A Short History of

RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHIC THOUGHT IN INDIA

Swami Krishnananda

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Among the publications of the Divine Life Society, the present book on the structure of *Inner India* is one of a special kind, for it offers to students of Indian Culture a taste of its quintessential essence and, to those who are eager to know what India is, a colourful outline of the picture of the heart of India.

The survey of thought covered in this book ranges from the Vedas and the Upanishads to the Smritis, including the Epics, Puranas and the Bhagavadgita, as well as the religious modes of conduct and the philosophic tradition of the country.

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PREFACE

There have been written several histories of religion and philosophy and it is not my intention to present here another chronicle along similar lines; for the task that I have taken upon myself is a different one. My purpose has been to suggest a proper *method* of the interpretation of values and a correct approach to the study of the religion and philosophy of India, which I regard not only as the right thing to do, but also essential to instil into the minds of students that perspective of life which can be .safely called comprehensive and tolerant, rather than merely add some more information to the existing histories on the subject. It is my observation that religion and philosophy are not being taught in the way in which they ought to be, and this is the primary reason why this great theme of human life is being relegated to the position of an 'optional' or even an 'encumbrance' in the educational career; in present-day universities. While in the discourse on 'Resurgent Culture' I have attempted to point out the philosophical and psychological background of the universal nature of the religious consciousness more than the forms which religion takes in the different social patterns of mankind, it is my endeavour in this book to touch upon the fundamental principles involved in the development of this consciousness through the ages, as embodied in the canonical scriptures and the teachings of the great sages of India. In this sense of the tracing of the growth of the religious consciousness through the passage of time, it is a history; but in the sense of a mere tabulating of events and thoughts, it is not. The religious spirit is eternal, while the structure of the religions of the world is temporal, being adapted to the

changing demands of the human mind. 'The phases of the true religious spirit are the content of our study.

To search out the religious content amongst the teachings of the religions and absorb the philosophic spirit from the thoughts of the various philosophers is not an easy undertaking; for there is always the fear of one's being drowned under the waves of an ocean. Teachers spoke in different languages and in varying accents, but stressed the same truth, though their emphasis was on one or more of its aspects suited to the times in which they lived. This should not, therefore, make religions appear as severed from one another, with no common element among them, for that would be a travesty of approach to the reality of religion. If religion is the way to perfection, the religious fanaticism that we generally see prowling on the surface loses its meaning. Religion makes one broad-minded, loving, charitable and divine, and philosophy is the rationale behind religion. Philosophy and religion are inseparable.

The historical trend present in this study naturally provides some material for further reading and research, and it may be taken as a pointer to the rich treasures hidden in the scriptures and the teachers of India, whose profundity calls for great patience and tenacious aspiration on the part of the student.

The earliest documents to be studied are the Veda-Samhitas and their culmination as the Upanishads. These constitute the magnificent heritage of the Indian people. The Epics and the Puranas follow as an expatiation of their theme in a lofty style which stirs emotion and heightens understanding. The Bhagavadgita is a unique specimen belonging to this type of literature. The Yoga-Vasishtha is like

a mystical edifice constructed on the towering peaks of realisation recorded in the Upanishads. Religion and ethics are like the wings of the spirit in man who tries to soar into the empyrean of the unknown. The Agamas and Tantras form a practical manual of the rule and conduct which fulfils itself as the worship of God in the world as well as in sanctified shrines. The schools of philosophic thought (*darshana*) are a kind of graded series of the development of human aspiration to know Reality. The Charvaka, or the materialist, sees only the external physical world in its crass objective features and everything appears to be a mode only of matter. The Vaiseshika and the Nyaya see behind matter certain constituents which seem to be ultimate. The Mimamsa works upon the material diversity of constituents and posits divinities behind them. The Sankhya confronts a difficulty in holding that there are many ultimate constituents in the objective universe and reduces all variety of manifestation to a single matrix, called Prakriti, which is counterposed by centres of knowing consciousness, called the Purushas. The psychology of the Sankhya is really an advance over the physics of the Vaiseshika and the Nyaya and the pluralistic theology of the Mimamsa. But consciousness cannot rest contented with a gulf between itself and the world outside. The Yoga school accepts the principle of God as a connecting element, but suffers due to a mechanistic relation which it introduces between its ultimate categories. This persisting difference is not satisfying and the spirit within seeks to overcome it by a more profound contemplation. This is the Vedanta which rises above the duality of subject and object and the trinity of God, world and soul, into a unity of

universality of experience. This is the zenith that Indian thought has reached, or man's mind can hope to reach.

The schools of Jainism and Buddhism provide an excellent psychological analysis and form important sections in the history of philosophy. The different schools, thus, may be regarded as complementary rather than contradictory, one helping the other in a higher fulfilment which is transcendent to and yet immanent in the lower. It is the exclusive emphasis laid by the followers of particular schools that has led to the erroneous notion of one school being opposed to the other. As a child cannot be said to be set in opposition to the adolescent or the mature in age, schools of thought and even faiths of mankind cannot be considered to be causes of obstructive distinctions, for they are intended to collaborate among themselves into a growing organism and furnish an ultimate support for man's existence and living, through their creative activity.

Swami Krishnananda
29th August, 1994

INTRODUCTION

The development of religious and philosophic thought in India comprises a many-sided presentation of the higher aspirations in man. While the Veda-Samhitas embody the prayers of the human spirit to the Universal Reality revealed in creation and record the vision of the One in the many, the Upanishads represent an attempt to dive into the One from the forms of the many. Though modern history sees an advance of thought from the Samhitas to the Upanishads, tradition does not permit any such bifurcation and sees in them two types of the vision of Reality, the former emphasising its aspect as creation and the latter its being, as it is. There is, no doubt, a tendency to view the essential nature of Reality as transcending creation, but it is not possible to ignore the creational aspect as a realm outside Reality, for creation also is within it. From this point of view, it seems quite reasonable to follow the way of ancient tradition that the Samhitas and the Upanishads are not to be divided as inferior and superior, but as pictures of one side and another side of Reality. It is an important aspect in the interpretation of the Vedas to regard them as a single body of scriptural lore, of which the Upanishads form the consummation. Without taking the purely historical view that the Upanishads transcend the Samhitas in their value, the former may be said to be an improvement upon the content of the latter in the sense that the Samhitas look upon creation and its Maker more in their cosmological significance maintaining a kind of awe-inspiring distance between man and God, while the Upanishads stir up within man a consciousness of the

immediacy, in his own being, of that cosmic grandeur of God in creation. The distinction of God, world and soul, when it is handled by the Upanishads, resolves itself into the unitary Absolute.

But a very meaningful point of view which is sought to be emphasised here is the importance of the Epics and Puranas in the history of Indian thought. The ancient sages were quick to appreciate the necessity to appeal to the various sides of human nature and to alter the method of teaching in adjustment with this need. As it was stated earlier, Reality and creation are not to be regarded as two facts or problems to be encountered but two ways of witnessing the same thing. The human mind is composed not only of the rational powers but also the emotional and the instinctive elements which feel the presence and working of certain truths that rationality cannot explain adequately. The Epics and Puranas answer to that aspect of human nature which is other than the ratiocinating or the investigative. It is human egoism which asserts that only scientific discoveries and affirmations in their modern sense are real and there is nothing true in the world which observation and experiment cannot certify. It is forgotten that reason is not all and science is not the last word in knowledge. The heart revolts against the conclusion of science that tears of grief consist merely of certain chemical substances or that the beauty of a painting is just the effect of a combination of colours. Religion, likewise, is not an invention of human crotchet or an outcome of fear or even a social necessity but the answer to a living surge of conscious aspiration which cannot be intelligible either to

reason or to science. Human nature is not a combination of scientific facts or a bundle of physical laws or chemical elements, but manifests in itself a meaning higher than all observable values in the world of mathematics, physics, chemistry or biology. The religious spirit of the Epics and Puranas is different from the beaten track of logical philosophy, for it reads an eternal meaning in the temporal structure of the world. The power and purpose of an Avatara, for example, infuses into the historical process of the universe a truth which is above history. Everything that is human has a touch of the mathematical and the logical in it, -- whether it is history, or science. But the eternal religion is that which feels the existence and activity of a supernal Reality, even in what is earthly. The personalities and events described in the Puranas cannot always be taken as myths and fables which have no substance in them, for the universe is nothing but the Absolute beheld through the channels of human perception. In their attempt at a bringing together of the temporal and the eternal, the Epics present before us a picture of divine perfection commingled with human weakness. In these records of cosmic history, the usual meanings of past, present and future assume a different suggestiveness and it is futile to read into them a mere human viewpoint of understanding. It is here that we come face to face with the fact that religion is neither a social practice nor a human contrivance but the perennial activity of timeless being.

The Bhagavadgita is a part of the Mahabharata and thus occurs in the context of an Epic, and so it is called a *smriti* (secondary revelation), as distinguished from the *sruti*

(primary revelation), which are the Vedas and the Upanishads. Yet, the Gita plays a unique role in the history of religious and philosophic thought. The Upanishads are like an extensive forest ranging over a wide area and covering almost everything which may be said to be of the nature of reality.

The Bhagavadgita is, on the other hand, a kind of garden of select plantations which are deliberately nurtured, keeping in view the needs of human psychology. It is at once rationalistic, volitional, emotional and charged with a high spirit of activity. In the Upanishads, Reality seems to be musing over itself and contemplating its own glories, while in the Bhagavadgita it speaks to man in a language which is intelligible to the mind that sees meaning in pleasure and pain, reward and punishment, progress and evolution, bondage and liberation. The Bhagavadgita is a world-gospel which tries to link man with God, enlighten him on the concrete relation subsisting between the world and the Absolute, and solace him that there is a way leading from the finite to the Infinite.

Nevertheless, the Upanishads may be said to have sown the seeds for every thought that occurred later In spite of their excessive concern with the trans-empirical Reality, whatever be its relation to the cosmos of creation, they make here and there profound statements, though at random, which sum up the principles of ethics, psychology and the path that leads to the Supreme Being. The Bhagavadgita is a detailed accentuation of some of the terse observations made already in the Upanishads. We have, for example, a statement on the nature of the universal *Virat* in

a single verse of the Mundaka Upanishad, which may itself be said to be an inspiration after the Purushasukta of the Samhitas. The Isa, Katha and the Svetasvatara Upanishads have verses that embody some of the important themes of the Bhagavadgita, which, on the whole, manifests the spirit of God descended into the field of action.

The Yoga-Vasishtha rises to a high watermark in the philosophic thought of India. It is a classic inimitable in its kind. Through elaborate descriptions, almost in an epic style, it works upon the fundamental principles enunciated in the Upanishads and combines philosophy with a lofty psychology by which it explains creation, evolution and involution purely from a spiritualistic point of view. In this way, it tries to give an ultimate explanation of everything in terms of the Infinite consciousness which manifests itself as the objects of experience on one side and the experiencing subjects on the other side. The sorrows which follow in the wake of every effort of man for acquisition of happiness in a world of transient phenomena, the knowledge needed to diagnose the common malady of everyone, and ‘ the ethical prerequisites to be cultivated for the attainment of true freedom are its main subjects. The uniqueness of the methodology of the Yoga-Vasishtha is in its attempt to analyse all things in terms of consciousness which is the ultimate reality of everything. Health and disease, happiness and misery, success and failure, bondage and freedom are all explicable in terms of the right adjustment or maladjustment of consciousness. Finally, even birth and death are traced to this mysterious cause which cannot be directly seen, as it is involved in the seeing consciousness

itself. Another text, known as the Tripurarahasya (Jnana-kanda), follows the lead of the Yoga-Vasishtha in the treatment of a spiritual idealism which it regards as the alpha and omega of all things.

An interesting part of the manifestation of Indian Philosophy as religion is its concept of the pantheon which has an immense practical significance in the day-to-day life of the country. The gods (*devatas*) hold such sway over the minds of persons that the theological evaluation of life may be regarded as a commonplace throughout India. A final interpretation of any problem hinges upon a Daiva or a presiding deity, a heritage of thought which may be said to have directly come down to the present day from the Upanishads that viewed the universe as constituted of the object (*adhibhuta*), subject (*adhyatma*) and deity (*adhidaiva*). There is nothing which is not involved in this triadic relation, in any stage of creation. It is interesting to note this concept of deity entering as an invariable concomitant of every stratum of evolution in the recent philosophy of emergent evolution, particularly in Samuel Alexander; who propounds this theme in his *Space, Time and Deity*. Herein he makes the principle of deity unavoidable in the evolutionary process on a *nisus* to progress upwards. It is needless to add that the Upanishads have already, many centuries back, anticipated in their intuitions this novel doctrine of deity; with an added significance and purpose, and even today it is impossible to remove from the minds of the Indian people the belief in the governance of the subject-object relation by a presiding deity. It is this presiding principle which the Bhagavadgita

confirms as the final deciding factor in all actions and processes of man and the world. The crystallisation of this doctrine is the great religious theology of India, which posits various deities as the guardians of the cosmos and sets forth rules of their worship in the interest of man's march towards his great destiny. Theology is an essential part of religion, which is a name for philosophy in practice.

The rules of conduct are a part of the religious way of life. The Smritis are the codes which lay down the laws of human behaviour in one's personal capacity as well as in society. The ancient dictum of the Veda that *satya* (truth as being) and *rita* (truth as law) are the primary principles of Reality and its manifestation is the background of the canons of *dharma*, or a life of righteousness. It is the intention of the Smritis to make explicit the forms of righteousness as they manifest themselves in practical life, which are only implicit in the principles of *satya* and *rita* or in the account of creation given in the Upanishads. The modes of living according to class (*varna*) and order (*ashrama*) instituted for the purpose of ensuring mutual cooperation in society are the main contents of the Smritis. These texts not only deal with the ethical problems of man as an individual and as a member of a family or of society in general, but also dilate upon the rules of administration, politics and statesmanship, legal principles and statecraft. The Smritis of Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara, the Santi-Parva of the Mahabharata and the Arthasastra of Kautilya are the primary sources of information on this subject. The social, political and legal systems enunciated in these codes are ultimately spiritual in their tone, for they analyse the life

of man into the fourfold scheme of practical endeavour, known as rectitude of conduct (*dharma*), and a righteous pursuit of economic values (*artha*) and of the fulfilment of one's normal desires (*kama*), to culminate in the blossoming of the flower of existence into the experience of eternal bliss (*moksha*). There is, thus, no clash between the individual and society, man and the State, or between God and creation.

Chapter I

THE VEDAS

The Vedas and Their Classification

It is customary for historians of the philosophy and religion of India to commence their studies with the Rig-Veda, which is regarded as the earliest sacred text of ancient Indian culture. A study of the Vedas forms generally the beginning of an advanced learning in the philosophical and religious literature of India. The Rig-Veda is a book of metrical hymns and is divided into ten parts called Mandalas. Another division of the book is into eight sections called Ashtakas. The hymns of the Rig-Veda, called mantras, are powerfully constructed poems, with an amazing power of rhythm, spontaneity and sublimity of effect, and charged with soulful inspiration, usually with four feet of the metre into which every poem is cast. The poem is pregnant with great meaning and force which can be directed, by a proper recitation of it, for or against any objective here or hereafter. The hymn has the power to protect (*trayate*) the one who contemplates (*mananat*) on it, and hence the name mantra. The mantras of the Vedas are intended to invoke the deities to whom they are addressed, and to summon the power of the deities for executing an ideal. They are the means of connection with the denizens of the celestial world and the divinities that immanently guard and perform different functions in the various planes of existence. There are also mantras addressed in glorification of the Universal Being or the Absolute.

The Vedas are classified into four groups, called Rik, Yajus, Saman and Atharva. The Rig-Veda is primarily concerned with panegyrics to the gods in the heavens, and is the main book of mantras. The Yajur Veda is classified into the Krishna (black) and Sukla (white) recensions. The Yajur Veda contains mainly sacrificial formulae in prose and verse to be chanted at the performance of a sacrifice. The Sama Veda consists mostly of verses from the Rig-Veda set to music for singing during the sacrifice. The Atharva Veda abounds mainly in spells and incantations in verse meant for different lower purposes than the purely spiritual.

Every Veda has four divisions, called the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishad. The Samhita portion of the Vedas embodies the hymns or prayers offered to deities, as already mentioned. The Brahmanas are the ritualistic portion of the Vedas which expatiate on the details of performing sacrifices. The most famous and costly of these sacrifices are the Rajasuya, Asvamedha, Agnishtoma and Soma Yaga, undertaken either for earthly sovereignty or for heavenly joy. There are many minor sacrifices for the performance of which directions are given in the Brahmanas. The mantras of the Samhitas are supposed to be recited in the sacrifices, mainly. They can, however, also be used as pure spiritual exercises in prayer and meditation, which aspect received emphasis in a development that led to the philosophic mysticism of the Upanishads, as we shall see later.

The Theme of the Vedas

The Veda Mantras are, as stated above, praises offered to the deities, or Devas, who are regarded as capable of bestowing any blessing on man. It does not mean, however, that the poets of the Samhitas were ignorant of the existence of the Supreme Being and that the gods of the Vedas are mere puerile personifications of the processes of Nature, as many Western orientalists are inclined to think. The Veda Mantras are not the ignorant prattle of immature cattle grazers, the pastoral hymns of primitive minds, as certain historians opine. The historical evaluation should not be oblivious of the logical grounding of process, whether of thought or of society. The trend of visualising the manifold as expressions of the One, and the One as revealing itself in the many is unmistakably traceable in the hymns of the Rig-Veda. It is true that the main gods of the Vedas are Indra, Varuna, Agni, Surya (Aditya or Savitr), Soma, Yama, Vayu, Asvins, Brihaspati and Brahmanaspati; and a correct chanting of the mantras, summoning the power of the divinities could produce supernatural results, and even the actual materialisation of them here. But it is easy to discover at the same time, in the Rig-Veda, the germinal sources of the concepts of Vishnu, Rudra and Prajapati or Hiranyagarbha as universal divine presences and as the supreme gods of the cosmos. We must reserve for treatment another grander concept,—the Supreme Being enunciated in the Purusha Sukta and the Nasadiya Sukta.

In the Purusha Sukta or the hymn of the Cosmic Person, we have the most magnificent description of the

spiritual unity of the cosmos. Here is given, perhaps, the earliest complete presentation of the nature of Reality as both immanent and transcendent. The all-encompassing Purusha, who is all-heads, all-eyes and all-limbs, everywhere, envelops and permeates creation from all sides and stands above it as the glorious immortal. The Purusha is all that was, is and shall be. The whole universe is a small fraction of Him, as it were, for He ranges above it in His infinitude of glory. Such is the majestic Purusha, the God of all gods. From Him proceeds the original creative Will (later identified with Brahma, Hiranyagarbha or Prajapati), by which this vast universe was projected in space and time. The Purusha Sukta proclaims once and for all, the organic inseparability of the constituents of society. The Vedic seer loved mankind and creation as much as he loved God.

The Nasadiya Sukta of the Rig-Veda gives, for the first time, intimations of the seer's sounding the depths of being. The astounding vision of the transcendent by the relative is the apparent theme of this famous hymn. Though the Absolute is the Being above all being, existence beyond all possible concepts about it, it becomes an intriguing something, about which nothing definite can be said and of which no definition can be given, when it is envisaged by the individual. Reality is here depicted as not capable of being designated either as existence or non-existence, for there was none to perceive it then, before the manifestation of the heaven and the earth. There was, as if, only an indescribable stillness, deep in its content and defying all approach to it by anyone. There was neither death nor immortality, for there was no differentiatedness

whatsoever. Naturally, there was neither day nor night. There was only That One Presence, throbbing in all splendour and glory but appearing as darkness to the eye that would like to behold it. There was nothing second to it; it alone was. From it this creation arose. But how it all happened no one can say, for everyone came after creation. This is the central point of the Nasadiya hymn, a development of which leads to the various ramifications of philosophic and religious thought in the Upanishads and the later classical established form of religion. In a famous mantra, the Rig-Veda declares that 'Existence (or Reality) is one, though, the wise ones call it by various epithets like Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, Yama, Vayu', thus unifying all the gods in a single Being.

There are other Suktas in the Rig-Veda, which are of great importance in different ways. The Asyavamasya Sukta has a very complicated structure of meaning and hints at certain vital issues of the creation and pattern of the universe. The Hiranyagarbha Sukta sings of the rise of the universe from the cosmic Hiranyagarbha or Prajapati (who is later identified with Brahma, the Creator). The Aghamarshana Sukta refers to the cycle of creation from the cosmic equilibrium in the beginning, in a recurring manner, so that the essential features of creation repeat themselves in every cycle. The Vamadeva Sukta mentions the spiritual realisation of sage Vamadeva even while he was in the womb of his mother and his exclamations of joy on his attainment of freedom from the fetters that bound him to individuality. The concluding portion of the Rig-Veda is a heartening call to unity in thought, word and

deed among people, a message which has so much meaning to humanity today.

The Rudra Adhyaya or the Satarudriya, a hymn of the Yajur Veda, is a thrilling invocation of the Supreme Being as Rudra-Siva, wherein He is addressed in all the visible and conceivable forms. The Almighty Lord is the big and small, the gross and subtle, the low and high, the distant and near, the visible and invisible, what is and what is not. This is an address of invocation to Siva as the all-comprehensive being, ready to shower blessings on the devotees who crave for His grace. The Purusha Sukta and the Rudra Adhyaya are chanted even this day during worship in the temples of India, as invocatory and purificatory process for bringing about world-solidarity and commonweal. The Vedic Almighty God combines in Himself aesthetic beauty and splendour, ethical goodness and law, and spiritual reality and perfection, all in one.

The Gayatri Mantra stands unparalleled in the Vedas, and it is regarded as their seed-word, which, with the three Vyahritis (Bhuh, Bhuvah, Svah), according to Manu, is supposed to have been the 'open-sesame' for universal manifestation at the commencement of time.

The Concept of Law and Sacrifice in the Vedas

The Rig-Veda gives two code words: *satya* and *rita*, signifying the spiritual law as such and the law in its working process in the cosmos. While *satya* is the principle of integration rooted in the Absolute, *rita* is its application and function as the rule and order operating in the universe. Sometimes *rita* is interpreted as the original

principle of being and *satya* its manifestation. The world is sustained by a just and inexorable law which is the decree of God for the well-being of all. Conformity with this law tends to material and spiritual progress and advancement, leading to higher forms of integration in life, while its violation is punished with a series of transmigratory lives in the different planes of manifestation.

In the Purusha Sukta we observe the concept of sacrifice carried to the degree of perfection where the whole universe is regarded as an act of sacrifice on the part of God. God becomes in the form of creation the field and opportunity for individual sacrifice. The universe is a sacrifice (*yajna*), and all actions, properly performed, in so far as they involve an element of self-abnegation for self-transcendence, are forms of sacrifice of one's individuality or whatever belongs to it as its appendage. The Supreme Being Himself is a transcendent sacrifice when viewed in the form of this manifestation, when the relative is construed as a self-alienation of the Divine Being. The essence of sacrifice is existence for others' sake, not necessarily in the form of social activity, but in a wider perspective of consciousness which gets engulfed gradually in a series of its higher reaches, pointing to a final absoluteness of being. This is the concept of supreme sacrifice in the Purusha Sukta.

From the point of view of such lofty thoughts as embodied in the Purusha Sukta and the Rudra Adhyaya, the adoration and contemplation of God is possible in any place and at any time, for God is here, just before us, and He can be worshipped through anything in the universe. In

this worship and contemplation, which is the highest sacrifice, God is the articles of worship, He is the worship, the worshipper and also the worshipped. His existence and manifestation mean one and the same thing. His being and activity constitute a single whole. Immortality and death, life and non-life are both His modes. The Supreme Being is here and now. He can be realised by this mighty act of universal self-sacrifice.

To the seers of the Vedas, life is a joy of sacrifice, and a daily visualisation of Divinity in all Nature.

Karma and Reincarnation

The principles of *rita* and *satya* imply a strict adherence to law and rule in conformity with the aim and purpose of the processes of the universe. Any action which originates in a sense of personal individuality set in opposition to or incongruous with the universal order of *rita* and *satya* should obviously mean the work of a nemesis, as a natural reaction to such action, endeavouring to set right the balance of cosmic equilibrium which has been disturbed by it. This principle of the redounding of the effect of action upon the doer of it is the metaphysical, ethical and psychological regulative force called karma, which requires the doer of such action to pass through a series of experiential processes called metempsychosis or rebirth in other conditions and environments than that in which the action has been done. Thus it would be clear that the law of karma and reincarnation is a scientific law of the integrality of the cosmos. The Vedas accept the operation of this principle and recognise the fact that one's future life

depends on the way one lives the present one. We shall have occasion to revert to this famous doctrine of karma and *samsara* in our studies of its further development.

The Vedas as Fountainhead of Development

The Vedas may be regarded as the source and fountain to which the later developments of thought can be traced. The bold speculative trend and philosophic flights of the Vedas culminated in the Upanishads and the system of the Vedanta. Their descriptions of religious ecstasy in divine contemplations inspired the formulation of the school of Yoga which was codified in the aphorisms of Patanjali. Their visions of the creation of the universe helped the rise of the Sankhya doctrine which regularised the prevalent notions on cosmology and psychology. The logical trend in the Vedas stimulated the development of *anvikshiki* (application of reason) and the rationalistic bias of certain systems among the *darsanas*. The ritualistic and sacerdotal emphasis in the Vedas laid the foundation for the purely authoritarian Mimamsa school. The forms of meditation and prayer predominant in the Vedic hymns sponsored the building up of the Bhakti schools among the Vaishnavas, Saivas and Saktas. The accounts of sages, anchorites and kings which the Vedas furnish, formed the beginnings of the elaborate Itihasas or epics, and the Puranas. The social rules and customs of the time of the Vedas became the cornerstones for the systematisation of conduct and law in the Smritis or Dharmasastras. The social, political and religious institutions were all meant to help the gradual evolution of the individual, according to each one's capacity

and aptitude, towards the realisation of spiritual universality.

Chapter II

THE UPANISHADS

The Period of Transition

The predominant tone of the Samhitas and Brahmanas was one of piety and ceremonialism, interspersed with raptures of religious feeling and contemplative ecstasy, which led occasionally to a spiritual vision of the Virat or the Cosmic Almighty. Though the undercurrent of the thought of the Vedic Rishis had an overtone of a spiritual vision in the things of the world, and their idea of sacrifice reached its zenith in a meditation on the Universe itself as a sacrifice of the Supreme Purusha, the tendency to material sacrifices or *yajnas* for propitiating the gods hymned in the Samhitas still continued to receive great stress in the ordinary life both of the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, who formed the upper classes of the social strata. Side by side with the concept of sacrifice and an obedience to the laws of *rita* and *satya*, the concept of *samsara* or worldly existence as a part of the requirements of the principle of reincarnation of souls due to karma received more and more attention, and the thoughtful began to feel a need for discovering a way of redemption from transmigratory life, since it was realised that transmigration is the result of subjection to a law which was being violated in life by the individual. The necessity felt for an austere achievement of freedom from desire, which was the cause of the violations of law, crystallised itself in the doctrine of *tapas* or asceticism and self-control which finds expression in the

Aranyakas as a fruit ripening from the Brahmanas and Samhitas. The Tapasvin or anchorite, living a life of retreat in the forest, began to command more respect than the priest of the Brahmanas and the hymnist of the Samhitas. The tendency to regard the Vedic sacrifice more as an act of internal meditation than outward oblation gained firm ground and the ceremonial piety of the earlier part of the Vedas flowed into a mystical contemplation of creation, while, at the same time, it was discovered that the inner sacrifice is more powerful than the outer in producing results.

The Quest for Reality

The sages who dedicated their lives more and more to meditation in sylvan retreats rather than to the external *yajnas* of the Brahmanas demonstrated their superiority over others by the spiritual prowess they possessed. The sage rose above the conventional formalities of ritualistic dogma and concerned himself with the duty of mastering Nature through *tapas* or self-restraint, which enabled him to have a knowledge of everything in the world simultaneously. He gained omniscience and could have access to the different regions of the Universe without hindrance. Certain sages almost approximated God in their powers and could create, preserve or destroy things, if they so wished, by a mere glance or even a thought. By meditation the sage solved the cosmic mystery and attuned himself to the Absolute, or the Divine Lord of the Universe. He overcame mortality and attained salvation from birth and death. He was regarded as the supreme conqueror, and

in the words of the Upanishad, 'the world belongs to him, nay, he himself is the world'. Such was the dignity of spiritual realisation. The collection of the revelations of such sages formed the Aranyakas and the Upanishads.

The Philosophy of the Upanishads

The Doctrine of Creation: The Upanishads do not reject the authority of the Brahmanas or the efficacy of sacrifice. But they go behind the sacrificial cult and regard it as a spiritual exercise. The thirst for knowledge could not be quenched by a routine of external *yajnas* or ceremonies. It was necessary to find an answer to the question of the creation of the Universe and one's relation to it inwardly and outwardly. The creation hymn of the Rig-Veda, the Nasadiya Sukta, heralded the quest for the Absolute, and in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad the Asvamedha sacrifice is contemplated as a process of the Universe, to be regarded in meditation. From the various theories of creation advanced in the Upanishads, we may sum up the whole scheme as follows:

Brahman is the Reality, and is often identified with Purusha. The condition when Brahman is potent with the possibility of a future creation is called the Avyakrita or Unmanifest, known also as Ishvara in the later Vedanta. In the Sankhya terminology, this condition is the Prakriti of all things. When the Cosmic Will is fully projected, it is Hiranyagarbha, or in Sankhya parlance, Mahat. Hiranyagarbha or the Cosmic Intellect, when fully manifest as the Cosmos, becomes Virat. Now the subsequent process

of creation is the beginning of *samsara* or individualisation by separation.

The universal Virat is conceived as *adhyatma*, *adhibhuta* and *adhidaiva*, when the diversified forms appear as divisions therein. The senses of knowledge and the organs of action, as well as the psychological functions, have their external counterparts and also their presiding deities ruling over them. Thus, the sense of hearing has sound (ether) as its physical counterpart and the deities of the quarters as its presiding deities. The sense of touch has tangibility (air) as its physical counterpart and Vayu as its presiding deity. The sense of seeing has colour (fire) as its physical counterpart in the world and Sun or Aditya as its presiding deity. The sense of taste has gustatory enjoyment (water) as its physical counterpart and Varuna as its presiding deity. The sense of smell has odour (earth) as its physical counterpart and the Asvins as its presiding deities. The organs of speech, grasping (hands), locomotion (feet), procreation and excretion have respectively Agni, Indra, Vishnu, Prajapati and Yama as their presiding deities. The faculties of thinking (*manas*), understanding (*buddhi*), self-arrogation (*ahamkara*) and memory (*chitta*) have Soma (Moon), Brahma, Rudra and Vishnu as their presiding deities. Apart from the physical counterparts and the presiding deities, the individual functions mentioned above have their locations in the body, such as ears, skin, eyes, palate, nostrils, mouth, hands, feet, genitals and anus. The psychological functions are the mind, intellect, ego, and the subconscious, including the unconscious. These details are

all not fully available in the older Upanishads but have to be gathered from the elucidations in the later Upanishads.

The doctrine of creation delineated up to this stage is as far as what can be gathered into a systematic whole from the different statements on the subject made in the Upanishads. But this scheme of creation is developed into a further detail of completeness in the Epics and, especially, the Puranas, which we can consider here with benefit, though these developments are not to be seen in the creation theories of the Upanishads. Together with the senses of knowledge and organs of action, and their locations in the body of the individual, there is the creation of their physical counterparts, *viz.,* Ether, Air, Fire (with light and heat), Water and Earth. The Creator Brahma or Hiranyagarbha projects out of his Mind the original individuals,—Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata. There is, then, the manifestation, from the cosmic body of Brahma, of the first progenitors of beings,—Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhrigu, Vasishtha, Daksha and Narada. Then is described the appearance of Rudra or Siva who is one of the trinities or primary gods of the Universe. Then, out of the body of Brahma we hear of the creation of Manu and Satarupa, the first king and queen, who formed two halves of an aspect of the body of Brahma. Manu and Satarupa had Priyavrata and Uttanapada as their sons, and Akuti, Devahuti and Prasuti as daughters. The relationships of these offsprings of Manu and Satarupa with the earlier progeny of Brahma, such as Marichi, Atri, etc., became the sources of the entire creation in all its Lokas or planes of manifestation.

The Puranas go into more detail of the creation of lesser divinities, such as the Devas, Gandharvas and Apsarases, Pitris, Yakshas, Siddhas, Charanas, Vidyadharas, Kinnaras, Kimpurushas and lower still Nagas, Rakshasas, Bhutas, Pretas and Pisachas. The creation of the plants, animals and humans is said to have taken place, according to the Srimad Bhagavata Purana, simultaneously with these lesser grades of beings.

One important feature in creation is that in the case of Ishvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virat, the appearance or existence of objects is posterior to perception by the ramified Cosmic Will (*drishti-srishti*), while individual psychological perceptions are posterior to the existence of the objects so manifested cosmically (*srishti-drishti*).

The Puranic classification of the seven regions or planes viz., (1) Bhuloka, (2) Bhuvarloka, (3) Svarloka, (4) Maharloka, (5) Janaloka, (6) Tapoloka and (7) Satyaloka may be regarded as pertinent to the worlds respectively of (1) inanimate matter, plants, animals and humans; (2) Pitris, and beings of their category; (3) Devas, Gandharvas and Apsarases with Indra as their ruler and Brihaspati as their preceptor; (4) the Siddhas and Rishis engaged in meditation (who may be considered as occupants of Maharloka, Janaloka and Tapoloka; the higher order of creation above the manifestation of Rudra being hailed as the presiding divinities in the region of Satyaloka. There is also to be mentioned a superior order of spiritual beings like Narayana and Nara, Vasishtha, Vyasa, Suka and such other Rishis, who may be residing in any region at their will. These subsequent descriptions of detail in greater

concreteness are not to be found in the Upanishads, but form the central theme of the creation theory in the Puranas.

Metaphysics: The Upanishads hold that the universe is in essence a spiritual unity. All this is pervaded by the Lord (*Isa*), whatever moves or moves not. To worship Him, therefore, implies a relinquishment of one's possessorship in regard to things. Covetousness is, thus, a denial of God's existence as the all-pervading reality. Life and its activities are non-different from divine contemplation. To bear what comes with fortitude and to act without initiative is real contemplation, in the light of the consciousness that He is all things.

The Supreme Being can neither be seen, nor heard, nor thought, nor understood, with the faculties of the individual. He can be recognised where the ego is abolished. He sees through the eyes, hears through the ears, thinks through the mind, understands through the intellect and breathes through the breath; but these instruments cannot apprehend Him. One who thinks that he knows, knows not. He is known by him who does not think that he knows anything in particular. If He is known here in this life, then there is the true end of all aspirations. If one does not know Him in this life, great indeed is the loss to such a one. Sages become immortal, after death, having seen Him alone in each and every being in this world as its very Self. Hence one should adore and contemplate on Reality as Supreme Love and Delight, whereby the universe begins to reciprocate this love to the votary of such a meditation.

The pleasures of the senses are ephemeral. They wear away one's energies, and tend to one's destruction. Even the longest life with the greatest pleasure is indeed worth nothing in the end. The only desirable aim in this world is the knowledge of the Self. The pleasant is one thing and the good is another. Both these come to a man together for acceptance. The wise man discriminates between the two and chooses the good rather than the pleasant. But the foolish one chooses the pleasant and falls into the net of the widespread death, on account of attachment to personal comfort. There is really no diversity here. As an indivisible Being alone should one behold it in all these things. He goes from death to death in a series of transmigration who perceives diversity here.

By knowing it, everything is known at once. He becomes it, who knows it. It is 'all this', and it ranges above perception. It transcends the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. It is the cessation of all phenomena, the peaceful, the blessed, the non-dual. It is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity. One possesses all things simultaneously, becomes all things at one stroke, and enjoys all things at once, who knows this as identical with his own being. Wonderful is that experience, marvellous is that man, great is his fortune, blessed are his friends, freed for ever are his relatives, gone is the bondage of those who have his blessings.

The Absolute is consciousness. It is the root of all existence. It blazes as the sun, shines as the moon, twinkles as the star. It sleeps in stones, breathes in plants, thinks in animals and discriminates in man. No part of this world is to be regarded as complete unless it is taken together with

all its other parts. The sun and moon are only a part of it. The solar system is a part. The stellar regions are a part. The earth and the heavens are a part. No meditation can be perfect when any particular thing alone is taken as its object. Meditation is defective when it does not comprehend all existence. Meditation is rightly done when its object is the totality of which the visible and the conceivable are just aspects. In such meditation individuality is swallowed up into Universal Being. Here meditation itself ceases, and the object of meditation alone remains. The actions of one who knows this secret are universal actions. The food that he takes in is the food offered to the universe, and the universe rejoices in such satisfaction. The food offered to him by anyone is a spiritual sacrifice performed in the altar of creation. Knowing this, if one were to throw some grains of food to an outcaste, it shall be veritably offered into the Absolute. As children sit round their mother for food, hungry and craving for her benign look, so do all beings in this creation look to him for their existence, who knows this secret.

The Infinite alone is bliss. There is no bliss in the small and finite. Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else,—that is the Infinite. Where one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else,—that is the finite. The Infinite is the immortal. The finite is the mortal. The Infinite is based on its own greatness. It has no resting place or support other than itself. It is in front, behind, to the right, the left, above, below and everywhere. It is all this at once. For one who knows this, everything springs from his own Self. The

whole universe, manifest and unmanifest, arises for him from his Self, and serves him without limitation of time and place. This is the consummation.

One who knows that He is the 'All' becomes the 'All'. Knowing is being. Knowledge is power. Consciousness is existence and bliss, immediately. He who seeks for the 'All' in any particular thing here, finds it not. The Eternal is not reached through the non-eternal. The permanent cannot be attained by the impermanent. The means and the end are both the Absolute.

None loves an object for its own sake. All love is for one's own universal Self. Things are dear because of the Infinite that peeps through them. The Infinite summons the Infinite in the perception of the beloved. Persons and things are not dear for their own sake. Though all love has a selfish origin in the world, it has a transcendent meaning above the phase of the seer and seen. He who knows the secret behind temporal loves knows Truth and is liberated from the thraldom of mortality. The knowledge of the Self is knowledge of everything. But he who, by an error, regards anything as being outside himself in truth, shall lose that thing, whatever it be.

Where there is duality, as it were, there one sees the other, hears the other, smells the other, speaks to the other, tastes the other, touches the other, thinks the other, understands the other. But where the One alone is, who can see what and by what, who can hear, smell, speak, taste, touch, think or understand what and by what? How can one know that by which one knows all these things? How can one know the Knower? This is the great admonition.

This is the treasure-house of knowledge. If one were to give the whole earth as a gift for the sake of this knowledge, one should regard this knowledge as greater than that. Lo, this is greater than all things.

The Upanishads proclaim in this strain the content of spiritual realisation and have as their aim and objective of existence the aspiration to rise from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from mortality to Immortality.

The Period of Transition

Personal God: Though the Upanishads are absolutistic in their approach, they are not lopsided in any sense of the term. Together with their lofty proclamations of Brahman beyond the range of understanding, they provide for the emotional aspiration of man by their concept of God, who creates, preserves and destroys the Universe as a divine play. At this stage we should not try to introduce the later logical formulations of Vedanta worked out by teachers like Sankara and Ramanuja, for the Upanishads belong to a time and period of thinking when such logical deductions were unnecessary, and it was enough for the sages to fly into an ecstasy of divine perception in all creation, a tendency of the Rishis of the Vedic hymns, and there was no need to argue out an intellectualistic difference between the concepts of Brahman and Ishvara. If Brahman is everything, it is also the creation, and its might can be seen in the processes of the Universe. The stages which the logical system of Vedanta would call Virat, Hiranyagarbha and Ishvara are comprehended within Brahman, and to the Upanishads it would be immaterial whether Reality is

addressed and envisaged as the indeterminable Be-ness, or the powerful Creator, Sustainer and Transformer of all things.

The Brihadaranyaka and the Mandukya Upanishads regard Reality also as the Indwelling Presence (*antaryamin*), the Ruler of all (*srveshvara*), the Lord of all (*sarvadhipati*), the King of all (*bhutadhipati*), the Protector of all beings (*bhutapala*). He is described as Omnipotent, Omniscient, All-pervading, the Source, Beginning and End of all things. This is the incipient stage of the concept of Ishvara in the Vedanta. The Svetasvatara Upanishad refers to God as the Supreme Lord of all lords, the God of all gods, the Ruler of all rulers, who is neither cause nor effect, and who has no equal. He is endowed with an eternal Power (*parasakti*) which works in creation as Knowledge (*ichha*), Energy (*bala*) and Action (*kriya*). He is the great God who has no defining marks of identification, is not affected by the vicissitudes of the world, as the sun is not sullied by the defects of the eye. He grasps without hands, is fast in movement without feet, sees without eyes and hears without ears. He knows everything, but there is none who can know Him. He is the great Purusha shining like the sun beyond the darkness of the separatist consciousness. By knowing Him alone does one overcome death, there is no other way of attaining Him.

Ethics: The ethics of the Upanishads is metaphysical and spiritual. They affirm that human life, which can be graded into a period of studentship, householdership (in which can be included one's social and political career), and retirement from active participation in world-life, is a

preparation for the realisation of Brahman. In this realisation every aim of life gets fulfilled and it is the culmination and purpose of all desires and aspirations. Those heroes who have such realisation rise above the desire for sex, wealth and worldly gain, whether here or hereafter, for to them, Brahman, the Absolute, is itself the world and the Self, all in One. Knowing this Truth, these heroes want nothing from anyone or anywhere, and live in the joy of Brahman, which is their Atman.

But such lofty spiritual experiences are open only to those who are endowed with tranquillity of mind (*sama*), self-control (*dama*), freedom from compulsive activity (*uparati*), fortitude (Titiksha), faith in the Ideal (*sraddha*) and power of concentration of mind (*samadhana*). The Upanishad affirms that when all the desires lodged in the heart are liberated for ever, then the mortal becomes immortal and herein does he attain to Brahman. When the knots of the heart are all rent asunder, then does the mortal become immortal. This is the supreme teaching, says the Upanishad. But it is hard for all to keep this lofty goal as their ideal in life, because the world has also the pleasant, in addition to the good, and mostly people go after the pleasant rather than the good, choosing rather the delights of sense than the good of the soul. It is only the highly refined spirit that chooses the higher blessedness after rejecting the temptation of the sense-world. *Sreyas* which is good is unfortunately not as easily available as *Preyas* which is the pleasant to sensation. It is the dictum of the Upanishad that unless one ceases from evil conduct and has reached composure of mind, control of senses, acuteness of

concentration and is settled in true tranquillity of thought, emotion and will, one cannot realise the Absolute merely with the help of intellectual understanding.

The concise teaching compressed into the words, 'Damyata' (be self-controlled), 'Datta' (be charitable) and 'Dayadhvam' (be compassionate), in the Chhandogya Upanishad, supposed to have been addressed respectively to the gods, human beings and the demoniacal natures, sums up the ancient ethical concept of an all-round necessity for restraint of the senses, self-sacrifice and love for creation as the moral prerequisites for the higher reaches of the soul towards spiritual perfection.

The convocational address of the teacher to the students says: "Speak the truth, practise righteousness. Do not neglect sacred study. Do not neglect worship of the gods and the Pitris. Let the mother be your god. Let the father be your god. Let the teacher be your god. Let the guest be your god. Practise only noble deeds; not others. Give with faith. Give in plenty. Give with modesty. Give with respect. Give with sympathy." This is, indeed, the height that any ethical principle can reach.

Universal love is declared not merely as a possibility but a real achievement. When one sees himself in all beings and all beings in himself, he does not shrink away from anything. As children sit round their mother with affection, so do all beings crave for him who sees all beings in his absolute Self. He who loves all, is loved by all. The woman and the man, the boy and the girl, are He; He it is that, as an old man, totters with a stick, thus deceiving the human eye; for He is in all things.

Psychology: The individual is envisaged in the Upanishad as a composite of the conscious, subconscious, unconscious and the absolute aspects of consciousness. In the waking state of the mind and the senses the individual is engrossed in an externalised consciousness of physical objects, while in the dreaming state there is an externalised consciousness of mere psychic objects projected out of memory. In the deep sleep state there is a complete overpowering of consciousness by ignorance of everything, a causal condition in which the seeds of dreaming and waking are latent. Transcending these three empirical conditions of the soul, hails the Absolute, Brahman or Atman, which is also immanent in the individual and the cosmos. The Absolute is neither externalised consciousness as in waking, nor internalised consciousness as in dream, nor a negation of consciousness as in deep sleep. The Mandukya Upanishad declares that the Atman is beyond this threefold state of consciousness which is in relation to the gross, subtle and causal bodies of the individual. It is the invisible, non-relative, ungraspable, indefinable, unthinkable, ineffable *something* which can be designated only as the Atman or the Self, where world-perception ceases and an entirely new perception, impossible to understand, takes its place. This is what is called the fourth state of consciousness in comparison with the three relative states mentioned. It is the aim of the relative to reach the Absolute. The principle of 'I' which asserts itself in all states is the Atman, which is transcendent, but which also pervades everything in the individual and the cosmos. The bearing of the waking, dreaming and deep sleep states of

consciousness, called respectively, Vaisvanara, Taijasa and Prajna in the Mandukya Upanishad, to the corresponding cosmic conditions of Virat, Hiranyagarbha and Ishvara is developed in the later systematised Vedanta, which need not detain us here. The Atman transcending the three individual states is declared to be identical with Brahman transcending the three cosmic states. "Tat Tvam Asi"—"That (the Universal) art thou (the individual in essence)." 'This Atman is Brahman', says the Mandukya Upanishad.

The Taittiriya Upanishad makes a further classification of these states into the physical (*annamaya*), vital (*pranamaya*), mental (*manomaya*), intellectual (*vijnanamaya*) and blissful (*anandamaya*) sheaths of consciousness. The first sheath operates only in the waking state, the second, third and fourth in the waking and dreaming states, and the fifth in all the three states, though primarily in deep sleep alone. The first sheath constitutes the gross body, the second, third and fourth together form the subtle body and the fifth is the causal body of the Jiva, or the individual soul. The Atman is beyond the five sheaths, though it vitalises every one of them with its presence.

Eschatology: The Upanishads openly describe the passage of the individual soul, stage by stage, after its shedding of the physical body. It may be mentioned here that, after death, the soul bound by karma may (1) return to this earth, (2) take birth in some other plane than the earth, (3) hang on as a discarnate spirit in any intermediary region (a condition called Preta), (4) go to the region of Pitris (Pitriloka), (5) reach heaven (Svarga), (6) fall into hell

(Naraka), or, if it is a highly advanced spiritual seeker, (7) pass through the region of the Sun (Suryadvara), to Brahmaloka, and then attain *moksha*. This last mentioned way of attainment is called Krama-Mukti (progressive salvation by stages). Only the absolutely desireless soul (Akama or Nishkama) attains Brahman here itself, without moving to any place, says the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. This attainment is called Sadyo-Mukti (immediate salvation).

The soul with desire of some kind or the other departs through the various nerve-passages of the subtle body, while the spiritually illumined soul passes through the Sushumna nerve-current and reaches Brahmaloka, *via* the shining region of the Sun. The Chhandogya Upanishad describes the stages of the passage of the soul on its way to Brahmaloka. The statements on this subject scattered over through the Upanishads, when grouped in an order, amount to the following description of the path, called Devayana or the path of the gods. The soul reaches the deity of flame (fire or light) and then rises gradually to the deities of the day, the bright half of the lunar month, the six months when the Sun moves to the north, the year, the region of the celestials, Air, Sun, Moon, lightning, the region of Varuna, the region of Indra, the region of Prajapati, and finally Brahmaloka. At the stage of the region of the deity of lightning, the soul is said to be received by a superhuman being (who it is the Upanishad does not say), and he leads the soul to the four higher regions. These gradations are difficult to understand, except as possible stages or grades of the manifestation of the Supreme Being

in the individualised contents of the various relative planes of existence.

The soul that is not destined to reach Brahmaloka and has merits enough to go to Pitriloka alone, is said to rise by stages to the deities of smoke, night, the dark half of the lunar month, the six months when the Sun moves to the south, the sky (it does not go to the deity of the year), and the Moon. From here the soul returns through the sky, wind, smoke, mist, cloud, rain and enters grains, herbs, trees, etc., which are consumed by individuals on earth.

The Upanishads hold that the future of a person is determined by his actions, the actions by his volitions and the volitions by his desires. Thus it is evident that on one's desires depends the nature of one's future life. The ignorant are said to reach dark regions devoid of all happiness. Those who are ignorant of the true nature of the Self go to sunless realms covered over with darkness. The doers of good deeds enter into birth in nobler species, while the doers of bad deeds may fall into the wombs of animals or depraved characters. karma, then, decides one's future life. But, as mentioned already, those who are free from karma, due to realisation of the Atman, have no rebirth; their *prana*s do not depart into space; they become Brahman, here and now.

Practice of Yoga: The Upanishads regard the senses which are extrovert as obstructions to spiritual experience. The senses have to be subdued and turned inward for the purpose of Yoga. When the five senses of perception, together with the mind, stand in tune with the intellect, and the intellect is not distracted by any kind of objectivation,

then one is said to be in the highest state of Yoga. Yoga is all-round self-control, and this state does not last long, for it comes and goes, and hence the student is very careful. This is the instruction of the older Upanishads on the art of Yoga. The Svetasvatara Upanishad goes to details and advises a steady seated posture, and thereby an attempt to restrain the turbulent senses and the mind which have to be brought from their aberrations outside in the world back to the centre within, the Universal Atman. This is to be achieved by regulation of *prana* in breathing, and persistent effort in directing the thought rightly, as one does in restraining restive horses. This calls forth tremendous energy and understanding on the part of the student in Yoga and no moral weakling can hope to succeed in it. Though in the higher stages meditation can be practised anywhere and at any time it is beneficial in the initial stages to choose a suitable place for commencing the practice of Yoga. The place suggested is one that is even, pure, free from gravel, fire, and disturbing features such as noise or sound of any kind, and from annoying elements like mosquitoes, and the like. The place should be pleasant to the feeling, secluded and not tempting to the sensuous urges of the lower nature. As one advances in meditation, visions like those of mist, smoke, sunlight, fire, breeze, light of firefly, lightning, crystal, moonlight, and so on, are possible. These visions are indicative of spiritual progress. When one masters in meditation the natures belonging to the five elements,—earth, water, fire, air and ether,—one rises, says the Upanishad, above the torments of illness, old age and even death, on account of his having acquired a

flaming spiritual body. Then it is that qualities like lightness of body, perfect health, non-covetousness, resplendence of body, fineness of voice, fragrance of personality, etc., manifest themselves. This is said to be the first stage of realisation in Yoga. Higher stages are further above. The Yogi, by degrees, unites his soul with Brahman which is unborn, eternal and omnipresent, by knowing which one is freed from all bondage.

Liberation: The soul that is freed from the bonds of world-existence traverses through its physical, vital, mental, intellectual and causal vestments and rejoices in the ecstasy of the realisation of Brahman. Here comes the knowledge that the experiencer, the experiencing process and the experienced object or condition are all one. In the words of the Upanishad, the realised soul, in a particular stage, exclaims: 'I am the food and the eater of food; I who am food, eat the eater of food. I have encompassed the whole Universe.'

In *moksha* or liberation all the principles and powers that were confined to individuality get released into their sources or divine essences, which again are merged in Brahman. The individuality, together with its Karmas, gets dissolved in the Supreme Imperishable One. As rivers enter the ocean, casting off their names and forms, the knower enters the Supreme Being, released from bondage. The liberated one enters into the All from every side, and becomes everything.

The Spirit of the Age

It is often thought by scholars of oriental learning that there is a note of pessimism in the Upanishads and that no pessimistic way of thinking can be regarded as a healthy trend of life. From the short account of the spiritual philosophy of life in the Upanishads that we have presented above, it would be obvious how far removed this charge is from truth. The life of the sages of the Upanishads was buoyant with the joy of the recognition of divinity and sacredness in the world, and the Upanishads laid the foundation for what is commonly known as 'Hinduism' today. The spirit of the Veda Samhitas and Upanishads, as we have observed in this survey, is one of life and not death, of health and not illness, of joy instead of pessimism and sorrow or a sense of world-weariness, which is never the aim and fulfilment of any religious or philosophic view of life.

The criticism is evidently levelled against certain passages in some of the Upanishads which speak of the impermanency of things, the transitoriness of the world and the impossibility of attaining the Absolute by the perishable acts of the mortal individual. If pessimism means the recognition of the inadequacy of empirical knowledge and the observation of the relativity of all things, then, obviously, all philosophy is pessimistic. But, then, this dissatisfaction with the surface view of things is the beginning of wisdom, for reality is not appearance. The Upanishads, thus, constitute the zenith of human thinking, a height it never reached either before or after, and are the

glory and treasure of the culture, not only of India, but of the world.

Chapter III

THE ITIHASAS AND PURANAS

The Rise of the Epics and Puranas

The Brahman of the Upanishads, which stirred the awe and reverence of the sages, could be realised only by the cream of mankind, and those who are fit to pursue the path chalked out in the Upanishads are small in number. But religion has to extend beyond realisation and cater to the emotional needs of the lesser category of humanity. No historian of philosophy, to our knowledge, has been able to get over the prejudice that all religious thought subsequent to the Vedas and Upanishads, and apart from the later systematic Vedanta of the Darsana school, is a kind of trash, or, at best, a concession to the weakness of the popular mind. But it need not be emphasised that, if the religion of the Hindus had exhausted itself in the visions of the Vedas and Upanishads and the metaphysics of the intellectual Vedanta, Hinduism would have died out long ago and remained today as a memory, like the cultures of Babylon, Greece or Egypt. The almost universal sweep of the thought of the Hindus has enabled their religion to withstand the onslaughts of foreign culture and pass through the vicissitudes of time.

The appeal of the great religion of India is not merely to the intellect or reason, or even to an empirical need, but to man *as such.* The longings of human nature are not Eastern or Western, but of the world. The awe-inspiring Brahman or Purusha had to be made accessible to the warrior and the businessman, the servant and the farmer in the fields, in a

way intelligible to them all, and practicable to their endowments and temperaments. While the Upanishads called forth special qualifications, the Epics and Puranas came to the help of the general man.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the towering Epics of India. While the Mahabharata is constructed out of a complicated theme of tradition, mythology, history, philosophy and mysticism, the Ramayana is a straight and running chronicle depicting the deeds of a divinely great hero who came to set an example to mankind as a whole. The Mahabharata soars into the realms of the supernatural and the marvellous, giving at the same time an easier exposition of the nature of the goal of human life. The Ramayana written in the ideal ornate style of Valmiki, mildly shaking the heart of the reader from beginning to end, and giving a silent touch of transformation to the feelings, brings about, without its being known or announced loudly, the requisite regeneration of the human mind into an ideal condition of humaneness, a sense of brotherhood, filial affection, fraternity of feeling, obedience to rule, servicefulness, honesty, firmness in resolution, and an unbounded goodness coupled with an adamantine adherence to truth. The Mahabharata, which is the magnum opus of the brilliant insight of Vyasa, on the other hand, raises a tumult of emotion and feeling and throws the mind to giddy heights, scattering it into the empyrean of a wondrous perfection of the ethical and spiritual ideal, and the student of the Mahabharata finds himself dashed by the waves of the powerful thoughts of Vyasa, now sinking down and now rising up in that ocean of Epic literature.

Valmiki and Vyasa are the real builders of Indian culture, and their names will be remembered as long as Hinduism lasts. The great heroes and heroines of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata,—Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, Sita, Hanuman, Krishna, Yudhishthira, Bhishma, Arjuna, Draupadi,—are bywords even to a schoolboy in India, and it is impossible to think of these noble personages without a sense of the supernormal creeping into one's veins. It is the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that have driven into the minds of people in India the idea of a compassionate and powerful God ruling the destinies of man and yet ready to help anyone who really craves for His grace. It is the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that have built India through the ages and saturated the Indian mind in religious thought and hammered down the ideal of God-realisation as the goal of human life and the possibility of receiving help in this endeavour from the Rishis and the Avataras of God. It is these sublime Epics that have cemented the hearts of the Hindus into a single whole, and if today India stands as a powerful Nation ready to face undaunted any force that may threaten it from outside, it is because of the moral toughness and courage that has been instilled into the blood of the Nation by the superminds of Valmiki and Vyasa. It is impossible for us here to adequately estimate the indelible impact which the thoughts of Valmiki and Vyasa have produced on the minds of the people of India. They brought into being an effect which cannot be erased out of history, for they touched the *being* of man.

The great works of Valmiki and Vyasa became the reservoirs for the streams of several inspiring works by the

immortal poets of India,—Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Bharavi, Magha, Sriharsha, Tulasidas, Kamban, and many other writers in poetry and prose, who drew inspiration from the inexhaustible founts of the authors of the two great Epics. The famous saying, 'whatever is of worth in the literature of the world is what has been already spoken by Vyasa (Vyasochhishtam Jagat Sarvam)', gives an idea as to the nature of the contents of the work of Vyasa. In the very words of the Mahabharata, 'whatever is here (in this Epic), whether concerning ethics, politics, human well-being or spiritual salvation, is elsewhere; what is not found here will not be found anywhere else'. The religion that the common Hindu knows and practises is the religion of the Epics and Puranas. It is this prolific literature that has made India spiritual in character. When the religious man of India, in general, prays to God or even contemplates on God, his idea is really that of the God of the Epics and Puranas. This is the popular religion of India, the religion of the masses and of the orthodox religious elite even today. The great religious festivals and ceremonies, rituals, vows and observances practised throughout the country are the result of the untiring proclamations made in this body of literature, ascribed to Valmiki and Vyasa. Under these circumstances, it is surprising that historians of philosophy, even of Indian origin, should have proffered a step-motherly treatment to these works of great literary merit, and in most cases ignored their very existence, as if they are the chaff of religious literature, while in fact it is to these alone that the religious man has clung for centuries down

to this day for inspiration and solace in times of emotional depression or dispiritedness in life.

This appraisal of the genius of Valmiki and Vyasa is indeed much less than the regard and attention that these masters and makers of human culture really deserve. We hope that students of the history of philosophy and religion will find time and patience enough to dive again into the depths of this ocean of Epic literature, for no one can be said to have truly grasped the spirit of Indian culture without having mastered the import of these Epics. As it is said in the Mahabharata, 'the Veda is afraid of him who has not studied the Epics and Puranas, for he would indeed kill it with his ignorance of its truth propounded in them.'

History and Symbology as Modes of Teaching

The method of the Epics is different from that of the Veda-Samhitas and the Upanishads. The latter lead the mind direct to the ultimate truth of things, with a forceful pressure of the revelation of a universal unity exerted on the understanding. The penetrating insight of the authors of the Epics and Puranas quickly discovered the impossibility of the application of this method on the minds of the masses and followed a way which can be easily accepted by everyone. The mind has a tendency to love the beautiful, admire the marvellous, fear the mysterious and imitate the heroic or chivalrous. The feelings of affection, sympathy and compassion, and a longing for the ideal of justice are all to be found even in the most learned or the philosophically minded. The human side does not vanish even for a metaphysician of the highest order. To

understand this aspect of man is a little difficult, and ignorance of this fact is the cause of man's failures in social life. The mind resents following a beaten path and yearns for variety. It loves and hates. It has prejudices and, occasionally, it is even fanatic. All this admixture of curious ingredients in the human mind does not receive full sympathy from the Upanishads or the Vedas. Man, being what he is, needs a friend, philosopher and guide in his day-to-day life. And this need is admirably filled by the works of the great Epic poets.

The personalities of the Epics are eternal inspirations for the drooping spirits of mankind. Consider, for example, the invincible power of Rama, that exemplar of truth and justice, who was like a thunderbolt to all evil and the tenderest consoler of the simple and innocent, and a forgiver of even the enemy who came to him for refuge, infusing into every heart, devotion, admiration and fear, all together, by the character of his ideal personality. Consider the wondrous Krishna who could walk on earth and in heaven simultaneously, bring kings down from their thrones by a mere word of his, assume the cosmic form of the Almighty and yet wash the feet of the guests who attended the Rajasuya sacrifice of Yudhishthira, bewitch charming girls who loved him, give assurance and comfort to the weeping Draupadi, put courage and energy into the diffident Arjuna, terrorise even the terrific gods in battle, speak the highest philosophy and fight as the mightiest of soldiers, give spiritual vision to Yogins in their meditations, hypnotise the whole army of the Kauravas by a mere look, converse with Brahma and Rudra as friends and yet hold

the reins of Arjuna's chariot in war, and remain at once the source of omniscience and omnipotence, a master of Yoga, a centre of love and a dynamic man of action, a perfection of personality as man and God in one. Vyasa, by his majestic descriptions of Krishna, stimulates one's being into an ecstasy of thought which the mortal frame cannot endure, for it may break if the thought deepens a little more in such contemplation. Consider the virtue of Yudhishthira, which bore the impertinence and meanness of the Kauravas in the court where Draupadi was grossly insulted in public, the virtue which ordered the release of the evil Duryodhana from the bonds of Chitrasena, the Gandharva, the virtue which had the understanding and patience to withstand the incitations of his brothers, while in forest, to take up arms against the enemies, which showed the presence of mind that had the boldness to walk singly through the thick of the arrayed army to receive the blessings of the elders before the war, which asked for the revival of his stepmother's son rather than his own mighty brothers when they were all in a swoon of death, which would rather give up the prospects of going to heaven than abandon a faithful dog which followed him in his weary journey. Who could remember Yudhishthira without tears in one's eyes! Consider the dexterity of Arjuna, the strength of Bhima, the might of Hanuman, the sorrow of Draupadi, the grief of Sita, the misery of Damayanti, the courage of Lakshmana, the sacrifice of Bharata, the greatness of Bhishma, the spiritual splendour of Vasishtha which foiled the mightiest weapons known on earth. Consider the wisdom of Vyasa, the realisation of Suka, the glory of the

divine sages, Narayana and Nara! Who can read the lives of these great ones without a thrill of wonder, fright, love, and an aspiration for the higher life! These are some of the many picturesque and unforgettable lessons that the Epics have left behind them as a legacy for directing the human heart to blossom from humanity to Divinity.

Apart from the great lessons that one learns from the lives of the towering personalities of the Epics, they also provide a symbolic representation of the activity of the cosmic forces, working both within and without, an activity which is the very nature of the Universe. The wandering of Rama in the forests also reminds one of the aberration of the Jiva (individual soul) in *samsara*, with his consort Sita, the mind that implores him to run after the golden deer of sense-object. The power of discrimination and virility which is Lakshmana gets grossly insulted by the desirous mind and is made to take leave of it by a misconstrued interpretation of situation. The ten-headed Ravana is the group of the ten senses which carries away Sita, the mind, impetuously, and Rama, the soul, is left all alone, seeking union with his consort in the wilderness of life. Another reading of this symbology takes it to signify the separation of Sita, the individual soul, from Rama, the Absolute. Here Ravana may be regarded as the mind working with the ten senses. The good tidings which Hanuman conveyed to Sita are like the happy news of the possibility of the soul's salvation, received from a *Guru* or spiritual teacher. The Guru's power of insight dispels the darkness of the mind and shakes the Jiva from its slumber of ignorance, as Hanuman disillusions the Rakshasas by his terrifying

power, dashing down their fortresses and challenging their unified attack all alone. In this symbology, the union of Sita with Rama, after the destruction of Ravana, is the union of the individual with the Supreme Being, after the annihilation of ignorance.

The Mahabharata, likewise, serves as a great symbol of the universal drama. The dark forces as the Kauravas banish from their estates the virtuous characters as the Pandavas, with apparent success in the beginning. Goodness in the world seems to have no support and it is put to shame by the vices which gain an upper hand. The Pandavas who represent good character and right conduct are disconcerted and defeated and forced out of their kingdom into the forest, where they live with the sympathy of some good people, who are naturally not many in number. Virtue is put to test and does not receive help even from God in the earlier stages,—Krishna is far away, busily engaged in something else, and does not know the woe of the Pandavas. There is also, after a time, a temptation to try the impossible and break a vow, when the younger brothers and Draupadi advise Yudhishthira, the chief among the virtuous and the good, to cut short their exile in the forest and retaliate upon the Kauravas. Only the sagacity of a Yudhishthira could realise the unworthiness of such a move at that time. After a period of severe test, virtue is rewarded, and armed forces come to its rescue, and God Himself as Krishna takes up the reins of its destiny in His hands, and the war with vice is waged. Even here is another symbology of the chariot, of which Krishna is the charioteer, a figure which occurs in the Kathopanishad. The supreme

intelligence in man is the charioteer or the guiding principle in the battle of life. Arjuna is the individual soul. The horses are the senses. The body is the chariot. The mind is the reins. The objects of the senses are the path and the direction of the movement of the chariot. In this war with unrighteousness one has to face not merely gross wickedness as of Duryodhana and his henchmen, but also outdated conservatism and tradition as in Bhishma, a character which may be called misplaced understanding that does not take cognisance of the subtlety of changing situations; alliance of knowledge and power with injustice as in Drona; and ability and conduct vitiated by bad association as in Karna. God, the Master of the destiny of the Universe, has His own plans, and Krishna, the Lord of Yoga rousing the confused soul with His gospel of the Bhagavad Gita and infusing confidence by His Visvarupa, Himself does all the work of the destruction of evil and establishment of righteousness, while the soul is merely an instrument in His hands. As long as God is seated in the body it lives and moves and when Krishna descends from Arjuna's chariot it is instantaneously reduced to ashes. God takes up the responsibility of caring for the Jiva when there is true self-surrender, and Krishna takes up arms against the fierce Bhishma when the need is felt. God sees that the vow of the soul in its battle is fulfilled as is illustrated in the overcoming of Jayadratha. The traditional concept of *dharma*, like the rule of mathematics fixed for ever, has to be abandoned and seen as it is in its vitality, a living, changing and ruling force, as was demonstrated in the vanquishing of Karna. The surgeon's knife has to be applied

when the body is going to be eaten up by cancer. Whether one is a Bhishma, worthy of respect, or a Duryodhana deserving kingly honour, he has to be put down when he goes counter to the divine order prevailing in creation.

The above description of an inner symbol in the Epics does not mean that they are only a symbol and there is no substance or truth in them. There are many who imagine these Epics to be the concoction of a brave genius, with no historicity whatsoever in their annals. Such a hazardous view goes to an extreme and truth is always in the middle. It is possible that some minor details, such as the Upakhyanas in the Mahabharata, have grown out of some old legends or traditions, but there is no reason to disbelieve the historical character of the central figures of the Epics. May we also suppose that the restless anxiety of some writers to reduce persons like Rama and Krishna to mythical or imaginary concepts of poets is due to an eagerness to see that the case of spirituality or divine living does not triumph in the world? Even during the time of Krishna himself, there was at least one man who denied his very existence.

The Metaphysics of History

Here it will be profitable to make a slight digression from the main subject and discuss the meaning of history and symbol, and how the charge of the non-historicity of the Epic figures cannot affect the main purpose of the Epics. Perhaps it is a feeling of many that non-historicity means non-existence. It is our purpose here to show that this erroneous notion is based on a wrong view of history itself. There is a cosmic significance of things, in addition to

the historical and isolated meaning which they seem to have in social life. The human mind has a habit of looking at events in a straight line and this linear march of events is normally regarded as history. This is what we call the three-dimensional perspective or the spatio-temporal vision of the mind—to look at objects as bodies, as existences cut off from others, in such a way that there cannot be any intrinsic or organic connection among them. This is the classical historical view. The events of political history have no organic connection. There appear to be sudden jumps, in space and time, of characters which cannot be predicted easily. But that this is not the truth of history will be clear to a true philosopher of history. The historical view takes account of the causal connection of events, while causation is not the whole truth of the universe. Arthur Eddington introduces a distinction between causation which is the commonsense meaning of the relation of cause and effect in which there is the notion of the temporal antecedence of cause to the effect, and what he calls causality which is the *symmetrical relation* of the totality of events in the universe, which is a complete system of reciprocally connected events. Whitehead holds a similar view when he considers reality to be of the nature of an organismic process. Here the three-dimensional or spatio-temporal view of history gives way to the truth of a *universal situation,* which though it may appear as extra-mental to individual observing centres, is involved in the very constitution of the observers, and hence incapable of observation at all. A necessity of thought need not be an uncontradictable truth. James Jeans observes: "We can no longer say that the past

creates the present; past and present no longer have any objective meanings, since the four-dimensional continuum can no longer be sharply divided into past, present and future". "If we still wish to think of the happenings in the phenomenal world as governed by the causal law, we must suppose that these happenings are determined in some substratum of the world which lies beyond the world of phenomena."

As the universe is a connected process and not a collocation of isolated objects hanging in space, no one thing or event can be said to be the cause of another thing or event, for, in an unbroken process, every part has to pervade and penetrate every other part, so that everything in it becomes a cause as well as an effect. Every event, thus, reflects a universal condition and does not stand as an element abstracted from the whole. Causation among things is to be understood as the individualistic reading of the consequences of an indivisible consciousness appearing as the witness of objects which have it as their existence and content. The function of this universal principle as an unbroken continuum appears, where it is manifest in individuals, as the law of causal relation. The dynamic self-expression of the Absolute in the world of objects involves among them a living connection which appears in this manner. Causation has a meaning in the empirical world, but is meaningless to the Absolute. The mechanistic senses of man cannot observe the teleological purpose hidden in the Universe, an aim towards which all evolution is directed.

The story of Lila and Padma, in the Yoga Vasishtha, demonstrates the truth that an event can have several dates and locations. Every event is a universal event and is valid to the whole cosmos. The past, present and future have no absolute determinations of their own. An event may have a different significance altogether with a different space-time meaning in some other framework of reference. What is past need not be necessarily past for everyone, and this law applies to the present and future, also. Any event taken by itself and at a given moment of time may belong either to the past, present or future according to the space-time coordinate from which it is viewed. From the point of view of the Reality behind the Universe, an event is a universal process inseparable from the consciousness in which it occurs. Space-time is a relation and not existence. This world of space-time in which we live is not the only possible one, for there can be as many worlds, with as many space-times, as there are frames of reference or modes of consciousness. Our world-history, therefore, need not be an ultimate reality. When subjected to critical analysis, the reality of the historical existence of things, as we conceive it, vanishes like mist before the sun.

What we understand to be history has a significance wider than that the historical level would permit. The crass notion of a historical being would perhaps be of a person or thing capable of being seen with the physical eye at the time when it existed. Perhaps the existence of someone who has never been seen by anyone would be an object of doubt as to his existence. As there is nobody today who can say that he has seen Rama or Krishna, for example, we are ready to

doubt their reality. We seem to reject everything which cannot be empirically proved right now and here. But in this weddedness of ours to the historical dogma we seem to forget that history need not merely be a straight march of certain events in time but can comprehend situations and realities overstepping the limits of sensory phenomena.

Is God a historical person? Perhaps the reason why his existence is often denied is because his being cannot be subjected to the test of empirical history. Is the world or the universe a historical entity? The solidness, the simple location, in short, the temporal historicalness of the contents of the world has been smashed down once for all, by the discoveries of the modern Theory of Relativity in physics, and its startling philosophic interpretations by such thinkers as Eddington and Whitehead. In this predicament one should really hesitate to give opinion against the historical existence of the personalities of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The perception of Valmiki and Vyasa ranged beyond the empirical view of history and looked at the universe from the point of view of *being qua being*. The Sages sang the history of the cosmos, which an uninitiated mind cannot comprehend. Any attempt by the layman to probe into their implications would be like a science student of a secondary school trying to read the discoveries of Einstein for himself and understand them. No one who is incapable of a universal perspective of things can appreciate the truths presented in these Epics, which proclaim to the world the outer meaning of the inner reality revealed in the Upanishads.

The history of a thing is not what happens to that thing in a particular country or village, but what it is in creation as a totality. We do not exist merely in a country; we exist in the cosmos. That some of us are visitors, some are pilgrims, some have arrived from foreign countries, and some have this or that character, quality or duty, is a description of our personalities; but we are all more than this descriptive form. Our status in the cosmos is our true history, and no study of a person can be complete or be free from doubt unless it is studied from the cosmical standpoint. Taking things bit by bit, in isolation, is not the method of a true historical study. The biography of a person, at least according to the viewpoint of seers like Vyasa, should include the story of body, mind and spirit together, and not merely of the sociological existence of the body. As our social relations today touch all nations, our spirits touch all the planes of being. This is the wider view of history, in which questions like "Did Krishna exist?" cannot arise. When creation is taken in its total perspective, everything in it becomes a historical reality.

To study universal history we require a different apparatus of understanding from that we need when we read European and Indian history. If, as the poet said, we cannot touch a flower in our garden without disturbing a star in the heavens, no one's reality can be evaluated without reference to his wider meaning in the cosmos. This is true not only of human beings but also of the smallest atom in the world or the gods in Paradise.

Apart from this inner truth of history and the reality of a person from this standpoint, there is nothing to disprove

the historical existence of the important personalities of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata even from the point of view of our own physical view of earthly history. That we have no means to adduce as proof of their existence need not imply that they did not walk on this earth at some distant date.

The Puranas

The Puranas are chronicles containing ancient history, mythology and longer or shorter discourses in religion, philosophy, Yoga, mystical attainments and spiritual realisation, and many other kindred subjects.

Large sections of the Puranas are devoted to glorifications of the exploits of Vishnu, Siva, Devi, Ganesha and Skanda, either in their original forms or through their manifestations. Other deities such as Brahma, Surya and Vayu occupy prominent places in the Puranas and receive great attention though not in the same measure as the five mentioned. The other themes are also widely spread through the Puranas in greater or lesser emphasis. The Puranas also describe at length such other subjects as medicine, art, rhetoric and literary appreciation, grammar, ethics, politics, ritual, social laws of the castes and the stages of life, pilgrimage to holy places, religious vows and observances, the nature and value of charitable gifts, and the philosophy of Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta in all their variegatedness. Their vivid biographies of stalwarts who lived and moved in the world as paragons of sagely wisdom, prowess and moral toughness, devotion to God and self-sacrifice give a concrete picture of the universal truths

which they elucidate in a homely but magnificent style. The classification of human conduct and duty into the four Purusharthas or aims of existence is a master-stroke of the ethico-philosophical concept of ancient India, and it formed the groundwork of the great systems of law embodied in the Dharmasastras or Smritis.

The gods, Rishis, kings, saints and moral heroes described in the Puranas have an exceptional educative value to the human mind. As regards the historicity of the personalities of the Puranas, our observations on those mentioned in the Epics have to be called back to memory, for the Puranas are only an amplification of those themes which are concisely hinted in the Epics during the course of the narration of their main subjects.

The major Puranas are eighteen in number and are classified, generally, into three categories of six each, dedicated to the glorification of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The other gods also find their proper places in the recountings of these texts in suitable contexts. As far as the essential content, philosophical profundity and religious impressiveness of the Puranas are concerned, the most important among them are the Vishnu Purana and Srimad-Bhagavata. The Srimad-Bhagavata, in particular, deals with the creation of the world, following the trend of Sankhya and Vedanta; the various incarnations or Avataras of Vishnu, which are twenty-two or twenty-four in number (including the ten great Avataras); the dynasties of gods and demons, sages and kings, as following from the original progenitors issuing from the Creator; the lives of great devotees of God such as Dhruva, Rishabhadeva,

Jadabharata, Ajamila, Prahlada, Gajendra, Ambarisha, Sudama and the like; philosophical discourses on Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta, especially those delivered by Kapila to Devahuti and Sri Krishna to Uddhava; astronomy and geography; the principles of the Dharmas of castes (*varna*) and orders of life (*ashrama*); and a description of time cycle (*kalp*a), the four ages (*yuga*) and the four kinds of dissolution of things (*pralaya*), etc. But the most striking and enchanting section of the Bhagavata is that which describes the life of Krishna. The forceful presentation of the great Avatara has become the source of a marvellous development of the various Bhakti schools in India. This part of the biography of Krishna, though referring to the events of the Mahabharata, carefully avoids the details of his public life as a statesman, warrior and teacher, which is so colourfully portrayed in the Epic. The chapters describing the Rasa Lila or the amorous dance of the lasses of Vrindavana with Krishna as a small boy, his childish pranks of earlier days with a divine import hidden behind them; his marvellous feats of strength and valour striking awe upon everyone even while he was an adolescent, have given rise to a vast literature by devout poets in later times and their spirit pulsates through the emotions of ardent lovers of God even till this day. The Puranas, backed up by the Epics, with their compelling force and grandeur of mien, form an efficient mouthpiece of the Vedas and Upanishads.

Chapter IV

THE BHAGAVADGITA

The Context of the Gospel

The central philosophical thesis of the Mahabharata is contained in the famous song of the Lord, the Bhagavadgita. Arjuna, at the commencement of the Mahabharata war, shows signs of bewilderment and mental confusion and refuses to take up arms even after having undertaken this task after great deliberation earlier. Having engaged himself in a duty befitting his position in society, he withdrew himself from discharging an obligation, which was really more than a question of personal prestige and etiquette, for it involved a principle transcending a simple option on his part. Human weakness overcame the powerful hero, and Arjuna succumbed to the temptations of love and hatred and an eye to the coveted result of action. This condition of the mind of Arjuna raised a universal question, that of duty in the human world. An event in the battle opened the portals of the larger problem of life. Arjuna's predicament became a human situation, for the problem of Arjuna was the problem of man. And the answer of Krishna to the query of Arjuna is the gospel of God to humanity as a whole.

A peculiar human difficulty evoked an astounding reaction from Krishna. The Bhagavadgita commences with a dramatic setting described in its first chapter, wherein the spiritually blind Dhritarashtra's question is followed by the entry of the proud Duryodhana into the scene of the battlefield. The self-aggrandising boast of the Kaurava king

revealed his secret anxieties over the result of war and he was suspicious over the qualitative strength of his quantitatively larger army. He had invincible but unwilling fighters like Bhishma, mighty but unscrupulous warriors like Drona, and reliable but disabled friends like Karna. On the other hand, the Pandavas had whole-hearted supporters like Krishna and the blessings of the gods who were eager for the victory of the Pandavas. Notwithstanding that destiny seemed to favour the Pandava forces the man in Arjuna disclosed his foibles before the Divinity in Krishna, when Arjuna's heart sunk in grief over the inevitable destruction of his loved relations, the uncertainty of victory and the social usability which, he thought, was to be the outcome of mass-scale destruction of people. These reasons were enough for Arjuna to make up his mind not to fight. Krishna's answer to Arjuna's question is the eternal gospel.

The Immortality of the Soul

Krishna commences his teaching with a declaration of the indestructibility of the Soul and the futility of grief over the death of what cannot die. The birth and death of the Soul are like the changing of one's clothes while the person in essence undergoes no change in the process. All experience of change like pleasure and pain is the consequence of the contact of the elements with the essential consciousness projected through the mind and the senses. The contact, naturally, is impermanent and hence its reactions are to be endured with fortitude. The unreal cannot be, and the real cannot not be. The Soul is real. The contacts are not real. No one can destroy the indestructible

Soul. The argument of Arjuna against destruction of life is answered by the doctrine of the deathlessness of the Spirit behind all life, but the essence of the gospel of Krishna is something more than this, for it is centred upon the Absoluteness of God.

God, the Almighty

The ultimate reality is God, who is Absolute. He is the supreme Brahman which cannot be designated either as being or non-being, from the human standpoint. It has hands and feet everywhere; eyes, ears and faces everywhere; and it exists enveloping everything. It has the characteristics of the percepts of all senses, but it is itself devoid of the senses of perception. Though it is unattached to external objects, it is the basis for everything. Though without descriptive qualities or epithets, it is the reservoir of all of them. Being inside and outside all things, it may be said to be both moving and unmoving. On account of its subtlety it is not visible to the eyes. Being infinite, it looks at if it is far, but being the Self of everyone, it is very near. Though it appears divided among the divided bodies, it is really undivided like the ocean beneath the waves. It is the absorber and releaser of everything, the Light of all lights, beyond the darkness of ignorance. Such is the description of the Absolute given in the Bhagavadgita.

The Absolute appears as the universal Virat when it is regarded as the support of the Universe. In the eleventh chapter of the gospel is sung a description of the Universal Being. The form of this Divinity is incapable of being visualised by the transitory mind of the mortal individual,

for all thoughts and acts, whether of mind or of body, have objectives in space and time as their ends, while the Divine Being is above space and time. To understand (Jnatum), to see (Drashtum) and to enter (Praveshtum) into Reality, a transcendence of individuality in a state of universal transfiguration of personality is necessary. God in His form as the Universal Maker of things determines the course of events in His cosmic scheme of creation, and it is the duty of the individual to act merely as His instrument and not assume a false responsibility of doership and enjoyership in life, which belongs to God alone. This perception of truth requires the development of a spiritual vision (Divya-Chakshus) and it cannot be comprehended by the senses or even the logical intellect. The Universal Form which Krishna assumed stunned the egoistic individuality of Arjuna, and in a thrill it looked as if his very being would evaporate in those dizzy heights of that blazing eternal form, which, with its supernal radiance, darkened the lights of thousands of suns. The descriptive powers of the poet reach their summit here in this apotheosis of human language.

There is no place where God is not, and no object in which he is not present. His glory is seen in high relief in everything which exhibits an intensified type of power in any manner. No one who looks to him for solace does ever perish or come to sorrow. Whoever, in undivided contemplation, resorts to him as the final refuge, to such a person he provides all needs and affords protection at all times. God does not need any rich offerings from man; he is satisfied with a dedicated feeling of devotion which can be

conveyed through even a leaf that may be consecrated to him. God has neither friend nor foe and he is not concerned either with the good or the bad action of the individual. Krishna declares, as the God of the Universe: "I am the sacrifice and the offering. I am the mantra and the ritual, the oblation, the fire and what is offered in the sacrifice. I am the Father of the Universe, the Mother, the Grandfather and the protector of all. I am the goal, the support, the Lord, the witness, the abode, the refuge, the friend, the origin, the desolation, the substratum, the reservoir, the seed indestructible. As the sun, I give heat; I withhold and send forth rain; I am immortality and also death; I am existence and also non-existence. O Arjuna."

God can be approached in any way suited to one's temperament and capacity. He does not belong to any creed, cult or religion. He is accessible to everyone, whether man, woman or child, whether learned or ignorant, whether high or low, in society. What is needed is undivided devotion, unflinching love for Him. The way out of all sorrows is to take refuge in Him, to the exclusion of all earthly aids. This devotion, however, is not easy to acquire. It comes by cultivation of it in many lives through which one has to pass, and it is difficult to find one who realises that *God is all.*

The Incarnations of God

God incarnates himself in the world, whenever there is decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, for the purpose of the protection of the good, the vanquishing of the wicked and establishment of justice in every age.

The theory of divine incarnation has been a controversial issue in the philosophy of religion and has been one of the intriguing questions in theology. It is impossible metaphysically to interpret to the mind of man the divine secret of the movement of spiritual force in the world. When a solution is attempted, the Avatara reveals itself as the answer of God to the needs of man. There is an internal bond of inseparable relation between the relative and the Absolute, and the descent of God on earth is the pressure of the power of truth forcing itself into the realm of the relative when the harmony of this bond and relation gets dissipated by centrifugal psychic energies that seem to run counter to the integrating centripetal call of God to all manifestation. The descent of God as the Avatara is said to be for the ascent of man to his divine home. As the health-giving forces of harmony in the body perpetually wage a war with the disease-producing toxins, the universal balancing power of the Absolute introduces itself as a corrective element amidst the disturbing forces of darkness. The Avatara is a perpetual activity of God who manifests himself at every juncture or critical situation (Yuge, Yuge) in the life of the world. The Avatara is the recurring reminder of God to man that it is impossible for the undivine to triumph over the essential goodness and divinity immanent in creation.

The Secret of Right Action

The Bhagavadgita is the classic treatise on the science of right activity, called karma yoga. Krishna exhorts Arjuna to engage himself in the performance of duty, by regarding

pleasure and pain as well as success and failure as equal, for the purpose of rightly directed work is not the achieving of any result for oneself but discharging the duty of cooperation with the law of the Universe. The merit that a right action produces never perishes in time, however small it be, and even the least effort done in the direction of righteousness is capable of saving one from the danger of falling into the bondage of life. One should, for this purpose, go beyond the pairs of opposites like pleasure and pain, by centring oneself in purity of thought achieved through a care-free life of the establishment of consciousness in the Universal Self.

One's duty is only to act and not covet the fruit of action. The secret of right action is in so conducting oneself that there is neither regard for the result of the action nor is there total abstinence from action. But the non-regard to the fruit of action is not to be interpreted as callousness to the performance of duty and a carelessness towards its method and purpose,—that would be another form of selfishness,—for karma yoga is 'dexterity in execution' and 'balance of mind' in the performance of action. Lest this science of action should be mistaken for mere prudence of behaviour and shrewdness in conduct, Krishna adds that all action is to be done after fixing oneself in Yoga and detaching oneself from any ulterior motive behind it. And Yoga is the equanimous settling of oneself in the consciousness of God.

No one would gain anything by trying to cease from action, because no one can remain without action even for a moment, as everyone is forcibly driven to it by the

properties of Prakriti whose very nature is to evolve increasingly into higher levels of being. There is no point in maintaining an inactivity of the body while the mind and the senses are engaged in the quest of their objects. It is true karma yoga when one engages oneself in outward action in keeping with the way of the world, while the mind and the senses are under perfect control. The purpose of work is not the achievement of any selfish end but participation in the cooperative activity of creation. Society everywhere lives on cooperation, the mechanism of the body works on cooperation, the world is an embodiment of mutual cooperation, the solar and stellar systems have their meaning in cooperation, the universe with all its contents is a dramatic scene of an all-round cooperative process. This marvellous system of the universal government becomes intelligible in the concept of the Virat-Purusha or God as the Cosmic Person described in the Purusha-Sukta of the Veda and the Vishvarupadarsana of the Gita.

The responsibility to work is said to cease only in the case of him who is satisfied with the Self and delights in the Self and is contented with the Self. For him there is nothing to achieve and it is immaterial whether he does anything or not, as he has absolutely no dependence on anything in the world. This extraordinary condition of non-action propounded in the Gita is not to be taken as a licence for inactivity of any kind. For the so-called inaction of the knower of the Self is the highest form of action. Noteworthy is the qualification 'he has absolutely no dependence'. It is humanly impossible for anyone not to depend on the world for something or the other, and man depends on society for

his sustenance, on his relations for timely help, on the government for his protection, and on the bounties of Nature for his very existence. The state of consciousness to which Krishna refers in this description of the sage delighting in the Self is not any conceivable bodily condition, but is the state of the transcendence of individuality in Universal Being. Naturally, work ceases to have meaning in Universal Consciousness. But work cannot cease in the case of anyone who feels that he exists in a world.

The great wisdom of action is expressed in the immortal enunciation of its technique that the wise one should engage himself in action outside without attachment inside, in the same way as the ignorant one does it with attachment; nor should the wise one condemn the erroneous acts of the ignorant, because such condemnation would, instead of educating them, mislead them into a state of dispiritedness and lack of zest in life. The duty of the wise is to encourage the ignorant and not to rob them of their faith, for the educative process is a rise from the lower to the higher understanding and not an outward compulsion. What mars the spirit of right action is selfishness in the form of passion, anger and greed. Freedom from these psychological diseases is real spiritual health. Real action is not bodily movement but inner volition born of desire. One who is freed from it does no action, though he is apparently engaged in it in the ordinary sense. The action which tends to the consuming of individuality in the sacrifice of God-consciousness melts away and does not bind the doer thereof. When one

beholds the diversity of beings as rooted in the One, he attains to the Absolute, then and there.

Universal Religion

The religion of the Gita is not a sectarian doctrine relegated to a section of humanity but a call of the One God to all humanity. While there are those who worship Him in erroneous ways by limiting symbols, they too shall reach Him, if their devotion to the ideals they have set up is exclusive in the sense that it can accommodate or harbour no other thought. Fanaticism in religion arises when there is devotion to one's ideal with hatred for the ideals of others. But this, according to the Gita, is not the way to God, since, thereby, selfishness would stultify the very purpose of religious worship. While the universal religion promises fulfilment of the aspirations of the followers of all paths, it recommends worship of the Universal God, as the ultimate salvation lies in this realisation alone. There is no need to worry about accumulating rich articles for gorgeous rituals, for God is pleased not with the objects offered but with the heart which makes the offering. God is satisfied even with a leaf or flower or a small measure of water offered as token of true devotion unto Him. The duty of the devotee is therefore to dedicate all his actions to God, whether the actions are physical or mental. The God of the Gita declares that He is the same to all in His dealings and even the sinner and the fallen can reach Him with devotion. This is the great gospel of God to man, the religion of man in general, for the sake of the experience of freedom which is immortal.

Yoga

In two terse verses, the Gita, at the end of its fifth chapter, says: "Shutting out all external objects; fixing the gaze between the eyebrows; regulating the harmonised currents of *prana* and *apana* within the nostrils; the senses, mind and intellect restrained; with *moksha* as the supreme Goal; free from desire, fear and anger;—such a man of meditation is verily liberated for ever."

The sixth chapter is like a commentary on this aphoristic teaching. In its details, it is declared that no one will become a Yogi who has not renounced the desireful will. Though action is the means for one wishing self-purification leading to the state of meditation, the higher inaction of tranquillity of mind is the means to him who has attained to Yoga. He is said to be established in Yoga, who has no attachment either to sense-objects or to actions, and has no purpose to serve anywhere, being rid of all volitional motive. The Yogi should practise meditation on the Atman, retiring into solitude, with mind and senses subdued, and free from ambition and possessions. Having established a seat on a clean spot and placing oneself on it, making the mind one-pointed and subduing its activity and the rovings of the senses, let one practise Yoga for the purification of oneself. Let him firmly hold his body, head and neck erect and still, with gaze inwardly fixed and looking as if at the tip of his nose, and not glancing around. Fearless, being firm in the vow of Brahmacharya, the Yogi, always steadfast in meditation, attains to the peace residing in God, the peace which is at-one with final liberation. Yoga is not for him who eats too much or too little, not for him

who sleeps too much or too little. Yoga comes to him who is moderate in eating and in recreation, in work, sleep and wakefulness. Establishment in the consciousness of the Atman is Yoga. This obviously implies freedom from all desires.

As the flame of a lamp in a windless place flickers not, so steady is the mind of the Yogi practising meditation. Where the mind, completely restrained through the practice of meditation, attains quietude, and where seeing the Atman by the Atman, one is satisfied in the Atman; where one feels that infinite bliss, which is super-sensuous and is capable of being comprehended only by the higher understanding; established wherein one does not move even a bit; having obtained which one considers no other gain as superior to that; and wherein established one is not shaken even by heavy sorrow;—that state is to be known as Yoga, a state of severance from all pain. This Yoga has to be practised with determination, undisturbed by despondency or depression of spirit. When the mind moves away from the ideal for any reason, let it be brought under subjugation, gradually by bringing it back to the Atman, from whatever object it may be thinking. It is here that the Yogi beholds the Atman in all beings and all beings in the Atman.

It is, however, to be reiterated that control of the mind is not so easy as one would imagine in a state of initial enthusiasm. It is turbulent, fickle, powerful and unyielding. It will not listen to threats and cannot be brought round by cajoling. Hard indeed is the task of the Yogi. But by practice (Abhyasa) and dispassion (Vairagya) it is possible to bring

it to concentration on the Atman. An undisciplined and unprincipled person cannot hope to achieve success in Yoga. One who strives to practise Yoga is never a loser, but always a gainer, and even if he dies in his attempt, he will be reborn under conditions suitable for the continuance of the practice left unfinished in the previous life.

It is the opinion of Krishna that even a student of Yoga is superior to an expert in theoretical knowledge of the performance of outward ritual. Though it may take, at times, several lives for one to reach the Goal of Yoga, there is no doubt that it is possible for everyone without distinction.

The Liberated Sage

The sage with spiritual wisdom, who is liberated from bondage is a Sthitaprajna (established in understanding), Gunatita (risen above the strands of Nature) and a Yogi (unified with the Absolute). He is not depressed in grief or exhilarated in joy, for he is free from desire, fear and anger, due to his understanding being fixed in God. Being devoid of personal love for anything, he neither welcomes nor abhors things when he comes in contact with them in the course of life. While his eyes are fixed on the world, his mind is fixed in God. In ordinary persons, the taste for objects persists though they may be physically absent in his presence; but in him, who has tasted the delight of the Supreme Reality, the taste for objects spontaneously vanishes. The senses, however, are powerful and they drag impetuously even a wise man's mind towards objects. It is necessary, therefore, to be perpetually vigilant in subduing

the powers of the senses in contemplation on God. This is the condition of settled understanding. As rivers get merged in the ocean, desires get absorbed in a sublimation of the mind in Divine meditation. It is this inner state of composure that is called *moksha* or liberation from the thraldom of mortal life. With their intellects fixed in That, with their being absorbed in That, with their life dedicated to That, and depending on That alone, those, whose defects have been removed by the cleansing work of knowledge, reach the Eternal Reality. Seeing the diversity of characters, whether in a learned savant or a low-caste, a cow, a dog or an elephant, the sage of equal vision recognises the Divine Presence in them all, without disturbing the course of life based on such difference. Liberation is the attainment of equilibrium of consciousness and it can be realised even here, for Brahman is everything, and is everywhere. The pleasures born of contacts are wombs of pain; they are transient, and hence the wise one does not delight in them. One who has become Brahman attains to the beatitude of Brahman. He is the real Yogi, with inner delight and inner illumination, which lights up all the Universe.

The sage is without hatred, and loves all. Firm in his resolution, he is yet possessed of the tenderest compassion. While wanting nothing for himself, he gives joy to all. He does not shrink away from anything, nor does he cause the world to shrink away from him. While doing all actions, he refrains from taking initiatives, for this is the business of God. Equal to friend and foe, in respect and censure, in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, attached to nothing in the world, speaking little, satisfied with anything that comes of

its own accord, having nothing to call his own, steady in meditation on God,—he is the sage who is freed for ever.

Death and After

The Lord assures that one who leaves this world, thinking of Him alone, reaches Him, in the end. One's future is governed by one's last thought, at the time of death. As this thought is, however, the cumulative result of what one has been thinking throughout one's life, it is to be understood that one's future life is determined by the nature of the present life taken as a whole. As a bitter tree does not bear a sweet fruit, one's last thought cannot be expected to be a divine one, if the life that precedes it is one of error and wickedness. By its fruit, we know the tree. Whatever one has been contemplating in one's life, that becomes the last thought which fixes the nature of the future life. Whatever one thinks deeply at the time of death, that one becomes in the next life. He who, by the practice of Yoga, meditates, in an undivided consciousness, on the Supreme Purusha, resplendent like the Sun, and thinks of Him at the time of his death, with deep concentration, devotion and power of aspiration, reaches Him, the Divine Being. In a concise statement, the Gita says that, by controlling all the senses, by centring the mind in the heart, by drawing the *prana* to the head, engaged in the practice of Yoga, uttering the monosyllable,—Om the Brahman,—and meditating on Him, he who departs hence, attains the Supreme Goal. There is no return to the consciousness of mortality (*samsara*) and pain after attaining the Divine Purusha.

The Gita confirms the two paths of the departed soul mentioned in the Upanishads,—the northern and the southern,—in a more pithy statement of this route. The blessed soul moving towards its salvation is said to course through the Deities of Fire, Light, Day, the bright half of the lunar month and the six months of the northern motion of the Sun. The soul that is destined to return to rebirth passes through the presiding powers of the Smoke, Night, the dark half of the lunar month and the six months of the southern motion of the Sun. The Gita does not throw light on the apparently intricate meaning of these stages of the soul's movement after its departure from the world, and we are left in the same position as in the Upanishads on the subject. In all probability the Northern Path (*archiradimarga*) and the Southern Path (*dhumamarga*) are certain mystical experiences of the Soul in the subtler layers of the Cosmos, through which it traverses, determined by the spiritual and non-spiritual tendencies in it, respectively.

In its classification of the three natures of the individual, the Gita makes mention of the fate of the soul in accordance with the predominance of the qualities of Prakriti operating in it. When, through every sensation or perception in the body or personality, the light of intelligence gets radiated, it is to be understood that Sattva is predominant in the person, and meeting death in that condition, one attains to the shining regions attained by those who are knowers of the highest Reality. When greed, restless activity, impulse to undertake initiatives, distraction and longing are seen in a person, it is to be understood that Rajas is predominant, and meeting death in that condition,

one is born among those who are attached to activity. When ignorance, inertia, heedlessness and delusion are seen in a person, it is to be understood that Tamas is predominant, and meeting death in that condition, one is born in the wombs of the deluded and the irrational. Those who die in the state of Sattva go to the higher worlds of light. In Rajas the middle world of action, and in Tamas the lower world of darkness.

But, when one beholds no agent of activity other than the properties of Prakriti, and knows That which is above the Gunas of Prakriti, one attains to 'My Being', says the Lord in the Gita.

The Spirit of the Bhagavadgita

The Gospel which Krishna bequeaths to humanity is not a cult, religion, or secret creed of any particular faith or community. It concerns not merely some remote otherworldly life, unconnected with practical activity here, but the whole range of experience, and lays down rules for systematic discipline. No aspect or phase of existence is excluded from the scope of the teaching of the Gita. Life is a process which is mysteriously connected with the Universe in all its planes of manifestation. The greatness of the Gita is in the integrality of its approach, the universality of its teaching and the all-comprehensiveness of its theme. The perfect person gives the perfect science of the perfect life. In this conversation between man and God, the hidden relations between them get unravelled and the glorious destiny of man revealed before his eyes.

The Gita discloses the fact that the primary cause of the troubles in which man finds himself is the erroneous notion which he has about his relations with the body and the world, and in the end, with God. The perishable nature of the body, the changing character of the world and the immortal essence of consciousness are forgotten and man clings to the reverse of this truth, thinking that the body and the objects amidst which he is placed have a permanent value and that the Self is a dependent entity entwined in interrelations with things that seem to sustain it. Affection for the objects of the world strikes at the root of the peace that the soul is really seeking, for these loves of the world are false evaluations springing from ignorance. Buddhi or the higher reason should be used in distinguishing the truth and falsehood of experience. Often the reason in the human being is seen to work in cooperation with the senses and becomes their tool, carrying out the function of transmitting to the soul the characteristics of the objects as interpreted by the senses in terms of space, time and externality and degrading experience into body-consciousness. All judgment passed in this fashion is erroneous, as it does not take into consideration the fact of there being a unifying reality transcending objectivity. The higher knowledge comes to the aid of the human reason when the latter is purified by freedom from the shackles of the senses. The reason which reflects sense-experience is different from the reason which draws sustenance from the Atman within and commands the sense-powers, independent of spatial and temporal relations. Discrimination between the real and the apparent is

possible only when the light of understanding is thrown on the facts and events which become its contents in experience.

Cessation from physical action is not non-action, for one can be physically inactive and yet be performing actions in a different sense. Vital, emotional and intellectual action is real action. Cessation from actions like these would be real inaction. But man has no freedom to do this. Action is the law of all individual life. One is forced to act by the very nature of one's being. To maintain equanimity in the midst of such activity, one should work in a spirit of self-sacrifice, self-surrender, self—restraint and self-knowledge. The Universe is a living organism and every element in it tends to fulfil the law of its unitariness. The duty of everyone, therefore, is to be conscious of this organic structure of the cosmos and attune oneself to its way of working. The Yoga which Krishna teaches is spontaneous action based on the consciousness of the absoluteness of God, the surrender of oneself to God, or one's steadfast concentration on God. Negation of action is not possible, but one can neutralise the effects of action by transmuting it into Yoga. The benefits that one enjoys in life are the products of cooperative action from all things in the Universe and one cannot, therefore, afford to appropriate anything for one's own personal satisfaction.

When knowledge and action blend into a single stream of concentrated force, when Krishna and Arjuna drive forward in unison, seated in one chariot, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and steady polity.

Chapter V

TEACHINGS OF THE EPIC AND PURANA TEXTS

The Anu-Gita

Next to the Bhagavadgita, in importance, comes the Anu-Gita which occurs towards the end of the Mahabharata epic. This Gita is supposed to be a tentative answer which Krishna gave to Arjuna, on the latter's request to hear the contents of the Bhagavadgita once more. Krishna's reply meant that it was impossible to summon again that power of the Absolute, by which the wisdom of the Bhagavadgita was spoken. He, however, agreed to give Arjuna a substitute which goes by the name of Anu-Gita. The contents of the Anu-Gita are not so inspiring as those of the Bhagavadgita and they touch upon the usual themes of Sankhya and Vedanta, which we shall have occasion to discuss elsewhere.

The Anu-Gita exhorts us to overcome the world by self-mastery. King Janaka says that he does not enjoy things for his pleasure, not even the smell that attaches to his nose, and hence he has conquered the earth-principle. He does not enjoy the taste that attaches to his tongue, and hence he has conquered the water-principle. He does not enjoy the form that attaches to his eyes, and so he has conquered the fire-principle. He does not enjoy the touch that attaches to his skin, and thus he has conquered the air-principle. He does not enjoy the sounds that attach to his ears, and so he has conquered the ether-principle. He does not enjoy the

objects of thought which attach to his mind, and so he has conquered the mind. Janaka says that he engages himself in action, not for his pleasure, but for the sake of the presiding deities (*adhidevata*) and their elemental counterparts (*adhibhuta*). The correlation of the subjective (*adhyatma*), objective (*adhibhuta*) and the Divine (*adhidaiva*) principles in the Universe has been explained under the subject of creation in our discussion of the philosophy of the Upanishads.

The Fire of the Soul (*adhyatma-agni*) gets ignited by the control of the senses, by weaning the mind away from objects, and by a life lived in seclusion. The spiritual fire burns as a conflagration by self-restraint. He becomes fit for immortality, who can remain in this condition even for a minute at the time of his death. The five senses and the internal organ with its faculties of thinking and understanding are like the tongues of fire, to which the objects of sense, thought and understanding are the faggots. The Soul, as the seer, hearer, thinker, understander, etc., is like the several Ritviks or performers of a sacrifice. One should consider all objects as offerings in this sacrifice of sensation, cognition and perception. By the performance of this internal sacrifice, externality is negatived and there arises in one the power of cosmic creation. The knower, knowledge and known are the three oblations offered into the universal Fire of the Atman. The ten senses are the performers of the sacrifice. Their ten actions are the oblations in the sacrifice. Their ten deities are the fires of the sacrifice. Here, the mind is the ladle (*sruk*) and cognitive knowledge is the material. This sacrifice (*yajna*) is

perpetually going on in the individual and the Universe. Hence, there is no condition of inaction anywhere.

When the mind is prompted to speak out its thoughts, the *samana* fire within gets lighted up, making the *prana* unite with the *apana*. Then, by means of *udana*, it rises upwards towards the head. And due to the work of *vyana* it passes through the throat, the palate, etc., and produces audible speech. When the action of the *prana* subsides, it again descends into the *samana*.

Like the senses, the *prana* also may be regarded as a performer of the universal sacrifice. The *prana* and the rest rise from Hiranyagarbha, the Universal *prana*, and return to Him again in the end. By the action of the Cosmic *prana*, air (Vayu) becomes *apana* through *prana*, *vyana* through *apana*, *udana* through *vyana* and *samana* through *udana*. The *prana* and *apana* move amid *samana* and *vyana*. When *prana* and *apana* are withheld, *samana* and *vyana* are simultaneously withdrawn. *Udana* is amid *prana* and *apana* and is the support of all the *prana*s. It is the Vaisvanara Agni, the Universal Fire situated in the individual as *samana* at the root of the navel, that rises as the powers of the senses as well as the cognitive and perceptive powers. *prana* and *apana* are like two oblations (*ajya-bhaga*) in the sacrifice and in their middle is the sacrificial fire in the form of *udana*. This is *Jnana-Yajna* and *Yoga-Yajna.*

One who moves with the consciousness of Brahman is a Brahmachari. He has no particular attachment to any action. Brahman is his sacrificial twig (*samit*); Brahman is his sacrificial fire (*agni*); Brahman is his sacrificial grass

(*samstara*); Brahman is his sacrificial water (*apas*); Brahman is his preceptor (Guru). Such a one is a *Brahmachari.* One who looks on all beings with equality of essence, with no desire or ambition, attains to this divine state.

Method of Self-Control

When, after the long discourse of Bhishma on the principles of *dharma* was delivered to Yudhishthira, the king was still depressed in mood and grieved over the sins he committed in killing his kith and kin, Krishna admonished him thus:

"All that pertains to desire is subject to death. The seat of Brahman is immaculate, above all desires. This is the object of the highest knowledge. You have done no actions; you have conquered no enemies. How can you be said to have overcome your enemies, when the great enemy within you, viz., the mind, has not been detected by you? In regard to this the following story is narrated: A great battle was going on between Indra and Vritra. Vritra occupied the whole of the earth. Seeing that the earth, the very object of the sense of smell, has been occupied, Indra got enraged, for a foul smell was made to fill the earth by the enemy who had entered it. Indra cast his fierce weapon, Vajra, on the enemy hiding within the earth; but Vritra immediately entered the principle of water. The object of taste had been occupied, and Indra again hurled his Vajra into the water, whereupon Vritra left water and entered the principle of fire, occupying thereby the object of sight, the essence behind all forms. When attacked again by Indra, Vritra rose

up from fire and entered at once the principle of air, controlling thereby all objects of touch. Pierced by Vajra even in air, Vritra entered the principle of ether. But even there he was pursued by the Vajra. Finding it impossible to live anywhere in the world on account of fear from Indra's Vajra, Vritra entered Indra himself, and overpowered him from all sides. When his very person was thus overwhelmed, Indra got confused in mind, and knew not his duty. He had then to be awakened by the Sage Vasishtha, with the Rathantara Saman. Indra regained his consciousness by the influence of Vasishtha, and destroyed the enemy inside, with an invisible non-material Vajra, the power of the mind."

The Lord continued: "Disease, here, is of two kinds: physical and mental. They influence each other, and without such mutual dependence they are not seen to arise. When the disease manifests itself in the body, it is called physical, and when it appears in the mind, it is called mental. Phlegm, bile and wind are the humours of the body; the harmony of these properties is called physical health; and their disturbance is called disease. Phlegm is contradicted by bile, and bile is affected by phlegm. The equilibrium of the qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas is the indication of health. When their equilibrium is disturbed, there is ill-health. It is seen that grief can be overpowered by joy, and joy in turn by grief. One who is in a state of sorrow broods upon the joy that is past or is in expectation. And another who is in a state of happiness retrospects over the grief that he has overcome. You are neither happy nor sorry by your own making, for

Providence is more powerful and controls all things. You should not grieve over your past misfortunes, for this is a defect of the mind. That war in which you were engaged in battle with Bhishma and Drona has now broken out again, wherein you will have to fight with your mind alone. In this battle no arrows, no physical valour, no soldiers, no relatives can be of any help, for, here, you have to fight single-handed, in order to go beyond the muddle of this confusion. When you win victory in this battle, you attain to a state by knowing which you would have done all that is required to be done in the world. Establish yourself in this exalted understanding and try to know the essential truth of all these beings.

"One does not attain perfection by merely abandoning external possessions; not even by the rejection of one's body. It is by the discipline and control of the mind that real perfection is attained. The virtues that are practised and the happiness that is experienced by one who has renounced external things but clings to the internal ones are really a vice, and the happiness a real sorrow. The causes of immortality and death are both to be found within a person;—selfishness is death and unselfishness leads to the immortal. All actions in which a person finds himself engaged are ultimately impelled by these two motives within. He who, having obtained the whole earth as his possession, feels no attachment to it in any way,—of what use is the earth to him? On the other hand, he who lives in a forest, eating roots and tubers, leaves and fruits, but cherishes a desire for things of the world, is really in the mouth of death.

"There is, in this world, no enterprise or undertaking not motivated by some desire. And all desires originate from the mind which a wise man controls with discrimination. The following Kama Gita is quoted in this instance:

"Kama says: 'I am not capable of being overcome by anyone who does not resort to proper means. I rise again in him who strives to strike me with the force of his strength and thereby tries to kill me. I rise again in him who tries to destroy me by means of sacrifices, gifts, etc. I rise up in him who tries to overcome me by the study of the Vedas and the learning of the Vedanta. He does not understand me who tries to destroy me by sheer determination, for I exist behind his thoughts and feelings. I rise up in him who, by austerity and self-mortification, tries to put an end to me. When one tries, again, to bring me to an end by directing his mind to *moksha*, I, looking at his *desire* for *moksha*, dance and laugh in joy. Among all beings, here, I am the one indestructible power.' Therefore, O Yudhishthira, focus your desire on righteousness, so that it may move in that direction, and rest there."

By way of elucidation, it may be mentioned here that the two important prerequisites for attaining success in the control of the mind are Vairagya or dispassion and Abhyasa or practice. The student of Yoga ought to try his best to be free from desire for pleasure, seen or unseen, and this dispassion can be had through constant perception of the patent defects in objects. Dispassion is an aversion to sense enjoyment, both here and hereafter. The detachment under consideration is of two kinds,—the lower and the

higher. A distinction is drawn between the inferior and superior types of Vairagya. The former is a distaste for the things in life, due to the experience that they cannot be acquired or preserved without trouble, while their loss causes pain, and the quest is never free from egoistic feelings; the latter is based on a clear perception of the difference between the intelligence that is the Spirit within, and the objects that appear in its light.

The determination to refrain from sense-pleasures is the first stage of Vairagya. In the second state certain objects lose their charm for the aspirant and he attempts to overcome the attraction for others, also. In the third stage the senses are controlled, but a vague longing for enjoyment yet lingers in the mind. In the fourth stage, however, the student of Yoga loses completely all interest in external objects, physical and even conceptual. This is the condition of true desirelessness, which leads to supreme independence, wherein one renounces all psychic powers, and sets little store even with such temptations as all-knowingness.

Basic Ethics

The Mahabharata is an epic of life. It depicts the truth that life is a journey and its meaning is in the practice of *dharma*. Virtue triumphs in the end and vice is put down by the universal justice. The things of the world are perishable and human glory is short-lived. The accumulations that one makes do not last long. Every rise has a fall. All union ends in separation. Life ends in death. As logs of wood meet one another and get separated in the

vast ocean, so do beings meet one another and get separated here.

Desire does not cease by fulfilment; on the other hand, it increases when it is fulfilled, like fire over which ghee has been poured. All the wealth of the world is not enough to satisfy the cravings of even one person; knowing this, one should attain tranquillity of mind.

We had innumerable mothers and fathers, wives and children in several lives. To whom do we really belong? What is the relation that obtains among us? Every day, people are seen dying and being cremated; and yet the remaining ones imagine that their death is not near. What can be a greater wonder in this world?

A wise person does not grieve over the pains or is exhilarated over the joys of life. He is a fool, who gets sunk in them and forgets his destiny.

Dharma is supreme in this world. *Dharma* brings material prosperity (*artha*), fulfilment of wishes (*kama*) and final liberation (*moksha*). It is surprising that people do not pay attention to the need for practice of *dharma*, when everything can be achieved through it. The essence of *dharma* is that no one should do to others what one would not like others to do to oneself. Selfishness is death. Unselfishness is immortality. Both death and deathlessness are in one's own person and not in some distant place.

The individual may have to be abandoned for the good of a group, or family; the group for the good of a larger community; the community for the good of the country or nation; and, even the whole world for the realisation of the Atman.

Heedlessness *(Pramada)* is death. There is no other death. The sense of 'mine'-ness is death. The knowledge, 'nothing is mine', is immortality.

These are some of the stock sayings in the Mahabharata, which are emphasised in different ways throughout the Epic, indicating the general trend of its teaching that life in the world is transitory and the realisation of God is the goal of life. That virtue has always the support of God at every critical juncture in which it finds itself is the principal motif of the Mahabharata Epic.

The philosophical portions in the Mahabharata apart from the Bhagavadgita and the Anu-Gita are the Sanatsujatiya and *moksha-dharma*. The ancient system of political administration under the directing principle of *dharma* finds elaborate elucidation in the Rajadharma section of the Santi Parva in the Mahabharata. This book, with the code of Manu, may be regarded as the standard scripture on ancient Indian polity. The Vidura-Niti is a renowned book on political ethics. The rest of the contents of these sections are mostly expatiations on the Vedanta, Sankhya, Yoga and *dharma* in general, which we shall be discussing elsewhere in our study.

The Appendix to the Mahabharata is called Harivamsa, which deals especially with the early and family life of Krishna, as well as his personal exploits, to some of which we shall refer in our study of this Avatara, and also certain legendary material pertaining to events prior to the advent of Krishna, since the creation of the Universe. Though the Harivamsa provides some additional details concerning Krishna's multifaceted life, all this cannot equal the force

and depth with which the glorious Avatara is presented in the Bhagavata Purana, which is the great classic on the subject, next only to the Mahabharata.

The Main Contents of the Puranas

The creation theory of the Puranas has been stated above, in brief, under the section on the Upanishads. While describing creation, they also give a scheme of time-calculation applicable in determining the major or longer events that take place in the Universe. Fifteen days and nights constitute one-half (Paksha) of the lunar month, thus, a month consisting of two halves,—the bright and the dark,—according to the phases of the Moon. Two months make a season (Ritu), and three seasons make one hemispherical motion (Ayana) of the Sun, there being two such motions,—the Northern (Uttara) and the Southern (Dakshina). Two such consecutive motions of the Sun make one human year (Varsha). Three-hundred-and-sixty human years make one celestial year. Twelve thousand celestial years make one cycle of the four Ages (Chaturyuga). The four Ages are Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali, in the descending order of truth and righteousness, the span of life and general prosperity during their periods. The Krita-Yuga consists of 4,800 celestial years, the Treta 3,600 celestial years, the Dvapara 2,400 celestial years and the Kali 1,200 celestial years. The Kali-Yuga is said to have commenced in 3101 B.C., the year in which Krishna disappeared from the earth. Seventy-one cycles of these four Yugas make one Manvantara or a period for which a Manu rules the world. There are fourteen Manus, of whom

the present one is the seventh. The period of these fourteen Manus (which, with the addition of twilight ages between periods of Manu, comes to one thousand four-age cycles) is a single day (Kalpa) of Brahma, the Creator. So much also is the length of the night of Brahma. Three-hundred-and-sixty such days make one year of Brahma. And Brahma's life is for such one hundred years. He is now said to be in his 51st year. At the end of the life of Brahma, there is dissolution of the cosmos (Prakrita-Pralaya). Brahma, then, with his creation, merges in the Supreme Being. In this condition of dissolution, the individuals (Jivas) remaining unliberated lie in a dormant state and get manifested again in the next creation.

The cosmography of the Puranas includes descriptions of the astronomical Universe, the solar system and the fourteen worlds, of which six are said to range above the Earth-plane and seven below it. The Earth-plane itself is said to consist of seven continents and seven oceans, all concentric in their arrangement, every succeeding continent and ocean being double the preceding one in extent. There is a detailed geographical description of our own earth, with its mountains, rivers and holy shrines. There is also a calculation which states that among the five elements,—Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether,—every succeeding element is ten times the preceding one in largeness. Apart from the superphysical existence of these wonder-striking planes, this description of the cosmos suggests its incredible vastness, all which is supposed to be a very insignificant part of the glorious manifestations of God.

The Puranas also narrate the history of the various dynasties and hierarchies that emanated from the Creator. As a continuation of the lines of Priyavrata and Uttanapada (vide, the doctrine of creation under the Upanishads, above), the world saw the coming in of many heroes, both spiritual and temporal. These offspring of the ancient ones included both the divine and demoniacal natures, which waged a perpetual war between themselves, and much of the Purana content is devoted to descriptions of these conflicts between the Devas and Asuras. Other than these earlier descendants of the progenitors of the race of all beings, particular mention must be made of the lines of the solar and lunar races of kings and sages, whose lives provide a highly interesting biographical reading of both human and superhuman natures. The history of these dynasties is brought down almost to our own times, thus connecting our present-day existence with the diviner sources from which we have come, as, in the words of the Upanishad, children of the Immortal (Amritasya *Putra).*

Philosophical Trends

The philosophy of the Epics and Puranas is essentially the pre-scholastic Vedanta in which the higher aspects of the Sankhya and Yoga get amplified. We have already noticed the teachings of the Mahabharata as embodied in the Bhagavadgita and Anu-Gita. The metaphysical side of the Mahabharata is a popular exposition of the wisdom of the Upanishads, in which Brahman is identified with Narayana as the Supreme Being, and the Prakriti and Purusha of the Sankhya are accepted as the material and the

essence, respectively, of the Universe (Jagat) and the individual (Jiva). In the Vedanta of the Mahabharata, however, Prakriti and Purusha are dependent on God and form His body, so that their existence is inseparable from His being. The Yoga system is accepted entirely in its practical aspects as enunciated by Patanjali, rejecting, of course, its metaphysics of the dualism of Prakriti and Purusha and the transcendental aloofness of Ishvara, which is peculiar to the school. The theory of creation; the nature of God, world and soul; the ethics, psychology and the doctrine of transmigration, as well as of salvation, as expounded in the Mahabharata, are all similar to the presentation of these systems made elsewhere in this study. The Sanatsujatiya is a concise statement of these ideas while the *moksha-dharma* is very elaborate. The Narayaniya section of the *moksha-dharma* lays the foundation for the Pancharatra doctrine of Vaishnava theology. The Vishnu-Sahasranama (one thousand names of Vishnu) and Bhishmastavaraja (prayer offered by Bhishma at the time of his death), and many other references to God in this Epic, adore Narayana as the ultimate Reality and identify Him with the Absolute. The place of Siva in the Epic, however, is not inferior to that of Vishnu, and the Siva-Sahasranama (one thousand names of Siva) also appears in it. Throughout the Epic, Siva is held in as much esteem as Vishnu, though Vishnu may be regarded as the central God of the Epic religion. Sectarianism does not seem to have entered the field of philosophical and theological thinking when the Epics were written. It is only in the Puranas that

we find the exaltation of a particular deity to the exclusion of and even in opposition to others.

Most of the Puranas abound in lengthy narratives of legends glorifying a particular god or deity, delineating his or her incarnations, descriptions of holy places of pilgrimage (Tirtha), vows or observances (Vrata), acts of charity (Dana), and the like, with some shorter or longer references to the process of creation, the genealogy of the gods, demons and kings, stories of Rishis, as well as occasional statements on the foundations of politics, and the arrangement of the continents of the world as parts of the cosmos. Thus, the Puranas form a general encyclopaedia of popular thought on religion and philosophy. But the Bhagavata and the Vishnu Puranas are a great exception to this rule and they constitute a really splendid literature on a very lofty philosophy and mysticism. The Bhagavata states that, in the beginning, God alone was, and nothing else existed,—neither the subtle nor the gross things; neither cause nor effect. What appears after creation, also, is God alone; what remains after the dissolution of creation is also God. That there appears to be a world outside God, though there is no such thing really, is due to Maya or the illusory power of God. Just as the five great elements may be said to have entered and also not to have entered into the created objects, since they are not affected by the divisions and other limitations to which the created things are subject, so also God is in all things as well as not in them. The quintessence of knowledge is this: God as the Atman is what exists in all places and at all times, as the cause of effected things, as different from the very

principle of causality, as the witness in the states of wakefulness, dream and deep sleep, and as unconnected with anything outside. God, as pure Consciousness, appears as the objects of the world, with the qualities of sound, touch, form, taste and smell, due to the externalising activity of the senses. As one does not observe a difference among the limbs of one's own body, the wise sage does not see difference among the things in the world.

According to the Vishnu Purana, there is nothing outside the Paramatman. The whole world is His glory. Due to ignorance people look upon God as this Universe of apparent variety. In fact, the whole world is Consciousness. Through ignorance, one looks upon it as a conglomeration of objects. God, in fact, never becomes an object. The mountains, the oceans, etc., are appearances of Consciousness. The Karmas of Jivas create a multiplicity where it is not. When there is one being present in everyone, questions like, 'Who are you?', and answers like, 'I am so and so', convey no meaning. That someone is a king, that he has a large following, that there is such a thing as kingship and there are other things outside him are all based on imagination alone. The truth is that there is the Atman. The Universe is an undivided existence of the Supreme Self. According to the Brahma Purana, all difference, whether in the world or among individuals, is unreal like the appearance of silver in the mother-of-pearl, or snake seen in the rope or the double moon seen by eyes affected by cataract. Thoughts, feelings, actions and experiences of every kind are a part of this apparent externalisation of Consciousness, which has no reality in

the ultimate sense. According to the Vishnu *dharma*, the Jiva suffers through karma and in *samsara* as long as it imagines its separation from God. When karma ceases, God is beheld as the sole Reality. God Himself appears as men, animals and birds, etc., and He alone appears as the high and the low, the happy and the suffering. The mind is the creator of difference. Virtue and vice and all systems of conduct are dependent on the functions (Vritti) of the mind. As one thinks, so one becomes in the end. The Linga Purana says that God cannot be designated even as one, for that would introduce a sense of difference. As Consciousness alone is, there cannot be a world or *samsara*. The Suta-Samhita sings the Upanishadic ideas in various ways and identifies the Absolute with Siva, even as the Vishnu and the Bhagavata Puranas identify it with Vishnu, investing the Divine Personality with the attributes of the Absolute.

The Srimad-Bhagavata is the most philosophical among the Puranas and its poetry and general literary form are of the highest order of fineness of execution. The eleventh section of this book contains the Uddhava-Gita, embodying the instructions of Krishna to Uddhava, which gives a gist of the philosophies of devotion and worship (Bhakti), meditation (Yoga) and knowledge (Jnana), in a beautiful blend. The aim of life as being devotion and realisation of God is emphasised. The whole of this Purana is a continuous hymnology on a spirited form of ardent love of God, sung in a variety of ways through history, mythology, illustration and philosophy.

Chapter VI

THE YOGA-VASISHTHA

Preliminary

The Yoga-Vasishtha is an inspiring philosophical work pregnant with lofty spiritual thinking and written in beautiful Sanskrit poetry. It begins with a description of the sorrows of life which is transitory and tantalising. The pleasures of sense are deceptive and it is man's ignorance that drives him to the pursuit of happiness in objects which appear to be pleasant only as long as there is desire for them. The restless mind does not find peace in anything of the world. The desires have no fixed aim but jump from one centre to another in search of that happiness which they cannot find anywhere outside. The whole life of man is a wild-goose chase, ending in no profit to the anxious mind. This painful condition is the outcome of the ignorance of the true nature of happiness. There is no way to freedom and real joy for the spirit other than the acquisition of right knowledge.

Knowledge does not drop from the blues, without proper exertion. Rightly directed effort is sure to lead to perfection. One should develop an attitude of contentment (Santosha) and tranquillity of mind (Santi), as also resort to company with the wise (Satsanga) and rational investigation into Truth (Vichara). It is difficult to find a better method for the acquisition of the knowledge which is identical with spiritual insight or direct realisation of the eternal verity and not mere intellectual understanding or theoretical reading.

The Ideal Character of the World

The fact that there is perception of objects by a seer or observer presupposes the existence of a conscious unity between the object and the subject. Unless there is admitted a universal spiritual reality existing everywhere, equally, the perception of objects cannot be explained. There cannot be relationship between two things unless there is a relating or connecting entity independent of the related terms. A subtle analysis of the perceptional situation discloses the truth that both the subject and the object are phases of a universal consciousness.

The nature of the world experienced by the individuals is accounted for by the constitutions of their minds. There is an objective 'something', which is invested with relative characters by the experiencing individuals through the reactions produced by their minds in relation to it, which is nothing but the cosmic stuff of the manifestation by Ishvara or Brahma, the Creator. There is, thus, an objective world of creation by the universal mind of Brahma and there are also the subjective worlds created by the minds of the individuals. Space and time do not have any absolute meaning, being relative to the standpoints of observing centres or perceptual contents. When the observational activity of the mind is put to rest, space and time are not experienced. Space is the relation of the coexistence of ideas and time is the relation of the succession of ideas. As coexistence and succession themselves are ideas, the world has no existence independent of the mind, working from the subjective side as the thought-process of the individual and objectively as the Will of Brahma. The spatiality,

temporality, regularity and objectivity of the world are as real as those observed in the world of dream. As the dream-world vanishes in waking, the waking world vanishes in the experience of the Absolute.

The relativity of the cosmos implies the existence of worlds within worlds and worlds interpenetrating one another without one being aware of the existence of others. Everyone is locked up within the processes of his own mind and hence worlds which exist outside the purview of a particular set of thought-processes cannot be known to exist. The number of worlds, therefore, cannot have any limit. It is infinity moving within infinity. But the worlds, though they are all made up of the same stuff as the mind,—individual or cosmic,—differ in their makeup and contents. Some of them may be almost similar in nature, but mostly they differ completely and may be inhabited by different kinds of individuals who cannot be even adequately imagined by our present state of mind. The evolution of the world goes on due to the impetus it has received from the mind of Brahma and the process of creation continues even in the individuals, though in a misplaced and distorted manner, quite at a tangent from the original Will of the Creator.

Life After Death

The relativity of life points to the fact that it is not possible for one to be satisfied with desire for any object. The relative nature of things implies that there is no permanency in the structure of any objective form. Every desire, therefore, is an attempt at the impossible, for no

fulfilment or satisfaction can be had from objects which are not enduring things but situations or contexts of experience. Desire for life in the body is due to the misconception that reality is confined to individuality. The wrong notion that the body is the reality leads to further errors in the form of the belief that the things of the world are meant for one's enjoyment or utilisation in different ways. That the world with its contents is not to be used as means to the selfish ends of any particular individual is the conclusion of right knowledge. But ignorance assumes a vain importance and meddles with Reality to the doom of the ignorant individual. The unfulfilled desires of individuals cast them into a series of transmigratory lives involved in the chain of causation. The death of the body is the change brought about in the form of individuality and so it is not something to be feared. If death means the cessation of oneself, that would indeed be welcome, for death would then put an end to all pain at one stroke. And if death is the process of evolution, it will still be welcome, for it is desirable that the soul should evolve for perfection. There is no extinction of soul in death. When the physical body is cast off, the soul moves with a subtle body (Ativahika-Sarira) consisting of the mind, senses and *prana*s. After a period of unconsciousness during death, the soul invested with the subtle body made up of desires becomes conscious of the world into which it is born. This process continues till the soul attains liberation in the realisation of the Existence-Absolute (Satta-Samanya). This realisation is *moksha*, which is the transcendence of name and form in Eternal Being.

Birth and death are due to the operation of the law of karma, which is the principle of reaction to selfish actions. Selfishness is the result of individualised existence separated from the Absolute. Though no such separation is really possible, imagination assumes it falsely and creates an artificial bondage for the individual. Liberation is therefore rethinking on right lines and resting in the consciousness of one's identity with the Absolute. Evolution and involution are the processes of the rising from and setting into the Absolute of phenomena due to the activity of universal mentation which is called Brahma or the Creator.

The Absolute

It is impossible to correctly describe the nature of Reality, for all descriptions are determinations into form, and all such determinations mean a creation of separation or duality which does not obtain in it. Hence we cannot say whether Reality is this or that, of this nature or of that. In every definition of the Absolute it is falsely objectified or externalised into an 'other' to the knowing consciousness. There is, thus, no such thing as 'knowing' the Absolute in the sense of anything that the mind can conceive. The only tentative description of it is that it is Universal or Omnipresent and is Omniscient and Omnipotent. It is undifferentiated existence, consciousness and bliss. Though it is everywhere, it cannot be seen, because it is not an object. It exists as the essential Seer or Self in everyone. It is most subtle, though it is the origin of the whole universe and everything is sustained by it and all things return to it in the end.

Means to Liberation

The way to ultimate spiritual freedom in the Absolute is to maintain a perpetual consciousness of it. No false sense of renunciation or austerity is of any use in this endeavour. Though a teacher can point out the way, the actual spiritual life has to be lived by one's own self. For knowledge or direct experience of Reality is the only way to liberation. Constant meditation on the presence of the Absolute in everything (Brahmabhyasa), by the thinking of It alone, speaking about It alone, discussing with one another on It alone, and depending on It alone for one's existence, is the highest method of practice. This is the way of Jnana or Wisdom. Another technique is the control of the mind (Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha) by Yoga and withdrawing the mind from externals to the Absolute. A third way is to regulate the vital energy (*prana*-Nirodha) through *pranayama* and restrain the activities of the mind gradually for higher meditation.

The Stages of Knowledge and Liberation

There are seven stages by which the spiritual seeker rises progressively. The first stage is Subhechha or the good intention to pursue the right path of knowledge. The second is Vicharana or a rational investigation into the ways of acquiring knowledge. The third is Tanumanasi or the attenuation of the mind due to the subtlety attained by the practice of meditation. These three stages constitute the condition of Sadhana or spiritual seeking. The fourth stage is Sattvapatti or the realisation of spiritual equilibrium on account of the attainment of the highest mental purity. The

fifth is Asamsakti or non-attachment to and non-contact with externality or objectivity of any kind due to the vision of universality. The sixth is Padartha-Abhavana or the non-perception of materiality or individuality due to the realisation of the Divine Existence. The seventh is Turiya or the ultimate state of the experience of the Absolute. The last four stages constitute the condition of realisation or perfection. Turiya is also called Jivanmukti, wherein established, one has the experience of Supreme Perfection, even though one is residing in the body for the time being due to the operation of Prarabdha-karma. When the Prarabdha is exhausted, the body drops, and the Jivanmukta becomes a Videhamukta or liberated beyond the body. One who is liberated while yet living is indeed the greatest soul on earth (Mahatma). His actions are universal (Mahakarta), his enjoyments are universal (Mahabhokta), and his renunciation, too, is universal (Mahatyagi).

The Yoga-Vasishtha is not a book to be read by the beginner. It is regarded as a text meant for the perfected ones or *Siddhas* and not for the seekers or Sadhakas. The method of teaching employed in the Yoga-Vasishtha is in answer to the needs of the human mind. Generally, the doctrine is stated in the beginning, and is illustrated by a story which instils the philosophy into the mind, effectively. The author of the book is confident that in the presentation of philosophical and mystical truths the work is incomparable and it exhausts every question of metaphysics, psychology and ethics. A constant study of this book stimulates the mind of the reader into a steady state of knowledge of Reality. It is one of the greatest

philosophical theses that has been ever presented under the Sun.

Chapter VII

THEOLOGY

The Need for a Personal God

The contemplation of the Absolute is the highest form any religion can take. But this enterprise of the mind requires of it an understanding of the universal situation far beyond normal human comprehension. The popular minds of the masses need a religion they can appreciate and absorb into their daily life, and they demand a religious goal which they can intelligibly plant in the soil of their feelings. The Epics and Puranas have the avowed purpose of providing the average man with a religion which he can practise with ease and confidence. It is almost impossible to visualise the transcendental Being of the Upanishads. Its manifestations in terms of Creation alone seem to be possibly accessible to the common mind. God as related to the Universe in the various phases of his revelation becomes the theme of the theological teachings and discourses in the Puranas, risen out of the subjects dealt with in the Epics, especially the Mahabharata.

The theology of the Puranas mainly centres round the Trinity,—Vishnu, Brahma and Siva,—as also the incarnations of Vishnu and the Saktis of the Trinity,—Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Durga,—and the two sons of Siva.

Though the worship of the gods and goddesses had its origin in the Epics, and the Puranas only amplify the religious aspect of this manifold adoration of God, there is some difference between the Epic concept of these divinities and its religious magnification in the Puranas.

The Epics, for example, look upon the three gods as on an equal footing and the notion of superiority or inferiority among them is a development later than the time of the Epics. The Epic religion is thus more catholic and dignified and it appears to be the first movement of the religious ideology descended from the notion of the Universal Being of the Upanishads. It is likely that there have been several interferences with the contents of the Puranas from zealots of the religious dogma which diversified itself into many cults and creeds as time advanced. In our treatment of the nature of the different gods of the Indian pantheon, we shall confine ourselves to what, in our opinion, is the genuine essence of the religious ideal behind these developments of religious thought, as prior to and different from the subsequent degradations of the purely spiritual religion of the Upanishads and the Epics into various sectarian ramifications in the form of cults of segregated and even contending gods. As it is in the case of every religion in the world, certain sections of Hinduism had their own immature and fanatical adherents who tended to bring about an ideological dissension among people, rather than unify hearts into a single whole of spiritual fervour, which is the central aim of religion.

Narayana or Vishnu

According to the Epics, the primeval God from whom the Universe emanated through the creative will is Narayana, a term signifying, according to these texts, the divine being who reposes on the universal waters of the primordial condition of the Universe, or one who is the

goal, ideal and destination of all individuals. There are references which make out that Narayana is prior to the division of the phases of God into Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, though, later on, Narayana got slowly identified with Vishnu. It is this identification that has been the source of disagreement among the Vaishnavas and Saivas as to the nomenclature of the One God, the one group asserting that it is Vishnu and the other affirming that it is Siva. It does not appear that originally the scripture had any intention of giving rise to a contention between the devotees of Vishnu and Siva, because this difference seems to be a later travesty of an initially great religious urge to name the original God. As we have noticed earlier, the Upanishads, at least the older ones, do not designate God by any name that would create a sense of partiality in the minds of the followers of religion. As it was found that the popular mind could not grasp the too lofty concept of the Upanishads, the Epics attempted to make God's relation to man more personal, so that the human heart may yearn for Him through its own limited feelings for the Creator. Though the word 'Brahman' is retained both in the Epics and the Puranas as an epithet of the Supreme Being, and the supermental glory of God is still sung in the spirit and tone of the Upanishads, the need for making religion a practical affair of day-to-day life was a greater concern of these later scriptures than merely an enunciation of Truth as it is. In addition to the term Brahman, God is now addressed and referred to as 'Paramatman', 'Purusha', 'Ishvara', 'Bhagavan', and the like. The name 'Narayana', therefore, as applied to God was not meant to be in opposition to the possibility of God being

called 'Siva'. The bigoted differences of later times in religious policies and practices were due to a gross anthropomorphism of the idea of God and a bringing down of the higher God-ideal into the lower rung of a humanised God whom ardent followers were eager to utilise as an instrument in fulfilling their own pious wishes circumscribed to a nationality, a community, or even a single family. Religion, thus, got diluted into petty, private notions and communal cults which ended many a time in battles and wars, a consequence which is far from the religious ideal, as the poles of the earth standing apart. The name Narayana may be safely taken to be an impartial reference to the Supreme Creator, as larger than and prior to the manifestations of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and not affiliated to the specialised Vaishnava doctrine in any way. This non-dogmatic attitude is substantiated by the descriptions of God in the Srimad-Bhagavata. God may equally be called Paramasiva, in the terminology of some of the Puranas. The Supreme Being, for the sake of sustenance of the world, appears as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva,—Brahma creating, Vishnu preserving and Siva, as Rudra, destroying everything in the end. It is this Supreme Narayana who is hymned in the Purusha-Sukta and the Narayana-Sukta of the Veda.

Vishnu is hailed as having his abode in Vaikuntha, with his consort, Lakshmi. The Vishnu Purana describes Narayana and Lakshmi as an inseparable reality, the one not capable of being distinguished from the other. In a sense, Lakshmi is inherent in Narayana as his Sakti or energy. He reposes on the great serpent, Mahasesha, who is

regarded as the support of the whole earth. Vaikuntha is situated in the Milk-Ocean (Kshira-Sagara). Vishnu's weapons (Astras) are the discus or Chakra called Sudarsana, the mace called Kaumodaki, the bow called Saranga and the sword called Nandaka. His powerful conch is called Panchajanya. The weapons of the Lord, called *Astras,* are mystically driven forces, as different from the ordinary weapons known to the world, which are called Sastras. The Astras are not material instruments but powers that can be directed by even a thought or will. Garuda, the bird, is the vehicle of Vishnu. The Lord, as the protector of the Universe, incarnates himself now and then for the welfare of everyone, through the establishment of *dharma* in the course of time. From the navel of Narayana, which is described as a huge lotus, issued forth Brahma.

According to the Pancharatra doctrine, God is manifest in five forms. These are called *Para* or the supreme form of His transcendent being; Vyuha or the group of His forms called Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, who may be compared to the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic intellect, the cosmic mind, and the cosmic ego respectively; Vibhava or His glory seen through His incarnations or Avataras; Archa or His presence manifest in His idols and images worshipped by devotees; and Antaryamin or His immanent presence within the Universe.

The Avataras of Vishnu are many. In the Srimad-Bhagavata at least twenty-two are named, of which ten are the famous incarnations, called Dasavataras. As is declared in the Bhagavadgita, the Lord incarnates himself whenever

there is decline of righteousness and a rise of unrighteousness, for the sake of the protection of the good and the righteous and putting down evil and wrong. For the establishment of truth and justice he reveals himself in forms suitable to the occasion. Among the Avataras, there are full revelations of Divinity called Purna-Avatara and partial revelations of it called Amsavatara or Kalavatara. Sri Krishna, according to the Bhagavata, was a Purna-Avatara or complete manifestation of God.

Among the incarnations of Vishnu, which are not included among the ten important ones, we should particularly make mention of a famous Divine manifestation in the forms of Narayana and Nara, who are said to have appeared again as Krishna and Arjuna for the benefit of the world. The spiritual power and glory of Narayana and Nara is extolled to great heights in the Epics and Puranas. The Mahabharata says that their radiance and glory overshadowed even the greatness of Brahma, the Creator. The Epic sings that their lustre fills the whole world and reaches the heavens, that they glow like fire and are invincible in all creation. They are bright like the sun, strong like the wind, lustrous like fire, and beautiful like the moon, says the Mahabharata. Their power was partly revealed when King Dambhodbhava challenged them for battle, and when Indra with his retinue tried to seduce them from their austerities. Dambhodbhava was overthrown most humiliatingly and Indra made to hang his head in shame.

The Matsya Avatara, or the incarnation as the Fish, was assumed by Vishnu for saving Manu and the seven sages

from the raging flood at the end of the Manvantara and rescuing the Vedas from destruction in the cataclysm. As the Kurma Avatara, or incarnation as the Tortoise, Vishnu supported the Mount Mandara on his back when it was used as a churning rod by the gods for recovering Amrita or the celestial nectar, and many other treasures which were lost in the cosmic ocean at the time of Pralaya. In the Varaha Avatara, or the incarnation as the Boar, Vishnu slew the demon Hiranyaksha and lifted the earth sunk in the cosmic ocean. As Narasimha, or the Man-Lion, Vishnu destroyed Hiranyakasipu, in spite of the latter's having received the protection of boons from Brahma, against death through the celestials, men and animals, both during the day and night, and from weapons of every kind. Unfortunately for Hiranyakasipu, Narasimha was neither god, man nor animal, for he bore the head of a lion and the body of man and tore the Asura with nails which were not any weapon, at dusk, which was neither day nor night. Bursting from a pillar with the sound of the thunderbolt, Vishnu, as Narasimha, proved his immanence even in material objects. The day of the revelation of Narasimha (Narasimha-Jayanti) is observed by devotees on the 14th day of the bright half of the month of Vaisakha (about the month of May). As Vamana or the Dwarf, Vishnu strode the three worlds with his three steps, covering the whole universe with his body, and overcame Bali, the Asura king, consigning him to the nether regions. As Parasurama, or Rama with the axe, Vishnu came to rid the earth of the arrogant Kshatriyas who had overstepped the limits of decency and good conduct and had become a menace to all

righteous life. He raged round the world twenty-one times, like a fierce fire, and destroyed the Kshatriya race with his invincible axe. In the Rama Avatara, or incarnation as Rama, Vishnu set the great example of *dharma* on earth.

It is the glorious history of Rama that is the theme of the great epic of Valmiki. Rama, the son of King Dasaratha, became an embodiment of the perfection of all virtues and an ideal of every conceivable quality of goodness. Valmiki, in his magnificent poetry, describes Rama as a repository of strength, self-restraint, fortitude, understanding, power of expression, extreme fineness of demeanour, and as a protector of all and saviour of *dharma*, learned in all the scriptures and all the arts, dignified like the ocean, majestic like the Himalayas, world-destroying fire in times of anger, and the very earth itself in forgiveness. Rama is portrayed as one with raised chest, long arms, rounded head, graceful forehead, of symmetrical limbs, attractive colour, broad eyes, and most beautiful. His bow is Kodanda, and the surety of the action of his arrows is proverbial as the 'Rama-Bana'. Under the instigation of the youngest queen of the king, the arrangements for Rama's coronation were foiled, and to fulfil a promise made by the father to this queen, Rama repaired to the forest, as a good son, whom his brother Lakshmana and consort Sita followed. It was in the forest that Rama had to encounter the Rakshasas or demons, who were a threat to the peaceful life of the Rishis, the chief of the Rakshasas being Ravana. The occasion for a war with the Rakshasas as a whole was the recovery of Sita from the custody of Ravana, who had managed to carry away Sita stealthily from the forest, while she was alone,

and with this end in view, Rama made alliance with Sugriva, the monkey king, who was in a similar predicament due to his defeat at the hands of his brother, Vali. Rama helped Sugriva in destroying Vali on the understanding that Sugriva would make necessary arrangements for a search of the lost Sita. A great hero in the Ramayana, next only to Rama, was Hanuman, the minister of Sugriva. Hanuman's strength is a byword in every home, and his great feat of jumping over the ocean to Lanka, the capital of Ravana, expanding himself to a gigantic size, is exquisitely described in the charming poetry of Valmiki, making one's hair stand on ends. His heroic deeds in Lanka, his valour that struck terror even to the undaunted Ravana, and his unselfishness, servicefulness, self-restraint and wisdom have made Hanuman an immortal son of India, whose glories are sung even today by thousands of devotees in the land. Hanuman is recognised as one of the Chiranjivis or those who do not die till the end of the world.

When the war with Ravana ended on his death at the hands of Rama, and Sita was recovered, Rama returned to Ayodhya and was installed king. Rama's exemplary rule is called 'Ramarajya'. Valmiki says that during Rama's reign there were no widows, no fear from wild animals, no disease, no anxiety due to wicked people, no calamity of any kind, no child ever died, and all were happy because *dharma* ruled the earth. There was no mutual enmity among people and everyone was free from sorrow. Everywhere people talked about Rama's greatness. Rama's name filled the whole country when he ruled as king. The

Avatara of Vishnu as Rama was intended to set an ideal before humanity, an example of perfection that man can ever reach morally, intellectually, materially and spiritually, even when living a social life in the world. The birth of Rama is observed on the 9th day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March-April), as 'Ramanavami'.

It is commonly believed that while Vishnu came as Rama to demonstrate human perfection, he came as Krishna to exhibit divine perfection. There is a marked difference between the ideal and the conduct which these two Avataras taught and revealed in the world of men. While Rama is Maryada-Purushottama, God setting forth the ideal of discipline, law, conduct and righteousness, Krishna is Lila-Purushottama, God playing the divine sport of his transcendent and supermental magnificence, glory and perfection in the world of mortals.

Narayana and Nara, the great sages who are supposed to be performing eternal penance in the holy shrine of Badrikashrama (modern Badrinath), and who are the representations of Vishnu's presence on earth, are regarded to have taken birth as Krishna and Arjuna, respectively, for the redemption of the world from sin and evil. Krishna, who is considered to be the Purna-Avatara (full incarnation) of Vishnu or, according to some, of the Universal Narayana who transcends even Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, revealed himself in Mathura as the child of Vasudeva and Devaki. We need not go into details of the miraculous and dramatic events of his early life in Vrindavana, such as the spontaneous opening of the gates of the prison where Vasudeva and Devaki were confined;

the ebbing of the river Yamuna when Vasudeva tried to cross it with the child Krishna; the destruction of Putana and other Asuras like Sakata, Trinavarta, Vatsa, Dhenuka, Baka, Agha, Pralamba, Kesi, Chanura and Kamsa at the hands of the boy Krishna; the release of the sons of Kubera from their curse due to which they were born as trees; his self-multiplication as thousands of cows, calves and cowherds in place of the real ones that were lost; the subjugation of the serpent Kaliya; the swallowing of the forest fire; the lifting of the Govardhana mountain and the humiliation of Indra; the bringing back of the dead sons of Sandipani; and several other incidents of this nature which revealed the divinity of Krishna even at an early age. The most intriguing and significant incident in the early life of Krishna is what has been called the Rasalila or his love-dance with the Gopis of Vrindavana. Commentators have tried to interpret the romantic seeking of Krishna by the Gopis and his response to their search in a dalliance that surpasses understanding as the eternal quest of objects for the Universal subject which is present in every one of them as their Atman, the seeking of the individual for the Absolute in an ecstasy of feeling that the intellect cannot measure or estimate, a rapture of love for God in which all rationality is hushed, and the divine reaction from the Supreme Atman in a revelation of multiple immanence or a universal Self-manifestation, a state of spiritual super-consciousness in which one forgets one's own personality and becomes conscious only of God's existence everywhere in an emotion of love which bursts the bubble of individuality, which, indeed, was the condition of the

Gopis. There was nothing of the human lust or physical passion in the immortal dance of Rasa, when especially the age of Krishna was only of a small boy who could not be expected to excite carnality in the minds of elderly women in such large numbers. Another interpretation regards this incident as an occasion when Krishna, though to physical perception he was a small boy, appeared as a charming young hero in the eyes of every Gopi, with every one of whom he was individually present by a multitudinousness of form which he assumed in the majesty of the power of his Yoga. To a doubt expressed by Parikshit on this question, Sage Suka gives an adequate answer. The Lord, Suka replies, appeared in human form to shower his grace on those who came in contact with him and to create devotion in those who listen to the greatness of his deeds and of his life. It is strange that the husbands of the Gopis never missed their wives, having had them, by the power of the Lord, always by their sides, even when the Rasa dance was going on. How then, can human judgment of values be applicable here? Further, Suka prescribes a study of the Rasa chapters of the Bhagavata as a remedy for lust and a means to acquire self-control and mastery over all desires.

While the early life of Krishna stimulates the tenderness of divine devotion and love for a spiritual union with God through Madhurya Bhakti or romantic aspiration and a silent melting of oneself in his sweetness, his later life opens an entirely new chapter in the book of human evolution, and stirs in one's mind Aisvarya Bhakti or devotion by an irresistible attraction for the glory of his power and knowledge.

Krishna closes his sportful life as a child and an adolescent with the destruction of Kamsa, and suddenly assumes a stern outlook of life and turns his attention to the work of freeing the world from all sources of wickedness. The first serious opponent whom Krishna had to meet was Jarasandha, king of Magadha, a worshipper of Rudra and a menace to all good and Sattvika natures. He attacked Mathura repeatedly and, after being harassed several times, Krishna and his elder brother Balarama determined to rout his forces, sparing his life alone to allow him opportunities for collecting larger forces which were destined to be uprooted. It was here that Krishna assumed the weapons of Vishnu, which all descended from the heavens, together with a celestial chariot which he rode in war. With a view to the fulfilment of future purposes politically manoeuvred by him as the world's greatest statesman and spiritually ordained as the world's greatest Yogin, Krishna got constructed a mighty and gorgeous fortress at Dvaraka, in the Western ocean, from where he began to rule the fortunes of people. The first question that arose in his mind was to enquire into the fate of the Pandava brothers, with which errand he sent Akrura to Hastinapura. His first meeting with the Pandavas was during the marriage of Draupadi in the palace of Drupada. After the marriage, Krishna offered them costly presents as a mark of respect. When Yudhishthira expressed his desire to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice, Krishna pointed out a great obstacle to it in Jarasandha and cleverly arranged to get rid of the latter through a private deal with Bhima. The occasion of the Rajasuya sacrifice of Yudhishthira became also the scene of

the death of Sisupala whose head Krishna severed with his discus, Sudarsana. This event is the theme of a famous poem of that name by the poet Magha and the incident may be regarded as the background of the bigger and more complicated scenes of the Mahabharata war. In the celebration of this sacrifice Krishna is said to have allotted more honourable duties to other kings and reserved for himself the humbler service of washing the feet of the guests who came for the function and of removing the remains after the banquet served by Yudhishthira to all those who attended the sacrifice. It is here again that the divinity of Krishna was publicly announced by Bhishma, to which Sisupala took exception and with insolent words challenged Krishna for battle. Krishna met the Pandavas now and then even while they were in exile, encouraging them with comforting words and promise of help to vanquish their foes and regain the kingdom. The incidents of Krishna's miraculous help to Draupadi in the form of unending clothes in the court of the Kauravas and his sudden appearance before her in the forest and demanding of her a little food by the acceptance of which he filled the stomachs of sage Durvasa and his large following of disciples are too well known to need any description. On the completion of the period of exile by the Pandavas, Krishna arranged for a conference in the court of Virata to decide the question of taking up arms against the Kauravas. As a measure of intelligent statesmanship, Krishna, however, accepted to go for a mission of peace with the Kauravas, though he knew well that the mission was not going to serve its purpose. As he himself expressed in his

talk with Yudhishthira, it was more a diplomatic move than a step that was really necessary or meaningful. Sanjaya's description of Krishna to king Dhritarashtra in his court is again a public proclamation of the divinity of Krishna. Krishna revealed his powers to the apprehensive Yudhishthira when he said that if the Kauravas attempted to do him any harm when he went to them for peace, he would not wait for the war to destroy them, but burn them down, singlehanded, and relieve the burden of Yudhishthira. The mission of Krishna to the court of Dhritarashtra, his famous speech in the assembly and the stunning cosmic form which he showed before the Kauravas, mark a wondrous scene in the great drama.

The next scene is the delivery of the gospel of the Bhagavadgita at the commencement of the war, the contents of which we have briefly explained elsewhere. His going for Bhishma with the Chakra, his hypnotisation of the Kaurava forces by his looks, the confusion he caused in the minds of the opposing army by making everyone in the battlefield look like Krishna and Arjuna, his dextrous moves which assisted Arjuna in vanquishing the Samsaptakas, his intelligence which destroyed the invincible Bhagadatta, his Yogic power which worked in overcoming Jayadratha, his clever stratagem, again, which foiled the Sakti of Karna while simultaneously getting rid of the demoniacal Ghatotkacha, the way in which he saved the Pandavas from the Narayana-Astra of Asvatthama and invoked the help of Rudra himself in the war for the victory of *dharma* in the cause of the Pandavas, the power which he exercised in vanquishing Karna's weapons sent against

Arjuna and in the saving of the latter from being burnt while his chariot itself was reduced to ashes by the Astras of Bhishma and Drona, his common-sense in the event of the killing of Duryodhana, and the mysterious instructions of his which saved the Pandavas from being destroyed by the icy hands of Asvatthama, his succour of the child in the womb of Uttara, his great understanding which saved Bhima from being crushed at the embrace of Dhritarashtra, are all highly interesting and instructive episodes described in the Mahabharata. He showed his cosmic form four times in his life,—firstly to his mother Yasoda, secondly in the court of the Kauravas, thirdly to Arjuna on the eve of the war, and fourthly to sage Uttanka. The prayers offered by Kunti and Bhishma to Krishna, as recorded in the Bhagavata and the Mahabharata, are magnificent not merely as forms of literary force, but also as specimens of the glorification of God in his Avatara as Krishna.

There are many other incidents in the personal life of Krishna mentioned in the Harivamsa, Vishnu Purana and Bhagavata which inspire one spiritually and provide a stimulating reading in the biography of one who demonstrated to the world the character of all-round perfection. The birth of Krishna is celebrated on the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Bhadrapada (August-September) every Year.

The purpose of the Krishna-Avatara was not only to destroy unrighteousness but also to reveal to the world the glory and greatness of God. In the well-adjusted integral conduct of the life of Krishna is manifest the majesty of the Almighty.

The last two Avataras among the ten mentioned are those of Buddha and Kalki. Often the Buddha-Avatara is identified with the advent of the Sakya prince, Gautama, son of King Suddhodana, who is known to the world as Buddha. It is the opinion of many historians that Hinduism wished to absorb Buddhism into its fold by recognising Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu. But there is also an orthodox view which holds that Buddha, the incarnation of Vishnu, was a different person altogether, who came with the purpose of deluding the Asuras in order to overcome them for the establishment of righteousness. The Avatara of Kalki is yet to come and is supposed to be a corrective force of God, descending at the end of the *Kali* age, to root out unrighteousness when it reaches its extreme and becomes intolerable. Kalki is said to come riding on a white horse and brandishing a flaming sword, flying like the wind, judging and destroying the wicked, saving the good, the just and the divine and restoring the *Krita-Yuga* once again in the world.

The glories of Narayana or Vishnu are sung in the Purusha and Vishnu Suktas of the Rig-Veda, the Mahabharata, the Harivamsa, the six Vaishnava Puranas, the Tripadvibhuti-Mahanarayana Upanishad, the Vaishnava Agamas and the songs of the Vaishnava saints.

Siva

Siva or Rudra is one of the Trinity and is regarded as a great benefactor of the Universe, having his abode in Mount Kailasa, with his consort Parvati, his children Ganesa and Skanda, and his vehicle, the bull, called Nandi.

Siva has three eyes representing the Sun, Moon and Fire, the third one usually closed, except at the time of the destruction of things. He wears a Jata or matted hair, supports Ganga on his head and the crescent moon on his matted lock, holds a trident in his hand, besmears himself with Bhasma or holy ash, is decorated with snakes on the head, neck and arms, and has a blue neck due to his having drunk poison during the time of the churning of the ocean by the gods. He is clothed in tiger-skin, or, sometimes, the skin of the elephant. His bow is called Ajagava and his main Astra is Pasupata. He remains mostly in a state of meditation for the good of the Universe and is called Yogisvara or the master of Yogins. His glories as the immanent Divine Presence are sung in the Namaka and Chamaka sections of the renowned hymn of the Yajurveda, called the Rudra-Adhyaya or Satarudriya. He is Mrityunjaya or Conqueror of Death, and devotees meditate on him as such to avert calamities of every kind. His final sport during the dissolution of the Universe is called Tandava, a form of terrific dance with wild rhythm, spelling death and devastation everywhere. In this form he is called Nataraja or the Lord of dancers. He is worshipped mainly in the form of Linga or a rounded stone which is often erroneously identified with the emblem of the phallus. The Linga has a deep significance in mystic psychology, representing formlessness and infinity. Siva is called Pasupati or the Lord of beasts, for, from the point of view of divine perfection, all created beings are like beasts in their nature. The main incidents that are narrated in his Lilas or sportful deeds are the destruction of Daksha's sacrifice, the

burning of Manmatha (Cupid) with the fire of his third eye when the former tried to tempt him by distracting him from meditation, the destruction of the Tripuras (three cities) in which work Brahma and Vishnu assisted him, the drinking of the poison arisen from the churning of the ocean, and the bearing of Ganga on his head. He is also said to have taken the form of Dakshinamurti, a personality he assumed to impart knowledge to the seeking Kumaras or the first-born sons of Brahma. The famous annual worship of Siva, called Sivaratri, or the Night of Siva, falls on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna (February-March). He is the supreme God of the Saivas, as Vishnu is of the Vaishnavas, though, as we have observed earlier, no marked distinction between them is made in the earlier scriptures. The more informed ones continue to adore Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, not as three gods but three facets of the Supreme Being.

The Rudra-Sukta of the Rig-Veda, the Satarudriya of the Yajurveda, the Saiva Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the six Saiva Puranas, the Saiva Agamas and the songs of the Saiva saints sing of the glories of Siva.

Ganesa

Ganesa or Ganapati, as he is called, is the first son of Siva and is elephant-headed, pot-bellied and holds weapons like the trident, the noose, etc. He is the god who is always worshipped first in all functions, rituals, ceremonies and every auspicious undertaking, as the remover of obstacles and bestower of fortunes. Ganesa is adored as the emblem of wisdom which is indicated by the elephant's head. His

vehicle is the mouse. The mouse which is the smallest of animals and the elephant which is the biggest as embodied in his form are regarded as symbols of his mastery over everything, from the lowest to the highest. There are many legends connected with his enterprises which endear him to everyone and make him the beloved god worshipped by every cult or sect, in all good beginnings. Ganesa is worshipped annually through an all-India festival, which is as famous as either Ramanavami, Krishna-Ashtami or Sivaratri, on the fourth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadrapada (August-September). People undertake a special observance in honour of Ganesa, called Siddhi-Vinayaka-Vrata, for the attainment of particular ends in view, usually for clearing oneself of false accusations, recovering lost objects, regaining lost status, or removing of obstacles on one's way.

The Ganesa Purana and the Ganapatyatharvasirsha Upanishad are devoted to the glorification of Ganesa.

Devi

Vishnu, Siva and Devi may be regarded as the chief deities universally worshipped in Hinduism. The concept of Devi, often identified with Durga, has a very ancient origin. Reference is made to the great goddess in the Rig-Veda and the Mahabharata. The hymns devoted to her in this Veda extol her as the embodiment of divine Power by which the Universe is sustained. The great Mother sung in the Veda appears as Uma of golden hue in the Kenopanishad. In the Mahabharata, she is mentioned as the sister of Krishna and thus bears a relation to Vaishnavism. She is also adored by

Saivas as the consort of Siva. Yudhishthira offered prayers to Devi for relief from suffering and for protection in distress. Krishna asked Arjuna to pray to her before the commencement of the war. But the most famous scripture which sings the glories of Devi is the Devimahatmya or Saptasati, regarded almost on a par with the Bhagavadgita. The Saptasati is a part of the Markandeya Purana. Devi is referred to as Chandi, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. She is often indistinguishable from Parvati, the divine consort of Siva. The goddess is annually worshipped in a nine-day festival called the Navaratri Puja, during the first nine days of the bright half of the month of Asvayuja (September-October). The adoration of Devi grew into a philosophical and mystical worship of Sakti as the inherent power of the Absolute, which transcended the exoteric ritualism of the Veda-Samhitas and Puranas.

In the Devimahatmya, the goddess is described as having manifested herself in three significant forms,—Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasarasvati. In the first form she woke up Vishnu from his cosmic sleep, to encounter the Asuras, Madhu and Kaitabha, who had risen in the cosmic ocean. In the second form she met the forces of the demon Mahishasura and slew him with his forces. In the third form she destroyed the Asuras Sumbha and Nisumbha with their forces and brought peace to the gods in heaven and to the world of men. These three forms of Devi are identified with the revelations of Divinity through the primordial qualities of Tamas, Rajas and Sattva, respectively. They are also equated with the manifestations of the Universal Powers of action (Kriya), Desire (Ichha)

and Knowledge (Jnana). The hymns to Devi in the Devimahatmya are charged with a fervour of feeling and charm of expression which are rarely seen in religious literature.

Durga, Lakshmi and Sarasvati are the spouses of Siva, Vishnu and Brahma, respectively, inseparable from their Lords, as heat from fire, which hints at the truth that the manifestations of the Saktis are ultimately God himself in action. Durga rides on a lion. Sometimes she is depicted as riding on a tiger. Though her abode is Kailasa, with her Lord, Siva, she manifests herself everywhere in creation as the beloved saviour of her worshippers. She is said to have eight hands and holds the various weapons of the gods. She is the goddess of transformation, destruction, war and pestilence, of disease as well as its medicine. She is the Samhara-Sakti or the all-destroying power of God as Siva or Rudra. Lakshmi is worshipped as seated on a lotus and also holding lotuses in her hands. She is the protective and sustaining power of God as Vishnu. She is the goddess of prosperity, wealth, fortune, peace and plenty. She is the preservative power of God and, being the consort of Vishnu, is also worshipped as Sita, the wife of Rama and Rukmini, the wife of Krishna, as also Radha, the favourite of Krishna in his early life. Lakshmi is regarded as having her particular presence manifested in cattle, grains and gold. Sarasvati is the creative power of God as Brahma and is portrayed as seated on a swan and holding a lute (Vina) and a book in her hands. She is hailed as Vak, or speech, in the Rig-Veda Samhita and is the presiding deity over all

fine arts, especially music and literature. She is the favourite deity of students, writers and musicians.

The Saktas, or worshippers of Sakti, adore Devi as Tripurasundari and Rajarajesvari, the great reality of the Universe.

The Devi-Sukta of the Rig-Veda, the Sakta Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Devimahatmya, the Devi-Bhagavata, Lalitopakhyana, the Sakta Agamas and the works of Bhaskararaya glorify Devi in her various aspects.

Brahma

Though Brahma is one of the Trinity of gods, he is not one of the deities commonly worshipped in religion. There is only one temple, in Pushkar, dedicated to him and, strangely, he is not the favourite god of any section of the Hindu faith. The Puranas describe his manifestation from the lotus of the navel of Vishnu, before creation. It was he who invoked Devi, Durga, as the Sakti of the Almighty, for the first time, to wake up Vishnu from his divine slumber (Yoga-Nidra) during dissolution (Pralaya). Brahma is the creator of the existing Universe in all its planes. He is, thus, called the grandfather (Pitamaha) of Creation. He is four-headed and is the revealer of the Vedas to his creation. In the scriptures, his status is stated to be very important and he is worshipped through penance by those who aspire for invincible powers, especially the Asuras, whom he blesses, unfortunately, to the woe of the Devas or celestials. Brahma is also called Hiranyagarbha, the first-born Creator of all things. He is sung in the Rig-Veda and identified with the cosmic *prana* in the Brahmanas and the Upanishads. He is

also identified with the Cosmic Mind or the Cosmic Intellect, regarded as the first movement of the Absolute. The mystic weapon or Astra in which he is invoked is called Brahma-Astra, the most deadly of divine missiles, used by experts in ancient warfare. He is the progenitor of the four Kumaras and the ten Prajapatis, and from his forehead arose Rudra or Siva. Brahma divided his body into Manu and Satarupa and became the source of the diversity of beings. Though six of the eighteen Puranas are supposed to be devoted to him, he is scarcely worshipped today, either in private or public.

The name, Brahma, used in the masculine gender, is to be carefully distinguished from Brahman, a designation of the Absolute, used in the neuter gender.

Skanda

Skanda, the second son of Siva, and the younger brother of Ganesa, is also known as Kumara, Karttikeya, Shanmukha, Subrahmanya, and by many other names. His banner is the cock and vehicle the peacock which stands clutching a serpent in its talons. His Saktis or inseparable powers are Valli and Devasena whom he assumed in the course of the great history describing his multi-formed life of a series of exploits both in the celestial and temporal realms. The devotees of Skanda form a large part of the population especially of Southern India, and constitute one of the important sections of the religion of the country. The advent of Skanda was the background of occasion when Siva burnt Manmatha with his third eye, a penalty he inflicted on Kama or the god of love for disturbing him in

his meditation. The story goes that the sparks which flashed forth from the third eye of Siva rushed through space, which Vayu and Agni carried and dropped into the river Ganga. Ganga, being unable to contain the divine energy, shoved it on to her banks, upon a shrub of reeds known as Sara. There is thus a combination of the ether, air, fire, water and earth principles in the depositing of the Tejas or energy of Siva in the world. The cumulative force which combined the forms of the five elements impregnated with the divine power of Siva (Divya-Tejas) manifested itself as a sixfold divinity with six faces (Shanmukha), including both the unmanifest and manifest elements in a single being. This is the child of Siva, of mysterious birth, mysterious bringing up, under mysterious circumstances, for a mysterious purpose which the gods alone knew. The third eye represents the principle of intelligence and Skanda, thus, as a revelation through the third eye of Siva, is said to stand for an incarnation of Divine Knowledge.

The principal weapon of Skanda is a spear (Vel), pointed at its end and tall in stature. Devotees understand by it the need for one-pointedness of mind in slaying the demon of ignorance, which is expected to be sharp and sure in its aim. The gods, under the advice of Brahma, connived the birth of Skanda through the instrumentality of Siva and his consort Parvati. The Asuras,—Surapadma, Simhamukha and Taraka,—who wrought havoc everywhere in creation, could be destroyed only by the son of Siva manifested as a special divine Power. Skanda became the General of the celestial forces (Senani) and he is worshipped as the martial god of Hinduism. The day on

which he slew the Asura is celebrated on the sixth day of the bright half of the month of Karttika (October-November) according to one tradition, and the month of Margasirsha (November-December) according to another.

The Skanda Purana is devoted to the glorification of Skanda and his sportful routing out of the Asuras. The great battle between the celestial forces led by Skanda and the Asuras is an epic by itself. Kalidasa's Kumarasambhava is a famous Sanskrit poem on the birth of the war-god. The Tamil poem, 'Tiruppugazh', by the saint Arunagirinathar, is held in as much esteem by the devotees of Skanda as the Vedas in Sanskrit or the 'Divya-Prabandham' in Tamil Vaishnavism and the 'Tevaram' in Tamil Saivism. His 'Skandaranubhuti' and 'Skandaralankaram' are other renowned songs on the love and experience of God as Skanda. It may be safely said that the cults of Vishnu, Siva, Sakti, Ganesa, Surya and Skanda form the six great sections in the book of the religion of the Hindus. Some would like to add the Pasupata cult, which is a minor group of the worshippers of Siva in a particular form. The Mahabharata recounts the principal deeds of Skanda. The Kumara Tantra forms an important literature on the worship of Skanda. The Skanda Purana is a sacred book devoted to Skanda, and in its Tamil recension records the mighty deeds of the god.

Surya

The sun-god is known as Surya or Aditya and his greatness is sung in the Rig-Veda in sections specially devoted to him, where it is declared that 'Surya is the Soul, both of the moving and unmoving beings' (*Surya atma*

jagatas tasthushas cha). 'This Aditya is, verily, Brahman' (*Asavadityo Brahma*) says a renowned passage. It is also said that 'Surya is the visible God' (*Suryah pratyakshadevata*). It is not difficult to imagine the indebtedness of everything in the world to the existence of the Sun. The life of all creatures on earth, of men, animals and plants, is vitally influenced by the solar energy and, inasmuch as nothing can survive without it, the Sun is veritably the Soul of all things. The power that the Sun exerts on the earth is such that the religious observance of Sandhya-Vandana or the prayer to be offered during the three junctions of the day in relation to the Sun,—morning, noon and evening,—is considered obligatory on the part of every orthodox Hindu who has been invested with the sacred thread (*Upanita*). The solar power actuates the body, *prana* and even mind, without one's knowing it, and the health and growth of beings are much dependent on the Sun.

The Sun, in India, is not regarded merely as a bright heating orb, packed with atomic energy that is released into a form of forceful activity. To the religious mind, Surya is the resplendent Divine Person (Hiranmaya Purusha), a representative of God in the world, manifesting himself as life-giving power and sustaining strength everywhere and bringing the message that God is the great Light of all lights (Jyotisham jyotir uttamam). The stirring prayers to the Sun in the Rig-Veda form the Mahasaura-Suktas, which identify the immanent divinity in the Sun with the One Reality (Ekam Sat). The Sun is an eye of the Virat-Purusha, and is the presiding deity over the eyes of all. The soul which

reaches Krama-Mukti (gradual salvation) passes through the region of the Sun,—Surya-Dvara. The Vedas are full with ecstatic declamations on the glory of the Sun, who is a divine colossus striding over the world with dazzling beauty and all-inspiring splendour. The Isavasya Upanishad has a special prayer offered to the Sun by a dying man. The Prasnopanishad identifies the Sun with *prana* (vital energy) and the Chhandogya Upanishad visualises in him the face of God and makes him the centre of the mystic meditation called Madhu-Vidya. A special physical exercise called Surya-Namaskara is devoted to the worship of the Sun and is daily practised by devotees during their morning prayers (Sandhya-Vandana). The deity of the celebrated Gayatri-mantra of the Veda is the Sun (Savita). In the Valmiki-Ramayana the sage Agastya is reported to have initiated Rama into a particular form of prayer to the Sun, called *Aditya Hridaya,* to enable him to bring about the destruction of Ravana. Yudhishthira prayed to the Sun, when he was in penury, and obtained a celestial vessel from the god, which supplied him inexhaustible food.

The time when the movement of the Sun towards the northern hemisphere of the earth commences is called Makara-Sankranti (the junction of the capricorn), when the Sun enters the tenth house of the Zodiac, about the middle of the month of January, which is regarded as a kind of New Year by many. Bhishma of the Mahabharata fame waited for the beginning of the Northern course of the Sun, to leave his mortal coil. The seventh day of the bright half of the month of Magha (January-February) is called Rathasaptami, and is supposed to be the day on which the

Northern movement of the Sun takes definite effect, and is traditionally regarded as the day when the chariot of the Sun is diverted to the North by his charioteer, Aruna. The plant which is sacred to the Sun is called Arka, whose leaves are placed by people on their heads when they take the sacred bath on this day.

Hanuman

A great hero in the Ramayana is Hanuman, an unparalleled source of strength, self-control, knowledge and the spirit of service. Tradition sings of his birth as a child of the deity of the wind (Vayu) through Anjana, a celestial woman of the simian species. Hanuman was blessed by Brahma, the creator, and all the gods, with invincible powers and deathlessness as a recompense for the hurt feelings of Vayu when his son was pushed down by Indra on the former's attempting to rise up to the orb of the Sun and catch it, in the playfulness of childhood. It is reported that Hanuman, with the matchless powers thus bestowed on him by the goodness of Brahma and the gods, ravaged the sacrificial grounds of the Rishis, in sheer mischief, and the Rishis, knowing the power of Hanuman, cursed him to a state of forgetfulness of his powers until he was reminded of them by someone. Hanuman was immediately reduced to a state of powerlessness due to this incident and he lived for long years in Kishkindha as a minister to king Sugriva, but without consciousness of his strength. The time came when he had to be sent in search of Sita, the wife of Rama, and it was here that Jambavan, the bear-chief, reminded Hanuman of his early life and the

powers he possessed. Valmiki says that, on thus being reminded, Hanuman immediately grew big in size and struck his tail with force and demonstrated an awe-inspiring form which delighted everyone on the possibility of success in the mission.

Valmiki's description of Hanuman's jumping across the ocean, to reach Lanka, is vivid and picturesque. Hanuman shook the mountain on which he stood and carried some trees which flew with him due to his force. He entered Lanka after overcoming the obstacles that stood on his way in the form of three superhuman powers called Surasa, Chhaya and Lankini. Having discovered Sita in Lanka after great effort, Hanuman's mind worked in a most unexpected manner, and he began to contemplate an aspect of work which was not exactly a part of the mission with which he was sent. His anger on Ravana took shape, and he determined to cause a general destruction of the beloved grove of the latter, not only to manifest his strength but also to see the fun of the Rakshasas getting devastated at his hands. He assumed a terrific form, with a gigantic size, towering like a mountain, and resplendent with the glory of the supernatural in him. He made short-work of the Asoka grove of Ravana and began to rove like a ravaging tempest. When news of this reached Ravana, he sent his armed forces, all of which Hanuman crushed in mere play. Ravana, then, sent eminent leaders, who were all pounded at the hands of Hanuman, and it looked that the whole of Lanka would be broken down if necessary steps were not taken. When Indrajit, the son of Ravana, applied the Brahma-Astra against Hanuman, the poet says, Hanuman

deliberately yielded, not only with a view to give respect to the Astra of Brahma, but also to seeking opportunity for seeing Ravana, face to face. Hanuman, bound, was taken before Ravana, where he had a bold speech with the Rakshasa king, at which the enraged king ordered his tail to be set fire to with rags soaked in oil. The result was that Hanuman, with his tail in flames, expanded his size and, crushing the Rakshasas near him, jumped from one housetop to another, setting fire to the whole city, when, it is said, a powerful wind blew, increasing the fury of the flames, as if Hanuman's father was pleased at his heroism, and Lanka was in the panic of death threatening all over.

Having seen Sita, again, to ensure that she was not burnt by the flames, Hanuman jumped back across the ocean to convey to Rama the good news of his having seen Sita. After the happy news was received, Rama rattled forth to Lanka with huge armies of monkeys to fight the forces of Ravana, in which epic battle Hanuman played parts of immortal honour. Hanuman is hailed as master of all the Vedas and all the nine grammars. He is supposed to be the candidate for the post of Brahma in the next cycle (Kalpa) of creation. Hanuman is one of the seven Chiranjivis or those fortunate ones who will not die till the end of the Universe.

The Sundara-Kanda of the Ramayana, which describes the exploits of Hanuman, is generally read to avert fear from enemies.

Sasta: A legend in the Puranas states that when, during the churning of the ocean by the Devas and Asuras, nectar rose from it, Vishnu, in the form of a charming damsel, bewitched the Asuras into a state of infatuation and, when they thus forgot themselves, she shrewdly distributed the nectar to the gods. News of this incident reached Siva who expressed a desire to see the form which Vishnu took to beguile the Asuras. When Vishnu demonstrated that form, Siva is said to have been so enchanted by it that he ran and embraced Vishnu in that feminine form. The energy of Siva which was released at that moment became the reason for the birth of Sasta or Harihara Putra (son of Vishnu and Siva), as he is called. This desire of Siva need not intrigue the minds of devotees, for it is only indicative of the intensity of the beauty into which Vishnu transformed himself. To tempt him who reduced to ashes the god of love, beauty should have assumed a form no mortal can ever imagine. The possibility of temptation transcends the resources of the Universe. The incident is both a lesson to the seekers of Truth and a peep into the richness of God's powers.

Sasta is commonly known as Ayyappan in Southern India and his spiritual presence is believed to be concretely manifest in the great temple dedicated to him in the Sabari hills (Sabarimalai) in the state of Kerala. Devotees regard a pilgrimage to this temple as a sacred ritual and a spiritual Sadhana and this vow of pilgrimage to the temple in the Sabari hills is, in the solemnity and sacredness associated with it, akin to the Kavadi Yatra performed by the devotees

of Skanda or the Varkari vow of devotees of Vitthala in Maharashtra. Though Sasta is specially worshipped in the South, the cult is now slowly spreading to the other parts of India.

The Loka-Palas: The guardian deities of the different directions are called Loka-Palas or protectors of the world. Indra is the ruler of the East, Yama of the South, Varuna of the West, Kubera of the North, Agni of the South-East, Nirriti of the South-West, Vayu of the North-West, and Isana of the North-East. Dyaus is regarded as the deity of the atmosphere above and Prithivi or Bhudevi of the earth. Indra is the famous god sung in the Vedic hymns, wielding the thunderbolt, lord over the clouds and rains and king of the heavens. The weapon of Indra is Vajra and his capital is Amaravati. Yama is the god of death, the dispenser of justice to the souls of the dead, and in this capacity he is known as *dharma*-Raja or the lord of righteousness. Though the function of Yama is dispensation of natural retributive justice, like that of a judge, the tendency of people is to look upon him as a fierce god of punishment to the souls after their departure from this world. He is regarded as the son of Vivasvan or the Sun, and so he is called Vaivasvata. He is also the lord of the Pitris or ancestors who have gone to the other world. The dreaded rod he wields is the *Danda* (known as Yamadanda). His vehicle is the buffalo and his capital is Samyamani. His clerk is Chitragupta who records the deeds of everyone for judgment by Yama on them. Varuna is the lord of waters, regarded often as the deity of the ocean. He is lord over all aquatic beings. Kubera is a sort of fairy-god and lives in

Alakapuri. He is regarded as the treasurer of Siva whose abode is Kailasa. Agni is the fire-god, famous in the Veda as the carrier of oblations offered in sacrifices to those who are addressed by the mantras. He is the all-purifier and is invoked in every sacrificial altar where oblations are offered. Nirriti is a demi-god evidently of a low cadre. Vayu is the wind-god. Isana is a special manifestation of Siva guarding a direction. Dyaus is the spirit of the atmosphere and Prithivi the spirit of the earth. Sometimes the moon-god is regarded as the presiding deity of the North.

Kama: The Indian love-god or Cupid is called Kamadeva. Though he is identified with the Kama that is mentioned in the Nasadiya-Sukta of the Rig-Veda and thus is a kind of self-born being, it is evident that the Kama of this Sukta is an epithet of the cosmic creative Will and cannot be identified with the Kamadeva of the Epics and Puranas. Kama (desire) is described as a handsome youth with a bow of sugarcane decked with a row of bees and with arrows made of flowers. His principal shafts are said to be five, perhaps referring to the senses. His wife is Rati (pleasure). He is always attended by a troupe of celestial nymphs called Apsarases, thus forming a force of erotic attraction. He is deputed to tempt sages performing *tapas*, to wean them away from their purpose. This is clearly a personification of sense-desires which obstruct any attempt at the spiritual unification of the Soul. Kama tempted the Rishis, Narayana and Nara, who put him to shame by producing with their power an Apsaras more beautiful than those of his party. He tempted sages like Visvamitra and his temptation of Buddha as Mara is a famous episode in the

life of the saint. In his attempt to distract Siva he got destroyed through the fire that issued from the third eye of the former, which occasion is celebrated all over India as Kamadahana, or burning of the love-god, on a day called Holi, which falls on the full-moon day of the month of Phalguna (February-March). Thenceforward, Kama had the name Ananga or the bodiless. Kama is associated with the spring season when desires are said to be more active in living beings.

Other Deities, Demi-Gods and Objects of Worship, Reverence and Awe

Besides the *devatas* or deities whose characteristics have been briefly stated above, almost every village in India has a presiding deity (Grama-Devata), most of whom are goddesses ultimately identified with Durga. These local gods and goddesses of the villages are represented by images in small shrines or even a fetish adored under a sacred tree. Apart from these, ancient cities in India had their own guardian deities. Also, some of the cities themselves were and even now are regarded as sacred, *e.g.,* Badrikashrama (Badrinath), Kedaranath, Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar or Kanakhal, Kasi (Varanasi), Dvaraka, Avanti (Ujjayini), Puri (Jagannath), Pushkar and Manasasarovara in North India, and Kanchi (Kanjeevaram), Rameswaram, Madurai, Tirupati, Srirangam, Tiru-Anantapuram (Trivandrum), Palani, Kanyakumari and many others in the South. Also, the confluences of sacred rivers, called Prayagas, are regarded as very sacred, the main Prayagas being Bhatta-Prayaga (Allahabad), Devaprayaga, Rudraprayaga, Karnaprayaga,

Nanda-Prayaga, Vishnu-Prayaga and Kesava-Prayaga. Except the first one, all the Prayagas are in the Himalayan regions, along the lines of the rivers Ganga and Alakananda.

The Rishis are a set of superhuman beings who may be living in any plane at their will and are repositories of spiritual dignity and power. The most famous among them are the ten first-born sons of Brahma, viz., Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu, Bhrigu, Vasishtha, Daksha and Narada, as well as Vyasa (Dvaipayana), Agastya, Brihaspati, Kasyapa, Bharadvaja, Gotama, Jamadagni, Suka, Dattatreya, Vamadeva, Visvamitra and Durvasa. The Rishis are worshipped on Rishi-Panchami which falls on the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadrapada (August-September). The Siddhas are a class of perfected saints supposed to be residing in the heavenly regions. The Pitris or the spirits of the ancestors are regarded as residents of Pitriloka and Chandra-Loka. The Pitris are offered an annual worship on the New-Moon day of the month of Bhadrapada.

The Nagas are a group of snake-spirits, often portrayed as having a half-human form with a serpent's tail. Their abode is Bhogavati in the nether worlds. They are the guardians of the treasures underground and may bestow some of them on human beings when propitiated. The Nagas can take human form if they so wish. As their emblem, the snake, especially the cobra, is revered and worshipped in villages. The snake has a traditions of respectful descent from such snake-deities as Sesha and Vasuki. The Nagas are specially worshipped on Naga-

Panchami which falls on the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Sravana (July-August). The Yakshas have Kubera as their lord, living in Alakapuri in the Himalayas, and constitute a group of semi-celestial gnomes or fairies. The Gandharvas are the heavenly musicians who entertain Indra in his court. The Kinnaras are also a set of celestial musicians. The Apsarases are the consorts of the Gandharvas and are supposed to be excessively beautiful and tempting. It is the Apsarases whom Indra sends to obstruct the penances of the sages. The Vidyadharas live in aerial cities magically constructed in the Himalayan areas. They can fly in the air and change their forms at will. The Asuras are the great demons of popular mythology supposed to be offering perpetual opposition to the Devas. The Rakshasas are a more violent set of fierce demons who could even materialise themselves on earth. Hiranyakasipu, Hiranyaksha, Ravana and Kumbhakarna were Rakshasas. The Pisachas are low spirits of a lesser cadre still. The Pretas, Bhutas and Vetalas are the spirits of the dead ones supposed to be haunting battlefields, cremation and burial grounds and places of violent death, to whom the ritual of the Sraddha ceremony has not been performed. They are said to trouble their surviving relatives, especially if the latter are weak-willed and impure in mind.

The *Vedas* are the most sacred of books and they are regarded as Apaurusheya (without any individual authorship). The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says that the Vedas are the expiration of God, and their knowledge is only revealed to the Rishis whose names are attached to the different hymns of the Vedas. The Himalayas are the most

sacred of mountains, apart from the legendary Mount Meru and Kailasa, the abode of Siva. The Bhagavadgita specifically refers to the Vedas, Mount Meru and the Himalayas as the manifestations of God's glory. Ganga is the most sacred river whose greatness is sung in every scripture, right from the Vedas. It is believed that Ganga was originally in Brahmaloka, from where she was drawn down when Vishnu, during his incarnation as Vamana, kept one of his feet on the celestial regions, and Brahma washed the sacred feet with the holy waters of the Ganga. She was borne by Siva on his matted locks to prevent her descent too fast on the earth, at the request of Bhagiratha who performed great austerity to bring Ganga down to the earth. The river Ganga, thus, has the holy historical background of having been sanctified by the touch of the greatest of gods,—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Devotees believe that a bath in this river ensures purification from sins and bestows salvation to the soul. The custom of consigning dead bodies or at least the ashes or bones of the dead ones to this river is based on the scriptural declarations that the soul whose body has been offered to Ganga shall attain spiritual salvation. Bhishma, the grandsire of the Pandavas and Kauravas, was the son of Ganga through king Santanu. Biologists are discovering these days that the waters of this river possess some incredible power to destroy disease-germs.

Next to Ganga, the other holy rivers are Alakananda, Yamuna, Sarasvati (which is said to flow underground these days as Gupta-Vahini), Narmada, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri. All the tributaries of Ganga are also sacred.

Gangottari at its source, Kasi in its middle and Ganga-Sagara at its mouth are holy places of pilgrimage. All the tributaries of Ganga above Haridwar are also regarded as different forms of Ganga.

The cow in India is an object of worship. The celestial cow 'Kamadhenu' is described as having risen from the ocean when it was churned by the Devas and Asuras. The daughter of Kamadhenu is the famous Surabhi who inherits the glories of her mother. The milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung of the cow, formed into a mixture, are called Pancha-Gavya, which is taken as a purifying medium by orthodox ones, in all ceremonies. The bull is adored as the emblem of Nandi, the vehicle of Siva. The image of the bull as Nandi can be seen in every Siva temple. In famous Siva temples a stud-bull is dedicated to Siva and adored as the form of Nandi. Airavata is Indra's sacred elephant and Ucchaihsravas his sacred horse. Garuda, the divine-bird, is Vishnu's vehicle. The sacred tree, Asvattha (peepul) is an object of worship. The Vata (banian), Nyagrodha, Asoka and Palasa are all sacred trees. The Tulasi or the holy basil is the plant sacred to Vishnu, and is grown in the courtyards of every religious community. The Bilva is the leaf sacred to Siva. The Soma plant is most sacred, as sung in the Vedas. The Kusa or Darbha is a grass regarded as sacred, made more so as it is believed that the pot of nectar brought by Garuda from the heaven was placed by him on a bush of this grass. It is universally used as a necessary item in all sacrifices (*yajnas*) and especially in rituals of offerings to ancestors (Sraddha). The Durva grass is sacred to Ganesa.

Among stones, the Saligrama is sacred to Vishnu, the Sivalinga (particularly available in the Narmada river) to Siva and Sphatika to Surya. The gems connected with the planets as well as the nine famous gems like Padmaraga, are all highly valued as possessing superphysical significance.

The Indian concept of God is one of Universal Presence, and Divinity can be invoked through anything, anywhere and at any time. The Absolute is not limited by space, time and objectivity.

Chapter VIII

THE SMRITIS OR CODES OF ETHICS

General Characteristics

Though the *Smritis,* especially the smriti of Manu, may, from the point of view of chronology, the mode of treatment of religion and ethics, and the general attitude to life, be considered to be older than the Epics and Puranas, the subject treated in the Smritis is being taken up after the discussion on the Epics and Puranas, for the reason that the religious spirit which reached its acme in the Veda-Samhitas and Upanishads found its greatest expression in the latter, and the aspirations of the minds of the large present-day population of India are articulated the most in them, and not so much in the Smritis which are more in the form of legalistic texts on social conduct than direct incentives to a fulfilment of the higher reaches of human nature. Further, the contents of the Smritis are elaborated in a more appealing manner in the Epic and Purana literature, so that one may safely confine oneself to the study of this great religious lore without missing anything that is of importance in the Smritis. The Mahabharata itself is regarded as a great smriti, as it almost exhausts the teachings on *dharma*. The Kalpa-Sutras, Agamas and Tantras are another body of rules on ancient Indian rituals and ethics. The present exposition is a comprehensive interpretation of this large body of teachings in their essence.

The Smritis, which are held to be an elaboration of the Srutis or Vedas, are the principal codes of social law. Among Smritis, those of Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara are the most authoritative and renowned. The Vedas, says Manu, are the principal sources of *dharma*, and next to them come the Smritis of those who know and practise this *dharma*. The Smritis supplement and explain the sociological and ritualistic injunctions of the Vedas, called Vidhi, and are thus also called *dharma-sastras* (scriptures on *dharma*). They lay down the laws which regulate national, communal, family and individual obligations *in general* (*samanya*) as well as *in particular* (*visesha*). They specialise in details on the *dharmas* pertaining to the four castes, viz., Brahmanas or those forming the philosophical and spiritual strata of society, Kshatriyas, or kings and warriors or the military class in general, Vaisyas or the trading class which constitutes the economic side of social life, and Sudras or the servant class of society. The Smritis also deal with the *dharmas* of Brahmacharins or students leading a life of continence and study under a preceptor or Guru, Grihasthas or householders who form the active, functional and professional aspect of the society, Vanaprasthas or recluses and hermits who have retired from active life as a preparation for the pursuit of spiritual realisation, and Sannyasins or monks who have renounced the world of activity and social contact for complete dedication to the ideal of the realisation of the Absolute. Thus the Smritis are a sort of general guidebooks to social living under different circumstances and in different times.

The Manu-smriti is the foremost among such codes or *dharma*-Sastras. According to Manu, *dharma* is to be known through the Vedas, Smritis, conduct of saints, and finally one's own purified conscience. By following *dharma*, one attains perfection. Manu goes into details on the duties of a student, householder, hermit, monk and king, as also the principles of political administration and the vows and observances to be followed as expiation for the commission of certain sins. Summing up his instructions, he says that, of all Dharmas, the knowledge of the Self is supreme, for thereby one attains immortality. By seeing the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self, and practising thus equality of vision, one attains absolute suzerainty or Self-realisation. One is born alone and one dies alone. One also enjoys the fruits of one's deeds, alone. Father, mother, wife, children and friends will not come to one's help in the other world. It is *dharma* alone that comes to one's aid in the end.

Neither should one cling to life nor court death, but live a life of non-attachment, doing one's duty properly. The essence of *dharma* consists in the practice of fortitude (*dhriti*), forbearance (*kshama*), sense-control (*dama*), non-appropriation of what does not belong to oneself (*asteya*), purity in thought, word and deed (*saucha*), restraint of mind (*indriyanigraha*), clarified understanding (*dhi*), knowledge of Truth (*vidya*), truthfulness (*satya*) and freedom from anger (*akrodha*). One should not be under the impression that one can do wrong or evil in secret, without the knowledge of others, for the very sky, earth, water, sun, moon, fire, wind, day and night, and one's own

heart, will stand witness to one's action in due time. Restraining one's mind in a state of equilibrium of thought, one should visualise both the good and the bad as appearances of the Self. By this method one puts an end to all inclination to unrighteousness. The Self alone is all the gods and everything is contained in the Self. That is to be known as the Supreme Purusha which is the ordainer of all things, subtler than the subtle and realisable by sharp understanding. One who thus sees the Self in all beings attains equality with everything and realises the state of Brahman. The method of meditation prescribed in the Manu-smriti is that of the recession of effects into their causes, viz., the earth element merging in the water element, water in fire, fire in air, air in ether and ether in Supreme Being. The ordinances of Manu are considered to be as efficacious as the prescriptions of a physician *(Yad vai manur avadat tad bheshajam).*

The Meaning of Ritual

Its Purpose and Method: The Karma Kanda forms the ritualistic portion of the religion of India and has its origin in the injunctions of the Brahmana section of the Vedas. The ritual of the Vedas received a powerful accentuation from the Purva-Mimamsa Sutras of Jaimini, which, with the famous commentary of Sabara on them, became the classical text of Brahmanical ritualism of the Vedic type. But the ritual of the Hindus today does not restrict itself merely to the ancient Vedic form of sacrifice. Hindu ritual has a many-sided shape, and is expanded in the Smritis, Kalpa-Sutras, Agamas and Tantras.

Ritual is religion demonstrated in an external act. It facilitates the human mind to observe religion outwardly, in daily life, and thus remember the aims of religion. Ritual, in a sense, is like the base, or the feet of religion, which in no way means that ritual is a non-essential part of religion, even as the feet are not a non-essential part of one's body, for on the feet the body is supported. Ritual is the outer form and not the essence of religion and, hence, when its spirit is missed, religion is seen to stagnate at this level and not rise above to its higher meaning. This would be a travesty of the purpose of ritual, but it does not thereby diminish its value in religion. An outside observer of a religion has his first impressions of it through its rituals and manifested practices in society. This is a social form of religion by which it enters into public relations with people. It is this form of religion which unites the society and nation into a single whole in which the parts are cemented together with a bond of affinity of feeling and purpose. This social element present in religion has the beneficial effect of unifying people by congregation and a fraternity of mutual appreciation, introducing a sort of strength to society. The aspect of pilgrimage (Tirtha-Yatra) in this form of religion brings also the advantage of historical renovation and respect for the ancient traditions of different places and rousing in people's minds a cultural and social relationship even from distance, by way of regard for places other than the location of one's own community. Without such injunctions people would lose association with others, especially those who are far away, and the nation would be deprived of that vital part which is necessary for uniting its

diversified limbs into a single character, called culture and common aim.

Ritual as a symbol of the faiths and beliefs of people enables them to visualise their own hearts in daily life and thus respect their own feelings in outer society. By this, the social bond is strengthened further, especially when the beliefs are common with those of others. One's longings are externalised in ritual, and by investing the outer form of life with the inner yearnings of the mind, life is made to look bright and worth living. It is a truth of psychology that every observer of things in the world colours them with his own views and attitudes towards them and the objects of the world are not seen as they really are in themselves. The bifurcation of thought into the contemplation of the desirable and the undesirable in the world is due to the compulsion of thought to invest things-in-themselves with its own relative appraisals of them, simultaneously with an inability on its part to develop an impartial attitude towards all things. This fact was noticed by the wise sages who instituted the system of rituals and prevented the mind from projecting within itself any unhealthy reactions towards the world outside, by providing thereby an avenue for the visualisation of sublime ideals in external objects. Ritual symbolises the higher aims of the human mind in the form of the outer acts of religious service and ceremony.

Ritual also acts as a corrective to the psychological tensions of the human mind which, when they are not properly handled, are likely to create complexes and a general condition of mental ill health. Ritual provides an ample opportunity to voice forth one's emotions and see

them, in one's presence, as it were, getting released from the heart, being freed from unnatural conditions caused by unfulfilled desires. The joys and sorrows of the mind are demonstrated before the deity of one's adoration, for example, in an act of elaborate worship (Puja) or sacrifice (*yajna*) which has the advantage of displaying one's mental condition before a congregation of other people during the ritual, in addition to producing a satisfaction in oneself that the deity has been pleased and the grace desired has been invoked. The mind comes out of its limitation and feels an expansion of its content and existence in the act of religious ritual.

Ritualism in the form of temple-worship has resulted in elaborate structures of architectural grandeur and sculptural beauty. Ritual in India has not been merely a system of mechanised acts and routines of worship and prayer but has been associated also with art as an aspect of religious practice. Religion has been not merely a science of formalistic practice of set doctrines but an interesting and attractive representation of the needs of the soul in social life. The great temples in the various important shrines in India have been a permanent source of inspiration on account of the dignity of their form and the artistic perfection of their build. The lofty and massive structures often scraping the sky through their spires raise one's thoughts to a height of mystical magnificence felt deeply within the heart of the observer. The famous temples have been patrons of architectural art and sources of elevated feelings free from the trammels of day-to-day life not only in the minds of devotees but even impartial connoisseurs of

the significance of art in general. Great temples are built in the pattern or symbol of the Virat-Purusha or the Cosmic Person sung in the Vedas and Upanishads. From the entrance to the innermost 'holy of holies' the making of the temple involves by stages the representation of the limbs of the Virat, thus giving a touch of the highest aim of religion as God-realisation to the art of temple-construction and the ritual of temple-worship.

Ritual plays a great role in the institution of moral values in society. Self-restraint which is the essential content of morality forms a necessary part of the practice of religion. Ritual as a stage in religion requires a person to follow several disciplines and vows (*vratas*) as well as observances which tend to the inhibition of the lower urges of human nature. Daily and timely bath, fast, vigil and the partaking of consecrated food which is prepared in a clean and holy atmosphere are some of the aspects of the conduct of the ritual in its several forms. During the performance of the ritual one endeavours to keep oneself aloof from contact with unholy things, in body, speech and mind, which, in their totality, produce an effect of physical health, sublimity of thought and a feeling of the spiritual presence.

The greatest impact of ritual on the mind of man is in the form of rousing the spiritual consciousness within him. Ritual is not an end in itself, but a pointer to the attainment of the religious consciousness which is different from the forms of religion. The purpose of ritual is to rouse this consciousness within, and it misses its aim when it fails to achieve this end. The system of ritual is instituted in such a way that its performance stirs the mind to a process of

unfoldment of its potentialities. Just as a treasure is unravelled through the use of proper implements, the wealth of the Divine Presence hidden beneath the mind is gradually revealed by shaking off from the mind the dross covering it by means of the equipment of ritual which acts as both a restraining and an entertaining factor to the mind of the individual. In the ritual of worship, for example, the mellow light of the lamps lighted in front of the sacred image of the deity in which the devotee sees the presence of God vibrating and radiating an atmosphere of holiness and grace, and the calm effect of the fragrance of incense placed beside it, stimulate the sensory and mental texture into a condition of receptivity to the inflow of the ideas of unification, integration and freedom from distracting multiplicity. All ritual, in this way, is a variety of the techniques to bring about a consciousness of the presence of the Divine Being. The elaborate parts of a sacrifice induce not only a sense of seriousness and a feeling of reality in the performance of the rite but also a state of concentration of mind to the exclusion of extraneous thoughts by the very fact of having to fix the mind in its widespread processes.

The performance of ritual is not the same in its forms for all people and for all times. It varies with the stage of life in which one is, the class of society to which one belongs, the circumstances under which the ritual is performed, the place, time and the purpose of the ritual, etc., so that ritual is a relative and not the absolute truth of religion. The details of all these aspects are laid down in the Smritis, Itihasas and Puranas.

Puja or Worship: One of the important rituals is the performance of worship (Puja). This is a procedure of invoking God in an image, a diagram or any other suitable symbol for the purpose of adoration and contemplation. God in the ritual of worship is treated as an honoured guest, mostly as a king, requiring solemn hospitality and reverence. The adoration of God in such worship may be either external or internal. External worship is the ceremony which we usually see being performed in temples and consecrated parts of houses. The process of invocation is an invitation to God for condescending to reveal himself in the symbol or the place of worship. The manner of invocation and the subsequent entertainment of the Divine guest have many stages, but the prominent ones are considered to be sixteen in number. The first stage is contemplation (*dhyana*) on the form of the deity, in the mind. The second is invocation (*avahana*) or mentally investing the symbol of worship with the glorious Presence. The third is offering of an elevated seat (*asana*) to the deity and enthroning it therein. The fourth is washing of the feet of the deity (*padya*), as is the custom in India when receiving a guest. The fifth is offering of special hospitality by way of respectful libations and glorification (*arghya*). The sixth is arrangement for ablutions (*snana*). The seventh is presentation of dress or clothing (*vastra*). The eighth is investiture of the deity with the sacred thread (*yajnopavita*) or such other requirement. The ninth is offering of perfumes or sandal paste (Gandha). The tenth is offering of flowers (*pushpa*). The eleventh is burning of incense (*dhupa*). The twelfth is waving of lamps (Dipa). The

thirteenth is offering of food (*naivedya*). The fourteenth is offering of betel leaves (*tambula*). The fifteenth is burning of camphor before the deity (*nirajana*). The sixteenth is offering of gift, especially in gold-ornament (*suvarnapushpa*). These are the sixteen forms of hospitable treatment (*shodasopachara*) with which the deity is honoured. In the end, the deity is given leave to withdraw from the image (*visarjana*). All these processes are attended with chanting of the respective mantras or formulae meant to indicate the different stages of the performance. In big temples, the deity is permanently invoked in the image and the temple forms a perpetual shrine for the divine manifestation and becomes a place of pilgrimage to devotees. In such temples the deity during worship is entertained also with the performance of dance and music, both vocal and instrumental. The deity is ceremonially roused in the early morning and taken to bed in the night after the day's ritual. God present in the images of temples as the great King of kings is taken in grand processions during special festive occasions (*utsava*). In worship, the devotee makes special gestures of the hands, called Mudras. By these gestures the worshipper indicates his feeling and intention in worship. Just as in a dance performance suggestive gestures are called Abhinayas, the gestures in worship are called Mudras, which convey the inner significance and purpose of worship. As an aid in the attuning of oneself to the form of the deity, the devotee performs the ritual of placing (Nyasa) of the different limbs of the deity in the corresponding parts of his own body. This is also a symbol of the adjustment of the macrocosm

with the microcosm, as a process of one's graduated endeavour to attain universality in the realisation of the Divine Existence.

Internal worship is a mental ritual of the adoration of God along the same lines as the external worship described above. Mental worship does not require material offerings but includes all the psychological processes of external worship. We hear of one of the Saiva saints, called Pusalar Nayanar, constructing a temple to the Lord, with mental bricks and mortar, performing a mental installation therein, and obtaining thereby the same results as through the external ceremony. The Mahabharata recites the mental sacrifice performed by sage Agastya without material components, working a wonder which stunned even the celestials. In higher forms of mental worship the process need not include such details as the sixteen limbs or an effort to collect articles of worship and arrange them in the pattern of the external ritual. It is a simpler but more concentrated act of the collecting of thought in an inward surrender of oneself by meditation (Dhyana), which is the consummation of internal worship.

The recitation (*japa*) of the divine Name or sacred formula is mostly a mental ritual, though in the initial stages it may be a verbal process coupled with thinking thereon. The divine Name or formula is called a mantra, which is a compact sound-symbol of the deity as the object of worship or contemplation. In addition to the deity (*devata*), the mantra has also a seer (*rishi*) and a metre (*chhandas*), which have to be mentally or verbally recited before the recitation of the mantra is commenced. The

remembrance of these three essentials of the mantra forms a subtle invocation of the power of the deity, the sage to whom the mantra was revealed and the force of the constitution of the letters of which it is composed. This triple power (*sakti*), thus invoked mentally, becomes a helpful factor in the achievement of success in the practice (Sadhana), in addition to the inner effort put forth by the devotee himself. The mantra is a specific type of formula consisting of letters which are juxtaposed in such a manner or order as to produce a particular type of effect. A correct pronunciation or chanting of the mantra causes a form to be projected outwardly in space and inwardly in the mind, which is the contour of the deity of the mantra. A mantra may consist of several letters or even a single letter which is called a *bija*-mantra (seed-formula). It is believed that the shorter the mantra the greater is its effect, perhaps due to the greater concentration of force in it and the facility one has in directing thought in relation to it. The highest mantra is the *prana*va which consists of a single sound-component formed of three constituents (A-U-M). This is regarded as the symbol of the Absolute in the realm of sound. The chanting of the *prana*va is recommended to bring about a system and harmony in the flow of energy through the nervous system and of ideas in the mind. This equilibrated condition of the personality frees the mind from distraction (*rajas*) and settles it in the condition of transparent rhythm (*sattva*). It is in this state of conscious equilibrium that the light of the Supreme Being, which is present everywhere, is revealed, as it is in the limpid,

undisturbed surface of a lake that we can see a clear reflection of the sun shining in the sky.

Prayer: There is a little difference between the recitation of a mantra in *japa* and the offering of prayer (*prarthana*). While *japa* is always a fixed form of utterance of words or formulae, as in a mantra, prayer can be an expression of one's feelings in any language and in any manner one would like. Prayer is primarily a supplication to God for his grace. In ordinary forms of prayer, it can be directed to an ulterior end, such as acquisition of material objects, recovery from illness, and the like. But the truly spiritual form of prayer asks for nothing from God; it asks for God alone. Though prayer may be expressed in words, phrases or sentences, it need not always be so; for prayer can also be mental and the devotee can inwardly solicit the grace of God by an act of deep concentration of mind and a feeling of union with him in love and adoration. The scriptures abound in prayers of various kinds addressed to the various gods of the pantheon, but often directly to the Supreme Being. Usually, it is the practice to regard one's chosen deity (Ishta-Devata) as the highest divinity and exalt it to the state of the Absolute, so that the devotee has no idea in his mind other than that of his deity. This is indicative of the truth that there is ultimately one God whose forms are all the deities adored in worship. Prayer can draw in grace by a spiritual attunement of one's being in the intensity of feeling, which is the motive power behind prayer. Feelings that rise from the deepest recesses of one's heart can produce immediate results, because of their proximity to reality. Japa and prayer are regarded as

the best forms of worship (*puja*) and sacrifice (*yajna*) as they do not involve dependence on external objects or circumstances. The purpose of this special rite is to grow into the likeness of the deity, whether by attunement of personality through mantra-japa or self-surrender by prayer.

Larger prayer-meetings held in congregation are nowadays called Satsangas, in which worship and discourses may also be included, in addition to prayer.

Ceremonies: The ritualistic part of religion includes a set of functions and ceremonies which may be grouped under what are called Samskaras (purificatory rites), Kriyas (holy acts) and Vratas (vows). These ceremonies may be classified as those bearing relation to the (1) stages of life, (2) seasons of the year, and (3) special occasions. The periods of life of a person are those of a student (Brahmacharin), householder (Grihastha), hermit (Vanaprastha) and monk (Sannyasin). The prominent ceremonies relating to one's early life are those that are performed when (1) the child is born (Jatakarma), (2) the newly born child is named for the first time (Namakarana), (3) the child is given solid food for the first time (Annaprasana), (4) the child is initiated into the first step in education by being taught the letters of the alphabet (Vidyarambha), and (5) the grown-up child is performed the investiture of sacred thread and introduced into the holy Gayatri mantra of the Veda and thus led into the first stage in spiritual life (Upanayana). The life of the Brahmacharin commences at this stage, when he is admitted into the protection and care of a teacher (Guru)

for study of the sacred lore and other branches of learning that may be regarded as necessary to him from the point of view of the class of society to which he belongs. When the student returns home after completion of his education, (6) the ceremony of returning (Samavartana) is performed. This particular ceremony has lost much of its meaning at the present time since the traditional form of student-period under the preceptor is nowadays not passed through, and the formality of this ceremony is undergone only at the time of marriage. Usually, on the completion of the period of studentship, one settles down at home after undergoing (7) the ceremony of marriage (Vivaha). Though the student is generally expected to go through the stage of the householder,—and this is regarded as the most normal course to adopt in the majority of cases,—scripture also makes a special provision that exceptional types of students who, due to a predominance of the spiritual urge in them, would not prefer to lead the life of the world (Pravritti) but wish to dedicate themselves to a life of pure spiritual pursuits (Nivritti), may pass directly from the stage of the student to that of a whole-timed spiritual seeker, either adhering to the vow of utter continence (Naishthika-Brahmacharya) and service to the preceptor till the end of his life, or as a monk (Sannyasin).

The householder, when he reaches a ripe old age, is expected to retire from active life and live as a recluse (Vanaprastha) leading a life of austerity, free from contact with his relatives. This is a period of preparation for the last stage of life which is the severing of oneself from all ties of worldly life (Sannyasa) and the devoting of all time to

divine contemplation or acts which are conducive to this sublime aim. The goal of the life of a human being is the realisation of God, and all the stages through which one passes are preparatory processes for this final attainment. The whole of one's life is thus regarded as a continuous process of education for God-realisation, a journey which has its destination in the reaching of perfection.

The periods of life as a student and householder are full with special injunctions on the performance of ceremonies of different kinds. The prayer called Sandhyavandana to be performed thrice a day is obligatory on both the student and the householder. This is primarily a ritual of prayer to the Sun, in whom the brilliant face of God is visualised and worshipped. Daily worship of one's chosen deity is an additional duty of the householder. This worship is performed by him irrespective of whether he is at home or is on tour for any reason. This daily item of worship by the householder is, however, not so elaborate as the one performed in big temples, but is a shortened form of it, though retaining the essentials of the process.

A very important part of the daily functions of the householder consists of a set of fivefold duties called Pancha-Mahayajnas (five great sacrifices). The first of these is Brahma-Yajna or the sacrifice dedicated to the Vedas and their seers (Rishis) in the form of regular study (*svadhyaya*) of the holy scripture and the teaching of it to deserving students (*adhyapana*). The second is Deva-Yajna or the sacrifice offered to the celestials in the form of oblations poured into the sacred fire. The third is Pitri-Yajna or libations, etc. offered to the ancestors. The fourth is

Manushya-Yajna or the feeding of uninvited guests (*atithi*). The fifth is Bhuta-Yajna or the feeding of animals, especially cows and birds. These five functions are imperatives on every householder and they are rightly regarded as great sacrifices (Maha-Yajnas).

In addition to these daily rites, the householder has also to perform certain monthly ceremonies such as offering libations to the ancestors on the new-moon day and the observance of the vow of Ekadasi or fast on the eleventh day of every lunar fortnight. The annual functions are those rites which are performed during such occasions as the birthdays of incarnations like Rama and Krishna, called Rama-Navami and Krishna-Jayanti respectively; the day sacred to Ganesa, called Ganesa-Chaturthi; the nine-day worship of Devi, called Navaratri-Puja; the festival of lights, called Dipavali, when special worship is offered to the goddess Lakshmi; the day when Skanda destroyed the opponent of the gods, called Skanda-Shashthi; the junctions of time when the sun moves towards the North, called Makara-Sankranti and Ratha-Saptami; the time when the new harvest in spring is reaped, called Vasanta-Panchami; the night most sacred to Siva, called Siva-Ratri; the day when Siva is said to have destroyed Cupid, called Kamadahana or Holi; and several other ceremonies like the annual offering of worship to the ancestors called the Mahalaya-Sraddha, and the days sacred to various incarnations of Vishnu, as also occasions when some one or other of the manifestations of holiness and piety in life is to be recognised and adored.

The ceremonies in the names of the dead have also great details, commencing with the rite of cremation and ending in the rites connected with the exaltation of the departed soul to the state of Divine Attainment. These rituals are all complicated in their nature and cannot be understood or performed by those who are not specially trained in their techniques.

The Laws of the Stages of Life

The Purusharthas: Life has been always regarded in India as a process of progressive self-transcendence from the realm of matter (Annamaya-Jivatva) to the realisation of supreme spiritual bliss (Parama-Ananda). Human values and ends in life have been classified into the scheme of the fourfold pursuit (Purushartha) of existence, viz., the practice of righteousness and goodness (*dharma*), the effort towards earning of the necessary material values (Ardha), the fulfilment of permissible desires through honest means (*kama*) and the endeavour for the final salvation of the soul (*moksha*). This analysis is based on a broad understanding of the different levels of individuals in relation to the Universe.

The principle of *dharma* is summed up in the Mahabharata as the attitude of not meting out to others what one would not expect others to mete out to oneself. What is contrary to the welfare of one's own self should not be discharged or done in regard to others (*Atmanah pratikulani paresham na samacharet*). Another definition of *dharma* is that it is the conduct which conduces to prosperity here (*abhyudaya*) and spiritual blessedness

hereafter (*nihsreyasa*). That charitable disposition by which one regards others in the world as ends in themselves and not mere means to one's satisfaction may be regarded as *dharma*. The practice of *dharma* in this sense is more than ritual or ceremony. Morality is superior to external rites. A moral act presupposes a moral condition of the mind within and the distinction between moral feeling and moral action is the same as that which obtains between character and conduct. The moral perspective is based on a general view of the world as consisting of a larger family than the one with which we are usually familiar. Our existence is wound up with great mysteries and is more complicated in structure than is apparent from a surface-view of things. The world-view which reaches its logical limits sees all beings as constituting a single unit of a universal cooperative life and the recognition of this fact in the smaller circle of individual and social life is *dharma* or righteousness. A violation of this principle is Adharma or unrighteousness. *dharma* sustains the organic structure of the cosmos, like the force of gravity which maintains the solidity of a body of matter. Adharma tends towards a rupture of the organism and brings about a condition of what may be called universal ill health. If *dharma* is health, Adharma is disease. *dharma*, thus, is eternal law and not the custom or religion of a country or people. All minor Dharmas which go by the names of goodness and religion receive the stamp of meaningfulness only when they are in consonance with this *dharma* of the Universe. The pursuit of material prosperity (*artha*), the fulfilment of one's desire (*kama*) and even attainment of salvation (*moksha*) are all

based on *dharma* which is the rock-foundation of all practical life. None of these efforts can be successful if it is not rooted in the primary acceptance of the truth that the individual is co-extensive with the Universe.

The Ashramas: The grouping of life into the pursuit of the four Purusharthas is the basis of the ancient ethics of India. Every act of the human being pertains to one or the other of these aims. The ethical system in India is connected with the mode of life to be lived by one as a Brahmacharin, Grihastha, Vanaprastha or Sannyasin, which are the four orders (Ashramas) or stages of life. It is the injunction of the scripture that a person cannot remain in a stage which is none of these four strata of society.

Brahmacharya is the first stage of life, which is lived in the observance of the vow of perfect continence and celibacy under the guidance of a preceptor and dedicated especially to the study of the Vedas and other scriptures. The Kshatriya students may also have to be trained in the art of using weapons and administration in general. It is a life of probation and strict discipline. The Brahmacharin is an adherent to the principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), self-restraint (*brahmacharya*), non-covetousness (*asteya*), non-acceptance of gifts (*aparigraha*), purity and cleanliness (*saucha*), contentment (*santosha*), austerity (*tapas*), sacred study (*svadhyaya*) and service of the preceptor (*guru-seva*). These are the constituent factors in the life of a Brahmacharin. He shines with spiritual splendour (*brahmavarchas*), which he earns by way of self-control, and on account of this glowing nature of his personality he is termed a fire-lad (*agni-manavaka*).

While the stage of the Brahmacharin is particularly devoted to the accumulation of *dharma*, the life of the householder is for the preservation of *dharma*, the earning of *artha* and the fulfilment of *kama*. He puts into practice the knowledge gained during the period of Brahmacharya. *artha* and *kama* should be directed by *dharma*. This rule is a great scientific prescription for sublimation of desire, as different from its repression, regression or substitution. The householder is regarded as the hub of the wheel of life, round whom the welfare of the society revolves. His is a life of a balance of forces,—social duty, personal desire and spiritual aspiration. His duties in the form of the Pancha-Maha*yajnas* have already been explained. This is the general rule for a householder belonging to the Brahmana class in society. The Kshatriya has the special duty of subscribing to the administration of the country by military service and the governmental system. The Vaisyas or the trading community, and the Sudras or the serving class, have their duties of providing for the economic harmony and needs of the country and the labour that is required for the sustenance of society. The classification of society into the four castes is not to be taken in the sense of a rigid mechanical isolation of groups by virtue of birth and heredity alone, as it has tended to be viewed in later times, but a logically developed cooperative system of living instituted for the preservation and prosperity of the whole society through division of labour based on the quality of persons and the proportion of the contribution that people can make for its solidarity in accordance with their aptitude, knowledge and capacity. Svabhava (one's inherent

nature) determines Svadharma (one's duty as an individual in society).

The third stage of life is of the Vanaprastha and is devoted to the duty of disentangling oneself from the attractions of the world. *Artha* and *kama* do not any more interest the mind which seeks only the final blossoming of *dharma* into the flower of *moksha*. The duties of life which meant a great value to the householder are relative to the phenomenal view of things and, while they are valid for sensory perceptions and mental cognition in the spatio-temporal realm, they do not reveal the Absolute which the soul hankers after and which alone can bring final satisfaction to it. The Vanaprastha girds up his loins to strive for this attainment through austerity (*tapas*) and inward worship (Manasika-Upasana). The Aranyakas and some portions of the Upanishads throw much light on the nature of the contemplations which the one dedicated to a life of spiritual discipline practises. While the Samhitas may be said to be relevant to the Brahmacharin and the Brahmanas to the Grihastha, the Aranyakas pertain to the life of the Vanaprastha. The consummation of this discipline is in Sannyasa or complete renunciation of worldly duty and desire, and living a life devoted to the highest meditations on the Absolute described in the Upanishads.

Though, originally, the order of Sannyasa as envisaged in the Manu-smriti and the Mahabharata constituted a purely spiritual condition into which the Vanaprastha entered, and it had no linkage with any social tradition, the order of the monk gradually developed into a system

(*sampradaya*) by which the renunciates were related to one another, in different groups, by the allegiance they owed to their own particular orders, and thus formed a section of society devoted to a voluntary discharge of the obligation of the dissemination of knowledge, in addition to the individual duty of spiritual meditation. This compromise with social life arose not only due to the peculiar circumstances of a changing society in the passage of time, on account of which the minds of people in general may be said to have found a life of total isolation impracticable, but also due to the withdrawal of support from society in the way in which it used to be given in earlier days when the monks could sustain themselves on alms received without making their existence felt by people.

In its true spirit, Sannyasa is a spiritual state, and not a social classification, in which established one learns the art of depending on the Supreme Being, by withdrawal of interest from the particular sources of support in the world. This condition is, however, not suddenly reached, and four stages even in the order of Sannyasa are recognised. In the first three stages, called the Kutichaka, Bahudaka and Hamsa, the Sannyasin lives in fixed residences, but in an increasing degree of freedom from the need for comfort, and the stages are distinguished by the increasing intensity of restrictions, in an ascending order, which the Sannyasin imposes on himself. The fourth stage is of the Paramahamsa, who is absolutely free from all the wants of a personal life and lives mostly a life of absolute self-dependence devoted to pure meditation. There are said to be two other stages, called the Turiyatita and Avadhuta,

wherein fixed one does not pay attention to creature comforts and is satisfied with anything that comes to him of its own accord and remains mostly in a state of consciousness lifted above the body and its surroundings.

Sannyasa is also said to originate from four causes. A Vairagya-Sannyasin is one who enters the order being prompted by the latent impressions (Samskaras) which direct him to take such a step. A Jnana-Sannyasin is one who takes to the order due to his grasp of the import of the scriptures, after a deep study of them, and being convinced thereby of the existence of the spiritual ideal. A Jnana-Vairagya-Sannyasin is one who resorts to Sannyasa after deep learning and also having seen the normal enjoyments of life. A karma Sannyasin is one who embraces the order having passed through the stages of the Brahmacharin, Grihastha and Vanaprastha, gradually. But he who takes to Sannyasa directly from the stage of Brahmacharya is called a Vairagya-Sannyasin. One who takes to it for acquiring spiritual knowledge is a Vividisha-Sannysin. One who enters it after having acquired this knowledge is a Vidvat-Sannyasin. One who embraces Sannyasa being compelled by impending death is an Atura-Sannyasin. One who takes to Sannyasa with a feeling that there is nothing except the Absolute is an Animitta-Sannyasin.

But Sannyasa is, in the end, as observed above, not one of the modes or orders of social life but a condition of consciousness in which it realises its spiritual absoluteness. Here ethics and spirituality coalesce in the attunement of the individual to the structure of the cosmos. Man becomes one with creation, being freed from the bondage of

attachment, convention and anxiety. The soul fixes itself in the Infinite and knows nothing other than It. The duties of the Brahmacharin, Grihastha and Vanaprastha are progressive stages of self-sublimation and self-transcendence which reach their fulfilment in Sannyasa. The three basic cravings, called Eshanas in the Upanishads, which correspond to the psychological complexes in the form of desire for wealth, fame (with power) and sex, are overcome in the graduated educational process constituted by the stages of life.

The plan of life arranged into the four stages is a systematic endeavour for the conservation and transformation of the vital, intellectual, moral and spiritual aspects of human nature towards the purpose of the attainment of *moksha* or liberation in the Absolute. In this fourfold scheme, society is preserved and transfigured for an insight into the reality which underlies it. It is a remedy for the problems and ills of life born of the separation of society into selfish individualities. It is the process of integration not only of the individual but of the family, community, nation and the world at large, through the expression of the great preservative force tending to universal solidarity,—*dharma*. The great hymn of the Veda, the Purusha-Sukta, makes the four aspects of the caste system limbs of the Supreme Being, thus teaching the organic structure of society knit into a single fabric with the threads of diversified personalities. Here is the philosophical background of the ethics of cooperation by which the Universe is maintained. The four Varnas (castes) and the four Ashramas (orders) are classifications based on

the three properties (Gunas) of Prakriti,—Sattva (equilibrium), Rajas (distraction) and Tamas (inertia) in their different permutations and combinations. The four Ashramas are the stages of the progressive overcoming of matter by spirit, externality by universality.

Karma, Bondage and Liberation

The liberation of the individual in the Universal is the central aim of the ethics of India. The need for the soul's salvation arises from the recognition of the transitoriness of life. Not only this; life in the world is seen to be complicated by the operation of the law of action and reaction, called karma. Though karma, etymologically, means action, its extended meaning implies the force by which every action produces an effect, and, later on, it came to be identified with this effect itself. Profound thinkers discovered that the bondage of karma due to the reaction which every action produces is explained by the fact of the unitary structure of the cosmos of which individuals are inseparable parts, and karma arises only when this inseparable connection of the individual with the cosmos is forgotten and the individual indulges in actions with the false notion that it is an independent actor or doer, inviting thereby the nemesis of reaction. This nemesis is the bondage of the individual (Jiva), and it can break through this bondage only when the sense of individual doership is given up and a feeling of at-one-ment with the cosmos is developed.

An action is an effort towards the achievement of an objective. Man does not simply exist. He ever tends to become something else. The impulse for action is ingrained

in the constitution of one's individuality. Action, thus, is an expression of the very make-up of the individual, and so one's entire life is action. Life and action have come to mean one and the same thing. The desire to possess and develop relations with external phenomena is the vital spring of all actions. The desiring individual is not always clear about the nature of the objects of desire. This confusion in the mind ends in the commission of unwise deeds in relation to the objects outside. Actions are one-sided in their motive, for the doer of the action has generally a constricted vision, which alone is allowed by any particular course of action. This course is taken without the knowledge of all the consequences of the action, which are wound up with the structure of the universe as a whole. Just as a good physician, while prescribing medicine for a disease, is cautious also of the reactions that the medicine may produce in addition to its healing effect on the disease in question, an expert handling of situations in life requires the engagement of oneself in actions with a knowledge of the different reactions they produce in addition to achieving the temporal desired objective, for usually one is oblivious of these side-effects when the mind is concentrated on the empirical result in view. The individual, when craving to fulfil a desire, has a rough idea of the nature of the effort required to fulfil the desire, but does not know that the source of action may disturb several other aspects of life and bring as a reaction suffering and grief in the end, though it may, for the time being, cause an enchantment into the belief that the desire is fulfilled. This is why the world is filled both with pleasure and pain,—

with foreseen effects of desires as well as their unforeseen results. An individual is born in a particular environment either because of a past wish cherished to live in such a condition or of an unknown consequence of desires. The miseries of the world are the forms of the reactions of deluded actions performed previously by its inhabitants. The world is a name given to the situation or manner in which individuals experience the fruits of their own desires and actions. The Universe is the shadow cast by the wishes of its contents and it is what these wishes are and what they sweep away from pure existence with the winds of the forces moving towards their fulfilment. We are asked to perform action without regard for fruits, because the fruits are not in our hands; they are determined by the general law of the Universe, which we, as individual sources of action, can neither understand nor follow. The accumulated and cumulative effects of actions done in all the past lives of individuals are packed into a concentrated residual of potentiality in their subtlest and innermost layer, constituting the causal world. The aggregate of all actions of the past, deposited thus in a latent form in each one's individual capacity, is called Sanchita karma (accumulated action). This potential aggregate is carried by the Jiva in all its incarnations and it never gets destroyed until the attainment of *moksha* by the Jiva. The determining factor of every incarnation of the Jiva is the characteristic of that portion of Sanchita karma, which is separated out as a specific allotment to be worked out in a given type of environment. This allotted portion of Sanchita karma is called Prarabdha karma (karma that has begun to produce

effect). The Jiva, after being born in an incarnation by the force of Prarabdha karma, performs further actions in its new life, called Agami karma, the results of which are added on to the unspent portion of Sanchita karma. This implies that the Sanchita cannot be exhausted and, consequently, the series of rebirths not ended until the Jiva ceases from adding new karmas to the old Sanchita. The technique of performing actions without producing reactionary effects is called karma yoga. The doctrine of karma yoga, especially as propounded in the Bhagavadgita, is a commentary on the principle of universal action and reaction, and the way to one's redemption from its laws.

The resultant force of action has the future determined by it. Patanjali says, in his Yoga-Sutras, that the class of society into which one is born, the length of life which one is to live and the nature of the experiences through which one has to pass are all determined by the residual potency of past Karmas. These potencies become active in this life itself or in a life to come. A famous verse proclaims, 'One's life, action, wealth, education and death are all determined even when one is in the womb of the mother.' The doctrine of karma, therefore, is not a belief in fatalism as is often wrongly supposed, but the enunciation of a scientific law that operates inexorably and impartially everywhere in the Universe, like the principle of gravitation.

Samsara or the bondage of worldly existence is the outcome of karma. When a soul is born in *samsara* it comes invested with certain sheaths (*kosas*). The innermost and subtlest of the sheaths is the causal one, called also the bliss-sheath or Anandamaya-Kosa. The second is the intellectual

sheath or Vijnanamaya-Kosa, the third mental sheath or Manomaya-Kosa, the fourth vital sheath or Pranamaya-Kosa and the fifth physical sheath or Annamaya-Kosa. Every preceding sheath is subtler than and pervades the succeeding one. The five sheaths are nothing but the Karmas of the soul manifest in a graded density of externalisation. In the various planes of the Universe, the soul may be born with one, two, three, four or five sheaths, as the case may be, in accordance with the intensity of the Karmas to be fructified in any particular plane. In death, the sheaths are withdrawn in their ascending order of subtlety, only to be manifest again into action after rebirth. The process of *samsara* continues till the salvation of the soul,—*moksha*.

The ultimate freedom which the soul attains in *moksha* is the cessation of transmigratory life and the experience of the bliss of the Absolute. The Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita declare that the soul, having attained liberation, does not return to *samsara*. As rivers enter the ocean, losing their names and forms, souls enter the Absolute, having been freed from spatio-temporal limitations in the form of the five sheaths and worldly relations. By restraint of the mind from indulgence in the temptations of *samsara*, by devotion to the creator and by the knowledge that one's essential being is identical with the Universal Substance, the soul attains *moksha*. The condition wherein this experience of spiritual freedom arises in the consciousness even before the shuffling of the physical body, in certain cases, is called Jivanmukti or liberation-while-living and the attainment of this freedom

after the leaving of the body is called Videhamukti or disembodied salvation.

NOTES

The Vedas: The auxiliaries to the Vedas are called Vedangas and Upa-Vedas. The word, Vedanga, comes from the terms 'Veda' (sacred knowledge) and 'Anga' (limb). The Vedangas are supposed to be preparations for a study of the Vedas. These Angas or limbs are six in number: Siksha or the science of pronunciation and intonation, Vyakarana or the grammar of language, Chhandas or the metre in which the hymns are composed, Nirukta or the etymological meaning of the words of the Vedas, Jyotisha or the science of astronomical calculation meant to help in fixing auspicious moments for propitiatory works etc., and Kalpa or the manual of ritual. The Kalpa-Sutras are again divided into the Srauta, Grihya, Dharma and Sulba Sutras meaning respectively the rules regarding Vedic sacrifice, domestic sacrifice, human conduct, and the principles of laying out sacrificial altars, and the like.

The word, Upa-Veda, comes from 'Upa' (subsidiary) and 'Veda' (sacred knowledge). The Upa-Vedas are like appendices to the knowledge of the Vedas. Ayur-Veda or the science of sound health including the art of preventing and curing diseases belongs to the Rig-Veda; Dhanur-Veda or the science of archery and warfare in general belongs to the Yajur-Veda; Gandharva-Veda or the art of music belongs to the Sama-Veda; and *artha*-Veda, known also as Artha-Sastra, or the science of economics, politics and statecraft, belongs to the Atharva-Veda.

The Upanishads: The main extant Upanishads are one hundred and eight in number. Of these, the major ones are

Isa, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chhandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Svetasvatara, Kaushitaki and Maitrayani.

Cp. The principles of *adhyatma*, *adhibhuta* and *adhidaiva* with G.W.F. Hegel's dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

The Bhagavadgita: While, throughout the eighteen chapters of the Bhagavadgita, its teachings on the different Yogas are distributed in various shades of intensity, the third, sixth, eleventh and thirteenth receive special emphasis on the highest principles of spiritualised activity, meditation, devotion and knowledge, respectively. The second and eighteenth chapters give a general outline of many aspects of its teaching.

The Itihasas: The Epics or Itihasas are two: The Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana, again, is divided into the Purva (earlier) and the Uttara (later) Ramayanas, the former dealing with the exploits of Rama and the latter with the philosophical instructions which Rama received from Sage Vasishtha, this latter being known as the Yoga-Vasishtha. However, the Yoga-Vasishtha is not generally regarded as an epic and, in the opinion of some, it is more of the character of an Agama-Sastra. The Mahabharata has an appendix, called the Harivamsa.

The Puranas: The major Puranas are eighteen, and they are: Brahma, Padma, Vishnu, Siva, Bhagavata, Narada, Markandeya, Agni, Bhavishya, Brahmavaivarta, Linga, Vamana, Varaha, Matsya, Kurma, Garuda, Skanda and Brahmanda.

The Yoga-Vasishtha: The principal content of this scripture is its idealism in which it tries to reconcile both the subjective and objective aspects of Reality. In the Utpatti, Sthiti and Upasanti sections, its central metaphysics is stated. The Vairagya and Mumukshu portions form its introduction laying down the preparations necessary for the reception of higher knowledge. The Nirvana section, which is in two parts, forms its consummation giving some of its practical teachings in great detail. The vehicle of the teaching is story, analogy and image of a highly poetic character, while its content is lofty philosophy.

Cp. The doctrine of worlds within worlds with A.N. Whitehead's theory of 'ingressive evolution', 'prehensions,' 'eternal objects' and 'concrescence'.

The Smritis: The Smritis or the codes of law are eighteen in number. They are: Manu, Yajnavalkya, Parasara, Vishnu, Daksha, Samvarta, Vyasa, Harita, Satatapa, Vasishtha, Yama, Apastamba, Gautama, Devala, Sankha-Likhita, Usanas, Atri and Saunaka. Of these, the most prominent are the first three mentioned.

The Purusha-Sukta of the Veda-Samhita

The Purusha-Sukta of the Vedas is not only a powerful hymn of the insight of the great Seer, Rishi Narayana, on the Cosmic Divine Being as envisaged through the multitudinous variety of creation, but also a shortcut provided to the seeker of Reality for entering into the state of Superconsciousness. The Sukta is charged with a five-fold force potent enough to rouse God-experience in the seeker. Firstly, the Seer (Rishi) of the Sukta is Narayana, the

greatest of sages ever known, who is rightly proclaimed in the Bhagavata as the only person whose mind desire has not been able to shake and, as the Mahabharata says, whose power not even all the gods can ever imagine. Such is the Rishi to whom the Sukta was revealed and who gave expression to it as the hymn on the Supreme Purusha. Secondly, the mantras of the Sukta are composed in a particular metre (*chhandas*) which has its own contribution to make in the generation of a special spiritual force during the recitation of the hymn. Thirdly, the intonation (*svara*) with which the mantras are recited adds a part to the production of the correct meaning intended to be conveyed through the mantras and any error in the intonation may produce a different effect altogether. Fourthly, the Deity (*devata*) addressed in the hymn is not any externalised or projected form as a content in space and time but the Universal Being which transcends space and time and is the Indivisible Supra-essential essence of experience. Fifthly, the Sukta suggests, apart from the universalised concept of the Purusha, an inwardness of this experience, thus distinguishing it from perception of any object.

The Sukta begins with the affirmation that all the heads, all the eyes, and all the feet in the creation are of the Purusha. Herein is implied the astonishing truth that we do not see many things, bodies, objects, persons, forms, colours or hear sounds, but only the limbs of the One Purusha. And, just as, when we behold the hand, leg, ear, eye or nose of a person differently, we do not think that we are seeing many things, but only a single person in front of us, and we develop no separate attitude whatsoever in

regard to these parts of the body of the person, because here our attitude is one of a single whole of consciousness beholding one complete person irrespective of the limbs or the parts of which the person may be the composite, we are to behold creation not as a conglomeration of discrete persons and things, with each one of whom we have to develop a different attitude or conduct, but as a single Universal Person who gloriously shines before us and gazes at us through all the eyes, nods before us through all the heads, smiles through all lips and speaks through all tongues. This is the Purusha of the Purusha-Sukta. This is the God sung in the hymn by Rishi Narayana. This is not the god of any religion and this is not one among many gods. This is the only God who can possibly be anywhere, at any time.

Our thought, when it is extended and trained in the manner required to see the Universe before us, receives a stirring shock, because this very thought lays the axe at the root of all desires, for no desire is possible when all creation is but one Purusha. This illusion and this ignorance in which the human mind is moving when it desires anything in the world,—whether it is a physical object or a mental condition, or a social situation,—is immediately dispelled by the simple but the most revolutionary idea which the Sukta deals at the mind with one stroke. We behold the One Being *(Ekam Sat)* before us, not a manifoldness or a variety to be desired or avoided.

But a greater shock is yet to be. For, the Sukta implies to any intelligent thinker that he himself is one of the heads or limbs of the Purusha. This condition, where even to think

would be to think as the Purusha thinks,—for no other way of thinking is possible, and it would be to think through all persons and things in creation simultaneously,—would indeed not be human thinking or living. Just as we do not think merely through one cell in our brain but think through the entire brain, any single thinker forming but a part of the Purusha's Universal Thinking Centre, 'a Centre which is everywhere with circumference nowhere,' cannot afford to think as it is usually being attempted by what are called Jivas or individual fictitious centres of thinking. There is no other way *(Na anyah pantha vidyate).* This is Supramental thinking. This is Divine Meditation. This is the *yajna* which, as the Sukta says, the Devas, performed in the beginning of time.

The Purusha-Sukta is not merely this much. It is something more to the seeker. The above description should not lead us to the erroneous notion that God can be seen with the eyes, as we see a cow, for instance, though it is true that all things are the Purusha, It is to be remembered that the Purusha is not the 'seen' but 'seer'. The point is simple to understand. When everything is the Purusha, where can there be an object to be seen? The apparently 'seen' objects are also the heads of the 'seeing' Purusha. There is, thus, only the *seer seeing himself without a seen.* Here, again, the seer's seeing of himself is not to be taken in the sense of a perception in space and time, for that would again be creating an object where it is not. It is the seer seeing himself not through eyes but in Consciousness. It is the absorption of all objectification in a Universal Be-ness. In this Meditation on the Purusha, which is the most

normal thing that can ever be conceived, man realises God in the twinkling of a second.