The rest is silence

Andaleeb Shahjahan explores the nature of the sacred silence that lies at the heart of all religions and mythologies

IT is perhaps the ultimate paradox to try to define "silence" through words. But since we, as human beings, are multi-dimensional -- according to the ancient as well as modern seers and sages, we exist on four distinct planes of consciousness all at the same time -- I hope that it is not altogether a meaningless or futile attempt.

What are these four planes? They are: a) the world of waking consciousness, b) the dream consciousness, c) the deep dreamless sleep consciousness, and d) silence. Joseph Campbell, perhaps the late 20th century's foremost scholar of mythology, has delineated these four planes of our total being in his writings that take us on a world tour of mankind's magical spiritual quests throughout history.

Starting from the Bronze Age of human history, he has traced the links between different mythological systems of thought that have succeeded each other, and also complemented each other, in the development or the gradual unfolding, if you like, of human consciousness.

Common to all these mythological systems of belief is mankind's relentless love affair with God. Mankind has been creating ever-new masks for God to get to know Him better since time immemorial. Although the stages seem disconnected because of our lack of vision, in reality they are interwoven, and indeed different, movements of the same grand symphony called life.

But, in general, in the world of waking consciousness we are not even fully aware of our spiritual identity. Here, we are mostly identified with the world of matter: the body, the house, the car, food, etc. without suspecting any deeper import of our day-to-day activities.

It is, however, in the dream-consciousness that we begin to perceive more than meets the eye. Be it day-dreaming or night-time dreaming, we encounter and experience a reality that is somewhat larger, more attractive, and more imaginative than our everyday reality. In our dreams, whether conscious or unconscious, we lose our physical boundaries and go wherever our secret desires take us.

In our dream-consciousness we are both the participant and the observer of the dream. Without soaring to metaphysical heights, which may seem unreal to some, we can draw examples from our innumerable day-dreams where we imagine ourselves to be heroes or heroines involved in great adventures or romance. We even borrow other people's masks to add spice to our dreams, that is, we literally put on the mask of our favourite movie star, or artist, or musician.

What happens then? Does the



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