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THE BEGINNINGS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

SELECTIONS FROM THE RIG VEDA, ATHARVA VEDA
UPANIṢADS, AND MAHĀBHĀRATA

TRANSLATED FROM THE SANSKRIT
WITH AN INTRODUCTION, NOTES
AND GLOSSARIAL INDEX

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myself throughout all the worlds; yonder heaven also I touch with my peak.

8. I also blow forth, (pervading everything) like the wind, taking to myself all the worlds. Beyond the heaven, beyond this earth, so great I have become in grandeur.

Rig Veda 10.129. The monistic (impersonal) cosmic principle

Monism; searching attempt to get from nothing to something, mainly by extremely cautious, largely negative, and very tentative starts. In the beginning was neither non-existent nor existent. In 2, 'That One (neuter) breathed'—but without breath (no ordinary breathing!); than it there was nothing else. In 3, 'darkness there was, hidden by darkness; an undistinguished ocean (cf. Introduction, Chapter I, fn. 2, p. 21) was This All. A generative principle (lit. 'coming into being') enveloped by emptiness—by the might of (its own) fervour That One (neuter) was born'. In 4, Desire (creative urge) arose, and from it Thought. Existent had, somehow, to arise out of non-existent. On vs. 5 see note 3 below. In 6 and 7 the poet seems to feel he has gone too far, and relapses into complete agnosticism; the gods are too late to know anything; maybe some power in heaven knows, but maybe not.

1. Non-existent there was not, existent there was not then. There was not the atmospheric space, nor the vault beyond. What stirred, where, and in whose control? Was there water, a deep abyss?

2. Nor death nor immortality (mortals nor immortals) was there then; there was no distinction of night or day. That One breathed without breath by inner power; than it verily there was nothing else further.

3. Darkness there was, hidden by darkness, in the beginning; an undistinguished ocean was This All. What generative principle¹ was enveloped by emptiness—by the might of (its own) fervour² That One was born.

4. Desire (creative, or perhaps sacrificial, impulse) arose then in the beginning, which was the first seed of thought. The (causal) connection (*bandhu*) of the existent the sages found in the non-existent, searching with devotion in their hearts.

5. Straight across was stretched the (dividing-)cord of them (i.e. of the following); below (what) was there? above (what) was there? Seed-bearers (male forces) there were, strengths (female forces) there were; (female) innate power below, (male) impellent force above.³

¹ Literally, 'coming into being', *ābhu*; noun to the verb *ābabhūva* 'came into being', vss. 6 and 7.

² *tapas*, 'heat' or 'ascetic fervour', as of a shaman.

³ Male and female powers develop in the chaos; by their interaction the empiric world is to be produced. 'Innate power' is an attempt to render *svadhā*, a difficult word. Renou 254 n. 9 takes it to refer to male forces, 'bien que le mot soit féminin grammaticalement.' More important, and decisive as it seems to me, is the fact that it is 'below'; the 'impellent force' (*prayati*, also grammatically feminine) is 'above', therefore male.

6. Who truly knows? Who shall here proclaim it—whence they were produced, whence this creation? The gods (arose) on this side (later), by the creation of this (empiric world, to which the gods belong); then who knows whence it came into being?

7. This creation, whence it came into being, whether it was established,¹ or whether not—he who is its overseer in the highest heaven, he verily knows, or perchance he knows not.²

¹ i.e. created; or perhaps, 'established itself' (the verb may be understood as passive or middle).

² Literally, probably 'or if he doesn't know?' ('then what?'); interrogative intonation.

Rig Veda 10.190. Cosmic, creative Fervour (*tapas*)

See Introduction, Chapter II, section headed *Asceticism*.

1. Cosmic order and Truth were born out of kindled Heat (*tapas*). From that night was born, from that the ocean with its waves.

2. From the ocean with its waves the year was born, which arranges days and nights and rules over all that blinks (lives).

3. The Creator (or Ordainer) fashioned in regular order the sun and moon, heaven and earth, the atmosphere and the light.