind with bounty and prosperity. Similarly, *Onam* festival that marks the annual return of the generous mythical King Mahabali, who is an embodiment of virtues required to rule the land, symbolically indicate a return of the sacred time of bounteousness and perfection, filling the hearts and minds of people with plentiful harvest, joy and contentment.

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Conflict of Interest

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