COMPARATIVE METAPHYSICS OF THE VEDAS, UPANIṢADS AND THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

BY

HARILAL G. DEWA

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of Philosophy and Political Science,
University of Durban-Westville

Supervisor: PROFESSOR F. ZANGENBERG

November 1990

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to make a special acknowledgement to his supervisor, Professor F Zangenberg, for his kind assistance and patience throughout the preparation of this work. The discussions held from time to time and the valuable guidance received are deeply appreciated.

The encouragement given by several colleagues has been a source of inspiration to the writer as well.

The writer also thanks the university authorities and library staff of the the Universities of Gujerat, Poona, Banaras, Bombay and New Delhi whose helpfulness added to the pleasure of researching in that country. He is grateful, too, to the staff of the UDW library for their assistance and efficiency at all times.

Special thanks are due to the members of the writer's family for their patience and understanding during the writing up of the project, and especially to Damayanti, Krpavati and Kapilray, who together executed the typing and proof-reading.

The financial assistance of the Institute for Research Development towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed in this thesis and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Institute for Research Development.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the end notes that are appended to each chapter:

Ait Brah	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
AU	Aitareya Upaniṣad
AV	Atharva Veda
BG	Bhagavad Gītā
BU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
CHI	Cultural Heritage of India Vol I
CU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
DAN AGOE	The Age of the Guptas and Other Essays by Dandekar
DAN EII	Exercises in Indology by Dandekar
DAS HIP I	History of Indian Philosophy by Dasgupta Volume I
HIR OIP	Outlines of Indian Philosophy by Hiriyanna
IU	Īśa Upaniṣad
KaU	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
KeU	Kena Upaniṣad
KU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
MaU	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
MaiU	Maitreya Upaniṣad
MuU	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
PU	Praśna Upaniṣad
RAD BG	The Bhagavadgītā by Radhakrishnan
RAD IP I	Indian Philosophy by Radhakrishnan Vol I
RAD IVL	Idealist View of Life by Radhakrishnan
RAD PU	The Principal Upaniṣads by Radhakrishnan
RV	ṚgVeda
SU	Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
ZAE BG	The Bhagavad-Gītā by R C Zaehner
ZAE H	Hinduism by R C Zaehner

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Chapter 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Indian philosophical speculations and theological thought have developed down the centuries through a complex web of interrelationships. Often it is difficult to distinguish in the literature the dominant interest between these two areas of concern. Yet no Indological scholar would deny that both these areas of concern take their root, in some way or other, in the Vedas, recognised as the most ancient Indo-European literature to have come down to us.

Several Indologists have identified non-Aryan elements in the Vedic hymns, and distinguished these from a middle period of true Aryan development (the Indo-Iranian period), and further distinguished these two from a final and more truly Indian period reflecting Indo-Aryan fusion, giving rise to characteristically Hindu metaphysical and religious modes of thought as we know them today. Such a schematization of the ancient literature has led directly to the thesis that the ancient Veda already exhibits a qualitative stratification of ideas belonging to different historical epochs, ideas that do not easily fuse with each other.

The complexity of the problem is increased in the further development of the Vedic literature in the texts of the Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. While many of the earlier Indologists have recognized in these sections of the literature radical and revolutionary schisms of thought, some modern (mainly Indian) scholars prefer to view the distinctions as being due mostly to selective emphasis, and not as due to any significant difference in aim and intention. In the main, traditionalist Hindu theologians have upheld the thesis that the entire body of Vedic literature reflects a single development, and that the religious interests as reflected in the Bhagavad Gītā are in fact the mere unfolding of ideas embedded in the earlier Vedic hymns. This school therefore maintains that modern Indian theistic thought, allowing its various manifestations, is germane to Vedic samhita literature, and that this theistic thought is given rational and philosophical support in the Upaniṣads.

While most Indological researchers would agree that the Vedic hymns have a dominant religious interest, they have contended for a severe qualitative difference in the themes exhibited in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā. They have asserted a strong polytheistic character with respect to the Vedas, such as would be inappropriate to a true monotheism. They have variously regarded the

Upaniṣads as reflecting a philosophical pantheism or some form of monistic gnosticism. And the Bhagavad Gītā, while it is accepted as being dominated by a monotheistic interest, its monotheism is considered to be compromised by strong pantheistic leanings. Clearly the Indologists have operated in terms of theistic ideas based on a standard derived from Semitic literature.

The writer does not wish to impose the limitation of such a standard upon his proposed research. While to some extent comparisons are inevitable for purposes of clarification and exposition, the writer wishes to investigate the characteristics of metaphysical thought pertaining to theism (in its various forms as reflected in the three sets of texts) within the confines and premises of Indian literature.

1.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study proposes:

(a) to undertake an analysis of representative selections from the Vedic Saṁhitās (especially the Ṛg Saṁhitā), the classical Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā;

(b) to investigate the characteristic structures of metaphysical thought in these three sets of texts;

(c) to underline those vital categories of theistically-related thought in terms of which distinctions among the three types of texts may be revealed;

(d) to arrive at a valid and systematic statement concerning the course of theistic development through the three demarcated chronological periods; and

(e) to consider the nature of Hindu theistic thought in terms of the relative stability of the underlying metaphysical constructs as revealed in the study.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā are the primary texts of Hinduism and are fundamental to the religious actuality of Hindu thought and practice. The writer is aware of the sensitive nature of the areas under study.

In the nature of the investigation the writer cannot be content with a plain descriptive account, but must engage in a critical appraisal and evaluation of the relative merits of the metaphysical and theological ideas revealed in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā, based on objective and impersonal philosophical criteria.

Therefore, the basic methodology will be that of an objective, Indological-style research, taking into account the views of both Western and Eastern Indologists.

This method entails a direct, factual examination of the data, in this case the hymns of the Vedas and the texts of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. The metaphysical structures underlying the theological notions in the texts will be sought to be isolated and analysed in detail, and then evaluated in terms of objective standards. As a necessary part of the study, comparisons will be undertaken among the three sets of texts, noting the relative merits of each and the logical interrelationships among them.

An evaluation of the results will also be offered in terms of modern theological ideas pertaining to the metaphysics of theism.

The spiritual intuitions of the sages of the Indian

tradition, though seen in terms of our modern analytic categories as polytheistic or pantheistic, henotheistic or monotheistic, or even monistic, may conceivably not do justice to the texts taken in their wholeness. The exercise of comparison, which must involve analysis and sifting of discrete date, no matter how sympathetic, cannot avoid setting the material objectively at a distance from the researcher, so to speak. In doing this, we may be missing a good deal of the meaning for the texts themselves often appear to indicate the need for an intuitive approach.

But such an approach, for our present purposes, is out of our reach.

We therefore do not purport to arrive at conclusions that can hold absolutely, but only within the context of the premises within which we have worked. In the words of Deutsch, "there can be no real understanding of traditional Indian thought without a sympathetic openness to it . . . one must experience for oneself the living values of a culture before one can understand its most profound insights. Sympathetic imagination we believe, is as necessary for understanding as critical intelligence."

Any comparison of ideas, however derived, has to

proceed on the basis of presumed norms of comparison. These are furnished by the generally accepted philosophical standard. We cannot say that these norms of comparison are either Eastern or Western, for they have to be assessed by each researcher according to his deepest understanding of the relevance of the norms to his particular situation. Briefly, we may say that these are the norms of scholarship, and each researcher has to be himself satisfied that he is applying them in the most meaningful way. He has to draw his conclusions with regard to every known fact and nuance. In general, we cannot do better than say with the savant Max Muller that "a scholar is a pleader, and he is bound to propound his reasons."

Finally, it needs to be pointed out that the writer is himself born into the Hindu religious-philosophical tradition, and has therefore felt called upon to exercise greater objectivity, so as not to err on the side of conservatism.

Despite this self-imposed attitude of caution, the writer must confess to an admiration for the critical-creative approach adopted by Radhakrishnan in his works on Indian Philosophy, and has, with due caution, tried to emulate it in some ways. It may be noted that Deutsch has also made the appeal that comparative philosophy

should not be divorced from creative philosophy.

In comparing the metaphysical and religious ideas pertaining to the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā, the writer has tried to adopt the creative approach without violating the factual data as he perceived them.

1.4 EARLY SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION

One of the first features that strikes the student about ṚgVedic studies is not that there have been a great many studies on this ancient text, but that there should be so many and diverse viewpoints concerning it. The proliferation of the western approaches to the ṚgVeda is symptomatic of the early indigenous Indian approaches to this text.

The Brāhmaṇa texts, which in the tradition are regarded as integral parts of Veda in the general sense[1a] are in fact the earliest attempts at an interpretation of the original mantras. Chaubey says in this regard:

> "There should not be any doubt, that the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa and the Kauṣītakī Brāhmana are the first attempts to interpret the ṚgVeda in its two recessions. They explain the

Ṛgvedic mantra by giving their ritualistic applications, occasionally giving etymologics of the words and legends connected with the rituals."[1b]

We are justified in saying that even the class of technical literature known as the Prātiśākhyas, in which pronunciation, phonetics, accent and different ways of recitation of the saṁhitā texts, in fact represent, albeit in a technical sense, specialised methods of interpretation of the textual materials. This is confirmed by Chaubey when he says:

> "Yāska in his Nirukta, while splitting certain padas, differs from Śākalya. From this we may, however, conjecture that in Yāska's time there existed more than one Padapāṭha of the Ṛgveda Saṁhitā and that Yāska consulted them while recording the different interpretations to which a Vedic stanza might be subjected."[2]

So far as historical individuals are concerned, the name of Yāska (or Yāskācārya) is well known as the earliest interpreter of Vedic texts. His Nirukta is the earliest known lexicon of Vedic terms, in which the terms are discussed from several etymological, derivative and grammatical standpoints. From internal references in

this work, it is obvious that other Nirukta compositions were in existence in Yāska's time, all belonging together by virtue of a more or less common exegetical purpose and a common exegetical methodology. Says Chaubey:

> "Yāska's Nirukta was not the only Nirukta. According to Durgācārya there were fourteen Nirukta texts. All the authors of Nirukta, although they differed very much at some places, formed one group known as Nairuktas in the field of Vedic exegesis."[3]

He further says:

> "In the time of Yāska the Nairukta school of Vedic interpretation was already well established. Yāska has referred to the opinion of Nairuktas about twenty times on different occasions, in his Nirukta. They interpreted some of the Vedic mantras on the basis of etymological explanation. They also discussed the nature of the Vedic deities taking them as different phenomena of nature. According to this school the legends related in the Vedic mantras should be interpreted figuratively and supposedly historical names should be taken as standing for eternal cosmic phenomena."[4]

Yaska himself has quoted no less than thirteen Nairuktas who came before him. These are Agrayana, Aupamanyava, Aurnavabha, Kravstuki, Gargya, Galava, Carmasiras, Taitiki, Satabelaksa Maudgalya, Sakatayana, Sakapuni, Sakapauneya and Sthaulasthivi. Yaska himself is the fourteenth exponent of the Nairukta school.[5]

Of all the Nairuktas, only Yāska's work has come down to us, and now his name is synonymous with the term Nirukta. Of Yāska's importance Macdonell says:

> "Yāska's Nirukta is in reality a Vedic commentary and is older by some centuries than any other exegetical work preserved in Sanskrit."[6]

In his work, Yāska explains about 600 passages of the ṚgVeda, whose authenticity appears to have been accepted by almost all later Vedic commentators in India.[7]

Besides the Nairukta school of interpretation, there existed several others, which testifies to the vibrant literary and critical activity in those far-off days. The <u>aitihāsika</u> school, or history-orientated school, appears to have existed from before Yāska's time. The chief principle of this school was that the Vedic gods

were in fact deified mortals, whose heroic deeds were amplified and glorified in the traditional records. Yāska himself adopts this method of Vedic interpretation.[8]

The Yājñika school of interpretation followed the liturgical method "wherein an attempt is made to explain the mantras in harmony with the existing ceremonials. Each mantra or each word should be explained, according to this view, in terms of rituals or ritualistic implements."[9]

The Naidāna school followed the method whereby a mantra or sūkta was interpreted mainly by reference to the occasion during which the mantra or sūkta was composed. Although this is mentioned as a separate school, it appears to be a version of the aitihāsika or historical school.[10]

The Parivrājaka school ostensibly refers to wandering teachers, and was also known as the Ātmavādin school, on account of the fact that they interpreted the mantras in terms of their possible spiritual import.

The Adhidaivata school followed the method which "took its stand on the supposition that since the mantras are addressed to the gods, the incident recorded in the

Vedas should be explained in relation to them."[11]

The Ākhyāna school, or school concerned with legends, appears to have been historically orientated. "It took its stand on the supposition that all the names occurring in the Vedas were historical, and incidents recorded in the Vedas were actual happenings."[12] As this school appears to have elaborated the legends of the Vedas, it is probable that it inspired much of the Paurāṇic literature of later times.

Our knowledge of the existence of all these schools is only very sketchily derived through references to them in a few places in Yāska's Nirukta, occasionally in the commentaries of Skandasvāmin, or in a work like the Bṛhadāraṇyaka. Still, it is to be acknowledged that, despite the paucity of lengthy historical records, vigorous and significant interpretation and critical activity was in vogue among the scholars of ancient India, with regard to Vedic exegesis.

There is strong evidence to support the thesis of the existence, even in those ancient days, of an established and fully-fledged school of Anti-Vedic Scepticism, which was obviously atheistic and decried, and tried to discredit the teachings of the scriptures. Says Chaubey:

"In the fifteenth section of the first chapter of the Nirukta Yāska has introduced a critic in the person of Kautsa, a representative of the anti-Vedic school, who held the view that Vedic mantras have no meaning. He has quoted seven arguments advanced by that authority to show that the mantras have no meaning, and has refuted them one by one."[13]

About the introduction of the anti-Vedic authority and according to it what amounts to a high and dignified status, another author observes:

"The reproduction of the Kauts-controversy indicates on the one hand, that not only was Yāska endowed with a rationalistic spirit and was free from bigoted fanaticism, but also it was possible to carry on such discussions with tolerance at that period of remote antiquity; and implies on the other that Kautsa was an eminent scholar or some great personality, or the exponent of some philosophical system, whose thought could not be ignored . . . It may also be taken for granted that he was the leader of a movement which may be described as something akin to materialistic rationalism, and which was the result of a remarkable

literary activity, a characteristic of the epoch of Yāska."[14]

From the anti-Vedic sentiments expressed in some portions of the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads, we may safely infer that an anti-Vedic school of sufficient strength and following must have existed even before the period of the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads, whose opinions, in a mild form, must have influenced the composers and redactors of the whole Vedic corpus.[15]

End Notes : Chapter 1.4

1. Nakamura, H A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy pp 93/5
2a. Chaubey, B B Treatment of Nature in the Rgveda p 1
2b. ibid p 2
3. ibid p 2
4. ibid p 3
5. ibid p 3-7
6. Macdonell, A A A History of Sanskrit Literature p 226
7. ibid p 8
8. ibid p 8
9. ibid p 9
10. ibid p 10
11. ibid p 11
12. ibid p 11
13. Chaubey, B B op cit p 12
14. Sarupa, L The Nighantu and the Nirukta p 72 Quoted in Chaubey pp 12/13
15. Chaubey, B B op cit p 13

Chapter 2.0 THE VEDAS: THEOLOGICAL VALUES

2.1 NATURALISTIC BACKGROUND

It is a noteworthy and striking feature of much Indian writing, on the subject of mythology, religion and philosophy that the several systems of thought that seek to reveal the tradition are in fact revelations of certain specialised points of view, and are not in any sense absolute. Even those systems which are clearly contradictory and mutually opposed are stated by many of those who undertake to interpret Indian thought to be merely revelations of some partial aspects of reality. Reality is generally assumed to refer to some unfathomable essence or Divine Power which is unknowable in its entirety, and the validity of any viewpoint is considered to be dependent upon a close conformity with the essential features of the Vedic texts, or consistency between the viewpoint and some one or more indubitable features of the Vedic teachings.

This type of judgemental ethos, prevailing more or less consistently in the Indian critical tradition, at times put forth directly as a matter of principle, but always present in the background of Indian thought, supplies the invariable justification for the existence, side by side, of systems of thought and practice, that to

the perception of a non-Indian or objective observer, must appear strangely incompatible. This phenomenon is effectively highlighted by D. J Stephen with regard to differing ideas in connection with reincarnation theory and the śrāddha ceremonies, when she says:

> "The two sets of ideas are quite irreconcilable, and they are never reconciled; but they go on side by side, in full vigour, in the same family, and in the same individual."[1]

We may regard this as a characteristically Indian habit of mind, which manifests itself with a fair degree of consistency throughout the ethico-religious history of Hinduism, barring the relatively restricted circles among which philosophical confrontations occurred, and which maintained the strictly philosophical traditions. This is the "eirenic" doctrine,[2] and it has been criticized by Ninian Smart as being inimical to philosophical thought.[3] Most Indian thinkers and reformers[4] refer to the ṚgVedic verse: "Ekam sadviprā bahudhā vadanti"[5] as lending support to this line of thought. One writer, immediately after quoting this verse, follows it up with what she takes to be the logical consequence of it, as:

> "Reality is not limited to any particular view, and different systems of philosophy are nothing

but different views about Reality. They are formed in accordance with their insight into the nature of Reality. No two approaches can be exactly the same since no two people have exactly the same temperament. Each system is based upon a particular approach and it is justified as long as its approach is consistent."[6]

In this type of assertions about Reality, or rather, non-assertions about Reality, we can certainly perceive and appreciate a genuine philosophical latitude which often and easily flows over into the ethico-religious domain of life, engendering and supporting in the individual a position of metaphysical tentativeness. It may be noted that such a position is highly conducive to the later advaitic two-tier model of total Reality, in that the individual holding the tentative hypothesis easily sees his position as relative, not only to his peculiar individual circumstances, but as relative to an absolute standard, which he soon begins to affirm positively, despite the fact that such absolute standard is by definition indefinable.

It is easy to see, therefore, that, what arises as non-assertions, or tentative assertions, about Reality, invariably leads within the context of Vedic Hindu ideas to a type of positive assertions about an ultimate or

transcendent Reality.

In the line of thought being presented here, we are attempting to reveal the conflict between the naturalistic interpretation of the Vedic literature and the tradition of its revelation. For it is easy to understand that a revelation will more firmly and more definitely fix the terms of reference within which the notion of Reality or God has to be understood, will more definitely secure to the human understanding the type of relationships that obtain between man and God, and will certainly conduce to the understanding of the Divine Power in terms of a Person rather than a Force or Essence. Consideration of the issues of naturalism on the one hand, and revelation on the other, is clearly pivotal to our understanding of the nature of Vedic religion. We may not be inclined to promote a decision as to which alternative has to adopted, but it does appear necessary to demonstrate how the two traditions are built up and supported, and to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of each tradition, and also as these may be obtained from the Vedic mantras themselves.

We cannot affirm that naturalism and revelation are the two clear-cut alternatives available to us for an understanding of the contents of the Vedas. All that we can say is that many Western Indologists have given us a

rendering which is strongly naturalistic, following largely the commentary of Sāyaṇācārya.[7] A common corollary of this view is that the people reflected in the Vedas who worshipped the elements of nature, were primitive and less advanced in so far as the recognition of a truly ethical conception of God is concerned. On this view the accounts given in the Vedas have to be viewed as mainly mythological, as becomes a people in the early stages of their cultural evolution.[8]

Following this line of thought, Riepe says:

> "The gods of the Vedic hymns are only slightly removed from the natural phenomena which they represent."[9]

Standing in stark opposition to this type of interpretation is the traditional view that the mantras of the Vedas are the revelations of the high and mighty God, vouchsafed unto the holy personages "for the enlightenment and welfare of mankind."[10] In relatively modern times this traditional view has been set forth with precision and elaboration by Svāmī Dayānanda.[11] It is important for us to establish the grounds and presuppositions on which our enquiries are based, and this is best done by following the lines which early indological investigations took, and whose

influence continues up to the present, and appears to have taken a permanent hold in some circles.[12]

It should be clear that this influence is not merely historical, but is supported by a body of facts and validity of reasoning, which no researcher can ignore, even if the logic of it is unacceptable to him.

It is a salient of feature of Indian culture that it has been characterised by a deep sense of inwardness[13] in matters of both philosophy of religion, imparting to both a type of ontological priority. It is to be emphasized that the quality of inwardness is most certainly manifested at the individual level, i.e., in the individual person himself. But, quite paradoxically, the person as an individual or unique unit of consciousness tends to get subdued or lost in the process.

N V Joshi, who attempts to show that, in order to overcome an unsatisfying dualism in the world of experience, logic has to be subordinated to ontology, makes the point well when he says:

> "The world of existence consists of a plurality of finite individuals. Every individual has infinite potentialities. From the standpoint of knowability it has two aspects - the subjec-

tive as well as the objective. In the latter, individuality is expressed only partially. But as we pass from the objectivity to the subjectivity, its inward potentialities are gradually quickened and developed. If one persists in the same direction deliberately concentrating one's entire conscious energy, it might gradually lead us to the realization of the sublimest aspect of one's self viz., God. God is the same as the Highest Self or Paramatman."[14]

This tendency, which is pervasive in traditional Indian thought, takes the individual as the most important datum of experience. Yet, in the process of explicating this view, the individual soon slips out of focus, and the Inner Essence, or a conception of the Absolute, replaces the individual. Under this scheme, even if individual value were to be maintained, it would be a samkhya type of value, a mere name without the substance of uniqueness or significance of inter-personal relations. This is the thrust of inwardness in the general Indian tradition. As Joshi says: "Perfection means the unfoldment of one's own potentialities . . . Hence the perfect Self is regarded as the source of infinite bliss, because here the self is in tune with the Absolute itself. That is why, the Upanisads have said:

Thou art that; This Self is verily the Brahman."[15]

This is the essence of the doctrine of inwardness, that it leaves each individual to realise the truth or God, for himself. The clear implication of this view is that the individual sets his own goal by setting up his own framework within which the goal is to be realised. Indeed the situation must not be imagined to be chaotic or totally unstructured, for the Vedas stand in the tradition as the standard authority which enunciates the principal values of life, together with the seers and ācāryas who clarify this authority to the common understanding. Yet it is a fact of the generally received tradition that, for each individual separately, this authority of the Veda can only attain precision, finality and completeness, in terms of his own personal and systematic understanding. The meaning of the Vedic values as it obtains for one individual cannot be strictly binding upon another individual. The essence of the argument is that, in general, Indian tradition is understood to have no tradition of revelation as this term is understood in Semitic culture. Even when used, and it is often used very loosely and imprecisely, it has no bearing upon human relations within the context of man and God. It is usually used to indicate the a priori or non-negotiable character of spiritual truths. P T Raju, who is recognised as a leading Indologist, says with

regard to Indian religion:

> "It is not a revealed religion in the sense that the revelation is not the prerogative of a particular individual . . . Indian religion from the beginning has been a reflective religion . . . It is rational and supra-rational . . . For the religious thinker, religion is generally a search for the ground of our being, it is an ontological and metaphysical search, not through pure thought alone, but also through realization."[16]

It is clear, therefore, that Vedic religion is not regarded as "revealed" in the sense that Semitic religion is so regarded. I is taken to be revealed in the sense of an inward realization, which is of necessity specific to each individual, and therefore cannot lend itself to definition except in the most general terms. Such a perspective requires the use of human thought to bring about order and harmony among the constituent units of society, the world and human experience, since ethical relations are not, and cannot be, given in inward realization. If we take strict account of the rational element in Indian religion, then we have to say that inward realization is always the realization of our essence which is continuous with the most inward nature

of the human consciousness. The rational description indicates that the terms and framework within which the spiritual quest is undertaken, and the situation of the individual within it, has to be understood through the process of human reasoning, and not in terms of the decree of Divine Power. In order to justify this approach, the tradition argues that the ultimate realization is always supra-rational, i.e., transcendent to all human categories;[17] and therefore transcendent to all ethical relationships. The above quotation from Raju is typical of this tradition, where the ontological ground of being must be understood in the most abstract sense as beyond all mundane relationships.

The experience of ontological truth, when taken as the sole basis of religious life, in fact appears to remove itself from the domain of social life and interpersonal relationships, which from the Semitic experience appear to be vital areas for a "revealed" tradition. In explicating the value of experiential religion, P T Raju states our argument also with terseness:

> "Religious experience and the quest for religious experience result in systems and schools of philosophy, provided we do not reduce the experience to the acceptance of some creed on the basis of faith. Such an

acceptance leads to dogmatism and fanaticism and makes the quest for the Supreme Being pointless."[18]

While it is not necessary that a creed and a faith lead to dogmatism and fanaticism, it is a point worth noting that a revelatory religion reduces the need for a passionate quest for the Supreme Being, though it need not make such a quest "pointless". India's rich, varied and continuing tradition of systems and schools of philosophy certainly appear to attest, in the general understanding of the scholiasts, to the non-existence of a fixed revelation and to the general need for inward contemplation for the comprehension of wider aspects of Reality.

Experiential religion is mystic and inward, and it becomes the source of all possible knowledge about Ultimate Reality. All phenomenal objects, including the instruments and equipment of man's psychological nature, although the means for attaining to such knowledge, have to be relegated to the world of natural phenomena. This is the thesis of natural religion, which in its strict application cannot admit any supernatural element such as God irrupting into the natural order of things. God, or more precisely in this case, Ultimate Reality, is the object of inward realization, continuous with man's inner

consciousness, sometimes said to be identical with this consciousness, at other times considered to be the Divine Source of which man's inner consciousness is a partial expression. Raju adumbrates such a broad-based natural religion when he says:

> "One may say that Indian religion is naturalistic and empirical. Here we should understand "nature" in the broadest sense of the term, but neither in the scientific sense of what obeys determinate laws and so predictable, nor in etymological sense of what has birth. We should understand it in the sense that everything that is, is natural. Then not only physical and biological nature, but also the psychological and the spiritual will be natural. If man's conscious being is natural, then whatever such a being implies and involves is also natural. If it is natural, then it must be capable of being discovered within man's conscious being."[19]

This statement of the naturalistic background of Vedic thought (and indeed all Indian thought generally) has the merit of being able to accommodate a range of kindred interpretations, and is therefore a most convenient category. For the Vedic hymns in many cases are

not easily categorisable, and has led to endless discussions among indologists. At one end of the naturalistic approach is the theory that all the deities of the Veda are mere representations of discrete natural phenomena. These phenomena are taken to be divine and magical in a primitive sense, as the rain that magically causes the crops to grow, or the sun that magically removes the darkness, etc. Occupying a somewhat medial position would be the theory that sees in some renderings of the hymns a flash of true divine understanding, when a Rsi is raised to the level of a significant insight into the Divine Nature. But such an insight is not sustained, and is soon replaced by more mundane reflections. At the other extreme of the naturalism continuum we may place the theory that the entire range of Vedic mantras ~~are~~ truly spiritual, but that the full and proper understanding of them is denied to us due to lack of competence. Among these three approaches it is easy to place any theory whose fundamental premise is that of the realization of the Divine Nature in man's inner being.[20] The three approaches, in the order presented above, may be termed "radical naturalism", "modified naturalism" and "spiritual naturalism", as standard approaches within the larger and naturalistic background of Vedic interpretations.

This scheme must, of necessity, preclude any inter-

pretation based on the idea of revelation, in the sense of such revelation originating in a conception of God who stands outside of man. Yet within the Indian tradition itself there exists a significant body of opinion for whom the idea of revelation, both akin to the Semitic type as well as a modified version of it, is the very foundation of all theology.

The early indologists, quite naturally, saw very close connections between European mythology and Vedic mythological forms. For example, Adalbert Kuhn promoted the thesis that, parallel to the existence of a common ancestral language of Indo-European peoples, there must have existed a common stock of Indo-European mythological ideas.[21] Dumezil has tried to show strong structural resemblances between Vedic mythology and Indo-European social organization based on Durkhein's ideas. But this approach has not proven fruitful, being "too narrow a frame to contain the variety and complexity of Vedic mythology".[22] Although several indologists, like Roth and Oldernburg, showed a greater interest in the Vedic mythology itself rather than drawing comparisons with European mythology,[23] still, the foundations of all these interpretations were built on evolutionary ideas and the approach of a radical naturalism. Central to this approach is the belief that "most of the Vedic gods were personifications of natural powers and phenomena."[24]

Such an approach to the interpretation of ancient documents is so natural and bears such a disarming aura of objectivity and scholarly respectability, that it has been accepted, down into modern times, as the sure path along which the Vedic interpreter must travel. Dr. G K Bhat, who was until recently curator and director of the Research Department of the famous Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Poona, effectively adumbrates this approach when he says:

> "The Rgveda, we know, is a collection of praises and prayers addressed to several deities that are, in the main, personifications of Nature-forms. The various aspects of nature evoked the feelings of wonder and awe and admiration. Their grandeur and majesty deeply affected the mind and turned it to seek their brilliance and beneficence as a precious gift in the daily life of the human world. Such an attitude of the mind is an attitude of reverence which, in course of time, arranges a worshipful approach to the Forces of Nature conceiving them as Divinities."[25]

Within the Indian tradition their is found a large body of respectable opinion even in the form of the orthodox schools of philosophy such as the Samkhya school

of thought, which, though understood to be nominally accepting the authority of the Veda, gives dubious support to the Veda as Śruti or divine revelation, so far as the earliest writings of this school, including the Sāṁkhya Kārikā of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, are concerned.[26] The Sāṁkhya is held to be a thorough-going rationalist system of thought which does not fetter itself with a tradition-bound, Śruti approach to the Vedas. It rather pursues independent lines of reasoning free of religious orthodoxy. For the Sāṁkhya, yukti or reasoning is of paramount importance, and "it cannot be held that the sāṁkhya philosopher accepts śruti as a pramāṇa in the sense of just accepting the authority of the Vedas."[27]

2.2 PLURALITY OF GODS

One of the most powerful and pervasive ideas that is pressed upon the consciousness of even the most casual surveyor of the Vedas is the notion of the multiplicity of gods or deities.[28] From the very first mantra of the ṚgVeda we are introduced unceremoniously and without the faintest introduction into the Vedic world of a plurality of gods, and men seeking to propitiate them for various ends, as:

"I laud Agni, the chosen priest, God, minister

of sacrifice, the Hotar, lavisher of wealth."[29]

This famous mantra, with which the first mandala of the RgVeda opens, sets forth the role of Agni in relation to other gods.[30] Agni, who is the fire of the hearth as well as the fire of sacrifice, is presented as doing service in the role of a priest and ministrator between men as the ministrants, and the gods in heaven,[31] who are ostensibly being propitiated for various earthly goods.[32] Although the conception Agni has been in many ways treated with special consideration in his relation to man,[33] and this relation is also one of special intimacy,[33] what strikes us, in the first two mantras, is the sense of separation among the gods, between Agni and the other gods, and a little further in the text, among those other gods themselves. This notion of separation is the more enhanced on account of the relation of the different gods to some one or other phenomenon of nature. Joshi says:

> ".....every one of the gods in the Vedic pantheon is the presiding power of some one or other aspect of Nature. But one aspect of her may be more impressive than the other in so far as its beneficial effect on the human destiny is concerned."[35]

It is necessary to clarify the thesis that, while the idea of a plurality of gods is a necessary corollary of radical naturalism (as presented in the previous section), it cannot be concluded that it is equivalent to theistic pluralism, so far as the Vedas are concerned. If it be accepted that a purely naturalistic interpretation of the Vedas is true and valid, then the separate existence of the discrete gods has to accepted on that very basis, as constituting the deified projections of those natural phenomena. The gods would then be as distinct as are natural phenomena. Natural phenomena may be seen to possess an intrinsic or "ontological" unity as the sum total or "whole" of nature, as in the phrase "Mother Nature", or nature as the source of all things, as in the phrase "Mater Procreatrix", but this intelligence, if attended upon, would surely result in the loss of the more vital categories pertaining to discrete natural events, and which alone are of practical utility in the life of man. And Vedic man saw in the different conceptions of deity just this practical utility, or, what would be just as meaningful in the context, "religious" utility, which had of necessity to be tied to discrete events of the natural world, though extended into religious usage. Very appropriately Joshi says in this connexion:

"The most common characteristic common to all

the Vedic gods is that every one of them presides over one or the other aspect of nature. For example Dyaus stands for heaven, Pṛthivī for Earth, Agni for fire, Sūrya for the sun, Ūṣas for Dawn, Vāta for wind, Indra for storm and lightning, Varuṇa for water. Even the most idealized forms of the Vedic gods, such as Hiraṇyagarbha or Prajāpati, have also a direct bearing on Nature, though not in any specific aspect of its external manifestation, yet in so far as they refer to the total force or power, through which nature is supposes to create and control the world of things. Indeed this constitutes the important limitation of the religious consciousness which has found its remarkable expression in the Vedas. In a word, the Vedic religion is essentially a religion of Nature."[36]

In slight modification of this view, yet essentially in agreement with it, we may note the words of Riepe:

"The conception of nature in the ṚgVeda is that of an aggregate of forces, but forces not set into activity by a common principle such as prakriti becomes for Sāṁkhya philosophers."[37]

This states the case for the plurality of gods quite precisely. Although Joshi himself is quick to point out that the Vedic gods are not therefore to be considered the "objects of nature",[38] the discrete and separate representation of them cannot be gainsaid, and especially so in connexion with the aspect of radical naturalism.

To all appearances, it is obvious that the Vedic conception of gods served a very practical purpose. Whether they may have been specifically connected in all instances, to the cult of sacrifice (as insisted upon by the Mīmāṁsakas), or conceived for purposes of laudation and adoration of perceived religious values, still, they represent objectified phenomena, natural or divine, or both. As Chaubey says, "Vedic gods are objects ~~of~~ worship." They call forth adoration and reverence at a simple or primitive level of relationship between them and man, and, as we sometimes see it, as between friends, even as between those who might disagree. The different appellations for divinity, that is, the different gods, appear to possess sufficiently distinct individualities to mark them out as separate from each other. And, to the extent and within the limitations of the framework of radical naturalism, that is, as tied to discrete phenomena of the natural world, we are constrained to regard them as so many separate gods. As Chaubey says, "The ṚgVeda is quite conscious of the distinct individualities

of the various gods and goddesses."[39]

We may say that Vedic plurality of gods is not in itself distinct theistic pluralism, because it does not necessarily involve the idea of worship. What calls forth worship is a factor other than their plurality. The number of gods simply make up a system of nomenclature, a system of ordering concepts with relatively exclusive referents, and a system which is available in the tradition for satisfying the needs of the early Vedic Aryans, such as social, religious or functional needs. Riepe says that the petitions to the gods in the hymns are for the tangible goods of this world."[40] We have pointed out that a Vedic "god" is any appellation or entity which is relatively distinct, and maintains this distinctness with fair consistency, that is, which cannot be shown to be easily merged with other entities. One fruitful way of establishing such distinctness of appellation is to see its connection with discrete natural phenomena, and many passages in the ṚgVeda appear to support this connection.[41] It is in this sense that radical naturalism enforces and enhances the notion of a plurality of gods. In the ultimate analysis, and that which lies at the root of our presentation of the concept of the plurality of gods, is the contention regarding the definition of the term "god". Our contention is that any appellation or entity that calls forth sufficient admira-

tion or interest to the point of becoming the subject of mantras and hymns, may with justification be called a "god". It is quite legitimate to consider the notion "Divine Power" or "Supernatural Power" etc. in this context, and then we shall be led on to considering the extent to which the notion of divinity, in a true sense, should be consistently applied. And so we shall be led to the stage of entering upon the discussion of theism proper. For the moment we should note that the term "god" as defined above, easily fits the subject matter of a large number of hymns, and there is no condition for attaching to it a regular meaning of any kind of Holy or Divine Power. In this sense, then, it cannot be denied that the Vedas envisage a plurality of gods. When the interpretational approach is confined to that of radical naturalism, as in the quotations we have given, the inference is that the notion of Divinity does not rise to any significant level beyond that of simple and naive naturalism. And this would then imply that theism, in the proper sense of the term, is absent in the Vedas. We have a fair way to transverse before a decision can be attempted on this issue. And it is possible that the complex and heterogeneous character of the hymns may make a simple decision difficult. Concerning the nature of Vedic hymns Clayton cautions:

"The student of the ṚgVeda cannot remind him-

self too often of the composite character of the collection of hymns that it contains." [42]

2.3 GODS OF THE VEDIC PANTHEON

Some writers hold the extreme view that the ṚgVeda is simply nature poetry elevated to the emotional, aesthetic and socio-religious requirements of man, and there is no denying the fact that nature, in many of its aspects, features prominently in the presentation of the thoughts of the Rsis. With regard to the gods themselves, as presented in the hymns, a bare and bland plurality is inescapable, so far as the presentation is concerned, and we have taken the approach that mere plurality does not necessitate reading polytheistic ideas into the hymns. It is mostly on some such a basis that traditional Indian commentators such as Yāska and Sāyaṇa , and many western indologists, have proceeded to investigate the gods of the Vedic pantheon, and attempted to classify them.

As our later discussion will proceed in terms of an investigation of the concepts of polytheism, monotheism, pantheism and related ideas, it is necessary to set out the general scheme according to which the many de facto

deities of the ṚgVeda have been generally classified. At the same time, this schematization will provide the opportunity to investigate and follow up the theologically and metaphysically important characteristics appertaining to the conceptions of the various deities. By noting these specific characteristics and how they are made to operate with regard to the deity concerned, and also with regard to several deities together, it may become possible to come to some understanding of the actual ideas sought to conveyed by the Ṛṣis, and the motivations underlying them.

So far as the number of deities is concerned, the ṚgVeda does not offer a uniform line of thought, and several alterhatives are mentioned.[43] Several hymns give the number as thirty-three.[44] But this number did not comprehend all the gods, and we have a sage exclaiming, in honour of Agni:

> "Three times a hundred gods, and thrice a thousand, and three times ten and nine, have worshipped Agni.[45]

The number three thousand three hundred and thirty-three, and the number thirty-three both appear symbolic in a simple way, in that they are divisible by the number three, and three is one of the two numbers (the other is

seven) that appears to be endowed with some mystic significance. At any rate, traditional commentators beginning with Yāska[46] have put forward a three-fold classification of the Vedic gods, according to the region that is held to the dwelling-place of the gods.[47] This type of classification has been a convenient starting point for the discussion of Vedic deities, and has been adapted by most indologists.[48]

According to this simple scheme the gods are severally associated with the earthly region, the mid-air or atmospheric region, and the heavenly or celestial region. In the main, Agni is associated with the earthly region, Indra and Vāyu with the atmospheric region, and Sūrya with the celestial region. In addition, many other gods are also assigned to one or other of the three regions.

GODS OF THE TERRESTRIAL SPHERE

AGNI

Of the 1017 hymns of the ṚgVeda, no less than 200 are devoted to Agni, and this makes him one of the foremost gods of the Vedic pantheon. Nor is his importance in point of theology less than any other, for he is the god that is supremely the intermediary between men

and the gods. "Agni is intimately connected with the element of which he is the deity, and his nature is therefore far less anthropomorphic.[49] Indeed many of the descriptions of Agni are also close descriptions of fire itself, in a poetic sense, and the god is said to be "headless and footless" even.[50] Agni's conceptual proximity to the element of fire makes him a most important divinity, inasmuch as the cult of the fire-sacrifice is closely linked to the Vedic mantras.[51]

The naturalistic and evolutionary line of reasoning suggests clearly the affinity between Agni and the fire element. The ancient and primitive mode of producing fire through friction between two sticks is regarded as the inspiration behind the mantra which declares Agni as the devourer of his parents. Then again, because the sticks are twirled by the action of ten fingers, he is said to have ten mothers.[52]

Because the fire waxes strong through regular oblations of clarified butter, Agni is declared to be "ghī-faced".[53] As, being kindled at night also, lighting up the environment and evicting the night-demons, he is regarded as dispeller of darkness.[54] As he is the god that is constantly present in the house, and is attended to daily by the householders, he is the <u>pati</u> or Lord of the household.[55] He bestows wealth upon his worshipers,

the performers of the sacrifice,[56] and he bestows glory upon them.[57] The office of being a messenger between gods and men "makes Agni in some ways a god of the closest intimacy with the life of men".[58] As Agni is himself the hotṛ,[59] the priest, he is said to have developed a special and personal relationship with the sacrificial priests,[60] and the hymns reveal the nature of this relationship which can be likened to bhakti or devotion.[61]

The birth of Agni is proposed in several ways. Apart from being born of two mothers (friction-sticks),[62] he is also the son of Dyaus the sky-god as his father and Pṛthivī the earth-goddess as his mother. Again he is the son of Īḍā (the sacrificial food) and he is also fathered by Indra.[63]

Agni is credited with three birth-stations - the common one on earth, that is, in the house, the second in the waters (of the air, i.e. as lightning in the clouds, as well as in the terrestrial waters), and the third in heaven.[64] The hymns also indicate that, as dwelling in man, in creatures, in rocks, etc., Agni "is the gem of all that is".[65]

Agni shares many characteristics with other gods. He is at times declared to be above all other gods, who

offer him worship.[66] Paradoxically, he is also said to be the generator of his own parents,[67] and also the slayer of them.[68] But the chief importance of the Agni concept is that of priest and mediator between gods and men.

SOMA

The whole of the ninth mandala of the RgVeda, consisting of 114 hymns, is devoted to the god Soma. In addition to six full hymns in other books also in his honour, he is invoked in parts of five other hymns. His name also occurs jointly with Indra, Agni, Pusan and the Rudras, and he is often mentioned in other places where it is difficult to say whether the term really refers to the actual deity.[69] Indologists make out that Soma is pre-eminently the intoxicating juice of a plant, or the deification of such juice.[70] The mythology concerning Soma does not develop any specific individuality clearly apart from its connection with the process of producing the juice. Keith says that "the anthropomorphism of the god is consistently coming into collision with the actual form of the plant and thus is prevented from attaining any clear development".[71]

From a standpoint of a naive and simple naturalism, the Vedic bards apparently drew no distinction between the juice and the deity,[72] as the following versified

translation of a Vedic mantra[73] shows:

"We've quaffed the Soma bright
and are immortal grown;
We've entered into light,
and all the gods have known.
What mortal now can harm,
Or foeman vex us more ?
Through thee, beyond alarm,
Immortal god, we soar."[74]

Pointing out the earth-bound rustic character of the praises paid to Soma, Keith says that "the most elaborate imagery seems to have been formed round the simple operations of pressing and straining the juice.[75] Following such naturalistic interpretations of the Vedic verses connected with the deity Soma, Whitney offers the following explanation of the process by which the deification could have occurred:

"The simple-minded Aryan people, whose whole religion was a worship of the wonderful powers and phenomena of nature, had no sooner perceived that this liquid had the power to elevate the spirits, and produce a temporary frenzy, under the influence of which the

individual was prompted to, and capable of, deeds beyond his natural powers, than they found in it something divine; it was to their apprehension a god, endowing those into whom it entered with god-like powers; the plant which afforded it became to them the king of plants; the process of preparing it was a holy sacrifice; the instruments used therefore were sacred."[76]

This commentary certainly makes out the ancient Vedic Aryans to be a simple-minded and naive people, and we cannot discount the reasonableness of such an interpretation if we accept the purely naturalistic interpretations of the mantras dedicated to Soma in the Vedas. Like most of the other gods, but to a greater degree, Soma is invested with some magical or divine potency, a potency which enhances in all the other gods their native divinity. Says the ṚgVeda:

"O Soma, gladden Varuṇa and Mitra;
cheer Indra Pavamāna ! Indra Viṣṇu.
Cheer thou the gods, the company of Maruts;
Indu, cheer mighty Indra to rejoicing."[77]

This is characteristic of the mantras invoking Soma, and shows the deep kinship, or liaison, of Soma with the

other gods of the pantheon. But it is most especially Indra who is presented in the hymns as the god addicted to drinking the elixir, as the Soma-drinker par excellence:

> "Then Indra at a single draught drank the contents of thirty pails, pails that were filled with Soma-juice".[78]

> "His belly, drinking deepest draughts of Soma, like an ocean swells."[79]

Soma becomes the inspiration in Indra, "who needs the drink to strengthen him to perform the slaying of Vṛtra: hence the drink is called the bolt, and Soma even takes the title of Vṛtra-slayer."[80] Although Keith asserts that "in the vast majority of passages, it is perfectly plain that the Soma plant and its qualities are referred to",[81] he also sees the need for some reservation about this total identification of Soma with the plant itself, and he says, in connection with other associations of Soma: "In all this there is clearly evident the fact that Soma is no mere plant on earth, but is in addition a great celestial deity."[82]

In any case, most indologists have adopted the simple naturalistic approach, and considered Soma, in the

perception of the poets, as the spirit-principle that animates the fermented juice. It is this perception, based on the intoxicating nature of the drink, that inspires the poet to address the god "in the highest strains of veneration." It is in this sense that Martin says of him:

> "All powers belong to him, and all blessings are his to bestow. He clothes the naked, heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, and power to the impotent. He is able to confer immortality on gods and men."[84]

Quite apart from the specifically naturalistic approach, both in the above and in the following passage, we are made aware of the working of a singular Divine Power, and one that is the bestower of salvation:

> "Place me , O Pavamāna, in that everlasting and imperishable world where there is eternal life and glory."[85]

The deity Soma is equated with the moon only from the time of the Atharva Veda,[86] and which must be presumed to be a later addition to the Atharva collection, for such identification is almost wholly absent in the ṚgVeda. Although one hymn of the ṚgVeda[87] lends

itself to such interpretation, Keith avers that it is not an early hymn,[88] and although there appears to be ṚgVedic passages on Soma which may be connected with the moon, "it is a very significant fact that the commentators on the ṚgVeda, despite their familiarity with the moon-theory of Soma, never identify the Soma there with the moon."[89]

BṚHASPATI

Though a relatively minor god, Bṛhaspati is of sufficient importance in the ṚgVeda to command scholarly attention. This god is represented in association with several other gods, and some scholars have taken him as an aspect of Agni,[90] while others have considered him to be a priestly version of Indra. And so he has ~~also~~ been considered "as a compromising link between Brāhmaṇa and Kṣatriya".[91] In the opinion of Bloomfield, the conception of Bṛhaspati is a lofty one. He says:

> "The most significant of all monotheistic personifications is derived from the sphere of worship and ritual namely, the god Bṛhaspati or Brāhmaṇaspati, Lord of Prayer of Devotion."[92]

The monotheistic idea in Bṛhaspati cannot be missed from the simple etymology of the term, i.e., in relation to the concept of Brahma, from the root "bṛh", while the

epithet "Brāhmaṇaspati" emphasizes lordship over prayer and devotion.[93] Thus we are justified in asserting that Bṛhaspati is the protector of prayer or the mantras.[94] Sāyaṇa also interprets the term in a similar way quite consistently.

Invoking him both as Bṛhaspati [95] and as Brāhmaṇaspati[96] the ṚgVeda devotes eleven hymns to him, though the conceptions are mentioned altogether about 50 times. Though he partakes of the characteristics of Agni at times, and of Indra at other times, Bṛhaspati possesses sufficient individuality as a god in his own right.

Despite various associations and anthropomorphisms, Bṛhaspati stands out chiefly as the divine priest. He is both the 'purohita' and the Brahman. Thus he is the protector of the holy power.[97] Keith asserts that "The chief importance of Bṛhaspati lies in the fact that he is in the earlier Vedic period the root from which sprang the god Brahman",[98] the latter continuing to develop high philosophic value.

PṚTHIVĪ

Pṛthivī is the goddess earth, with the etymological sense of that which is extended wide or broad. The goddess, as the Earth-Mother, is revered in the ṚgVeda

only in one hymn,[99] and is involved mostly together with Dyaus, or heaven,[100] the pair of them probably representing the most ancient Vedic deities.[101] Together with Dyaus, the goddess is regarded as the parent of all the gods, and therefore also of all men, since man is made out to have sprung from Vivasvant through Manu.[102] Pṛthivī is invoked in a funeral hymn,[103] and requested to show tenderness and kindness to the dead as to a child.

In later times this goddess, though she never eclipses the major gods such as Viṣṇu and Śiva, retains for her share much praise and propitiation among many Hindus.

SARASVATĪ

In the RgVeda Sarasvatī is invoked as a river and a river-goddess.[104] She is regarded as the mother of all streams, and has seven sisters. She is stated to be divine in her own right, and she descends from the sky, which is clearly "an early anticipation of the common Indian belief of the divine birth of the Ganges".[105] She is invoked to be present at the sacrifices together with the Fathers, which were conducted presumably on her banks. Sarasvatī inspires the sages to compose their hymns, and, although there is no development beyond this idea in the hymns as regards speech, she rises to great importance in later mythology as identified with Vāc, the

goddess of speech, and so becomes the goddess of wisdom, and, quite logically, also the wife of Brahma who creates the universe out of his knowledge of the Vedas.[106] But even in the ṚgVeda superlatives are heaped upon Sarasvatī as the best of rivers, of mothers, and of goddesses.[107] In conformity with this idea, she takes over qualities in common with most of the other deities, and she becomes the bestower of progeny, wealth and immortality. So far as the other gods are concerned, she is mainly connected with the Aśvins. As such, she is also a healer, and she participates in a rite with the Aśvins for healing Indra. In the YajurVeda she is made the wife of the Asvins.[108]

In the Āprī hymns of the ṚgVeda she is invoked together with two other goddesses Bhāratī and Īḍā, with whom, she forms a triad. Although Sarasvatī, even as a river, is attributed with great strength, is considered divine, and tears down the mountains as she descends, like other goddesses of the ṚgVedic pantheon, she does not rise to any prominence comparable to the great male gods.[109]

GODS OF THE AERIAL SPHERE

INDRA

Among all the gods of the ṚgVeda, Indra alone can be

said to be the god par excellence. Only Varuṇa may be said to be a close contender for the highest honours in the Vedic pantheon. Keith says of Indra:

> "Indra is the greatest of the gods of the RgVeda with the solitary exception of Varuṇa, who may be deemed to equal him in might."[110]

Varuṇa, however, is regarded as an earlier deity of Indo-Aryan origin, and also as having many attributes in common with Semitic ideas of God. Indra, on the other hand, is seen as a development on Indian soil, a product of the Indian environment specifically, and expressing the hopes and wishes of Indian man. The development of Indra on Indian soil is clearly expressed by Murray Mitchell:

> "In the Gangetic plain there are three great seasons - the cold, the hot and the rainy. Towards the end of the hot season all nature languishes, the sun pours down its terrible heat, the water courses dry up, the great rivers became mere trickling streams, all around are thousands of acres of sun-baked earth with scarcely a vestige of verdure for the starving cattle. The suffering people look up to the sky and see there the clouds, laden with

life-giving waters, floating in from the ocean; but they move on, impelled by demons who wish to chain them in the recesses of the mountains. The people call on Indra to avert the wide-spread calamity and break the power of the cloud-compelling demons. They pour out to him large libations of the liquor which both he and they love so well - the Soma juice. The flash of the lightning is seen. It is Indra hurling his bolts against the demon Vṛtra. The thunder roars - Ah! that is the demon, struck, and howling, and howling as he flies away. Then the blessed waters rush down to earth, they change the desert into a garden, and man and beast, tree and flower, rejoice in Indra's praise."[111]

Based on the theory of naturalism, the above is effective expression of the development of the idea of Indra as a god who averts national calamities, a god of supreme strength, and therefore the supreme saviour of man in distress. Radhakrishnan also attests to his faith in the climatic conditions of India as important causative factors leading to changes and development of Vedic mythology, especially with regard to the god Indra, when he says:

"When the Aryans entered India they found that, as at present, their prosperity was a mere gamble in rain."[112]

Apart from being a god of great might and immense achievements in battle, that is, apart from being a type of national hero, the ṚgVeda also ascribes to Indra many important cosmic functions such as that of measuring out the wide expanses of space and of supporting the heavens. And moral characteristics of smiting sinners are also attributed to him. However, these attributes are in the ṚgVeda the peculiar attributes of Varuṇa, and it is in this light that we should see the career of Indra. Says Bhat in this regard:

> "The attribution of the cosmic function of supporting the connection of the idea of sin and punishment are no doubt understandable on the assumption of the supreme position of Indra. But when we remember that these notions are peculiarly associated with Varuṇa, their attribution to Indra appears to be deliberate. And if it is so, here probably is some little evidence of Varuṇa's supersession by Indra."[113]

The same investigator also convincingly presents the thesis that the ṚgVeda shows evidence[114] of a real tussle

between the followers of Indra and Varuṇa for establishing the supremacy of their own god.[115]

That among all the gods Indra must be reckoned as "the principal god of the Vedic Aryans",[116] is quite a safe conclusion on the basis that the largest number of hymns, 250 hymns to be precise, that is, almost a quarter of the entire ṚgVeda saṁhitā, are in his honour. And, in addition, he shares with other deities at least fifty more.[117]

The picture of Indra in the ṚgVeda is highly anthropomorphised, and this would appear to conform with the requirements of a national hero-god. Although Max Muller states that the name Indra has its root in the term "indu" meaning "drop" and that therefore Indra is the great bringer of rain, the overall impression supplied by the hymns is more a picture of great strength and valour.[118] Chattopadhyaya says that Indra etymologically means 'strength', and that "Indra was definitely the most manly of the gods".[119] Even upon his birth he established his supremacy among the gods.[120]

Indra is of irresistible might and of great prowess in battle. He is agile and handsome with a tawny beard.[121] While the thunder-bolt is given, most infrequently, to a few other gods, it is Indra alone who

is the vajrin, 'bearer of the bolt' par excellence.[122] His thunder-bolt, which bespeaks his great strength, has a hundred angles and a thousand points. He is also endowed with a bow and with hundred-pointed arrows. In the Atharva Veda he is also given a net with which to capture and overcome the enemy.[123] His thunder-bolt, which is of metal or gold, is fashioned for him by the god Tvastṛ.[124] The war-god in Indra is dramatically revealed in the following ṚgVedic hymn, as his second nature from the moment of his birth:

> "As soon as he was born, the slayer of Vṛtra grasped his arrow and asked his mother: 'Who are they that are renowned as fierce warriors?'[125]

As the bearer of the thunder-bolt, Indra is not only a god of the thunder, as Max Muller described him and as presented even by the ancient commentator Yāska,[126] but the symbol of his greatest and most prominent martial exploits against the cloud-dragon Vṛtra. He is therefore popularly known as Vṛtra-han, or slayer of Vṛtra. As such he is fittingly celebrated in the ṚgVeda:

> "Now will I sing the feats of Indra, which he of the thunder-bolt did of old. He smote Āhi (the cloud dragon), then he poured forth the

waters, he divided the rivers and the mountains. He smote Āhi by the mountain where Tvastṛ forged for him the glorious bolt."[127]

Besides being the great dragon-slayer, in the ṚgVeda Indra is the great Soma-drinker, said to be the exhilarating and intoxicating juice pressed from some mountain plant of unknown origin. Although a traditionalist interpretation would oppose this sense of the passages, there is no denying some type of strong exhilarating effect produced by or associated with Soma-juice. Indra is the champion drinker of this juice, and the ṚgVeda states that his mother fed him with it to surfeit even from his birth.

Such a conclusion is based on researches following the traditional western naturalistic lines of interpretation. Yet, we cannot say for sure that it is, from that point of view, a false conclusion.

"On that day that thou was born, thou didst from love of it, drink the mountain-juices of the Soma plant. Of old, the youthful mother who bore thee, satiated thee with it in the house of thy mighty father."[128]

Indra is characteristically represented as quaffing

huge quantities of Soma, which drive him "like violent blasts" to victory in battle and destruction of the enemy hosts, of whom even five tribes are reckoned as less than a mote for Indra.[129] His passion for the juice so blinded him that he is said to have caught his father by the foot and slew him.[130] S N Sharma says:

> ""He (Indra) embodies completely the human qualities of brag and bluster gluttony, drunkenness and lust."[131]

Indra's birth is miraculous, for he is born from his mother's side. His parents are the god Dyaus (Father Heaven) and Pṛthivī (Mother Earth). In later Hinduism Aditi is made his mother. Agni is his twin brother. Just as there is reflected a tussle for supremacy between Agni and Varuṇa, so also there is a tussle for leadership and supremacy between Indra and Varuṇa and between Indra and Dyaus-Pṛthivī. Although Indra is victorious, it is a temporary victory, for "the gods of the Hindus are like beings who reign for a time and then give place to successors."[132]

MĀTARIŚVĀN

Mātariśvān is a deity that is mentioned 21 times in the ṚgVeda.[133] The name itself means "he who grows in his mother", and, as it is difficult to directly connect

any physical phenomenon consistently with this deity, it appears to refer more directly than most gods to some kind of ethical or even spiritual entity. Still, the term Mātariśvān is most closely connected to Agni,[134] though A C Das makes out a closer connexion with Vāyu.[135] In the famous monistic-type verse of the ṚgVeda, Mātariśvān is clearly distinct from Agni.[136] Yet again he is identified with Agni also.[137]

Like the legend of Prometheus, it is Mātariśvān who, from the higher reaches of space brought down Agni to earth and gave it to Bhṛgu, that is, to men.[138] In the YajurVeda and the Brāhmaṇas Mātariśvān is more pronouncedly the god of wind.

VĀYU

Vāyu is regarded as the god of wind, who has a longish hymn dedicated to him.[139] Vāta, who is quite distinct in character from Vayu,[140] has two short hymns addressed to him.[141] Clayton feels that Vāta is the wind itself while Vāyu is the god of wind.[142] Das, however, identifies the two, and, in translating one verse pertaining to Vāta refers to the god as "soul of the Gods" and "germ of the world." Keith, again, refers to Vāta in the same verse as "breath of the gods" and says that "Vāta is merely the wind in its power, sweeping along great clouds of dust."[143]

Vāyu is closely connected with Indra in the ṚgVeda, and shares six hymns with him. He is presented as "thousand-eyed", "touching the sky", and as "beautiful". He races along in a chariot yoked to 99, 100 or 1000 horses, and he is Indra's charioteer.

In the great Puruṣa-Sūkta, Vāyu is shown as being born from the breath of Puruṣa.[144] Elsewhere he is the son-in-law of the god Tvastṛ. He is said to have generated the Maruts, though he is not shown to have any other connexion with them, except that he is once accompanied by them.

Like Indra, though not to the same extent, he is a drinker of the Soma-juice, which he also protects. Though not very prominent in the ṚgVeda, in later popular Hinduism Vāyu is well-known as the parent of the monkey-god Hanumat. Though Vāta is on the whole less anthropomorphised than Vāyu, his moral nature gives to him both dignity and distinction, as in the following verse:

"And, Vāta, thou art our father, our brother,
and our friend;
Cause us to live.
From the treasure of immortality, which is
deposited yonder in thy house, O Vāta, cause us

to live."[145]

PARJANYA

Parjanya is strongly characterized by elemental associations.[146] He was "the god of rain, thunder and lightning of the early Aryans"[147] at a time when they had been in a nomadic and pastoral stage, and did not settle down as agriculturists".[148] He is thus of a more ancient time than the development of the conception of Indra, and this is attested by the fact of the existence of the parallel concept of Perkunas in Lithuanian, meaning thunder-god, and of Fairguni in Gothic, and of Fiorgyn in Norse.[149] Therefore, it appears that he is quite distinct from Indra, though in later times, he is superseded and displaced by Indra,[150] whose complex and multiple functions were more suitable to the Aryans in their new land of settlement.[151]

Parjanya is stated to be born of Dyaus. He has a son[152] who is probably Soma, as Soma is stated elsewhere to be the son of Parjanya.[153] Parjanya is often associated with Vāta, and sometimes with Indra. Though he is called father, and ruler of the world, he generally retains his association with the element of rain and thunder cloud.[154]

RUDRA

In the ṚgVeda three hymns only are concerned with Rudra. He shares one hymn with Soma, and is altogether mentioned about 75 times.[155] The term Rudra is taken to mean "howler" or "roarer", and often also has the meaning 'ruddy' or 'red'.[156] Keith says that, although the name itself is clearly derived from the root rud, and that it is fair enough to take it in the normal meaning of 'cry', the original nature of the god is not thereby clarified.[157] However, despite Keith's doubts on the matter, other authorities have regularly taken the term in the sense of "howler", and this is not too far from the sense of 'cry', or 'one who causes weeping'.

The ṚgVeda portrays Rudra as a fierce deity,[158] he wields the lighting and the thunder-bolt, and is quite unassailable.[159] He is strongest of the strong,[160] and destructive like a terrible beast.[161] His character is both malevolent and benevolent,[162] and he is frequently implored to avert calamities for his devotees,[163] to free men from disease,[164] to remove sickness,[165] and to bestow longevity.[166] He is the god of many healing powers[167] and he grants remedies to men.[168] His more terrible side becomes apparent in the prayer that beseeches him not to send his man-slaying missile at the devotees.[169] He is even directly referred to as man-slaying.[170] Says Keith in this regard:

"..... his malevolence is very prominent: his wrath is continually deprecated, he is invoked not to assail his worshipers with celestial fire, and to make his lightning fall elsewhere."[171]

In the ṚgVeda the term śiva, is used only as an adjectival epithet meaning 'auspicious', and, while the malevolent aspect of Rudra is continued, and even heightened in the Brāhmaṇa literature, it is only in the later Sūtra literature that the terms Śiva and Śaṁkara in their nominal senses are used for Rudra.[172] These terms are "evidently intended to be euphemistic: the great and dreaded god must be treated as auspicious in order to make him so in point of fact."[173] This is a dexterous and plainly accommodating development,[174] for, so far as the ṚgVeda is concerned, many of the later characteristics associated with Śiva do not appear to blend too easily with the ṚgVedic Rudra.[175]

As Śiva, however, Rudra is significantly linked to the later development of the Vedic culture, as the result of the syncretism of ideas and practices drawn both from early Vedic and from non-Aryan sources. In the ṚgVeda, however, Rudra is the father of the Maruts, who are spoken of as the Rudras or the Rudriyas. Rudra is also identified in one passage with the god Agni.[176]

MARUTS or RUDRAS

As indicated above, the Maruts are the sons of Rudra. But they are also the sons of Indra, and their mother is represented as the speckled cow Pṛṣṇi, which represents the swollen rain-clouds. So they are said to be the storm-gods.

The Maruts are also stated to be sons of Agni and of Vāyu, and of heaven. They form a troupe, and are said to be thrice seven[177] or thrice sixty[178] in number. They are all of equal age, of one mind and of one abode.[179] Their bride is the goddess Rodasi[180] who stands for lightning,[181] as the Maruts are storm-gods. The simplest explanation of the Maruts is that "they are the deities of the winds in their aspect as bearing the storm-clouds."[182] Later Hindu tradition connects the Maruts with the wind itself, rather than the storm.

In their fierce aspect they derive their characteristics from Rudra.[183] They are usually represented as playful like children or calves and are terrible like wild beasts. They ride on their steeds, which are the winds, and they make a terrible noise as the roaring of the wind or the thunder. They bring rain with them, and they are also bringers of light and dispellers of darkness. Their most important function is aiding Indra in slaying Vṛtra, and they also appear sometimes as

drinkers of the Soma.

DYAUS-PITAR

The god Dyaus-Pitar belongs to a very early time in the history of the Vedic Aryans, a time when they had not yet separated from other branches of the ancient Aryan stock. Vedic Dyaus and Greek Zeus are obviously the same, so are Dyaus-Pitar and the Latin Jupiter. Dyaus-Pitar is the "Heaven Father", ancient Aryan god of the vast expanse of the sky. Heaven-Father and Earth Mother are often found together in the mantras, as Dyāvā-Pṛthivī, as the parents of all the gods and of all things, and have been celebrated thus from very early times.[184] Das says in this respect:

> "The budding Aryan mind was doubtless greatly impressed by the vastness of the bright sky above and of the Earth below, which seemed to be joined with each other in the distant horizon, and to have produced by their union not only the animals and plants of the earth, but also the bright sun, moon, planets and stars, representing the shining ones or Devas, that moved between them."[185]

Nothing could be more natural than that of "the bright, wide-spreading Heaven taking into its strong

embrace the rich bountiful Earth which stretched beneath it".[186] And such a marriage of the two divinities is fittingly celebrated in later Hindu texts.[187]

Although no complete hymn is devoted to Dyaus, he has six hymns together with Pṛthivī, and since the two together are styled pitara (father)[188] or Mātara, mothers,[189] or janitrī, mothers,[190] we may either take it in a simple poetic sense, or, as Keith avers, "much weight cannot be laid on the contrast between male and female".[191] Dyaus is said to be rich in seed, which is obviously his productive capacity as Divine Father of all. He is also said to be a black steed, decked with pearls, which refers to the night sky and the stars. He is called a red bull which bellows downward, referring to the thunder and the storms let loose from the skies. His smiling through the clouds appears to be a reference to the lightning. He is even mentioned as holding the thunder-bolt, which, again, brings him very close to the Greek conception of Zeus.

It appears that, although Dyaus was probably a prominent and sovereign divinity with the very early Aryan peoples, his fame even in the earliest ṚgVedic times already shows signs of being on the wear, and he comes to be replaced by other more recently conceived gods, and more particularly by Indra.[192]

VARUṆA

Like the other great gods of the ṚgVedic pantheon, Varuṇa is also a highly anthropomorphized deity, with arms, hands, feet and many functions akin to humans.[193] Still Varuṇa has many cosmic dimensions to his character. His eye is declared to be the sun which sees all things,[194] he is thousand-eyed and far-sighted.[195] Sometimes Varuṇa shares his honours with the deity Mitra. Thus Mitra is the day and Varuṇa becomes the night. Still, Varuṇa is represented not as a petty chieftain, but as a samrāt or universal monarch, and that too, of cosmic significance.[196] He is the king of both gods and men,[197] and king of the universe.[198]

Varuṇa is one of the Ādityas; the sons of Aditi, the goddess who stands for boundlessness or infinity. Varuṇa is the best of the Ādityas, who are given as seven in one passage,[199] and eight in another.[200] In the Brāhmaṇas their number is fixed as twelve, and that is the number that has come down into modern Hinduism. In conformity with their number as eight the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa[201] gives their names as Mitra, Varuṇa, Āryaman, Ahiṁsā, Bhāga, Dhātṛ, Indra and Vivasvant.

Varuṇa's most important characterization in the ṚgVeda is as a god of high moral stature.[202] Says Martin in this regard:

"Indeed the attributes and functions ascribed to Varuṇa impart to his character an unparalleled moral grandeur and a sanctity far surpassing that attributed to any other Vedic deity."[203]

The moral idea is beautifully expressed by Vasiṣṭha, worshiper of Varuṇa, when he prays for forgiveness of sins committed:

"Be gracious, O Mighty God, be gracious. I have sinned through want of power; be gracious . . . . . .
It was not our will, O Varuṇa, but some seduction which led us astray; passion, dice, thoughtlessness. The stronger perverts the weaker, and even sleep occasions sin".[204]

In many ways, Varuṇa may be said to be the god of righteousness, with whom the worshiper can establish a truly personal ethical relationship. In any case, this may seem to be the case more in relation to Varuṇa than in relation to any other god of the Vedic pantheon.[205] As he is keeper of the moral order, of righteousness and truth, Varuna is also keeper of physical order. As lord of the <u>ṛta</u> he is the governor of the moral and physical aspects of the world. His ordinances, both moral and

physical, are fixed and unassailable.[206] It is through these ordinances that all things proceed as they do. No creature can even wink without his power,[207] and he is also the eternal witness of men's truth and falsehood.[208]

Although other gods of the pantheon are sometimes attributed with similar excellences, in their combination of both moral and physical aspects these characteristics are the province of Varuṇa. In this respect, "the conception of Varuṇa is grand indeed".[209]

The ṚgVeda records show also the decline of Varuṇa, with Indra assuming the position of Saṁrāt or Universal Monarch.[210]

SŪRYA

Ten hymns of the ṚgVeda are devoted to Sūrya, who is regarded "as the sun god in his simplest and most direct form," and whose "natural character is very obvious in all that is told of him".[211] Such a simple statement, however, may not cover all aspects of the matter, for we see Sūrya being described as "the soul of all that moves or stands".[212] Also, if Savitṛ be accepted as a version of Sūrya, the matter becomes more complex, as Savitṛ is the deity of the well-known Gāyatrī Mantra, wherein the deity is supplicated for mental and spiritual sustenance.[213] In one hymn, Savitṛ appears to be identified

with some aspects of the setting sun.[214] Martin, however, says that the two names Sūrya and Savitṛ, are used interchangeably in the Vedas for the same deity, and that the character of strength (and therefore, impelling force) is similarly ascribed to Savitṛ. Keith is also of the same opinion.[215]

Sūrya is an Āditya of special brilliance, and though in the ṚgVeda he is eclipsed in this role by Varuṇa, later Hinduism regards him as the primary Āditya. He is the son of Dyaus, and in the Puruṣa Sūkta, he originates from the eye of Puruṣa.[216] In other passages he is the son of Ūṣas,[217] husband of Ūṣas[218] and also brother of Ūṣas,[219] which roles become intelligible also on the basis of some form of naturalistic interpretation.

Sūrya's primary function appears to be to bring warmth and to be a quickener for gods and men. He rouses up the world and is the source of life and growth.[220] He dispels the powers of darkness and also drives off sickness and disease. Sūrya has a chariot which is drawn by a single horse, or by seven horses, and sometimes by an indefinite number. In one passage the sun is itself made out to be the horse.[221]

Sūrya is closely connected with Pūṣan and Bhāga, though they have several distinctive characteriza-

tions.[222] In the ṚgVeda eleven hymns are devoted to Savitṛ and eight to Pūṣan.

VIṢṆU

Though a god commanding great devotion and allegiance in later Hinduism, in the ṚgVeda Viṣṇu has only five hymns devoted to him, and he is mentioned about a hundred times.

The term Viṣṇu means 'to pervade', and thus Viṣṇu is the deity whose presence is everywhere. Viṣṇu is swift of motion, and he set into motion ninety steeds with four manes. This is taken to refer to the 360 days of the year and the four seasons, which makes Viṣṇu the ordainer of time.

Viṣṇu is allied with Indra in the latter's duel with Vṛtra,[223] and together with Indra, Viṣṇu also slays the demon.[224] Viṣṇu is also mentioned as the promoter of conception and the protector of the embryo.[225]

By far the greatest feat performed by Viṣṇu is his action of taking three strides. This is interpreted in his role of the sun, with its rising, crossing the zenith, and setting. Another interpretation that is seen in it is "the manifestation of one and the same god, as Agni on Earth, Indra or Vāyu in the atmosphere, and as

the sun in heaven.".[226] Both types of interpretations are supported by various classical Indian commentators.

According to the ṚgVeda itself, the bare description is that the first step was on earth, the second in mid-heaven, and the third step is visible only to the gods.[227] Viṣṇu is celebrated as the god of the highest heaven, where the gods rejoiced,[228] and where there exists a well of honey.[229] Viṣṇu's closeness to human interests attests to his importance, and "it would be impossible to deny to Viṣṇu the position of a great god in the period of the Ṛgveda."[230]

AŚVINS

The Aśvins are the twin gods of the morning and the evening twilight. Though less precisely defined of all the gods, they are quite frequently mentioned in the ṚgVeda - more than fifty hymns are addressed to them, and they are mentioned over 400 times.[231]

The word Aśvin means "possessed of horses". Thus Aśvins means "riders", and the Asvins are said to be riding about everywhere. "The presence of the Asvins is ubiquitous; they are declared to be in the heaven, the air, in plants, houses, the mountain top, above and below".[232] They ride out along their golden pathways. However, their most significant function is during the

early morning before dawn breaks, in the twilight, when they awaken and bring on Ūṣas, the dawn, by yoking her chariot. Thus, they are especially the gods of the first light, and they drive away the darkness.[233]

The Aśvins are children of Dyaus, but they also have other gods as parents. They are often joined in their car by Sūryā, who is their common wife, and who is therefore also called Aśvinī. However, Sūrya is also regarded as the wife of the god Soma, in which case the Aśvins have to be regarded as groomsmen who conduct the bride to the husband.[234] Keith[235] points out that the function of the Aśvins relate to marriages, to safely conduct the bride to her husband's home in their golden car. They are also matchmakers and quickeners of life.

As quickeners of life, one of the Aśvin's important functions is thus related to the care of the needy, the distressed, and the sick. They are regarded as physicians of the gods. They restore youth and prolong life.[236] They give sight to the blind,[237] and make the lame walk,[238] They are even credited with being able to fit on an iron leg for a soldier who had lost his leg in battle.[239] Das is of the opinion that such feats of surgery must have been actually performed in Vedic times by Hindu physicians.[240] The Aśvins are also spoken of as the Nāsatyas.

ŪṢAS

Ūṣas is the goddess of the dawn, and "the hymns that are addressed to her are among the most brilliant in the whole of the Saṁhitā.[241] Twenty hymns are addressed to her, and she is mentioned about 300 times. Although highly anthropomorphised, like many of the other gods, she is a deity "whose natural character is in no way obscured by personification".[242] Indeed, they are the very poetic descriptions which warms us to her, and which show the inspiration of the Vedic poets. Macdonell says of her:

> "Ūṣas is the most graceful creation of the Vedic poetry and there is no more charming figure in the descriptive religious lyrics of any other literature."[243]

Ūṣas decks herself in beautiful robes and displays her bosom,[244] and shows her lovely form.[245] She is clothed in light and drives away the darkness.[246] As she is born again and again, she is ever young. There is a melancholy note in her appearance for man, as she reminds men of the inexorable passage of time.

Ūṣas has a very close relationship with Sūrya. As she precedes him she and is also followed by him, she is made out to be the mother of the sun-god,[247] as well as

his daughter. Yet again he pursues her as a lover.[248] She is also represented as born of the night, and like all the gods, also of Dyaus.

Though normally Indra cooperates with Ūṣas in ushering in the light, once he is said to have become hostile and to have crushed her chariot[249] with his thunderbolt.

Through this sketch of the major divinities as given in the ṚgVeda, we can appreciate the close intimacy that existed between the several gods and the vast arena of the natural world.

While we may often invariably be drawn into feeling that the Vedic Ṛṣis, while representing the gods in such direct materialistic terms, are also attempting, through that imagery, to express the workings of some transcending power, at times spiritual but often plainly supernatural, we yet cannot doubt on the whole the buoyant exuberance of the poetic fancies of these earliest seers, which made a god of any aspect or form of power, glory or beauty. This was their way of communion with the spirit of nature.[250] Radhakrishnan says in this regard:

> "The process of god-making in the factory of man's mind cannot be seen so clearly anywhere else as in the Ṛg-Veda"[251]

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121. Clayton, A C op cit p 73

122. Keith, A B op cit p 124
123. AV 8.8.5/8
124. RV 1.32.1
125. RV 8.45.4
126. Chattopadhyaya, K op cit p 100
127. RV 1.32.1
128. RV 3.48.2
129. RV 10.119
130. RV 4.18.12; 3.48.4
131. Sharma, S N op cit p 55
132. Martin, E G op cit p 48
133. Keith, A B op cit p 138
134. ibid p 138
135. Das, A C Rgvedic Culture p 471
136. RV 1.164.46
137. RV 1.96.4; 3.5.9
138. RV 1.60.1
139. RV 4.46
140. Keith, A B op cit p 139
141. RV 10.168,186
142. Clayton, A C op cit
143. Keith, A B op cit p 139
144.
145. RV 10.186.2
146. Keith, A B op cit p 140
147. RV 5.83
148. Das, A C op cit p 62
149. ibid p 102
150. Martin, E G op cit p 79
151. Das, A C op cit p 93
152. RV 7.101.1
153. RV 9.82.3
154. Keith, A B op cit p 141

155. ibid p 142
156. Clayton, A C op cit p 76
157. Keith, A B op cit p 146
158. RV 2.33.9
159. RV 7.46.1
160. RV 2.33.3
161. RV 2.33.11
162. Das, A C op cit pp 444/5
163. RV 5.51.13
164. RV 1.114.1
165. RV 7.46.2
166. RV 2.33.2
167. RV 7.46.3
168. RV 2.33.12
169. RV 2.33.2
170. RV 4.3.6
171. Keith, A B op cit p 144
172. Clayton, A C op cit p 77
173. Keith, A B op cit p 146
174. Dandekar, R N op cit p 266
175. Keith, A B op cit pp 148/9
176. RV 2.1.6
177. RV 1.1336
178. RV 8.96.8
179. Keith, A B op cit p 151
180. RV 1.167.4
181. Das, A C op cit p 104
182. Keith, A B op cit p 152
183. RV 7.56. 9
184. Martin, E Q op cit p 26
185. Das, A C op cit p 77
186. Martin, E Q op cit p 26
187. Ait Brah 4.27

188. RV 1.59.2
189. RV 1.155.3
190. RV 10.110.9
191. Keith, A B op cit p 95
192. Clayton, A C op cit p 62
193. Keith, A B op cit p 96
194. RV 7.61.1
195. RV 1.25.5
196. RV 1.25.10
197. RV 2.27.10
198. RV 5.85.3
199. RV 9.114.3
200. RV 10.72.8
201. RV 1.1.9.1
202. Keith, A B op cit p 97
203. Martin, E Q op cit p 42
204. RV 7.86.3/6
205. Stephen, D J op cit pp 9/10
206. RV 3.54.18
207. RV 2.28.6
208. RV 7.49.3
209. Das, A C op cit p 81
210. ibid p 84
211. Keith, A B op cit p 104
212. RV 1.115.1
213. RV 3.64.10
214. RV 2.38
215. Keith, A B op cit p 105
216. RV 10.90.12
217. RV 7.78.3
218. RV 7.75.5
219. RV 1.123.5
220. Martin, E Q op cit pp 35/6

221. RV 7.77.3
222. Keith, A B op cit pp 106/7
223. RV 6.69
224. RV 6.20.2
225. RV 7.36.9; 10.184
226. Sharma, S N op cit pp 64/5
227. RV 1.22.20
228. RV 8.29.7
229. RV 1.154.5
230. Keith, A B op cit p 109
231. ibid p 113
232. ibid p 114
233. ibid p 115
234. RV 10.85.9, 26
235. Keith, A B op cit p 115
236. RV 1.116.10
237. RV 1.116.16
238. RV 1.112.8
239. RV 1.112.10; 116.15
240. Das, A C op cit p 449
241. Keith, A B op cit p 119
242. Sharma, S N op cit p 67
243. Macdonell, A A Vedic Mythology p 12
244. RV 1.92.4
245. RV 11.123.11
246. RV 5.80.56
247. RV 7.78.3
248. RV 1.115.2
249. RV 2.15.6
250. RAD IP I p 78
251. ibid p 73

Chapter 3.0 THE VEDAS : THEOLOGICAL VALUES

3.1 POLYTHEISM

At first sight, the various gods, and the few goddesses of the Vedas give the appearance of undisguised polytheism. As we saw earlier, the fact of the plurality of gods need not lead to a polytheism. There is no inherent logic in mere plurality that points to polytheism, for even a single object can have many and different appellations which act merely as referents with respect to it. It does not require much intuition to realise that within any given metaphysical system, and Hinduism is certainly a many-sided metaphysical system, a multiple set of attributive names can operate as indications of an unknowable and invisible central reality which is God.

In spite of such a possible line of approach, most Indologists and other interested critics, have flatly and unambiguously ascribed total and unmitigated polytheism to the ideas of deity as revealed in the ṚgVeda. In this vein Sharrock says of the ṚgVedic Aryans:

> "Their gods, the 'Bright Ones' (Devas) were for the most part the gods of nature, and their religion was distinctly polytheistic."[1]

It is understandable that an anthropological-style approach to the Vedic scriptures would create the predisposition to read into them first, a simple naturalist-orientated attitude to deity, leading to a plurality of gods representing various different powers of nature and culminating in a rank polytheism. As mentioned earlier, a radically naturalistic approach to the interpretation of the hymns must envisage at the same time a plurality of gods and lead to a polytheism. Max Muller reconstructs the picture of early Vedic man as follows:

> "In the hymns of the Vedas we see man left to himself to solve the riddle of the world. We see him crawling on like a creature of the earth with all the desires and weakness of his animal nature. Food, wealth and power, a large family and a long life, are the theme of his daily prayers. But he begins to lift up his eyes. He stares at the tent of the heaven, and asks who supports it? He opens his eyes to the winds and asks them whence and whither? He is awakened from darkness and slumber by the light of the sun, and him whom his eyes cannot behold, and who seems to grant him the daily pittance of his existence, he calls 'his life, his breath, his brilliant Lord and protec-

tor.'"[2]

This is a frank and empirically formal presentation of a projection based on the Vedic hymns themselves, and which are naturalistically interpreted. It asserts the outwardness of the Vedic prayers rather than the inwardness of them, which latter quality is almost unanimously asserted by all critics of the so-called 'late' hymns of the RgVeda, as well as of the later phases of Vedic literature. As natural objects become 'the theme of his prayers,' the Vedic Aryans, according to this quotation, practiced a genuine form of polytheism.

Vedic polytheism has also been said to be inward, in the sense that abstract ideas such as Śraddhā (Faith), and Manyuh (Wrath) have also become in some sense objects of worship. We should notice that any definition of polytheism must contain essentially two ideas which have to exist side by side: the idea of worship or adoration of different ideas or forces or entities, and the idea of a clear distinction among the objects thus worshipped or adored.

As already noted earlier, the Vedic deities are fluid in their nature and operation and often appear to merge and coalesce with other somewhat kindred representations of deity. But, under such circumstances, the

crux of polytheism must be stated to be that, if, even in the presence of suggestions of such mergings, some persistence of the invocation of one deity as against one or more others can be demonstrated, then alone a verdict of constructive polytheism may be delivered.

One recent researcher places the interpretational accent on naturalistic considerations intermixed with material ideas; when she says in relation to the ṚgVeda:

> "The bulk of the Saṁhitā can be characterised as poetry of praise and prayer addressed to the gods. The earlier substratum of the pantheon was an apotheosis of nature and evoked awe and wonder.. The anthropomorphic description of their form, dress, weapons, feats and bounty is frequently charged with poetry although the prayers are mostly crude and uninspired."[3]

This suggests that, against the background of pluralistic conceptions of deity, there is also evidence of the historical development of polytheistic conceptions. It appears reasonable to expect that even if Vedic mythology were approached from a naturalistic standpoint and this includes, if not polytheism, at least a pluralistic conception of deity, the mythology should not be taken as a series of static conceptions prefigured

by underlying (again static) spiritual or historical ideas. Rather it is more reasonable to view the mythology against a background of moving events and circumstances, historical, social and psychological.

A well-known modern researcher in the Indological field, R N Dandekar, expresses substantially this view when he says:

> "It must be remembered that, only on the background of the history of the development of human thought as a whole, can the Vedic mythology be studied in its proper perspective. The personality of the Vedic god consists of diverse - and in many cases, mutually inconsistent or even contradictory - elements. To explain this mythological fact on the basis of 'Naturalism' or mere syncretism, as has been done by some early schools of Vedists, is to take a static view of things. It must be emphasized that the Vedic mythology is essentially an evolutionary mythology."[4]

The historical development of a people is always reflected in the stratifications of their social institutions. And in a corresponding manner, their psychological-spiritual development is to a large extent

reflected in their mythology. For mythology is not the conscious creation of a few isolated or wayward individuals, but the collective intuitive consciousness of an entire race set in a relatively specific psycho-spiritual world in each generation or age. But this is not to say that specific gifted individuals in specific ages might not give a peculiar direction or impart a striking spiritual dimension to certain aspects of the mythology. Indian metaphysical thought-patterns do not discount a genuinely spiritual base for both race and individual, and, as we shall see in later sections, this base is not essentially removed from the notion of Supreme Divinity in its generalized operations in different individuals.

We are here anticipating an argument that the polytheistic mythological framework revealed in the RgVeda need not, within the premises of Indian metaphysical thought, which thought itself can be traced to many sections of the Vedas, indicate a mutually exclusive refraction of the notion of a Supreme Power, although our investigations might appear to satisfy the above-stated condition of persistent worship of different deities and the persistence of these differences in opposition to each other. Therefore the interesting and pertinent question that must arise in this connexion is, what then are the logical conditions or set of circumstances, under

which a true and unmitigated polytheism could be established. The Greek model immediately comes to mind as an obvious example, but this is extending our thought in anticipation of a later discussion. To return to our line of thought to the mythology as such, we have stated that the gods, and therefore their various, and even inconsistent, characteristics, are the summated and integrated products of different ages.

Looking at Vedic mythology in this evolutionary guise, it is not difficult to accept the supporting perspective offered by Dandekar, when he says further:

> "It [Vedic mythology] has reached and responded to the many vicissitudes in the life of the Vedic people; and, with each vicissitude, new elements have been introduced into the personality of the Vedic god. It is this dynamic process that has been responsible for the complex character of the Vedic gods. It is, however, not impossible, through a critical study on the Vedic literature with the aid, wherever necessary, of comparative philosophy, comparative mythology, and anthropology, on the one hand, to explain why particular gods have, in particular periods, dominated the Vedic mythology, and, on the other, to fix the

plausible order in which the various elements must have come to be introduced into the personality of an individual god and thereby to present, as it were, a picture of his 'becoming'."[5]

The universe in which we live is a universe of interaction between organisms on the one hand and environment on the other. Races as a whole and the individuals comprising them are constantly subjected to the pressures of the environment, which in matters of religious beliefs and metaphysics often assume subtle psychological forms, and express themselves all too unconsciously in their literature.

The world of beliefs, and the expression of them in the overt action of a people, which must include social and psychological elements, and which often fall legitimately within the province of ritual magic and myth, cannot remain the province of a simple time-period such as a decade or even a century, or the preserve of a small section of a larger nation, for interaction among people, and interaction within the environment which gives rise to development in a true sense, must be presumed. And when we come to consider the vast literature of the Vedas, and the great wars of the Aryan people over whom it had such influence and who produced

it, it is unreasonable to claim any significant immunity for it. Sukumari Bhattacharji clearly indicates the several influences acting upon the production of the RgVeda, when she says:

> "When we think of religion and philosophy of the RgVeda we are at once plunged into the complex of beliefs and practices of a people composed of several racial and cultural elements whose history stretched over at least a millennium. Also, during this period this literature was evolving and did not remain static as a finished product; hence it contains traces of the various stages of its development - both in mythology and in metaphysics."[6]

This gives a nice reinforcement to the proposal of Dandekar of Vedic mythology being a mythology in evolution. From the point of view of the history of ideas, it becomes necessary, indeed imperative, for us to understand and to bring about coherence and order in our thoughts regarding the contents of the RgVeda as best as we can. This in itself is a formidable enough task, and the description of its mythology as being complex is, to say the least, a fair enough description. Many a scholar has baulked at the challenges the task presents, and many too have been led into easy generalizations and sweeping

characterizations regarding the nature of the mythology.[7]

While the scholar and the historian must endeavour to order the data in a regular fashion, the material of the ṚgVeda does not appear to co-operate in any manner with such an attempt, except in the most general fashion. For the Vedic Ṛṣis themselves show no evidence of concern for a total presentation of the mythology of the ṚgVeda. It should be no surprise, therefore, that it should be said of the Vedas that

> "It is a curious fact too, that in so great a collection of hymns there is so little attempt to weave the scattered religious instincts and aspirations of the time into a consistent whole; nor any evident effort after ordered religious conceptions of the universe, . . . In spite of the many statements in the hymns of the Aryan sages as to the relations of the gods to each other, there is nothing but inconsistencies in the genealogies of those gods, and a complete lack of agreement between the various assertions that are made about them. It is impossible to construct a theology out of the materials found in the Vedas."[8]

And in this respect it is wise to remember that even

polytheism, when it is strictly and regularly defined as a clear and unambiguous alternative to monotheism, becomes a theology of its own kind. If we say that it is impossible to construct a theology out of the Vedic mythology, what we are saying also is that it is impossible to read into them a clear and consistent statement of polytheism.

As we have already noted, the theology of the ṚgVeda has, in fact, been described by some as "distinctly polytheistic". In any case, many writers are content with characterizing the pattern of worship of the Vedic Ṛṣis as being polytheistic.[9] Even Max Muller says that "If we must employ technical terms, the religion of the Veda is polytheism, not monotheism."[10] The scholarly caution in this way of putting the idea is obvious and necessary and shows that polytheism is a term that can attain different meanings in different circumstances. There is no easy road to its understanding given the complexity of ancient cultures, and especially Vedic culture. A facile and easy fundamentalist interpretation of the ṚgVeda does not yield satisfying results. We must again quote at length from the savant Dandekar whose insight into the matter affords us a better understanding than most other sources do of the intricacies of ṚgVedic culture and the need for caution. He says:

"Even on a casual perusal, one will realise that the Veda presents the picture of a highly complex character. It seems almost impossible to characterize the religion of the Veda as belonging to any specific category, such as polytheism, pantheism, or animism. Considering that the Vedic religion is the growth of many centuries and that it has been developed and elaborated by the fertile and often subtle brains of a number of generations of active people, it becomes quite understandable that it should defy any attempt to define it sweepingly in one word. What is true of the Vedic religion is equally true of the Vedic mythology, for in the conception of Indian religion, particularly of the Vedic religion, the elements of theology, mythology, ritual, and magic are inextricably interlaced."[11]

If simple characterizations cannot reveal the true picture of Vedic mythology, and cannot give rise to a correct interpretational medium, they may still serve as aids in gaining insight from various vantage points into the nature of the field of our enquiry. They can provide some feeling through which we may somewhat appreciate the manner in which the Vedic Ṛṣis looked upon the Divine Power, and how they dealt with related issues. If we

accept, and from many perspectives it seems quite reasonable to so accept, that Vedic mythology is a mythology in historical evolution, there is no reason to deny the possibility of seizing upon clusters of thought within a limited range, as these pertain to the Divine Power.

In point of fact, there is no other way of studying such a vast and intricate mythology as that which the RgVeda presents, except through a consideration of discrete hymns, and groups of what we may consider related hymns, since there is no rule of approach available in the text itself, for reasons clarified above.

As noted in earlier sections, a plurality of gods or devas is intrinsic to the Vedic literature. At every turn we meet with plural conceptions of the gods. What interests us, therefore, from the point of view of the history of ideas, and especially as pertaining to theism, is the notions of worship and adoration with respect to these deities, and the types of relationships obtainable among them. Distinctions of the gods and worship paid to them is seen clearly in the following verses:

""We will worship the great gods,
And worship the small ones,
We will worship the young gods,

And worship the old ones,
We will worship all gods
To the best of our power;
Nor may I forget to worship
The gods of old times."[12]

The above lines are quite clear about the adoration given to innumerable different deities, and are therefore clearly polytheistic. There is a genuinely positive attitude shown towards the deities who are felt to be worthy of such attention. Clearly the gods, in their distinctness, represent some value for the worshippers though in the above extract they are placed on an equal level. On the whole, however, the gods of the RgVeda are historically arranged, which shows both historical vicissitudes, and differential preferences among different sections of the Vedic people. In this connection and with reference to the religion of the RgVeda, Sukumari Bhattacharji says:

"This religion is frankly polytheistic with a host of gods arranged hierarchically, each of whom in turn is described henotheistically as supreme. We are dimly aware of clan or family preference for this or that divinity, or regional predilections of particular gods, sacrifices or modes of sacrifices; the rise and

fall of deities in time is, however, much more plainly manifest."[13]

As said earlier, it is understandable that a label of polytheism, and even "frank polytheism" would be applied to the ṚgVeda on the evidence presented in individual hymns. And, as indicated by Bhattacharji, when we consider the hymns in terms of large time-periods, perhaps several centuries apart, we have clear evidence of the rise and decline of individual gods.

The earliest gods of the Indo-Aryans may have been the ones shared with other Indo-European races somewhere in central Europe.[14a] From this original home the Indian branch of the this family appears to have moved in a south-easterly direction, bringing with them conceptions of Dyaus (the sky) and Pṛthivī (the Earth), probably some of the earliest Indo-European gods. It is commonly held that already in the ṚgVeda Dyaus's popularity was decreasing as newer gods began to take his place in the worship of the people.[14b] Clayton says in this regard:

"The oldest among the gods that the Aryans worshipped was Dyaus, and he was probably revered by the ancestors of the Aryans long before any Aryans had journeyed to India."[15]

It appears quite natural for the earliest conceptions of deity to be related to the Sky-father and the Earth-mother, at least within the framework of the Vedic mythology. The great dome of the sky easily appears as coming into a union with the earth in the distant horizon, and an alliance between these two deities would appear a most logical consequence of such perception of natural phenomena. Thus they are together referred to as pitara, the parents[16] or mātara.[17] One such hymn reads:

> "With my invocations I adore the thought of the beneficent Father, and the mighty inherent power of the Mother. The prolific parents have made all creatures, and therefore their favours have conferred immortality on their offspring."[18]

We may reasonably surmise that the sky gods, like the solar gods, belong to an early phase in the life of primitive peoples, on the strength that they reflect a more settled pastoral type of life. In the case of the Indo-Aryans, when they left their Central European homeland, the Urheimat, and moved in the south-easterly direction, they took these gods with them, although their significance dwindled with the addition of more gods.[19] That the Vedic Indians at an earlier time and the ancient people of Persia "were ethnologically one people, speak-

ing nearly one and the same language or different dialects of it, having nearly the same myths and worshipping nearly the same gods",[20] is quite certain.

As the nomadic, Aryan tribes moved through the north-western passes of India, "the rain and thunder gods of a nomadic period were added to the already existing pantheon. They are actually a mythical projection of the historical experience of the invading Aryans."[21] Whatever may be the reasons put forward for the phenomenon of changes in deities adored by the Vedic peoples, the phenomenon itself, that is, the fact of the rise and decline of gods, is of great importance to a proper theological assessment of the Vedic scriptures.

Of interest to this line of thought is the contention of Das[22] that the ṚgVeda itself mentions three distinct ages during which its hymns were composed, as "ancient, medieval and later." He quotes a ṚgVedic verse in support of this contention:

> "The worshipper, by his conservative sacrifice, has made Indra present. May I bring him to my presence to obtain new wealth, him who has been exalted by praises, whether ancient, medieval or modern."[23]

Das admits that "we do not know anything about the extent of each age.",[24] but he considers that the ṚgVedic period is already the most recent age mentioned in the verse quoted, or at least the period of the latest redaction and recasting of the collection of hymns.[25] In the ṚgVedic text as we have it at present, the importance of the conceptions of Dyaus and Prthivi as some of the most ancient deities[26] is quite evident, as well as the sense of their even greater importance in the past. Most scholars are of the opinion that the worship of Dyaus (and probably Pṛthivī together with him) was displaced by that offered to Indra when the Vedic Aryans entered the plains of India and settled there.[27] Martin reconstructs this change in the direction of worship as follows:

> "The early Aryans in their common home in central Asia, where bleak winds howling over cheerless steppes, constituted their daily experience, looked to the brilliant radiance of heaven as the holiest and most divine thing in their experience. Then when they settled in the sultry Indian plains where the sun pours down its well-nigh intolerable heat they longed and prayed for the cooling, life-giving showers at Indra's disposal. So Dyaus was quickly forgotten and Indra reigned supreme."[28]

This interpretation placed upon the change from Dyaus to Indra shows up a strong materialistic quality in the religious life of the ancient Vedic people. If this is an accurate interpretation of the Vedic mythology, that is, if no other motivation or conception played a role in the changing allegiance, then it would go a long way towards establishing a rank polytheism in the Vedas. We shall have to consider this issue fully later.

A further, and highly dramatic shift in devotion and worship is reflected in relation to the god Varuṇa. Varuṇa is among the earliest of the gods of the Indo-European pantheon.[29] He is about the highest deified representation of righteousness and morality that is revealed in the Vedic scriptures,[30] and in the Ṛgveda particularly "an exceedingly high position" is ascribed to him.[31] Yet even he suffers from the inevitable loss of allegiance of his worshippers, and, just when his rising star reaches its zenith in the ṚgVeda, he "seems to fade away".[32] The text records that Agni, though himself one of the great gods, appears subservient to Indra and confesses his change of allegiance in the following words:

> "I bid farewell to the great god, the Father (Varuṇa),. . . .
> Away pass Agni, Varuṇa and Soma. Kingship

alternates:

This (supremacy of Indra) I come to favour."[33]

These are moving lines indeed, and reflect the ease with which allegiance can be transferred among the gods. That religious conceptions reached a particularly high level of morality in association with the figure of Varuṇa[34a] rather than of Indra adds to the poignancy of the change. Bhattacharji attributes the change to changes in climatic conditions and the environment experienced by the Aryans and thus to purely material motivations.

From the point of view of the worshipper, rather than the race as a whole, the essential factor responsible for the transfer of allegiance has been made out to be the notion of "power", a power that is associated with specific deities, and, in the perception of the worshipper is striking and overwhelming. This power may be regarded as of value in its own right, that is, as an abstraction, or, as is usually the case, it is connected with natural phenomena. In the latter case, the worshipper is "profoundly struck by the vastness, brilliance and bounty of nature".[34b] And further, in connection with the deity Dyaus, for example, Dandekar says that "he translated this feeling of his into the mythological concept of Father Dyaus, The anthropomorphized repre-

sentation of the shining sky, which latter was rightly regarded as the symbol of that vastness, brilliance and bounty".[35] It is "rightly regarded" because the perception of "power" is real for the worshipper, and the symbol to which it is tied can evoke genuine feelings of awe and wonder in him.

It is in the tying down of that perception of power to any single phenomenon of nature, or to an abstract notion for that matter, and then allowing the perception to alight on different objects of nature, such as to evoke fresh and renewed acts of adoration and worship with respect to the new object, that precisely constitutes the polytheistic act. For the old objects are not summarily dismissed, but retained in the general pantheon of deities to be invoked when a fancy to do so overtakes the worshipper. The old gods are retained but there is shift among them regarding the position of honour.[36]

Dandekar also contends that, although the Vedic Aryans entertained several different gods in the older stratum of their pantheon, such as Varuṇa, Mitra, Aditi, Dyaus etc., these had to give way to newer gods as a result of the expansionist urges that impelled a few adventurous tribes to move away from their European-Asiatic homelands.[37] And one of the most significant

additions to the Vedic pantheon.as result of this expansionist drive has been the figure of Indra. Against this background, which explains the importance of the moving scenes of natural phenomena across the field of vision of the ancestors of the Vedic Aryans, it can quite reasonably be construed that Indra, though fated to be the dominating figure in the entire ṚgVedic pantheon,[38] could not originally have been so highly placed.[39]

> "Indra's greatness in the ṚgVeda depends entirely on his valour and might. He fights formidable enemies who offer stubborn resistance and are not easily vanquished even with the Vajra.[40]

In many ways then, it seems reasonable to adopt the thesis, so far as the mythological representations in the ṚgVeda lead us, that the hymns connected with Indra and Indra-worship are "war-songs glorifying Wehrmacht and Wehrkraft; one can almost hear the clang of the armour and the shouts of victory".[41] But in later times, when the vision of the natural circumstances before their eyes changed from a scene of continuous battles to one of subtle agricultural life, Indra continued to be invoked as the war-lord to ensure "victory over drought, indigence and barrenness in men and cattle . . . Indra's victory assured them peace and plenty; thus his pre-

eminence in the Vedic pantheon, as well as with the magic elixir Soma, and which is often also deified in its own right, though kept to a minimal level".[42] Indra's rise to power in the ṚgVeda is clearly indicated as he ousts his parents from the central arena:

> "The divine Dyaus bowed before Indra, before Indra the great Earth bowed with her wide spaces"[43]

Of great significance for our theistic interest is the fact that even Indra, as well established as he is throughout the Veda, succumbs to the process of time and the changing moods of the people. Martin says of Indra:

> "His sovereignty, however, did not endure for long. In the Brāhmaṇic days he sinks to the rank of a secondary god, inferior to the great Hindu Triad, and liable at the end of every hundred divine years to be superseded by some other god or man who by his merit should raise himself to the necessary status. The sacrifice of one hundred horses is sufficient for the purpose."[44]

Although Indra is thus not completely dismissed, he is drained of all personality, all importance as an

individual god. He is not even retained as a god among many gods, but, as is clear from the above, he stands for a mere station, a platform that any other god or even any man, can occupy. Such occupation, in the nature of the scheme, will in its turn also be of temporary nature, and shows, on the one hand, the immense lowering of the significance of the polytheistic attitude, and on the other hand, as the foundation and corollary of such attitude, the establishment of the notion of the transcendence of personality.

This line of reasoning takes us beyond the discussion of polytheism itself. To return to the polytheistic interest, therefore, we may consider the figure of Agni, who is another god considered to be a member of the ancient pantheon.[45] Although Agni is not regarded as important as Indra, he is only a step lower than Indra in terms of the number of hymns devoted to him, as we saw in an earlier section. Nevertheless his importance can never be minimized, for, as connected with the domestic hearth, and the daily fire-sacrifice, Agni attained, and maintained for long, a pivotal significance in the religious life of the Vedic Indians.[46] He attained to a truly personal relationship with his worshippers, for he is that "divinity which brings the world of man closer to the world of gods."[47] In spite of such favourable circumstances, circumstances which, as in the case of Varuṇa

also, could be easily conceived to lead to personal trust, faith, and faithfulness on the part of the worshipper, even Agni succumbs to the common fate of the Vedic gods. Soon after the ṚgVedic period "he gradually reverts to the pre-mythical natural element, a shadow of his old mythical self. As the Aryan learns to build walled cities for ensuring safety, the original glamour of Agni, man's first friend and protector on earth, faded."[48]

Allegiance to gods in the Vedas appears to be built upon the shifting sands of time, which sweeps away all things. This is the inexorable law, before which even the gods must bow down. The motif that appears to be made out by most researchers in explanation of the polytheistic attitude, is one of fulfillment of purpose, of the creation of circumstances conducive to man's life on earth, not in heaven, of giving him succour on earth and satisfying his practical wants. Speaking of the twin Aśvins, the physician gods of the morning and evening twilight, gods who are relatively minor in the pantheon, one writer gives the reason for their being worshipped thus:

> "They are personifications of those natural phenomena and were gratefully worshipped for announcing the disappearance of the night with

all its terrors."[49]

This is carrying the theme of simple nature worship in relation to material need-fulfilment to its uttermost limit. Radical naturalism could rarely be better or more effectively expressed. The very same idea is expressed with regard to the Dawn goddess, Ūṣas, that "she was worshipped not because she was beautiful, which of course, she was, but because she was useful."[50] It sounds too simple a motive, too easy of application, and not at all flattering to the genius of the ancient Aryans and their descendants the Vedic Indians. The same writer attempts to give a philosophical justification for such a picture of nature-worshipping Aryans, thus attempting to supply a leitmotif to the vast panorama of Vedic religion and mythology, in the words:

> "If arthakriyā-kāritva (fulfilling of a purpose) can be the lakṣaṇa (definition) of satya (truth), it can also be the basis of personification and worship. This is the basis of worship of all the gods and goddesses in the Vedas, whether powers of nature or functions or qualities."[51]

It is difficult to accept that thought did not penetrate deeper and see through the phenomena of nature

than the above words indicate. Yet it is also undeniable that it is easy to recognize in the Vedic gods, in many passages, not only associations but also identifications with the objects of nature, if we are to get any sense out of the passages. That is, the sphere of influence, and therefore of meaning, is tied down to the limits imposed by the objects of nature.[52] But we must also bear in mind that quite often the sphere of influence of a god transcends the limitations of the physical or natural object.[53] In one verse, for example, the sun is represented as operating within the limits of his natural habitat, and even subordinated to other gods:

> "The sun rises, the bliss-bestowing, the all-seeing,
> The same for all men;
> The eye of Mitra and Varuṇa,
> The god who has rolled up darkness like a skin"[54]

Yet he is also represented as transcending the natural limits and attaining levels of true divinity:

> "Looking on man, O Varuṇa and Mitra, this sun ascendeth up by both the pathways,
> Guardian of all things fixed,
> Of all that moveth,

Beholding good and evil acts of mortals."[55]

Vedic nomenclature for the gods of the pantheon is significant from the theistic perspective, for it gives the god character and stabilizes him as a deity. For example, the above quotations lend a distinction to the Sun-god, and arouses and sustains our interest in his fortunes. While it is true that among the Vedic gods the characterizations are not as complete as among the Greek gods and that there is a blurring of distinctions among them, an issue that we shall have to take up later, the gods are plainly distinguishable and operate largely within the fixed parameters of their characters. The gods are definitely endowed with personal characteristics which make them both interesting and viable within the context of ṚgVedic religion and mythology.[56]

Such definable and definitive characteristics are often thrust into relief into passages which denote a struggle for power among the gods.

A legend which first appears in the Yajur Veda[57] shows the clear and mortal antagonism between the gods Indra and Tvaṣṭṛ, which becomes the mythological background so to say of the Indra-Vṛtra combats recounted in the ṚgVeda. Because Indra had cut off the three heads of Tvaṣṭṛ's son, Tvaṣṭṛ performed a sacrifice invoking the

deity Vṛtra to arise as indra-śatru i.e., "slayer of Indra", but through an unfortunate mis-accentuation, the meaning of the term became "he whose slayer is Indra." This resulted in the repetitious duel between Indra and Vṛtra, in which Indra always emerges the victor.[58] This is one of the episodes that earns specific mention in the ṚgVedic sajanīya hymn[59] which, by one interpretation seeks to impress upon the masses of the people the glories of Indra and his being alone worthy of adoration and worship as the Supreme God.[60]

But it is clear that no monotheism can be built upon these ideas as the foundation, so far as the ṚgVeda is concerned. For strewn throughout the text of this voluminous scripture are many references to different deities, not merely as deities in the sense of exciting awe and wonder , but as specifically calling forth worship from men. In very many cases the one god is said to be the same as another, and yet another. There is a clear lack of a fixed ideological structure, and this militates against a simple western-style monotheism. What metaphysics we do have in the ṚgVeda precludes the separation of any one deity from the the rest of the gods, to be raised to a position of permanent supremacy.

It is beyond reasonable doubt, given our present understanding of the text, and an objectively verifiable fact

that such exclusive worship of any one deity from among the ṚgVedic pantheon, is never sustained in the ṚgVeda as a whole, as it is never sustained in post-Vedic Hinduism, where "even the more ordinary processes and objects of nature are, under the influence of animistic, or, on a higher level, Vedic beliefs, given their place among the multitude of deities. There is nothing either in the heaven or earth, which may not be worshipped as a particular deity."[61]

We cannot say that this overwhelming characteristic of later Hinduism is not a direct inheritance of tendencies and directions evident in the ṚgVeda itself. The arrangement of the hymns in a historical order requires the work of a number of workers in specialized and technical fields of language, syntax etc., and the nature of Vedic Sanskrit prevents accurate chronologisation of the hymns. We cannot at this point in time be sure of the period of origin of the mantras, as we must assume that the oral tradition was begun long before the Indo-Aryans settled on Indian soil.[62] Although we have in the Vedic texts evidence for the existence of new hymns against old ones, it is not possible to identify individual hymns in terms of older or later compositions, except in a general fashion.[63] We are therefore constrained to take the text as a whole, and ascribe significance to the various deifications in terms of the

contents of the hymns rather than in terms of any kind of chronological priority. Thus even the hymn that deifies an item such as food becomes, from the point of view of theistic enquiry, a datum of some significance.

> "Now will I glorify Food that upholds great strength, by whose invigorating power Tṛta rent Vṛtra limb from limb."[64]
>
> "O pleasant Food, O Food of wealth, thee have we chosen for our own; so be our kind protector thou."[65]
>
> "In thee, O Food, is set the spirit of the great Gods
> Under thy flag brave deeds were done: he slew the dragon with thy help."[66]

The original term, which is here translated as "food", is "pitu", and this may mean any form of nutriment.[67] The hymn, it should be noted, not only glorifies food, but also displays an invocatory nature and shows up a worshipful attitude on the part of the singer. The slaying of the dragon refers to the deed of Tṛta mentioned in the first verse.

Another hymn of interest in this connexion is the

one addressed to frogs, which has been interpreted as a satire on gods and priests alike. The attitude of worship and invocation is pronounced in the last verse of the hymn, which reads,

> "May the cow-toned, goat-toned, the speckled, the green, grant us riches. May the frogs in the fertilizing season, bestowing upon us hundreds of coves, prolong our lives.[68]

Although it may be accepted that this is presented in a satirical vein, which also is not flattering to either gods or brahmins,[69] it nevertheless plainly reflects the easy deification to which any natural object could be subjected. The next two quotations, with respect to rivers and the sacrificial post, illustrate the same point:

> "Forth from the bosom of the mountains, eager as two swift mares with loosened rein contending,
> Like two bright mother cows who lick their youngling,
> Vipas and Śutudin speed down their waters.
>
> Impelled by Indra whom ye pray to urge you, ye move as 'twere on chariots to the ocean.

Flowing together, swelling with your billows. O lucid Streams, each of you seeks the other,".[70]

God serving men, O Sovran of the forest, with heavenly meath at sacrifice anoint thee.
Grant wealth to us when thou art standing upright as when reposing on the Mother's bosom.

Set up to eastward of the fire enkindled, accepting prayer that wastes not, rich in heroes,
Driving far from us poverty and famine, lift thyself up to bring us great great good fortune.

Lord of the Forest, raise thyself up on the loftiest part of the earth
Give splendour, fixt and measured well, to him who brings the sacrifice."[71]

These examples must count, from the theistic point of view, as some of the low points of the ṚgVedic mantras, though from the poetic point of view, the river-crossing for example, may be highly extolled.[72] If we seek for unity in a commonsense fashion among the great gods like Indra, Varuṇa, Agni, etc., it is likely that our attempts will yield no satisfactory results, and we

shall find no real unity.[73] The gods are not only tied to natural phenomena for a large part of their characterizations, and as natural phenomena they must maintain essential distinctions, as frogs are distinct from rivers, but the great gods also appear to compete for worship when one seeks to eclipse the other.

Taking into account the complex nature of the Vedic hymns, Dandekar is therefore led to confess that "if any label is at all to be attached to the Vedic religion, it may be described as polytheistic. This polytheism affords ample scope for an exuberant growth of myths and legends."[74] And, as we saw earlier, even Max Muller, who cannot be accused of partiality against Hinduism, and who spent the larger part of his life on the RgVeda, says of its religion:

> "If we must employ technical terms the religion of the Veda is polytheism, not monotheism."[75]

When we look at the characteristics of modern Hinduism and notice the unsystematic profusion of images and deities, and further when we consider that even the primary traditional deities such as Viṣṇu and Śiva, are often displaced and forgotten in favour of newer gods and religious teachers and saints, we tend to look at the Vedic religion with deeper respect because of its rela-

tive freedom from images and idols. Macdonald, however, expresses disagreement with this view of the comparative purity of the Vedas, when he says:

> "However free from the grossness of the image-worship of modern Hinduism their religion may have been, these worshippers are chargeable with the deification and worship of fire, air, the atmosphere in motion or at rest, the sun, moon, dawn, Soma, prayer, etc. and with all the refracting, splintering and distorting of the idea of God which is implied in such worship."[76]

In our perception, Macdonald appears to have clearly missed the spirit of Vedic worship. He is confusing constructive polytheism with naturalistic polytheism. The latter has its roots in a simple deification of natural objects, while the former is what is suggested by the actions of the worshippers; it is only the external dressing which conceals a range of ideas beneath it. As already noticed, Max Muller's pronouncement appears guarded, for he is aware of many higher-level aspirations that are truly spiritual in the ṚgVedic hymns. Sir Alfred Lyall demonstrates a greater caution and understanding of the generally perceived polytheistic attitude, and asserts also the higher spiritual realiza-

tions of the sages, when he says:

> "The whole panorama of religious ideas and practices in polytheistic India may be compared to the entangled confusion of a primeval forest, where one sees trees of all kinds, ages, sizes, interlacing and contending with each other; some falling into decay, others shooting up vigorously and overlapping the crowd while the glimpse of blue sky above the tree-tops may symbolise the illimitable transcendental ideas above and apart from the earth-born conceptions."[77]

Martin indicates that the religious conduct of the Hindus though it is clearly characterised by all the appearances of a polytheistic life-style, nevertheless "bears the mark of a supreme and very real religious consciousness."[78] He further asserts that

> "The contribution the Hindu will ultimately make to the religious consciousness of the world will be no slight one, for Hindu mythology and the practice of Hinduism teach us that to the Hindu, religion is taken into the very core and centre of daily life."[79]

This scholar, who knows that many European scholars who have researched Hindu spiritual concepts from the Vedic age onwards, have denied significant moral and ethical values to Hinduism, who is himself a trained Christian minister operating as a missionary in India, is himself hesitant in denying ethical and spiritual values to Hinduism, and, in his opinion, Hindu mythology, despite its polytheistic religious practices, and of whatever origins and structure, "constantly emphasizes the superiority of the spiritual over the intensely material conceptions of our present-day Western life."[80]

Vedic mythology with its polytheistic dress and trappings has endowed modern Hinduism with an even richer and exuberant mythology. It is perhaps the case that the ancient polytheistic mythology has not been accurately understood or faithfully represented in modern Hinduism. Nevertheless, in the nature of the case, a polytheistic attitude is always broad and tolerant and receptive to new ideas, in contrast to a strict monotheism which is jealous of its preserves, relatively immune to external influences, and which tends to be intolerant. The words of the modern Indologist Dandekar offers a fitting conclusion to our discussion of polytheism, when he says of Hindu mythology:

"Mythology is at once the strength and weakness

of Hinduism - strength, because mythology represents some of the distinctive features of Hinduism, such as tolerance, broad sympathy, liberal outlook, and dynamically assimilitative, and at the same time, elevating power: and weakness, because there is the danger of the true spirit of Hinduism being undermined by the weight of its mythological richness."[81]

3.2 MONOTHEISM

The central issue under investigation in our work is the nature and development of the religious consciousness through the centuries. As we have already seen, the RgVeda presents us with an immense amount of material pertaining to this issue; yet, our expectations of a simple or clearly of systematized set of directions emerging from texts do not bear any promise of realization.

The reasons for this lie firstly in the composite character of the RgVedic texts, that is, as containing material dealing with diverse topics, and not solely with matters pertaining to the theistic interest. Secondly, and for us quite importantly, those texts dealing with matters of worship and the deity are, first of all, not

all of the same or even similar category; and then, many texts give evidence of moving along two or three dimensions simultaneously. As an example, we can think of those passages which appear to be presenting natural phenomena in a simplistic way, and then the vision is raised beyond the bare or direct sensual experience.[82]

Although this may be sometimes ascribed to poetic technique,[83] our interest lies in the thought that is sought to be conveyed through the poetry and the images. Again, we know from historical evidence that the Vedic Aryans brought with them the traditions of a past which is for convenience seen as divided into an Indian period, an Indo-Aryan period, and a yet more primitive Indo-European period, all of which cannot be totally divorced from the specifically Indian period.[84a] And all this testifies to the composite character of the texts and allows for no easy treatment of the material and thoughts contained therein. So far as the historical dimension is concerned, therefore, we have to say that the ṚgVedic hymns have had many authors and their production spans several centuries. It is unlikely that the sages through whom the mantras were handed down did not pass on to us some of their own peculiarities. It is reasonable to say, from the objective viewpoint, that the hymns bear the stamp of the different personalities of the Ṛṣis, as well of the circumstances and historical exigencies of

their actual production in a literary form.

Against such a formidable background, we have to apply our skills as analytical historians of philosophical ideas, and come to terms with what is perhaps the most intractable collection of ancient literature in our possession. And against just such a background we have to formulate as precisely as the data will allow, a theory of the possible theistic viability of the ṚgVeda. In this section, we address ourselves to the question of whether a monotheism is promoted in the ṚgVeda in particular, and the Vedas generally, what grounds there are for upholding the view of Vedic monotheism, what the characteristic marks of such monotheism are, and whether it is compatible with Western, that is, Semitic ideas of monotheism, or does it form a category of its own, and if so, to what extent it is unique. Are monotheistic ideas in the Vedas to be inferred via tortuous and indirect methods of interpretation, or can such ideas be gained from a direct reading of the text, that is, in an unambiguous fashion. Even this way of prefacing our investigation indicates an apprehensive sense of possible problems that might be encountered, even regarding so simple a theme as the worship of the one only God, that is, monotheism. We cannot imagine this lack of sureness in the case of the Bible or the Koran, whose leading ideas we cannot totally disregard, even when dealing with

the Vedas. A great deal of scholarship has gone into researching the Vedic texts from a theistic perspective, and this includes a great deal of honest scholarship as well. We have to bow before the awesome weight of this great tradition, and take many directions therefrom. This tradition, in large part, is tentative in its pronouncements on Vedic theism, and the more scholarly because it is tentative. With this vast and invaluable experience behind us, and upon which we hope to draw, we might be excused for having the ambition of being less tentative in our conclusions. So important a theme as monotheism in relation to so important a set of scriptures as the Vedas having so vast a following as the Hindu people spread over so many distant countries, calls for a more definitive and conclusive statement which is neither fanciful nor untrue to the facts.

At a simple level we may just say that "monotheism is the belief in and worship of one God only," while "polytheism is the worship of many gods".[84b] Such simple definitions do not allow much insight into the intricacies and intertwined ideas of deity and worship that the Vedas are so replete with. We need more comprehensive definitions, definitions that do not violate the special sense of each term, and do not leave room for such violations. At the same time, though the definitions should not be tailored to the requirements of any

particular scripture and the special categories of the scripture, they should bear the criterion of universality, that is, any phenomena in literature, connected with the ideas of worship and deification, should be without difficulty categorisable under the terms of the definitions. And this implies, from the scientific point of view, the utilization of the twin principles of accuracy (that is, the subject matter must be clearly and unambiguously indicated) and economy (that is, there should be neither repetition nor redundancy). With these considerations in mind, we offer the following definitions of the two key terms - monotheism and polytheism. For, though our discussion will be concerned primarily with monotheism, as is the nature of the case with the Vedas, the background of our discussions always requires a clear and definitive comprehension of polytheism, which has become so much a part of the critical tradition, both Western and indigenous, regarding the Vedas.

No one will, we are sure, disagree with defining monotheism as the belief in and worship of One God only, where such God is taken to be distinct from men and from all created things, though He is in some way the Creator both of men and of all things. Polytheism, on the other hand, must necessarily be the belief in and worship of two or more gods who must be endowed with limited supernatural powers, including necessarily creative powers and

who are necessarily distinct from men, and generally distinct from all things.

In these definitions we have observed the criterion of a fundamental opposition between the two terms, as far as such opposition could logically be maintained.

Simple worship of natural objects to which no significant supernatural powers are ascribed, either creative or cosmic, cannot be counted as polytheistic, but needs be classified as merely animistic, or totemistic, or fetichistic, which latter have also been discerned in parts of the Vedas by several Indologists. When truly polytheistic gods are discerned who possess some supernatural power and control some elements, we can observe the opposition between such conceptions and the conception of monotheism.

The examples from Vedic literature that have been quoted earlier, and within a limited framework, demonstrate the type of opposition to a monotheistic idea of God that the Vedas might be surmised to harbour. It seems to us quite likely that such is not the case, because the full meaning of the idea of a Vedic god, and, we may say even at this stage, the Vedic idea of God, cannot become apparent unless the text is examined in its totality. This does not mean that specific hymns cannot

contribute to the conception of God, but that the spirit of the whole text alone can provide the correct approach to individual sections. And this view is not to be taken as committing us to any fixed system in the Vedic ideas of deity or to any thorough-going consistency among the Ṛṣis of the different hymns. In these matters we can confess to no special wisdom other than what has been revealed through the labours of a long line of European and other Indologists. But that the essential meaning and purport of a Vedic god when such conception has been developed beyond a primitive level or a rudimentary sketch (and this rules out of significant consideration hymns such as those of frogs or the rivers), lies in an approach to such god conjointly with a general approach to all the major gods, must remain a fundamental principle of our thesis. Taking mainly the Indological researches and expositions of the Vedic hymns (and leaving out of consideration the traditional Indian interpretations), we propose to demonstrate, nevertheless, that, even on this basis of accepted scholarship, the Vedas raise before us the conception of the Divine Power that is not of less value for theology or for human life, than the conceptions generally put forth in Western tradition.

One of the commonest, and perhaps most attractive notions concerning monotheism is that of exclusivity of

worship. The monotheistic God must be a jealous God who does not tolerate His worship being shared with other gods, real or conceptual.

A similar and striking desire for exclusivity of worship and adoration is expressed with regard to Indra, whose worshippers extol him as the only fit object of worship, considering others as Dasyus, the godless, offering no sacrifices, and who, on that account, are even considered inhuman. Indra's worshippers thank him profusely for giving them victory against the Dasyus.[85] And the feeling against the unbelievers is strong indeed:

> "Indra, thou justifiest us, and tramplest down the slanderers.
> Guard thyself, Valiant Hero, in thy vital parts;
> Strike down the Dāsa with thy blows.
> The man who brings no sacrifice, inhuman godless infidel."[86]

This clearly indicates the pride and feelings of superiority on the part of Indra's worshippers, and the contempt they bore towards unbelievers. This contempt is only superseded by the contempt they bore towards those who did not worship like them, those who worshipped foreign or primitive gods, and especially those who wor-

shipped the śiśna-devata (the phallus-emblem), as the following verses show so clearly:

> "He [Indra] seized the hundred-gated castle's treasure by craft, unchecked, and slew the phallus-worshippers."[87]

> Let our true God subdue the hostile rabbles. Let not the phallus-worshipper approach our holy worship."[88]

The passages cited above demonstrate our point clearly. Apart from prejudice born of racial animosity and feelings of superiority, there is also the clear reference to belief and worship, in which regard the infidel Dasyus are hated most. Whether the Dasyus actually slandered against Indra, we can never be sure, for we have only the words of the Indra-worshippers for that, and so a mere reprisal may be ruled out, though actual political conflicts must be accepted as parts of the actuality prompting the verses. At any rate, jealous guarding of personal belief and modes of worship come through as the major issues, and if we accept the principle of molecular textual criticism, then it must be admitted that the above verses qualify, within the limits of those verses, for many characteristics associated with monotheism. And, if we include those hymns and verses

which glorify Indra as greater than all other gods, and as the creator of all things, once again we shall have the makings of a monotheism.

Our reasoning in this matter may be elaborated. If we cannot allow an interpretation favourable to a monotheistic conception, on the basis of a few selected verses, a polytheistic conception cannot likewise be justified on the basis of a few selected verses. And this principle must be maintained in spite of the name of a deity being exhausted throughout the text of the Vedas. This might appear too large and inadmissible a requirement, but it has to be insisted upon because of the nature of presuppositions underlying Vedic deifications, and which are derivable from the text itself. The gods have such inter-relationships and origins, that the doctrinal significance of their mere names appear to be cancelled out. Appelative designations do not produce a theology in the Vedas.

It is a truism with regard to the Vedas that a profusion of different appellations are used with regard to the deities, which suggests to our immediate perception a multiplicity of gods. In this regard Macdonald says:

"From the beginning to the end of the Rig-Veda

it is a worshipping of the many. The first hymn is a worshipping of Agni; the second is a worshipping of Vāyu, Indra and Vayu, Mitra and Varuṇa; the third is a worshipping of the Aświns (the young gods), of Indra, Viśwadevas or collective divinities, and Sarasvatī, and so on they proceed with hymns to Indra, the Maruts or storm-gods, the Āprīs or river-gods, Ritu, Brāhmaṇaspati, Prajāpati, Sāvitrī, Āryaman, the Ādityas, Pūṣan, Rudra, Sūrya, Soma, the Ribhus (deified men), the earth, the sky, Swanaya, Bhavayavya, heaven and earth, the horse, Rati, Pitu, Brahaspati, water, grass, sacrificial posts, the sun, etc., etc."[89]

Such is the presentation of the Vedic gods by Macdonald, who is doctrinally interested in showing up the utter plurality of the Vedic deities, as against the singular unity of the God of Christian monotheism particularly and Semitic monotheism generally. He says towards the end of his book:

"It has been well said, that if a person accustomed to compare and reflect, were to read the whole of the Old Testament through, and were to state what two things struck him more than anything else as characteristic of it, he would

answer, (1)Zeal for the unity of God, and (2)zeal for righteousness; or both in two words,'Ethical monotheism.' Now in the Veda there is a zeal for neither. There is neither ethics nor righteousness. In our survey I think, I have made it very clear that instead of simple monotheism, we have rank polytheism."[90]

Now, such comparisons as these are in the proper line of any comparative study, and we welcome them. For they help to clarify the issues, and enable us to focus on precisely those issues and considerations which lend a distinction to our categories - in this case, the categories of monotheism and polytheism.

Macdonell also states, quite correctly, and as we have already indicated earlier, that the Vedas themselves proclaim the number of deities as three thousand three hundred and thirty-nine in all (though later Hindu mythologies extend this number to thirty-three million gods). The principle, however, remains unaltered, and we cannot deny the manyness of the gods. The manyness, that is, which has to be understood in the context of the Vedas themselves. And this context reveals that a Vedic god does not usually stand by himself. His personality is always dependent upon several other gods. This is the

principle of fluidity of personality where the character of a god is not so sharply and consistently drawn as to distinguish him entirely from other gods. The gods do possess fairly identifiable traits, but they also blend with each other, as real objects of nature and real persons cannot blend.

Macdonald, however, follows the line of "an undoubted polytheism" which "is seen not only in the number of gods worshipped, but in their separate individuality, their distinct traits of character, and their personal histories".[91] In consonance with this view of ṚgVedic theism, the same writer further asserts that the Vedic gods were not only simple representations of natural phenomena, but that they were not at any time sufficiently abstracted from those phenomena to rise to a true monotheistic level.[92]

Now we cannot deny that the ṚgVedic deities are for the most part presented in the garb of natural phenomena. Further, following some of the most respectable Indological researches into Vedic culture of the past hundred and fifty years and more, we cannot also altogether deny that they were not the consciously drawn up figures symbolizing, behind the natural phenomena, some type of secret and mystic meanings. Yet, in fairness to the hymns as we have them, and taking them in a spirit of objectivity, we

also cannot deny some theologically striking and significant complexities and peculiarities. These complexities and peculiarities, some of which have already been referred to clearly rule out a radical naturalism and its necessary complement, rank polytheism.

Radical naturalism refers to that interpretation which asserts that the Vedic gods are simple representations of discrete natural objects, in a type of one-to-one correspondence, resulting necessarily in a true or rank polytheism.

It should be remembered that the religious conceptions of the Vedas are borne along on the basis of a naturalistically-based mythology in historical development. Neither is the naturalism consistently radical, but quite often modified and tending strongly to the spiritual, nor is the mythology a static one, but a growing and evolving one. And these features have to be seen to be characterizing the ancestors of the Vedic Indians from the early days of their Urheimat somewhere in central Europe. The story of the journeyings of the Vedic people is one in which a vibrant folk lore and much mythology constantly interacted with both the material and the spiritual aspirations of a highly sensitive race, who knew the meaning of kindness, honesty and righteousness, and who valued the joys of living and reacted with

firmness against any threat to their survival or their cultural integrity. These characteristics can be reconstructed from the extant hymns of the RgVeda. The basis of the RgVedic mythology can be traced back to the early Indo-European days, and a strong spiritual strain is evident from the earliest hymns, and which is seen generally to grow in intensity as the mythology progresses, culminating in the monistically flavoured hymns of the Tenth Book.

The complexities and peculiarities that initiate a purely naturalistic interpretation may now be noted. The first is the naturalistic interpretation itself, which states that the gods represent simple natural phenomena. The first few hymns of the first mandala give us some directions in this matter.

Agni, the priest, is in these verses the bearer of the oblations aloft, and at the same time the invoker of the gods of heaven to the sacrificial altar. The gods are not simple animistic spirits tied down to their natural habitat,[93] but powers of nature that could bestow favours upon their devotees. They are more specifically already presented as spiritual powers in the sense that the yajamānas feel that they need the help of these divinities who have the capacity to bestow goods and blessings. If this feeling of need is present, and the

willingness of the gods to offer the help (albeit when duly propitiated), then we shall not be violating the canons of good sense if we say that a spiritual relationship is evident in verses of this type. With regard to the worshippers' attitude to the natural phenomena, R R Rai says:

> "And though they worshipped these natural phenomena, it was not really the phenomena to which they did offer their adorations but to the inherent powers - the energy underlying those manifestations."[94]

Rai adopts the evolutionary explanation and affirms that at that early time, the Aryans could have attained to the conception of "one Supreme Deity devoid of human attributes".[95] Now it is true that the Vedic hymns portray the gods with many anthropomorphic attributes, both in matters of personal appearance as well as other personality characteristics. But these characteristics are also often generalized so that we are left with the impression of a desire to merge several gods into some kind of unity. This is the second significant peculiarity tending towards a type of monotheism within the context of RgVedic metaphysics. In this regard Clayton says:

> "In spite of the many allusions to the gods,

there is a great lack of clear descriptions of the separate deities. The Vedic gods are not defined. Attributes of one are ascribed to another."[96]

Developing the comment further Clayton quotes Macdonell, saying that:

"the personifications, being but slightly developed, lack definiteness of outline and individuality of character. . . The character of each god is made up of only a few essential qualities combined with many others which are common to all the gods such as brilliance, power, beneficance, wisdom. These common attributes tend to obscure those which are distinctive."[97]

Das makes the important observation that the gods are usually credited with two births, "one physical and material, and the other subtle and spiritual",[98] suggesting strongly that they were not regarded merely as physical phenomena, but as something over and beyond them. As a consequence of this characteristic they are called <u>dvijanma</u>, or twice-born.[99] We also see that Father Sky, or Dyaus Pitar, was probably the most primitive conception of God for the entire Aryan family, and which was

certainly conceived not as a merely localized godling, but as the progenitor and ruler of all the gods and was himself the manifestation of an invisible type of sky called Parama Vyoma.[100] And it was within this larger and more rarefied entity that Indra is said to have upheld the Divine Parents, Dyaus and Pṛthivī.[101] These higher order abstractions strongly indicate a search for a higher principle that was going on in the minds of the Ṛṣis, a yearning for the invisible, a conception that appears to be at least bordering on the truly spiritual. And yet, though against this background, there continued to be projected the din and clamour of the activities of the gods with all their physical and material trappings. And therefore the investigator needs always to remember that the mythological garb in which the more advanced spiritual ideas may be discerned, is a mythology that is constantly evolving. The idea of evolution need not give us the idea only of progress. There could also be regressions, mythological aberrations. Just as the descent of man according to the evolutionary hypothesis could not have been a simple step-by-step advance, but must have been marked by many unproductive blind alleys, so also we may justifiably imagine that mythology was not a steadily ascending or advancing one.

But it is the same line of thought, that is, maintaining the unbiased and objective viewpoint, that com-

pels us to give due importance to the many striking features of the ṚgVedic collection, features that convey the clear sense of an overpowering and transcendental Divine Power, whose partial manifestation can be seen in the most insignificant object even, as in the mighty powers of nature, and which does not lose itself in these manifestations.

And the very same spirit of objective enquiry, and unbiasedness, requires us to reveal that, upon going through the nearly 10500 verses of the ṚgVedic collection, we meet with much that it appears trite, childish and insignificant in terms of our theistic interest.

Yet the passages which speak more clearly to us of the Divine Power, the passages that must strike our sensibilities as passages of an almost different order, are yet not totally divorced from the bulk of the background material. In important ways they seem to grow out of the vast liturgy of the ṚgVeda, like the flowers and fruits of a wide-spreading tree. Even this vast background is not without its philosophical value, for, what it does not say, when it in other respects it appears to say so much, is of profound value for the metaphysics of theism. But we need to illustrate this argument from the ṚgVeda itself.

One of the characteristics of the ṚgVedic gods, and one which has been noted by almost all investigators,[102] is the habit of grouping certain deities in pairs. For example, Dyaus and Pṛthivī are taken together as Dyāvā-Pṛthivī, and even made into one as Dyāvā-Pṛthivyau. Mitra and Varuṇa have hymns dedicated to them jointly, and they are also made into a new deity as Mitrā-Varuṇau. There are about eighteen such compound names in the ṚgVeda.[103]

Now, when gods in any primitive and ancient mythology are tied to physical phenomena, they are precluded from violating the territorial integrity of other nature gods; the delimitation imposed upon their powers is fixed and severe, and, of course under such conditions the religious thoughts cannot rise to the level of a monotheism.[104] However when a slight metaphysical abstraction is allowed as when the deities are severally anthropomorphised and endowed with independent wills and means of action (as in the Greek and Vedic mythologies), then their connections with the physical phenomena, even if not totally severed, become theistically irrelevant. Because then what looms up as of the utmost importance is the conative propensities of the gods, that is, what they will to do. In spite of an immense amount of frenzied and boisterous activity of the major Vedic gods, and even if we allow that a great deal of the sacrifice-related

hymns are trite and vain and materialistically orientated; what we do not find in the Veda, what is most conspicuous by its absence, is that the gods do not range themselves against each other, they do not split themselves into opposing camps, though the Ṛṣis knew all about wars and battle-strategies, though they were aware of the gods giving to their devotees victory in battles, though they were even aware of the concept of deceit and unfairness and luck. Yet, except for the very minor, and quite unclear episode of Indra acting against the Maruts, the Vedic gods do not challenge each other, they are never a house divided against itself.

In time, and only in time,[105] do the major gods succeed each other. Dyaus merely "fades" away,[106] and in time, Agni also fades away, both giving way before the supremacy of Indra, who in time and in his turn, gives way to Brahmā in later Hinduism. But the point of supreme theistic importance, and what must point to an underlying metaphysical formulation, is that the gods never line up against each other in open conflict, as the Greek gods do, and as other primitive and non-spiritual polytheistic gods can be easily imagined to do.

Max Muller's concept of henotheism is sometimes regarded as mere "poetic licence" on the part of the Ṛṣis.[107] By the same token, the Ṛṣis were free to

present the concept of their favourite god (accepting such a way of speaking temporarily) in any one of a number of relationships with the other gods. Yet it is the most remarkable fact, and theistically of the utmost importance, that, given the apparently polytheistic background of the Vedas, the Ṛṣis never sought to juxtapose the gods into a relationship of conflict.

Max Muller regarded henotheism as "a peculiar character of the ancient Vedic religion", and it is imperative that the full weight and significance of this peculiarity be imposed upon the projected polytheism of the Vedas. For it is only against the background of polytheistic belief and practice that we can properly speak of henotheism as a "peculiarity." If, on the other hand, once monotheism is accepted as the general belief running through the Vedic hymns, and polytheism is regarded as the mere appearance thereof, henotheism will evaporate as a problem, because it will stand explained. And, in its place polytheism cannot arise as a problem, for the reason that it is already explained as a naturalistically-based mythological phenomenon. That is, it will pose no metaphysical problem. And surely that must be the aim of philosophy, as of science, the arrival at that position which is the simplest and most comprehensive explanation of all the known facts. The view that reads the Vedic hymns as rank polytheism, is,

to say the least, unsatisfactory from the philosophical perspective, as it must surely be degrading to the religious sensibility, though on no account can the latter be made part of the motivation of our thesis.

In consonance with our stated aim of a thorough and objective assessment of the data of the RgVedic hymns, and before we go on to further details, we need to analyse fully the two above-mentioned features of non-conflict among the gods, and henotheism, in order to understand accurately the metaphysical basis of Vedic thought.

Now, the importance of an issue often becomes more prominent and obvious when considered in negative terms. Following this principle, the issue of non-conflict among the Vedic gods may be changed hypothetically to one of positive conflict. This would then make Vedic mythology analogous to Greek mythology, and the verdict of rank polytheism would surely have to be unhesitatingly delivered by all Indologists with regard to Vedic mythology.. It is significant that in such a case, hypothetical as it may be, while anthropomorphism would loom large, the naturalistic basis of the mythology, that is, the gods as representations, in some measure, of natural phenomena, would not appear relevant at all.

The fact of anthropomorphic characteristics in notions of God has never been a serious theological problem. It does not necessarily detract from the supremacy of His power or the unity of His nature. In any case, it is a common denominator among Semitic, Vedic, and Greek mythologies, and, as such, can be cancelled out. The odd feature is that of the naturalistic character of Vedic mythology. As noted earlier, it has to be accepted that Vedic mythology shows strong naturalistic orientations, and these orientations originated in the common Indo-European homeland, the Urheimat, of ancient times. The Vedic branch of the larger family continued to develop its mythology on foundations supplied by such naturalistic origins. As noted in the section on the gods of the Vedic pantheon, almost all the major gods, Dyaus, Varuṇa, Indra, Agni, etc. have a clear naturalistic base. To what extent, if at all, these gods are abstracted from their naturalistic bases, even in and through various functions, and made to serve a genuine theistic interest, is the part of objective scholarship to say.

With this added dimension and the salubrious direction it provides for the understanding of Vedic mythology, we may again take up for consideration, in quick succession, the two issues of non-conflict among the gods, and henotheism. And it has already been seen that

these two issues are closely related.

Macdonald, who favours the interpretation of "rank polytheism" of the Vedic mythology, speaking about henotheism with regard to the god Agni, says:

> ". . .Agni, the lord of fire, . . . is spoken of as the first god, not inferior even to Indra. Sometimes, while Agni is invoked, Indra may be even forgotten; <u>for there is not competition always between the two, nor a rivalry between them and the other gods</u>. Some may regard this as a most important feature in the religion of the Veda, seldom taken into consideration by those who have written on the history of ancient polytheism."[108]

These are extremely significant words in relation to the issues under discussion. They provide significant reinforcement for a form of monotheism that we think our research is surely revealing, as far as the Veda is concerned. The under-scoring in the above quotation is ours; that Macdonald admits to the non-competitive, non-rivalry character of the relationships among the Vedic gods, is certainly an important part of our argument, and the reinforcement it receives, again from Macdonald, though in a negative sense, when he says that in some

quarters this fact of non-rivalry may be regarded "as a most important feature in the religion of the Veda." is another important part of the argument, attesting to the genuineness of the argument from a logical point of view, and which indicates the clear relevance of it at the same time to our thesis.

When Macdonald goes on to indicate that this feature of non-conflict among the gods is "seldom taken into consideration by those who have written of the history of ancient polytheism", it becomes for us a startling revelation of the facile manner in which judgements of "rank polytheism" have been passed on the Vedic religion in most quarters, and the undoubted importance of it, for the sake of a clear appreciation of the actual state of affairs with regard to the ancient religion of India. Since this feature of non-rivalry is so pervasive a characteristic of the Vedas, its detailed treatment, is essential for a proper assessment of the developmental aspects of Indian religious thought as whole, and for the defining characteristics of the Vedic religion especially.

Macdonald gives a verdict opposed to the theory of a non-conflict among the gods, for he says: "nor do we know that the one god is forgotten when the other is so praised",[109] and because references are in fact made to

the other gods in the immediately following hymns. His view appears to be that the monotheistic sense is only an apparent one, though he admits that when any god "is conceived as the one and only God",[110] "strong language was frequently used by the worshipper with respect to their god".[111] And his argument for rejecting any kind of monotheistic sense in the Vedas is given with some finality as :"But all must admit equally flattering language was addressed to almost every member of the Aryan pantheon.".[112] Macdonald's rejection of henotheism as a significant phenomenon appears to be based on the general polytheistic character of the Vedic hymns. Yet it is only against the background of such general polytheism that henotheism can at all be considered a phenomenon. Vedic mythology does not present us with an unmixed polytheism nor a straight and simple monotheism. These are the bland facts of the case, the bare data upon which scholarship has to labour.

We cannot disregard henotheism; it does not occur just once and is then forgotten. It recurs, with reference to almost every major god of the Vedas, and the language is often stately and imposing. To pass it off as of no consequence is to ignore an important aspect of the data, and can only give rise to stilted conclusions. If we say with Bloomfield that henotheism is "polytheism grown stale in service",[113] we have to contend with many

recurring points of such staleness, and then it becomes apparent that such a characterization does not really explain the phenomenon. What is really required is a philosophical explanation, and one that takes full account of all the relevant data in an objective and scientific spirit. What is needed is to bring the phenomenon of henotheism, together with related ideas, into a satisfactory metaphysical system, one that will explain it as a phenomenon, apart from merely naming it. Calling the phenomenon as "henotheism" and allowing it to float around as an oddity of Indological research, presumably with other oddities, is to invite condemnation of it as of no consequence (as Bloomfield and others have done), or according it the status of a non-concept (as Macdonald has done), upon the mere feeling and fancy of the researcher. Henotheism and related ideas are real facts of Vedic mythology. They are not bound to disappear merely by ignoring them.

The great Max Muller coined the term 'henotheism' and brought to the attention of the Indological world the existence of this phenomenon over a hundred and ten years ago. Within two years, Macdonald brought out his book on the Vedic Religion admittedly with the purpose of helping the missionary carry out his calling in India, prefacing it with the words:

"To help him to do so the following pages have been written, in the hope that the Spirit of God may use them for the pulling down of strongholds, and for the building up of His own kingdom in India."[114]

It is obvious that the scientific objectivity with which Max Muller investigated Vedic mythology and the motive of clarification of some problems associated with it that we see manifested in his isolating the phenomenon of 'henotheism' from the general gods of Vedic mythology, we cannot properly expect from the work of Macdonald. The latter's stripping the concept of 'henotheism' of all significance and its reduction to the level of a non-concept, are, on objective grounds, that is, on the grounds testified by the clear contents of the Vedic hymns, inadmissible. And we may recall that even Bloomfield, who seemed irritated by the phenomenon of henotheism, did not deny the fact of the phenomenon. On the contrary, he credited it with being a form of monotheism, only, he condemned it as being an "opportunist monotheism."[115]

Bloomfield's characterization of henotheism as an "opportunist monotheism" allows a grudging recognition to the existence of some type of limited monotheism in the Vedas, while at the same time stigmatizing it as being

out of character with the large majority of ideas in the Vedas. We have to differ from Bloomfield on purely philosophical grounds.

Our researches have shown that the Vedas promote a plurality of gods, where the gods have to be taken as a peculiarity of the mere nomenclature. The Vedas also give evidence of a naturalistically-orientated polytheism, where the same nomenclature is tied to many and discrete natural phenomena. But our researches also reveal that the gods so tied to the objects of nature are as easily abstracted from those objects (even Macdonald admits this in some ways[116]) and made to serve mythological ends, ends which often, and in startling ways, exceed the normal expectations associated with those objects. But most importantly, the polytheistic deities often operate along dimensions that, when taken by themselves, can only be interpreted as serving religious ends associated with a Unifying Divine Power. The high points of these instances are the henotheistic and related phenomena under our present scrutiny.

We recall that Macdonald denied that any real theistic unity was ever achieved in India, and compares Vedic mythology with Greek and Jewish ideas.[117] And, in contradicting the phenomenon of henotheism, he denies that the different gods are really forgotten by the worship-

pers.[118] His position has an internal logic, though he has veered away from the actualities of Vedic religion. By this we mean that Macdonald expects a unity of the Greek or Semitic type, like sovereignty of a monarch who either maintains petty rulers under him, or subdues them to annihilation.[119] He gives us this feeling whenever he says in such effective words, that Indra "got to the highest throne in the Pantheon, eclipsing his majestic rival Varuṇa, by the din of his resounding splendour." He says further, showing the kind of Supreme God he expects: " Most unfortunately, we do not discover in their writings that the Rishis were finders of the true God. There is a gulf between him, the holy One and the just, and any and every other divinity or divinities."[120] But no amount of comparison and denunciation can alter the fact that Semitic mythology and Vedic mythology have been moving along quite different theistic dimensions. The terms of one cannot be transposed into the spirit of the other. The components of one cannot be foisted upon the ethos of the other. Though the two may be compared for some similarities (which are to be expected as both are sub-cultures of one human family), it is the appreciation of their differences that is the real fruit and most meaningful result of the exercise in comparison. For the two traditions, the Semitic one on the one hand, and the Aryan or Vedic on the other, operate wholly in terms of differing sets of metaphysical premises.

Because of Macdonald's stated missionary interest (quite legitimate in itself) he tends to see the significance of the Vedic gods in terms of Semitic presumptions. And herein lies his error, as a result of which he is led to deny the raw data of henotheism, when he asserts that other gods are not forgotten when one god is raised to the level of one only Divine Power. In this, we contend, he touches upon the most significant difference in approach to the Divine Power between the Semitic and the Aryan traditions. In the Semitic tradition it is the essence of the religious consciousness to deny all other gods, indeed, to assert their non-existence, and if their names are invoked by others, to declare them "false gods", while at the same time asserting the reality and truthful being of the one only True God. In the Aryan tradition, on the other hand, the reality of the one only True God is asserted in and through the existence of all the other gods, when such gods are present to the minds of the worshippers. It is primarily the sense of unity, the consciousness of a single undivided Divine Power, and which is perceived as operating in terms of the different divinities, that makes for the assertion of the one only Divine Power and its supremacy against the fractionated sense of it. We admit, however, that it is a fair criticism that it may be difficult to make out whether it is the fractionated sense or the unified sense of the Divine Power that is

really carried uppermost in the minds of the worshippers, and much depends upon the actual language used with reference to a particular idea of divinity. This is not vital in Macdonald's case, and his criticism that other gods are not forgotten cannot be vindicated as an argument against the supremacy of a comprehensive one only Divine Power, for it is at least clear that, in principle, such a Divine Power can be asserted in and through a plurality of gods in the context of Vedic religious thought.

From a purely philosophical point of view, then, we have shown that there are acceptable grounds in the Vedic hymns themselves for accommodating a type of polytheistic attitude within a larger metaphysic that generally allows for the view of Divine Unity and establishes it strikingly under special conditions (of the henotheistic variety). This is stating the case as objectively as possible, and if we were to generalize, we can assert that the Vedic religious teachings give us, as its high point, the existence of the one only Divine Power or God, that functions in the world in diverse ways (that is, through the agency of diverse divinities, which are the <u>devas</u> or gods).

We have now prepared the ground for considering Bloomfield's criticism of "opportunist monotheism." As

noted earlier, this phrase is serious enough in its implication that henotheism, that is, raising one god after another to the highest level of Divine Power, is out of character with much of the Vedic hymns. But we see this criticism as being out of step with Bloomfield's own perception of clear monistic trends in the Vedic hymns (which will be the subject of our discussion in the next section). Even if we accept the general chronology of these hymns as being later than the bulk of the liturgy, still they cannot be surmised to be uncharacteristic of the ethos, though they are uncharacteristic of the expression of it, of earlier hymns. We know that later, when the monistic doctrine comes into its own in the Upaniṣads, though that is not the only line of development, the gods of the ṚgVeda are displaced,[121] not because they contradict the inner ethos of Upaniṣads, but because they have become redundant in relation to the central thesis of monism.

We suspect that Bloomfield also has had Semitic-type expectations in the Vedic monotheistic expression - the expectation that, for the monotheism to be genuine, the other gods must be denied and completely obliterated, so that the supremacy and glory of the one only god (Indra or Varuṇa or Agni etc.) would be thereafter permanently established. Again, as explained above, this is a type of monotheism that cannot fairly be expected of the

Vedas. Such an expectation, in its application to the Vedas, is inappropriate. Because Bloomfield imposes such an expectation, derived from Semitic sources, upon the Vedic scriptures, his characterization of the phenomenon of henotheism as an "opportunist monotheism" is inappropriate and misleading.

It is not necessary to be culturally chauvinist or racially prejudiced. But it is necessary, from the point of view of objective scholarship, to understand that Semitic and Aryan theistic values do not easily mix. Attempting to judge one tradition in terms of the norms of the other gives us a false reading of both. The tendency on the part of many Western scholars, and Indian scholars too, to impose Semitic values upon the Vedas have resulted in lop-sided accounts of Vedic religious ideas. Our researches have revealed that Vedic religious thought is complex enough, and at times quite baffling, based as it is on an evolutionary mythology. But reading it with Semitic-style preconceptions in mind only introduces unnecessary complications, which hinder the clarification and systematization of that thought. The Vedas have to be studied with reference to its own contents at every point without the introduction of foreign ideas, but with some help from the sciences of comparative philology and comparative anthropology, history, psychology, etc. But imposing doctrines that are not indigenous to the Vedas.

cannot reveal their thought properly, and often serves only to confound the confusion worse.

Over a hundred years of indological research on Vedic religious thought has not resulted in any satisfactory system that accommodates the major characteristics of Vedic thought in a uniform manner. We are of the opinion that this has been so because of the operation of Semitic-style presumptions in the minds of the researchers, sincere and painstaking as their labours no doubt were in the interests of learning.

Our considered contention is that, if presumptions have to be made, presumptions that aid the research by accommodating the largest possible amount of data, then those presumptions must be made on the basis of the contents of the Vedic texts themselves, that is, on the basis of the data itself. Only by proceeding along this line can a philosophically satisfying system be arrived at, an explanation along a truly metaphysical dimension of the many deities of the Vedas and their relationships, and an explanation of the meaning of the single, one only Divine Power, that finds such recurring mention in the Vedas, and upon whose meaning the investigators often appear to be seeking an easy exit.

As stated earlier above, the later monistic develop-

ment,[122] which finds some impression in some of the hymns of the Tenth Book of the ṚgVeda, already gives us the basic ethos of ṚgVedic mythology. This is not to say that the ideas of monism itself are clearly developed, but they are expressed in the most general terms in many passages and in many different ways throughout the text. And, it is most important for us to realise that all these allied ideas find origin and justification in terms of the grand and ancient concept of Ṛta, and which operates as the great key which makes intelligible a host of Vedic ideas and expressions. Through the concept of Ṛta, the Vedas themselves provide us with that metaphysical principle which explains all at once the polytheistic, henotheistic, monotheistic, and even monistic principles that baffle us in the text of the Vedas.

Ṛta is a peculiarly Aryan concept, and is judged to be associated with the god Varuṇa specifically from the early days of the rise of Vedic mythology.[123] But we are anticipating our fuller treatment of this all-important term.

The concept of Ṛta, as a single concept, provides the basis for the understanding of the Vedas as a unique body of religious literature. It includes no presuppositions born of any other tradition. It is native to the soil of the Vedas, that is, it has been carried by the

singers of the hymns, wherever they have sojourned, having arisen wholly from out of the Vedic hymns. We need not make any appeal to philosophy, or anthropology or history, or to any extra-Vedic authority in order to justify it. It presents itself to us in somewhat subdued form, merely to be logically construed and put together from so many references and allusions to it in the Vedas. Most importantly, it is the explanation of Vedic monotheism and the many monistic trends apparent in the hymns, while it at the same time it reinforces, supports and extends the meanings of these developments. It is the single concept with an amazing range of applications. It is the basic spirit and ethos of the specifically religious side of Vedic culture, though it may be true that the bulk of the hymns may not reflect this spirit. But there are sufficient clear manifestations of this principle to enable us to formulate through it a substantial metaphysical theory under which both monotheism (such as it occurs in the Vedas) and monistic ideas may be easily subsumed.

Due to the principle of Rta, the Vedic gods could not be ranged against each other in any serious conflict. The gods represent light and goodness, prosperity and righteousness, and they cannot be out of harmony with each other no matter how closely they might be tied to natural objects. All nature is a gigantic system of har-

mony, a cosmos, not a chaotic heap of objects and elements.

If we apply this principle of Ṛta to our treatment of the Vedic gods, we immediately see that a harmonious relationship becomes established among them. On this principle the phenomenon of non-conflict among the gods stands explained, for the operation of Ṛta ensures a harmonious blending. The characteristics of one god tend to be shared with other gods. While such sharing of characteristics can sometimes be explained on historical grounds and in terms of the development of the mythology, as in the case of Varuṇa and Indra,[124] mere historical and mythological development does not explain a certain primary motivation in the minds of the Ṛṣis, a motivation that operates as the presumptive governing factor guiding the relationships among the gods.[125]

The hymns reveal that different Ṛṣis often promote their favourite conceptions. Yet, besides a mild type of competitive spirit evident in the hymns, understandable in terms of human preferences, the gods are never engineered into any open conflict. In fact, the features of one god are freely ascribed to other gods, in spite of the desire to advance favourite conceptions. And a favourite god is raised to the highest level of Divine Power as the one only God, while the other gods may not

be forgotten.

There can be no rational explanation of this phenomenon other than the projection of an ontological principle behind the conception of the gods, a principle that itself sustains the gods; nay, a principle of which even the gods themselves are but the varied expressions. Such a principle is Rta, arising in a clear way from out of the bulk of the ṚgVedic mythology, but which at the same time supplies the raison d'etra of that mythology. It may be that this principle assumed its importance during the course of the evolution of the myths, though it also seems to have been germane to the conception of Varuṇa, which takes its genesis back in time to Indo-European origins.

In any case, the Ṛṣis of the Vedas must have been aware of an underlying ontological principle, running generally through the hymns known to them. And when the individual Ṛṣis were responsible for creating new hymns, they appear to have accepted the inviolability of the spiritual principle, so that wherever we have gods exhibiting distinctive personality characteristics, in line with a general naturalistic base of the mythology, it is only the appearance and dressing in various styles, for a reality which is in essence one.

If we are looking for a metaphysical principle that will operate as the key to unlock some of the most important and nagging problems posed in the Vedas so far as theistic interests go, we have such a principle in the spiritual conception of Ṛta. We do not have to develop a logical construction, or ingeniously twist linguistic terms of the Vedas (which becomes an endless process), or look for cross-cultural conceptions (which can create new problems which are never really in the original texts). We have such a principle ready to hand; a principle that, within the context of Vedic thought, appears to be metaphysically sound, and which reasonable appears to have been operating as a guiding principle in significant areas in the development of that tradition.

The use of this principle of interpretation satisfies the scientific criteria of both accuracy and economy. Accuracy because it directly solves once and for all, the major problem phenomena in relation to the Vedic gods. Economy because as a single conception it explains so much directly while at the same time lending a spirit and an ethos which leads so naturally and smoothly to the later monistic-type developments. But not at all insignificant is the fact that it totally obviates the need to impose a Semitic model for the elucidation of Vedic ideas. As an indigenous Aryan term, the principle of Ṛta can accommodate the entire range of

the development of Vedic thought from its Indo-European past, through the Indo-Iranian interlude, to the period of the settlement of the Aryans in the Panjab plains and the expansion of Aryan hegemony throughout northern and central India: further through the classical and medieval periods of Hinduism, and even down into the modern period of neo-Hinduistic developments. If just one term can do so much, it should surely be adopted even if it were a totally foreign concept. That it is indigenous to Vedic culture calls for no further recommendation.

Vedic monotheism, which has to approached within the context of Vedic hymns, is seen strikingly in the figure of Varuṇa. And the most striking feature of Varuṇa is that he is pre-eminently the god of righteousness, keeper of the moral law of Ṛta. The worshipper of Varuṇa feels the burden of some type of sin, and wishes to expiate it, but does not really know how to go about it. He has the feeing that the grace of Varuṇa alone can break the feeling of guilt. And this grace is seen in association with the god, as in the verse:

> "What has become of those friendships of ours,
> that we once shared, free of offence?...
> Since thine ally of old is dear to thee, O
> Varuṇa, though he has sinned, let him be thy
> friend."[126]

Varuṇa also appears in the hymns together with the gods Āryaman and Mitra, suggesting the characteristic commonness among the Vedic gods. But, of all the Vedic hymns, the special feature of the hymns to Varuṇa is that they reveal a strong personal relationship between God and man. And the relationship is a moral one, with Varuṇa representing the source of the moral law.[127] A comparative interest sees in the figure of Varuṇa the closest resemblance to the Semitic idea of a god of righteousness,[128] and this line of thought, though interesting in itself, cannot be pressed too far.

In terms of the principle of Ṛta, which is the source of moral and physical law,[129] as well as of all the gods,[130] a general and ineluctable sense of a pervasive and universal unity is established throughout the ṚgVedic hymns. Although a great many hymns appear commonplace and without bearing on religious issues, they are not a contradiction of this principle. Says Stephen, referring to this principle:

> "This conception occupies more space than any other in the Veda, indeed it is Pantheism, and it is the most permanent element in all Hindu thought. We find it everywhere."[131]

And it is in terms of this principle, the various

deities being expressions of it, in spite of a naturalistically-based mythology, that any god can be raised to the level of the one only God, the supreme Divine Power, which can then be legitimately counted as the high points of Vedic monotheism. It is in this sense that "in the ṚgVeda Varuṇa is an all-pervasive, all-encompassing, and all-enveloping god."[132]

We may also note that Varuṇa represents the high point of an ethical monotheism in the Vedas, and that, with the changing preference for gods in Vedic mythology, such ethical concerns give way more to concerns relating to power and glory.[133] Yet this does not affect the supremacy of individual gods raised to the highest position, though this supremacy tends towards a heroic form of monotheism, especially in the case of Indra: as we see in:

> "Even the heavens and earth bow before him,
> And at his vehemence the mountains tremble."[134]

and in:

> "Apart from whom men never are victorious,
> Whom they, when fighting, call on for assistance."[135]

And a more striking monotheistic glorification, with

strong metaphysical undertones, as seen in:

> "Indra has no match among those born or to be born".[136]

and in "He makes the non-existent existent."[137]

It should not be imagined that the Vedas consistently, or even generally, present striking revelations of monotheism, as understood in the Vedic context. As already noted, there is a significant shift away from an austere, ethical monotheism in the direction of a more world-affirming attitude that shows an unabashed preference for the goods of this world. Yet this is an expression of optimism that does not reduce the value of Rta as the inner power, with its ever-creative expressions. It is only later, when the outward perceptions are slowly replaced, through a one-sided development of the general Rta-idea, for a search after an inner vision, that theistic ideas tend to be suppressed or bypassed.[138]

The clear enthusiasm for life and the beauties of the natural world,[139] reflected in the Vedas seem not to allow the gods to evaporate or fade away, as happened in the Upaniṣads. There appears to be a genuine correlation between an outward, more realistic appraisal of life and the world on the one hand, and some form of monotheistic

outlook on the other. The common essence of the gods is not allowed to replace the gods; rather, the gods are real expressions of this essence. Therefore the hymns declare the reality of the one only Divine Power (which is the inner essence) through the reality of the multifarious gods of Vedic mythology. Thus we have an entire hymn with the refrain:

"Great is the single divinity of the gods".[140]

The asya vāmīya hymn is rightly famous as a monotheistic hymn that more strongly leans towards an impersonalistic idea.[141]

If we turn to the figure of Viṣṇu, who, though he occupies a comparatively insignificant position in the Vedas, we see that he is nevertheless associated with an immensely significant monotheistic development in later literature. His most important characteristic in the ṚgVeda is that of his taking the three steps - one on earth, one in the middle region, and one in heaven.[142] Although some traditional, and later modern commentators take the three steps to mean the rising, culminating and setting of the sun, since Visnu is associated mythologically with the sun, yet he is "not clearly connected with any natural phenomenon",[143] and, taking into account the etymological meaning of the name Viṣṇu, with which the

meaning of his action of taking the three steps is consistent, the conception appears significant in terms of Vedic monotheism.

Thus, the characteristic of ascribing supreme excellence allied to a single, all-encompassing Divine Power, to individual gods, becomes meaningful only when viewed in terms of Rta, the Inner Essence, in which they participate, and by virtue of which they are expressions of that excellence. If it is difficult to forget that the monotheistic ideas are expressed through gods that in many ways function also as discrete deities, then the monotheism of the Vedas will have to be dubbed as belonging to a polytheistic background. On the other hand, if the gods are taken to be the shifting and impermanent expressions of a higher or deeper reality, expressions that offer themselves to the senses directly, then the theism of the Vedas may justifiably be called a monotheism. Much depends upon the way in which the hymns affect the subjective sensibilities of the researcher.

There is room in the Vedas for both views. It would be a useless show of dogmatism to assert one view to the complete rejection of the other. It is to be noted that even Western researchers have acknowledged the existence at least, in the Vedas, of genuine monotheistic ideas. Writing as early as 1829, Lt. Col Vans Kennedy, who had

lived and worked in India for many years, observes with admirable perspicacity, regarding Vedic and modern Hindu forms of worship:

> "...monotheism and polytheism are so intimately blended together, both in their sacred books which were most likely composed more than 3000 years ago, and in the daily thoughts of the Hindus of the present day, as to render it probable that neither of these two systems preceded the other, but that that they were both actually coeval in origin."[144]

This is a significant way of expressing the relationship between polytheism and monotheism in the Vedic religion. It shows that there is no vital antagonism between the two theistic modes, so far as the Vedic expression of it is concerned. For, as explained already, both are the expressions of the inner essence or Rta. And, as Kennedy points out, it is very likely that the two systems originated together, which points to the high antiquity of the concept of Rta, which can be established easily from the Vedic hymns themselves.

Developing still further the monotheistic idea of the transcendence of God, and of the impossibility of manifesting this transcendence except in proximate terms, within the framework of Hindu metaphysics, Kennedy says:

". . . and it would seem therefore, that the belief in one God, and in the impossibility of His rendering his power manifest except through the intervention of other celestial beings, were co-existent and fundamental tenets of this religion from its very first origin."[145]

Referring to the impressive hymn dedicated to the goddess Vāc, Das speaks of it in terms of the principle of Ṛta, after giving a translation of the hymn at length. He says of the various gods, that:

"These manifestations, though diverse in character are really one in essence. All objects, material and immaterial, owe their origin to it. The ṚgVedic bards realized the presence of this Universal Soul not only in the God, but in men, animals, trees, mountains, and in all natural phenomena."[146]

Max Muller also has testified to the clear sense of a Transcendent Divine Power in the Vedic hymns quite apart from any ideas of an original revelation, and rather as a compulsive urge that led the Ṛṣis to express their ideas in divine ways, and more in a manner of a search for that nameless reality, of whose presence they were sure, but which they could not grasp:

"The ancient Aryans felt from the beginning, nay, it may be more in the beginning than afterwards, the presence of a Beyond, of an Infinite of a Divine, or whatever else we may call it now; and they tried to grasp and comprehend it, as we all do, by giving to it name after name."[147]

It is true that not only do the later hymns (of the Tenth Book of the ṚgVeda), but also the earlier books, contain many direct references, and many allusions, to a Transcendental Power. While the hymns show evidence of a naturalistic base, that is, while it is so clear that the gods refer immediately to aspects of nature, the hymns are yet not merely nature poetry, for we get the sure feeling that the Ṛṣis are often imbued with the realization of a spiritual Divine Power above and beyond the natural world. Commenting on the projection of the Immanent World Soul, and quoting the verse:

"Ātma jagatastasthusasca," as meaning "the Soul of all that moves or is immovable",[148] Das says:

"This invisible world of the soul constitutes the one underlying principle of all physical existence, life and manifestations, and the ṚgVedic bards had a clear conception of it."[149]

Further quoting the impressive verse:

"One is that which hath become all this," Das concludes that

> "It will thus appear that there was in the mind of the RgVedic bards a clear conception of unity in the midst of diversity".[150]

We are now in a position to conclude our discussion on the important and interesting topic of monotheism with respect to the RgVeda specifically, and the Vedas in general. We have seen that, through representative quotations drawn from the Vedas, a certain monotheism forces itself upon our perceptions, while there are many more allusions to a general Divine Power operating in and through the different god, as well as in and through the objects of nature, and which Divine Power is commonly referred to as Rta.

We have seen that this principle of Rta is seen to operate even along the physical dimension since it is ineluctably associated with the gods, in the manner of being the vital essence of the gods. Yet it is more properly the principle of Divine Power, and which operates most conveniently in terms of an all-comprehensive metaphysical principle.

On the somewhat negative side, as we have shown plainly, there are innumerable gods mentioned in the Vedas. If we wish to be conservative in favour of a traditional view, we may say they are innumerable names merely. But in terms of an objective and unbiased assessment, we have to note that these names are associated with personality characteristics, both descriptive and operational, with a sufficient degree of consistency to enable us to identify the different gods over the period of their individual careers, and this in despite of the remarkable feature of the fluidity of the gods. We are therefore constrained to declare that the religion of the ṚgVeda is particular, and the Vedas in general, is not essentially polytheistic, but it is marked by clearly polytheistic characteristics against a monotheistic background. This way of expressing the matter places some emphasis on the principle of Ṛta or the Inner Essence which our research has shown runs throughout the Vedic hymns, and is not displaced even when the naturalistic connections appear strong. For, in our view, the monotheism of the Vedas is a variety of its own kind, in the sense that it is inseparable from the immanentist doctrine of the Inner Essence, and as having its origin and being in it.

We are in a position to maintain this contention in

spite of some Western views favouring the figure of Varuṇa as very nearly approximating to a Semitic-type of monotheism. As shown earlier, our contention is that even Varuṇa, as a purely Aryan god, is the "Asura par excellence",[151] and as such he is in fact a striking, if not the best, expression of the Inner Essence or Ṛta. In this he is no less an Aryan god than Indra; perhaps more so. Our position, as a consequence of these considerations, is that Vedic monotheism is best described as "polytheistic monotheism" which suitably entails the role of the immanentist doctrine of pantheism.

In support of our position, we quote just one occidental scholar, no less than the respected indologist Prof. Macdonell, who says:

> ". . . by the end of the ṚgVedic period a kind of polytheistic monotheism had been arrived at. We find there even the incipient pantheistic conception of a deity representing not only all the gods but Nature as well."[152]

3.3 MONISTIC TENDENCIES

One very impressive aspect of the Vedic hymns is, as has often been pointed out, its spirit of "joie de vivre", the outgoing tendency of love of life, enjoyment

of the goods of the world provided by nature, and an incurable optimism. When the forces of darkness are perceived to overtake man and human society, whether mythological such as the Vṛtra-demon, or historical such as the opposing dasyu forces, Vedic man responded, often lustily, with verve and passion, and opposed these forces with total involvement of self and society, to preserve the cherished values of the good life. In modern Hinduism, this spirit of optimism with the centrality of man is preserved for us in the dictum that "there is nothing greater than humanity".[153]

No one who has even casually studied the bulk of the Vedas will deny that this dictum is in the clearest line of development from those ancient hymns, which for all its varied religious expressions, give primacy of place to man and society.

The tradition, however, that pervades educated circles, both Indian and Western, and to an extent the lay public as well, is that "the soul of India is essentially philosophical".[154] By this declaration Dandekar means to say that a distinctive brand of philosophical outlook, derived, in part, no doubt, from the ancient treatises, eschewed "the anthropocentric tendency which dominates most of the Western philosophical thought",[155] and emphasized a variation of it by making man a 'part'

of Nature. This gave centrality to the cosmos, or nature, and only second place to man. In the words of Dandekar:

> "According to the cosmic vision of the Indian, which must be clearly distinguished from the anthropocentric speculation of the West, man does not stand 'apart' from Nature - he is essentially 'a part' of Nature. Cosmos or Nature, and not man, is therefore the starting point of the Indian philosophical thought."[156]

As our discussion of the principle of Rta has already shown, man is certainly 'a part' of Nature, and, in addition, in terms of this principle, a vital part of Divine Nature. And so far as the Vedas are concerned, it is in terms of this principle of Rta, which is the all-comprehensive Divine Power, which comprehends under it all of nature, including man, that thoughts about nature as the highest possible generalization of created things can give rise to philosophical speculations.

And again, so far as the Vedas are concerned, that is, keeping within the clear metaphysical premise of the hymns themselves, the supremacy and suzerainty of the self-existent, self-willing Divine Power, which expresses itself through a plurality of gods, and which is to that

extent endowed with personality, is maintained with reasonable consistency in regard to thoughts about the process of creation, and in terms of which speculation proceeded.

Therefore, on purely objective grounds and upon a consideration of the hymns before us, we cannot completely and strictly go along with Dandekar when he says:

> "And the underlying unity of this vast and variegated universe is the first cardinal doctrine of Indian philosophy. Indian philosophy, in other words, is essentially monistic."[157]

We must understand Dandekar as meaning more the Upaniṣadic approach to life and the world than the earlier Vedic approach (though his phraseology seems to take the entire Vedic development in its sweep). Yet, it is not unfeasible to allow that certain passages in the later hymns do foreshadow, in some ways, the Upaniṣadic type of monism. And in these hymns we may discern what we may take to be monistic tendencies.

We have seen that the concept of Ṛta, as meaning the Inner Essence, already provides the grid and foundation

upon which monistic ideas of a universal and essential unity can be developed, without any direct violation of the logic of that term. In addition to this principle, there also occur in the Tenth Book of the ṚgVeda, certain seminal hymns, which can be more directly connected with the later philosophical development of Hindu thought and more particularly, monistic thought. The first of these hymns is the Puruṣa Sūkta, or hymn of the Supreme Person. Regarding this hymns Clayton says that:

> ". . .it is certain that in later Vedic times there were those who had begun to give a monistic interpretation to the universe."[158]

As Clayton points out this hymn does not discountenance the older more mythological forms of expression, but rather tries to present higher level philosophical ideas through the use of such mythology. Nevertheless, he asserts that the spiritual unity of all existence is quite "definite in the poet's mind and is forcibly put."[159]

One writer, N V Joshi, sees in the hymns of the Tenth Book the operations of reflection and philosophy conjointly with the religious consciousness, and which together results in the appreciation of a monistic basis for all existence. This type of speculation, he says:

> ". . . has for its basis the genuine religious urge of the individual to attain its highest possibility which can only be one. We can thus say that the RgVeda does point in the direction of ontological monism."[160]

This writer distinguishes ontological monism from logical monism saying that the latter which largely characterises the hymns, seeks to discover a logical principle that can introduce order and system in our experience, a principle that is discovered purely through reasoning and not through experience. If this way of expressing the matter excludes the unity of the objective world, then we cannot agree, for not only is the principle of the Inner Essence or Rta seen to be operating throughout physical nature, taking up man and his mental, psychological and religious consciousness in the process, but it has to be this principle alone, and in no sense a negation of any part of it, that can present itself as the viewpoint of a Vedic monistic tendency. However, he says of the monistic principle in the RgVeda, that it is

> ". . . that creative and dynamic principle which can be regarded as the creator of all that exists. Such a monistic principle, which is ontological, is not foreign to the religious consciousness."[161]

This we can accept, for though it is ontological in the realization of it, it is equally applicable to the objective and the subjective sides of life. The monistic tendencies that we can discern in the Vedas certainly do not give us any indication of the falsity of the objective world. Joshi himself says, in the context of later Vedanta:

> "The Absolute must be existentially operative in everything that is finite", and again, "And if the Absolute does not create the manyness out of itself, then it is prima facie incapable of serving as an ontological principle."[162]

Considering the principle of Rta as the true (and only) ontological principle of unity, we can easily say that it represents the perception of an inner reality in the Vedic hymns, from early times. We may also say that what should distinguish the ordinary praises of the Vedic gods or the mythological accounts of them from those that indicate at least a trend towards monism, is the feature of an inwardness. Says Raju in this regard:

> "In the Vedic religion, the monistic drive is also a drive towards inwardness."[163]

This inwardness, though related to the notion of Rta

or the Inner Essence, is not precisely the same as it; but rather the conscious search after the Supreme Reality.[164] When the worship of the innumerable gods later took the form of a single Reality or Brahman, there was also the realization that this Reality could not be external to man. "It could be found not outside man high up in the heavens but deep within, and inward to him."[165] Although the abstract notion of an inward reality, through which the monistic feeling was best expressed, could be easily traced to the late hymns of the ṚgVeda, there is no clear indication there that it is bereft of all personality.[166] The monistic type hymns, even when they speak of the Primal Reality in the neuter, ascribe to it the urge of creativity and manyness of being, which may be legitimately seen as the endowment of some kind of personality, bound up with the reality of the created universe which is at least as real as the Creator Himself. Thus far does the monism of the ṚgVeda extend itself upon a direct showing of the hymns themselves.

Yet we have to admit that, together with the unorthodox spirit of free enquiry engendered by these hymns, this monistic trend led to the collapse of the gods as Max Muller puts it.[167] "They threw away the old names, but they did not throw away their belief in that which they had tried to name. After destroying the altars of their gods, they built out of the scattered bricks a

new altar to the Unknown God - unknown, unnamed, and yet omnipresent."[168]

Scepticism in the Vedas does not indicate the hollowness of faith; rather it is a sign of faith in the category of the transcendent. There is a clear reference to doubts about Indra's existence, even while the god's praises are sung.[169] The verses give the feeling that the object of the doubt is to enhance the perception of the Reality behind the figure of Indra. It must be said to the credit of the ancient Rsis that they did not look upon this type expression as a sacrilege. Honest doubt appears in the Vedas, more as a doubt about method than about the object of the religious or intellectual exercise, as also asserted by Max Muller.[170]

And following a similar line of argument also, Stephen says of the seers' doubts that lead them to an appreciation of a single power:

> "But a philosopher is never content to believe in many gods and these thinkers saw, and declared, that it was one power which lay behind the many names that man had given"[171]

We have to bear in mind that the singular peculiarity of Vedic monotheistic ideas, and one that sets it apart from Semitic notions of it, is that it is

struck in a pantheistic background, from which it cannot be extricated. There is no school of later Hindu theism even, that will disown or deny the immanence of God in all nature. And this is but the general principle of the Inner Essence of Rta, stated from the point of view of monotheism.

We see thus that monotheism and the ontological principle of Rta are, in theory, in very close relationship, and within a single metaphysical system it can easily be conceived that the two are in fact different ways of looking at a single reality, again only against the background of the immanentist doctrine. When the monotheistic aspect thus gets levelled down, and the more impersonal principle of Rta is emphasized in its aspect of ontological creativity, theism begins to pass over into monism. The fact that monism tends to be featureless, tends to be impersonal and cold, is forgotten in the flush of discovery and newness, spiritual as it no doubt is.

Thus we see that the scepticism that arises out of a perception of the manyness of the gods, that is, a dissatisfaction with this manyness, tends to get confounded with a manyness of things undergirded by a singleness of essence. And this latter dissatisfaction finds its true expression in the emphasis on the One Reality, to the

relative neglect of the manifold world of empirical facts in which men have to operate in their daily lives.

We see this striking enthusiasm for the "one" in the following verse:

> "There is one fire only, wherever it is kindled; one sun shines through the world, one dawn lightens all this; truly one has all this."[172]

This verse gives the clear impression that the "one" fire is more important than all the different hearths or altars wherein the fire is separately kindled; that one sun is more important than the countless individual gardens and forest glades that it lights up. The one dawn is more important than the individual daily dawns that actually mean something to men. The abstraction of the "one" is made more significant than the really meaningful manifestations of it. When this happens, we see the process of the transformation of theism into monism.

The relationships that should obtain between the one god and its many manifestations lose their importance, because it is not the "one sun" or the "one fire" or the "one dawn" that is really the point of the realization, but rather the one-"ness", that is, the pure abstraction

which is of necessity featureless, on pain of endangering its survival as an abstraction. A pantheistic monotheism, such as we have in the Vedas, is always subject to the easy possibility of developing into a featureless monism.

The process of abstraction once begun through the sceptical mode of thought, has no built-in safeguard against the attrition of faith in the conception of a personal God. And this attrition of faith, because of the pantheistic warp and woof of all Indian religion, is a logical product of that distinction in which the oneness of the Divine Power is emphasized to the neglect of the empirical manyness. But it is not easy to say that the Vedic hymns state this type of extreme monism; they only point in that direction, sometimes mildly, sometimes strongly. On the whole, however, even the hymns that show monistic tendencies are really too distant from the classical developments of the monistic Vedanta doctrines.

Our interest, however, is to discover whatever trends towards monism there might be in the Vedic hymns. Such trends need to be analyzed, and examined in terms of underlying factors and ideas, such as would lead to a clearer assessment of these trends. We can show the importance of this procedure by pointing to the existence of significant confusions in the understanding of monism

in relation to monotheism. For example, Masih says:

> "The monistic tendency set in through henotheism, but also through the process of blurring of the characters of many gods, e.g., Mitra, Sūrya, Savitṛ, stand for sun and light. Parjanya, Indra, Maruts, Vāyu and Vāta are associated with rain and winds."[173]

Many writers have assessed henotheism as a step towards monotheism, as simple and logical development. And we have already shown the fluid character of the go as helping to establish the monotheistic doctrine withi the framework of Vedic metaphysical premises. And moni is most certainly not a doctrine of merely the one only God, of which conception Masih himself is clearly aware.[174] Yet he confuses monotheism with monism becau of insufficient evaluation of the pantheistic factor in the definition of monism.

Masih is correct when he says of the famous Asya Vāmīya hymn that: "Naturally a reality which can be called Agni or Yama or Mātariśvān cannot be any one of them in particular",[175] but he certainly is incorrect i his assessment when he follows it up with "The reality a such becomes impersonal."[176] Now we know that abstrac- tions tend to be impersonal but they are not impersonal

because they are abstractions. The term Īśvara is an abstraction, and refers to a formless idea of God. Yet it is very much a personal conception, because of the relationships that are posited between men and that conception of God.

Following this line of reasoning, that positing human-type relationships with a conception of deity establishes that deity somewhere along the personal-impersonal dimension, we may be able to understand that even in the important monistic-type hymns of the Vedas, there is exhibited a far stronger monotheism than monism, except perhaps in the Nāsadīya hymn. In this regard Masih is correct when he says:

> "If by impersonal is meant the exclusion of personality, then this impersonal reality cannot be worshipped. But for the Vedic seers the supreme reality is not wholly impersonal"[177]

The process of arriving at a somewhat monistic conception, so far as the trend towards it is concerned, appears to have culminated in the Nāsadīya Sūkta, so far as the Vedic hymns are concerned. There appears to be a distinct trend away from the traditional concept of the gods in one sense, in that the gods are sought to be transcended in the interests of a higher level of unity,

which is at the same time truly transcendent of all created things. We get this sense very clearly in both the Puruṣa Sūkta and the Nāsadīya Sūkta. In this regard we may agree with Stephen when she says:

> "The idea of ultimate unity was reached at last, but not by the exaltation of any god above the rest, not in connection with the Vedic gods at all."[178]

And yet from another point of view which accommodates this unity in terms of the ontological principle, we have to say that the gods are superseded by inclusion, not by rejection. And this view would accommodate the larger holistic sense, which is mostly the operating principle in Indian conceptions, though subdued at times. Therefore, as Max Muller so rightly points out, the search after a transcendent unity, although it is seen to represent the amplification of the monistic trend, cannot be regarded as a completely fresh start. It builds upon the old, whose externals only are discarded while retaining the kernel, as it were. It is a change of direction, but the drive and urge and purpose are the same.[179] In this view Max Muller would seem to be giving an excess of credit to the early ancestors of the Indo-Aryans, as when he says that they persisted "in their search after what had been present to their minds from the first awakening

of their senses, but what they had never been able to grasp firmly, to comprehend or to name."[180] True as this surmise might appear in relation to the inner cravings and deeper urges that motivated the Vedic Aryans from the earliest times, in relation to the actual observed life-styles promoted in the Vedic hymns, and as against the monistically-orientated Upaniṣads, there is great and obvious difference. The monistic tendency thus seen to be originating in the Vedic hymns leads to a more speculative and meditative life-style, in which prayer and praises to the gods or even to the one only God are conspicuous rather by their absence than their presence.

The earlier hymns of the Vedas are replete with prayers and praises - a singular characteristic of the earlier phase. In the austere monotheistic transcendence of God seen in the hymn to Varuṇa, we witness a deep kinship with God, the feeling of a more human relationship with Him, a great friendliness, even as in some of the Indra hymns. The human experience is allowed some form of expression within the theistically-orientated framework.

In the more monistically-orientated hymns, however, the sense of a spiritual kinship with the Divine is not promoted in terms of a personality sense. The Divine, although it becomes All, and encompasses all things human

and divine, is nevertheless more of a force than a person; it is incapable of personal orientations.

The trend towards the impersonal conception of the Divine is expressed by Ghanananda thus:

> "In their search for the ultimate unitary Principle, the rsis conceived an infinite and absolute Power as the primary cause of all creation, which could be neither masculine nor feminine, which was beyond all names and forms, and which was described as 'Tad Ekam' (That One).[181]

End Notes : Chapter 3.0

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3. Bhattacharji, S Literature in the Vedic Age p xiii
4. DAN AGCE p 332
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13. Bhattacharji, S op cit p 129
14. Das, A C Rgvedic Culture p 77

15a. Clayton, A C op cit p 62

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16. RV 3.3.11
17. RV 1.155.3
18. RV 1.159.2
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21. Bhattacharji, S op cit p 130
22. Das, A C op cit p 16
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33. RV 10.124.3/4
34. Bhattacharji, S op cit p 134
35a. DAN AGOE p 333
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71.
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73. Macdonald, K S op cit p 79
74. DAN AGOE p 346
75. Muller, Max Chips from a German Workshop Vol I p 27
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101. RV 1.62.7
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108. Macdonald, K S op cit p 78
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116. Macdonald, K S op cit p 83
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127. Stephen, D J op cit p 10
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129. RV 4.23.9
130. RV 7.66.13
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132. Mashih, Y op cit p 28
133. ibid p 28
134. RV 2.12.13
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136. RV 4.18.4
137. RV 6.24.5
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145. ibid p 197
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147. Muller, Max Origin C R pp 303/4
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151. DAN
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173. Mashih, Y op cit p 41
174. ibid p 45
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Chapter 4.0 UPANIṢADS: GENERAL FEATURES

4.1 CHARACTER OF THE UPANIṢADS

At the outset it may be noted that the Upaniṣads stand at the tail-end of the development of the Vedic literature. In the popular mind the Upaniṣads represent the thought and culture of the most ancient Veda, placed before us in refreshingly new language and ideas. In no small measure is it the pride of the Hindu religious consciousness specifically, and philosophical consciousness generally, that these texts place before us those ancient ideas in the form of propositions and formulae that appeal to the rational sense of man.

It may argued that, in the process of the growth of a tradition, it is a natural expectation that earlier expressions should be more mythological and naive, while the later ones should be orientated towards a somewhat philosophical appraisal of the old. At any rate, the later should be expected to show some advance over the earlier forms. Yet, insofar as the Hindu religious tradition is concerned, we have to hold before our mind's eye the strength of the tradition that what we see being revealed in the Upaniṣads is the thought of the more ancient Vedas in a new medium. Speaking of the composite character of Hinduism, as being made up of Vedic elements

on the one hand, and several important non-Vedic elements on the other, Sen observes, after marking out the principle of ahimsā (non-violence and non-hatred) as being non-Vedic in character:

> "There are other non-Vedic notions to be found in Hinduism today, such as the worship of Śakti, the Vaiṣṇava approach through devotion or bhakti, and ideas of asceticism, renunciation and continence, but the Hindu nevertheless persists in thinking of his religion as being according to the Vedas and in looking upon the Vedas as the embodiment of revealed literature."[1]

This opinion startlingly reveals what goes for revelation in the Indian tradition. It at least cautions the objective-minded researcher to be on guard against suggestions that are constantly supplied by the tradition, but which the scholar may not adopt in the premises. In the present undertaking especially, the utmost diligence needs to be exercised, for it is the central objective of this research to examine just those texts of the Indian tradition which are strongly affirmed to be continuous with each other.

In their simple assertions and somewhat archaic

expressions, the Upaniṣads indeed stand at the head of a long and hoary tradition of philosophical development, as it occurred on Indian soil. No scholar would deny this. At the same time it is more remarkable that the same set of texts, the Upaniṣads, also stand, together with the earlier Vedas, at the head of an equally long and hoary tradition of the development of specifically religious thought and practice, as attested by Nakamura when he says:

> "What is especially worthy of attention is that the Hindu religious sects, the common faith of the Indian populace, looked to Vedānta philosophy for the theoretical foundations for their theology. The influence of Vedānta is prominent in the sacred literatures of Hinduism, such as the various Purāṇas, Saṁhitās, Āgamas and Tantras"[2]

That the Upaniṣads, as the fountain-head of the Vedānta philosophy, have been utilised to serve specifically religious and theological purposes, there can be no manner of doubt. That we need to examine these texts in order to ascertain their character as religion and theology, as opposed to philosophy, should appear necessary in the face of some of the more formal characteristics of these texts, and the milieu of debate and dialec-

tics in which they appear to have arisen, and which are also a characteristic part of them. For example, we read in the opening lines of the Kena:

> "Who impels the mind to alight on its object? Enjoined by whom does the chief prāṇa proceed to function? At whose behest do men utter speech? What intelligence indeed, directs the eyes and ears?"[3]

or again, we read in the Śvetāśvatara:

> "What is the cause? Is it Brahman?
> Whence are we born?
> Why do we live?
> Where is our final rest?
> Under whose orders are we, who know Brahman, subjected to the law of happiness and misery?"[4]

The Upaniṣads are indeed characterised by a spirit of deep enquiry. In this they are certainly continuous with some of the hymns of the Vedas, which are regarded as late hymns. And we may be justified in seeing in this a type of theological continuity with the more ancient tradition.

Yet, we may not be unjustified in considering that

the Upaniṣads may be the products of a richer milieu of the polemical tradition, and in some ways their propositions might be more tentative than dogmatic theology can be, as being more philosophically speculative. We may again refer to the words of Nakamura, with regard to the climate of thought that covered the period of the rise of the Upaniṣads:

> "The philosophers of India engaged in heated controversies from the respective standpoints of materialism and spiritualism, idealism and realism, rationalism and nominalism, hedonism and asceticism, conservatism and liberalism, theories of self and of non-self, claims for logic and for intuition. The history of Indian philosophy is the uninterrupted and continuing narrative of such opposing and contradictory systems of thought."[5]

Some scholars are of the opinion that the Upaniṣads themselves uphold doctrines as contradictory as realism and idealism (Frauwallner, 72-74). Radhakrishnan also concedes the logic of deriving a realist doctrine from some parts of the Upaniṣads, while other parts present idealist propositions.[6]

However that may be, the general Indian tradition

holds fast to the view that while "concentrated pursuit of truth is the hallmark of the development of philosophical concepts which one finds in the Upaniṣadic literature",[7] in the opinion of one writer, the same writer also holds that:

> ". . . loyalty to tradition and devotion to truth are the two principle characteristics of the entire discussion in all the principle Upaniṣads."[8]

What loyalty remains is open to question if truth is perceived to be different from ancient tradition. Surprisingly, the same writer also declares the perception of a genuine divergence between the ancient tradition and the teachings of Upaniṣads when he says:

> "In the Upaniṣads we do not hear of any personified God but only a deep abstract principle called Ātman, Brahman and Paramātman. If only one considers the fact of this departure from the Vedas, one realizes that original as well as intensive spirit of enquiry has gone into the debate and dialogue which led to the formulation of this concept and even in regard to it the Upaniṣads are not fanatical or dogmatic."[9]

INTENSIVE SPIRIT OF ENQUIRY

We shall be concerned shortly to take up the question of the idea of the "personified God" as opposed to that of a "deep abstract principle" with reference to the text and content of the Upaniṣads. In this general prefatory survey we cannot too strongly emphasize the "intensive spirit of enquiry" as a major and relevant characteristic of the Upaniṣads. In these ancient texts we meet with an obvious and clear earnestness in the approach to truth, however the truth may be formulated and whatever the specific validity of such formulation.

The Upaniṣads stand for the worship of truth and the notion of truth as revealed by its greatest sages. This is undoubtedly one of their most outstanding and most general characteristics. Perhaps in no other literature in the world can we witness such deep reverence for bare truth, with anything like the consistency and constancy that the Upaniṣads reveal to us. When the dialogues open it is difficult to resist the descent of a serene calm upon the consciousness, heralding the contemplation of ideas profoundly spiritual. Even if we may not agree with the conclusions from our specifically philosophical or religious standpoint, yet we cannot help being affected by the purity of resolve and earnestness of spirit brought to bear on the great questions of life. To many in the East, and not a few in the West, the

Upaniṣads give us revelation in the profoundest sense of the term. Such a view is based on the validity of personal or mystic experience as revealing the spiritual truths that lie hidden in our souls.

The deep and profound reverence for truth, accompanied by a sincere spirit of enquiry, meets us with disarming frankness in the following excerpt from the Chāndogya. Already we may note that the setting of a father desirous of instructing his son indicates a relationship of warmth, friendliness and paternal concern, and places high premium on the revelation to follow:

> "O Śvetaketu, live the life of a brahmacārin. Dear boy, there never is anyone in our family who does not study, and is only nominally a brāhmin."[10]

Upon the son's humble request for further clarification, the father cites several illustrations ending with the great saying "tattvamasi" (That thou art), as in:

> "Bring a fruit from this banyan tree."
> "Here it is, revered sir."
> "Break it."
> "It is broken, revered sir."
> "What do you see in this?"

"These seeds, small like particles, revered sir."

"Break one of them, my child."

"It is broken, revered sir."

"What do you see in it?"

"Nothing, revered sir."

"Dear boy, this subtle essence which you do not perceive, growing from this subtle essence the large Banyan tree thus stands. Have faith, dear boy."

And the father gives the spiritual teaching:

"That Being which is the subtle essence, even that all this world has for its Self. That is the true, That is the Ātman. That thou art, O Śvetaketu."

Yet the son seeks further clarification:

"Revered sir, please explain it further to me."

"So be it, dear boy," said the father.[11]

And so it goes on, in the full sense of the gnostic tradition, apparently seeking to know through the understanding that which clearly lies beyond the ordinary understanding.

In a similar manner, each of six brahmacārin disciples approach their teacher, and severally ask him questions relating to spiritual matters, as related in the Praśna.[12] The idiom used in these discourses and the phraseology employed are clearly far removed from modern-day practices. Yet we cannot miss the feeling that neither teacher nor taught feel anything amiss. They receive the great issues of human destiny and Ultimate Reality and accord to them the high seriousness and dignity that befits such topics. Their reverence and earnestness of spirit are unmistakable. As sensitive and discriminating readers, we feel the situation as a challenge to our rational dignity, and so feel compelled to make the attempt to understand the issues as the original participants understood them.

In the high tradition of objective scholarship, this process of a semi-empathetic reading of the texts can conceivably lead to a deeper participation in the spiritual adventure that the Upaniṣads so earnestly portray; but at least the objective study of the texts, whose subject matter is not trite or insignificant, should confer on us the merits of an intellectual adventure.

The subjective and objective experiences of man

present a picture of contrast. They are two mighty worlds which thinking minds in all the great cultures of the world have striven to put together. To try to understand the one in terms of the other, or both in terms of a higher principle, is one of the joys encountered by anyone who undertakes a serious study of the Upaniṣads. Dasgupta underlines the sages' enthusiasm and their positive approach to spiritual knowledge in the following words:

> "Even the most casual reader cannot but be struck with the earnestness and enthusiasm of the sages. They run from place to place in great eagerness in search of a teacher competent to instruct them about the nature of Brahman."[13]

Whether the seers of these texts inherited the intellectual habit of mind from the earlier lore, or developed it spontaneously, it is one of the aspects of their genius that they raised it to heights of passion. In this regard, it is easy to agree with Radhakrishnan that

> "The pleasure of understanding is one of the purest available to man, and the passion of the Indian mind for it burns in the bright flame of the mind."[14]

Though a span of some thirty centuries separates our time from the age when the ancient seers conducted the debates and dialogues that we have as the Upaniṣads, still the seriousness of the contents of their thoughts arrests our attention even today. Many thinkers of the orient as well as the occident have recognized their relevance and meaning for the modern age.[15] Edmund Holmes says of the spiritual message of the Upaniṣads, in terms of its relevance for modern man:

> "The metaphysics of the Upaniṣads, when translated into the ethics of self-realization, provided and still provides for a spiritual need which has been felt in diverse ages and which was never more urgent than it is today."[16]

So long as human nature is what it is, the fundamental questions of life do not change. Many thinkers the world over, Radhakrishnan among them, hold that the different cultures and religions are merely different ways of satisfying the spiritual needs of man. We need not assume that all cultures perceive even the problem of metaphysics in the same way. The assumptions that are made and the differing models of ethical practices certainly point to the operation of factors over and above the purely spiritual needs of man.

However, it will be conceded that, broadly speaking, there are many common elements in the human situation the world over. Human nature, or the psychological make-up of man, being a universal factor, itself creates the necessary conditions for thinking men to be able to appreciate spiritual values across different cultures, even as it affords us the possibility of comparing historical periods within the same culture, or different source-materials within that culture.

We have to say that metaphysical assumptions must enjoy priority over other considerations. They are what form the basis of a true philosophical discussion. They furnish our thoughts with perspective and enable us to exercise forms of intellectual discrimination concerning different systems of thought. Our conception of spiritual reality, in the sense and to the extent that we are able to frame it as a proposition, is always a metaphysical assumption from the philosophical point of view. Belief or non-belief in such proposition is irrelevant in a philosophical discussion.

This is already to say that a conception of spiritual reality, if it is cast in the form of a significant sentence, is intellectually meaningful. The Upaniṣads present us with a conception of spiritual

reality that appears to be many-sided, and that is not lacking in the metaphysical justifiability. Within a related philosophical framework, the Upaniṣads speak to us of a spiritual reality that many have found makes an appeal not only to their intellects, but also to their hearts. Edward Gough, however, records a severely opposite opinion in his book "Philosophy of the Upaniṣads":

> ". . . there is little that is spiritual in all this . . . this empty intellectual conception, void of spirituality, is the highest form that the Indian mind is capable of."[17]

We cannot disallow that a critic may have his own belief regarding the spiritual value of the Upaniṣadic ideas. Yet we cannot help seeing that such criticism is in fact prejudiced and unphilosophical, for it fails in turn to allow that Upaniṣadic thought has its own peculiar frame of reference, which makes it metaphysically sound. It therefore cannot be an "empty intellectual conception." Gough has obviously not taken adequate account of the premises underlying the Upaniṣadic conception of spiritual reality. As Holmes indicates:

> "In Gough's <u>Philosophy of the Upaniṣads</u> we have

a contemptuously hostile criticism of the ideas which dominate that philosophy, based on obstinate misunderstanding of the Indian point of view - misunderstanding so complete that an author makes nonsense of what he criticizes before he has begun to study it."[18]

Such an attitude is hardly relevant to a philosophical appraisal of the contents of any text, for it fails to see the propositions within the premises and assumptions of that text. Gough's assessment appears to be more the result of prejudice than the application of philosophical standards. We may therefore go along with Tagore's stricture that

". . . the lack of sympathy and respect displayed in it for some of the most sacred words that have ever issued from the human mind, is amazing."[19]

For several reasons it is not easy to make a fair assessment of Upaniṣadic thought. Not the least of problems facing the critic is the wide influence of standard approaches such as that of Śaṁkara and Rāmānuja. As Gough himself reveals, Śaṁkara is (according to him) the greatest expositor of the doctrines of the Upaniṣads, and the bulk of his own assessment is based on the writ-

ings and expositions ascribed to Śaṁkara.[20] He therefore says that "we must pronounce the Brahman of the Upaniṣads to be unconscious, for consciousness begins where the duality begins".[21] Following the commentary in a direct and formal manner, he says that "the procession of aeons is often likened to a succession of dreams. The world is often said to be the mind-projected figment of migrating souls".[22]

Gough indeed quotes many passages from the Upaniṣads, especially those conveying the idea of oneness between Brahman and Ātman, yet he places upon all this the peculiar interpretation of Śaṁkara alone, and proceeds to criticize the notions. He says further that "the soul is never anything than the one and only Self: and all that it is, and sees and does, and suffers, is never anything else than a figment of the world-fiction. Śaṁkarācārya proceeds to enforce this teaching by ...".[23]

And so on he proceeds, establishing on these grounds that "unity alone is real, and that plurality is a figment of fictitious vision or illusion".[24]

It is certainly imperative for us to consider carefully the relative merits of Śaṁkara's interpretation of the Upaniṣads as against other interpretations, and thereby to understand more fully theistic elements in these texts. For this Gough's assessment is valuable.

though derogatory.

Other occidental opinions, also supported by deep scholarship, have been more charitable. We may quote the words of Arthur Schopenhauer:

> "The Oupnekhat (Upanisad) breathes throughout the sacred spirit of the Vedas . . . Every line is full of sure, definite, and harmonizing influence throughout. Out of every page confront us deep, original, elevating, elevated thoughts, while a higher and highly sacred earnestness vibrates through the whole . . . It is the most elevating and the most rewarding book which there can possibly be in this world. It has become the solace of my life and will be the solace of my death."[25]

This is high praise indeed. It may be pointed out that Schopenhauer made a diligent study of fifty of the Upaniṣads that had been translated into Latin by Anguetil Duperon from the Persian translations made by Dara Shikoh in the seventeenth century in India.[26] Dara Shikoh was subsequently executed by his brother Aurangzeb who had usurped the Moghal throne, for his impious promulgation of infidel ideas.[27] Schopenhauer's direct acquaintance with the texts (though not in the original Sanskrit) and

without the deflecting influence of Śaṁkara's commentaries, is both interesting and instructive. He does not see in these texts the pessimism and world-denial that a Śaṁkarite slant tends to foster. Although it cannot be denied that Śaṁkara remains to this day the most widely influential commentator so far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, it is necessary to look beyond him for the true and full meaning of these texts.

Yet not all those even, who have followed a Śaṁkarite interpretation, have allowed themselves to be lulled into the belief that the Upaniṣads therefore have no essential permanent value for us. Paul Deussen, for example, is quite outstanding for ignoring the pessimistic suggestions in the theory of <u>māvāvāda</u>, which he himself espouses, and emphasizing the more positive aspects of the Upaniṣadic teachings. He says:

> "If we strip this thought of the various forms, figurative to the highest degree and not seldom extravagant, under which it appears in the Vedānta texts, and fix our attention upon it solely in its philosophical simplicity as the identity of God and the soul, the Brahman and the Ātman, it will be found to possess a significance reaching far beyond the Upaniṣads, their time and country; nay, we claim for it

an inestimable value for the whole race of mankind."[28]

And further, about the value of the notion of the individual consciousness as the centre of the identity between the subjective and the objective worlds, he says:

> "It was here that for the first time the original thinkers of the Upaniṣads found it when they recognised our Ātman, our inmost individual being, as the Brahman, the inmost being of universal nature and of all her phenomena."[29]

The above general survey of the character of the Upaniṣads already reveals the abstruseness of the subject matter, as well as the resulting plurality of views and interpretations. It is also clear that the type of discussions that forms the subject matter of the Upaniṣads, that is, the abstract notions of Brahman and Ātman, easily leads our thinking into non-theistic avenues.

Yet, it is remarkable that the absolutist as well as the several theistic schools of thought in Indian culture find much of their inspiration in these ancient texts. In the sections that follow, we shall endeavour to trace the specifically theistic lines of thought in the

metaphysical speculations of the Upaniṣads, as against opposing tendencies of thought.

4.2 RELATION TO THE VEDAS

As we had noted earlier, the Vedas proper are recognized as the earliest verse portions of the Vedic corpus. These are known also as the mantra portions, and collections of them came to be known also as saṁhitā.

The general Vedic tradition as it developed later, however, comprised not only of the hymns and sacrificial texts, which are the Mantras or Saṁhitās, but also the texts of theological elucidation, which are known as Brāhmaṇas, and which included under this general term those texts known as āraṇyakas (forest books) and Upaniṣads (specialised teachings or secret instructions.[30]

The four Vedas, then, being the Ṛg, Sāma, Yajur and Atharva Vedas, are each constituted with its own Brāhmaṇa, Āraṇyaka and Upaniṣad sections though not in equal divisions. As, from ancient times, the Vedas were promulgated in different Vedic schools or śākhās, which in course of time deviated much from each other, especially and understandably in connection with later

material, and therefore a good deal of diversity of approach is discernible in the Upaniṣads, which are generally the latest additions to the older Vedic material.

Since each Vedic school developed relatively independently of other such schools, it also developed its own distinctive texts of rituals, generally understood under the title Brāhmaṇa but more specifically known as vidhi (directives regarding rituals) and arthavāda (exegetical explanations).[31]

It is interesting to compute the possible number of Upaniṣads on the basis of at least one per śākha. Tradition holds that there had been 21 schools of the ṚgVeda, 1000 of the Sāmaveda, 109 of the Yajurveda and 50 of the Atharvaveda."[32] This would give us a minimum number of 1180 Upaniṣads! The Muktikopaniṣad, however, gives the traditional number of them as 108, most of which, though identified, are of recent origin.[33]

Some accounts give the extant Upaniṣads as being 200 in number, and this is also possible, considering that in the Indian tradition, any high-souled teaching composed in an acceptable form could pass for an Upaniṣad and such "continued to be written even so late as the spread of the Mahomedan influence in India".[34]

There being a good deal of repetitive material in all the recent texts that pass themselves under the name of Upaniṣad,[35] and which are therefore clearly spurious, only ten of them are considered the classical Upaniṣads, such as have been directly commented upon by Śaṁkara. These are Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, Aitareya, Taittirīya, Īśa, Kena, Kaṭha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka and Māṇḍukya.[36]

Following Śaṁkara, the commentators of opposing schools, as well as of his own school, have continued to comment on these texts. It is necessary to add to this list the Upaniṣads known as Kauṣītaka, Maitrī and Śvetāśvatara, not only because these have been referred to by the classical Indian commentators, and so "vitally affected the course of the development of Indian philosophy and ethics",[37] but also because they have been considered important enough by modern critics such as Max Muller, Deussen, Hume and Radhakrishnan.[38] The ideas presented in them may safely be considered the representative ideas of the whole Upaniṣad tradition.

End Notes : Chapter 4.0

1. Sen Hinduism p 45
2. Nakamura, H A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy p 3
3. KeU 1.1
4. SU 1.1
5. Nakamura, H op cit pp1/2
6a. Frauwallner, E History of Indian Philosophy Vol I pp 72-74
6b. RAD IP I pp 259/60
7. Gajendragadkar, P B The Ten Classical Upanisads p 54
8. ibid pp 54/5
9. ibid p 54
10. CU 6.1.1
11. 6.12.1-3
12. PU 1.3;2.1;3.1;4.1;5.1;6.1
13. DAS HIP I p 43
14. RAD IP I p 22
15. RAD PU p 5
16. RAD PU p 950
17. Gough, E Philosophy of the Upanisads p
18. RAD PU pp 946/7
19. ibid p 940
20. Gough, E op cit p viii
21. ibid p 41
22. ibid p 46
23. ibid pp 254/5
24. ibid p 255
25. Quoted in Deussen, P Sixty Upanisads of the Veda p vi
26. DAS HIP I p 39

27. Bloomfield, M The Religion of the Veda p 52/3
28. Quoted in RAD IP I p 169
29. RAD IP I p 170
30. DAS HIP I p 38
31. Deussen, P op cit p 1
32. ibid p 2
33. Bahadur, K P Upanisads pp 16/7
34. DAS HIP I p 39
35. Mascaro, J The Upanisads p 7
36. DAS HIP I p 39
37. Dewa, H G Ethical Correlates of Indian Metaphysics p 48
38. RAD PU p 21

Chapter 5.0 UPANIṢADS: CREATION

5.1 RELATION TO THE VEDAS

Our brief general survey of the Upaniṣads and their approach to matters concerning man, God and the world has revealed that these scriptures have exercised the minds of men in diverse ways.[1] While some have shown a passionate regard for them, others have had negative views with equal passion.

Despite this difficulty in arriving at a consensus, it may be stated quite simply that, for the Indian traditionalist, the Upaniṣads are undoubtedly the crown and glory of all India's religio-philosophical literature.[2] Further, and significantly from the standpoint of our enquiries, this literature is regarded as the symbol and justification of all the schools of Hindu religion and philosophy. A modern translator of the Upaniṣads expresses this faith in the following words:

> "If I may say so without exaggeration, there is no piece of literature in the whole of Indian philosophy, except the Bhagavad Gītā, which is so truly religious as the Upaniṣads, and demands from young India an intellectual justification of her faith in the light of modern

thought."[3]

Much of traditional Indian scholarship has held out for a strong continuity between the older Veda and the thoughts of the Upaniṣads. Discrepancies between the two have been taken to be occurring in restricted areas and of minor significance, while the general trend remained true to a common direction.

According to this pattern of interpretation, in the Prajāpati hymn of creation of the ṚgVeda,[4] the Vedic seer recognizes in the act of divine creation a unification of God's being with the various materials of the created universe. The Lord is said not only to exercise his divine powers to fashion the material aspects of the world, but his Lordship consists also in his entering into and animating all things.[5]

The Nāsadīya hymn,[6] which is the most famous creation hymn, is also generally regarded as conforming to Upaniṣadic ideas of creation. It is held that "this hymn is the forerunner of the monism of the Upaniṣads".[7] Since the hymns clearly reflect the one, self-existent primordial entity besides which nothing at all existed, it is easily seen to be consistent with the line of development that leads to the Brahman-Ātman equation of the Upaniṣads, the non-dual essence.[8]

It cannot be denied that this creation-hymn, perhaps more than any other hymn of the Vedas, strikes us as being remarkable for its frank and deep probing into the mystery of creation. The conception of tadekam (That One), for which the hymn is justly famous, has all the indications of conforming to the Upaniṣadic idea of the Absolute. There is also the clear indication of hesitancy and genuine metaphysical doubt on the part of the Vedic seer concerning the agency of creation, since the gods are recognized as being "later than creation", that is, as being themselves created beings. Chennakesavan observes that the seer is aware that the gods of those times were in fact the creations of the poets' own minds.[9] And, although she states that the hymn reflects enquiries about objective nature in an objective fashion, the inability of the Vedic Indian to penetrate the mystery and his consequent bewilderment is what leads "smoothly into the speculative thinking of the Upaniṣads".[10]

When we consider that the doubts and uncertainties expressed in the hymn imply an objective frame of reference, we are constrained to admit that the seer appears to have in mind a somewhat materialistic idea of the evolution of things, since the hymn ends with the words:

"From whence this creation came into being, whether it was created or not - he who is in the highest heaven as its ruler, he alone knows; or perhaps even he does not know"[11]

Our study of the Upaniṣads reveals that these texts do not countenance a materialistically-orientated theory of creation, that is, the objective creation of the things of the world. And if this fact is taken to be of sufficient importance from the philosophical perspective, and in spite of the fact that there are important and distinct monistic suggestions in the general presentation of creation ideas in the Nāsadīya hymn, we may appreciate Dasgupta's analysis of the Vedic and Upaniṣadic conceptions of creation. He says:

"In the Upaniṣads, however, the position is entirely changed, and the centre of interest there is not in a creator from outside but in the self: the natural development of the monotheistic position of the Vedas could have grown into some form of developed theism, but not into the doctrine that the self was the only reality and that everything else was far below it. There is no relation here of the worshipper and the worshipped and no prayers are offered to it, but the whole quest is of

the highest truth, and the true self of man is discovered as the greatest reality."[12]

It is interesting and instructive that Dasgupta should have noticed a genuine drift away from a theistic interest, as evidenced in the Nāsadīya hymn. The relation between man and God, with all the peculiar undertones of the Vedic world-view, was seen to be a feature of the earlier hymns, in which man encountered God (or the gods). The spirit of God as standing over against man was the basic fabric upon which man and the cosmos operated.

By "the peculiar undertones of the Vedic world-view" we mean to refer to the pantheistic sense of the Divine Power, be it Ṛta or any one or more of the gods, working in and through the elements of the objective world. Yet this feature was not allowed to overtake and dominate the mind and heart of man. Man essentially retained his role as the worshipper before God who was the worshipped.

This delicate balance that is so important for sustaining the sense of true religion, is already, it appears, beginning to be disturbed in the creation ideas of the hymns of the tenth book of the ṚgVeda, and especially in the Nāsadīya hymn. It cannot be too strongly emphasized, as we saw earlier, that the mystic sense of the oneness

of all things is present, thought hazily, in the earlier hymns; but it is seldom allowed to obtrude into and disturb the ethical relations between man and the Divine Power, however conceived.

It is true, as Dasgupta says, that henceforth, and thus more or less throughout the later Upaniṣads, "the whole quest is of the highest truth, and the self of man is discovered as the greatest reality." The attempts in several sections of the Upaniṣads to grapple with the problems of creation and the universe, are informed by a deep sense of subjectivity; they invariably utilise the notion of inwardness to the extent of linking the deepest aspects of man's being with that of God in the creative process. To the extent that the seers are conscious of such an involvement of man himself in the stupendous work of creation, to that extent do the Upaniṣadic speculations put the emphasis on thought as the prime requirement for unravelling the mystery of creation.

Indeed, within this general ethos of inwardness, a "bewildering number of conjectures were hazarded as to the solution of the problem of the universe",[13] and which is again a reflection and an index of the general Indian, and specifically Upaniṣadic characteristic of freedom of thought in matters philosophical and religious.

What is of importance, and which deserves to be noticed in connection with the Upaniṣads, is that those texts emphasize the general pantheistic tone of the earlier Veda in one direction and to the extent of linking man himself in the creative activity of God, so that a clear monistic tendency comes to the foreground. Macnicol says in this regard:

> "Practically all the religious thought of India, we must remember, is pantheistic in the sense that the immanence of God in the universe became early for it an axiom. The whole drift of its reflection is in this direction and continually it overflows, as it were, into pantheistic monism."[14]

5.2 DIVERSITY OF THEORIES

The fundamental proposition of such pantheistic monism is that the stuff of the world is the product of the being of God, so that we may be justified in asserting that God dwells in all things. As a centre of consciousness, man himself is pre-eminently the representative of God the creator, who thus creates the world of objects for Himself as the soul of man. With regard to the general position of the Upaniṣads on the question

of creation, Dasgupta says:

> "There is the ātman not in man alone but in all objects of the universe, the sun, the moon, the world, and Brahman is this ātman. There is nothing outside the ātman, and therefore there is no plurality at all . . . The essence in man and the essence of the universe are one and the same, and it is Brahman."[15]

The idea of there being "no plurality at all" cannot be taken in an absolute sense, and indeed Dasgupta does not do so. It only means that essentially, all that exists may be looked upon as a unity since everything is product of Brahman whose presence in all things is the fundamental fact of existence. Although the seers of the Upaniṣads do not deny the multiplicity of the natural world, and although, "when the empirical aspect of diversity attracts their notice, they affirm it",[16] the general tenor of their thoughts is on intellectualizing the relationship between the Supreme Reality and the human soul. And, given the premises and predilections of Indian thought, this flows naturally in the direction of emphasizing the unity.

Therefore, in explication of the true Upaniṣadic viewpoint, we can agree with Dasgupta that

". . . the universe has come out of Brahman, has its essence in Brahman, and will also return back to it. But despite its essence as Brahman its character as represented to experience cannot be denied."[17]

One of the earliest creation accounts is available in the Aitareya, and in it we can easily discern the unity of the Creator and the created (both man and things):

"In the beginning verily, all this was Ātman alone. There was nothing else existing as a rival. He thought: Let me create the worlds. Thus he created these worlds . . . He thought: These indeed are the worlds. Let me now create the guardians of these worlds. He then raised the Puruṣa from the waters and fashioned him . . . He thought: How can this remain without me? By which way shall I enter? Having split open the suture of the skull, He entered by that door . . . Thus born He named all things, and thought if he could name anything beside Himself. He perceived this very Being, Brahman, over-spreading all . . . "[18]

This remarkable passage, whose archaic expressions

plainly reveal its antiquity, is nevertheless strongly suggestive not only of pantheism, which is its obvious import in relation to creation, but also a type of monism. If we assume the characteristically Indian theological notion of "ex nihilo nihil fit", then the rendering of the passage consistent with a general advaita conceptions becomes unavoidable.

The opening words: Ātma vā idameka evāgra asinnanyatkincana recall to us the tremendously suggestive opening lines of the Nāsadīya. They have often been taken to establish the absolute existence of the Ātman as against phenomenal forms. To be consistent with the sense of the passage as a whole, we have to take Ātman in its full meaning of the Ātman-Brahman principle of all existence, that is, as the material and efficient cause of the universe.[19]

It is quite possible to regard creation in the sense of bhutasṛṣṭi, in the fashion of dualist philosophers,[20] and in this case the prior existence of primitive material, akin to the sāṁkhyan pradhāna, must be presumed. The last-quoted text, sa etameva puruṣam brahma tatamamapaśyadidamadarśam does not quite rule out this possibility, since tatamam (all-pervading or overspreading) may be construed to require real objects which can be so pervaded.

Like the vast majority of Upaniṣadic passages, however, one has to consider the context, and atmosphere created, in order to divine the precise metaphysical doctrines presumed in the text. The task of seeking precise metaphysical doctrines even in what appears at first glance to be texts with simple and straightforward meanings, can be frustrating. In this connection we may consider the words of Raju when he says that

> ". . . the Upaniṣads are not the work of a single man, and no single Upaniṣad by itself gives us a systematic exposition. It is doubtful whether even all the Upaniṣads put together can give a system, comprehensive enough to include the problems which any philosophical system is expected to include. Further, the various interpretations possible of any sentence or word by grammatical analysis will leave us in endless controversy and confusion."[21]

Raju further suggests that an interpreter is invariably guided by one or more of the existing systems. While we have to utilise the existing classical systems as frames of reference which are available, the danger is that they are all too easily taken to be stock answers that might include material that the texts do not jus-

tify.

Pertaining to the Aitareya passage quoted above, Sarvānanda says:

> "But the higher view of the Vedas regarding creation and the world is, in the first place, that there has been no creation; the manifestation of the visible is but an expression of the inner Reality. Creation is nothing but the evolution of Nāma and Rūpa, name and form, from the Unmanifested. And this evolution, although it may have some pragmatic value, has no absolute reality; it is only a phenomenon, a reading of Reality."[22]

Such a view as this is startling in its extremism, and takes a line of head-on collision with any form of theistic interpretation. It is the expression of the classical advaita position, the theory of <u>māyāvāda</u>, relegating the world, including the world of human relations, to an inferior level. The extremism of this position is seen clearly in the words "there has been no creation", "nothing but", "although it may have some pragmatic value", and "only a phenomenon." When all is said and done, even if a phenomenal reading of Reality be accepted as the meaning of creation, we cannot be jus-

tified in saying that the world is "only" a phenomenon, or that it has "some" pragmatic value, for the essential value of human life, from the theistic point of view, is the development of values that are fully realised in union with God, where God has to be the very Absolute, to use Radhakrishnan's emphasis on "God" and "Absolute".[23]

The Aitareya passage under scrutiny is plainly consistent with a general advaitic interpretation, though it cannot be stretched into the service of advaitic phenomenalism of the classical variety as promulgated by Sarvānanda. From the general presumption that Ātman alone existed in the beginning, the seer was not betrayed into the position that Ātman alone exists. Once creation has occurred, whatever its source, it appears to have been tacitly acknowledged.

5.3 ACOSMIC AND COSMIC PRESENTATIONS

Some passages in the Upaniṣads are seen to be upholding what is known as the niśprapañca or acosmic view, This view combines in it an account of the world and the Absolute as a unity, but emphasizes the notion of the Absolute as being the more overwhelmingly important.[24] We may note that this acosmic view is just the view of Śaṁkara's kevalādvaita spoken of above. The pas-

sages which are said to support this view adopt a negative approach to establish the existence of the Absolute, and tend to deny any relation between it and contingent objects.

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka apparently promotes this view in its doctrine of "neti neti", "not this, not this",[25] suggesting a negation of all empirical attributes since they stand in the way of a full appreciation or realization of the Absolute. In the style of the Māṇḍūkya, Brahman is regarded as that which can have no possible specifications, "no distinguishing marks whatsoever," and is "free from all differentiations."[26] It is to be noted that Brahman is further regarded as "satyasya satyam", the Truth of truth,[27] and this must lead us to acknowledge the truth of contingent reality. Though we cannot clearly say that it is relegated to a lower level of reality, in any derogatory sense, it is certainly considered to be the dependent reality, while Brahman is the independent, and in that sense, the higher reality.

In a further passage of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka the sage Yājñavalkya, regarded as "the greatest thinker of the age and probably the first idealist of the world",[28] teaches a lady disciple, Gārgī, the truth about Brahman, thus:

"It is neither coarse nor fine, neither short

nor long, neither redness nor oiliness, neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor ether. It is not sticky, nor is it savour or odour. It is without eyes and ears, without the organ of speech and mind, non-effulgent, without the vital force and mouth. It is not a measure, and is devoid of interior or exterior. It does not eat anything, nor does anybody eat It."[29]

The sage here brings out what many commentators see as the undifferentiated, characterless spiritual essence which is Brahman. Since "it is free of all attributes and is only One without a second,[30] it is the Supreme unconditioned reality that cannot, by its nature, come into any relationship with the created universe. Such an acosmic view considers that the rise of contingent reality "is only apparent since there can be no other than Brahman that is real."[31] In another celebrated passage the same venerable teacher gives the instruction that appears to establish the world as in some sense illusory:

"Here there is no diversity whatever;
he who sees diversity, as it were,
goes from death to death."[32]

Later commentators in the advaitic tradition utilise

the term iva (as it were) to indicate the unstable and illusory character of the phenomenal world.[33]

Similarly also, in the Chāndogya, the teacher Uddālaka Āruni teaches his son Śvetaketu the nature of Brahman on the analogy of a permanent entity and its variable and therefore transient names and forms:

> "Dear boy, just as through a single clod of clay all that is made of clay would become known, for all modification is but name based upon words, and the clay alone is real . . ."[34]

Through such examples the Absoluteness and spiritual reality of Brahman is sought to be established, while all else would fall into the category of "mere name based upon words." This form of teaching tends to relegate all changing phenomena, world, man and society, to a level distinctly less than real. Of course, we may also take the view, that, since clay pervades all its modifications, and is the substance of which the forms are made, the forms will resolve themselves into their original substance. But contingent reality, the objects of the sensible world, are not in that sense bodily related to any basal substance, unless we presume a naive realism. We have to infer that the changing world-effect is unreal in some sense, while the spiritual reality alone is real.

ityeva satyam.[35]

The problem is that, though the prose passages of the Upaniṣads represent protracted discussions between teacher and disciple, the key terms and really important ideas are presented in condensed and cryptic form. It becomes incumbent upon us to place some form of interpretation upon the passages.

While the above quoted passages give us the acosmic views of creation, the Muṇḍaka illustrates both the acosmic and the cosmic views with one following upon the other:

> "What is invisible, ungraspable, unoriginated and attributeless; what has neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands nor feet; what is eternal, all-pervading, immeasurably subtle and limitless manifestation - that Imperishable Being is what the wise perceive as the source of all creation."[36]

This represents Brahman as being both immanent in the world, and transcendent to it. Although immanent in the world, Brahman is more than the world; the world does not exhaust Brahman though it is somehow produced out of it. At the same time the world is not apart from Brahman

though Brahman transcends the world.[37] For Brahman alone gives the world its reality in every way. As Hiriyanna says:

> "There is no world apart from Brahman, but it is not therefore unreal for it has its basis in Brahman. Brahman again is not nothing, for it furnishes the explanation of the world, though it is not identical with it or exhausted in it."[38]

And, as far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, we may say that, while the world is the given datum of our experience, it requires an explanation other than itself in kind, otherwise it would be a regression ad infinitum. Brahman therefore, being the pure and untainted spiritual reality, fulfills a necessary role, that is, as a philosophical requirement, as the only valid explanation.[39]

The view that accepts that the world actually arises from Brahman and is reabsorbed into it at the end of time, came later on to be styled brahma-pariṇāmavāda, the theory of the actual transformation of Brahman, and so accommodated the saprapañca or cosmic view of creation. The view that holds to the apparent creation of the world came later on to be styled brahma-vivartavāda, and accom-

modated the niśprapañca or acosmic view of creation.[40]

We have seen the sources of the acosmic theory of creation in several Upaniṣadic passages, and the following popular passage of the Muṇḍaka may be cited for its effective imagery and forceful analogy, as representing the cosmic conception of creation:

> "As the spider sends forth and withdraws its web, as herbs sprout on the earth, as hair grows on the body of a man, so also from the Imperishable Being this universe springs forth."[41]

Similarly the same Upaniṣad utilizes the analogy of fire ands sparks to illustrate the rise of the manifold universe from the being of God.[42] The Bṛhadāraṇyaka[43] and the Śvetāśvatara[44] make use of similar and kindred analogies. By utilizing varied analogies and illustrations from nature and human experience the Upaniṣads give forth the teaching that although the diversity of the empirical world stares us in the face, at the deepest level of being all things are one. Yet we are free to interpret the texts in the cosmic or acosmic dimensions of meaning. In this regard Radhakrishnan says aptly:

> "The Upaniṣads are decisive about the principle

that Brahman is the source of life in all that lives, the single thread binding the whole plurality into a single unity. When the problem of the coexistence of the plurality and unity is taken up, the Upaniṣads speak in the language of similes and symbols, but do not give any definite answer."[45]

It is undeniable that Brahman binds together all empirical existence into a unity so far as the Upaniṣads are concerned. This, of course, makes Upaniṣadic philosophy positively pantheistic in character, which is not only their inheritance from their ṚgVedic past.[46] but also a legacy which, in lesser or greater measure, they pass on to all later Indian thought[47] through the Bhagavad Gītā, the Purāṇas, and down to modern times. This character of the teachings is epitomized in the Chāndogya as "sarvam khalvidam brahma", which is one of the mahavākyas.[48] This teaching is forcefully supported in the Maitrī[49] and again in the Muṇḍaka.[50]

Like the earlier quoted spider analogy, the Taittirīya gives the same pantheistically-orientated emanation doctrine of creation with similarly disarming directness:

"That from which these things are born, that in

which they live, and that into which they enter at their death, that is Brahman."[51]

This view sets the general tone of the Upaniṣadic revelations regarding the question of creation. There is no good evidence to doubt that a strong pantheistic undercurrent, which is brought to bear upon the reader's consciousness at almost every turn, is fairly a major characteristic of these texts. The second major characteristic is undoubtedly the Brahman-Ātman equation, which makes for the absolutistic element in the Upaniṣads.

Upaniṣadic absolutism cannot generally be taken in the sense of an austere philosophical definition of it. for there occurs in the Upaniṣads rather scanty grounds for this. Mostly, we may be bold to say, the Supreme Power, though spoken of as transcendent, imperishable and unchanging in itself is nevertheless regarded in terms of the manifestation of one or other aspect of the world. It is therefore that Power that informs all entities in creation in a genuine pantheistic or all-pervading sense, securing a universal unity. This circumstance, which is a major characteristic of these texts, is the cosmic view of creation "in which the greater emphasis is laid on the manifold character of the universe and an unmistakable tendency towards some form of realism".[52] And therefore we can say with justification, in connection with the

Upaniṣadic approach to creation, that this approach, though monistic, cannot be seen as totally divorced from human values. And therefore also, we can agree with Chennakesavan when she says that:

> "Unless the world of experience of man is endowed with some reality all human effort becomes meaningless."[53]

It should be noted, before we conclude this section, that the ideas connected with creation were not always sophisticated. There also occur what may be considered primitive speculations in the Upaniṣads, such as those relating to the production of the world from water, as given in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka,[54] and the Chāndogya,[55] and the Kauṣītakī.[56] A discussion in the Chāndogya also posits space as the ultimate substance of the universe.[57] The Bṛhadāraṇyaka[58] considers breath to be the superior force, while the Praśna posits food (or earth) as the source of all creatures,[59] as does the Maitrī.[60] These, together with the higher-order "cosmic egg" doctrine,[61] appear to be continuous with the speculations of pre-Upaniṣadic times, and they were superseded in the maturer monistic doctrines concerning Ātman or Being.[62]

Yet we should not overlook the pervasive spiritual

outlook of the Upaniṣads as a whole, which declares that even matter is informed with a spiritual force. The Chāndogya, which investigates the origin of creatures in a striking series of passages, ends with the conviction:

> "Where could its root be, apart from water? Dear boy, with water as the shoot, look for fire as the root. With fire as the shoot look for Being as the root. All these creatures, dear boy, have Being as their root, have Being as their abode, and have Being as their support."[63]

The Upaniṣads are averse to splitting up the world between matter and consciousness. The latter is always for them a spiritual consciousness, which, though latent in primitive forms of matter, is the root and support of all. The world is a true unity, it is not a system of opposing forces.[64] The theory of materialism, if it ever existed as such, is discarded by the Upaniṣads.[65]

While we cannot deny, as we have already noted above, some evidence for the postulation of material elements at the head of the process of creation, so far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, we are in a sure position to declare that such elements were a spent force almost before the Upaniṣads had gotten into the strides of their

dialogues. There is no exaggeration in Hume's conclusion regarding the spiritual foundation, 'warp and woof', of the Upaniṣads as a whole:

> "But the conception which is the ground-work of the Vedānta, which overthrew or absorbed into itself all other conceptions of the world-ground, was that of Brahma. Emerging in the Brāhmaṇas, it obtained in the Upaniṣads a fundamental position which it never lost. Indeed, the philosophy of the Upaniṣads is sometimes called Brahma-ism from its central concept."[66]

of higher, spiritual truth. The strong regard for the events of the natural world, the system and order it represents, may be witnessed in many of the arresting dialogues of these texts, as in the already-cited teaching of Uddālaka Āruni.[3] The several analogies that the teacher uses are each time left behind once the spiritual teaching has been served. The idea of inwardness and meditation is sought to be established in the very opening section of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, which is counted among the oldest of these texts.[4] More than any other set of literature in the world, the Upaniṣads point to a reality that is beyond the immediately sensible, beyond the world, and which is yet realizable in the depths of the human consciousness.

While we have to agree with Hume that "the Upaniṣads are the first recorded attempts of the Hindus at systematic philosophizing,"[5] we have to note that the concept of philosophy and theology, concepts such as God and Absolute or specific view of the world, are not available in these texts in any systematic manner, or in any clear-cut philosophical guise. This is because the Upaniṣads are a mixture of inward experience and speculation about it.[6] Wild fancies which are untrue to the perceived facts of the external or internal worlds, cannot be a part of philosophical speculation. But there is certainly such a thing as 'true imagination' which is

speculation born of the deeper apprehensions of the soul. In regard to the Upaniṣadic teachings, Mascaro says:

> "Fancies disturb the mind and they may lead to destruction, but imagination is an inner light which with the help of reason leads to construction. All faith comes from true imagination, but fancy, or distorted imagination is the source of all fanaticism and superstition."

There is an intimate connection between the oft-repeated thesis that Hindu teachings, and especially Upaniṣadic teachings, are unethical in character, and the faith that comes from 'true imagination' which is necessarily free of fanaticism and superstition.

So far as the Upaniṣadic idea of ultimate reality is concerned, we might be tempted to say that "intuition" is a better term than "true imagination". Yet the force of the term "imagination" lies in its human quality, which can consciously work with the still more human activity of logical construction. Upaniṣadic thought does not lead to fanaticism and superstition largely because it is based on these "apprehensions of the soul", call them intuitions or true imaginations, which are both analytic and synthetic in their very nature, but which yet require

some imagination to bring them into a relationship with the prosaic constructions of logic. In a sense, therefore, it is true to say that "the spiritual vision, like the poetic vision, is not an analysis, it is not even a synthesis: it is the joy of truth revealed to a living soul",[8] if by analysis and synthesis we mean self-conscious activities of the mind, mental constructions that shift the data of experience according to preconceived patterns of thought. The intimacy of experience and speculation, revelation and human thought, characterize the Upaniṣads and "from these lights were derived the illumination and warmth of the different schools of philosophy".[9]

The essential nature of the mystic experience, which is personal and incommunicable in itself, is defined for us in the sense of the term Upaniṣad itself, which refers to the deeply personal, non-formal and non-verbal character of it. Mahadevan opines that the term Upaniṣad probably developed its full esoteric meaning in later times.[10] Yet we have even as early as the Chāndogya that it means secret teaching, guhya ādeśa.[11] The Kaṭha also supports this view by designating it as "the supreme secret of the Vedānta,".[12]

While we have ample evidence in the Upaniṣads them-

selves that direct personal experience of a spiritual type is what establishes the notion Supreme Reality, and while we may accept that "different experiences are different readings of the same Reality from different perspectives and levels",[13] we cannot be justified in holding that "we find in the Upaniṣads more inspiration than definite teaching".[14] Because the Upaniṣads do not give us revelation in the commonly accepted sense, because the experience that seeks to fathom the mystery of life and the universe has to be relatively unstructured, because spiritual experience which forms the speculations in the Upaniṣads is necessarily ineffable, we cannot say that they say nothing at all about the Supreme Reality. The long string of questions which Gārgī put to Yājñavalkya[15] ends in a declaration of Supreme Reality which is as definite as the subject-matter will allow. While the notion of Supreme Reality may not be flexible enough to fit the fancies of all men, and while philosophers of a later day have drawn varied pictures of Reality from the texts, the bulk of the evidence within the Upaniṣads themselves justify a notion of such Reality in terms of two major categories. It is to be noted that, while in Western philosophical systems, the Absolute is that which is totally removed from all predicability,[16] in Upaniṣadic thought, such Absolute may be seen in connection with the world in various ways. Therefore in Indian thought, the Absolute is presented to

us in two senses, that is, in the sense of the Absolute of philosophy and necessarily unconnected with the world, and in the sense of God, that is, necessarily and vitally connected with the world. To be true to the broad band of classical Indian theologians barring Śaṁkara, who have used the original term Brahman to stand for the Absolute of philosophy as well as for the God of religions, we have to accept that the term Absolute may be used in either sense, in which case we may be creating a problem concerned with philosophical discussion. But the major problem is that there is no manner of agreement, neither among the long line of Indian philosophers from ancient down to modern times, nor among Western commentators, on the question whether the Upaniṣads give any significant or real consideration to the concept of an impersonal Absolute that has minimal or no connection with the world.

6.2 BRAHMAN: ABSOLUTE AND WORLD-GROUND

The search for a commonly acceptable conception of Ultimate Reality, so far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, and that means to say for the entire course of the later development of Hindu thought, has been going on since the close of the Upaniṣadic period. Even the Bhagavad Gītā is regarded as presenting the salient truths recorded in

the Upaniṣads.[17] Yet even the Gītā became part of the prasthāna traya, the triple foundation of Vedānta, and was made to assume a place next to the Upanisads, which is some evidence that its teachings were not seen as so direct a reflection of Upaniṣadic ideas.

The question of the true or overall teaching of the Upaniṣads, especially regarding Ultimate Reality, was found to be a thoroughly perplexing problem, and in an important ways it is felt to be so even today. Madhavānanda, a modern commentator, asks, in relation to the perceived conflicting accounts in the Upaniṣads, "What then is their proper attitude?" and answers:

> "It is to understand that different parts of the Upaniṣads express different phases of the same Truth, according to the degree of realization on the part of the seer. Being intended for humanity at large, among whom there is an infinite variety of gradations as regards the capacity for understanding as well as temperamental differences, the Śruti, like an affectionate mother, prescribes different courses for different people."[18]

It is difficult to accept the thesis that the Upaniṣads, or the entire range of the Vedas, for that

matter, were put together in a self-conscious manner to serve the needs of individuals with differing capacities. In any case, it has been a part of the Hindu tradition that the Vedas, and especially the Upaniṣads, are secret or esoteric doctrine which cannot be broadcast among all manner of people. "As the Upaniṣads are regarded as teaching the highest truth, they could be imparted only to those who were competent to receive and benefit by them: and such competent pupils could be only a few at any given time".[19]

If we remember that the authors of the Upaniṣads are many indeed, and that the texts are the product of a long time-span,[20] argument for the conscious differentiation of the teachings falls away.

While we cannot deny the varied nature of ideas presented to us in the Upaniṣads[21] it yet remains a legitimate theological pursuit to seek that level of generalization whereby "there will be no antagonism between statements as widely divergent as monistic and dualistic,[22] a pursuit that will not violate the natural historical development of ideas and philosophical criteria.

In this regard Hume says:

"The Upaniṣads are no homogeneous products, cogently presenting a philosophic theory, but they are compilations from different sources recording the 'guesses at truth' of the early Indians. A single, well-articulated system cannot be deduced from them; but underlying all their expatiations, apparent inconsistencies and unordered matter there is a general basis of a developing monism."[23]

As noted earlier in connection with notions of creation, the Upaniṣads put forth two major views regarding Ultimate Reality in the view that Brahman is the all-inclusive ground of the universe, and the view that seems to suggest that Brahman is the reality of which the universe is an appearance.[24] Hume has made a compelling analysis of this issue and proposes that the former, the conception of a unitary worldground, is historically prior to the conception of its unity and its alleged nominal relation with the world of empirical objects. He says:

"The doctrine of illusion, then, was the speculative outcome of the conflict between the phenomenal and the super-phenomenal, between the lower and the higher Brahma. It was the logical conclusion of the abstract presupposi-

tion as to the nature and possibilities of the pure unity which those thinkers conceived of as the essence of reality, and to which they pressed on as the great goal of all their speculations."[25]

It should be noted that Hume criticizes Gough's analysis of Upaniṣadic philosophy as being "erroneous" for reading into it a classical advaita type pure illusionism.[26] Hume's analysis also makes out that an idealistic position is the final one arrived at by the Upaniṣadic thinkers, but that the world is not a figment like a mirage in the desert or a snake in the rope.

We cannot say for sure that the Upaniṣads in fact lead up to any single conclusion, and Hume himself admits that "there are not the chronological data in the Upaniṣads upon which an unquestioned order can be maintained throughout."[27] Although we are in a surer position to separate the older from the later Upaniṣads, "even in them there is a variety of philosophical doctrines which are not in the same stage of development."[28] And Hume is constrained to admit further:

"The heterogeneity and unordered arrangement and even apparent contradictions of the material make it difficult, indeed impossible,

to set forth in systematic exposition a single system of philosophy."[29]

And in spite of this Hume also says: "Yet in it all there is a dominant tendency which may readily be discerned".[30] It is not difficult to accept that there may be a dominant tendency in the Upaniṣads, but it is highly unlikely that it could be identified with any system that radically opposes the empirical world, and the best expressions of man's sensibilities with regard to it. Since Hume finds Gough's view erroneous on account of it being based upon Śaṁkara's illusion doctrine, it is difficult to understand Hume's own position when he says that Upaniṣadic thought finally settled for "the extreme of philosophical idealism"[31] in which "the manifold world was seen to be the construction of the imagination".[32]

Again, this position does not comport with Hume's own assessment of Yājñavalkya's teaching that all things in the world are dear not for themselves, but for the sake of the Ātman[33] in the words:

> "The central idea is rather that all those objects are not separate entities, in themselves of value to us; but that they are all phases of the world-self and that in the common everyday experiences of having affection for

others we find illustrated for us the great doctrine of the individual self finding his selfhood grounded in and reaching out towards that larger Self which embraces all individuals and all things."[34]

We wholly endorse these comments, and hasten to point out that it reflects a mild (and not extreme) version of monistic idealism. Inexplicable and mysterious the empirical certainly might be, but comments like the above do not match the view that "the manifold world was seen to be the construction of the imagination."

At any rate, no scholar will deny that if a view were the truly favoured one, in a time-span of something like a thousand-year development of the Upaniṣadic texts, such view would be established at the end of the period with reasonable prominence. It is safer to hold, under pressure of facts from the texts themselves, that the Upaniṣads maintain a position of general monistic idealism, though not the philosophically extreme version of it. This view entails that, in the maturer thought of the Upaniṣads, it is likely that there may be no real opposition between the two major views such as the opposition discerned by Hume or by traditional Indian thinkers. Yet, philosophers must philosophise, and if the excuse depended on the most meagre of facts, we may trust them

to find it out.

The contest highlighted in Indian philosophical literature of the classical, medieval and modern periods, is that between those who see in the Upaniṣads the thesis of radical idealism (following the classical advaita school) and those who discern a genuine theistic teaching (of the realist and dualist school of Rāmānuja).

Although we cannot say for sure that the Upaniṣads present any view with consistency, it is equally certain that they do not present either the non-dualist or the dualist varieties of thought with anything approaching doctrinal passion. Yet significant support may be discerned for both views, which circumstance itself suggests a strong undercurrent of a type of thought and feeling, generally and generously dispersed throughout the Upaniṣads, which may accommodate both the contending views. This, as we said, is the disposition of the Upaniṣads towards a general monistic idealism.

6.3 THE COSMIC IDEAL

This theory of man, nature and ultimate reality is often presented under the exclusive banner of theism. Yet, it can quite logically be brought under the general

theory of monistic idealism also.[35] It is the theory that the entire universe of contingent reality is the manifestation of the Supreme Reality. So far as the Upaniṣads are concerned, the source of the universe is Brahman itself, though we cannot be sure that the universe is actual (as in a realist sense); at the same time we also cannot legitimately say that the universe is illusory (as in an idealist sense), on the grounds of the cosmic idea alone. This is not to hold that the Upaniṣads do not contain ideas pertaining to the absolute reality of the world. If a developmental thesis were granted, then taking into account the naive outlook of primitive man, the real existence of the world "out there" would have to be granted. But, in the nature of the case, the Upaniṣads at least reflect a protracted search after Brahma or the world-ground which is the one spiritual unity and they are mostly indifferent to the existence of diversity as diversity, all around them. At least they acknowledge the diversity,[36] but do not propound a true philosophy of realism. We have to infer their ideas from what they affirm about the Brahma world-ground. Hence the cosmic ideal may be seen to be quite legitimate under a quasi-idealist scheme. The universe is acknowledged as a reality, but "the real in it is Brahman alone".[37]

The cosmic approach to the origin and explanation of

all phenomena may have been taken to have been first promulgated in terms of material entities. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka gives creation as having its source in water:

> "In the beginning this universe was just water. That water produced the true (or the real). Brahman is the true."[38]

The Chāndogya also refers to creation from the primal waters:

> "He who was born of old from austerity, was born of old from the waters, who stands, having entered the secret place (of the heart) and looked forth through beings. This verily is that."[39]

The idea of origins here appears to refer to the Nāsadīya hymn of the ṚgVeda. Radhakrishnan asserts that here "there is no suggestion of the unreality of the cosmic evolution."[40]

The Chāndogya gives a more elaborate list of entities with water as the primitive substance:

> "It is just water that assumes different forms

of this earth, this atmosphere, this sky, the mountains, gods and men, beasts and birds, grass and trees, animals together with worms, flies and ants. Water indeed is all these forms."[41]

The Chāndogya also gives the doctrine of the Life-Breath as: "Life-Breath is all this".[42] The space doctrine is also given prominence:

"All these creatures are produced from space. They return back into space. For space is greater than them. Space in the final goal."[43]

As these accounts of the origin and final goal of the world are found in various parts of the Upaniṣads, and appear in no type of satisfactory chronological order, the evolution of ideas can only be surmised. What is most interesting from the objective point of view, is that in all these accounts the permanent and discrete existence of the discrete phenomena of the world is not accepted. The feeling and search for a unitary world ground is the common theme, which culminates in the high points of Upaniṣadic revelation as the Brahma world-ground.

We may say that in a sense the Upaniṣadic specula-

tions concerning a material ground of the universe are superseded, in terms of greater abstraction, by those speculations in the earlier Vedas which trace the origin of the world to Non-being.[44] The ṚgVeda says:

> "Existence, in an earlier age of gods, from non-existence sprang."[45]

Although we do not see in this entire hymn of nine verses any idea of a return to the primal "non-existence", however it might be interpreted, this theory is evident also in the Taittirīya:

> "Non-existent, verily, was this world in the beginning. Therefrom, verily, was existence produced."[46]

The non-existent or asat, according to Radhakrishna, refers only to the unmanifested condition prior to actualization of the world; it does not refer to a void.[47] Hume, however, feels that the asat of the Taittirīya is prior to a positively conceived unitary world-ground, although this latter is the characteristic conception of the Upaniṣads as a whole.[48] Hume is also of the opinion that even an evolutionary analysis culminates in a fully cosmic ideal even in the earlier Vedas. He says:

"These searchings of the origin and explanation of the world of phenomena, first in a phenomenal entity like water from space, and then in a super-phenomenal entity like non-being, being or the Imperishable, had even in the Rig- and Atharva-Vedas reached the conception of a necessarily unitary basis of the world, and even the beginnings of monism."[49]

The central idea in the Cosmic view is that the world of becoming has a unitary basis, whether the origins are traced to non-being or to being. The Chāndogya recalls the ancient Vedic idea of Hiraṇyagarbha, the Golden Egg,[50] and although it is stated to be produced from non-being, is asserted to be the unitary source of all things that are. Upon the bursting of this cosmic egg and out of its substance were formed the vault of heaven, and the earth, the mountains, streams and ocean, and the sun.[51] In later advaitic theorizing the concept of the Golden Egg is used effectively to foster the idea that all things in the created universe have a unifying soul.[52] Dasgupta is of the opinion that the Hiraṇyagarbha doctrine cannot be supposed to have any philosophical importance in the Upaniṣads.[53]

The cosmic ideal is illustrated in an arresting passage of the Taittirīya:

"That, verily, from which these beings are born, that, by which, when born, they live, and that into which, when departing, they enter. That seek to know. That is Brahman."[54]

This passage states directly the world-creating, world-sustaining and world-dissolving functions of the God who in later advaitic Vedānta is regarded as Īśvara, the creative aspect of the immutable Brahman.[55] Although technical terms of the later advaitic philosophers, such as Virāṭ, Hiraṇyagarbha, and Īśvara do appear in the Upaniṣads occasionally, their forming part of a system is a theoretical construction, not the original revelation. The Taittirīya passage quoted above takes the Absolute Godhead or Brahman to be deeply involved in the life of the world. The immediately following passages define Brahman in terms of matter (food), life, mind, intelligence and Bliss. Although we see a deep spiritual lesson in the gradatory steps to the fullness of the Divine, the same Absolute Brahman is involved at every stage in the life of the individual. "The higher includes the lower and goes beyond it".[56] The entire series of passages is a high testimonial of theistic faith.

In the Śāṇḍilya Vidyā of the Chāndogya we have another equally striking passage of similar ideas:

"Verily, all this universe is Brahman. From Him do all things originate, into Him do they dissolve and by Him are they sustained.[57]

This passage is considered to be the sage Śāṇḍilya's "cosmological proof of the existence of the Supreme Being",[58] since the following passages give a personal testimony of the actual operation of God's power in the individual's life:

"This, my Ātman, residing in the heart, is smaller than a grain of paddy, than a barley corn, than a mustard seed, than a grain of millet, or than the kernel of a grain of millet. This, my Ātman, residing in the heart, is greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds".[59]

And in the final passage declares the identity between the Supreme Spirit and the individual Self:

"He whose creation is all that exists . . . He is my Ātman residing in the heart; He is Brahman. On departing hence I shall attain to His being."[60]

These passages are used with great force by the proponents of non-dualism in the Hindu tradition. Since there is a clear identification of the Ātman with Brahman, and Ātman is declared to be both vast and small to indicate its subtlety.[61] Theists have held the soul to be anu (infinitesimal) while the pure idealists have held it to be vibhu (infinite).

However that may be, and if one just attends to the words of the text without prepossessions, the passages must strike us as declaring an actual participation in some way, of the Divine Power, in the evolutionary process. There is no indication that the world is mere appearance, notwithstanding the identification of the soul with God. Radhakrishnan affirms that:

> "For Śaṇḍilya (1) the Absolute is that from which things are born, to which they repair, and by which they live, (2) our next life depends on what we do in this life, (3) Ātman is both the transcendent and the immanent, and (4) the end of man is union with the Self."[62]

In Hindu theological literature the theory of emanation (pariṇāmavāda) is upheld by the proponents of theism, with the illusion or appearance theory (vivartavāda) being upheld by the idealists. While there is

division of opinion on this issue, the Upaniṣads seem more firmly to support the conception of Brahman as the world-ground.[63]

The cosmic view is again effectively illustrated in the Muṇḍaka:

> "As a spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair grows on the head and the body of a living person, so from that Imperishable arises here the universe."[64]

The vivid illustrations in this passage impose a clear meaning of the reality of the world. Radhakrishnan says of it that "there is no suggestion here that the world is an illusory appearance of Brahman."[65] And it is further supported by Belvalkar and Ranade in these words:

> "The Muṇḍaka stands in a sense apart from the other Upaniṣads inasmuch as it asserts rather too prominently a metaphysical realism . . . the cosmic conception which emerges from a consideration of the Muṇḍaka cosmogony is a realistic one."[66]

The Maitrī[67] uses the spider analogy, not for in-

dicating the source of the world from Brahman, which it assumes, but for assuring us that, just as the spider moves along its web and attains to freedom, in this world the Śabda Brahman (the sound Aum) is the bridge to the higher Brahman. Although this does not appear as severely realistic in tone as the Muṇḍaka passage above, there is a good deal of emphasis on the genuine connectedness of the world with the Absolute.[68] The Śvetāśvatara also utilizes the spider analogy, whose phraseology has been found amen-able to non-dualist interpretations as well.

> "The one God who, according to His own nature, covers Himself like a spider with threads produced from pradhāna (unmanifested matter), may He grant us entrance into Brahman."[69]

The term for covers, āvṛnoti, has been developed in the non-dualist tradition to great effect as the veiling agency responsible for man's inability to apprehend correctly the ground of existence, which is Brahman. The spider analogy is, however, in itself realistically orientated, for, just as the threads have to be taken as the actual productions, the world may also be interpreted as a real production of God's being.

In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka[70] the spider analogy is used

again to indicate that the products of the world are true; for the Self is truth, satyasya satyam.[71] Therefore, there is no warrant for considering the world false, only, its truth is derived from the ground by which it is sustained.[72]

The above-mentioned text of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka also mentions the fire analogy side by side with the analogy of the spider and threads. But the more compelling use of the fire and sparks analogy is given in the Muṇḍaka:

> "As from a blazing fire, sparks of like form issue forth by the thousands, even so, O beloved, many kinds of beings issue forth from the immutable and they return thither also."[73]

The fire and sparks analogy aptly suggests the divinity of created beings, inasmuch as the sparks are lit up even as the fire is. Yet their difference in terms of brightness and duration also suggests the immensely greater glory and majesty of God as against the creatures, who have to be totally dependent on the Lord for their life and sustenance. The analogy illustrates well the Lord and creature relationship, and has been utilised effectively in the theistic schools, especially in the school of Vallabha.[74]

6.4 THE ACOSMIC IDEAL

The second current of thought about the nature of Ultimate Reality is the niśprapañca view or the acosmic ideal. We saw that the defining characteristic of the saprapañca view or the cosmic ideal was the presumption of the actual transformation of the original Divine substance into the world and its contents. In this characteristic the importance for theism lies chiefly in the deep involvement of God in His creation and the availability of a meaningful basis for the exercise and development of values. Brahman in this view is always saguṇa, full of illimitable benign attributes.

The acosmic ideal, on the other hand, emphasizes the absolute immutability of God and therefore denies any form of transformation (pariṇāma) of God into the world and its contents. Such a view must hold that Brahman is nirguṇa, attributeless and distinctionless, unconditioned and without marks, and cannot legitimately be brought into any type of relation with the world or with men. Mahadevan says that the acosmic view "regards the Absolute as the distinctionless substrate whereon somehow the illusory world-show appears; Brahman per se is nirguṇa, attributeless".[75]

This, of course, is an extreme form of monistic

idealism and is closely related to the classical exposition of Śaṁkara's advaitavāda. We have already seen in several passages of the Upaniṣads themselves, how this view seems to be contradicted. Yet, in texts as varied as the Upaniṣads, some contradiction is to be expected.

The Upaniṣad that appears to teach the doctrine of acosmism in a 'pre-eminent' way is the Bṛhadāraṇyaka.[76] A lady enquirer, Gārgī, requested the sage Yājñavalkya to explain to her the basis of the universe. Having traced it to space, when he is requested to explain further, he hesitates, and then goes on to declare the truth of Brahman by following the negative way:

> "That, O Gārgī, the knowers of Brahman call the Imperishable. It is neither gross nor fine, neither short nor long, neither glowing red (like fire) nor adhesive (like water). It is neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste, without smell, without eyes, without ears, without voice, without mind, without radiance, without breath, without a mouth, without measure, having no within and no without. It eats nothing and no-one eats it."[77]

This passage, which tries to explain the inexplicable, "brings out that the Imperishable is neither a

substance nor a possessor of attributes".[78] It emphasizes therefore the immutability of the Divine, which is a fundamental feature of the extreme acosmism.

Yājñavalkya, one of the chief locutors concerned with this doctrine, seems to emphasize the significance of Divine immutability in another passage:

> "There is no diversity whatsoever in it. He who sees diversity, as it were, in it, goes from death to death."[79]

Diversity refers to the common-sense world of experience, while Brahman, the referent for 'it', as indicated in preceding passages, is denied any metaphysical connection with the world. We are told that the phrase 'as it were' is a positive indicator of the operation of some sort of illusory power which causes the perception of duality, but in reality there should only be the perception of the non-dual Brahman.[80] It clearly points "to the existence in the Upaniṣads of the idea that the world is an appearance".[81]

In another passage of great charm, Yājñavalkya teaches King Janaka the nature of the Ātman by the method of systematic denial of attributes. After speaking of the individual ego as being capable of diverse

experiences in every direction, he says of the Ātman:

> "But the Self is not this, not this. He is incomprehensible, for he is never comprehended. He is indestructible for he cannot be destroyed. He is unattached for he does not attach Himself. He is unfettered, he does not suffer, he is not injured."[82]

Only a physically delimited entity can undergo the ravages imposed by the conditions of life. But the Divine Self, which does not attach itself to conditioned existence, is necessarily free of such ravaging influences. Here the teaching is given in answer to the query "Where will you go when you are released from this body?" meaning, the fate of the soul upon attaining liberation. Yājñavalkya's reply indicates that the self is not an entity among other entities; conditions and fetters do not apply to it. We therefore have to infer that, like the Sāṁkhyan concept of puruṣa, the self does not produce and it is not itself produced; it is simply immutable.

Again, in a passage which considers two 'forms' of Brahman, the principle of negation is used effectively:

> "Now therefore there is the teaching, not this, not this, for there is nothing higher than

this, that he is not this. Now the designation for him is the truth of truth. Verily the vital breath is truth, and He is the truth of that."[83]

Since in the opening passage of this section there is a reference to 'two forms of Brahman, the formed and the formless, the mortal and immortal, the unmoving and the moving, the actual (existent) and the true (being),[84] the passage appears to draw a distinction between the "absolute transcendent Godhead" and "the Creator God;" neti neti focuses attention on the "Absolute transcendent non-empirical Godhead".[85] However, by associating with the vital breath, some sort of genuine though indefinable relationship appears to be asserted.

In another passage the philosophical absoluteness of Brahman is indicated:

"This Brahman is without an earlier, without a later, without an inside, without an outside. This Brahman is the self, the all-perceiving."[86]

The phrases "without an earlier", "without a later", should indicate that Brahman is not connected with the space-time world, and suggests perhaps the operation of some form of illusion. Brahman is immutable and

attributeless, and indescribable.

A passage of the Taittirīya indicates the indescribability and unfathomability of the Absolute, and yet appears to connect it to the human consciousness via a vital category of spiritual being, that of bliss or joy:

> "That from which all speech recoil along with Manas, being unable to reach; he who knows the bliss of that Brahman sheds fear completely for all time."[87]

The utter transcendence, and therefore acosmic mode of Godhead is the central idea here. The passage "emphasizes the unknowable nature of Brahman as far as its peculiar and essential being is concerned."[88] The passage is also of great theistic value, for, as Radhakrishnan avers, "it gives to apparently abstract being an inner content of feeling."[89]

The Muṇḍaka gives us a passage that distinctly aims to reconcile the transcendent Absolute with the world.[90]

> "That which is ungraspable, without family, without caste, without sight or hearing, without hands or feet, eternal, all-pervading,

omnipresent, exceedingly subtle, that is the Undecaying which the wise perceive as the source of beings."[91]

Setting two views that we may discern in the Upaniṣads, as relating to the cosmic and the acosmic ideals, we can see that while much depends upon the subjective inclination which the reader brings to the situation, we cannot escape the central teaching of a unitary world-ground. In this we may find the justification of designating the teachings as an ideal of oneness, or 'monistic idealism' following Hume.

End Notes : Chapter 6.0

1. Ghanananda CHI p 334
2. Mashish, Y The Hindu Religious Thought p 11
3. CU 6/8/7
4. BU 1.1
5. Hume, R E The Thirteen Principle Upanisads p
6. Ghanananda CHI p 342
7. Mascaro, J The Upanisads p 27
8. ibid p 26
9. Ghanananda CHI p 344
10. Mahadevan, T M P Invitation to Indian Philosophy pp 28/9
11. CU 3.5.2
12. KU 5.6
13. Ghanananda CHI p 344
14. Mascaro, J op cit p 35
15. BU 3.8.8/9
16. Hume, R E op cit p 40
17. Ghanananda CHI p 354
18. ibid p 354
19.
20. Belvalkar, S K & Ranade, R D HIP pp 134/7
21. Hume, R E op cit p 9
22. Ghanananda CHI p 355
23. Hume, R E op cit p 9
24. Mahadevan, T M P op cit p 41
25. Hume, R E op cit pp 38/9
26. Gough, E Philosophy of the Upanishads p 39n
27. Hume, R E op cit p 70
28. ibid p 70
29. ibid p 70
30. ibid p 70
31. ibid p 71
32. ibid p 52
33. BU 2.4.5
34. Hume, R E op cit p 65
35. DAS HIP I p 51
36. ibid p 48
37. ibid p 48
38. BU 5.5.1
39. CU 2.1.6
40. RAD PU p 633
41. CU 7.10.1
42. CU 7.15.4
43. CU 1.9.1
44. Hume, R E op cit p 11
45. RV 10.72.2
46. TU 2.7
47. RAD PU p 549
48. Hume, R E op cit p 11
49. ibid pp 12/13
50. RV 10.121
51. CU 3.19.1/2

52. RAD PU pp 171/2
53. DAS HIP p 52
54. TU 3.1
55. RAD PU p 553
56. ibid p 557
57. CU 3.14.1
58. Belvalkar, S K & Ranade, R D op cit p 219
59. CU 3.14.3
60. CU 3.14.1
61. Swahananda, Sw CU p 222
62. RAD PU p 393
63. Mahadevan, T M P op cit p 45
64. MuU 1.1.7
65. RAD PU p 673
66. Belvalkar, S K & Ranade, R D op cit p 282
67. MaIU 6.22
68. RAD PU p 834
69. SU 6.10
70. BU 2.1.20
71. BU 2.1.20
72. RAD PU p 190
73. MuU 2.1.1
74. RAD IP I p
75. Ghanananda CHI p 169
76. ibid p 173
77. BU 3.8.8
78. RAD PU p 62
79. BU 4.4.19
80. Mahadevan, T M P op cit p 64
81. HIR OIP p 63
82. BU 4.2.4
83. BU 2.3.4
84. BU 2.3.1
85. RAD PU 69
86. BU 2.6.2
87. TU 2.4
88. Sarvananda TU p 100
89. RAD PU p 545
90. ibid p 673
91. MuU 1.1.6

Chapter 7.0 THE UPANIṢADS: INDIVIDUAL DESTINY

7.1 THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

The Upaniṣads conceive of man as the highest object among all finite objects.[1] The metaphysics of the Upaniṣads relating to man and nature place him in this category of the highest, since it is he alone that most fully participates in the Divine Essence, as the "principle of consciousness which underlies all the experience of an individual."[2] Although Brahman is the Ultimate Reality and source of all things, whether conceived in the acosmic sense or entirely the other, or in the theistic sense of the Supreme Controller, still, the conscious individual as the finite centre and representative of the Infinite and Imperishable, is accorded the highest value among all finite objects.[3]

One of the oldest of the Upaniṣads, the Aitareya, records that when the gods were created, they desired a suitable habitat in order to fulfill their wants. So the Creator produced for them the body of a cow, but they rejected it as unsuitable. Similarly the body of a horse was also rejected. But when the Creator brought forth the form of a man, they praised the Lord in joy, and then entered and assumed their respective stations in it.[4] In the estimation of the Upaniṣadic thinkers, therefore, the

human individual must enjoy a status of great dignity.

Again, from the strictly metaphysical point of view, and according to the ruling conceptions of these texts, the status of the human individual and the question of individual destiny cannot raise any insurmountable problems, since man is himself the Ātman, the Brahman. What goes about in finite dress, is, at least in essence, "fundamentally identical with Brahman".[5] In truth, however, the Upaniṣads do raise a problem with regard to the empirical self, as they in fact raise with regard to all empirical manifestation generally.[6] The truth is that the Upaniṣads give full recognition to empirical life as just empirical and do not confuse the category of the Absolute with it. The tension that the sages sometimes express in regard to the explanation of the finite world when their certainty, arising from spiritual experience, concerns the infinite and the Absolute is, we may say, a mild reflection of the tension of the human individual, full of imperfection, striving to become perfect. While the sages strive to harmonize the world process with the being of God in a philosophically satisfactory manner, the general tone of the Upaniṣads is that such harmony has to be achieved at the level of the human individual also. The Brahman-Ātman equation is the categorical proposition of the Upaniṣads. The conclusion that "everything is dear for the sake of the Self",[7] does

not clarify of the nature of "everything", but raises the philosophical question of how the empirically conscious individual can relate, if at all, to the trans-empirical Ātman. The Upaniṣads accept that the finite individual has to be accounted for, and although they analyse the human being in terms of the physical world, they endow him also with a principle of Divinity.[8]

The Praśna says quite directly that the human body is informed with Divinity together with material aspects:

> "Here, within this body, my friend, exists that Puruṣa, from which arise the sixteen parts."[9]

The Chāndogya explains creation as an act of willing by the one only self-existent being, and the divine faculty of will is then passed on to created beings together with the material trappings of fire, water and earth.[10] Yet we have to say that "the ātman as the innermost self of the individual is distinguished in the Upaniṣads from the psycho-chemical complex which externally clothes it but does not constitute it".[11] This is the bare logical position and the Upaniṣads are not in a position to compromise it. The notion of divinity cannot be invested with transience. As we saw in the previous section , mutability is the sign of contingency while immutability is the mark of the truly spiritual.[12] There-

fore, in Upaniṣadic thought, the empirically operating individual, the jīva, is upon analysis found to be consisting of psycho-physical properties which are part of the changing world. Although the Upaniṣads recognise the close and intimate interweaving of the jīva and the Divine, as when it is said "He (the self) entered in here even to the tips of the nails, as a razor is hidden in the razor-case,[13] they are careful not to reduce the spiritual to the level of the material. We can only say that the higher aspects of the jīva reflect the Divine, while the material descriptions constitute the lower aspects of it.[14a]

If we mean by theism the existence of souls in an infinite number, and destined to preserve in some sense their separate individualities throughout eternity, in some relation with God, the Upaniṣads fail to furnish sufficient and convincing evidence for this. After considering the Śvetāśvatara as the most highly theistic of the Upaniṣads, in consideration of its concept of God as Supreme Ruler, Dasgupta concludes:

> "But in spite of this apparent theistic tendency and the occasional use of the word Īśa and Īśāna, there seems to be no doubt that the theism in its true sense was never prominent, and this acknowledgement of a Supreme Lord was

also an off-shoot of the exalted position of the ātman as the supreme principle."[14b]

In the most general terms, then, and within the context of Hindu thought, we may say that the jīva is that psycho-somatic complex that operates as an empirically separate individual in relation to the world. According to monistic idealism, which is the general consensus of the Upaniṣads, the jīva is in reality the Ātman, who "according to his own nature, covers himself like a spider with threads produced from pradhāna (unmanifested matter)".[15] In the sense that the jīva is an individual soul in its most general meaning, that is, a self-conscious entity with a divine basis, it is also called the Puruṣa, derived from puriṣaya, or "that which lies imprisoned within the body".[16] The individuality of the jīva presupposes the full psychic or mental apparatus, which includes the mind and the sense-organs and which is connected to physical body. The jīva is tied to the body even as "an animal is attached to a cart".[17]

In the metaphysical doctrines of the Upaniṣads, the psychic process which in ordinary thought is understood to be the basis of an individual person, in itself requires the presupposition of a spirit soul which applies the consciousness. In this regard Dasgupta says:

"To the Upaniṣadic seers the existence of the soul is a necessary presupposition of all experience. It is the basis of all proof and itself therefore stands in need of none."[18]

Consciousness, according to the Upaniṣads, is the pre-eminent characteristic of Brahman or Ātman, which informs the individual and gives it the soul characteristic. Without it the body-mind complex could not operate meaningfully. It is also known as "the Puruṣa who remains awake shaping all sorts of objects of desires even while we sleep - verily that is the pure, the Brahman, and that is also called the immortal."[19] Here, the Kaṭha tells us that, even in the dream state, while the individual is not aware of himself as a consciously operating empirical entity, it is the Ātman that is the light of consciousness of the jīva. This Ātman, or Puruṣa, or Pure intelligence, "remains as the witness of all three states of consciousness, viz. - waking state, dreaming state and the state of dreamless deep sleep"[20] The text further emphasizes the pivotal role of the spirit in man: "no mortal ever lives by Prāṇa (outbreath) or by Apāna (inbreath). But they live by something different on whom these depend."[21] In this way the text effectively emphasizes the metaphysical necessity of the spirit for all the operations of the empirical jīva. In doing so it also "repudiates the materialistic doctrine

that the soul is just an assemblage of parts."[22]

Since the basis of individual personality is the spiritual consciousness known variously as Ātma or Brahman or Puruṣa, the jīva as the psycho-physical complex is in an empirical sense regarded as agent or kartā, and as an enjoyer or bhoktā.[23] These terms secure the meaning of the jīva as a psychic entity whose actions and experiences are related to an empirical framework, while it is yet spiritually based. And this provides the basis for regarding the jīva as in a special sense immutable and indestructible. In the context of Upaniṣadic usage the indestructibility of the soul is the indestructibility of its spiritual basis (Ātma or Brahman or Puruṣa), and not the empirical dress it wears. Of this empirical dress the most vulnerable to physical vicissitudes is the gross or physical body, which is regarded as having nothing in common with the spiritual basis of the jīva. Therefore the Kaṭha is able to declare:

> "The knowing soul is not born nor does it die. It has not come into being from anything, nor anything has come into being from it. This unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient One suffers no destruction even when the body is destroyed."[24]

Death therefore is only the destruction of the body, while the soul survives through this crisis. As the verse shows, Upaniṣadic metaphysics caters for the pre-existence of the soul, and the post-existence of it becomes a logical corollary. This idea, of course, leads on to the hypothesis of reincarnation enabling the soul to inhabit another body. In the sense that each individuality preserves itself as a unique conglomerate interacting with others, the Upaniṣads admit the existence of a plurality of souls at the empirical level.[25]

A further definition of the jīva given in the Upaniṣads is as the living entity operating in the world through five graded psycho-physical sheaths or kośas, is outlined in the Taittirīya.

Since all living things together are born (in their outer bodily covering) from food or annam,[26] the first and outermost sheath is known as the annamaya kośa (sheath of food). Beneath the food sheath is the prāṇamaya kośa (sheath of life), which indicates that all creatures depend of the prāṇa or life-force[27] which suffuses and fills the life sheath, assuming the shape of the person.[28] At the next deeper level occurs the vijñānamaya kośa (sheath of intelligence) which informs the former and also assumes the shape of the person.[29] And under this occurs the ānandamaya kośa (sheath of bliss) which

in its turn informs the former sheath while it also takes the shape of the person.[30] This innermost sheath is stated to have Brahman as its support, as there is no other sheath beneath it. The ontological analysis of the total self of man is seen to have a teleological basis leading to the realization of the highest Self "whose true nature is Bliss and self effulgence.[31]

Such is the doctrine of the kośas adumbrated in the Taittirīya, and which furnishes the framework for the full understanding of operations and spiritual evolution of the individual soul. The graded complex of the five elements of matter (anna), life-force (prāṇa), mind (manas), intelligence (vijñāna) and bliss (ānanda) defines jīva, whose total personality is the sum of contributions received from each level. All the sheaths, including the innermost two (vijñāna and ānanda) are considered to be purely prakṛtic or material in character.[32] But "at the back of this whole structure is the Universal Consciousness, Ātman, which is our true being."[33] Radhakrishnan avers that "the Highest Spirit, which is the ground of all being, with which man's whole being should get united at the end of his journey, does not contribute to his self-sense".[34] Nikhilananda says that "the Light of Ātman shines in varying measure through the different sheaths, according to their composition."[35] Svami Sarvānanda comments that the "core of vijñānamaya self is

the notion of agency, "since the jīva operating at this level employs discursive and reflective thought which involve ego-sense or doership. The ānandamaya self "is the true Self without the notion of agency" but "even here the Self is not absolutely free from all trappings, because there is the upādhi of intelligence transformed as joy".[36]

Since action and joy are taken to reflect a cause and effect relationship, "so also agency and enjoyership have the same relation".[37] Kartṛtva (agency) and bhoktṛtva (enjoyership) limit each other by setting up a frame of reference, even as the body is a limiting factor.

It is thus clear that for the Upaniṣads, the individual self is a psycho-physical agent operating at five graded levels of being in the world, but whose essential being is that of the Ātman or spiritual essence. At the level of the former he is part of the world (which includes levels of psychic existence), and at the level of the latter he is pure spiritual being equivalent with Brahman. Yet we cannot say that the individual self or jīva is itself the Ātman. The Upaniṣads do not give an account of the precise relationship.

7.2 KARMA AND SAṀSĀRA

The Upaniṣadic conception of the individual or the jīva is thus that of a highly complex entity operating through many different levels of being, each level furnishing the base, so to speak, for the one above it. The lowest level of the jīva's operations is the physical sheath of the body, which hides within it the others. In terms of the evolutionary sense promoted by the Upaniṣadic descriptions, we may say that the five demarcated layers of being, though defined as kośas or sheaths, should be seen more in terms of an ever-widening spiral as one descends deeper into man's being. While at the physical sheath level there operates the most obvious limiting factor in terms of freedom of movement and mutability, these are seen to give way generally, to greater freedom at the deeper and wider levels of being.[38] Greatly reduced restriction and mutability is characteristic of manas, vijñāna and ānanda, which are the higher spiritual levels leading to realization of the Ātman. The metaphysics of the Upaniṣads support consistently "the infinitisation of man;" they teach that "the absolute is the deliberate goal of man."[39]

This way of expressing the spiritual bent in man also brings out the importance of his conscious and measured efforts towards self-realization. While the

Upaniṣads suggest in one sense that self-effort or karma in the sense of being antithetical to understanding is unproductive of spiritual gains, that is, that the path of jñāna or knowledge is the most efficacious one leading the soul to realization of its inherent divinity, in a secondary or lower sense the Upaniṣads are largely agreed that the psychic or mental circumstances that bear upon spiritual advance, or regression, depend upon moral and ethical factors. While the strong emphasis throughout the Upaniṣads is upon the acquisition of knowledge leading to liberation,[40] the physical concomitants of life, the jīva operating at the psycho-physical level, the need for the self to negotiate its journey to the Supreme through the operation of desires and motives, bring to the foreground of consideration the nature and importance of moral actions. The very close interweaving of the physical self with the inner mental self increased, in the estimation of the Upaniṣadic sages, the metaphysical value of human actions in their moral dimension. The nature of man as a graded series of selves operating at different levels called for a more truly spiritual conception of <u>karma</u> than appears to have been fostered in pre-Upaniṣadic times.

Although we may be told that "it seems beyond doubt that the doctrine of <u>Karma</u> is a natural and moral outcome of the inarticulated views of the pre-<u>Upaniṣadic</u> sages, which assume a definite and articulate shape in the

Upaniṣads",[41] it is difficult to envisage a common system of moral actions when the metaphysical goal, which is so definitely stated in each case, is so obviously variant.

Most writers see in the Vedic concept of ṛta the source of the rigid and inflexible aspect of the well-known concept of karma. We are given in the earlier Vedas no world-transcending ambition on the part of man in order to seek out his destiny. There is not even the adumbration of a metaphysical scheme in this regard. There is indeed, as we saw earlier, the peculiar polytheistic-monotheistic type of repetitive adoration of the gods, often rising to admirable heights of personal spiritual communion with the deity, and showing the human individual in the guise of an undisguised and artless soul, petitioning for blessedness and the gifts of life in this world. Such an atmosphere surely involved a deep sense of filial duty towards God and trust in Him, and the values of kindness and fellowship among men. But we fail to find that the Ṛta principle, with so much potential, was translated into anything that went beyond the life of present concerns or a simple idea of heaven in any higher eschatological sense.[42]

On the contrary, during the intervening period of the Brāhmaṇas, the idea of ṛta with its essentially cosmic notion of order, was utilized to impress man's ritual

acts with that very same mechanical and soulless rigour which soon became its chief character, and even raised to a kind of world-principle.[43] This is not to deny that the Brāhmaṇa literature did not develop the karma idea beyond its mechanical ritualistic application. Indeed, as the fore-runners of much of Upaniṣadic thought the Brāhmaṇas are literally storehouses of a wide spectrum of ideas which later develop also along diverse lines. With regard to karma, the Brāhmaṇas certainly develop its importance with regard to the repeated births that characterize human existence. Yet, it is of great importance in a comparative study such as the present one, to note that the context of Brāhmaṇa speculation was a ritualistic one, a legacy that in a variety of ways continues down to modern times. Within the narrow confines of this framework there is no scope for those eschatological ideas that require the simple external act to be associated with higher level motives that take into account man's psychological and spiritual dimensions.

If karma is conceived in terms of a simple theory of judicial rewards and punishments, then we have to say that there is the legacy of the strong ritualistic orientation of the Brāhmaṇa world-view. On the basis of their highly developed spiritual insight into man's nature, as evidenced in the analysis of the three levels of consciousness with the turīya as the fourth, and the

doctrines of the kośas reviewed above, the Upaniṣads radically transform the idea of karma into a dynamic metaphysical principle of great subtlety and spiritual import. The bare description of it, "man becomes good by good deeds and bad by bad deeds" as the Bṛhadāraṇyaka[44] says, now takes account of a wider psychological frame of reference that connects man's desires and tendencies of thought to a spiritual goal. The reward of a good life is the experience of goodness, and not of crass and material benefit.[45]

Yet we cannot deny that the Upaniṣads carry also a somewhat simplistic idea of karma and the associated doctrine of transmigration. The Chāndogya says:

> "Those who have good residual results of actions here, quickly reach a good womb, the womb of a Brāhmaṇa, of a Kṣatriya, or of a Vaiśya. But those who have bad residual results of action quickly reach an evil womb, the womb of a dog or of a hog, or of a caṇḍāla."[46]

We shall not be wrong if we judge that this one-to-one type of correspondence is really the legacy of the Brāhmaṇa ethos, which considered human actions and their consequences only in terms of an invariable mechanical

rigidity. The higher thought of the Upaniṣads gives a surer guide for the interpretation of the doctrines of karma and saṁsāra, and the Upaniṣads give us different phases of these doctrines in their development.[47] The Upaniṣads give us the feeling that the external world works according to mechanical laws, the inner spiritual life is marked by greater freedom from necessity, but does not mean moral depravity. As a principle of spiritual life in evolution karma, as well as the concept of saṁsāra, emphasize the development of character which is seen as continuous with a long past and a foreseeable future.[48] When Yājñavalkya takes Ārtabhāga Jaratkārava by the hand and leads him away to converse in secrecy about the nature of karma,[49] it must indicate that the principle of karma cannot be stated in simple physicalistic terms, but that it is subtle, profound and deeply spiritual in nature. An understanding of its workings through analogies drawn from external nature may prove misleading.

It is significant that Hume should question the source and origin of the idea of karma and reincarnation.[50] If it cannot be so directly linked to the Brāhmaṇic inheritance of the Upaniṣads, it goes to show its essentially spiritual dimension which may not be linked too closely to the rigid and mechanical types of relationships that obtain in external nature. The

Śvetāśvatara indicates the importance of character in the spiritual development of the jīva.[51] The Kauṣītakī indicates the importance of knowledge also for a jīva in its re-embodiment in a future existence.[52]

The doctrine of karma and saṁsāra indicate both the need for a moral foundation as well as the evolutionary character of the spiritual life, though the Upaniṣads also give us indications of possible retrogression.

7.3 LIBERATION AND JÑĀNA

The destiny of man, the destiny of the human soul, is probably the most intriguing of all questions man has ever had to face. In the Indian tradition this question is answered in various ways, and a particularly attractive answer is given in the simple yet profound narrative of Naciketas going to the Lord of Death to find Eternal Life. Abandoning family and friends the young brahmacārin arrives at the abode of Lord Yama and, being granted three boons, and exhausting the first two, asks:

> "When a man dies, there is this doubt: some say, 'He exists'; some again, 'He does not'. This I should like to know, being taught by thee."[53]

Though Yama tries to dissuade the boy with many temptations, Naciketas stubbornly persists in his request; so Yama teaches thus:

> "One thing is good, and different indeed is the pleasant; good befalls him who follows the good, he loses the goal who chooses the pleasant."[54]

Yama continues:

"He who thinks that this is the only world falls into my control again and again.";[55] "This (Ātman) . . . subtler than the subtlest, is inarguable";[56] "The knowing soul is not born, nor does it die . . . This Unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient One suffers no destruction, even when the body is destroyed".[57] "This Ātman cannot be attained by the study of the Vedas, nor by the intellect, nor even by much learning; by him is it attained who it (the Ātman) chooses - this, his own Ātman, reveals its own form.".[58] "He who is intelligent, ever pure and with the mind controlled, verily reaches the goal whence none is born again";[59] "Nothing is superior to the Puruṣa (Ātman) - that is the end, that is the supreme goal";[60] "Having realised that Ātman which is soundless, touchless, formless, imperishable, eternal, without beginning or end . . . one is released from the jaws of death."[61]

We may choose to follow the opinion that "the conception of the life eternal, of release, salvation or mokṣa, is very vague in the Upanishads",[62] yet that very vagueness issues from the nature of the goal itself. It is not possible to give any definite indications, for "it is not any of those concepts found in ordinary knowledge.[63] Though immanent, it is yet transcendent and beyond the reach of words and mind.[64] Even the great teacher Yama declares it to be "inarguable", and not attainable by any kind of "study" or "learning." The Upaniṣads also suggest a negative approach as being the more appropriate to the issue, the path of "neti, neti".[65]

Yama himself says that the path of final emancipation is "difficult to cross over and hard to tread," that it is as "sharp as a razor's edge".[66] What emerges as the characteristic of Upaniṣadic teaching on the question of liberation is that it is put before us in precisely the same terms as Ultimate Reality itself. Brahman or Ātman is itself the highest value in life, and whose realization alone can confer salvation from the "jaws of death", from the continuous series of rebirths.

Expressing that unity, the Ātman, as the goal of man, Yājñavalkya says:

"This is its highest goal, this is its highest glory, this is its highest world, this is its highest bliss; all other beings live on a particle of this very bliss".[67]

It appears to be abundantly clear, then, that the empirical individual, the jīva, in the view of the Upaniṣads, finds its highest destiny merely in realizing its true self. Irrespective of the particular approach in the different texts of the Upaniṣads, it still seems to be the consensus view that there is a kind of merging of the jīva with its own most interior essence, the Ātman. Dasgupta says in this regard:

"Thus it is said that the true knowledge of self does not lead to emancipation but is emancipation itself. All sufferings and limitations are true only as long as we do not know ourself. Emancipation is the natural and only goal of man simply because it represents the true nature and essence of man. It is the realization of our own nature that is called emancipation."[68]

There are many references in the Upaniṣads which indicate the world of material entities to be real, and which cannot be passed off as products of illusion.[69]

Yet, so far as the individual jīva is concerned, it fairly seems that, on the whole, the Upaniṣads teach an ultimate unity, which is somehow veiled from view. It is only self-knowledge that can wipe off the false knowledge.[70]

Those who uphold the acosmic view of Ultimate Reality insist that the path to liberation consists exclusively of jñāna or knowledge. And even from all that we have said about the Upaniṣads, we do get the impression that knowledge is the appropriate approach to Reality.

The whole matter turns on the issue of the nature of Ultimate Reality. We need to see that the structure of language and the normal ways of speaking give an advantage to the knowledge approach that might be unjustified. Though the Upaniṣads do use examples and anecdotes such as "knowing one lump of clay all that is made of clay becomes known",[71] a closer analysis shows that, since spiritual reality is not likely to be anything like physical entities, therefore, the 'knowing' required need not necessarily be related to acosmic types of learning. Indeed, the texts do not always sponsor mere learning, as we saw from the Kaṭha passages given above, but the sponsors of the academic ideal have certainly maintained the view that the approaches of knowledge and meditation

alone are appropriate to mokṣa, while karma and bhakti are merely instrumental.

Although it has to be granted that in the Upaniṣads, there is not much scope for bhakti in the understanding of it in relation to the Gītā, yet we may not be entirely unjustified if we say that some groundwork for it appears laid out in the Upaniṣads,[72] and especially in relation to the characterisation of Brahman experience as supreme bliss and supreme consciousness.

End Notes : Chapter 7.0

1. RAD IP I p 204
2. Kumarappa. B Hindu Conception of Deity p 12
3. DAS HIP I p 50
4. AU 1.4
5. Chennakesavan. S A Critical Study of Hinduism p 42
6. ibid p 41
7. BU 2.4.5
8. RAD IP I p 204
9. PU 6.2
10. CU 6.2.3/4
11. Garg, R K Upanisadic Challenge to Science p 84
12. BU 4.4.20
13. BU 1.4.7

14a Chennakesavan. S op cit p 42

14b DAS HIP I p 50

15. SU 7.10
16. Chennakesavan, S op cit p 42
17. CU 8.12.6
18. DAS HIP I p 66
19. KU 2.2.8
20. Sar
21. KU 2.2.5
22. RAD PU p 638
23. KU 1.3.4
24. KU 1.2.18
25. RAD PU pp 93/4
26. TU 2.3
27. TU 2.3
28. TU 2.3
29. TU 2.4
30. TU 2.5
31. Beidler, W The Vision of Self in early Vedanta p 34
32. Nikhilananda. Swami The Upanisads Vol I p 107
33. RAD PU p 91
34. ibid p 91
35. Nikhilananda. Swami op cit p 107
36. Sarvananda, Swami TU p 105
37. ibid p 106
38. Garg, R K op cit p 190
39. RAD IP I p 207
40. Hume, R E The Thirteen Principal Upanishads p 58
41. Garg, R K op cit p 44
42. Hume, R E op cit p 54
43. Belvalkar, S K & Ranade, R D HIP p 17
44. BU 3.2.13
45. RAD IVL p 275
46. CU 5.10.7
47. RAD IP pp 249/50
48. RAD IVL p 276
49. BU 3.2.13

50. Hume. R E op cit p 55
51. SU 5.11.12
52. KauU 5.7
53. KU 1.1.20
54. KU 1.2.1
55. KU 1.2.6
56. KU 1.2.8
57. KU 1.2.18
58. KU 1.2.23
59. KU 1.3.8
60. KU 1.3.11
61. KU 1.3.15
62. Ranganathananda. S The Message of the Upanisads p 98
63. DAS HIP I p 60
64. TU 2.4
65. BU 2.3.6
66. KU 1.3.14
67. BU 4.3.32
68. DAS HIP I pp 58/9
69. Kumarappa. B op cit p 31
70. DAS HIP I 59
71. CU 6.1.5
72. Garg. R K op cit pp 204/5

Chapter 8.0 THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

8.1 VALUE OF THE GĪTĀ

It is universally recognised that the Gītā is one of the great spiritual books of the world. The esteem in which it is held in the scholarly world is reflected in the fact that the number of commentaries written on this text by eastern and western scholars runs into several hundreds. We can agree with Radhakrishnan when he says ". . . if the hold which a work has on the mind of man is any clue to its importance, then the Gītā is the most influential work in Indian thought".[1] Dasgupta attests to the high merit of the book when he says of the Gītā: "This book is rightly regarded as one of the greatest masterpieces of Hindu thought."[2]

In the Indian tradition the Gītā is often not looked upon as a śruti or revealed text, but rather as part of the smṛti tradition.[3] We have to see that this relegation of the Gītā to a lower hierarchical level has largely been sponsored by the non-dualist school of thought, which is prone to place less importance on the events of history. Yet the Gītā is the one book in the Hindu tradition that holds a position analogous to the Bible or the Koran, according to many writers.[4] Otto, who sought to prove through his researches the existence

of an original or "ur" Gītā, asserted that such original text consisted of only 128 verses.[5] Although the researches conducted by the Bhāndārkar Institute of Oriental Research, in which manuscripts have been collected in several different scripts (such as Devanāgarī, Bengalī, Telugu, Malayālam etc.), spread over about 220 different manuscripts, have brought to light 19 additional and 10 half-stanzas, in the view of Belvalkar these are "admittedly repetitious and doctrinally insignificant". There appears to be good evidence for saying that "from the time of Śaṁkarācārya down to our own days the Bhagavad Gītā has been regarded as consisting of seven hundred stanzas."[6]

In the critical edition of the Mahābhārata, chapters XXIII to XL of the Bhīśmaparvan constitute the Bhagavad Gītā,[7] and this has also been affirmed by Radhakrishnan.[8] In the Hindu tradition, therefore, in the historical record accepted in this tradition, the Gītā becomes a part of the Mahābhārata, which is regarded as an <u>itihāsa</u> (a work of historical record). In the Hindu tradition, the <u>śruti</u>, which is the direct revelation of spiritual truth, includes the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, while historical works such as the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, and legendary works such as the Purāṇa and Āgamas, are considered <u>smṛti</u> works, i.e., mere elaborations of the revealed truth.[9]

This circumstance of the Gītā being part of a smṛti text, could have contributed to its relegation also to the smṛti or secondary group of religious texts. From the point of view of our theistic interest, we have to note that it is at least peculiar that the Gītā has not been accorded the status of primary revelation, especially since, so far as the Hindu tradition is concerned, it represents the only recorded revelation of the incarnate God.

A likely explanation is that in the understanding of the influential non-dualist school of thought, the Gītā, being a part of history, cannot be accorded supreme status since all empirical events are in some sense false. The Vedas cannot be so regarded for the reason that they are taken to stand at the head of the history of mankind, and are not themselves part of that history, enunciating only the principles that govern man and his relations with God. Whether this is a valid argument for not according śruti status to the Gītā is highly questionable, since the Gītā in the Hindu tradition is itself the very Word of God.

It is, however, of more than historical interest that, even in the period of the classical commentaries, there developed the tradition of the trayi-prasthāna or triple scriptural foundation, consisting of the

Upaniṣads, Bhagavad Gītā and Brahma Sūtra.[10] Although the earlier śruti tradition was left undisturbed, this new grouping of the three texts effectively and constructively replaced the original śruti arrangement. In the later tradition of Vedānta, which means almost all Hindu religious and philosophical speculation, this grouping of the prasthāna-traya held supreme sway.

We see in this a definite design to allow the Gītā an entry through the back door, so to speak, and establish it in a position of supremacy together with the Upaniṣads. Even the great Śaṁkarācārya, the founder of the non-dualist school of Vedanta, gives the Gītā high praise as "the collected essence of the teachings of all the Vedas".[11] We may note that Mādhusūdana Sarasvatī, a high-ranking medieval polemicist and protagonist of advaita doctrines, also gave it a status apparently higher than the Upaniṣads as "the ambrosia-milk of the Upaniṣads".[12] Svāmī Vivekānanda, the famous Hindu monk of modern times, and an ardent proponent of the non-dualist philosophy, held that the Gītā is "a bouquet of Upaniṣadic flowers".[13]

It is pertinent for us to take note of the high esteem and regard accorded to the Gītā by many Western scholars and savants.

The Bhagavad Gītā was first translated into English by Charles Wilkins in 1785. In introducing this work, Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, wrote that "the Bhagavad Gītā will survive even after the British dominion in India shall have ceased to exist and the sources of its wealth and power are lost to remembrance".[14] A short time later August Schlegel translated the Gītā into Latin.[15]

The great German critic William von Humboldt wrote: "The Gītā is the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known language".[16] And in a letter to his statesman friend Frederick von Gentz, he wrote: "I read the Indian poem for the first time, when I was in my country estate in Silesia, and while doing so I felt a sense of overwhelming gratitude to God for having let me live to be acquainted with this work. It must be the most profound and sublime thing to be found in the world."[17]

J W Hauer, a German missionary who worked in India, refers to the Gītā as "a work of imperishable significance" which "gives us not only profound insights that are valid for all times and for all religious life, but it contains as well the classical presentation of one of the most significant phases of Indo-German religious history".[18]

And Aldous Huxley gives unstinted praise when he observes: "The Gītā is one of the most comprehensive and clearest summaries of the perennial philosophy ever to have been made; hence its enduring value, not only for India, but for all mankind."[19] We may find instruction also in the observation that while many people in the modern times have taken enthusiastically to the message of the Gītā, there are also not wanting critics who find its general pantheism marring to the true spiritual message. This problem will be addressed in a later section.

A wide range of views have been offered with regard to the teachings of the Gītā. Because it draws ideas from all the important fountains of thought of ancient India, it is often considered to be a somewhat mechanically synthesized work representing various schools of thought represented in a religious dress.[20]

In 1895 Hopkins wrote about the Gītā in the following terms:

> "The same thing is said over and over again, and the contradictions in phraseology and in meaning are as numerous as the repetitions ... The different meanings given to the same words are as indicative of its patchwork origin, which again would help to explain its

philosophical inconsistencies."[21]

Garbe felt that the Gītā was originally a text of the Sāṁkhya-yoga school, and which was later worked over by the proponents of Vedic thought.[22] We have to admit that the Gītā in fact does portray a great deal of thoughts that are related to the sāṁkhya and yoga doctrines. At first glance the Gītā appears to be a kind of amalgam of the philosophical ideas of the Upaniṣads, the older Vedic ritualism and fixed duties, as well as dispassion for worldly goods characteristic of Buddhist thought. Yet, because of the overpowering figure of Kṛṣṇa the Gītā seems to carry, for the greater part of its teachings, the views of the ancient Bhāgavata cult.[23]

There are many controversies regarding the origin of the worship of Kṛṣṇa, and there are many conflicting accounts of the origin of Kṛṣṇa himself.[24] There does not seem to be much chance of these controversies abating, since the actual historical materials are so scanty, and always appear to be mixed up with legendary lore. Our approach is based on the Gītā and its content, and we have to say, with Edgerton, that:

> "We know nothing of the process by which he (Kṛṣṇa) attained divine honours, nor of his earlier history as a God, before the Bhagavad

Gītā, which is probably the earliest work presented to us in which he appears as such."[25]

Through internal references and stylistic comparisons, the Gītā appears to be a genuine episode of the Mahābhārata.[26] It was a time of much conflict and tension, both in terms of movement of men as well as of ideas. We cannot doubt that the Gītā does, to a significant extent, reflect views that might easily be connected with diverse and even opposed systems.[27] While we cannot say for sure that the different approaches to the study of the Gītā are without ground, many scholars also agree that the book has a consistent message in terms of its own premises. Thus Aurobindo feels that the Gītā, based on the spiritual experience of a sage of deep wisdom, gives us a synthetic doctrine of karma yoga, set out with great skill.[28]

Another scholar, who poured forth immense labours on this little scripture, has been B G Tilak. His summing up is that the Gītā is the flower and culmination of the Vedic tradition, setting out the synthetic doctrine of action, devotion and knowledge.[29]

Mahātmā Gāndhī has forcefully declared the Gītā doctrine to be based on karma yoga, with the clear emphasis of the idea of detachment. He has given it the

designation of anāsakti yoga, the yoga of detached action.[30]

Garbe, like many others, also emphasizes the wide tolerance and catholic spirit of the Gītā, when he says:

> "In the Gītā there is a sage that speaks in the fullness and enthusiasm of his knowledge and of his feelings, and not a philosopher brought up in any school, who divides his material in conformity to a settled method and arrives at the later steps of his doctrines through the clue of a set of systematic ideas."[31]

Such a view would lead us to believe that a message not allied to any specific school is the substance of the Gītā. While this may be true and a general feature of the Gītā teachings, it is unlikely that a book that does not have a fairly consistent message could hold the minds and hearts of men for more than two thousand years. That it can mean different things to different people is not a neceassry bar to the consistency of its meaning. It shows that the book can give to men that which they seek, within limits. We can therefore agree with the observation that "the Gītā stands midway between a philosophical system and a poetic inspiration."[32]

8.2 UPANIṢADIC CHARACTER OF THE GĪTĀ

Many ardent traditionalists espouse the view that the Gītā, being a part of the general and generalized Indian tradition known as the Vedānta, is equivelent to the teachings of the Upaniṣads. They therefore are inclined to see the Gītā also as the representative scripture of the spiritually absolutistic world-view propounded in the Upaniṣads.[33] The Gītā is taken, in this understanding of the relationship, to be the dramatic expositor of its own inheritance, the elaborator of the ideals propounded in the earlier scriptures. While the Upaniṣads furnish these ideals in their essential philosophical form, the Gītā elaborates them in terms of their application in the practical life of man.[34] The unknown and the unknowable Supreme Reality, is assumed to take the form of Kṛṣṇa, "and the Upaniṣadic truths emerge out of His lips."[35]

It has to be admitted, on objective grounds, that the tradition that the Gītā is the mere elaborator of the teachings of the Upaniṣads is fairly well established. Its strength is seen in the colophon at the end of every chapter of the Gītā, which supplies the sub-title 'Upaniṣad of the Gītā', and follows it up with a more definitive indication of the relationship as 'Brahma-vidyā', knowledge of the Eternal or Absolute.[36]

It is peculiar that Vaiṣṇava editions of the Gītā do not appear to include the colophon, judging from the Bhagavad Gītā As It Is by Svāmī Prabhupāda.[37] Yet, all the Vaiṣṇava ācāryas, Rāmānuja, Madhva and Vallabha, fully accept the Trayī-Prasthāna tradition, and they are anxious to establish that their views are in close conformity to the Upaniṣadic teachings.[38]

On the strength of the colophon alone, therefore, it appears quite possible that "the Bhagavad Gītā could be considered an Upaniṣad"[39]

There is no denying the importance of the Upaniṣads for the Gītā, as the immediately preceding antecedent literature relevant to its contents. The structure of the Gītā in the form of a dialogue is reminiscent of the Upaniṣadic teacher-pupil dialogues such as those between Uddālaka and Śvetaketu, Yājñavalkya and Gārgī, etc. The striking image constructed before our minds by the Gītā, the image of the chariot and its rider, recalls immediately a similar portrayal in the Kaṭha passage which says that the Ātman is the master of the chariot and the chariot is the body; the intellect is the charioteer and the mind is the rein.[40] In the Gītā of course, "Arjuna becomes the soul of man and Kṛṣṇa the charioteer of the soul."[41]

There are in fact whole verses in the Gītā that may be correlated with verses in the Upaniṣads. In Chapter XIII of the Gītā we have, with regard to the Supreme Being:

> "Without and within all beings; the unmoving and also the moving; because of its subtlety, incomprehensible; It is far and near."[42]

While in the Īśāvāsya there occurs the verse:

> "It moves and it moves not. It is far and It is near. It is within all this and it is also outside all this".[43]

A similar idea occurs in the Muṇḍaka also:

> "Self-resplendent, formless, unoriginated and pure, that all-pervading being is both within and without." (MU 2.1.2).

We see thus that there are several almost verbatim correspondences between the Gītā and several of the classical Upaniṣads, even as we have correspondences among the Upaniṣads themselves. That the Gītā enjoys in the tradition the status of an Upaniṣad, and further, that it also has the character of Upaniṣadic teaching, is fairly

beyond doubt. It is interesting to consider, however, to what extent the Gītā exhibits the Upaniṣadic character. Since the Upaniṣads, as we have already seen, out of the complex strains of metaphysical thought that are considered in them in fact give prominence to the two major aspects of monistic idealism, that is, the cosmic and the acosmic ideals, it is the task of our thesis to establish which of these, either one or both, and to what extent, the Gītā represents. Or alternatively, whether the Gītā presents its own peculiar system of metaphysics. And further, since our study is theistically-orientated, we are concerned to investigate the nature of the Gītā theism and in what ways this theism may be related to the Upaniṣads, and to the earlier ideas of the Vedas.

End Notes : Chapter 8.0

1. RAD IP I p 519
2. DAS HIP I p 8
3. Prabhavananda, Swami The Spiritual Heritage of India p 95
4. ibid p 95
5. Otto, R
6. ibid p 36
7. ibid p 36
8. RAD BG p 14
9. Prabhavananda, Swami op cit p 95
10. Mahadevan, T M P Invitation to Indian Philosophy p 261
11. RAD BG p 10
12. Swa
13. Vivekananda, Svami Thoughts on the Gita p 8
14. Rao, N P Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy p 73
15. Mascaro, J The Bhagavad Gita p 9
16. Rao, N P op cit p 73
17. ibid p 73/4
18. Mahadevan, T M P op cit p 73
19. Huxley, A
20. RAD IP I p 530
21. Majumdar, B Krsna in History and Legend p 37
22. ibid p 37
23. ibid p 45
24. ibid p 51
25. ibid p 55
26. RAD IP I p 523
27. ibid p 524
28. Rao, N P op cit p 76
29. Tilak Gita Rahasya p
30.
31. RAD IP I p 522
32. ibid p 522
33. Bowes, P The Hindu Religious Tradition pp 8/9
34. Sharma, S N A New Approach to Some Important Aspects of Indology pp 86/7
35. Chennakesavan, S A Critical Study of Hinduism p 51
36. ibid pp 49/50
37. Prabhupada, Svami BG As It Is
38. DAS HIP I p 70
39. Mascaro, J The Upanisads p 7
40. KU 3.3
41. Mascaro, J BG p 22
42. BG 13.15
43. IU 5
44. MuU 2.1.2

Chapter 9.0 THE BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ: GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

9.1 ULTIMATE REALITY

In an earlier presentation of the ideas of the Upaniṣads we had seen that it was not easy to set out this philosophy in any straightforward way. One of the problems was the many crisscrossing strands of thought in these texts which appeared to restrict a clear view of their general metaphysics, giving the impression of their lacking "a definitive viewpoint".[1]

If the Gītā presents us with a similar problem, it is because it is in many important ways the inheritor of the legacy of the Upaniṣads. In the last chapter we noted that the Gītā clearly breathed an Upaniṣadic character. From this perspective, we have to say with Zaehner that "the Gītā is not an easy text to interpret as it is not consistent with itself".[2]

That the Gītā incorporates the leading ideas of the earlier Vedānta is not open to any doubt. Some of the basic ideas of the Upaniṣads are certainly included "as a determining viewpoint in its remarkable synthesis of ideas from various sources".[3]

The Gītā is generally regarded as being a work on

the ethics of religious life. Its metaphysical position therefore is not worked out with the kind of supporting dialectic that we witness in the Upaniṣads.[4] The Gītā utilizes the Upaniṣadic concepts of Brahman, Īśvara, Ātman and Puruṣa in the service of its own premises which modify the Upaniṣadic use of them.[5] While in the Upaniṣads we saw that the Absolute or Brahman was referred to by the alternative terms of Ātman and Puruṣa within the meanings of transcendence and immanence of the Ultimate Reality, in the Gītā Brahman is significantly referred to also as the essence of the God of religion, thus giving the Gītā a strong theistic bent.[6]

As the Supreme Lord and Maker of the World of nature, Kṛṣṇa still exceeds all that meets the eye and extends beyond it. The world does not affect the stability and immutability of God who, though the creator of it, encompasses it and transcends it. The text draws an analogy using the seemingly all-pervasive wind and the transcendent ether to establish God's supremacy over all things:

> "As the mighty wind moving always everywhere, rests ever in the Ākāśa, know thou that even so do all beings rest in Me."[7]

In this we have the conception of God not only as

the infinite and the immutable, but also as the support of the world at the same time. Being one He supports all. The essential distinction between God and the objects of the world, which a simple pantheism is prone to ignore, is also sought to be established. Traditional cosmogonic theory, even as generally available in the Upaniṣads, maintains a strict distinction between the five great elements, the pañca mahābhūtas, so far as the manifested world is concerned. "Air exists in space, but it does not consist of space and has nothing essentially in common with it. It is only in such a sense we can say that things exist in God.[8]

The Gītā recognizes the metaphysical problem associated with creation, since creation entails working with the infinity of the unmanifested (prakṛti or pradhāna). The sāṁkhya formulation clean avoided the problem, since it did not countenance the principle of a Creator God. In the case of the Gītā, and even from the time of the Upaniṣads,[9] this has had to be met and overcome. As Supreme Creator and Controller of all things, God cannot abdicate His responsibility for the world. The creation of the world is a mighty act of gigantic karmic proportions. In accordance with the law of karma, it should be binding and produce consequences for the doer. In words that are reminiscent of the sāṁkhya, Kṛṣṇa says:

"These acts do not bind Me, sitting as one neutral, unattached to them, O Dhanañjaya."[10]

Cold as these words may sound, they are necessary in the context of Hindu theism particularly, for establishing God's non-defilement with worldly processes. In the case of the Upaniṣads, such non-defilement was sought in order to preserve the Ātman's supreme transcendence. In the case of the Gītā, however, besides transcendence, God's personality as a God of love, who at the same time remains undefiled, has also to be preserved.[11] Zaehner points out that while sāṁkhya <u>puruṣa</u> is totally indifferent to the course of the world by definition, the God of the Gītā is <u>udāsīna-vat</u>, '<u>as</u> one indifferent', and thus He is not prevented from loving those especially who are devoted to Him.[12] "God is thus unweariedly active and free from its laws."[13]

The attitude of the distinctionless Transcendent Divine of the Upaniṣads necessarily involves a sāṁkhya-type of cold indifference towards the world. Kṛṣṇa carefully avoids this attitude, so tempting to a strict monistic interest. Therefore, although He is undefiled by the activities of the Prakṛti, it is on account of His guidance, His supervision, <u>adhyakṣena</u>,[14] that Prakṛti brings forth all things in nature, both moving and unmoving.

The metaphysical notion of a pure Absolute and the sāṁkhya conception of the transcendent Puruṣa are both combined and worked up in the Gītā into the Godhead that can serve religious ends.

The references to God in the sense of Ultimate Reality in the Gītā have usually been taken, and quite rightly, to refer to the Absolute of the Upaniṣads. One passage may be identified as of staggering importance for the religious interest, wherein Kṛṣṇa appears to declare His supremacy over even the Absolute as normally understood:

> "For I am the abode of Brahman, the Immortal and Immutable, of everlasting Dharma and of Absolute Bliss."[15]

The immutable Brahman referred to here is undoubtedly the Highest Absolute of the Upaniṣads, which places Kṛṣṇa on a level with the philosophical conception of Ultimate Reality. Radhakrishnan[16] gives the views of the classical ācāryas, and shows how advaita-orientated teachers attempt to underplay the clear supremacy claimed by Kṛṣṇa. Śaṁkara makes out that "the Supreme Lord is Brahman in the sense that He is the manifestation of Brahman." Among the advaitins only Madhusūdana accepts the text as one in which Kṛṣṇa identifies himself with

the absolute unconditioned Brahman. We have to note that even this last statement is in fact somewhat of an understatement, for it does not take into account the force of the word '<u>pratiṣṭhā</u>', which we have accepted as abode, as given by Swarūpānanda, who also comments that Kṛṣṇa here speaks from the standpoint of "the <u>Pratyagātman</u>, the true Inner Self."[17] This again, concerned with advaita dogmatics, causes more confusion than clarification, and certainly breaks continuity with the previous important verse, which says that he who goes beyond the three <u>guṇas</u>, is fit for becoming Brahman,[18] which indicates that it is the Absolute Brahman, and not the Inner Self, that is being referred to.

However, if in the last quoted verse the phrase "fit for becoming Brahman" is taken in the sense of "fit for liberation" as Radhakrishnan's comment indicates,[19] then Brahman in both verses can be made to refer to liberated souls, so that Kṛṣṇa then becomes the home of the aggregate of liberated souls. In point of fact, this is the meaning that Rāmānuja supports.[20] This appears to us an exercise in illegitimate stretching of the text.

Zaehner translates the most important words "<u>brahmano hi pratiṣṭhā'ham</u>" as "For I am the base supporting Brahman", and he draws support from the translations of Hill, Edgerton, Barnett and Deussen.[21] He

criticizes Radhakrishnan, who, he avers, "oscillates alarmingly between theism, pantheism and qualified monism, because of his essentially indifferentist attitude to religion," and who therefore "compromises on 'abode' which pratiṣṭhā does not happen to mean." Of course, Zaehner is quite correct in his translation, if we take grammatical precision as our criterion.

The criticism of Radhakrishnan appears somewhat unfair. In the first sentence of his commentary of the verse in question Radhakrishnan says: "Here the personal God is said to be the foundation of the Absolute Brahman." So Radhakrishnan is fully aware of the sense of foundation or supporting base that can be ascribed to Kṛṣṇa in the verse under discussion. In an earlier work Zaehner also translates the relevant line as meaning that God is "the foundation of Brahman." We cannot say that Radhakrishnan would disagree with Zaehner's translation: we rather feel that he would disagree with the import of the words in terms of the total metaphysical scheme.

For Zaehner, Brahman connotes "the absolutely transcendent",[22] and "both the timeless state of being which characterizes mokṣa and the source and origin of all that has its being in space and time. It is then, both time and eternity".[23] Radhakrishnan would not disagree with this reading of the term Brahman, only, so far

as the Gītā is concerned, Radhakrishnan seems to invest it with a theistic flavour against a monistic background. He affirms that

"Eternity does not mean the denial of time or history. It is the transfiguration of time. Time derives from eternity and finds fulfillment from it. In the Bhagavadgītā there is no antithesis between eternity and time. Through the figure of Kṛṣṇa, the unity between the eternal and the historical is indicated. The temporal movement is related to the inmost depths of eternity."[24] This is the eloquent statement of the Gītā theology from the monistic point of view. And if the living God of the Gītā receives too impersonal a status here, we should consider Radhakrishnan's words further on in the same work:

> "Absolute being, the one Godhead, is behind and beyond the world; He is also the Supreme living God, loving the world and redeeming it by His grace."[25]

For Radhakrishnan, speaking from the monistic standpoint, the Absolute does not really get fragmented into the multiple world of objects and selves. Though the world is not a pure illusion, it is also not what it appears to be. Though, in his treatment of the Gītā, he

sometimes appears to modify the strict advaitic standpoint, still, his reading of the Gītā is against the background of the Upaniṣadic philosophy of Brahman. He does not see the Gītā as a further development of the theistic stream of thought of the Upaniṣads, though we have to admit that such theistic thought is still only a faint glimmering in comparison with the Gītā.

To come back to the issue of Kṛṣṇa being affirmed as the "support of Brahman" as against "the abode of Brahman," we are obliged to consider that Zaehner himself has rendered it as "totality of existence, both the eternal world of changeless being and the phenomenal world of coming to be and passing away", as the consolidated meaning of the term (Z BG 36). We submit that "the eternal world of changeless being" must, from a philosophical point of view, account for any conception of Divinity that we wish to raise, monistic or theistic. To say that there exists a being beyond "the eternal world of changeless being" appears to us to be philosophically illegitimate, for it simply reduces "the eternal world of the changeless being" to the finite order, and in its place intstitutes the newly posited Being.

The truth is that there can be only one "eternal world of changeless being;" it has to be an all-inclusive unity, that is, the temporal order must be founded upon

it and be fulfilled in it. The real problem is the relation obtaining between the two. That there has to be a relation is a metaphysically sound proposition; so it is equally certain that this relation cannot be conceptualized in empirical terms. Which means that it cannot be characterised at all, so far as philosophical legitimacy is concerned. Whatever characterization we wish to give to this relationship rightly belongs to the realm of religious faith only, and may justifiably be operated within that context.

So, we may reasonably say, thinking along lines of metaphysical dualism somewhat like the sāṁkhya thinkers, that total reality may be bifurcated into two categories, the purely spiritual and the purely material, and their is no room for a third. If we insist upon setting up a third category, it will be found to be appropriating the functions of one of the original two.

In our view, such a third category is, any way, out of character for the Gītā, which carries a fairly strong pantheistic-monistic strain of thought inherited from the Upaniṣads. The constraints placed by the Upaniṣadic ideas upon any interpretation of the Gītā, though mild in emphasis, are fairly pervasive in their scope.

Zaehner's concern for translating <u>pratiṣṭhā</u> in the

meaning of a supporting base, and for carrying through its meaning in the literal sense of it appears to be founded upon an anxiety reminiscent of Rāmānuja, to establish a permanent distinction between God and the human soul. Since the human soul can attain to oneness with Brahman,[26] or as Zaehner calls it, "Nirvāṇa which is Brahman too," and so the holy distinction may be obliterated. To save religious life from the danger of final oneness of Brahman, Zaehner says that "it is Krishna's task to fit it into a scheme of things which also makes room for a personal God".[27]

We may note again that even Madhusūdana who, though an advaitin, and noted for his very strong theistic-type of leaning towards Kṛṣṇa, takes the term 'Brahman' in the verse under review to mean "the personal Lord", and so he takes it that "Kṛṣṇa identifies Himself with the absolute, unconditioned Brahman".[28] This may appear to be stretching the Upaniṣadic concept of Brahman somewhat, but we should remember that a fairly pronounced movement is evident from the earlier Upaniṣads to the later ones, culminating in the Śvetāśvatara, during which "the Supreme Being came to be thought of in moral and religious terms.".[29] And so Madhusūdana's translation might on that ground be found acceptable. This would also help to secure a monistic structure for the Gītā's metaphysics and which is in evidence elsewhere as well.

Radhakrishnan, speaking generally of the Gītā's philosophical thesis, says:

> "The Gītā does not uphold a metaphysical dualism; for the principle of non-being is dependent on being. Non-being is a necessary moment in reality for the unfolding of the Supreme".[30]

If we saw in the Upaniṣads tension between a classical non-dualist reading of Ultimate Reality and the personalistic one resolving itself, on the whole, in favour of a general monistic idealism, then in the Gītā we must say, the tables are turned. Although monistic tendencies appear to persist, the conception of a Personal Godhead who is also the highest Absolute, is strongly in the ascendant.

At any rate, the conception of Ultimate Reality as the Personal Godhead is established firmly in this verse, in the sense of identification of Kṛṣṇa with the absolute Brahman, which has been the aim and end all along, of traditional Hindu theism.

One of the high points of the Gītā, where the theistic idea of God is declared to be the highest conceivable, is declared by Arjuna, who, within the context of

the Gītā, is the direct perceiver of the Divine Nature. Kṛṣṇa is completely identified with both the transcendental and the immanent sides of Ultimate Reality. Arjuna is the speaker:

> "Thou art the Supreme Brahman, the Supreme Abode and the Supreme Purifier, the Eternal Divine Person, the First of the gods, the Unborn, the All-pervading."[31]

Radhakrishnan, whose translation we have given above, rightly says that "Arjuna accepts the truth of what has been declared (prior to this in the original text) and proclaims his conviction that Kṛṣṇa who is speaking to him is the Supreme Godhead, the Absolute."[32] and that in the immediately following verse he supports his experience with similar experiences of other revered sages in the tradition.

For Radhakrishnan to give this view is at least interesting from the point of view of his usual non-dualist position, which maintains a qualitative break between the Absolute Brahman and its appearance in the world of contingent reality. In this commentary, however, he admits not only to a true continuity between the transcendent Absolute and the Personal God, but to that transcendent Absolute being the very Personal God

himself. We shall have occasion to refer to this issue again, but we may note that in the above verse Radhakrishnan renders "ādideva" as "first of the gods", which, in accordance with non-dualism would refer to the Īśvara or Hiraṇyagarbha; the Lord of the phenomenal world as against the Absolute who remains aloof and only "appears" to participate in the world process. Advaitic teachers almost always give this rendering.[33] But we venture to submit that such a rendering reduces the force of the terms "parambrahma", "śāśvatam" and "ajam", which clearly seek to bring out the absolute character of the Lord, and not any relative derivative quality. Zaehner, who gives "ādi-devam" to mean "primeval God" is more faithful to the total sense of the text.[34] Both Zaehner and Radhakrishnan take the phrase "puruṣaṁ śāśvatam divyam" as a whole to give the sense of "eternal, divine Person", which not only establishes Kṛṣṇa as the personal God, but also establishes a continuity with the best theistic tendencies in the Upaniṣads.[35] We may recall here especially Yājñavalkya's clear enhancement of personal values in life and their essential relation to the divine principle of the Ātman or Brahman.[36]

Arjuna extends his adoration once again in the grand theophany of the eleventh chapter, which establishes Kṛṣṇa, the Personal God, as the very highest Ultimate Reality:

"And why should they not, O Great-Souled One, bow to Thee, greater than, and the Primal Cause, even of Brahmā, O Infinite Being, O Lord of the Devas, O Abode of the universe? Thou art the Imperishable, the Being and the non-Being, (as well as) That which is Beyond (them)."[37]

We need to give attention to two terms which, we may say, knock down the last barriers against a strictly monistic interpretation in favour of an unimpeachable theism - "garīyase brahmaṇo'py ādikartre" and "sad asat tatparam yat." In the former phrase, Kṛṣṇa is declared to be "greater, than, and even the creator of, Brahmā." who in standard advaitic terminology, is the creator-God Īśvara. It is common practice for monistic theologians to consider Kṛṣṇa (and all other accepted incarnations) to be the manifestations of Īśvara, since any direct participation by the Absolute Brahman would contradict its essential immutability. In this highly important verse, however, the order is reversed, and Kṛṣṇa the Personal God, becomes the creator of Īśvara, and therefore the Ultimate Reality behind the temporal order of events. This makes Kṛṣṇa identical with the Absolute.

Zaehner renders the phrase in question as "more to be prized even than Brahman,"[38] and connects this with

his rendering for verse 14.27 discussed above. Our difficulties in accepting this would be the same as those given in the earlier discussion. It is noteworthy that Radhakrishnan gives the direct rendering as "greater than Brahmā the original creator," and then comments that "ādi kartṛ" may also be taken in the sense of "Thou art the first creator or Thou art the creator even of Brahmā."[39] Advaitic theologians also take the term Brahmā to mean the immanent aspect of Īśvara, and this would then be taken to mean that Īśvara is the primal cause of Brahmā even, and so identify Kṛṣṇa with Īśvara, and not the Absolute Brahman.[40] So far as philosophy is concerned, the true Absolute must transcend thought in every possible way. The philosophically-orientated advaita, however, makes the Absolute non-relational, and therefore distinctionless, but as it is said to be based upon the normative considerations of Upaniṣadic thought which is concerned to account for the plural world, it is said to be "non-dual", which means that no aspect of being is omitted from it. "The ultimate ground of being, Brahman, and the empirical state of being, the world, are not different. The world of plurality can be reduced without residuum into the everlasting one, Brahman."[41] But no philosophically satisfactory relationship may be posited between the two without effecting a subject-object opposition, and this would nullify the Absolute.

The barest self-consciousness implies a subject-object relationship and, taking their cue from Upaniṣadic statements, advaitic protagonists attach "sat, cit and ānanda" to the concept of the Absolute to make it appear consistent with the existence of the world. Yet these factors are said to be 'absolute' and do not affect the distinctionless or non-dual character of the Absolute. Considering the issue of becoming and taking into account the conception of Īśvara, Radhakrishnan says:

> "The Upaniṣads imply that the Īśvara is practically one with Brahman. Very strict usage and meticulous philosophic accuracy require us to say that there is the slightest conceivable diminution from the absolute when we come to the self-conscious 'I am I'"[42]

The reference is to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka statement as follows:

> "Brahman indeed was this in the beginning. It knew itself only as 'I am Brahman'. Therefore it became all."[43]

Our point is that upon the very onset of self-consciousness the world of becoming begins to operate in its entirety. Except for highly theoretical purposes,

therefore, it is of no consequence to separate the immanent aspect of Īśvara (and call it Brahmā) from the transcendent aspect of Him. The subjective-objective categories of being exist simultaneously, and it would be a violation of what we see as the very nearly direct sense of the text to attempt to differentiate between the purely theoretical advaitic concepts of Brahmā and Īśvara.

However we may approach the text then, the theistically important principle is inescapable, the principle of Kṛṣṇa's transcendence and supremacy over any conception of a mere demiurge.

To turn now to the second of the two phrases of the Gītā verse under consideration here, viz., "sad asat tat-param yat". Zaehner takes it to mean "beyond being and non-being" equating being and non-being with all non-contingent reality.[44] As cited by Zaehner,[45] Samkara places the whole phrase in apposition to 'imperishable' that is, Kṛṣṇa is held to be beyond all forms of contingent reality, and is thus probably identified with the imperishable Īśvara of advaitic thought. Rāmānuja, again as cited by Zaehner, seems to take a line truer to the text, for he offers the rendering as "what is beyond and other than material nature and individual selves still bound up in it, that is, the category of liberated

selves."[46] We shall not be violating good form if we just take the phrase to be a further and emphatic re-statement of the earlier idea, with "being" taken to stand for Brahmā, the spiritual principle inaugurating the world-process, and "non-being" taken to stand for all of material nature, either manifested or unmanifested. This would secure the meaning that is in conformity with many other texts of a similar nature, without violating the meanings of the words too much from what has generally been accepted in the Indian tradition. Madhusūdana, though an advaitin, appears to follow a similar line of thought when he says with regard to this verse:

> "The Lord is both the apparent and the non-apparent, the manifest and the unmanifest. He is also the principle that transcends both, being the Immutable Reality from which stems the world of appearances and its unmanifest matrix. In fact, nothing can be conceived to exist apart from Him."[47]

Madhusūdana must be aware that the term akṣara has already been used earlier in the Lord's discourse to refer directly to the Supreme Brahman as, "The Imperishable is the Supreme Brahman".[48] In his commentary on this verse, Madhusūdana[49] in elucidating the term akṣara, directly refers to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka passage in

which Yājñavalkya instructs Gārgī that the akṣara is "not coarse, not fine, without inside, without outside, etc."[50] Akṣara in the above context, therefore, can only mean Brahman.

In the mighty theophany of the eleventh chapter, Arjuna experienced the overpowering and awesome majesty of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Reality. "There, in the body of the God of gods the son of Pāṇḍu saw the whole universe resting in one, with its manifested divisions";[51] "he saw in that body of that God of gods, all grades of beings: Brahmā, the Lord, seated on the lotus, and all the ṛṣis and celestial serpents;"[52] he saw the Supreme "of boundless form . . . neither the end nor the middle, nor the beginning;[53] he saw him as "a mass of radiance shining everywhere . . . and immeasurable".[54] And "he saw the splendour of that mighty Being" as if it were "the splendour of a thousand suns rising simultaneously.[55] After this stupendous vision, the opening of the next chapter "must be one of the biggest anti-climaxes in literature."[56] for Arjuna asks in a simple and artless manner the relative merits of those who worship Kṛṣṇa, and those others who choose to worship "the Imperishable, the Unmanifest".[57]

As one of our two major enquiries in this study is the exposition of theistic values, the appreciation of

the nature and qualities of the Personal God as evident in the eleventh chapter furnishes data of great importance. And in the immediately following chapter the consideration of the question whether men should offer worship to such Personal God or to the abstract imperishable and unmanifest being appears pivotal to our thesis.

We may first attempt to establish whether "the Imperishable, the Unmanifested" may be accepted in the advaitic sense of the personal Īśvara, or as referring to the Absolute Brahman. Swarūpānanda, the translator of the text we have been basically following, and who belongs to the advaitic tradition, comments that "the Unmanifested refers to the "Avyakta, i.e., That which is incomprehensible to the senses, is devoid of all Upādhis".[58] Upādhis are usually the "limiting adjuncts" or necessary fetters that the Godhead is endowed with for the purpose of effecting the world process. Māyā is the collective term for the upādhis, as it 'affects' the Absolute Brahman in the act of creation. A highly regarded modern advaitic writer, Svāmī Nikhilānanda, says:

> "Māyā, both in its cosmic and in its individual aspect, hides the true nature of Brahman. Thus, the infinite and eternal Absolute appears as a finite being, limited by time and space."[59]

and again in further elaboration:

> "Brahman associated with the upādhi or collective ignorance (māyā) is designated by Vedāntists as Īśvara or Saguṇa Brahman, who corresponds roughly to the Personal God of various religions. According to non-dualistic Vedānta the Personal God is one step lower than Brahman . . . Brahman cannot be described by any specific attribute. It is Īśvara, and not pure Brahman, who, in His different aspects, is called the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe."[60]

As we have noted above, Swarūpānanda, though an advaitin, concedes that the phrase "unmanifest" in verse 12.1 refers to that spiritual principle which is not conditioned by the limitation of <u>māyā</u>. So it can only refer to the Absolute Brahman. Even Śaṁkara says that "the Imperishable" of 12.1 refers to "Brahman who is unmanifest, being adjunctless".[61] Madhusūdana again refers to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka passage of the discussion between Yājñavalkya and Gārgī in illustration of the meaning of "Imperishable" as used by Arjuna.[62] We cannot clarify the terms of the present enquiry better than by quoting Radhakrishnan on this verse:

"There are those who seek oneness with the Absolute, one and impersonal, unrelated to the universe, and others who seek unity with the Personal God manifested in the world of man and nature . . . Is it the Absolute or the Personal God, Brahman or Īśvara, that we should worship?"[63]

Now that we have established, even according to the most worthy advaitin commentators, that the matter at issue in Arjuna's question is indubitably the opposition between the Absolute Godhead and the Personal God, we are in a position to meaningfully refer to the answer the Lord delivers:

"But those also, who worship the Imperishable, the Indefinable, the Unmanifested, the Omnipresent, the Unthinkable, the Unchangeable, the Immovable, the Eternal . . . verily, they reach only Myself."[64]

There can now be no manner of doubt as to the status of the Personal God as revealed in the Gītā. Kṛṣṇa is not "one step lower than Brahman," however necessary such a qualification may be for maintaining the integrity of an austere monistic position. Though He revealed himself to Arjuna as "the mighty world-destroying Time",[65] He is

clearly not limited to the temporal order, but the very Absolute, capable of serving the ends of philosophical speculation, as well as religion. In elucidating His transcendental status, Madhusūdana[66] recalls the famous line from the Taittirīya which declares that the Supreme is "that from which words recoil with the mind unable to grasp It".[67]

That the Personal God is the Supreme Transcendent is the understanding given to us in the fifteenth chapter also. After saying that in this world the Lord acts in terms of a dual spiritual role,[68] He declares that He is also beyond both these as the Supreme Person, the Immutable Lord.[69] Though there is much contentiousness about the meanings of the terms in these verses, as indeed with so many other verses also, almost all commentators agree that the Personal God both transcends the world as well as supports it. Radhakrishnan also avers that in these verses "the Gītā extols the conception of the Personal God who combines in Himself the timeless existence (akṣara) and the temporal beginning (kṣara)".[70] Although these verses strongly reflect Kṛṣṇa's total divinity within the context of the Gītā, Radhakrishnan is probably taking extraneous material into consideration when he expresses the doubt:

"Whether Kṛṣṇa is identical with Puruṣottama or

only a limited manifestation of Him is a question on which there is difference of opinion."[71]

We have tried to demonstrate, through citing relevant passages, through an appeal for consensus from among the works of different scholars, in spite of the fact of their differing overall philosophical viewpoints, that, within the context of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa enjoys the full status of the Personal God and the Absolute Godhead, and that His function of participating in the world is shown to be continuous with His status as the Absolute, and not refracted into the meaning of a second order Reality. Within the context of the Gītā's metaphysics, Kṛṣṇa participates in the world as the Supreme Godhead.

9.2 GOD AND CREATION

The Upaniṣads do not directly deny the reality of the world, but in their more absolutistic phases, when the world of forms is considered as "mere name and form",[72] or when the plural world is devalued, as in "he goes from death to death who perceives here diversity, as it were",[73] the sense of the futility of world-affirmation is strongly felt. The Gītā, however, has none of this type of negative absolutism. Its view of the world is that, though it is produced from and returns

to Him in the end, there is no suggestion of unreality. Kumarappa says of the Gītā view:

> "Assuming that the world is real, the Gītā teaches, like most of the Upaniṣads, that it forms a part of the Supreme, being created, supported and dissolved by Him."[74]

The conception of creation in the Gītā is that of a real world, issuing from God in a real sense; "there is no suggestion that the world is a troublous dream on the bosom of the infinite".[75] If at all the world is looked upon as in any way as an inferior form of reality it is due to the quite normal and unalterable fact that it belongs to the order of time, and in time must pass away, while eternity is the higher aspect of reality, which is yet the destiny of all things.[76] We must say, however, that there is some suggestion of the rejection of saṁsāra in the tree analogy,[77] and in the reference to the pain of living.

To take up again the analogy of the tree in the context of the conception of creation, it is impossible to miss the sense of its origin in the Supreme Lord, as the seed of the tree being not only a part of the Lord, but deriving its essence from Him as the the unitary Source of all things. The root of the tree of the world is an

aspect of God's energy which is continuous with the rest of creation, even as the root is with the rest of the tree. In this sense of the world partaking of the vital nature of God, we may relate the first four verses of the fifteenth chapter to the problematic two Puruṣas of verse 16. Then, the creation of material forms (lower prakṛti) and the vitalizing principle that continuously flows from God and unites the jīvas or finite centres of consciousness (higher prakṛti) may legitimately be taken to be the two Puruṣas, over which the Puruṣottama stands supreme. In this understanding, we have to take prakṛti as "the ever-flowing current of evolution",[78] and therefore as being in a simple sense continuous with God's being. In his comment on verse 16, Zaehner feels, however, that it is illegitimate to use sāṁkhyan terms in so radically a non-sāṁkhya fashion.[79] However he admits, with reference to the verse under survey, to a possible "tension between the Sāṁkhya dualism and Upaniṣadic pantheism which no one can help noticing in the Gītā".[80]

In support of our contention of the universe proceeding from the unitary being of God, and in continuation of the conception of 'seed', we may cite the following passage:

"And whatsoever is the seed of all beings, that also am I, O Arjuna. There is no being,

whether moving or unmoving, that can exist without Me."[81]

It is significant that it is not declared that the Lord 'possesses ' the seed or that the seed is 'with' him, but the more monistically categorical 'that am I'. The seed idea appears again with the same distinctly monistic flavour in "Know Me, O son of Pṛthā, as the eternal seed of all beings".[82] Śaṁkara does not elaborate significantly on this, and Radhakrishnan not at all. Zaehner comments that "as 'seed', Krishna is the eternal origin of the whole world process".[83] Only Madhusūdana makes the significant and directly relevant remark with regard to the key words of the text, when he comments: "That Universal Cosmic Seed known as Avyakrita (the Unmanifest, unevolved matrix) is Himself and not different from Him. This should be perfectly understood."[84]

However this may be, the Gītā does not go over into any kind of radical non-dualism of the type of classical advaita. In its delineation of the categories of contingent reality, it mostly follows the simple sāṁkhya categories of prakṛti and puruṣa. The five traditional elements of the gross world (earth, water, fire, air and ether) together with the mind, the intellect, and the the individual ego are said to be the Lord's eightfold

material nature or prakṛti.[85] This is said to be of a lower order than another and higher prakṛti, which is declared to be the principle of self-consciousness.[86] And the Lord further declares that He is "the origin and dissolution of the universe" because these two prakṛtis are taken to be the totality of all reality other than God.[87] And a strong dualistic sense is supported in the following verse:

> "Beyond me, O Dhanañjaya, there is naught. All this is strung in Me, as a row of jewels on a thread."[88]

In spite of the Gītā's monistic undertones, then, it is primarily attuned to the positive side of life with all its diversities, which are seen to derive from the Divine Himself. In asseverating against the wicked and atheists, and those who hold the world to be in some way false, the Gītā asserts strongly the real nature of the world and God, and the vital meaning of moral actions in the world.[89]

With the Gītā's strong sense of the reality of the world-process and the importance of moral actions, and in spite of its somewhat monistic tendencies, we cannot quite equate its teaching of the wise man taking refuge in God and "realizing that all this is Vāsudeva"[90] with

the Upanisadic declaration of sarvam khalvidam brahma, "all this indeed is Brahman".[91]

9.3 THE AVATĀRA DOCTRINE

Among all the ancient texts of the Indian tradition, the concept of avatāra, which is loosely translated as 'incarnation', first occurs in the Bhagavad Gītā.[92] Although this concept is quite popular in the Mahābhārata as a whole, the final text of this scripture is not considered to have been fixed at the same time as the Gītā itself.

The precise meaning of the term avatāra is 'descent' and directly refers to the descent of God among men.[93] In the Indian tradition there have been as many as twenty-four such avatāras enunciated, while ten (dasāvatāra) have become established as the standard number.[94] These are the matsya (fish), kurma (tortoise), vārāha (boar), nṛsiṁha (man-lion), vāmana (darfa), paraśurāma (Rama with the axe), Rāma (the hero of the Ramayana), Kṛṣṇa (of the Mahābhārata and the Teacher of the Bhagavadgītā), the Buddha, and Kalkin (yet to come). Of this list, only Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are important from the point of view of the development of Hindu theism and the establishment of devotional sects.[95]

From the time of the classical Upaniṣads onwards, and with regard to the development of devotionalism, the Bhagavad Gītā with Kṛṣṇa as the avatāra therein, assumes the greatest importance.[96] It is to be noted that Kṛṣṇa is regarded in the tradition as the total avatāra or pūrṇa-avatāra,[97] and we may not be wrong if we see in this important doctrine a continuation of the loftiest ideas of Godhead which the Bhagavad Gītā certainly takes over from the prior tradition.

This is to assert a significant change that devotional religion makes in the descent of religious and metaphysical thought from the Upaniṣads to the Gītā.

But it is an index of the power of thought ~~over~~ the yearning of the human heart, that the impersonalistic metaphysics of the Upaniṣads has not lacked representatives who claimed even for the incarnation a position that conforms to their premises. We may say that the Upaniṣadic teaching of the Ātman as the Supreme Reality that exists within man himself, invites an allegorical or symbolical interpretation of the avatāra doctrine. Radhakrishnan states this point of view effectively when he says:

"The avatāra is the demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity. It is

not so much the contraction of Divine majesty into the limits of the human frame as the exaltation of human nature to the level of Godhead by its union with the Divine."[98]

In this point of view, it is not necessary to take the incarnation to be factually true, but only in a literary and symbolic sense, which gives an enhanced conception of man's divine possibilities.

This view has been most clearly and tenaciously held in modern times by Gāndhī, who, though he has been declared to hold a generalized monistic position,[99] has also been interpreted to hold a position of dualistic realism.[100] We can agree that although Gāndhī did not directly refute the monistic view, as witness to his strong and persistent devotionalism, he wrote:

"God is with us and looks after us as if He had no other care besides. How this happens I do not know. That it does happen, I do know"[101]

Though Gāndhī did speak of himself as an advaitin, his life-style showed himself to be "deeply rooted in the religious philosophy of Vaiṣṇava theism".[102] Yet, regarding the avatāra theory, Gāndhī held the view that the picture depicted in the Gītā has

an allegorical significance. It may not be taken as a real historical event. In this connexion he says:

> ". . . when I first became acquainted with the Gītā I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the Gītā".[103]

This states nicely the case for the allegorical interpretation, and we may note in passing that Gāndhī's case, not being an advaitin of the <u>māvāvāda</u> type, and knowing that he believed in God's grace and the existence of great suffering in the world[104] his position regarding avatāra theory appears to us to be the result of his anxiety to uphold the doctrine of non-violence on a respectable religious basis. It also appears to us that to a fair extent Gāndhī was influenced by the teachings of Islam, as he disbelieved in idolatory[105] though his wide tolerance would not allow him to deny it to others should they be inclined towards it.

Radhakrishnan also interprets the avatāra doctrine in a quasi-existential sense of inner spiritual development, when he affirms:

> "God is never born in the ordinary sense. Processes of birth and incarnation which imply limitation do not apply to Him. When the Lord is said to manifest Himself at a particular time, on a particular occasion, it only means that it takes place with reference to a finite being"[106]

In saying this, Radhakrishnan preserves the monistic view. But we have to assert that the crux of the avatāra concept is the irruption of the Lord into the process of history, where both the divine activity and the historical process have to be taken as real events.

Vivekananda, who held to a strong advaitic metaphysic, and who yet concerned himself greatly with the ideals of love, fellowship and charity in the affairs of the world, asserted that it was quite possible for the infinity of God to be compressed within a finite human form, when he said that "God's infinitude refers to the unlimitedness of a purely spiritual entity, and as such, does not suffer in the least by expressing itself in a human form".[107] That the physical vastness of space is

not to be confused with the spiritual concept of infinity or omnipresence, is the issue that Vivekananda sought to clarify in the above words, and by so doing, he accepted the logic of the avatāra theory.

Yet, at another time, and within the context of a discussion on māyā and Brahman, he affirmed the irrelevance of the essential idea pertaining to the avatāra theory:

> "The theory of incarnation is the first link in the chain of ideas leading to the recognition of the oneness of God and man. God appearing first in one human form, then re-appearing at times in another human form is at last recognized as being in every human form, or in all men. Monistic is the highest stage, monotheistic is a lower stage."[108]

This is a clear statement of that form of the monistic interest that is concerned with preserving the integrity of the pure Ātman, and which sees an avatāra as a threat to the direct link between each individual and Brahman.[109]

Although Vivekananda in a general sense accepts what he calls the "avatāra of Īśvara",[110] and indeed also ac-

cepted Ramakrishna as such. advaita metaphysics would stand compromised on three counts if it were to admit the essential notion behind the concept of avatāra. The first is a fixed relation of a simple nescience preventing the jīva from recognizing itself as the Brahman: the second is the compromise of the impersonality of Brahman: and the third is the necessity of devotion to a manifested being in order to obtain release. All these are violations of traditional strongholds of advaitic metaphysics.

Śaṁkara himself had accepted the theory of avatāra, but had severely modified the value of an avatāra. At any rate, he could not accept the supremacy that Kṛṣṇa claims for Himself in the Gītā. Parrinder says in this regard:

> "So it is concluded that Śaṅkara's whole teaching of non-dualism breaks on the rocks of the theory of incarnation. This shows that Śaṅkara's attempts to absorb the conception of the Lord and give his system an air of theism, is untenable."[111]

In so far as the incarnation belongs to the world of manifestation, that is, that it is the irruption into history of the Divine as Īśvara, Radhakrishnan sees no

logical difficulty in accepting it as a possibility.[112]

He says that if the Lord assumes human nature it does not raise any logical difficulty apart from the problem raised by creation itself. We can agree with this position, only, it will also create difficulties for advaita metaphysics which insists on the avidyā hypothesis, while the avatāra of the Gītā seeks devotion from men. In any case, in the advaita metaphysics, even taking into account the concept of the Saguṇa Brahman, avatāras would be an extravagance. They do not appear to be necessary within that scheme, in which "religion and worship disappear" and "it goes without saying that there is no room for incarnation."[113]

For theistic metaphysics it is of immense value that incarnation should become a necessity in the world process and not remain a mere possibility. But if in addition, the incarnate God were also to be the highest possible conception of Godhead, it would give the theistic view sufficient metaphysical leverage to enable it to rise to a dominant position, so far as the Hindu tradition is concerned.

The most popular statement of the avatāra in the Gita is given in the following verses:

"Whenever, O descendent of Bhārata, there is a decline of Dharma, and rise of Adharma, then do I body Myself forth. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of Dharma, I come in to being from age to age."[114]

The reason for the Divine participation is given in these verses, together with the promise of its continuity for the welfare of the world. Although it has not always been so in the history of Hinduism, a sympathetic and religiously true interpretation finds sufficient latitude in these lines to see the operation of the love of God for man and an abiding concern for his welfare.[115] The necessity for participation of the Divine in the affairs of men is established on the basis of acting against the transgressors of dharma, and for the protection of those who are good. That such necessity has come about is established on de facto grounds as well, for the Gītā itself is the evidence.

If we look at the second requirement for strong theistic metaphysics, so far as avatāra theory is concerned, and that is, the supremacy of the incarnate God, the Gītā gives us ample evidence of it. While the two verse quoted give the bare and formal declaration of the basis of incarnation, we need only to refer again to the

Puruṣottama conception[116] which has been accepted by almost all commentators as establishing Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Godhead, above all definable categories, and yet as the Supreme Person.[117]

Radhakrishnan concedes the validity of the conception of Puruṣottama in the context of the Gītā, as including the highest philosophical and religious values. in the words:

> "The immutability of the absolute and the activity of the Īśvara are both taken over in the conception of Puruṣottama. The personal Puruṣottama is from the religious point of view higher than the immutable self-existence untouched by the subjective and objective appearances of the universe. He is looked upon as an impartial governor ever ready to help those in distress."[118]

A strict philosophical interest makes Radhakrishnan say that "on ultimate analysis the assumption of the form of Puruṣottama by the absolute is less than real".[119] He gives greater consideration to the divine essence of Godhead which the Gītā speaks of[120] and which cannot itself become perceptible at the level of manifestation.[121] Yet he acknowledges that "the Gītā accepts the belief in

an avatāra as the Divine limiting Himself for some purpose on earth, possessing in his limited form the fullness of knowledge."[122] Prabhavananda, also a writer in the full advaita tradition, similarly acknowledges that "Kṛṣṇa, the teacher of the Gītā, openly declares himself to be an incarnation of the Godhead".[123]

After sifting through all the relevant evidence in the text, and taking account of the opinions of many scholars, Majumdar affirms that "the whole trend of the Bhagavad Gītā is to show that Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme God".[124] And in the introduction to his translation of the Gītā, Feuerstein concludes:

> "The only complete and perfect incarnation of the divine essence is Kṛṣṇa who, in the Bhagavad-Gītā, figures as the teacher of prince Arjuna. He speaks with the authority of the Divine. As is clear from his self-testimony ... he is the supreme Reality."[125]

9.4 THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

It is not untrue to say that the metaphysics of the Gītā is unformed and tentative, traceable to the Upaniṣads and Sāṁkhya sources, and not conclusive. The

Gītā does not engage in argument and explanation of its metaphysical position as the Upaniṣads do, yet we have to contend, on the basis of the statements in the text itself, that the jīva or individual self is shown also to possess consciousness in its own right, and which cannot be said to be merely borrowed or reflected consciousness.

The doctrine of avatāra places the theistic interests of the Gītā on a firm foundation, and, if it can be reasonably demonstrated that the individual soul bears consciousness in its own right, and therefore stands over against God in a necessary personal relationship, the interests of theism would be more thoroughly served. Zaehner sees in the Gītā an overall theism[126] which he supports with an impressive elaboration of a metaphysical structure drawn from the text. Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, though in agreement with the view that the Gītā operates in a theistic fashion, holds that finally the text "does not uphold a metaphysical dualism".[127] We have to see what the text itself says on this issue of the individual self, and this can be done quite briefly for our purposes by touching on the nerve of the matter, as it appears to us.

We may work on the premise, which has been shown in an earlier section of our work, that the Gītā draws its major metaphysical concept of the Absolute or Supreme

Spirit from the Upaniṣads, and its ideas of material nature from sāṁkhya sources, albeit via the Upaniṣads also.

In the thirteenth chapter we are told that all things, the moving and the unmoving, issue as a result of the union of kṣetra and kṣetrajña,[128] where kṣetra is taken by almost all commentators to mean the material world including the body of man, while kṣetrajña is taken to be the Lord as the Knower of the field. Madhusūdana, who gives a strong monistic interpretation (as is to be expected), yet says, quite significantly for us, that "this verse clarifies the previous lesson that high or low parentage is due to the commingling of matter and spirit".[129] We should note the aptness of 'commingling' for conveying the sense of saṁyogāt. Zaehner gives the rendering as 'union' and 'conjoining',[130] while Radhakrishnan does not himself comment on this major term, except for referring to Śaṁkara's view that "the union of the two is of the nature of adhvāsa, which consists in confounding the one with the other."[131] We have to see that this is moving away from the dynamic sense of saṁyogāt, which cannot be referred to a passive proximity of the principle of consciousness in sāṁkhyan style.

The passivity of the kṣetrajña cannot be legitimately maintained here, for in a slightly earlier verse from which the sense continues, the role of God is

clarified:

> "And the Supreme Puruṣa in this body is also called the Looker-on, the Permitter, the Supporter, the Experiencer, the Great Lord, the Highest Self."[132]

If we agree with Radhakrishnan that "here the Supreme Self is different from the psychophysical individual",[133] in the usual advaitic sense, in order to enable us to say that "all the consciousness or intelligence that manifests itself in the activities of life is but the reflection of the All-pervading, Absolute and Perfect Intelligence - the Supreme Spirit,[134] then kṣetrajña in verse 13.26 becomes invalid, for it is stated to enter into a 'union', which is a 'commingling'.

It is significant also that, though the Supreme Puruṣa is stated to be the Looker-on (that is, the sākṣin), He is also the experiencer or bhoktā, and so, for him to enter into a true union with material nature is not unreasonable, especially within the context of these verses.

In terms of even the advaitic premises, then, the text enhances the conception of the individual self as a real product of the union between the Supreme Puruṣa on

the one hand, and the prakṛtic material on the other.

For corroboration, again even within the context of advaitic premises, we need only to look at a further text:

> "My womb is the great Prakṛti; in that I place the germ; from thence, O descendent of Bhārata, is the birth of all beings."[135]

to understand that the Lord participates in the world process not as a mere witness, but in a vital, life-giving capacity. It is not sufficient to hold, in the pure advaitic fashion, that the living individual that interacts with other beings in the world, is mostly a conglomerate of guṇas playing upon guṇas. Madhusūdana says that "the whole (world) process is informed and driven by Māyā - the creative power of God . . . it is not the case that the entire process goes on independently of any divine causality".[136] We cannot agree that this meets the issue; it is more like working around the problem in the interests of a prearranged theory. Radhakrishnan, on the other hand, acknowledges the more vital interaction between the Supreme Spirit and primordial matter, when he says:

> "The Lord is the father who deposits in the

womb which is not-self, the seed which is essential life, thus causing the birth of every individual."[137]

In fairness to the text we should go even further, and say that to the make-up of the individual the Supreme Puruṣa must contribute something of Himself, even as Prakṛti does. Beidler focuses attention on this point when he says,

> "It is important to understand the peculiar position of the jīva, partaking of both Puruṣa and Prakṛti, i.e., of both natures of the Absolute."[138]

The jīva, then, is of this world as well as of the beyond, both matter and spirit. This makes the jīva a real part of God, even from an advaitic perspective. It is not the product of the mere proximity of Puruṣa, not the product of mere māyā. It stands for the real involvement, in the life of the individual, of God Himself. Kṛṣṇa is both he who plants the seed and the seed itself.[139] And so He must be taken to participate in a real and vital fashion in the life of the tree of saṁsāra[140] through being the spiritual element in the branches of the tree, through being the essence of the host of jīvas or finite centres in the universe. This,

in the Gītā, is the true meaning of the Lord as the Father and all humanity His children.[141] The seed image is used also to show that in the contingent world of becoming the Lord is still the 'seed' of all beings,[142] which, apart from establishing the usual principle of immanence, more importantly points to the active spiritual creativity which the jīva essentially stands for. The spiritual principle in the total make-up of the jīva, which is a complex unit of many factors, may be best identified in our language in terms of the purified or intelligent will,[143] and which may be seen as the spiritualised determinative faculty, the higher intelligence.[144] Kṛṣṇa says that He is the intellect of the intelligent.[145]

On this analysis the spiritual essence of the jīva has to be identified with the buddhi, which in general advaitic psychology is seen as receiving the reflection of the pure Ātman. Radhakrishnan says that the soul, which is "God's image in man, is the bridge between heaven and earth",[146] but we should add that, whether it is an image or the advaitic reflection (which is probably what Radhakrishnan means), if it is not real enough to help man in the struggles of life, it is unlikely that man will be able to cross over to heaven. In the Gītā, the buddhi comes nearest to the idea of the spiritual soul,[147] and in this sense it becomes the spiritual es-

sence of the jīva, which generally also carries the meaning of the total psycho-somatic complex.

That the soul of man is a real and distinct part of God is shown more than clearly in the following verse:

> "An eternal portion of myself, having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses and the mind for the sixth, abiding in Prakṛti".[148]

The jīva is thus "that aspect of the Supreme Self which manifests itself in every one of us".[149] It is not necessary to take the view that the Lord actually divides Himself, or "that the Supreme is capable of division or partitioning into fragments".[150] As Zaehner says: "It should be enough for us to note that for the Gīta God, though by definition infinite and indivisible, is nonetheless capable of assuming a finite and separate form".[151] And we should, in the present context, take this to mean the form of an avatāra as well as individual selves.

Following from the fact of the soul drawing unto itself the senses and the mind, we have to say that the soul is also a doer and an enjoyer,[152] which are vital aspects of the Divine sharing in the life of the soul.

Before closing this section, it needs to be indicated that, following the metaphysical doctrines of the Upaniṣads, the Gītā believes in the doctrine of karma and rebirth, and the associated idea of liberation from saṁsāra. As these concepts are worked out as linked in important ways to the Gītā's specific type of theism, we shall treat them in the concluding discussion.

End Notes : Chapter 9.0

1. Lott, E J Vedantic Approach to God p 2
2. ZAE H p 93
3. Lott, E J op cit p 2
4. RAD BG p 20
5. DAS HIP Vol III p 473
6. ZAE BG p 37
7. ibid p 6
8. RAD BG p 240
9. BU 3.7.3
10. BG 9.9
11. ZAE BG p 277
12. BG 7.17
13. RAD BG p 241
14. BG 9.10
15. BG 14.27
16. RAD BG p 325
17. Swarupanand, Swami BG p 322
18. BG 14.26
19. RAD BG p 324
20. ibid p 325
21. ZAE BG p 358
22. ibid p 358
23. ZAE H p 93
24. RAD BG p 38
25. ibid pp 39/40
26. BG 2.72
27. ZAE BG p 158
28. RAD BG p 325
29. Kumarappa, B Hindu Conception of Deity p 57
30. RAD BG p 39
31. BG 10.12
32. RAD BG p 260
33. Swarupanand, Swami BG p 226
34. ZAE BG p 295
35. Kumarappa, B op cit pp 10-12
36. BU 2.4.5
37. BG 11.37
38. ZAE BG p 313
39. RAD BG p 283
40.
41. RAD IP I p 183
42. ibid p 168
43. BU 1.4.10
44. ZAE BG p 314
45. ibid p 315
46. ibid p 315
47. Madhusudana Sarasvati On the BG p 213
48. BG 8.3
49. Madhusudana Sarasvati op cit p 167
50. BU 3.9.8-11
51. BG 11.13
52. BG 11.15

53. BG 11.16
54. BG 11.17
55. BG 11.12
56. ZAE BG p 321
57. BG 12.1
58. Swarupananda, Swami op cit p 275
59. Nikhilananda, Swami Self Knowledge of Sankaracarya (Atmabodha) p 73
60. ibid p 74
61. Warrier, A G K Concept of Mukti in Advaita Vedanta p 385
62. Madusudana Sarasvati, op cit p 218
63. RAD BG p 291
64. BG 12.3-4
65. BG 11.32
66. Madhusudana Sarasvati op cit p 219
67. TU 2.4
68. BG 15.16
69. BG 15.17
70. RAD BG p 332
71. RAD IP I p 544
72. CU 6.1.4
73. BU 4.4.19
74. Kumarappa, B op cit p 61
75. RAD IP I p 548
76. RAD BG p 38
77. BG 15.3/4
78. Swarupananda, Swami op cit p 324
79. ZAE BG p 366
80. ibid p 362
81. BG 10.39
82. BG 7.10
83. ZAE BG p 247
84. Madhusudana Sarasvati op cit p 154
85. BG 7.4
86. BG 7.5
87. BG 7.6
88. BG 7.7
89. BG 16.7-19
90. BG 7.19
91. CU 3.14.1
92. Chennakesavan, S op cit p 46
93. Prabhavananda, Swami BG p 118
94. Puran Encyclopaedia p
95. ZAE H pp 91/2
96. ibid p 92/3
97. Feuerstein, G BG p 15
98. RAD BG 98
99. Raju, P T p 297
100. Srivastava, p 179
101. ibid p 181
102. ibid p 180
103. ibid p 163
104. ibid p 178

105. ibid p 174
106. RAD BG pp 31/2
107. Vivekananda, Svami Selections from Swami Vivekananda p 390
108. ibid pp 423/4
109. Parrinder, G Upanishads, Gita and Bible p 52
110. Vivekananda, Svami Essentials of Hinduism p
111. Parrinder, G op cit p 61
112. RAD BG p 33
113. Parrinder, G op cit p 49
114. BG 4.7,8
115. ZAE H p 93
116. BG 15.17
117. Parrinder, G op cit p 39
118. RAD IP I p 542
119. ibid pp 543/4
120. BG 7.24
121. RAD IP I p 543
122. RAD BG p 35
123. Prabhavananda, Swami op cit p 119
124. Majumdar, B Krsna in History and Legend p 50
125. Feuerstein, G BG p 18
126. ZAE BG p 9
127. RAD BG p 39
128. BG 13.26
129. Madhusudana Sarasvati op cit p 240
130. ZAE BG p 347
131. RAD BG p 310
132. BG 13.22
133. RAD BG p 209
134. Swarupananda, Swami BG p 301
135. BG 14.3
136. Madhusudana Sarasvati op cit p 246
137. RAD BG p 315
138. Beidler, W The Vision of Self in Early Vedanta p 148
139. ZAE BG p 352
140. BG 15.1
141. BG 9.17
142. BG 7.10
143. Beidler, W op cit p 157
144. BG 2.41
145. BG 7.10
146. RAD BG p 328
147. ZAE BG p 22
148. BG 15.7
149. Swarupananda, Swami op cit p 328
150. RAD BG p 328
151. ZAE BG p 364
152. Swarupananda, Swami op cit p 328

Chapter 10.0 CONCLUSIONS

We have now come to the end of our survey of some of the salient metaphysical characteristics of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā, characteristics that are generally considered of fundamental importance for theism. Metaphysical principles and religious values are not identical; yet it cannot be denied that the latter are derived from the former. In this sense, religious values must depend for their support on those more basic metaphysical values which are perceived to be relevant to them.

A sound metaphysical basis is indispensible to a truly spiritual religion, since religion, though concerned primarily with the Divine Truth which is God, has to show a continuity between pure belief in God and those assumptions and processes of thought which make that belief more firmly set in the heart. When it is stated in relation to the religious thought of India that it is too philosophical, it to state the not too infrequent attitude of many who profess religion to emphasize the metaphysical values at the expense of the truly religious ones. It cannot be denied that if we work on certain presumptions, the Upaniṣads would appear to lead to the position of metaphysics turned into religion.

Our study had set out with the aim of following the development of key philosophical and religious conceptions from the Vedic scriptures through to the Bhagavad Gītā. It should be noted that whether we start from a fixed revelation or not, the course of history and changing social circumstances are bound to affect the development of any idea, however firmly tradition may try to pin it to a certain interpretation.

In the case of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā, the related time-period is dauntingly vast, and as such its effect on the fortunes of the more ancient ideas can be expected to be significant. Even within the period of a single set of texts, more especially the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, the philosophical views reflected in the texts appeared to undergo changes. We have tried to take account of these in the most economical way within the compass of this work.

In the case of the ancient Vedas, our research appeared to confirm the chronological periods already demarcated by most earlier workers in the field of Indology, especially in the sense that the fortunes befalling some of the Vedic gods conformed to the expected schematization, and in the further and related sense of the relationship of the Vedic gods to the phenomena of nature. Indeed the latter sense is of far greater impor-

tance for the theology of that period, as it emerged in the research.

So far as the internal chronology of the Vedas is concerned, this is the only aspect of the chronological factor that was felt relevant to our work. And therefore it should be noted that the normal dating of the so-called 'late' hymns of the tenth book of the ṚgVeda, apart from nominal acknowledgement, was not perceived to be relevant to an assessment of the metaphysical ideas emerging from the Vedas. It appeared more meaningful, taking into account the wide time-span covered by the texts, and most importantly in view of the religious actuality pertaining to the texts, to maintain the strict divisions into Vedas, Upaniṣads and Bhagavad Gītā. In this, we have followed the larger frame of reference of our own study, as well as the lead given by Radhakrishnan, Dasgupta, Max Muller, Kaegi and the other indologists as well as the more tradition-oriented writers such as Mahadevan and Rao.

In attempting to arrive at a valid satisfactory set of ideas concerning the Vedic conception of God, it was found helpful to trace out the naturalistic background against which these conceptions might be understood. This approach appeared to prove fruitful, since it was seen to accomodate the vast array of the Vedic devatās in

the most meaningful fashion, that is, to accommodate their plural existence, on the basis of the simplest objective categorisation. The brimming data concerned with the plurality of gods was thus revealed for consideration in terms of the more vital metaphysical and theological categories of polytheism and monotheism.

Taking account of the bare facts revealed in the texts, we have argued that it is misleading to read into the Vēdas a plain and simple polytheism, on a wide range of grounds. It was possible to show that a merely plural nomenclature does not necessarily mean theistic pluralism. While the hymns of the Vedas show evidence of plural divinities, any form of stable and fixed theistic pluralism within the strict meaning of the term was found inappropriate to the religious actuality of the Vedic period, so far as could be judged on objective grounds. This therefore means that polytheism does not appear to be supported in the Vedas, in despite of many writings to the contrary.

On the basis of the many allusions to a Divine Power above and beyond the multiple conceived divinities, we have rather argued for the recognition of a metaphysical principle of Unity, which could be the basis of both the apparent polytheism of the Vedas, as well as the foundation for Vedic monotheism. As the one principle that is

readily available in the hymns themselves, and clearly stated there in true metaphysical terms, this principle, it appears to us, operates in the Vedic world-view as the highest generalization of an 'inner essence', yet seen in its external manifestation as the various gods of the Vedic pantheon. This is the principle of the Rta, and signifies the immanentist doctrine, which, from the time of the Vedic hymns, has become the singular characteristic of the development of Indian thought and religion. Like a thread running through, holding together and unifying many diverse thoughts and practices, has been this singularly important immanentist doctrine of Rta, the defining and categorising principle of all things Indian. Indian thought has often been regarded as pantheistic; and, though this is not an accurate description, it yet points to that feature of Indian life and the constructions of its world-view which is mostly akin to the operations of Rta. MacNicol is quite accurate when he observes:

> "Practically all the religious thought of India, we must remember, is pantheistic in the sense that the immanence of God in the universe became early for it an axiom."[1]

We may therefore easily appreciate that the pantheistic sense runs through every phase and period of In-

dian life and literature. Pantheism, as a western term, cannot fully convey the meaning of Ṛta, and we have argued also against the wisdom of using foreign terms, that have already gathered their own clusters of meaning, especially in the face of available indigenous terms.

It is appropriate to indicate the wide cosmic sweep of the Ṛta concept as it occurs in the well-known Swan hymn of the fourth book of the ṚgVeda:

> "As light he dwells in the luminous sky, as Vasu (air) he dwells in the mid-space; as hotṛ (fire) he exists on the sacrificial altar; as a guest he exists in the house; (as life) he exists in man; as supreme Entity he exists; as right (Ṛta) he exists (everywhere). He shines in the sky, in water, in light, in mountains and in Truth"[2]

Sharvānanda comments that in this mantra all the divinities are "synthesised into one ensouling Principle, the Supreme Spirit or Paramātman." And he further indicates that for the great commentator Sayana also it reflects the "identity of the human soul, the gods, and the supreme Soul."[3]

It cannot be denied that, once the principle of pan-

theism or immanentism is granted, as so obvious in the mantra quoted above, Rta alone, accepted in the Indian philosophical and religious tradition as the principle of cosmic harmony as well the principle that upholds men and gods, becomes the unifying and explanatory factor in the plural universe, and which is yet spiritual. Indra, the god to whom the largest number of hymns are addressed in the RgVeda, himself declares that the source of his strength is the eternal law or Rta:

> "I exist, O singer, look upon me here;
> all that exists I surpass in splendour.
> The Eternal Law's commandments make me mighty;
> When I rend asunder the worlds."[4]

Similarly also, Mitra and Varuṇa are the gods most closely concerned with this Eternal Law or Rta which they uphold, and through which they guard the universe. Since all heavenly bodies, the dawn, the sun and the moon, follow the path set out for them through the principle of Rta, they also, besides the major gods, may be said to manifest Rta.[5] The foundation of this Eternal Law is unshakeable.[6] Radhakrishnan is firm in his acknowledgement of the principle of Rta as that which is "the permanent reality which remains unchanged in all the welter of mutation"[7]

Since the conception of henotheism is held by many scholars to represent a middle position in the advance from polytheism to monotheism, and which we have to note is still a conjecture, the evidence present in the hymns themselves for the conception of a Divine Unity cannot be ignored. We should not take for granted the immense spiritual force behind the declaration:

> "What is but One Reality, the sages call by different names - as Agni, Yama and Mātariś-vān."[8]

or the stupendous power behind the refrain that is repeated no less than twenty-two times:

"Great is the divinity of the gods."[9] And this does not entail any degree of relaxation of academic objectivity.

Dandekar perspicaciously has pointed out that '<u>asura</u>' an ancient term which in early Indo-Iranian times was taken for a god, comes from the root 'asu' meaning Inner Essence. It is on this strength that Varuṇa is said to be the greatest 'asura', because he is the chief guardian of <u>Ṛta</u>, the eternal law of this inner essence. Dandekar suggests that the pantheistic idea of the all-pervasive spiritual principle may also be referred to as

'asuism'. This seems feasible enough, and, especially since almost all Indologists have characterised Indian thought as basically 'pantheistic' this is the very principle on which Vedic religion has to be declared as monotheistic and not polytheistic. It is immaterial whether the immanentist principle is designated 'pantheism' or 'asuism' or by the indigenous term Rta.

If we just drop from our consideration the idea of plurality of the Vedic gods, that is, if we do not allow the mere nomenclature to obstruct our vision of the religious scene, a genuine unitary Divine Power will arise before our minds' eye, in all those Vedic passages concerned with Divine Activity. Vedic monotheism can thus be easily established on the basis of the single metaphysical principle of Rta.

In our researches, however, we found that, as much s the gods presented in the text are fluid enough to merge into each other, as much as their personalities are unstable and precipitate enough, they are also sufficiently stable not to be simple descriptive representations of the Divine Power. Since the personifications of the gods appear to us to be reasonably consistent, we have concluded that the theism of the Vedas may fairly be characterised as polytheistic monotheism. On which side of this term the emphasis may be placed must,

in the ultimate analysis, depend upon individual perception of the meaning of the mantras, and their spiritual impact. N S Agrawal, writing of Yāska's treatment of Vedic thought, calls this theism as pantheistic monotheism.[10] So far as we are concerned, and in the light of our research in this area, this latter designation would be just as acceptable to us.

When we come to consider the nature of Upaniṣadic thought about Divine Reality, our research revealed that it becomes necessary to make some rather significant changes in perspective. We see that the Ṛta concept, though it represented an inner essence, and which, within the understanding of this term, engendered the sense of a spiritual unity among gods who could then be subordinated and controlled under this all-pervading Power, this idea of the inner essence, so far from spiritualisng and controlling the gods, in fact totally displaced them. The idea of the inner essence, which had remained for so long as maintaining the balance between the oneness of its essence and the manyness of its manifestations, now passes over into a unitary spiritual vision which sacrificed the multiplicity in the interest of the One.

The monistic tendencies that began to claim the greater attention of the seers towards the close of the Vedic Saṁhitās, somehow appear to have completely

engulfed religious and metaphysical thought immediately after the intervening period of the Brāhmaṇas. Our survey reveals that the sages of the Upaniṣads appear to have made a most significant assumption in their metaphysical thought concerning all reality - and that is, not only that the Divine Unity is more important than the multiplicity, but that it is also more real. The source of all is taken to be more real than the all that is produced.

While in the Vedic period the inner essence played the role of explaining the gods, in the Upaniṣads it explained away the gods. While earlier the principle of unity shared reality with the plural divinities, in the later age it appropriated the full share of reality to itself. Precisely how this change occurred or why, we are unable to say in objective terms. The theory of an expanding spiritual consciousness, which is the usual explanation, does not appear to us satisfactory, since a consciousness of the One Unity is no less remarkable in the asya vāmīya hymn or the hamsāvatī hymn mentioned above.

The Vedas appear to disclose, in the words of Agrawal again, "a metaphysical realism in which One and Many do not clash either in form or in substance"[11] There the One is the inner essence, the many are regarded

as its genuine manfestations on the same plane of reality. If the Upaniṣadic sages accorded equal reality to the One as well as to its manifestation in the gods and material things, we should have some tangible evidence of it; but of this, we do not have much as a result of their passionate preoccupation with the question of Ultimate Reality, conceived either as Brahman or Ātman. These sages seem to have reasoned along the simple theory that, that which is changeful is ephemeral while that which is changeless is the true and real.

Yet, we are unable to say for sure that the Upaniṣads positively devalue human life, though a somewhat enhanced sense of pessimism might be detected if we dwell solely upon some of the extreme presentations regarding rebirth and without suitably counterbalancing these with the brightness and fearlessness to be derived from the Ātma-doctrine.

As an overall assessment of the Upaniṣadic position, and again not chronologising among these texts, we have been led to conclude that since the Upaniṣads consistently present a unitary or non-dual (though not non-dualistic) ideal as being the ultimate reality, whether approached theistically or not, their teachings may appropriately be regarded as monistic idealism. And as we saw during our survey pertaining to these scriptures,

such a designation accommodates both the ruling views of acosmism as well as cosmism. Most scholarly opinion, as revealed in the literature, we feel, is accommodated in the designation of Upaniṣadic teachings as a form of general monistic idealism, thought many would emphasize a true philosophical idealism. Some few have opted for a heavier theistic learning in their characterization. To this, we have to say that, though the Upaniṣads do not deprecate theistic values and attitudes, at the same time they portray little of those elements that make for a truly theistic attitude. In this, we are saying that they do not enhance the feeling of any sort of relationship with the Divine, as that between servant and master, or between father and child.

It is true that there is deep reverence of the teacher for the pupil, and even filial love as between Uddālaka and Śvetaketu, or loving regard as between Yama and Naciketa, and these may point to the existence of some form of theism in the background. Yet we have to say that the Upaniṣadic discussions do not disclose a God with whom a relationship, as between person and person, may be established. And if this is accepted to be the defining characteristic of theism, then we have to say that the Upaniṣads do not support it. Since the earlier Vedas largely support a theistic relationship between man and God, even involving God's grace, they are to that

extent removed in character from the Upaniṣads. This is not to deliver a pronouncement of value regarding the Upaniṣads, whose deep and abiding spirituality makes them among the treasures of the world's scriptures, but rather to assess them in an academic spirit as their character is revealed to our understanding. By any reckoning, the Upaniṣads are seen to portray too deeply the spirit of philosophy, which has the habit of intellectualizing the raw data of spiritual experience and so frustrating the promise of any theistic development. The Upaniṣads do show occasionally the warm glow of theistic flashes of experience which is soon lost in the speculative scheme.

While the thought and teaching of the Upaniṣads, on the whole, tend to recede from theism, and its associated values, it has been patent to us that the Bhagavad Gītā and its doctrine of the avatāra, breathe a different atmosphere. In brief, while the Upaniṣads are essentially monistic, the Bhagavad Gītā is essentially theistic. In saying this, we are also saying that there is a wide gulf between the thought of the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, as arising from their differing metaphysical assumptions with regard to Theism.

The Gītā stands on the strength of Kṛṣṇa, who is the incarnate God, and who is the figure who towers above all things throughout the text. Without Kṛṣṇa the Gītā

would be a curious mixture of ideas without any principle of life or meaning.

In our survey we saw that much of what metaphysics the Gītā has appears to be partly derived from Upaniṣadic and sāṁkhya sources, though it turns them to its peculiar advantage and accommodates them to the supremacy of the manifested Lord.

In point of fact, it turns out that the Gītā's stock of metaphysical ideas, those which may be counted unique and peculiar to itself, is indeed paltry. They consist of the avatāra doctrine and the relationship of the soul to God through the method of bhakti or loving surrender. Other metaphysical data regarding Brahman, Ātman, prakṛti, etc. are terms not peculiar to the Gītā, but used in it in peculiar ways. It is sometimes not easy to read a consistent meaning into the verses.

Yet it is easy to see that the Gītā in many ways breathes an Upaniṣadic atmosphere, as we showed in our survey earlier on. And what is important in respect of our conclusions here is that this atmosphere is the ancient doctrine of immanence.

Arising in the Vedas against a background of the many gods of the pantheon, and there remaining only in

the background, this undying principle of Indian metaphysics came to the fore in the Upaniṣads, sweeping and subduing all the gods, and in some ways the world of multiplicity as well, and comes also to settle in the Gītā as well. Some critics tell us that, as a result of the influence of this one doctrine the metaphysics of the Gītā sets its face in the direction of idealism.

While we cannot deny the existence of this doctrine in the Gītā, for we meet it in an important way in the Gītā's theory of creation that all things have issued from out of the body of the Lord and are destined to return to Him, that all individual selves are also eternal portions of Himself, implying a final return to His being, and so on. In all this, we are certainly in the world of the Upaniṣads. And it is our part to see the extent to which the Gītā is a part of the Upaniṣadic world.

On the one hand we cannot deny that the immanentist doctrine binds the Gītā to the Upaniṣads. On the other hand, "there is a revelation of the nature of God and a loving relationship to Him",[12] on account of the avatāra doctrine.

The inviolable sanctity with which the Upaniṣads surrounded its characteristically impersonal notion of

Brahman, makes the Gītā's ideal of the personal God come down among men in flesh and blood, a large violation of the former view. The Gītā in a sense is part of the Upaniṣadic world-view in that it subscribes to the ultimate unitary view of the world. In this it has to be counted as an idealism.

Yet, the love of God that Kṛṣṇa bears to man, His hearkening to their need from age to age, and entering into loving relationships with them, sets the Gītā at a substantial distance from the earlier texts. It is a firm consensus of Gītā scholarship that this scripture is essentially theistic in character, exhibiting all the properties that theism is generally taken to represent. Though it is embedded in the background of immanentism, the Gītā never allows the nature of God to become subdued or effaced in any manner. On the contrary, the Lord, though immanent in all things, is never lost in all things. He preserves His unique personality against every individual creature and emerges as the Personal Saviour of man.

That a large number of scholars and public figures from different walks of life, who, while professing a non-theistic idealism, have yet acknowledged the Gītā as having given them a personal message of deep inspiration, must count as an indication of the power that this little

book can wield over man.

We shall therefore be eliciting no dissenting opinion, neither among the large number of votaries of this scripture, nor among the scholars, if we see fit to give it the label of a '<u>theistic idealism</u>'. In so doing we are both acknowledging its role in the field of Upaniṣad-style, thought, as well as setting it apart from those texts. Lest it should be felt that the Gītā's Upaniṣadic background might endanger its unique glory, we can only speak of our faith in His glory that outshines all things else, as in the words of Sañjaya:

> "If the splendour of a thousand suns were to rise up simultaneously in the sky, that would be like the splendour of that Mighty Being."

End Notes : Chapter 10.0

1. MacNicol, N Indian Theism, p 45
2. RV 4.40.5
3. CHI p 194
4. RV 8.100.4
5. RV 1.24.8
6. RV 4.23.9
7. RAD IP I p 79
8. RV 1.164.46
9. RV 3.55
10. CHI p 301
11. CHI p 327
12. Parrinder, G Upanishads, Gita and Bible p 39

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