

Religion
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THE
PHILOSOPHY OF THE UPANISHADS
AND
ANCIENT INDIAN METAPHYSICS.

*AS EXHIBITED IN A SERIES OF ARTICLES CONTRIBUTED TO THE
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CHAP. I. places it is Indra that has begotten the sun, the sky, the dawn; that has set up lights in the sky, that upholds the two worlds, the waters, the plains, the hills, and the sky.

“What poet now, what sage of old,
The greatness of that god hath told,
Who from his body yast gave birth
To father sky and mother earth?
Who hung the heavens in empty space,
And gave the earth a stable base,
Who framed and lighted up the sun,
And made a path for him to run.”¹

Elsewhere it is Soma, the deified moon-plant, that generates the earth and sky, that puts light into the sun, and stretches out the atmosphere. In another hymn Aditi, the endless visible expanse, is all that is: “Aditi is sky, Aditi is air, Aditi is mother, father, son. Aditi is all the gods, and is the five tribes of men. Aditi is whatever has been born, Aditi is whatever shall be born.” The five tribes of men are the Brāhmanas, Kshatriyas, and Vaiśyas, the priestly, military, and agricultural orders, more or less of Aryan extraction, the Śūdras, or indigenous serfs and slaves grafted into the Hindu communities, and the Nishādas, or tribes of unreclaimed barbarians outside the Hindu pale.

In Rigveda x. 72, 2 we read: “Brahmanaspati has forged these births of the gods, as a blacksmith fans his flame: in the primal age of the gods entity came forth out of nonentity.”

In the Purushasūkta, Rigveda x. 90, the world is made,—the Rik, the Sāman, and the Yajush, the three Vedic aggregates, the Brāhman, Rājanya, Vaiśya, and Śūdra, the four orders of people in the Hindu pale, are produced,—out of Purusha, the highest deity, the personality that permeates all living things, offered up by the gods, the Sādhyas and the Rishis, as a sacrificial

¹ Muir's Metrical Translations from Sanskrit Writers, p. 173.

victim. Here the idea of the emanation of the world from a divine spirit internal to all embodied sentiences is presented in a form gross, obscure, and almost unintelligible to the modern mind. “Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He compasses the earth on every side, and stands ten fingers' breadth beyond. Purusha is all this; he is that which has been, and that which is to be: the lord also of immortality, and the lord of that which grows up with food. Such is his greatness, and Purusha is more than this: one quarter of him is all existing things, three-quarters that which is immortal in the sky.” It will be hereafter necessary to return to this hymn, as it contains a portion of the mythologic imagery of the subsequent Vedic philosophy of the Upanishads, and to exhibit its natural interpretation in accordance with that philosophy by Śāyaṇa, or, as he is otherwise known, the schoolman Mādhavāchārya.

Meanwhile, to proceed to another hymn. The effusions of awakening reflection reach their highest energy in the celebrated Nāsadiyasūkta, Rigveda x. 129. It is in this hymn that is first suggested the primitive type of Indian thought, the thesis of all the Upanishads, viz, the emanation of the world and of all the forms of life that successively people it, out of the sole reality, the Self that permeates and vitalises all things, through the agency of the unreality that overspreads it, the self-feigned fiction, the cosmical illusion, Māyā. “It was not entity, nor was it nonentity,” says the Rishi. The cosmical illusion neither is nor is not; it is a self-feigned fiction, a spurious semblance of being, for it is Self alone that is. And yet it is not merely nothing, for then the world of experience would not be here and everywhere, for living souls to pass through. “No air was then, no sky above.” In the state of things in which the various spheres of experience and the sentient lives that inherit them have not yet reappeared

from their last disappearance into the fontal, spiritual essence, in the infinite series of æons, there is as yet nothing thinkable, nothing nameable. "What shrouded all? where? in the receptacle of what? Was it water, the unfathomable abyss?" Water, be it noted, became in the later philosophy of the Brāhmins one of the many names of the inexplicable principle of unreality, the world-fiction. "Death was not then, nor immortality." These are things that have no meaning in the sole life of the undifferented Self. "There was no distinction of day or night. That One breathed without afflation, self-determined: other than, and beyond it, there was naught." This one, the all, is the sole reality, the aboriginal essence, the undifferented Self, the Brahman or Ātman of the later Hindu quietist. "Darkness there was, wrapped up in darkness. All this was undifferented water. That one that was void, covered with nothingness, developed itself by the power of self-torture. Desire first rose in it, the primal germ: this sages seeking with the intellect have found in the heart to be the tie of entity to nonentity." The Self in its earliest connection with the cosmical illusion becomes the creative spirit, the Īsvara of the philosophy of the Upanishads. The creative spirit is said in the Taittiriya Upanishad to perform self-torture, to coerce itself, as the scholiasts say, to rigorous contemplation, to a prevision of the world that is to be, and this prevision is its desire to project the spheres, and to part itself illusively into all the innumerable forms of life that are to pass through them. "The ray stretched out across these, was it above or was it below? There were generating forces, there were mighty powers; a self-determined being on this side, an energy beyond. Who indeed knows? who can say out of what it issued, whence this creation? The gods are on this side of its evolution: who then knows out of what it came into existence? This creation, whether any made it, or

any made it not? He that is the overseer in the highest heaven, he indeed knows, or haply he knows not."

Thus there is in the Vedic hymns a second line of movement, and this leads us to the primitive type of Indian philosophy as it develops itself in the Upanishads. The hymns made in generation after generation by the Rishis, fashioned by them as a car is fashioned by a wheelwright, or fabricated or generated by the gods, were transmitted by memory from age to age, till they became of inscrutable origin and authority, of no mere personal authorship, but timeless revelations coming forth afresh in each successive æon. The period of the hymns or Mantras was followed, as has been seen, by the period of the ritual and legendary compilations known as the Brāhmaṇas. Of these Brāhmaṇas, particular portions, to be repeated only by the recluses of the forest, were styled Āraṇyakas, and to the Āraṇyakas were attached the treatises setting forth as a hidden wisdom the fictitious nature of the religion of rites as part and parcel of the series of mere semblances, the world-phantasmagory, and the sole reality of the all-pervading and all-animating Self, or Brahman. This hidden wisdom, the philosophy of the Upanishads, in contradistinction from the Karmakāṇḍa or ritual portion, received the name of Jñānakāṇḍa, or gnostic portion, of the Śruti, or everlasting revelation. There were now virtually two religions, the Karmamārga, or path of rites, for the people of the villages, living as if life with its pleasures and pains were real, and the Jñānamārga, or path of knowledge, for the sages that had quitted the world and sought the quiet of the jungle, renouncing the false ends and empty fictions of common life, and intent upon reunion with the sole reality, the Self that is one in all things living.

After this brief notice of the period that preceded the rise of philosophy in India, it will be necessary, in the second place, to point out certain modifications of

The hymns of reflection lead up to the philosophy of the Upanishads.

Climatic, ethnological, and religious degeneration in the Hindu pale.

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