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INDIA WITHOUT MISREPRESENTATION—BOOK 2

HINDU GODS AND HIDDEN MYSTERIES

By

GOVINDA KRISHNA PILLAI
*Director of the Centre of Indology,
Allahabad.*

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DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER
Vettinjayathil Narayana Pillai

By the same author

1. The way of the Silpis
2. Vedic History (set in chronology)
3. Origin and Development of Caste
4. Traditional History of India.

PREFACE

Vedic scholars have done a great deal to unfold the personalities of the Vedic gods and the mysteries in which they are enveloped. Religious teachers have done more work to reveal other gods and goddesses and to make them understood. This is an additional attempt to make them known to the general public.

Some gods are said to have been brought by the Aryan invaders. In Book No. I of this series, Vedic History Set in Chronology, it is shown that there was no Aryan invasion and the antecedents of all the gods and goddesses are traced in India.

I take the stand that all gods are men's creation. Kings were gods at one time ; even now preceptors are regarded and worshipped as gods. Protection is the main idea behind god conception. Protection without power is unimaginable. Hence man attributed all powers to the gods and hoped for protection from them. How the Hindus reacted in this respect is the main theme of this book. Thirty-three thousand gods are spoken of in sacred texts. How this huge number can be made up will be shown in this work.

The Hindus developed the highest conception of god over 4,500 years ago. Still they worship trees and stones. They worship Brahman, the 'frame-work' of creation side by side with the tree which gives them protection. Each god is supreme for them ; each one is without limitation. Max

Muller called it henotheism. Others call it idolatry. No Hindu is perturbed by such remarks. All men are not equal. Even brothers begotten by the same parents and brought up in the same school may have different views on God. To some he is a dreaded and relentless god, to others he is a loving father. As such the respective approach of each man to god is bound to vary. This psychology is well in evidence in every religion, especially among the Hindus. Hinduism is a composite religion. Persons of different faiths could be Hindus ; and they can have their own gods and modes of worship. They may listen to various views, and to various teachers with the greatest patience, but in the end go home to worship their gods in their own way.

The mysteries unfolded here, it is hoped, will help one to see with a clearer vision and a greater appreciation than before the Hindu gods and the mysteries that envelop them.

My thanks are due to Mrs. Scott and Dr. Rubin for reading through the script, and to Sri Bishambar Nath Pande for reading the proof.

Oct. 10, 1958

18-A *Queens Road,*
Allahabad.

G. K. PILLAI

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INTRODUCTORY

It is often stated that God has created man in his own image. It will be nearer to the truth if the order is reversed, as the conception of God changes from time to time and at all times. The primitive man's conception of God bears little resemblance to the present-day conception. From the all-dreadful and relentless God, He has become all-loving and forgiving.

The primitive approach to God was one of fear. Fear of father gave rise to the fear of God, and love for mother gave rise to the love for Goddess. Father God and Mother Goddess became the main feature of religions. Even religions like Vedism and Buddhism, that started without Goddesses, had to give in to the mother urge in faith.

In primitive societies, whether it was Matriarchal or Patriarchal, the head of the family was an autocrat, with the power of life and death over the rest of the family. Despite the revolt of Youth, the pater still claims the right, though in a milder form. Fear for ancestors resulted in worship, and propitiatory rites to please them. Some, after giving the care of the departed ancestors into the hands of God, began to propitiate God. But the Hindus, even with an extraordinary high standard of religious development, still propitiate the ancestors. To a Brahman the propitiation of the ancestor spirits is as important as to his compatriot, the aborigine. In

fact it is even more so; for the Brahman considers it most essential to perform propitiatory rites every day of his life; while the aborigine does it only on holy days and occasional days.

The primitive man's fear of his ancestors did not die with the death of the ancestor. In the disembodied spirit of the ancestors, he felt greater potentiality for doing good or evil. Hence he lets no occasion of any importance pass, without giving oblations to the ancestors; he offers rice beer and cooked meat to the departed ancestors; while the Brahman transubstantiates them into water and cooked grain. The relics of the dead became the concern of all. They, like the psychometrists of the present day, saw something personal in these individual relics. So they preserved them, revered and often worshipped them. Shrines were constructed for these relics, whether it was an article they used, or a piece of bone taken out of the decomposed or burnt body. When the spirit-worship gave way to God-worship, they put objects or images in similar shrines for worship. Thus the idols and idol-worship came down from the spirit worship.

When primitive man realised that he could have everything that he wanted through the good services of the 'Fathers', he looked round for the powers that might be of help to him.

Will the mountains help to ensure him good game? Will the earth help him to ensure good crops? Will the clouds help to ensure him seasonal rains? Will the Sun help to give him dry weather when he needs it? Will the Moon help to make him do

overtime? He thought that each one would, at any rate in its respective sphere. Thus the worship of them as Gods merciful was started in the hoary past. Some of them are still worshipped for the same reasons. While others have taken their place under different names or under modified concepts, still their functions have scarcely changed. A clear realization of this psychology is most essential in understanding the Hindu gods and hidden mysteries.

Visitors to India will see various forms of worship. Some will cry them down as barbarous, primitive and antiquated. Some will turn them down as egoistic; while a few who understand will praise them, though it will be beneath their dignity to embrace them.

However, the worship of Divinity was in various forms going on in India at least for the last five thousand years; gods with various attributes and various conceptions existed side by side. Brahman existed side by side with Chandi, the former discernible only in deep meditation, while the latter could be appreciated in the virile quality of hers as depicted in hard stone. Nobody ever tried to proselytise. No missionary spirit arose for standardisation. Each one or each set was allowed to have its own theology, and its peculiar form of worship. Hence India is even now an anthropological museum in respect of religion, it is so in other respects. Bigotry in religion will level up the society by forcing the individual to rise up to a standard; but it interferes with the growth of religion. God should be left out as an individual conception. If

it is socialised, all theological growth will stop; man will be found religiously the same without advancement. Should the growth of any institution be wilfully stopped?

India was also faced with waves of religious fervour and doctrinal enthusiasm, at times; but it affected only a few intellectuals. It made hardly any mark on the society. Society was ruled by social customs. Social customs gave preference even to the Civil Laws. Monogamy was not enforced, polygamy was not abolished. The climate of religious freedom made the religiously oppressed foreigners leave their homes behind, come and settle down in India. The Hindus, whether they were Buddhists, Jains or animists, gave them shelter and treated them well. The early Christians and the Jews, who emigrated to India, were protected by the state. Later the Parsees too received similar treatment. When nations outside India warred against each other on religious grounds, and sects cut each other's throats, India protected even the contending parties. If Hinduism can do this, there must be some redeeming features in that religion. Perhaps a study of Hindu gods and hidden mysteries may throw some light on the matter.

CHAPTER I

MOUNTAIN AND EARTH DIVINITIES

Is the Mountain God earlier than the Earth-Goddess ? As man was a wanderer before he preferred a settled habitation, the Mountain God should receive precedence. In the wandering stage, men in groups went from place to place gathering nuts and roots for food, augmented by birds they shot and animals they trapped. For this purpose mountain slopes were more suitable, as will even now be found from the habits of the wandering tribes, like Kader and Vedar.

When they settled down to agricultural pursuits, it must have been then that they began to worship the Earth-Goddess. The mountains are stated to have had wings at one time, until some king clipped them and made them settle down at their respective places. This clipping of the wings can have only one significance, that the wandering tribes did settle down or selected particular mountain slopes and settled down.

Opinions may differ as to whether the first Mountain God they worshipped was Siva or Sasta. When it is reviewed from the more primitive form of worship Sasta will be found as the elder. Sasta is represented even now with any unshaped stones, while Siva is represented by well-shaped ones. Sasta is propitiated by some simple form of worship, generally by breaking coconut on a stone placed near the image, while Siva is propitiated by a more elaborate form of worship.

Sasta is a mountain God, and he is the God of all mountains. Though he may be given the name of a particular mountain like Sabari-mala Sasta, or Sostam-kotta Sasta, he is one, and one God, and in the mind of his worshippers, he is the God most supreme, who dispenses favours and punishes the offenders, like the Yaveh of the Hebrews, who is also said to have a stone origin.

However, when Siva became a supreme God, Sasta became a son of Siva, in which form he is even now worshipped. Now he is sometimes given a human form, with a sacred thread and other attributes. This shows the influence of Brahmanism on Sasta worship. But on the whole, 'Sasta' is still a caste-less God. All castes are equal before him ; in his worship they take part as brothers, without any observance of untouchability or unapproachability.

Sasta appears in two different forms now, one a benevolent form, in which he is worshipped just like any other god ; the other a malignant aspect, in which, he is feared and dreaded. Thousands of pilgrims who go to Sabari-Mala, on the Western Ghats in Travancore year after year will indicate his popularity as a benevolent god. For the first time perhaps his worship is spreading towards the north. A short time ago a temple was constructed in Banaras for his worship. Soon he will be worshipped at the foot of the Himalayas. In his dreaded aspect, he is called Catan, the Devil. In this respect, He is the right-hand deity of the sorcerers, who propitiate Him, with such secret rites as were common in early Vedic days, and

still linger in the dark corners of the land. His visitation is most dreaded by the people. His activities are terrible and most perplexing. For instance, suddenly a ball of fire appears on the top of a house, or in a box full of clothes, or even on the body of the persons who wear them, and it burns for some time and disappears without doing any damage. Another method of his persecution consists of throwing dirt and filth on prepared food. A third system of persecution, the mildest, is stone throwing. Huge blocks of stones could be seen falling where the members of a family would congregate, terrorising the people. But in all these no person is hurt or injured. To create terror in the people is the main object of persecution. The remedy for this lies with the sorcerers, whose ministrations are said to pacify the ire of this god. Even now the newspapers at times give details of such persecutions.

One cannot but wonder whether this 'Catan' of India bears relation or identity with the Sātan of the Hebrews and the Christians. The Hebrews assigned the dung-heap of Gehenna to their Satan, whose place of abode become Hell in later days.

The worship or fear of Catan has not yet fully disappeared. Till the beginning of the present century, Catan had an assigned place in the writer's ancestral home in Travancore. With the decrease in the worship of Catan, he is moved from the household shrine to a nearby Devi Temple, where he may be worshipped occasionally or not.

The advent of the Earth Goddess indicated a settled form of life among primitive man. When he

gave up wanderings and settled down on mountain slopes, he became a food producer. He cleared jungles, levelled grounds, and started cultivation. At the early stages he may not have known the use of manure or fertilisers, and depended entirely on the ground to make the seeds grow and yield crops. In the unseen force which made the sapplings grow he recognised the Earth-Goddess, who like a mother nursed the plant and the plantations. Hence his chief concern became to propitiate Mother Earth.

The propitiation began to take higher forms. In worshipping the mountain God, Sasta, it was invariably prayer, penance and fasting. Even now the entire people of a village or 'nad' (area) will be found fasting the whole day in front of a Sasta shrine, which may even be a crude stone placed under a tree, in case of drought or scarcity of rain. When the earth began to be worshipped, the worship took the shape of sacrifices. With a permanent home, man began to domesticate and breed animals, which on becoming the greatest of his possessions, he sacrificed to the Goddess.

The idea behind the human sacrifices is the offering of the greatest of one's possessions to the deity of one's devotion. Originally the victim selected for the sacrifices was one's own offspring. Even the Jewish Patriarch, Abraham, offered his son as a burnt offering to his God Yaveh. The aborigines, in the Vindhya Hills even now may be found sacrificing their own children in the absence of stray individuals to propitiate the Earth-Mother, to ensure fertility to their fields, and prosperity to

the tribe. Their sentiment, though we cannot cherish it, is very noble. They sacrifice the nearest and dearest to them for the benefit of the community, to bring fertility to the soil and yield bumper crops to ensure food for the tribe. The sentiment behind the "Maria-Murder" and such rites is not in any way different from this.

Man's approach to the Earth is one of veneration. Many a Hindu could be found saluting the earth on getting out of bed. Labourers could be found saluting the ground before digging or hoeing. Respect for Mother Earth is often interpreted as the innate feeling of sex. But for the cultivator, digging the earth is a sacrament. Often he does not touch the plough without purification. Generally he washes the hands and feet, and rinses the mouth to purify himself from any sexual contact. Rural India still maintains the old traditions.

Man's possession of land made him localise the Earth Goddess. Each village and each locality began to possess a Goddess, called after the village or town. Tribes like the Oraons call her Chalo, Pachcho, Desavali, or Sarna Burhia. Chalo Pachcho may mean the 'pisach' or devil that makes things move; Desavali may mean one who protects the 'desa' or country, while Sarna Burhia means the 'Old woman of Sarna,' the village grove for worship. Sarna Burhia is as real to the Oraons as any god to his devotee. The Oraons assert that they see this old woman going about the village, in times of trouble.

The Greeks often called their gods and goddesses after the name of the place where their

images are installed or found. Hence they had Aphrodite Pythian, or Diana of Ephesus, etc. Similarly the Hindus have Vishwanath of Kasi, Jaganath of Puri and so on. Each deity was given a local sway ; in case of pestilence and trouble, people of the locality go to him or her, do penance and pray, and no doubt receive relief and consolation, which is nothing but what is expected of every god.

The manner of propitiating the gods changed from time to time. Baal of Carthage was propitiated by placing new-born babes in his mechanised arms whence the victim was transferred into the fire-pit behind the brazen image. Baal in other places would appear to have been well satisfied with the fore-skin of the child instead of the whole body. The Jewish Patriarch Abraham offered his son as burnt offering to his god Yaveh. King Harishchandra of Ayodhya offered his only son Rohita to be sacrificed to God Varuna. The aborigines of the present day offer a fowl or two occasionally to their goddess ; a goat, too, at times if they can afford it.

Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess was worshipped by saturnalian rites, and by sacrificing the virginity of every woman in the country. But no such rites appear to have existed anywhere in India at any time. Yet some scholars often assert that worship of Mother Goddess and Siva indicate the worship of Sex. Even at the worship of Sarna Burhia, sex is away from the mind of the people. In truth they do not allow the women to enter the sacred grove, which at present is nothing more than a tree or two.

CHAPTER 2

SIVA

Siva is a god without any form or attributes. It stands for the first reflection of man of something beyond his physical vision and it is a result of cumulative experience. It is something beyond the Mountain and Earth, God and Goddess, who gave him food and protection. It is an expression, like the Syllable OM, which stands for all knowledge ; but it indicates that which is unknown. He is not tangible, he is not created, but born of his own, hence he is called Svayambu, 'Svayam-bhuva', or 'Sambhu' in short, all meaning self-born. When it was realised that he was at the bottom of everything that is moving, he was called Isvara, or 'ee-chara' (ee, this, and chara to move). The same idea is expressed in 'Nartakari', or 'Tandava Nartakari', or one that keeps up the rhythm of the world in the world.

The representation of Siva in this last aspect has been recognised in the broken image, brought to the surface by the spade of the archaeologists, at Mohenjodaro from a stratum dating about 3,000 B. C. Some are sceptical about this identification, as no Siva is mentioned in the Vedas. But they fail to realise that there is a hymn in one of the earliest books of the Vedas, namely, Atharva Veda II. 28 that stands in the name of Sambhu, who to all appearance was a man named after God or Siva.

Rudra, a name that is found in the Vedas, indicates a different phase of Siva, in his capacity as

the god who makes the clouds weep, or bring down the rain. Among the Hindus every god and goddess has more than one, nay many names, each indicating some quality or characteristics of the respective divinity. When they thought of Him as all-merciful, they addressed him as 'Karunakara'; when they conceived him as all-courageous, they addressed him as 'Maha-Vira'. The synonyms of gods and goddesses take up a good many pages of a 'Nighanthu' or dictionary.

Siva, the God Supreme, came to be worshipped in his different aspects. In one aspect, he was the Sun-God; in another he was the Storm-God. In a third aspect he was 'Tandava-Natra-Kari', and so on. Later some of his attributes began to be separated from him, and each was conceived as a separate god. His quality as a rain-making god was taken away from him and associated with Indra; Siva's 'trisula' or three-pronged spear became 'vajra-ayudha' or the weapon of lightning in the hand of Indra. Rudra's role as a medicine man was taken away from him, and was given to the Asvini-devas (Asvins). His quality as the giver of light was given to the Sun, his quality as the light itself was conceived as a different deity, Velayudha or one who has 'Vel' as his weapon. 'Vel' is sun-light, and this god's weapon is shown as a dart. Akhnaton, the king of Ancient Egypt, represented the Sun's rays with darts. Then when all the gods were humanised, Velayudha was made a son of Siva. If Siva is the Sun, what comes out of the Sun can be termed the son of Siva. Though it may be a coincidence or idea transfusion,

it is interesting to see that the Storm gods of the Hittites would remind one of Maha-Vira. The Bhogaz-kuie carving of the Anatolian Storm God would remind one of Mahavira's depiction found in numerous crowded alleys in India. The pose and strength in each have a most uncanny resemblance. Recently a similar Storm God, Hadad, was found in North Syria, standing on a Bull of Siva. Likewise Baal, the Sun God of the Babylonians, and Velayudha have philological and ideological resemblances. Baal could easily be a form 'Vel': the change 'V' into 'B' is even now a feature of Indian languages. Then the earliest depiction of Baal is like a disc with wings. The disc in this case is accepted by all as the Sun. The interpretation of the wings could easily be made from a later depiction of Baal, where he is shown as a winged being coming out of the disc. What is coming out of the disc-Sun, cannot but be sun's rays or 'Vel'.

One peculiar feature of Velayudha worship is a kind of annual fast and prayer during which staunch devotees enforce silence on themselves by the use of a peculiar kind of metallic mouth-piece fastened at the back of the head, the type of which has been found at Adichch Nalloor (the good town of the Sun) Tinnavelly, as well as in Palestine strata of the Neolithic Age. In India this type of mouth-piece has given way to arrows or darts of Velayudha made of silver, which when pierced down through the outstretched tongue or pierced through the mouth cheek to cheek will stop the movement of the tongue. But the old mouth-pieces are still

being used by the Indian colonists of Bali and other islands of the East Indies.

Velayudha, the god of light later on became the war-god, Skanda. As a war-god, he is given six heads and twelve hands. The numerous hands are for various weapons. Four heads are for keeping watch over the four quarters, the fifth for keeping watch above and the last for watching the ground which one traverses. All are symbolic of watch and cautiousness on the part of a war-lord. He is often seen riding on a peacock, a bird of slow and cautious motion, quick change and flights. All these qualities are needed in an advancing army. In the zone system, specified by the town-planning architects of Ancient India, the temple of Skanda had to be located within the barracks of the king's body-guard. In his pose as Velayudha, on the other hand, he is depicted as a handsome, youth with normal features.

Siva has two more sons. One is Sasta the older mountain god, and the second is Ganapati or Ganesa, which literally means the ruler or the leader of the army. Sasta was made a son of Siva when Siva was given attributes of Sasta. Ganesa is depicted as a man with the head of an elephant. During the days when petrol-driven tanks were not in existence, elephants were the best means of clearing the jungles, especially for the infantry to march forward. In Ganesa man's ingenuity and the elephant's strength are depicted. He is another war-god. He is also known as Vignesvara, the god who removes not only the jungle in front of the marching soldiers, but all that obstructs his devotees.

Hence he is worshipped before undertaking a journey, or at the commencement of any undertaking intellectual or monetary.

The Hindus conceive God in two aspects as 'Nirguna' and 'Saguna', Nirguna in abstract form and Saguna with qualities ; Nirguna they resort to for meditation, Saguna for prayer. In meditation, no request is made ; what is the use of requesting anything of one who has not got it ? With Saguna, it is different. One with flour can give flour, one with bread can give bread. So they attribute whatever they require to the deity of their devotion, before they ask it of him or her. So they conceive the Mother Goddess Annapurnesvari, goddess filled with food, before they pray for bread from her. Likewise, they give many hands and weapons in each of them to Skanda, before they pray for assistance in warfare ; before they ask for mercy, they address God as 'Karunakara', the dispenser of mercy, and so on. A true realisation of this feature is most essential to know why there are so many gods in the Hindu Pantheon, and why they are addressed by so many names. The Abstract should be defined with physical attributes before the ordinary human mind can grasp it. After all, religion is for the mass. Religion without mass-psychology seldom appeals to the people. The incomprehensible should be made comprehensible to be grasped by the human mind.

When Siva was humanised to ensure common man's approach to him, he was given wives and children, a residence, and ornaments. His wives are Parvati and Ganga, his residence Kailas, his

ornaments the crescent Moon and snakes. His animal the Bull. His residence is Kailas, a mountain, which at one time may not have been any particular mountain at all.

Even in these attributes a gradual change is most obvious. The crescent Moon rising on the top of the hill must have given rise to the conception of it as a diadem of Siva when he was Mountain God. If it were so, his residence at first must have been on the Ghats, most probably the Western Ghats. The Moon over the Himalayas could not have given rise to this conception as the crescent Moon cannot be seen in the north but only in the east or west.

However, his wife Parvati, was a gift of the mountains. It is in that capacity that she became the mother of Velayudha. His second wife, Ganga, is a gift of the Himalayas from which this river takes its rise. He has no sons from his wife Ganga. Ganesa, the elephant-headed god, is a son of Parvati. His birth is stated to have taken place when she and Siva sported in the jungles as male and female elephants ; this again gives all three of them a mountain origin. Hence it may be that all these conceptions are as old as the mountains.

The myth makers were thorough in their work. As a family man Siva is a lover of animals, in this respect he is called 'Pausupati'. Some are of the opinion that it is in this aspect that he is seen on Indus-Valley seals. To decide how far the presumption is correct, one will have to wait till the decipherment of the Mohenjodaro script. But Pasupati can have a common interpretation, and

that is as the husband of the cow, or the bull. The bull or the Apis bull was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians as a god. On Indus Valley seals the bulls are not uncommon. The bull is considered to be a favourite animal of Siva. Hence the bulls, the 'Bahmini' bulls or dedicated bulls receive special consideration from the Hindus. The human-headed bulls received great importance from the Babylonians. Their carving emphasises the fabulous strength of the animal with the wisdom of man. The ancient Egyptians gave these qualities to human-headed lions and goats. On Mohenjodaro seals too, genii of these types can be seen.

These instances will indicate that the humanisation of the gods was done gradually. The primitive man would appear to have deified wild animals first, and then when he began to see gods elsewhere, he made these terrible animals the Vahanas, or carriers of the gods and goddesses, though some of these animals became their cognisances or symbols of recognition. Thus it will be seen that Yama, god of death, rides on a buffalo, Devi rides on a lion. When sculpture became standardised or stereotyped, the chhinnas or cognisances became the main means of recognition. Similar images represent the twenty-four Tritankaras of the Jains. Having given each a sign of cognisance, Adinatha, the first of the Jain saints, is known by a bull. This bull differs from the bull of Siva. The bull of Siva is a self-composed and independent animal, while the bull of Adinatha is a submissive and adoring animal.

Likewise, as all Rishis were to have matted

hair, long beards and practically identical features, Vaibhandaka, whose sacrifices brought about the birth of Rama, is depicted with two horns on his venerable head, to show that he came from Sringeri in Mysore, hence he is also called Sringa. The mischief-making Narada is distinguished by a Vina in his hand, and so on.

Siva-worship would appear to have attained tremendous height even during Mohenjodaro of 3,000 B. C. In a broken image found there, Sir John Marshall sees the likeness of Nataraja or Dancing Siva. Biyatallitic stones and Shiva lingams were also found at this site as well as at Harappa. These are symbolical of the great heights that Siva worship has attained.

The mountain conception of Siva changed into a stone conception. The mountains have forms, but the stones can be as formless as possible. When they conceived that God has no form of particular shape, shapeless stones began to remind them of him. The shapeless stones are still a feature of Siva worship. Well-shaped pebbles and stones of different varieties can be seen worshipped by millions all over India. Some are placed on a stone base by the river or road side, while some are placed on the mountain tops. All receive worship with the same fervency and zeal from the multitude. After the morning sacred bath (the morning bath is considered a bath of purification) crowds resort to such shrines with symbolic purity and piety. What they ask of this god-personification is difficult to say. Do they ask for daily bread? As the majority of the Hindus have no

set-prayers, each one seems to pray in his own way. But from their deportment it will be seen that the bended knees and raised eyes are not intended for the stone image, but to something above the surroundings, and something above everything mundane. Just for the moment the world does not appear to have any concern for them. This is Siva worship.

The name on their tongue is Siva or Iswara. They are identical ; but would appear to have different roots. Siva may have derived from 'jiva' or 'civa' both meaning life. If God is not life itself, what else can it be ? The expression 'Iswara' may have derived from 'ee-chara', one who makes all things move, as is symbolised in the Dance of Siva. The most sacred prayer of invocation addressed to him consists of five letters, na-ma-Si-va-ya, which means I prostrate before you, O Siva. Millions worship him only by these syllables.

When the shapeless stones was given a shape by the sculptors, it became Siva-lingam. It is not the lingam or the reproductive organ, but it is something that represents Siva. In the conception of Siva-lingam, the Hindu silpi surpassed himself. According to him, the Siva-lingam consists of three parts ; a square at the bottom, an octagon in the centre, and a cylinder with a spherical end at the top. The square portion represents Brahma, the creator ; the octagon represents Vishnu, the preserver ; and the round portion which vanishes at the top even without a point represents Siva. It is from the formless or crude stone that an expert mason fashions out the

square, and it is by chipping off the corners of the square that he makes the octogon, and it is by rounding off all the eight corners that he makes the circle. Hence Siva-lingam represents evolution, existence and involution, the equivalents of which every Hindu has got on his tongue as 'Srishti, Stiti and Samhara'.

It is this highly symbolised and spiritually conceived image of Siva-lingam that the western writers and their eastern followers designate as Phallus. The Hindu silpis were experts at delineation. It is doubtful whether anybody else has given as much attention to details and expressions to different limbs and parts of the body as they have done. The masters of the Greek world have no doubt given more attention to beauty and symmetry, but in giving expression the Hindu artists have never been surpassed. If the male organ or Phallus, therefore, were in their mind in delineating Siva-lingam, they would have shown better skill. A closer examination of any Siva-lingam does not betray any characteristic signs of the Phallus. No 'sushira' or hole on the top, and no ring round it except where the circle changes into an octogon and the octogon into a square. Further the Hindu conception of the male-organ can be seen, for instance, in the naked figures of the Tritankaras or Jain Saints. The Hindus never practised circumcision, nor cut off the fore-skin to propitiate their deities.

However, sex is the least in the mind or heart of a worshipper when he or she worships before Siva-lingam. They always wear 'ashes and sack-cloth', not only metaphorically but also in truth.

They appear before the deity or Siva-lingam with ashes on the forehead, on the chest, arms and even on the thighs and legs. Ashes are the sign of mortality and not sexuality. In what better material can one be covered to approach the 'Samhara-murti', who represents destruction and involution ?

In the human representation of Siva, his body from head to foot will be seen covered with ashes, his neck adorned with a garland of skull-bones and snakes and a skull bowl in his hand. These are not objects conducive to create sex in his devotees. The snake is often associated with wisdom. But in the case of Siva it is a sign of mortality, as it is a symbol of sudden death. The potential death is further emphasised by giving him a blue neck, in which capacity he is addressed as 'Nila-kantha'. The origin of his Nila-kantham is explained in the mythology of Palazi-mardanam, or the churning of the ocean of milk. When the ocean of milk was churned with Mandara mountain as the churning rod and the Snake Vasuki as the rope, the force exerted in pulling brought out deadly poison from the mouth of Vasuki. Fearing that it would by contact destroy the earth, Siva, who was present among the rest, received the poison in his hand and attempted to swallow it. Parvati by his side fearing the death of Siva, caught hold of his neck and stopped the poison from going down, and saved Siva or kept up the rhythm of destruction. The obstructed poison left a permanent mark on his neck. Parvati stands for the

creative or generating force in the universe. Untimely destruction of the universe was, therefore, timely stopped by Parvati. Saving the life of Siva is like stopping the effect of the hydrogen bomb, and leaving the world to run its course to gradual destruction or devolution as envisaged in the dance of Siva.

The creative unit is termed Yoni, and it also signifies the female organ. Yoni means even more than this. A unit measure of 8 Angulas or 6 English inches is also called a Yoni by the Hindu architects even to-day. On the misapprehension that Yoni always stands for the female organ, the circular drain with a spout that is shown round the Siva-lingam is taken by many as representing the female organ; and based on this assumption Siva-worship is further emphasised as Phallic worship. But if it represents sexual contact or the usual relative position of the component parts, it is hardly necessary to stress the point that it represents an absurd situation. The Yoni round the Siva-lingam is a drain circular with a flat bottom and a lip round it and a spout at one side. The lip round it is to prevent the annointed liquid, water, oil or milk, from splashing on the surrounding ground, and the spout is to drain it out. The truth of this will be seen that this drain is not always round; and when it is located at the bottom square portion of the lingam, it is square in shape. Innate unsatisfied sexual desires alone can make one see sex in the lingam and Yoni of Siva worship.

The main characteristic of the Hindu religion has been its growth. Dogmatic religions have no

room for growth. The growth depends on the adherents of the religion. In an intellectual age the growth of the religion will be intellectual ; in a metaphysical age it will be metaphysical ; and in a decadent stage of society, the religion also will lapse into decay. The ups and downs of Hinduism cannot but stagger the imagination. One god, one world, and one set of rules for conduct are no doubt great ideals. But what a monotonous world it will be. Without intellectual growth and material development, society becomes stagnant ; and stagnancy creates decay. As religion occupies the best part of man's attention, it should put on new covering or new clothes to make it suitable to the intelligentsia. Hence it will be seen that the simple worship of Siva, which originated as the worship of an awe-inspiring Being, passed through the Stone Age, both Paleolithic and Neolithic, entered the Agricultural Age with their respective characteristics and finally in the Metaphysical Age attained transcendency. This will be reflected in what is known as Kashmir Saivism.

The Kashmir Saivism is a readjustment in the conception of Siva to satisfy the rising metaphysical tendencies. The Upanishads upset the prior conception of the Vedic or Nature gods. They gave rise to philosophical speculations. First they brought all the Nature gods, like Indra, Varuna, Vayu and Agni, under the hegemony of the Sun. Still as something was missing they placed Brahma over the Sun. Yet a different approach to Brahman, which itself was a similar conception like Siva was made through the component parts of

Life. Then a twist in the conception of Life led to the search for Self, which in fact is life with Mind. In a higher conception of Self, man became all in all.

The gods began to recede. Materialism raised its head. The followers of the Lokayata school believed in what they saw. Darsana or perception became the authority. The idea of causation was entirely rejected by them, as sensuous perception did not establish any sort of causation. They held that two or more isolated instances were not sufficient to establish relationship. Under materialism Art and Science prospered. What gave pleasure to the eye received more attention. What gave pleasure to the senses held sway. 'Drink and be merry' became the order of the day. Art was sought to give sensual pleasure. Sculpture and painting became hand-maids of sex, joy and abandonment. Idealism as it was in the conception of Siva-lingam suffered. Idealism was humanised. Gods began to appear in humanised forms. Their qualities began to take material shapes. Siva began to traverse cremation ground, the symbol of the end. The Sun was given a twelve-horse chariot, driven by Aruna, or his morning rays. The twelve horses represented the twelve months of the year. The eclipses of the Sun and Moon became endeavours by two snakes, Rahu and Ketu, that creep up to swallow them and plunge the world in darkness. The unsophisticated villagers even now come out with huge sticks to threaten these demons, and beat them to death, and after the cessation of the eclipse undertake a purificatory bath as is usual

at the performance of all death ceremonies.

However, such matter-of-fact views of life did not explain the cause of human misery. In primitive days man attributed the cause of misery and suffering to malignant spirits or malignancy in gods. If then there is no god or gods, who or what is at the bottom of it all? Kapila, the great philosopher, attributed them to ignorance.

To dispel the ignorance, Kapila advocated : (i) Perception, (ii) Inference, (iii) Comparison, and (iv) Verbal testimony. By these means he set aside the usual conception of creation. And in its place he substituted a process of cosmic evolution, in conformity with certain fixed laws, natural or cosmic. Cause and effect were not two different things for him ; effect was only a change of form of the cause, marking two events in time. Both cause and effect were real, but with the difference that cause was unevolved, while the effect was evolved. The evolved or animating principles he called Purusha, and the unevolved principle he called Prakriti or the cosmic substance. Prakriti functions in two aspects as evolution and involution. The manifestation of the phenomenal world is the evolutionary aspect of Prakriti. To differentiate from the evolved matter it was called Pradhan. But Prakriti for its evolution as well for its involution depended on three Gunas or qualities, namely, Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Satva is the quality that illuminates and reveals all manifestations. Rajas is the power that activates and excites potency, without which the other two qualities cannot function ; while Tamas restrains, obstructs and

envelops the other two, counteracting the potency of Rajas to do work and of Satva to reveal. At the beginning it was taken that all the three were balanced. But under the influence of Puruṣa or urge, Rajas was activated which made Satva manifest, under the restraint of Tamas. Under the urge of Puruṣa, Prakṛiti became massive ; this was the first manifestation of Nature. Kapila explained that creation commenced in this fashion, and all further manifestations were the result of interaction between Puruṣa and Prakṛiti, though the two had no separate existence.

Kapila thus threw a red flag in the already disturbed sphere of the religious world. Denial was not the Hindu ideal, adjustment and accommodation was always their policy. The dual aspect of Kapila had to be accommodated and the worshippers of Siva made an excellent job of it. The task of accomplishing this is attributed to one Vasu Gupta, a resident of Kashmir, and evidently a non-Brahman. He took the dualism of Kapila fully into consideration. He saw that Siva was worshipped with Parvati or Uma as his consort, and the Mother Goddess was worshipped as Sakti without any attachment. He also observed a loophole in the arguments of Kapila's analysis of creation. Kapila did not explain what or who caused the Urge in Puruṣa to act on Prakṛiti. Kapila's arguments will lead one to think that it was a chance action of Puruṣa that created the Urge. Gupta attributed the creation of this urge to Parama Siva, or Parama Samvit, that could be visualised only in an ecstasy of spiritual illumi-

nation. It was transcendental, potential and passive. It is the spiritual substance of the Universe. It is Caitanya, the ultimate reality. Its potentialities are (i) 'Cit' or universal consciousness, (ii) 'Ananda' or the universal bliss, (iii) 'Iccha' or universal desire, (iv) 'Jnana' or universal Intelligence and (v) 'Kriya' universal action. Hence it is known as 'Sat-Cit-Ananda.' This ultimate reality was in a potential state before creation. The first factor in the process of cosmic evolution is termed Siva Tatva or Siva, and the second factor is termed Sakti Tatva or Sakti. Siva is the static centre of all consciousness, Sakti is that which "negates universal consciousness by producing a strain on the surface of the consciousness." Siva and Sakti are unproduced and eternal. Before creation they were in a state of equilibrium, in the same state as Purusha and Prakriti of Kapila. Sakti may be called cosmic energy with three characteristics : 'Iccha' or will, 'Jnana' or knowledge, and 'Kriya' or impulse of action. These three psychological steps precede the determination of every action. The third factor is called Sada Siva, which is the first step forward in manifestation. "Aham Idam" or I am this. The fourth factor is called 'Isvara' or cosmic evolution, the same conception as 'eechara' of the primitive man. Isvara signifies "that condition in nature when all is recognised as one." The fifth factor is called 'Sad-vidya' or pure knowledge, which accounts for the complete unity in the dual relationship of 'I am this,' and stands, therefore, for universal action. 'Maya' is the sixth factor in the process of cosmic evolution. Maya means

delusion as the veiling or obscuring force in nature. But it accounts for the manifestation of all forms out of the formless, or for the evolution of the finite out of the infinite. The other factors that Vasu Gupta is said to have enumerated are the evolutes of Maya. Maya, being unreal, is not an object of worship ; but Siva, Sakti, Sada Siva and Isvara are objects of worship.

Even to-day when people worship Siva, it is in one of these aspects. They may not be able to explain it in any detail, but in their social consciousness it is there deep down covered or veiled by Maya ; and there it awaits for 'sadvidya,' illumination.

But the popular form of Siva worship is not metaphysical. It is purely devotional, and servile. These aspects of Siva worship are amply illustrated by the life-history of the Saiva saints of South India. The antiquity of the Tamil Saivism surely goes back to the third Sangam or Academy at Madura. One the presidents of this Academy which lasted till the first or second century A. D. was a Saiva saint named Nakkira, who was an ardent worshipper of Siva and Murga (Velayudha). Kannappa was another saint, who probably lived about the second century A. D. He belonged to a low caste of hunters. He worshipped Siva with meat and wine, in true Vedic fashion. In a state of devotional frenzy he is said to have plucked one eye and was just at the point of plucking out the other, when he was granted the beatific vision. Another saint, Appar or Tirunavkkarasu, a Sudra, preached the cult of personal devotion to Siva, and

went about with a hoe in his hand to move rubbish from the temple premises. He and his junior and constant companion, a Brahman saint, Sambandha, preached the fatherhood of Siva, and exemplified the brotherhood of man. Another saint, Sundara, a Brahman with a non-Brahman wife, who regained his eye-sight through devotion to Siva contended that fast and penance, rites and ceremonies, logic and metaphysics could not take the soul by themselves to the footstool of God, unless they are accompanied by love and devotion welling forth from the depth of one's being.

All these and other saints like thousands of others before and after them, worshipped Siva through Siva lingam. Their Siva was not the dreaded Rudra of the Vedic school, who made the clouds or men weep, but a loving Father with a divine consort Uma or Parvati. Appar, unlike the Vedic rishis, recognised the position of woman in religion and society. His reaction to the beauty and dignity of womanhood may well be seen from his idyllic poems. The hymns of Sambandha are still the "abiding source of inspiration" to thousands of devotees. Yet the most sacred and cherished hymn of praise on the tongue of every one of his worshippers is "Nama Sivaya," I bow before thee, Siva.

No talk on Siva worship can be complete without some remarks about the much-abused and most misinterpreted institution of deva dasi. Critics are under the impression that deva dasis are prostitutes attached to the temple of Siva. But they are virgins dedicated to the service of gods

and humanity. They have no call to violate their virginity in the service of god or goddess as was the custom in Assyria and Babylonia. The dedication of children to gods and goddesses is a custom still lingering in the country. In cases of serious illness, when the doctors could not give any hope, children used to be dedicated to the deity. After this act of dedication often the child gets better, and he or she would be forced to keep certain vows for good conduct and deeds of piety. The writer is a living example of such dedication to a goddess. The ceremony was performed in a Devi temple, in front of the goddess who is worshipped as the family deity. The boys thus dedicated were not 'pansy-boys.' Similarly the girls dedicated to Siva were not to be prostitutes. They considered themselves slaves of the deity. They had the option, when they grew up, to slave for the deities and take up their residence in temple premises, where their conduct was supervised and their development was guided. It was from among them that the oracles of the temple invariably appeared. In Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt, the oracles were priests hidden behind the images of gods and goddesses. In India there was no such trickery; the oracle of the deities were under spirit control, for which purpose they were specially trained.

These oracles on the Malabar Coast were known as 'Velicchapad', or one who reveals light or truth. These men used to carry about the Devi's sword and other symbols of their calling. But on the Malabar Coast there had been no

deva dasis, except in certain temples like Suchindram where the Tamil influence prevailed. At Suchindram, the temple records will show that the deva dasis were highly honoured and respectable ladies. They were among the trustees of the temple, and often large sums were placed at their disposal for public utility and temple expenditure.

When they were attached to the temple they were to keep celibacy. But if they broke the vow of celibacy, and married any one temporarily or permanently they had to leave the temple. Yet some of them kept the title of deva dasi ; for it carried respectability, enlightenment and culture. To counteract such desertion, it was made compulsory to marry them ritually to the deity of the temple. This must have happened when marriage was made a sacrament which could not be broken. In truth the deva dasis were at one time Sisters of Mercy.

Inside the temple their duties were various, generally to assist the routine; but without menial service. As Siva was conceived as the god of Music and Dance, these slaves of Siva cultivated these arts. The best way of pleasing the deity has always been to emulate him. His dasis, therefore, vied with one another to excel in these arts, and as an act of devotion they displayed their skill in front of the deity, to the enjoyment of the devotees, who gather round the temple premises.

The Hindu temple was not merely a place of worship. Early mornings it served as a place of worship, when people approached the deity in

“ashes and sack cloth” or with purificatory rites and rituals. In the evenings the temple served as a civic centre when people presented themselves in “Sunday” clothes and smiling faces, to meet friends, to listen to the music and witness the dance performed by deva dasis, band played by the temple attendants, tales and traditional stories narrated and enacted by gifted individuals and men of talents. Where there were no deva dasis, their duties were performed by professionals. In Travancore, for instance, Marars played the band, Chakyar did the acting and Nambyar told the stories with the musical accompaniment of the Nangyars, their women folk.

Had it not been for the good services of the deva dasis, Bharata Natya, the most artistic dance with pose and posturc, would not have survived in the land. So the South Indian Ragas (tunes) and Talas (timings) after a lapse of centuries, rise up again in the artistic horizon. Unfortunately there are no signs of temple, civic centres being revived. The temple civic centres had one redeeming feature. Being located round the deities, most of the hilarity and abandonment associated with club life was conspicuous by its absence.

Religions have come and gone. Forms of worship changed from time to time. Animal sacrifice took the place of the human sacrifice. Ritualistic sacrifices took the place of the animal sacrifice. The Vedic religion held its sway over two thousand years. Then the Upanishads drew the thinkers in secret conclaves and they came out

with nerve-racking philosophy and theology. Yet Saivism still flourishes and vies for supremacy with Vaishnavism and Devi worship. The worship of Siva appeals to the intelligentsia, and grips the common men to the core. The repetition of "Nama Sivaya or Sivaya nama" is simple and potent, and the worship of him with the green leaves of Belva needs no call on one's resources.

The sages of old probed into the mysteries of nature, and some of them sang with understanding. One for instance, Brihaspati of unknown antiquity sang in verse :

"Existence in the earliest age of gods, from non-existence sprang.

Thereafter regions were born. This sprang from productive power.

Earth sprang from the productive power ; the regions from the earth were born.

Daksha was born of Aditi, and Aditi was Daksha's child."

(Rig Veda : X, 72, 3 and 4).

Daksha from Aditi and Aditi from Daksha is the same story as Oak from Acorn and Acorn from Oak, or Evolution from Involution and Involution from Evolution. The Siva lingam stands for Evolution and Involution. It starts from the shapeless mass, which is then shaped into square and octogon, stage by stage, and finally turned into a cylinder which vanishes into nothing at the top ; and from nothing again, probably in aeons of time, it may become an unshapen mass, to continue the rhythm or dance of Siva over and over again.

CHAPTER 3

KALI

Kali is supreme divinity conceived as mother. Mañ in all ages would appear to have had the preference for a mother approach to Divinity. Perhaps it is more comforting. A child takes all its troubles to its mother. When the father beats the child, it returns to the mother. When the mother beats it, it cries out "mother," as the last and only hope. To a child the father is more or less a stranger, sometimes even an occasional visitor.

Is is was the supreme goddess of Ancient Egypt. Osris was her son. Christ was the son of Mary, how many millions approach Him through her? Buddhism started without a goddess, but ended in having Tara, a goddess.

In the Vedas no worship of Kali is indicated. Perhaps it might have been due to the trouble the Rishis experienced with the sorcerers, whose chief deity Kali has always been.

The word Kali is of Dravidian origin. No Indo-Aryan language has the letter 'L' as it is pronounced in Kali. Kali may have been as old as Kalam (Time).

The primitive form of worshipping Kali may be seen among the Oraons, a primitive group in Manbhum district. They worship her as Chandi, evidently a prototype of Chamundi, another name for Kali. The Oraon approach to Chandi is somewhat similar to the Atharva Vedic approach to

Sarasvati, to make men virile. The Oraon youths invoke Chandi before they set out for their first hunt. They represent Chandi by means of a rough, but well-shaped stone, similar to batylic stones that were found in Mohenjodaro and Harappa.

All the same, their usual form of worship is without an image or anything representing a god or goddess. They call the Mother goddess Chhalo Pachcho, literally the spirit or the devil that makes things move. Each village has a grove, for the worship of her, called Sarna, always in its outskirts as all Kali temples used to be. The old groves for the worship of the goddess have disappeared. Among the Oraons, it is now represented by one or two trees. But in places like Travancore, groves for the worship of Kali can still be found, or Kali temples inside a grove which they call 'Kavu'. There, as well as elsewhere, the deities are called after the localities where their temples are. Thus 'Telli-kavil-Bhagavati', the Devi at Telli Kavu 'Kasi-Visvanatha', Siva of Kasi, and so on.

All the groves around the shrines are as holy as the temples themselves. No one is to enter the precincts in any state of pollution. The Oraons do not allow their women folk in their Sarnas, for they always carry potential pollution with them. They have no images or stones even to represent the goddess. They sacrifice, like all other aborigines and Vedic people, animals to their gods and goddesses. They make an altar, like the Vedic people, though it may be crude in form. They give oblations of liquor to their deities and ancestor spirits. The first toast of obligation goes to Chhalo

Pachcho. The next toast will be for 'Pat', a mountain god like Sasta.

Imageless worship would appear to have been the oldest practice in India. When there was no image, there was no occasion to have temples. Compatible with the architectural development in the Indus Valley, no temples were found there. Till recently every Nair Taravad, or original home of a Nair in Kerala contained a shrine to worship Devi without an image. But in these shrines there were 'pidhas' or seats for Devi to occupy, in front of which lights used to be burned. Most of the votary figures found in the Indus Valley would appear to be lamps of this kind; such lamps, more or less with the same design carved in stone, could be found at the shrine entrances in Kerala. Similar lamps with human figurines are used on the occasion of Diwali, in many parts of India.

A lighted lamp represents the Devi. The Hindus on every auspicious occasion light a lamp, they light a lamp even to welcome distinguished guests, which is clear indication of the nature of welcome. In a strict Hindu home, no day passes without lighting the 'mangala dvipa' or the lamp of auspiciousness. Such lamps are lit at least twice a day; first at daybreak, and secondly at sunset. These lamps were to be lighted after sweeping the house and entire premises, and settling the dust with sprinkled water.

Kali or Devi in this cleansing ritual represents Lakshmi, the goddess who ensures prosperity and health. Adherence to the principle of clean-

liness is driven home by means of a story. It is said that Lakshmi has an elder sister, Jyeshta. She lives in dung-heaps, dirty spots and dark corners. There is an understanding between them that whenever Lakshmi visits a place, if Jyeshta is in occupation Lakshmi will go away. The Hindu ideal is that every house, whether it is a palace, hut or cottage, should always be ready to receive Lakshmi, and every residence should be a shrine for Lakshmi. Those who do not comply with this rule or ideal are outcastes, untouchables and unapproachables. Houses should not be opened to them, shrines should not receive them ; even market-places used to be prohibited areas for them.

But Devi is a goddess for all, Brahmans, Sudras, untouchables, unapproachables, aborigines and cultured. They all worship according to their culture and understanding. To cater for all she has been given various aspects : Kali, Durga, Vana Durga, Devi, Bhadra Kali, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Mahisha Mardini and so on. The deft hands of craftsmen have given appropriate delineation to emphasise different character in painting or casting or carving the image of Devi in various aspects.

In one aspect, she is shown as a symbol of cruelty with mouth and tongue of dripping blood, and various hands provided with murderous instruments. To appreciate this aspect, a knowledge of social background is essential. The Hindu community in ancient days had no professional butchers. The meat needs of the family were met from sacrifices, conducted by the head

of the family or the priests of the community. Family altars and public altars were the places of sacrifice. Cutting the throat of animals day after day is bound to make one disgusted and chicken-hearted. Then an image of Kali at the altar with murderous aspect is bound to give one encouragement, and invite him to do sacrifice, for the salvation of his soul, and for public benefit. The Hindus were the most practical people at one time. Each image of Devi has an appropriate aspect. One of her most sublime aspects will be seen in the pose of Mahisha-mardani. Though this has also variations, the main theme is chastising the demon Mahisha, personification of wickedness. Mahisha, a buffalo, lies under her feet, with which she exerts corrective pressure on him. Though her hands are fitted with various weapons, she does not use them. She is not in anger, her drooping eyes and matronly look are the attitude of a mother who has to chastise a wayward child. Then in this depiction, often a dwarf boy will be seen standing by her side, whose head is caressed by her left hand. The dwarf boy is the repentant soul of Mahisha or all wicked mankind, to whom she holds out protection.

In her pose as Vana Durga, or Durga representing qualities of the forest, her shrine in the middle of a grove will be roofless, and the image will be exposed to the Sun, rain and storm, fulfilling her quality as the goddess of the Seasons. In her pose as Bhadra Kali, she is shown as a comely maiden with human features, yet with a tamed lion by her side. It is in this aspect that she is worshipped as

a household deity. She is all kindness and a giver of joy, but with power to curb wickedness, as is depicted by the tamed lion. In her pose as Sarasvati, she has the book of learning or wisdom in one hand, while with another she is tuning a Vina, an entirely Indian instrument. With soft music she calls the attention of the world to the book in the other hand.

In a similar pose Siva, the Nataraja, or the dancing 'Siva, calls the attention of the people to a book or light in one hand with the soft beating of 'damaru' a miniature drum, and with a third hand he receives the devotees and with the fourth, he gives them protection. In Siva's case he is drawing attention to the Light or eternal truth. In the case of Sarasvati, she is drawing attention to Vidya, or knowledge that could be obtained through book-learning.

Yet some say that the Hindus had no goddess of letters or alphabets. What is Grantha or book without alphabets? Bhoja-patra, or palm-leaf, is nothing but dried leaf without letters. Whether in the hand of Sarasvati or Siva, without writing, they are nothing but objects to be thrown away.

Like the Siva temples, the Devi temples were also civic centres and centres of culture. Fine arts like drawing, painting, carving, shaping and framing would appear to have grown round the Devi temple. Art would appear to have had its origin in magic or witchcraft. The sorcerer made the images of the enemy and struck pins on the body to hurt him. It is a practice which is being follow-

ed even now. First the images were drawn on the ground, then they were drawn on a palm-leaf or copper plate and finally moulded in clay or cooked rice. Such drawings are buried underground or burnt to destroy the enemy. The 'Pindam' at 'Pitru-kriya' is nothing but the representation of the dead ancestor, which should be clothed, fed and obliterated upon for the satisfaction of the spirit. Since the abolition of the human and animal sacrifices, Yajnas are performed by the ritual killing of the horses and men drawn on the sanctified ground with powders of various colours. The skill that the priests show in such craftsmanship is worth commending. The mural painting in India is the outcome of this practice.

As the Siva temples were centres of music, dance and acting, the Devi temples were centres of art and craft. As a host of recalcitrant spirits were placed under Siva, under the leadership of Ganesa, all the mischievous and evil spirits, both natural and disembodied, were placed under Bhairavi, the hand-maid of Devi. One way of propitiating Devi was to make the representation of these spirits, and make them dance before her in recognition of their submission to her. This dance, which the Europeans call the devil dance, was to be held once a year. Such occasions were the revival of art and craft. The devils were to have suitable make-up and costume. The primitive nature of this art will be seen from primitive paints and simple materials they use in this make-up. In Travancore the paint they use for this purpose is black made of charcoal and red made of turmeric and lime, painted and

shaped masks made of 'pala' or the outer thick and broad covering that protects the pollen of the arecanut, and most of the bodily decorations done by the articles made of tender coconut-leaves. The much appreciated art of Kathakali is a direct descendant of the devil dance.

Such devil dances are in existence from Ceylon to the Himalayas. Even the Buddhists have adopted them probably since they adopted a female deity, Tara, in their religion. In Travancore these dance festivals are known as 'pata-yeni', which literally means a collection of soldiers. The significance of the term may be better appreciated when it is known that in olden days every able-bodied man was a soldier.

The 'pata-yenis' were the occasions for the annual revival of art and craft. For exhibition at the festivals huge representations were made of animals, birds, demons and gods, and also of cowsheds two or three storeys high, with accommodation for at least a dozen life-size bulls in each story, huge Rathas of triangular shape, fifty to sixty high with carved images, depicting the Puranic or mythological anecdotes. The perfection of Indian art, craft, modelling and decoration was exhibited on these occasions. The enthusiasm and co-operation of the public needed no better evidence when it is seen that hundreds of the people combine to carry these huge sculptural and architectural objects on their shoulders and practically dance with them before Devi.

Art exhibitions like this were carried out with a competitive or even rival spirit. The people

of different localities vied to excel with one another, and when two parties were at the same place the desire to excel enhanced the standard of exhibits. Alas, prayer meetings have replaced such carnivals, and the artists and craftsmen with no chance to put their deftness into execution have left their traditional study and occupation with great loss to art and craft. Under the vituperation of missionary oratory, art disappears, craft deteriorates, traditions become the targets of derision.

The simple Devi worship has also attained transcendental heights. Devi has been made the Highest Divinity and a Competitor to Prama Siva by the Sakteyas. The Sakteyas are out and out monotheists; there is no room for any other god in their pantheon. They are mystics. Like the mystics of ancient Egypt they work behind closed doors. What is going on behind the screens are close guarded secrets, never to be divulged to the uninitiated. Strangely enough, Saketya mysteries are open to women. Participation of women and practice behind closed doors have made the Sakteyas a favourite target for criticism. But they thrive unmindful of all criticism and ridicule.)

As it is in other mysteries there are different degrees in Saketya religion. The Brahman cult has seven degrees as symbolised by seven knots on the stick that the Brahmanhari or aspirant has to carry about. Like the Freemasons the Sakteyas have three degrees and they are Pasu Bhava, Vira Bhava and Divya Bhava. As Pasu, one has to undergo a course of apprenticeship, so as to learn to control the self and desires by constant asser-

tion of will. As a Vira one has to prove the mastery over sex and passions, under most provoking tests and conditions. Divya Bhava is the highest stage when the victorious Vira meets the divinity face to face and attains the supreme spirituality.

The usual way to spirituality is through abstinence, penance and mortification, which is actually running away from life ; but the Sakteyas realise that by shunning life one cannot overcome passions and desires, and which can be done only by a safe conduct through life. The desire for five 'Mas' is to be killed by enjoyment, vision or contact. The five 'Mas' are five objects whose names begin with the letter Ma, and their English equivalents are meat, fish, wine, women and cereals. Nobody outside the screen knows how the aspirants are tested by these means. But Swami Nirvedananda (Ramakrishna Mission) says that these objects are placed before the devotee for the purpose of sense enjoyment and then he is made to defy these by thoughts or sense so as to convert the sense attraction into love for the Divinity. Here, no doubt, there is risk. But ancient mysteries were not devoid of risks and the Masters were determined that the pupil should take such risks.

In the mysteries of ancient Egypt, the soul of the aspirant was temporarily removed from the body by mystic passes and mesmeric devices for the purpose of making him acquainted with what is beyond. Lucius, one of the aspirants who passed through such trials, says, "I drew nigh to the confines of death, I trod the Threshold of Proserpine, I was through all the elements and returned to the

earth again, I saw the Sun gleaming with bright splendour at dead of night, I approached the gods above, and all the gods below, and worshipped them face to face."

Ramakrishna Paramhansa had similar visions. He saw "innumerable gods corresponding exactly with the descriptions given in the scriptures", some of them even talked and advised him. He gained the beatific vision, according to his disciple Nirvedananda, without any connection or physical contract with wine or sex, but he was assisted by Bhairavi, a lady preceptor. Ramakrishna commenced his devotional career as a selfless worshipper of Kali, and his blind devotion to her nearly drove him mad, and caused him severe physical and mental pain ; but through the services of a good Sakteya lady guide, Bhairavi, regained his mental equilibrium and physical health.

How high the goddess was placed may be seen from the following hymn which every Brahman is to repeat at a certain stage of his spiritual development :

"O illustrious Goddess, I pray homage to Thee;
Grant that when I lay down this perishable
envelope I rise to the high spheres.

O Divine spouse of Him who moves upon the
water, preserve me both day and night.

Thou art of spiritual nature. Thou art light of
lights. Thou art not subject to human
passions, art eternal and powerful.

Thou art purity itself. Thou art the refuge of
man ; Thou art our salvation ; Thou art
knowledge ;

Thou art the essence of sacred scriptures, and
by Thy constant fruitfulness the Universe is
sustained.

Thou art the figure of invocation ; Thou art
prayer ;

To Thee all sacrifices should be addressed ;
Thou art the dispenser of all good.

All things are in thy hand—joy sorrow, fear
and hope

Thou art present in three worlds, Thou
hast three figures and that number from
thy essence,

Nari, the immortal Virgin.”

Nari, who is invoked thus, is a virgin, the
Immortal Virgin. Though she is addressed as the
spouse of Him who moves upon the waters,
Narayana or Vishnu, she is still a virgin. Is it not
the sense in which all the goddesses have been
conceived?

This indicates the sublime heights the goddess
occupied in the religion of the Hindus. Is there
a Divinity who is conceived higher than the
Goddess Nari? Sakti of the Sakteyas is Nari.
They consider that every woman present at the
rituals is an embodiment of Nari, to lead men
without passions and desires upward and onward
through the paths of virtue and enlightenment.

But to an ordinary worshipper of Devi, she is a mother to whom one could open the heart without any reservation, admit all misdeeds and shortcomings, and from whom consolation and relief can be expected. Yet crimes have been done in her name ; but it is not the fault of the goddess. Misunderstanding and misinterpretation of godly qualities have led many people to extreme limits. Do they not fight even now bloody battles in the name of the Prince of Peace?

CHAPTER 4

AGNI, THE FOREMOST OF THE VEDIC GODS

The primitive man's attention must have been drawn to Agni or fire by its mysterious appearance. In the sky it appeared as dazzling forks of lightning ; in the forest it appeared as wild fire. Man must have learnt the useful nature of the fire, by chance, by eating a carcase or tubers roasted by wild fire. As the primitive man's first concern was for food, it was but natural for him to be drawn closer and closer to the element that made his food palatable. But to depend on a chance or wild fire for a palatable feast, the ingenuity of man must have revolted. He may have posted sentinels to watch the outbreak of the spontaneous combustion in the jungles and to find out how it happened. By intelligent observation he must have learnt that repeated rubbing of one wood against another had caused the forest fire. Naturally he must have tried to imitate nature. After repeated trials he must have learnt the art of making frictional fire. What must have been his surprise when he found that the limp wood in his hand caught fire ? His surprise must have given rise to such expressions as 'tee' or 'ag', which in India even now indicates fire.

When once he found or created Agni, was it likely that he would let it go out of his reach ? He must have taken it home to his hut and kept it in charge of the head of the family, probably one who was too feeble to go out and work. Hence the head of the family or 'kula' became

the nourisher of the 'Nitya Agni', or daily fire.

In these days of cheap or easily accessible matches, one cannot feel the difficulties our ancestors felt in keeping up the fire. In the day it was usefully maintained in the kitchen, but to maintain it in the night was the problem. For the purpose they made fire-pits stacked with suitable materials which could keep up the fire, but would not be consumed uneconomically. This is how the villagers even now maintain the fire. When Agni began to be worshipped as a god, these fire-pits became sacred 'kundas' and the fire therein was maintained by choice fuel nourished with ghee.

Agni, whom the Vedic Rishis at first worshipped, was the frictional fire. One of the early Vedic Rishis, Hirnayastupa, speaks of him as, "O Agni, thou sprung from two mothers, wise, through all existence spread, resting in many a place for the sake of living men". The two mothers are the two pieces of wood used for fire ritual. Another passage in the Rig Veda clears up the point by stating, "Let us rub out Agni as heretofore. This god is deposited in two pieces of wood. He is produced of them like a newborn infant". Agni is the fire in the lightning they dreaded, and that they did not worship. The Atharvans prayed to their gods from the early days to protect them from lightning and implored them to hurl it at their enemies.

From the Vedas it would appear that the Angirases were the foremost among the worshippers of Agni; but they and their descendants were the most prominent Rishis during the Vedic

periods, whether they were Rig Vedis or Atharva Vedis. Angirasa is said to have discovered him when he lay hidden "fleeing back from wood to wood" (RV : V. 11. 6). But from the Puranas it will be seen that Agni was worshipped even during the pre-Vedic period. Among those who descended from the first of the Manus, called Swayambhuva or self-born, there was a tribe called Agnidhras, evidently worshippers of Agni. When the Agnidhras were in occupation of India, which was then called 'Jambu-dvipa' or the island of great heat, there were no other racial elements in the country. The priests of the Agnidhras were called Ourvas. There were Rishis known by this name late in the Vedic period, roughly between 2500 and 1000 B. C.

The fire ritual is even now most scrupulously done in the true Vedic fashion by some aboriginal tribes. The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa produce frictional fire once a year. Their sacrificial priest, called Dihuri or Diuri, sits on the floor, holds firm a soft piece of wood with the soles of his feet, takes a hard piece in his hands, and churns until the fire is produced. On this fire rice is boiled in milk and distributed among the villagers, after it is offered to the ancestor spirits. After the ceremony, the priest distributes the fire among the people, who take it to their respective homes to light afresh the kitchen fire which is to be kept for the year.

The god they worship on this occasion is the Sun, the new-born Sun, who traces his ambulation towards the north after he has been to the furthest south.

Nahusha, the third king of the Aila race, whom Pargiter recognises as the Aryans, is said to have received Agni or the sacrificial fire, from the Gandharvas, probably a neighbouring tribe of aborigines, and he is, therefore, called in the Rig Veda (V. 12.6) the father of Agni. This was about 132 generations before Pushyamitra ascended the throne of Magadha. But this child of Nahusha became the guardian of the Bharatas (the descendants of Nahusha), and the household priest, and supreme god ; through him all other gods were brought to the sacrifice ; moreover he usurped the powers of other gods like Indra, as Agni Vaisvanara "he struck down the Dasyus, clave Sambara through and shattered down the fences".

Some are inclined to give a foreign parentage to Agni, and derive the word from the Latin 'ignis'. But Max Muller sets aside this opinion "because there is no indication that Latin remained longer united with Sanskrit than any of the other Aryan languages". But he also sets aside the idea that Latin borrowed from Sanskrit. All the same, Santhali, one of the aboriginal languages, has the words 'ac' for flame, or stifling heat, and 'ani' for that one Acani or Agni could easily be a combination of these two.

There is a presumption that Agni worship could have originated only in a cold climate. But it appears to be wrong. If it had originated from a desire to get oneself warm, then worship of fire ought to have been more prevalent in cold countries. But to keep the night fire burning is a desire common in all climates ; and the tendency to do so is greater among the less civilised.

The sage Medhatithi calls Agni Tanunapat, son of thyself, because the fire is self-generated and says that Tanunapat "presents our sacrifices to the gods to-day sweet to the taste that they may feast" (RV : 1.13). Here in addition to the fact that Tanunapat makes the food palatable to the human tongue, he makes it sweet to the gods. Perhaps it may be on account of this quality that he is considered as the host at the sacrifices. But the ancient Rishis saw Agni or latent fire not only in two limp pieces of wood and wild fire which is nourished by Matarisva, the god of wind; they also saw him lying dormant in water, at the bottom of the sea, in the centre of the earth and in everything movable and immovable. Hence it will be clear that they realised his presence in everything and everywhere, a quality most essential to any god or every god. It is no wonder that they made him witness every action of theirs, the death ceremony, the marriage ceremony, any affirmation, or denial, to prove fidelity and various other kinds of human activities.

One cannot wonder why the people of Mitanni did not cite him as a witness in their treaty with the Hittites. This treaty is dated 1400 B. C. Is the final or supreme conception of Agni of later date? It would appear to be so. The powers of Agni are still being investigated. The Atom bomb, the Hydrogen bomb, and other latest instruments of destruction cannot but be his ways of manifestation.

Will he destroy the earth eventually is the question that comes from every direction.

THE WORSHIP OF THE SUN AND THE MOON

From the worship of Agni, the worship of the Sun is a direct step. Agni stood for the fire and heat on the earth, while the Sun stood for the heat and warmth from the sky. As stated before the Dravidian name for Agni is 'ti', and the oldest name for the Sun is Aditya, or 'A—ti—tya' or that fire there or above. Likewise the oldest name for the Moon seems to be 'Chandro', the shining one in the night. Like all other gods, the Sun and the Moon have different names, according to respective or peculiar characteristics. The Sun is called Divakara or one who makes the day ; the Moon, Soma or Indu, a drop in the sky; and so on.

Though man first looked at these luminaries with curiosity and wonder, soon he began to make use of them. The sunrise was his signal to get up and start work. The moonlight he began to use for extra work or pleasure-hunting. To differentiate one day from the other the Moon gave him great facility. Each night has had its own peculiarity. Some nights began with the Moon of different sizes or shapes and some nights began with no Moon, though he appeared later on. The Moon to the Indians has always been a He or male, and not She as it is for the Western people. The Indian seems to have had a shrewd idea about the dependency of the Moon on the Sun ; in some old hymns sung every morning by the villagers at

daybreak in praise of the Sun, it is sung that it is only through the rays of the Sun that the Moon could be made visible. From early Vedic days every bridegroom is made to represent the Moon, who is ever seeking Surya. The Sun's rays are represented by the bride.

During some nights the Moon completely disappeared while at other nights he appeared in full glory. This did not fail to attract the attention of the observers, and they used it for fixing a cycle of days. From one Full Moon to the next Full Moon, it took 30 days and 30 nights, and they called this interval a 'Masam' (month), literally a measure, and the Full that made introduction of this measure possible 'Poorna-Masi' (full-measure). The No-Moon day and night they called 'A-Ma-Vasi,' that (the Moon) was not there.

'Poorna Masi', the Indian name for the Full Moon, itself indicates that they first counted the months, Full Moon to Full Moon, and their years also began from the Full Moon. At present as well as during the ages past, the practice in North India is to reckon the months and the years from New Moon to New Moon. This is evidently a later practice, which was undoubtedly introduced when greater importance was given to ancestor worship. For remembering the ancestors, who have disappeared from their midst, and propitiating them no better day could have been fixed than No-Moon day, on which the Moon has gone away, yet people knew that he was somewhere like the dead ancestors. They associated the Moon with the dead ancestors; and the region where the dead had gone

they called 'Chandra Loka', or the region of the Moon. The belief in rebirth or reincarnation is of a later date, probably incorporated from Buddhism. Ancestor worship has been as common among the aborigines as it is among the Hindus. Many an aborigine will not take his food and drink without offering some for the dead, who are deemed ever present with them. The advanced Hindus have a special time and date fixed for giving oblations to a limited few of the ancestors. The No-Moon days are special days for 'pinda,' or food-offerings to the dead, among all those who follow the lunar calendar ; but among those who follow the stellar calendar the death anniversaries are performed on stellar days.

The Full Moon periods have been the nights for celebration and special duties. The aboriginal hunts took place at the Full Moons. Their dances are conducted in moonlight, and annual festivals at the Full Moon.

The lunar months are divided into two halves according to the decreasing and increasing Moon. When the Moon is on the wane it is called Krishna or Black Paksha, and when it is on the increase it is called Sukla or White Paksha. In each Paksha there are fixed dates for fasts and special religious observances ; each day of the Paksha is called a 'tithi,' and counted Pratipada, Dwitiya, Tritiya, etc., which means nothing but 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. dates.

The Moon has been a living entity in the life history of the people, yet no temple for his worship has been found in India. The Chaldees of Ur had

temples for Nannar, their Moon God, about 2000 B. C. Perhaps the Moon worship in India belongs to a period when there were no temples or image worship. Though the Sun is worshipped extensively in India both his temples and images are very rare.

All the world over they thought twelve Moons would bring the seasons round, so they fixed a year comprising 12×30 or 360 days. In India they would appear to have found the mistake earlier than other nations. For their literature alludes to the New Year's beginning from Vernal Equinoxes at different stars ; and if one is to judge from such records this practice will go back to 5000 or 6000 B. C.

The Indians made the study of the Stars, the Sun and the Moon simultaneously, and as a result they established a stellar year consisting of 327.9 days and a lunar year consisting of 354.8333 ...days, both synchronising with the solar year 35.6256 days ; no other nation seems to have achieved this. The gods who helped them in achieving this are the Moon, the Sun and the Stars, and they worshipped them all. Even the primitive sorcerers have been swearing by these gods. No Hindu performs a ceremony, religious or social, without looking into their positions. Among the orthodox not even a journey is undertaken without considering their dispositions.

Neither were they insensible to the part the Sun and the Moon played in the germination and growth of the vegetable kingdom ; some of the earliest of the Vedic hymns give evidence of this

by which the parentage of the plants is attributed to the Sun, Moon and the waters.

From the parentage of plants to the parentage of man is not a far cry. They claimed the parentage of the Sun and Moon for two of the earliest royal families. The Ikshvakus claimed their parentage from the Sun, and the Purus from the Moon. Even now the number of families who claim descent from them are innumerable, and their number is still on the increase.

The Egyptians, about 2780 B. C. went a step further, and their kings began to claim themselves to be the Sun. Why not? Kings then ruled as the Sun governed the world. The expounders of the Upanishads gave the Sun his rightful place in the hierarchy of gods. The secret doctrine of the Upanishad has made him the source of all cosmic activities. They placed all the Vedic gods on the rays emanating from the Sun and thereby emphasised their dependency on him. This was a great improvement in nature worship. Since then the worship of the Sun has taken great strides in India, and has not abated even now.

The Egyptians too changed their approach to the Sun. Instead of the kings themselves being recognised as the Sun, Akhnaton, their 'heretic' king, 1380-1362 B. C. recognised the Sun as the "beginning of life," "creator of the germ in woman, maker of seed in man", and contented himself to be the son of the Sun. The source of his heresy has not yet been fully settled. Yet a guess can be made from what has been discovered from the Tell-el-

Amarna letters. Even before the days of this heretic king, his predecessors and the kings of Mitanni were on most cordial terms and there was also intermarriage between them. It may even be possible that his favourite wife, with whom he is seen in sculpture, protected by the Sun and his rays, was a princess of Mitanni and a close relation of king Shuttarana. However, there is no doubt the Mitannians spoke an Indo-Aryan language and worshipped the Vedic gods.

In India both men and women are enthusiastic worshippers of the Sun and Moon. It is not at all surprising when it is realised that two of the earliest preceptors of the Sun-cult were two ladies, Ambini and Vac. Sunday is reserved for the Sun worship and Monday is for the worship of the Moon. No sacrifice or puja is essential for the worship of these deities; fast and prayer are the chief ways of approach to them. Sunday is called Ravi (Sun) Vara (day of the week) and Monday is called Chandra (Moon) Vara. The other five days of the week are called Kuja (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Guru (Jupiter), Sukra (Venus), and Sani (Saturn). There are those who contend that the week and week-days come from the West, but their Dravidian equivalents, such as Njayar, Tinkal, Chovva, Buddhan, Vyazam, Velli and Sani, should contradict this presumption. Indian week-days are called seven Grahas (orbs); it is doubtful whether it can be said of the Western week-days. The Hindu astronomy as well as astrology is based on the relative position of these Grahas. Hence Vara or week-day reckoning should be considered as old as these sciences.

How these Varas or day divisions help in astronomical computation will be apparent to one who watches the calculating board of an astronomer, which contains nothing more than a few cowries, used with a full knowledge of zero and place value notation. It will be seen that the shape of the zero has derived from the peculiar cowrie they use for indicating Sunya or Zero. No astronomer commences his work without invoking the aid of these Grahas. His invocation is not based on blind faith, but on the full realisation of their part in his work, whether it is for finding an auspicious moment or determination of the beginning of the months or of the eclipses.

Now, if one realises the importance of sunlight to the animal and vegetable kingdoms alike, the common man's concern in warding off eclipses by shouting and beating on the ground can also more or less be appreciated. If Rahu and Ketu, two shadows, will eclipse the Sun and the Moon, once and for all, what would happen to the world? It is this fear that is at the bottom of these childish actions. He prays when the eclipse occurs, he rejoices when it is over. Are we not afraid of the possible consequences of the Hydrogen bomb? Will our prayer stop its production or action? Yet we hope and pray. Why should we blame the ignorant only?

Worship originated first from fear, then from the idea of warding off evil consequences, and lastly from hope. The Vedic Rishis first invoked Indra to keep his missiles away from them, then they prayed to him for the gift of the rain, and lastly when they found out his limitations, they gradually

dropped him, and other gods were invoked in his stead. But the Sun, the Moon and the Stars are still living ; they are not conceived in imagination, they are visible deities, their benefits are measured hour by hour ; they cannot be ignored, so they still occupy a very high position in the galaxy of the Hindu gods. They know they are still benefactors, they will continue the performance of their duties, whether you believe in them or not.

CHAPTER 6

THE STELLAR GODS : ASVINS AND PUSHAN

Some are of the opinion that the stellar gods in India were worshipped before the solar gods. The Vedic gods are generally termed solar gods. Most probably the stellar and the solar gods were worshipped side by side. Both are nature gods, and there is no reason why primitive man did not worship the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars at the same time. The wonders of nature could not but have appealed to him without restricting him to solar or stellar deities. However, the developments in the lunar calendar itself will show that they are highly and intricately connected with stellar observations.

But even in the heyday of the Vedas, it would appear that most of the stellar gods had taken a secondary place, and their antecedents and identity have been forgotten.

The identity of Asvins was a puzzle even in the first millenium B. C. to Yaska, the first commentator of the Vedas. Some have suggested the Asvins were the Earth and Heaven ; others are of the opinion that they are the Night and Day ; yet others see in them the Sun and the Moon. Some even confuse them with the Nasatyas, who are said to have been brought by the invading Aryans along with Indra, Varuna, and Mitra. The confusion is mainly due to the presumption that

the Asvins and the Nasatyas are identical. Even when the Mahabharata was written, the presumption was that the Asvins were only two.

The Asvins in fact are three, and they are an inseparable trio. The triple nature of the Asvins is most emphatically stressed by Rishi Hiranyas-tupa in his hymn RV : 1.34, where he says—

“Three are the fillies in your honey-bearing car, that travels after Soma’s loved one, as all know. Three are the pillars set upon it for support ;.....thrice come to our home thrice bring us what shall make us glad. Thrice grant us prosperity, thrice grant us fame ; for the Sun’s daughter has mounted the three-wheeled car. Thrice Asvins grant us heavenly medicine.....thrice those of earth and thrice those that the waters hold Favour and health and strength bestow upon my son ; triple protection, Lords of splendour, grant to him. Thrice are ye to be worshipped day by day by us ; thrice, O Ye Asvins, ye travel round the earth. Car-borne from far away ; O Ye Nasatyas come like vital air to bodies, come ye to the three. Three are the jars, the triple offering is prepared, three are the worlds, and moving on above the sky ye guard the firm set vault of heaven, through day and night. Where are the three wheels of your triple chariot, where are the three seats thereto firmly fastened ? Come, O Ye Nasatyas, with thrice eleven gods, come O Ye Asvins to the drinking of meath.....Borne in your triple car,

O Asvins, bring us present prosperity with noble offspring.....”.

Here oblations are offered in three pots, if the Asvins were only two, the third pot would be superfluous. They are not the Nasatyas, if they were, the poet would not have asked the Nasatyas to come to the Three, namely, the Asvins. If other hymns in Veda are also studied carefully, it will be seen that the qualities and characteristics of the Asvins and Nasatyas are different. The Nasatyas were a kind of glow in the sky even before the dawn, as will be seen from RV. 24.4,5 & 6, and they were not three, but only two; and their functions could also be judged from this passage—

“Strong Lords of magic power, ye Twain (the Nasatyas) churned the united world apart; when ye implored by Vimida, Nasatyas forced apart the pair. When the united pair were rent asunder all the gods complained. The gods to the Nasatyas complained. The gods to the Nasatyas cried, bring these together again. Sweet be going forth and rich in sweet be my approach to home. So through your deity, both gods, enrich us with all pleasantness”.

It will be clear from this that the two Nasatyas were the gods who forced apart the world, or the sky and earth were made visible, from an invisible state of darkness. But the separateness could not be continued for ever, as the day is as essential as the night so that rest should follow work. Hence the significance of the prayer by gods to unite the

two worlds again together. To the individuals, it was sweet going forth to work, and sweet coming back to rest with the fruits of labour. Hence the opening and the closing of the day were most suspicious, and the two gods who preside over this function are the Nasatyas.

The Asvins, on the other hand "guard the firm-set vault of heaven", and as Rishi Sunahasepa describes them that they are the "light that giveth light to man", and Rishi Kutsa says they "encompass the Sun when far away". All these qualities can be found only in stars. There is a constellation of stars which would satisfy all these qualifications, namely, Asvini or Asvati. In the sky they will be seen moving together, as if the three were tied together. Two of them are bright, while the third one is less bright. Hence the significance of the statement that "three are the fillies in your honey bearing car", and "three are the pillars set upon it for support". If a line is drawn joining the two luminous ones, and the two ends of it are connected to the less luminous one, a triangle will be formed, and if it is connected to the lower stars of the next constellation Bharani, the whole figure would give the outline or the profile of a horse. It must have been on account of this that this constellation was named Asvin or Asvani, horse-like.

This explanation may disconcert many who think that the horse was introduced into India by the Indo-Aryans about 1000 B. C. But a glance at the geneology of the kings of Ayodhya will convince us that at least nine kings, whose names end with 'Asva', horse, all flourished before this date.

Asva here stood for an epithet like 'simha' (lion), Pungava (bull), and Sal (tree) of later date.

The Asvins were the gods of the sorcerers and the anti-sorcerers of the Vedic and pre-Vedic days. Even now the sorcerers and anti-sorcerers invoke their aid and call them to witness their rites and imprecations.

The Asvins were the healers and medicine-men among the gods. They are among the oldest gods, perhaps co-eval with Rudra, the Vedic form of Siva, who is said to have paid visits from house to house with simples and cures.

Pushan is another Vedic god, whose identity has not yet been established. According to Ragozin, he holds a modest rank in the gallery of the Vedic gods of light ; though he shares honours with them, he is only affectionately remembered. Many gods of the Hindu pantheon have shared his fate. Hindu gods are not created at random and forced on an unwilling multitude. Each and every god of their tradition stands for a certain principle or ideal, the usefulness of which for man may have a temporary or permanent significance. A god of the plough may not have much use for a man of the pen, or for a man of fight, unless the plough is converted into an article of fight, as the plough became a formidable weapon in the hands of Balabhadra, Krishna's brother.

"Pushan", according to Bergaigne, the French scholar, "is first of all a pastoral and agricultural deity. He is requested to direct the furrow ; he is armed with the ox-goad ; he is principally the guard-

ian of the cattle, who prevents them from straying and finds them again when they get lost. He is, therefore, to follow the cows to bring them home safe and sound.....He is the founder of the hidden treasure.....cows first on the list always. Lastly Pushan guides men, not only in their search for lost or hidden things, but on all their ways generally. In a word, he is the god of wayfarers as well as of husbandmen and herdsmen. He is called 'Lord of the Path', he is prayed to lay out the roads, to remove from them foes and hindrances, to guide his worshippers by the safest roads, as 'knowing all the abode'.

One of the earliest hymns invoking the aid of Pushan stands in the name of Vishvamitra, probably the first Vishvamitra of the twenty-first century B. C. It is the hymn AV : III. 17. Here the god Indra is invoked "to hold down the furrow", and Pushan to keep it straight and thrust apart the soil. The hymn is evidently intended to be sung at a ceremonial ploughing. The ceremonial ploughing is done, when the ground is prepared for locating a town or village, and also at the first ploughing of the season.

The first ploughing is generally done during the rain, after the earth has been softened by the downpour. It is done so even now by the aborigines. At these functions, first they bathe in a nearby stream, don new clothes and often sacrifice a fowl to the Sungod.

Pushan is often called a Sun god. In fact he is a Sun, one out of the twelve suns representing twelve months. If it is realised how the months

were first named, one might know something more of this god. The months were named after the Nakshtras or constellations against which the full moons appeared. When the Full Moon appeared in line with the constellation Visaka, or Vaisakha they called it Vaisaki or Vaisakha. The Sanskrit name of Pushan for a month has derived from the constellation Pushyami, Pushan, or Pooyam. The equivalent name of month Pousha in Tamil is Thai. The Tamils and their descendants in the East Indies still celebrate the Pooyam, in the month of Thai. It is a great annual festival chiefly of austerity and prayer, to propitiate Velayudha, the son of Siva. This festival comes very near to the beginning of the lunar month Sravan. The first of the solar month Sravan is the beginning of the New Year in Travancore, while the first of the lunar month Sravan was the New Year's day in North India even down to Ashoka's time. So it could be reasonably presumed that Pushan was once the first month in the year.

A close study of the Rig Vedic hymn : 1·23 will finally establish the stellar characteristics of god Pushan. The relevant verses are :

13. "Like some lost animal, drive to us, bright Pushan, him who bears up heaven (Soma).....
14. "Pushan the bright has found the king, concealed and hidden in a cave who rests on grass of many hues.
15. "And may he, the six bound closely, duly bring to me, through these drops, as one who ploughs with steers bring corn".

There is a difference of opinion, as to the identity of the one "who bears up heaven, whether he is Soma, the Moon or Soma the drink. Griffith rightly takes him for Soma, the Moon. Pushan found him in a cave hiding. It is most evident that the Moon hides himself only on Amavasya or New Moon night. Though we cannot see him, the stars can see him; and the stars who found him concealed—Pushan the six bound closely. Now the constellation Pushan will be seen in the sky as a cluster of six stars in a line, moving together as if bound together. Thus there is no doubt that the god Pushan which the Vedic Rishis invoked, especially Medhatithi, the second Rishi of the Rig Veda and the author of this hymn, was a cluster of stars.

This incidentally may enable one to date the antiquity of Pushan worship. It would appear that it was on the New Year's eve that the Moon was hidden (being Amavasya), and then Pushan was the guiding star, who received oblations. The Hindus generally commenced the New Year from the Vernal Equinox. The Vernal Equinox at the constellation Pushan could not but have been later than 5600 B. C.

Pushan seems to have lost his importance when the Vernal Equinox slipped away from him, and the New Year sacrifices began to be performed when other stars were at the Equinox. The post-Vedic literature speaks of sacrifices performed with other stars at the Equinox, specially Mrigasirsha and Kritika, which should respectively be at 4000 and 2200 B.C. But the importance of Asvins or Asvati was not due to the fact that any new year began

with them at the Vernal Equinox, for such a phenomena could not have been earlier than c.400 B. C.; but the worship of Asvins appears even in the early books of the Atharva Veda which are of great antiquity.

The first hymn AV:II.30, in which the Asvins are invoked is a sorcery hymn intended for securing a woman's love. The second hymn AV:III. 3 is "for the restoration of a king, and according to the commentary it is intended for a sacrifice that should be performed on an altar called Sutramani. Sutramani means the jewel of the sutras or secrets. What the secret is can be found only by research in ancient Hindu mathematics.

The Sutramani altar or the Soutramani is the second of a series of three altars, Mahavedi, Sutramani and Pautrika. The area of the Sutramani should be one-third of the first and three times the area of the third. Such an altar cannot be constructed without an accurate value of the root of the surd 3. If this is properly accomplished one is sure to get a better value for the root of three than that we use at the present time. A search of the Vedic hymns may reveal several more secrets like this concealed in them. These secrets or values may have been communicated only by the teacher to the disciple at the performance of such sacrifices. These altars were constructed in brick, and as such those who constructed them must have been craftsmen and scientists combined.

Hindu science and religion were once inseparably mixed and complementary to each other. It was but natural, as both were beneficial to man.

It will be found that some of these sacrifices were demonstration classes, at which theory and practice of mathematical principles were taught to the students.

However, if the Vedic history is set in chronology it will be found that the hymns referred to belong to a period earlier than 2500 B. C. This would mean that the Asvins were worshipped in India before 2500 B. C., or before the presumed invasion or incursion of the Aryans to India. The scholars are of opinion that the horse was brought to India by the Aryans. In the Veda the horse is known by 'Turaga'; but why it is called 'turaga' no explanation is forthcoming. Turaga would appear to have been derived from Dravidian 'Kutira', which means an animal that gallops. The change of consonant 'ka' to 'ga' is very common in Indian languages. The change in the order of syllables is also not unknown. The Maharashtra equivalent of Tamil 'rasam' or 'rasa' is 'sara'. The Dravidian equivalent of Asvin is Asvati, which means like a horse; and Asva or horse must have been known to the Hindus before they first named the twenty-seven stars of their Zodiac.

It is not only the Vedic Rishis who took notice of Asvati, but the sorcerers and the anti-sorcerers before them. It is a practice even now in Kerala among anti-sorcerers to swear by the name of Asvati, along with Aditya (the Sun) and Chandra (the Moon). In many pre-Rig Vedic or pre-Aryan hymns Asvins are invoked, as is done in Rig Vedic hymns.

The Asvins are three stars that give light when

there is no Moon ; Sunahsepa one of the earliest Rishis of the Rig Veda says that they are "a light that giveth light to man", another Rishi Kutsa says that they "encompass the Sun when far away". Were they the Dawn as is alleged, the plurality of their name would have no foundation, as they would have encompassed the Sun from his vicinity and not from far away.

Some are of the opinion that the Asvins appear before the Dawn (Ushas), that comes before sunrise. But this is based on the misapprehension that the Asvins and Nasatyas are the same. However, it clashes with the order given in the hymn RV: I. 92, by Gotama, in which he says that "Dawn laid the darkness open.....and it drives away the darksome monster" (verses 5 and 6). It is only after finishing his invocation to the Dawn that the author directs his attention to the Asvins, which should indicate that they are still visible in the sky ; and that is a matter of fact ; some stars are visible even after daybreak, or sunrise.

No doubt, these stars shine bright in the dead of the night, even brighter than Pushan. The allegory of the Asvins taking Surya (sunlight) the daughter of the Sun, in their chariot to the Moon to be wedded may have risen from the fact that when the Moon rises in the night these stars lose their lustre.

However, the worship of the Asvins has not been brought by the Aryans, and it has originated in India, like the worship of Indra.

CHAPTER 7

INDRA

Indra was the supreme god of the Rig Vedis, held in even higher estimation than Agni and Varuna. But he was worshipped as such even before the Rig Vedic period. He was worshipped before the days of Ikshvaku (son of Manu Vaivasvata), who ascended the throne of Ayodhya, 135 generations before Pushyamitra usurped the throne of Magadha (c. 180 B. C.). He was worshipped even earlier, as Satakratu, by the descendants of Manu Svayambhuva (self-born), the first of the recorded Manus; and as Indra by the descendants of Manu Raivata.

The word Indra may have originated from a combination of Indu (the Moon) and Ra (the Sun), perhaps when his worship went very high. He, as storm god, usurped the powers of Rudra (Siva), the Sun and the Moon. As the rain-giving god, he usurped the power of Rudra, whose three-sula (three-pronged spear) appeared in his hand as Vajra or Lightning. He occupied the Sun's position in the East as the guardian deity of that Quarter. He reigned in Svarga (Heaven) where he gathered all the good people, dead or alive, without giving a chance to go to Chandraloka, the region of the Moon.

The early Vedic conception of him was as the controller of lightning. The Atharvans prayed to him to keep away the shaft of the missiles, when

the clouds embraced the tree, and the quivering dexterous reeds (bamboos) sang (AV : I. 2 and 3). The next approach to him was to assist them in destroying their enemies :—

“Do thou, Agni, bring hither the sorcerers bound ;

Let Indra with the thunder-bolt crush their heads.”

(AV : I. 7. 7)

Indra received his full powers long before the Rig Vedic period (before 2500 B. C.), when the Atharva Vedis sang his glories thus :—

“Now I proclaim the heroism of Indra,
Which first he of thunder-bolt did ;
He slew the Dragon (Ahi) ; he penetrated the
waters ;

.....

Tvashatar fashioned for him the whizzing
thunderbolt...”

He slew Vritra, split Vala.....AV : II. 5:
These are nothing but the exploits of Indra which the Rig Vedic Rishis also sang, but with greater details, local colouring and personal motives. From Bharadvaja hymns of the Rig Veda Book VI, it will be seen how high he became as their one strong champion in the van for the battle” (RV : VI. 17).

The Vedic conception of Indra was different from the Puranic or mythical ; the former was scientific. The author of the hymn RV: IV. 18,

Vamadeva, makes Indra speak about his birth and activities thus :—

Verse 1. "This is the ancient and accepted way
by which all gods have come into
existence.

I hereby could one be born though
waxen mighty,
Let him not otherwise destroy his
mother.

2. Not this way I go forth ; hard is the
passage,
Forth from the sides obliquely will
I issue.

Much that is yet undone must I accom-
plish :
One must I combat and the other
question."

Indra is a phenomenon that occurs when the rain clouds sweep the sky. "Forth from the side (of the clouds) obliquely I issue." It is from the sides or edges of the clouds that the manifestation of Indra takes place, where the positive and negative electricity cumulate and discharge. Generally the birth takes place from the centre—"not this way I go forth." If I had come out through the centre, like all gods have done, I would have destroyed my mother. I have to accomplish many things ; one I must question, while others I must destroy. The questioning will be seen in the repeated glow of light that appears through the outline of clouds when they approach each other from a distance. Some I must destroy. The destruction takes place when the positively and

negatively charged clouds clash with each other and cause the rain.

3. "He bent his eye upon his dying mother ;
I now withdraw. That way I follow.
In Tvashatar's dwelling Indra drank the
A hundred worth of juice pressed from
the mortar."

In his intention, not to kill his mother, the rain-bearing clouds, he was not successful. For he went to Tvashatar's dwelling ; Tvashtar, the first artificer in metals, fashioned the weapon of Vajra, lightning for him, and came back enervated with the intoxicating drink of Soma (like a soldier who goes forward to the battlefield enervated with drink). When armed with lightning, he became the slayer of his mother, the rain-bearing clouds.

4. "What a strange act shall he do, he whom
his mother
Bore for a thousand months and many
autums?.....
5. Deeming him a reproach, his mother hid
him,
Indra endowed with all heroic valour
Then upsprang himself, assumed his ves-
ture, and filled
As soon as he was born, the earth and
heaven.
6. With lively motion onward flow these
waters, the holy

Ones, shouting as it were together.

Ask them to tell thee what the floods are
saying,

What gurgling rock the waters burst as-
under.

7. Are they addressing him with words of
welcome?

Will the floods take on them the shame
of Indra?

With his great thunder-bolt my son has
slaughtered

Vritra, and set these rivers free to wan-
der."

Vritra was the force that held together the waters in the clouds, but the clouds, charged with opposite kinds of electricity on coming closer to each other produced great strokes of lightning, which discharged the waters that came down with gurgling noise. This was killing Vritra, who held the waters together. The poet then humorously asks, "Are the waters by their gurgling sound welcoming Indra, or are they saying that they condemn Indra for killing his own mother? But the mother, like all mothers, excused him:—

8. "I cast thee from me, mine thy youthful
mother;

Thee mine own offspring, Kushava hath
swallowed,

To him my infant, were the waters gracious,
Indra, my son, rose up in conquering
vigour.

9. Thou art mine own, O Maghavan, when
Vyansa struck

To the ground and smote thy jaws in
 pieces,
 But smitten though, the mastery thou won-
 nest, and
 With thy bolt the Dasa's head thou
 crushest."

According to Sayana, the Vedic commentator, Kushava was a female demon who swallowed up Indra at his birth; and Vyansa was the father of Indra. This shows that even to Indra, a hidden force in nature, they have given father or creator and a swallower or end. Though the commentators have not explained what these were meant to be, if their roots are traced to Santhali, a primitive language, the significance of these names will become obvious. Vyansa may have derived from 'vyan' or 'byan,' birth or parturition and Kushava from 'Kushava' to suck or absorb.

All nature gods of the Hindus, like Indra, are not mere 'bogeymen.' They are natural phenomena, observed, studied, and understood, and then deified. When God remains unknown, why should one not deify the known forces, especially if they are beneficial? After all, man's approach to God is primarily as a benefactor.

So they sang the praise of Indra and revered
 him.

"We reverence Indra; constantly reverence
 him;

These praise hymns of the Vritra slayer have
 come up to me ;

He who goes to the call of the worshiper,
of the
Well-doer let him free us from distress."

by Mragra (AV : II. 42)

This sort of reverence for Indra can never be well appreciated without a full realisation of the conditions in India just before the rains. There long before the countryside dries up, not a blade of grass is found. The cows will be roaming about in search of dry leaves to satisfy their hunger. The buffaloes will be wallowing in mud to keep themselves cool. The brain-fever birds will be distressing the world by their shrieks. Chatak (another kind of bird) will be looking at every passing clouds and seem to be begging for water in mournful tones. Because of the intense heat men will be seeking shady trees, which are few and far between. No work on the land is done. Day by day they will be watching the moon to see whether its angle indicates the coming of the rains. It is to this dry and parched earth that Indra brings the downpour of rains, with his brandishing weapon of lightning and thunder. Really he is a god who saves the people from distress.

This god they propitiate with sacrifices and prayer. Special hymns were made for his praise; special libations were made for his drink; and special animals, and many of them, were sacrificed in his honour. Indra held the imagination of the Vedic people over a thousand years, when he contested with other nature gods for supremacy. Then his popularity waned. The reason evidently was that the people realised that he himself depended on

another god, the Sun, for all his activities. Yet the god they worshipped was not to be discarded, therefore they made him a set of rays emanating from the Sun and through the worship of the Sun they revered him and gratefully remembered him.

Now, nobody worships him, except perhaps the aborigines, who once a year sacrifice a spotted fowl and offer its blood to him in gratitude for the showers which helped them to cultivate their fields.

However, in the Puranic age, he received a great deal of attention from the story writers and myth-makers. They have given him a high place in Svarga or heaven, where he lives in perpetual enjoyment, in the midst of singing and dancing with his wives and family. He fights with demons, but often runs away from the battlefield, to seek the assistance of Brahma and particularly of Vishnu. When Vishnu usurped the powers of the Sun, or when the Sun became identified with Vishnu, Indra in turn became a dependent of Vishnu.

The revolt against Indra worship was started by Krishna about a thousand years before Christ, when Krishna stopped the annual sacrifice at Gokula intended for Indra. The Puranic story-tellers say that Indra in rage let loose all the clouds, and flooded out Gokula, and Krishna by holding up Mandra mountain protected the cows and Gopals. In the end Indra came down from heaven on his white elephant and made peace with Krishna. Indra lost his prestige with the loss of sacrifices, and he became a dependent of Vishnu, when Krishna was conceived an 'avatar' or incarnation of Vishnu.

CHAPTER 8

VARUNA

Varuna stands very high in the order of the Vedic gods, next to Agni and Indra. Though the Western scholars, like Ragozin, consider him as one of the gods the Indo-Aryans brought to India, he will be seen as being worshipped by the primitive Atharva Vedis long before the date given by them for the Aryan conquest. He appears for the first time in the Atharva Veda as the father or generator of the reed, along with Parjanya, Mittra, the Sun and the Moon. (AV: 1.3). The author of the Atharva Veda hymn IV: 16 says that, "the two oceans (the Western and the Eastern seas) are his pouches" and he is also hidden in "petty water". Those who take him for a sky god trace the word Varuna to the root 'var', to cover. But the Atharva Vedic conception of him is given thus: "As ye waters were flowing previously (apakaman), since Indra verily hindered (var) you by his powers ye divine ones, therefore the name var (water is assigned to you)". (AV: III. 13.) This interpretation is in line with the popular conception. For, Var or Vari stands for water as is seen in words 'Varidhi' and 'varar-nidhi' for the ocean.

However, to the Atharva Vedis he was not a sky-god. His position as a sea-god is confirmed by two Atharva Veda hymns, AV: III. 27 and IV. 40; both are for the purpose of fixing the eight cardinal points, and in both Varuna is given the

western quarter, or the direction of the western sea, to guard. The author of the second hymn, Sukra, is a great Silpi or architect, who is quoted even now as an authority by the indigenous architects of India. According to Puranic chronology, Sukra stands 132 generations before the accession of Pushyamitra (King of Magadha), which took place c. 180 B. C. and also 63 generations before Sudasa 'the reputed Aryan conqueror'.

The undoubted nature of Varuna as a sea-god will be seen from the following quotations from Manava Dharma Sastra or Manu Smriti. (1) "King should not appropriate the fine from the criminal, let him throw it into the water to god Varuna" (MD : IX. 243—244). (2) "As Varuna..... binds the guilty in fatal cords, thus let him representing the genius of water keep the offenders in close confinement (MD : I X. 308).

In view of these undeniable evidences from the Veda and Dharma Sastra, the arguments that have been brought forward to establish Varuna as a sky-god may be scrutinised. These arguments and their rejoinders will show that there is nothing incompatible in considering Varuna as a sea-god.

Argument (1) In the name of the "all-enfolder" Varuna covers "the wide world with a robe".

Rejoinder : During the period of "pralaya" or primordial flood, the embryonic world was covered with waters, and it was the unfolding of the water that brought the world to the view.

Hence Varuna can deserve the epithet of the enfolder of the world. The Hindu idea of cosmic evolution completely fits in with this poetical conception.

Argument (2) Varuna measured out the earth and marked out her utmost ends.

Rejoinder : India or 'Jambu Dvipa' (the island Jambu) having most of its limits being bound with water, it can be said without much error that Varuna measured up her boundaries.

Argument (3) "He (Varuna) has encompassed the night around ; he has by his wisdom established the dawns ; he visibly encompasses all things" (RV : VIII. 41.3).

Rejoinder : As the Sun sets in the western sea and rises up from the eastern sea, it could be said that the sea or Varuna, the god of the seas encompasses the night around.

Argument (4) "Varuna laid out the Sun's path, and for days he appointed wide tracks ; and sent the waters coursing the sea and guided them as a racer does his mares. His breath is the wind that rushes through the air" (RV : VII. 87.1)

Rejoinder : As the Sun sets down in the western sea and rises up from the eastern sea, who could have laid out a

path for him except Varuna, the god of the seas ? As the days also disappear and rise up again like the Sun, he made wider tracks for them : enormously bigger than a path. He, the god of the sea, draws all waters to sea, and during the rains they tumble down to sea as race horses guided by a divine hand. A visitor to the sea-coast can see gushes of wind coming from the sea as if it were the god of the sea breathing.

Argument (5) “He (Varuna) leads forth the great, the holy sun-steed.....When I gaze upon his face, I seem to see him as the blazing fire, as the king causes me to behold the splendours of the light and darkness in the heavens” (RV : VII. 88.2).

Rejoinder : The Egyptian conception is that the Sun does his daily round in a boat ; while the Hindu conception is that the Sun travels in a chariot drawn by 12 horses representing the twelve months of the year, with Aruna, the red rays of the Sun as his charioteer. Is it not Varuna or the sea that leads the sun forth to our view, while we stand by the sea ? If the poet, the author of the hymn, were not on the sea-side, and if he were like Kalidas in an inland town like

Avanti, he would have said, in fact as he has done, that the mountains in the east gave birth to the rising sun. Then again the poet, just as any one of us, must have seen the blazing fire especially at sunset, to enable him to behold the splendours of light and darkness. This cannot make one think that the poet was acquainted with the sun-rising phenomenon in the east as well as the sun-setting phenomenon in the west, both from the sea-shore.

Argument (6) "The stars up there, that are seen at night, where do they hide in the day? But Varuna's ordinances are immutable, and the Moon goes shining brightly through the night" (RV : I. 24.10).

Rejoinder : Every observer of the celestial phenomena cannot but ask the questions—whereto the stars go in the night and whence comes the Moon that shines brilliantly at night. They cannot but have realised that the stars were in the day where the Sun was in the night. But who brings about it better than the god of the sea who brings them up and takes them down? But Varuna's Laws in his capacity as a supreme god are immutable, nobody can change them, as they are the Laws of Nature. The

Vedic Rishis did not, and the majority of the Hindus do not, believe that penance and prayer can make God's law to be changed, and their inclination to 'fatalism' or 'karma' is based on their conviction that the laws of Nature are immutable. One who sows must reap.

Some are of the opinion that the Vedic Rishis had no experience of the sea. This is mainly based on the presumption their ancestors came from an inland country and the hymns were made in the inland regions of India. But there are passages, especially in the Rig Veda, which should disprove this. For example, one Vasistha sings :—

“When Varuna and I embark together and urge our boat in the midst of the ocean, we, when we ride over ridges of the waters, will sing within that swing and there be happy.”

The very nature of the hymn will indicate that it was not a celestial ocean that the author had in view.

According to the Rig Veda, Varuna was the most dreaded of all Vedic gods. His laws were immutable, and he strictly ruled according to his ordinances. The Atharvans do not appear to have dreaded him so much. They did not even hesitate to release his victim, and give him “a hundred autumns to live” (AV : I. 10.)

In the Rig Vedic approach to Varuna there is a tone of repentance and guilt. One of their early and foremost Rishis, Suanhsepa, prays—

“With bending down oblations, sacrifices, O Varuna, we deprecate thine anger.....loosen the bonds of sins by us committed.....So in thy holy Laws may we be made sinless” (RV : I. 24, 14). Another Rishi Vasistha asks—“What has become of our ancient friendship when without enmity we walked together ? If he, thy true ally, hath sinned against thee, still.....he is the friend thou lovest” RV : VII. 88. 5, (6). He again says—“With mine own heart I commune on the question how Varuna and I may be united ? With what gift of mine will he be unangered ? When may I calmly look and find him gracious ? Fain to know this my sin I question others..... This one answer even the sages gave me. Surely this Varuna is angry with me.” (RV : VII. 86. 2, 3.)

The secret of the sin committed against Varuna will be seen from the post-Vedic literature. According to that will be seen that Sunahsepa himself was once an offered victim to Varuna, Rohita, son of Harischandra, king of Ayodhya, was born to be a victim to Varuna ; but in his place Sunahsepa was brought to the sacrificial altar. But due to a difference of opinion among the Rishis who assembled at the sacrifice, Sunahsepa, who was tied on the stake, was released and set free. Evidently it is that sin which Sunahsepa laments about. It will be seen that the one who stopped the intended sacrifice was Visvamitra, and it was his son, Madhuchhandas and adopted son, Sunahsepa, who started the Rig-Vedic group. The idea of original sin among the Christians rose from eating the forbidden fruit; while it is obvious

the idea of sin among the Rig Vedis originated from depriving Varuna of his 'lawful meat.'

The importance of Varuna became less since he, like Indra, and other Vedic gods, was placed on the rays of the Sun, by the propounders of the Upanishads. But the worship of Indra still continues as a sea-god, especially among the sea-fearing people who lives in coastal areas. No ship is launched without making an offering to Varuna. On the coast of Gujarat Varuna or the flood is appeased by offering sacrifices. There often will be seen the village headman throwing effigies of a bride's crown made of plantain leaf and a bit of sari into the flood, followed by few drops of blood from his own hand, all to appease Varuna.

The relics of Varuna worship are still traceable in the inland places in North India, in their Gudia festival, when a home-made rag doll is made to represent a girl of the house, and taken in procession to a flooded tank, and thrown out to the flood, while the boys keep it down belabouring with sticks to the great joy and elation of the crowd. Varuna used to be satisfied with only human sacrifice. Since the animal and human sacrifices were substituted by ritualistic rites, even Varuna has to be satisfied with substitutes.

Indians especially those in the Peninsular regions from time immemorial were sea-faring; and Varuna was the god of the sea-farers. An intelligent perusal of the Bhagavata, a book of southern origin, will give evidence to it.

CHAPTER 9

MITRA

Mitra is supposed to be one of the Vedic gods with a foreign origin, whom the Indo-Aryans brought with them from a proto-Aryan home. Ragozin says that he “retains all the qualities which distinguished him before the separation of the races”. This supposition received further confirmation with the discovery of the Bhogaz-kui tablets containing the text of a treaty between the rulers of Khetta (the Hittites of Anatolia) and their neighbours the Mitannians.....The former spoke an ‘Indo-Germanic’ language and the latter an ‘Indo-Aryan’ language. The date of the treaty has been fixed as 1400 B. C. In this treaty Mitra of Mi-it-ra has been invoked as a witness along with Varuna (U-ru-w-na), Indra (In-dar) and Nasatya (Na-sa-an-na). Though neither the antecedents of the Mitannians nor of the Hittites have been discovered, a branch of some of them is supposed to have introduced this god to India. The name of this god appears in the Rig Veda, which in turn is supposed to be the first literary work of the Indo-Aryans who conquered India under the leadership of Sudasa. But the worship of Mitra would appear to have been in India long before Sudasa. For, according to Puranic chronology, fourteen generations or about three centuries before Sudasa, who was a king of the Aryan or Vedic settlement on the banks of the defunct river Sarasvati in the East Punjab, there was a king of Ayodhya far east on the banks

of the river Sarju and his priest who were called after this god. This king was called Mitra-saha-Kalmaspada and his priest Vasistha was called Maitra-Varuni or son of Mitra and Varuna. If this god was not worshipped on the banks of the Sarju at this date, neither the king nor his priest would have been called after this god.

Unfortunately from the Rig Veda the peculiar qualities of this god cannot be ascertained. All except in one hymn he appears with Varuna, whose qualities he seems to share. However, there is a hymn in one of the earliest books of the Atharva Veda from which his qualities could be ascertained. The hymn under reference is AV:III·8 where it is stated, "Let Mitra come, arrange with the Seasons, uniting the earth with the Ruddy Ones; then to us let Varuna, Vayu, Agni, assign great royalty of union."

Here the Ruddy Ones are evidently the Rising and the Setting Suns; and Mitra is invoked to arrange the Seasons with the Earth and these Suns. Even a schoolboy will answer that what arranges the seasons is the annual movement of the earth in relation to the Sun. The author of the hymn may not have seen the earth rotating round the Sun; but he could evidently have seen the rising and the setting Sun changing their positions month by month if not from day to day, and the seasons recurring according to these changed positions of the Sun on the horizon. The Sun keeps on moving northward or southward in the horizon. When the rising Sun is furthest south it is the height of the cold season and when it is furthest north it is the

season of great heat. These movements of the Sun they called Ayanas, literally movements. Southward movement they called Dakshnayana, and the northward movement Uttarayana. The extreme limits of these movements are even now recorded by the Hindu astronomers year by year in their calendar; and the people also celebrate these occasions with great zeal and enthusiasm.

How they first fixed these dates is difficult to say. But the Hindu astronomy, if it were not imported from elsewhere would appear to have started with the observation of the Sun's shadows, the shadows that shorten and lengthen as the day advances, and reaching a minimum in mid-day. The shadows cast by the human body were measured by one's own feet and fingers, and used to determine the time of the day; this is even now done by the rustics. But for strict observation of time they used gnomons or Sankhs about nine Angulas or $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches in length, set up in the centre of a circle with a radius equal to twice the length of the gnomon. The same arrangement is excellent in fixing the limits of the Sun's amplitude in the horizon. They manipulated the shadows for fixing the four cardinal points, a method by means of which even now the indigenous architects in India orientate their buildings accurately. From the days of Mohenjodaro of third millenium B. C. it will be seen that the Hindus were very particular about true orientation of their buildings. In the absence of the magnetic compass, the Indus Valley people would appear to have used the shadow correction methods for orientation.

However, evidently it was the changing or moving Sun, who made the Seasons, they called Mitra and worshipped as such. By the time this idea was developed they had already a god in the western quarter whom they called Varuna, and the west was known as Varuna quarter or Varuna. Therefore, to designate the Mitra phenomenon in the west they qualified him as Mitra-Varuna or Mitra in the west, while this phenomenon in the east was still called Mitra unqualified, at any rate for a time. In the east too they had a god in the Sun. In course of time Mitra lost his individuality as he represented only one phase of the Sun, and merged in the Sun, hence the neglect of his worship as an individual god.

Now as Mitra was a god who changed in position in the horizon from day to day, the most convenient time for his worship, they fixed at his furthest points of transit, or on the days he changes his course. Makara-Sankranti in the cold season indicates the beginning of his northward movement, and Karkata Sankranti his southward motion. Both are days of celebration. In North India these days are observed by bathing festivals, while in South India by illuminations—by illuminating mainly temples, though preceded by individual or collective bathing.

Even the aborigines celebrate the Makara-Sankranti. They go in procession to nearby streams or tanks, and after immersion don fresh clothes, spend the whole day in feasting and merry-making culminating in a dance lasting often throughout the night. Some hill tribes celebrate the day by pro-

ducing the frictional fire in true Vedic fashion to be used for the whole year. These festivals would appear to have their parallels in Western countries, where they once would appear to have celebrated by bonfires on mid-winter and mid-summer nights, which according to anthropologists are the forerunners of the Christmas and St. John Baptist's celebrations of the Christians. Mitra or Mithra worship was once prevalent in many countries of Asia Minor, before it reached Europe. The Egyptians celebrated the Nativity of the Sun on that day from which the day began to lengthen and the power of the Sun began to increase. They represented the new-born Sun by the image of an infant and if possible by a new-born babe, which they exhibited to the devotees. G. Fraser says "Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun ; and it appears that the Christian church chose to celebrate the birthday of its founder on the 25th December in order to transfer the devotion of the heathen from the Sun to him who was called the Son of Righteousness".

However, the difference between Mitra and Mithra is negligible. And as both are identified with the Sun, they are virtually the same god. Is it not possible that Mitra worship originated in India, then spread to Persia, from there to Asia Minor and European countries ? In the West, no doubt the Son of Righteousness made Mithra disappear ; and in India advancement in the worship of the Sun as god over all other gods of the Vedic pantheon, as expounded by the school of the Upa-

nishads, made him dwindle and his antecedents forgotten.

First Mitra the season-making god was worshipped as the moving Sun in the east and the west. Then when the Sun was conceived as twelve in number, making twelve months, the northward moving and southward moving Mitras becoming two of them, lost their identity. It is natural in every progressive religion that the conceptions change, gods change, their attributes change, and some of them will even be forgotten.

Another reason for forgetting Mitra or Moving Sun can be attributed to the introduction of the Solar Calendar, by which the entry of the Sun in each of the Zodiac signs marks the beginning of the month, and commencing the New Year with the Vernal Equinox. Post-Vedic literature gives reference to this ; but the practice is older than the Vedic period. For one of the eras, the Kali Era, which is still a living era for the Hindu astronomers and astrologers, will be seen as commencing from the Vernal Equinox of 3101 B. C. According to Arya Bhata, the Vernal Equinox in 499 A. D. was fixed at the first point of Mesha Rasi or on the 1st of the month Mesha. Vernal Equinox is known by the name of Vishu, which is a day of celebration even among the aborigines.

The worship of Mitra or Mithra is said to have gone to Europe from Persia through the countries of Asia Minor. The worship of him was common among the Roman soldiers. In the Roman sculpture of about 90 B. C. Mithra is represented as a

handsome youth slaying a bull. No one appears to have given an explanation for this design. If it is presumed that the Roman Mithra is the same as the Hindu Mitra and the worship of him has gone from India it is not impossible to give a legend for this design.

According to the Hindu astronomers, the Bull, Etiru (in Tamil) or Tauros (in Greek) represents the month of Vrishabha (May-June). Therefore, the slaying of the bull may stand for the end of month Vrishabha. According to the Hindu Almanac, say of 1958, the southernmost transit of the Sun coincides with the end of Mithuna, the end of the month after Vrishabha. Hence if the last point of Sun's transit had coincided with the end of Vrishabha it must have happened about 2100 years earlier or about 140 B. C. Therefore the conception of Mithra killing the Bull could have originated in India of 140 B. C. and between 140 and 90, the idea could have penetrated to Europe or be taken by the Greeks who were trading with the Malabar Coast of India.

(AV : I, 32). Another Rishi Vena gave this mystery a name "The Brahman that was the first-born of old, Vena, hath disclosed from the well-shining edge ; he disclosed the fundamental barest shape of it, the Womb (Yoni) of the existent and of the unexistent....." He who was born forth, the knowing relative of it speaks all the births of the gods ; he bore up the Brahman from the midst of the Brahman ; downward, upward, he set forth unto the swadhas (Nature gods) (AV : IV. 1). Vena again speaks of this unknown God and the Creation:

"The golden embryo was evolved in the beginning ; it was when born, the sole lord of existence; it maintained the earth and heaven..... The Waters, generating a youth (Vatsa), set in motion in the beginning an embryo, and of that, when born, the foetal development was gold....." (AV : IV. 2).

Has cosmic evolution ever been explained in better terms ? This was done, according to the Puranic chronology, some 131 generations before Pushyamitra, who ascended the throne of Magadha c. 180 B. C.

Another Rishi Kutsa (by AV : X. 8) explains Brahman thus :—

"He who is set over both what is and what is to be and everything, and whose alone is the heaven..... By the Skamba (framework of creation) these two stand apart, both sky and earth

In skamba (is) all this that soul, what (is) breathing and what winking.....”

Contemplation such as this of Brahman was not for all. Therefore, special schools were established for study and realisation of Brahman. One school for such purpose dates from 67 generations before Pushyamitra. Another school was established some fifteen generations later. Both the schools tried to expand the theme of Brahman. Some in their exposition of Brahman got entangled with the Self. Hence there arose divergence between the conception of Brahman.

The conception of Brahman by Sandilya of the Atharva Vedic school may be seen from the following. According to him :—

“The intelligent whose body is spirit, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like ether, from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odours and tastes proceed; he who embraces all this, who never speaks, and is never surprised. He is myself within the heart, is that Brahman. When I shall have departed from hence, I shall obtain Him. (Chhand-Upani: III.14,2,4).

When Brahman began to be perceived in the Self within the man another school of thought came to existence. Taking the essence in man, they began to expound that life which consisted of five types of breathing was Brahman. Others began to see Brahman in Pancha-Bhutas, *i.e.* Fire, Air, Earth, Water, and Ether. Then one school came to the

conclusion that the Sun was the source of everything, and on this realisation they placed all the Vedic gods on the race of the Sun from whom they have derived their essence and power. But those who developed the theme of Brahman were not to be baffled. They contended, while admitting the Sun as the visible source of cosmic power in the world, that the Sun himself must derive his power from some other unseen force which they designated Brahman. Hence the secret doctrine of the Sun as well as the secret doctrine of Brahman was propounded.

The Rig Vedic reaction to Brahman may be seen from the following narrative in the Upanishad:

Balaki, a proud Brahman of Gargya Gotra went to Ajatasatru, king of Kasi, to teach him Brahman. The king offered him a reward of a thousand cows. Balaki asked him to meditate on that being in the Sun as Brahman. The king did not agree. Then he was asked to meditate in succession on the beings in the Moon, lightning, ether, wind, fire, water, self-reflection in the mirror, echo of the foot-steps, space, shadow, etc.

Though the king admitted the relative importance of these meditations, he asserted that these are not enough by which to know Brahman. Thereupon Balaki wished to learn from the king, though he was not a Brahmana. The king then took him to a sleeping man, who did not answer to his address, though couched in glorifying terms. But when he was shaken to consciousness, he got up. Ajatasatru then asked Balaki, "When this

man was thus asleep, where was the person (Purusha), the intelligent, and whence did he come back?" Balaki did not know. The king explained, "When this man was asleep, then the intelligent Purusha, having through the intelligence of the 'pranas' absorbed within himself all intelligence, lies in the ether, which is in the heart. When he takes in these different kinds of intelligence, then it is said that the man sleeps (svapiti). When the breath is kept in, speech is kept in, the ear is kept in, the eye is kept in, the mind is kept in." This is the dream state, and in the dream state the Self may move about as it pleases, taking the organs with it as it pleases. When in profound sleep, it knows nothing and rests in the surrounding body, and rests in perfect happiness. When it is awake, "as the spider comes out with its thread, or small sparks of fire come forth from the fire, thus do all senses, all worlds, all gods, all beings, come forth from that Self." This is the Secret Doctrine of the Self, which is called "the True of the True." (Brihad: II. 11-20.)

Here, it may be noticed that Balaki, after having failed to convince Ajatasatru about his conception of Brahman, goes back convinced with the Self. It would appear to this school that Self was more important than Brahman, for the development of which the Rig Vedis had no hand. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which is admitted to be the most important and the oldest Upanishad of the Rig Vedic school, really begins with the Self. "In the beginning this was Self alone"

He, on looking round, saw nothing but his self.

He first said, 'This is I,' therefore he became 'I by name.' He knew 'I indeed am this creation, for I created all this.' (Brihad : 1.4.1-5).

They even would appear to have scoffed at the idea of Brahman, when they said, "Here they say : 'If men think that by knowledge of Brahman they will become everything, what then did that Brahman know, whence all this sprang.'" (Brihad : 1.4.7 and 9).

Yajnavalkya (not the author of Sukleya Yajur) is the leading character in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. His discourses with Janaka, king of Videha, his discussions with Sakalya, his advice to Maitreyi, his wife, etc., fill the pages of Brahmadaranyaka Upanishad. When he was asked by Ushasta Chakrayana to tell "the Brahman which is 'visible, not invisible, the Self (atman) who is within all', Yajnavalkya replied, 'He who breathes in the up-breathing....., who breathes in the out-breathing, he is thy Self, and within all. This is thy Self within all.'" Ushasta objected that such a definition of the self is applicable even to a horse or cow. Yajnavalkya replied : "Thou could not see the perceiver of preception, know the knower of knowledge. This is thyself, who is within all."

Self eventually became a Doctrine of Liberation. This will be seen from Sanatkumara's teaching to Narada. Narada was a most learned sage and he had known all the four Vedas, the rules of the sacrifices, Veda of the the Vedas, the science of Rasi (Numbers), Daiva (portents), and Nidhi (wealth), Brahma-vidya, Bhuta-vidya, Kashatra-vidya, Astro-

logy, Astronomy, Logic, Phonetics, singing, dancing, acting, etc. Yet he was not free from intellectual ailment. He approached Sanatkumara in grief, hoping that a true knowledge of the Self would give him deliverance. Sanatkumara, like the others of his school, emphasized that the meditation on 'Prana' (life) as the best means for the realisation of the Self. The one who perceived and understood Prana correctly, he is called an 'atvadin.', one who declared the Highest Being to be true. But one who does not understand the True, cannot declare the True. Without perceiving one cannot understand. Without belief one cannot perceive. Attention to a tutor brings belief. One who does not give attention to a tutor without a desire for the performance of one duties. Without performance of duties, one cannot attain bliss. But there is no bliss in anything finite. One should, therefore, desire to understand the Infinite. The Infinite is everywhere. It "is below, above, behind, before, right and left." The infinite is the I. "I am below, I am above, I am behind, before, right and left." But as the Infinite is the self, "Self is below, above, behind, before, right and left—self is all this." "He who sees, perceives, and understands this, lives the Self, rejoices in the self—he becomes a Swaraj (ruler of the Self); he is Lord and Master in all the worlds." (Chhand: VII. 1—25).

The realisation of the self, such as this, is not achieved by asceticism or self-torture, but in fact only through 'ana' and 'apa', or food and drink that are most essential. Sanatkumara says that if

a man abstain from food for ten days, though he may live, he would be unable to see, hear, perceive, think, act and understand (Chhand: VII. 9). He further emphasises that food and drink should precede dhyana (reflection), vijnana (understanding) and bala (power).

Uddalaka demonstrated to his son Svetaketu that fifteen out of sixteen parts of 'Purusha' (man) consist of food, by making his son fast for fifteen days, except for a sip of water occasionally, and asking him to repeat certain Vedic texts, which he knew by heart, and proving his inability to do it.

Bhragu Varuni sought to know Brahman or "that from which all beings here are born, by which they remain alive, into which on departing they enter." He started from the assumption that food was Brahman, as Prana, (life) depended on food. On contemplation he realised that 'manas' or mind was greater than Prana, hence he thought the mind was Brahman. Then by different stages in contemplation he found Vijnana (knowledge) greater than mind, bliss greater than mind, and came to the conclusion that bliss was Brahman, and all beings were born from bliss, remain alive in bliss, and on departing, or after death or destruction, enter into bliss, that Supreme Bliss, that is hidden in the cave of the Intellect.

It is not the Self that is the "Ruler and Master in all the worlds" that concerns the common man, but it is a self, that is somewhat restricted. The Chandogya Upanishad of the Atharvaveda says that "In the city of Brahman (body) there is a place,

with a lotus (heart). What exists therein is a small part of the ether. Both heaven and earth contained within it, both fire and air, both sun and moon, both lightning and stars, whatever there is of him (the self), here in the world, and whatever is not, all that contained within it." It is not killed by death. All desires are contained in it. "But those who depart from hence, after having discovered the Self and the true desire, for them there is freedom in all the worlds." (Chhand : VIII. 1-6). "That Self is a bank, a boundary, so that these worlds may not be confounded. Day and night do not pass that bank, nor old age, death, and grief ; neither good nor evil deeds. All evil-doers turn back from it, for the world of Brahman is free from all evil." Therefore, whoever crosses that bank, ceases to be blind; if wounded, ceases to be wounded ; if afflicted, ceases to be afflicted", and when the bank is crossed the night becomes the day. (Chhand : VIII. 4 1. 2).

In this world beyond the bank, whatever object one is attached to, or whatever one desires by mere wishing for it, it goes to him, if one wishes to see the father, mother, brother, sister or friends, they go to him. If one desires the world of song, music or woman, they all go to him. But all these privileges are only for those who have discovered the Self (Chhand : VIII. 2). In this there is religion, there is hope for the future, and there is inducement to conduct one's desires through desirable channels, and induce one to lead a life of usefulness and righteousness.

But "He only who realises Brahman attains the

supreme”.....“Brahmam is existence, intelligence, infinite ; he who realises him treasured in the cave in the highest ether, fulfils all wants together, as Brahmam the Omniscient”.

“The individual soul becomes fearless only when it obtains a firm and peaceful ground in that invisible, selfless, unutterable, supportless, reality (Brahmam)” (Taitt . II. 7). “If a person takes Brahmam for unreality, truly he becomes a nonentity. If he understands that Brahmam is an existent entity, in consequence of that, the wise will consider him right and good” (Taitt : II. 6).

Hence, the Atharvans of old sang :—

“Whither the Brahmam knowers go along
with concentration, with ardour thither let
Agni conduct me.....

Thither let the Moon conduct me.....

Thither let Indra conduct me.....Thither let
Brahmam conduct me ;

Let Brahmam impart to me Brahmam :—to
hail Brahmam, Hail”. (AV : XIX. 43).

Truly the Vedic gods were only guides to conduct a man’s mind to Brahmam, about whom another Atharva Vedic Rishi, Kutsa, said——

“He who is set over both what is and what
is to be and everything and whose alone
is heaven.....”(AV : X. 8).

This is still the general belief among the people, though undefined or unexpressed it might be. Brahmam is the highest conception of God that

man has ever achieved. Though myth-makers have made him a go-between between Vishnu and other gods, in the heart of every Hindu he is something supreme, and from which all has taken rise. He took rise probably in the mind of a thinker called Brahman some 4,500 years ago, and he still remains in the heart of every Hindu as indefinable and as incomprehensible as ever.

The myth-makers tried to define him by attributing qualities and characteristics ; but all human conceptions have limitations. As language fails to describe him, the artists fail to delineate him in truth, however inspired they are. He has no special temples, his images are fragmentary, his special devotees are scarce, but he is in the heart of all, where he reigns for ever as Most Supreme.

Brahmam, or Brahma is not included in the list of gods who are supposed to have been brought to India by the Aryans. As there is no mention of him in the Rig Veda, the origin of the word Brahmam may be looked for in some primitive language in India.

The Kolaryan Santali have the word 'Barem' which means brilliant or refulgent ; that itself would appear to have derived from 'Barac', to be cognisant of. Both are applicable in the case of Brahmam. There is also a possibility of Brahmam deriving from 'Param', meaning not of the world. Later on Sankararya added 'Param' to the Brahmam and designated the cosmic principle as 'Para Brahmam.'

CHAPTER 11

VISHNU

Vishnu is by far the most popular god among the Hindus. Not merely because he is one of the 'Tri-Murtis', or Hindu Trinity, but he is identified with Krishna, the frolicsome boy of Vrindavana.

Vishnu held a high position among the galaxy of the Vedic gods, though judging by the small number of hymns in which he is invoked he may not have been very popular. However, the importance that was given to him in very early days may be seen from one of the early hymns of the Atharva Veda, namely, AV: III.20. The hymn is known as Vasisthadasarcum, and according to Kaushika Samhita, it was to be sung with an offering of rice mixed with pebbles. It was to be repeated when the sacrificial fires were moved from one place to another; when bricks were laid for the construction of the Agni-sayana altars, of which there are three in number, namely, Ahavanya, in the form of a perfect square, Garhapathya a circle and Dakshina, a semi-circle. As all the three are to be equal in area, the construction of them cannot be done without a ratio between the circumference of a circle and its diameter, and without an established value for root of 2. By this hymn, god Agni is asked to turn up at the sacrifice with a number of other gods, namely, Aryaman, Bhaga, Sunrta, Soma, Aditya, Vishnu, Surya, Indra, Vayu, Sarasvati and Savitar.

All these are the most ancient gods of the Vedic people, though some have been long forgotten. Aryaman even with the importance given to the Aryans is not worshipped. Bhaga is probably worshipped by the aborigines as Bhagat, Indra too by the aborigines at times. Vayu is respectfully remembered as the father of Rama's general Hanuman and father of Bhima, the second of the Pandava cousins. Aditya and Surya, though, originally were different, Surya being the daughter of Aditya, is now being recognised as Savitar by the twice-born and remembered in their daily prayers. Soma is worshipped by fast mainly by the ladies. Sunrata is completely forgotten ; while Vishnu and Sarasvati are the only divinities of this group that are being worshipped by the Hindus in general.

Vishnu has undergone many changes. His original role may be seen from the early hymns. There he will be seen as the guardian of the fixed quarter or the Earth, with Varuna as the guardian of the West Quarter or the Sea. In this aspect Vishnu has a black-spotted serpent as the neck-defender and plants as arrow-mark, (AV:III.27). These alone should mark him out as an Earth-god. For the most primitive man Earth was a goddess; but the Vedic Rishis with a distinct aversion to goddesses would appear to have designated the Earth as a male god.

Vishnu's position as an a Earth-god becomes clearer from a later hymn in Atharva Veda, where it is stated :

“By whose force were established the spaces,
Who by heroism are most heroic, most mighty,
Who by their power lord it unopposed.

To Vishnu, to Varuna both gone the first invocation."

(AV: VII.25.1).

As the space or globe is covered by the Earth and the Oceans, and if the Oceans are represented by Varuna, the Earth should represent Vishnu. Vishnu lording over the Earth, may further be seen from the mythology in which Vishnu as Vamana rescues the Earth from Maha-Bali, by measuring it by three strides.

From the same hymn which is called 'Vishnu-panjaram', it will be seen that Vishnu, from the humble position as the guardian of the Fixed Quarter, becomes the god of all Quarters, the eight cardinal points, and up and down. The importance of this statement will be known fully when it is realised who are the guardian deities of these quarters whom Vishnu has replaced. They are Indra in the East, Agni in the South-East, Yama in the South, Nirurti in the South-West, Varuna in the West, Vayu in the North-East, Soma in the North, Isa (Siva) in the South-East, the Sun in the upper regions, and the Earth below. Evidently this was an attempt to bring all the Vedic gods under the hegemony of Vishnu, and raise him as God Supreme.

However, it would appear that Vaishnavism or the worship of Vishnu did not gather strength until Krishna was recognised as Vishnu, or the human personality of Krishna become merged with the divine attributes of Vishnu.

Krishna was born in prison, where his father, Vasudeva and his mother, Devaki were imprisoned

by his maternal uncle Kamsa, King of Agra. After Devaki's marriage, her devoted brother Kamsa was escorting the couple to their residence. Then a voice was heard that the eighth son of Devaki would be the cause of Kamsa's death. This enraged Kamsa and he was on the point of putting the couple to death. Then Vasudeva pleaded for their lives and promised to hand over all the children born of Devaki soon after they were born. However, Kamsa as a precaution imprisoned the couple and placed guard over them to see that the promise was carried out. Six boys born to Devaki were handed over in turn, and Kamsa smashed their heads on a stone. The seventh boy was substituted by a girl, who had a miraculous escape from the hands of Kamsa; while the boy was whisked away to Gokula, where the shepherd chief Nanda and his wife adopted him and brought him up as their son. Then when the eighth child, Krishna, was born, in spite of the strengthened guard round the prison, Nanda came and took the baby away in the night, crossed a flooded river, and reached Gokul in safety. Yashoda and Nanda brought up Krishna and his elder brother Balabhadra as their own children.

From that day onward many miracles began to happen. It is said when Nanda was crossing the river, the flood receded and made a pathway for him. Kamsa became furious at the escape. His vigilance at last traced them to Nanda's home. A wet nurse, Pootana was sent to poison Krishna, but he sucked her life out through her breast. Then Sakata was sent with a toy-cart; but in his

attempt to kill Krishna, he himself was killed. Many more attempts were made on Krishna's life; all of them failed. Krishna grew up with many a boyish prank. He exhibited a wonderful talent to enjoy himself and making others happy. His pranks pleased them, his mischief amused them. He sported with the village maidens, and played havoc with them. He danced with them, he played his flute to amuse them. In short he became a source of enjoyment for all.

When Krishna and his brother Balabhadra came of age, Kamsa enticed them to his capital for an annual sport. On their entry to the city-gate, they were set on by a mad elephant. Escaping from death they were led into an arena where a big tournament in wrestling was going on, and at which Kamsa himself was presiding. After having received the royal commands previously, two of the famous wrestlers, Chanura and Mushtika, engaged the youths. Chanura wrestled with Krishna and Mushtika with Balbhadra. The youths soon found that it was not a game but a trap to kill them. This infuriated them and their opponents soon met with death. This enraged Kamsa to the extreme, and he ordered his ferocious court-bruiser, Tomalaka to attack Krishna. Fighting against odds Krishna killed him too.

The infuriated Kamsa, ordered the seizure of Balbhadra and Krishna, seizure of Nanda's cattle and land, and tortured to death Devaki and Vasudeva, who were specially invited to watch the game. Then the enraged Krishna jumped over the

platform where Kamsa was seated, knocked off his crown and dashed him on to the ground with such a force that he was instantaneously killed. Thus the prophecy was fulfilled. A cry of admiration and a sigh of relief rose from the people.

Kamsa was an autocrat. He was cruel and unscrupulous. He usurped the throne from his father, who was still rotting in prison. The people were glad at the removal of Kamsa from the throne. Had Krishna desired the throne he could have occupied it with the unanimous acclamation of the people. But he did not, he sent for old Ugrasena, the aged father of Kamsa, and placed him on the throne, to the surprise of every one present.

This deed of Krishna would have been sufficient in itself to acclaim him as a god. Even a thousand years later, in European countries, for deeds of less merit, kings have been proclaimed gods. Krishna's life is full of selfless devotion to duty. He is associated with many an anecdote. Some of them are real, while others are clothed in mythological garb. Among the real ones, his fight against Jarasandha, the king of Magadha, and his fight with the Yavana, King Kala Yayava, may be mentioned.

Exploits connected with Krishna are many. This is not the place to enumerate them. He fought with many, he caused the destruction of many ; but it was all done for a good cause. He was free from personal ambition or unworthy motive. He helped the just and punished the

wicked. He was a knight-errant. He was a man of high principles. He would not help even his devoted brother-in-law, Arjun, against the rival Suyodhana in the battle of Kurukshetra, on a matter of principle.

Krishna raised the standard of revolt against the Vedic religion by stopping at Gokula the annual Satra or the great sacrifice intended for Indra. He stood against the sacrifice of innumerable animals in the sacred name of religion.

Krishna's attack on the Vedic mode of worship, and the respect he advocated for animal life made the Vedic people think and take stock of their gods and sacrifices. Indra at this time was the greatest of the Vedic gods. How could a human being stop the sacrifice intended for him? Those who act against gods are to meet with dire consequences. But look at Krishna. He thrives. He goes from victory to victory. They began to ponder. Is there anything wrong with their way of worship? Is there anything wrong with their gods? If one is to judge from what happened since then it will be evident that they did not fail to think on these lines.

First and foremost, they changed the way of worshipping the Vedic gods. They made all the animal sacrifices ritualistic. Human beings were substituted by human forms made out of dough or cooked rice. Horses were substituted by the figures drawn on the ground with rice flour and other coloured materials. Then they put their Vedic gods under test. Have they got the

qualities which were attributed to them? They scanned the sky once again. They found that all Vedic gods were depending on the Sun for their manifestations. They made the Sun therefore a god of gods, when they conceived the Sun as the cause of all cosmic activities. This doctrine in the Upanishads is known as the Secret Doctrine of the Sun, by which all Vedic gods are metaphorically placed on different rays of the Sun. Henceforward Sun worship was fostered with great zeal. Not that there was no Sun-cult earlier in existence. A school for the Sun cult was in existence long before Krishna's time, according to Puranic chronology some eleven generations before him. The first preceptor of this school was a lady called Ambini; the second preceptor was also a lady, Vac. About this time another school gave special attention to the Brahma-cult though it was much older. The first preceptor of this school was one Prajapati, known as Paramestin. This school developed the Secret Doctrine of Brahma by which Brahman was conceived as the source from which the Sun itself received his powers.

The developments such as these took a considerable time. In the meantime the disaffection created by Krishna began to bear fruit in other directions. What was the main point in Krishna's harangue at Gokula to the Gopalas or shepherds? They were told that they did not depend on Indra for their material prosperity. Being breeders of cows their prosperity depends on the cattle and the mountain slopes on which they were grazed. Or he asked them to substitute the cows and the

mountain-slopes, or grazing fields as objects of worship. They evidently followed this doctrine, and preached it wherever they went. The cow-herds and shepherds have been a wandering tribe, they went from place to place, district to district, or country to country in search of fresh grazing field for the cattle. Through them the whole of India came to know of Krishna, his childish pranks, his heroism and his stand against the Vedic religion. The common man soon idealised him as a god. No wonder at it. Even now in India men of outstanding ability or ideals are worshipped as gods.

The teachings of Krishna and his idealism began to prevail. Some of the Vedic people were not prepared to give up all their gods without a struggle. They looked for a god who would fit in with the humanitarianism of Krishna. In Vishnu they found one. Vishnu was not propitiated by animal sacrifices. Rice cooked in milk and sugar has been the main offering to propitiate him. Krishna pleaded for the cows. As a youngster he exhibited also a special liking for butter and milk. A god of Vishnu's habits could not but have pleased him. So they brought to the fore the worship of Vishnu. Vishnu being already the Earth-god, he also stood for prosperity. Did not Krishna say that they should worship the cows as well as the mountain slopes on which the prosperity of his followers was dependent?

Since then every attempt was made to make Vishnu the god of gods. When all the Vedic gods

were superimposed by the Sun, they made hymns to Vishnu to identify him with the Sun. When the Sun was superimposed by Brahma they made him take his rise from a lotus that shoots up from the navel of Vishnu.

In the artist's delineation of Vishnu, he rests on the snake Ananta, which floats on 'Palazi' or the sea of milk. From his navel there shoots up a lotus with a flower on the top, which forms the seat of the four-headed Brahma. Brahma is said to have been born of the lotus ; and Vishnu is called Padmanabha, one with the lotus as his navel. The importance of this depiction can never be realised if its cosmic importance is not understood. Long before Vishnu gained his importance, one sage Prajapati spoke of the cosmic evolution thus :—

1. "Then was not non-existent, nor existent
There was no realms of air no sky beyond it,
What covered in, and where ? and what
gave shelter ?
Was water there, unfathomed depths of
water ?
2. Death was not then, nor was aught
immortal ;
No *sign* was there, the days and night
divider.
That one thing, breathless, breathed by
its own nature ;
Apart from it was nothing whatsoever.
3. *Darkness* there was ; at first concealed in
darkness ;

3. *Darkness* there was ; at first concealed in
darkness ;

Here the seer visualises a state when there was neither existence nor non-existence when there was neither the sky nor regions. Yet there was something. Was it water? If it were so, it was fathomless. Yet there was no direction, nor the day and night divider, the Sun. But there was something that breathed without breath. Then there was darkness which at first concealed in darkness itself, though everything was indiscriminate chaos. All that existed then was void and formless. Then arose warmth (heat or Agni) and Desire on the part of the primal seed or germ Spirit. On this realisation the sages thought that they discovered a kinship between existent and non-existent, which served as a serving line, but they know not what was on either side of this line. All the same they saw mighty forces at work, begetters, with potential energy at one place and freedom of action at the other. Then the author in despair asks—who knows the truth? Who can declare that it is so? Or when has all this taken place? All the same he knows that it was long before the gods were born, or man began to make his gods. Is it what they call creation? If it were so, who is the creator? Or has it all happened without a creator? Who can be sure of it? If there is a creator, do his eyes control this world from somewhere? Does he know? Perhaps he may not.

These questions were asked by the seers in all ages. This hymn stands in the name of Prajapati. If it were the same Prajapati, who stands first in the list of the teachers of a branch of Brahma cult,

he must have flourished about fifty generations before Pushyamitra or before 1000 B. C.

The sage asserted that there was only darkness at one stage. The artists and the myth-makers, gave this colour to Vishnu. They have made him rest on Ananta, or the endless, which is time, as the germ spirit is always in existence. Ananta is shown as a coiled snake with numerous heads and double the number of eyes. These numerous eyes indicate observation through the ages, and as the snake has been in all ages the symbol of wisdom it is only fitting that the god idea should be shown as resting on wisdom.

At one stage the sage said that there was water, deep and fathomless. The artist, therefore, made Vishnu float in an ocean of milk. Apart from the fact that darkness of Vishnu and the milky whiteness of the ocean give a contrast or dividing line, milky white is the colour of which all other colours form a part.

Vishnu is shown as reposing on the bed of Ananta ; but he is neither in sleep nor fully awake. He is in a state of sleepless sleep, or Yoga-Nidra. When he is fully awake, he is Brahma or in the state of creation. He is given four arms ; and weapons intended for the four arms, which he may bear or he may not. Chakra is one of the weapons, with its ceaseless motion which indicates the never-stopping cosmic forces at work. The second weapon is the Sankh, conch-shell or conch. Conch or Crouncha is said to have been a demon, a demon of destruction, who was killed or tamed by Vishnu.

If destruction is allowed to go unrestricted, will it not be an end to everything? It is not without reason that we fear atomic development. The weapon for the third hand is Gada or mace, which is symbolic of immense power in him. But it is always shown in a non-operative position, or with the head down; perhaps to indicate that he never uses the power latent in him. The weapon for the fourth hand is a lotus but shown in a similar manner, evidently indicating that the lotus or the source from which the creator of Brahma has taken rise is also of his.

Vishnu, who is thus conceived as a Cosmic Being, has been given personal qualities, when he is treated as personal god. Then he is in erect position standing in full length, with all the four weapons in his hand, showing that he may use all at his will.

Krishna became fully identified with Vishnu, when both received each other's qualities and characteristics; so much so that for a devotee both are the same: Krishna is shown with the Sankh and Chakra in his hands; Vishnu is shown with Kaushtubha, the jewel of Krishna. As Krishna had two wives, Vishnu is also shown with two wives, Lakshmi and Bhumi, the former symbolical of prosperity, and the latter the source of prosperity, and both qualities were vested in Vishnu himself in the early days of the Vedas.

No religion seems to be as adoptive as Hinduism. With the rise of every god, all godly qualities go to him. Or every one of their gods or

goddesses, irrespective of the nomenclature, is the Most High. Some may call it henotheism, or uncritical form of monotheism. But the Hindus are very critical, they do not worship any god without conceiving him as the highest, or attributing all godly qualities to him. The same is in their approach to their goddesses. The Hindu had no occasion to take a vow that he would have only one god. All gods are the same to him, except for the manner in which they are worshipped.

The complete identification of Krishna with Vishnu would appear to have given them the idea of 'avatar'. If it were so, Krishna was the first 'avatar' or incarnation of Vishnu. By means of the Avatars, the Hindus would appear to have built up a theme of evolution. The first Avatar of Vishnu is Matsya, or fish, indicating the fully developed animal that lives in the water. The second Avatar is Kurma, or tortoise, an animal that lives in the water as well as on the land. The fourth is the 'missing link', Narasimha, half man and half lion. The fifth is Vamana, a youth in pursuit of study. The sixth is Parasu-Rama, the man with the axe, indicating the early culture of man. The seventh is Rama, with bow and arrow, indicating the conquering stage. The eighth is Sili, one with the plough, indicating the agricultural stage of society. The ninth is that of Krishna. A perfect gentleman or knight-errant, engaged in the pursuit of correcting the wicked, serving the righteous, and dispensing justice. This is the highest ideal of man. The Hindus have conceived god in this ideal. God in cosmic aspect is Vishnu, and in

human aspect is Krishna. How could the human mind comprehend that which is incomprehensible? Human mind can seldom reach beyond human conceptions. So Krishna was given the best of human qualities. He was not vindictive, he was kind ; he was called 'Karunakara', dispenser of compassion. He was Mukta-pradayi, the giver of salvation, and so on. The best of the attributes given to Krishna is Kanna or one with the eyes. It could be seen from the above quoted hymn that sage Prajapati has given a set of eyes to the Cosmic Being, the eyes that control this world in the highest heaven. Visualisation of Krishna as one with the eyes has been a great relief to his devotees. In Him they found a witness to all their actions, thoughts and intentions. Occasions may arise when one cannot convince even those who are nearest and dearest to him. In such cases the distressed can find consolation that there is at least one who has seen what was even in the innermost recess of his heart.

Krishna-worship made great strides through the teachings of the Bhagavat-Gita. The Gita can be called the magnum opus of Hinduism. The authorship of Gita is attributed to Sanjaya, who is said to have listened of Krishna's discourse with Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. However, according to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan the origin of the Gita should date about the fifth century B. C., which according to the Puranic chronology would be at least five centuries after the battle of Kurukshetra ; but if this book has a sociological background its date should not be earlier than the end of the Gupta period.

The Gita can rightly be called the philosophy of Action. It is against inaction. It absolves man from the results of action, provided it is done in due performance of his duties. A soldier's duty, for instance, is to fight, he should not run away from the battlefield. He may have relations on the opposite side, he may have sympathy with the opposite side, but it should not stand in the way of doing his duties as a soldier. A soldier should not be chicken-hearted. Likewise every individual has duties to perform ; and he should find salvation in due performance of them. It should not matter whether one is a prince, peasant or priest, each should do his duty.

The class duties specified in the Gita have been interpreted by the interested parties as caste duties, and often cited as an excuse for the maintenance of the Caste-system. The text in question is :—

(i) "Serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, also uprightness, wisdom, knowledge, belief in god, are Brahma-Dharma". (ii) "Prowess, splendour, firmness, dexterity, and also not fleeing from battle, generosity, kingly nature are the Kshatriya-Dharma" (iii) "Ploughing, protection of the kine, and trade are the Vaisya-Dharma". (iv) "Action in the nature of the service is Sudra-Dharma". (Gita : XVIII. 41-44).

If one is not caste-minded, it will be seen that there is nothing in this that delegates the Sudra to a life-long servitude to other castes. Service is not servitude. In fact, if this is a ruling, the Sudra stands higher than the others, for all duties that

are not specified for others automatically devolve on the Sudra. It should be realised that the professional priests, fighters, cultivators and merchants form only a section of the society, as it always has been. The politicians, administrators, lawyers, judges, scientists, industrial magnates and a good many others should necessarily be among those classed as Sudras. The direction given above should be taken as qualifications for the three professions, namely, for the priest, soldier and merchant-cultivator ; and they can be well inserted in advertising for these posts. Further, there is no exclusiveness in any of them. If it were so, belief in God should pertain to priests only.

Though the Gita lays extreme stress on action, it admonishes you "Let not the fruit of action be thy motive, nor be thou to inaction attached" (Gita : II. 47). It stands for 'Nishkama Karma,' action uninfluenced by unworthy motive. The Gita attacks the various religions of the day and criticises their views. It admonishes the "foolish with flowery speech, rejoicing in the letter of the Veda, saying 'there is not but this '" (Gita : II. 42). It speaks against those who prescribe "many and various ceremonies for the attainment of pleasure and lordship" (Gita : II. 43). It challenges the doctrine of the Self of the Upanishad when it says that "the man who rejoiceth in the Self with the Self satisfied, and who is content with the self, for him verily there is nothing to do" (Gita: III. 17). It is a challenge to the liberation through knowledge advocated by the Sankhyas ; and also against the Yoga of action of the Yogic school (Gita : III. 3).

It also stands against Buddhism that advocates "rise to perfection by renunciation" (Gita : III. 4) But Gita has taken all these views into consideration and recommends a code of action that leads to salvation. Against the aridness of the Upanishads, desolation of Buddhism, and the stupor caused by the Materialistic or Charvaka philosophy, the Gita holds out a garden of beauty, a field of devotion and the joy of life, all through happy means. Above all it holds out a personal god in Krishna, to whom the afflicted may turn, to whom the distressed may approach, and to whom the wayward may retrace his steps. Despite the tremendous stress it lays on Karma (action) and Dharma (duties) it enjoins one simply to turn his attention to him for shelter that will not be denied. For the Gita says : "Abandoning all duties come to me alone for shelter ; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins" (Gita : VIII. 66). It might be observed that this liberation is with no strings attached to it.

The worship of Krishna is one of love and devotion. It is not out of fear ; neither is it an outcome of repentance. It is devotion for the sake of devotion. It is love for the sake of love. It is akin to a mother's love for her child. Though Vishnu is considered as Purusha, or Virat-Purusha, or the whole universe itself, Krishna is thought of as a child, a romping child full of fun, music and dance. Every devotee of his wants only to see his chubby face, the dimples on his cheeks, and his captivating smile. His life in Vrindavana among the Gopis and the Gopalas is the stage set

for his worship. One devotee bursts out in lyrics and asks how he managed to drink milk direct from the udder of the cow, and how he managed to steal butter from the top-shelf without a ladder, while others wonder how he sucked the life out of Putana through her breast. Hymns and songs addressed to him are many, and they are spread all over the country, in every strata of society with additions and alterations according to the intensity and type of devotion. Krishna worship or devotion to Krishna wells from the heart, and sways them to lyrical ecstasy.

Vaishnavism or Krishnavism of the common man is something like the Alwar Vaishnavism of the South. The first of the three Alvars, Tirumalassai, Nam-Alwar, and Kulashekhara were known respectively as 'pogai,' 'putan,' and 'pey,' all indicating that they were mad but mad only with the love of Krishna. They in their ecstasy of devotion forgot themselves and behaved like madmen. They wandered from place to place, made and sang songs of devotion; they laughed, they wept and they danced. They recognised no other god but Krishna. Krishna to them was not a dreaded god like Varuna. Krishna was a beloved companion to them, a playmate and 'Mukti-pradayaka' or one who gave salvation, though they did not hope for salvation of any particular kind.

Nam Alwar, a Sudra, for instance, treated him as a ministering father, a beloved child and a charming companion. Gonda-Alwar, a Brahman lady, after identifying herself as Radha, one of the wives of Krishna, acted like a wife towards him. It was

not sex. It was Bhakti or devotion. Some eight centuries later, the great Vaishnava saint, Chaitanya, from Nava-dvipa, Bengal, behaved as if he were Radha. Vaishnavism such as this is emotional but pure Monism. The devotees believe in the impermanency of world-enjoyment ; they wish for freedom from world entanglement, and they hope to gain 'moksha' or freedom through their devotion to Krishna.

Vaishnavism took a metaphysical turn in the South, which is progressing as Acharya Vaishnavism. But it is a cult of the few ; while the common men's Vaishnavism is the Alwar and Chaitanya Vaishnavism. The psychological aspect of it will be seen in the celebration of Krishna-Lila. It is surprising to see how young and old celebrate this festival. They lay out a miniature garden for Krishna, in imitation of the garden at Vrindavan, where Krishna romped about as a child, with many items that will appeal to a child. There will be tiny shrines for Krishna to sit. There will be a swing for him to swing. There will be small trees and shrubs for him to play hide-and-seek. There will be small pathways for him to roam about. Some devotees may even look for his tiny feet moving about through hills and dales and through tiny forests and streams. The young and old, men and women, exhibit a childish mentality at these functions.

Man meditates, god reveals, faith confirms, hope survives, and life departs. None comes back to tell the tale. The world moves on. Who or what is at the bottom of it ? Is it Vishnu ? They say

it is Krishna-Lila, or play of Vishnu. If it is a play why should we not play with him? Music and dance is dear to us as it was to Krishna. Why should we not enjoy? Why should we not play with our child-god and project our lives to his plane?

But the sages have spoken about the last and the tenth Avatar of Vishnu, which they termed Kalki. It may be called the shape of things to come. According to Sanskrit dictionary Kalkibhu means 'become paste.' However, the Kalki Avatar stands for the destruction of the world, probably to a placid state from which it originated. Will it be a gradual reduction, or will it be sudden destruction? Who can tell?

