

SUGGESTIONS FOR A THEORY OF RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

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VII.

(Concluded)

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The period of symbolism was immediately followed by that of Typism. That, before migrating to India, the Aryans had reached a degree of culture higher than that revealed by the early hymns of the Vedas, and that, when they reached the valley of the Indus, they actually possessed some of the important characteristics of the Tupal stage, are propositions which have been arrived at on socio-psychological considerations alone; and they cannot be discussed in details, in a paper like this. We realise, however that Historians are against us. According to them, the Aryans first came to India by the same North Western Route, which was taken by Alexander at a later date; then they settled down in the Punjab, composed the Vedic hymns, developed their culture, and gradually penetrated into the Gangetic valley. But lo; there they came face to face with their own cousins. How could it be? To meet this difficulty historians propound the theory of the Second Aryan "invasion." We are to suppose that certain Aryan Tribes came to India via Chitral and Gilgit, and that they marched further east, and settled down on the banks of the Jumna and the Ganges. We are not competent enough to argue the pro and con of these historical issues, much less to decide them. But it should be pointed out that the position of the historians has of late been seriously disputed. For instance, Dr. Waddel holds that the Aryan settlers in India came first as a seafaring people to colonise at the mouth of the Indus. "The first

settlement and colonization of the Indus valley by these Aryan-Phoenicians is proved by the record of Uruas in regard to his having built Edin; and by the seal of Lord Mudgala as the "Capturer" and "minister" there, holding the Edin state as a captured colony of the Sumerian Empire of Mesopotamia."¹⁰ Referring to the so-called "Aryan Invasion" Dr. Waddel adds, "this latter event with its permanent occupation and systematic civilization of the heart of India, the Ganges valley or Hindustan, I find from a mass of new evidence, took place no earlier than the beginning of the seventh century B. C. and not by sea, but overland by Asia Minor and across the lower Indus, by a remnant of the Hittite and Aryan Syrio-Phoenician people seeking new settlements after their calamitous defeat by the Assyrian Sargon II. at Carchemish in 718 B. C."¹¹

During this period the socio-psyche underwent a further dissociation; it ceased to be symbolic and entered into the typical stage. The community, which was homogeneous, broke up into various tribes, agriculture showed marked improvement; industry arose; trade advanced; an ornament called Nishka came to be the medium of exchange; and a certain berry *Labus Precatorious* was used as the unit of weight. Villages were reorganised with a view to accommodate the centers of new activities. The king shed off his religious functions, and confined himself to military, political and legal affairs. Immorality was recognised as crime, and punished as such; the business of administering punishment was taken away from the injured person and vested in the king or the magistrate; and a new set of people arose who specialized in dective work. Sons were granted the right, as sons, to a share of the ancestral property; and the head of the family was allowed to adopt some one to function as son, in case he happened to have none. The daughter-in-law of the house was entrusted with the duty of managing the house-hold, in case her mother-in-law was too old for work; and in this capacity she was to be the sole mistress. Though alphabets were still unknown an ideo-graphic system was introduced. Prose was still non-existent, but poetry developed in various metrical forms.

The most important feature of the age was the rise of caste distinctions. The sacrificial rites became complex; and since the king could not attend to them in person, he had to delegate his spiritual functions to a set of priests; hence arose the Brahaman Class. Owing to the constant friction going on either among the

¹⁰ Waddel; *Sumerian Seals deciphered*, p. 115.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

tribes themselves, or between the tribes on the one hand and the neighbouring people on the other, it became necessary not only to organise a standing army but also to relieve the soldiers of all extraneous duties; and this led to the formation of a fighting class called Kshatryas. The rise of industry and the expansion of trade required men with special training and experience; and the result was the formation of the Vaisya class. These three classes were supposed to do work of a noble nature; and to discharge the multifarious menial services in regard to them, it was necessary to set apart a class of slaves, so made either by conquest or by purchase; and in this manner the Sudras came into existence. At first the Brahmans, the Kshatryas, and the Vaisyas enjoyed equality in status, but in course of time the status of the Brahmans and the Vaisyas came to be regulated by the position they occupied in relation to the warriors.

It was an age of types. The inner dynamic force that brought about this change was the intellect, incipient, no doubt, but still intellect. The first work of the intellect is to unify; so we find that an attempt was made to unite objects which were discrete and disconnected, and this attempt culminated in the formation of different types. To his end the old way of describing objects in terms of size, shape, colour, and other characteristics, gave place to the new method, first, of penetrating into physical appearances to discover important functions; and secondly, of describing objects in terms of them. Whenever a new object came into view, it was assimilated and placed at once within a known type. The lion, for instance, came to be called a strange dog. Every man in the community regarded himself as belonging to a particular class, with corresponding privileges and obligations; and he had a nascent sense of individuality in respect both of himself and of others. Between the utter lack of personality on the one hand, and extreme individuality on the other, the conception of the type served as the mediating link. The typical idea was so pronounced that it was taken for granted that one Brahman was as good as another, and that any Kshatriya could function as well as any other; and if a Tacitus had observed them he would have concluded, as he did in the case of the Germans, that all members of a class looked more or less alike. These experiences reacted powerfully on the construction of the notions of deities. The proto-deities of the symbolic period were just the physical appearances themselves. In the next age they became shadowy

personalities with certain important functions attached to them. For example, while Indra was just the rain in the earlier period, he became rain-maker in the new period. Another interesting change was in the way in which the new functions were used to describe the deities. Whenever more functions than one were discovered in respect of a deity, they were not combined together in one idea; instead they were used simply to form different names; and the deity in question came to be known by as many names as the number of functions discovered in respect of him. Indra came to be known as the rain-maker, the thunder, the wielder of lightning, the cloud, and lastly the sky itself. Similarly, the Sun became the illuminator, the life-giver, the nourisher, the traveller on the sky, and also the sky. Though we have been using the word deities, we should not forget that in this period the deities had not assumed any clear-cut shapes: they still remained proto-deities of a higher quality.

In addition to the older deities, which were developed into some sort of personalities, certain new ones came to be recognised. The chief amongst them was Aditi (the boundless, the infinite). This is the first time in the life of the Indo-Aryans that a female deity came into being. This must have been the reflex of the important position accorded in the household and in the community to mothers and daughters. In contradistinction with the ordinary deities, the new ones had not to pass through physical stages, but were conceived straight away as personalities with proper functions. The real test whether a deity was Indian in origin is the way in which it was conceived: if it was described in mere physical terms, it belonged to the Iranian period; if, on the other hand, it was conceived as a person, it must have belonged to a later age; at any rate, must have been brought into existence while the Aryans were about to come to India.

The most interesting discovery of the age is yet to be mentioned. Apart from the deities, old and new, apart from the development in their forms; there came into view a new reality, not indeed an agency but something through which the agencies worked; and this was *Rtam* (path). In its primary meaning it was the path of the Sun. Later on it assumed a secondary meaning and became the path of Rectitude, Truth, Goodness, and Law in general. The discovery was pregnant with possibilities. It served to modify the notion of personality in the moral direction; and it served also as the basis of the idea of transmigration.

VIII.

Human nature gravitates towards the habitual. There is a tendency in man, not merely to form habits, but under certain circumstances to fall back upon them and to let his life be governed accordingly. The habit-forming period commences almost from his very birth, and may continue even till old age. When he becomes senescent, he loses the power of adaptation and remains helpless in new situations. In his earlier days his muscle was supple and mind alert, but now the limbs are tired and the spirit weary, with the result that the old indomitable will is replaced by an utter lack of energy. Life is essentially ruled either by the future or by the past. When the capacity for vision is gone, anticipation is replaced by reminiscence, and expectation by memory. Apart from this usual phenomenon, special circumstances arise, in which a return to habit becomes almost natural. The pioneer who wants to settle down in Africa, or in the wild west of America, struggles hard against the forces of nature, and clears a certain area of land; but before proceeding further he takes care to secure what he has already won. It is a commonplace in Military affairs that a good general should consolidate his ground before he makes a further advance. From the psychical standpoint, the act of consolidation is the same, in principle, as that of fixing a habit; for in both cases the processes involve memory, recollection, and repetition.

As with the individual, so with society. To meet an exigency the socio-psyche invents a method, and by suggestion, imitation and repetition it gradually assumes the shape of custom. But when the psyche loses its capacity for reflection and organisation, by long continued subjection to authority, or what amounts to the same, when in an epicurean forgetfulness, it abandons itself to a plethora of comfort and luxury, it loses vitality, becomes effeminate, and begins to live on its own inheritance, physical and mental. Such a society is on the road to decay. The Roman Empire during the period of the Caesars was in such a condition, and so it fell to the first stroke of a barbarian. Even in the case of a vigorous society, it is necessary at times to cry a halt in the course of activities. A nation enters into a war of conquest, be it the conquest of land or that of trade, and after much difficulty gains an advantage; but before extending the sphere of operation, it has to pause, and take stock of the situation; and then employ its previous experiences to consolidate, to

stabilise, to make permanent what was only a temporary achievement.

It was an attempt like this that was made by the Indo-Aryans after they passed the Typal stage. Originally caste was based on functional suitability, and any one could change caste if he was only functionally fit. It is to this condition of affairs that Manu referred, when he observed that every man was born a Sudra, but became a Brahman, a Kshatrya, or a Vaishya, according to his function. Gradually however, the situation changed. The constant association of a function with an individual created the belief that it was only that individual who could discharge that particular function. It was only the Brahman who could officiate as priest, it was only the Kshatrya who could take up arms, and to enter into a trade was the special prerogative of the Vaishya. In this manner the mobility of the previous order vanished, and in its place a certain rigidity set in. Not only this. Function receded in the background, and memory and heredity did the rest.

Owing partly to the complexities of social life, and partly to the memory associated with certain individuals and families, privileges were conserved, and status became a matter of heredity.

But *noblesse oblige!* The men, who thus consolidated the power and privileges, were not after all so selfish as at first sight they might appear; on the other hand, they were inspired by noble motives of social service. They evolved for each caste a code of duties and a code of honour, known by that protean term, *dharma*. The rules of the game were strictly observed, and lapses were punished by outright ex-communication. It was an altogether interesting period, it was an age of conventions, of religiousness, of chivalry, of bourgeois.

Gods followed in the wake of men. They also were caught up in the same psychic movement which brought about a change in human personalities. In this case, too, function, as the principle of determination, was replaced by memory and association; but there was this difference, that while in regard to caste the new principles were capable of direct application to their objects, they could be applied to Gods only indirectly, that is to say, to the ideas of them in human minds. Gods could not consolidate their positions; man had to do it for them. To take a typical illustration, Indra was originally conceived as a shadowy personality which could be described only

in terms of certain functions. In the new period his functions become secondary; the qualities, by means of which he came to be known, were those which were associated in people's minds with power, strength, capacity to protect and to save; these, though not sufficiently recognised hitherto, were brought in the foreground; and Indra was conceived by means of them. The result was that his personality was neatly rounded off, his physiognomy was clearly outlined, and he attained the status of a full-fledged deity, a deity *per se*, irrespective of his functions. What happened to Indra happened to other deities also, and their number was legion.

For deepening the personality of a deity, two concepts were exploited. We saw that the Indo-Aryans, like the German Philosopher Kant, were struck by two things, ADITI (Infinite) and RTAM (Law). These appealed to them in a peculiar manner, and they felt that Gods had something to do with these. The relations were expressed in rather picturesque language; Indra lived near the Infinite, Mitra was her son, and Dawn was her face; similarly Indra was the originator and preserver of law, Mitra too was its guardian, and Varuna had the same relation to it. Intellectually the deities were conceived as infinite, boundless, omnipresent, and morally they were the sources of law, truth, and goodness, and they also sat as judges on those who transgressed. Gods were thus jostling against one another, their qualities and powers overlapped, and no one had a higher status than the rest. A growing intellect would not be satisfied with the situation. How it was met, we shall see in the next section.

IX.

Hitherto the evolution of religious ideas was going on in a linear direction. After the period of conventionalism, it began to canalise itself in two branches, the moral and the intellectual. The former, if pursued, would lead to the idea of a transcendental God and the latter to that of an immanent one. If we could visualise the religious histories of various communities, we should be able to see that, up to a certain point, development everywhere involved the same principles and was going on in the same direction. After the construction of a divine personality, half moral, half intellectual, and not wholly perfect, that is to say, a personality like the one sketched in the preceding section, religious progress everywhere

took one of the two lines mentioned above. Hence the maturest idea of God in any community could only be that of a transcendental God of love or that of an immanent God of existence. This classification has been brilliantly described by Edmund Holmes. He opens his book on "*The Creed of Buddha*" with the following observations:

"The religions of the civilized world may be divided in two great groups—those of which the paramount deity is the Jewish Jehova, and those of which the paramount deity is the Indian Brahma. Jehovah reigns supreme, under the title of God the Father, over Europe and the Continents which Europe has colonised, and under the title of Allah, over Western Asia and Northern Africa. Brahma reigns in the Far East, India being under his direct rule, while Indo-China, China, and Japan belong to his "Sphere of influence". . . . The Western mind had conceived of a natural order of things which is real because God has made it so, and of a super-natural order of things which is the dwelling place of God. . . . In the Eastern cosmology there is one world, and one centre of reality—the world of our experience seen as it is." How the idea of Jehovah was reached is not to be explained in this paper. We shall attempt on the other hand to trace the line of development which culminated in the idea of Brahman.

This further development occupied two stages, the Individualistic and the Subjectivistic. When we read the literature of the Individualistic age—the books called the Brahmanas and the Sutras—we are struck at once by the luxuriance of an intellectual growth, and dazzled by the splendour of achievements. During this period, the Aryans completed their migration into the Gangetic Valley; the tribes were regrouped; they came in contact with strange folks, fought, subdued, and civilised them. They saw new rivers, perennially flowing, and new mountains, cloud-capped and sky-kissing. They got acquainted, also, with new kinds of animals, and fresh plants and trees. All this gave them a fresh geographical outlook. Industry and agriculture were developed in details; towns and cities were founded; and the urban classes arose. The king became an emperor; law was developed; and the police and the magistracy came into existence. Alphabets were freely used, though at the end of the period; prose which began to be the medium of expression at the end of the Conventional age, was refined and used more and more for literary purposes. "Reason's awful power gave thought

a bolder range." Knowledge increased all round: Phonetics, Etymology, Grammar, Poetics, Astronomy, Geometry, and other studies were organised and taught in various schools.

Intellect which was just emerging in the Typal age, reached the acme of progress in the age of Individualism. It was an age of enlightenment, and its *dominant* was reason; the world as it was experienced then was thoroughly analysed, examined, described, interpreted, and defined; and nothing was left out. This intellectual ferment gave a new orientation to the conceptions of men and Gods. The restless enquiry into the nature of things, and the intense efforts to reach the very foundations, coupled with fresh achievements made men conscious of themselves, as living, free, individuals.

On the religious side, also, there was a tremendous change. We saw how the deities were personified in the previous age, and how they came to be regarded as more or less alike. The situation raised important questions. Are all these deities real existences; if so, wherein lies their individuality? If God is supreme, could there be more Gods than one? Is the supremacy of one God consistent with that of the rest? Who is the real God? These questions led to what Max Muller called Heno-theism. The predicates of the supreme were successively applied to each deity; Indra, Surya, Mitra, Varuna, and the rest, were tried with a view to find out if any would satisfy the conditions of the supreme; and all of them were finally rejected. Some times this process of comparing them was graphically described as a struggle in which God vanquished God. After each deity, taken singly, failed to satisfy the test, a combination of two deities was tried. After this, too, failed, attempts were made to define the real God as a unity in plurality; that is to say, as the "all-gods." This too proved unsatisfactory. In all this the governing motives were purely intellectual. Simplicity, clearness, distinctness, and consistency were the tests.

The new God was given all the divine attributes which the Human could discover, and He was known as Visvakarman, Prajapati, Hiranyagarbha, and even Brahma. A peculiar importance attaches to these names, and it is worth while to explain it. Both in India and in Europe, thinkers have arrived at certain conclusions regarding their experiences of the world. Some of these are; that the world is an effect of some cause, that it was evolved from a primal stuff, that it involves a purpose, that it presupposes the source of moral law; and that existence is implied in thought.

These were applied in Europe "to prove" the existence of God, and they came to be known as the Cosmological, the Evolutionary, the Theological, the Moral, and the Ontological arguments. In India the same experiences were used for a different purpose. Here philosophy arose out of religion, and there was no doubting the existence of God. God was felt as being somewhere from the very beginning, His life being bound up with that of the world. From the nature of the world it should be possible, therefore, to determine, not indeed the existence, but the nature of God. He must be *Viswakarman* (the forger of the world), *Praja-pathi* (the Lord of creatures), *Hiranya-Garbha* (the golden egg), and *Brahma* (life and power). The name that ultimately found favour with the people was *Brahma*—used in the masculine gender; and it meant the Supreme Person, the Heavenly Father, the Creator, the Sustainer and the Destroyer.

Such a God most admirably suited a people, who were conscious of individuality, power, and strength; and whose ruler was not a mere king, but an Emperor, a King of Kings.

X.

The Vedic Literature, properly speaking, ends with the discovery of the Supreme God. When we turn to the Literature immediately following, i. e. to the Upanishads, we are startled by a dramatic change. Instead of being instructed further about the Father in Heaven, we are told that Brahman is Atman. What this statement means we shall consider in the next section. For the present, our interest is in the word Brahman. Originally it meant God, conceived as masculine in gender and personal in nature; but in the new formula the same word signifies the supreme, conceived as impersonal and neuter. How came this change? Search as we may all the ancient books, we shall not find the answer. None seems to have raised this question, much less given any suggestion to discover the missing links.

It is true, no doubt, that Max Muller noticed one of the questions, viz, the change in gender; but his answer is that "in choosing the neuter, the ancient sages tried to express something that should be neither male or female, that should be in fact as far removed from human nature as weak human language could well express it; some-

thing that should be higher than Masculine or Feminine."¹² But the question remains: why did the sages want the change? For answer we should go back to the previous age. The very attempt to subject the ideas of deities to a thorough-going criticism should lead naturally to the change we are discussing. Efforts were made to remove all limitations from the idea of the Supreme. To think of God as a male is to limit him by a sexual principle; He should, therefore, be lifted above sex, as being the source of sex; and this could be expressed in language only as neuter. Neuter in this context really means "above-sex" as contrasted with its meaning in popular tongue.

It is the same intellectual attempt that is responsible for the de-personalising of God. To conceive God as personal is to make Him an object to a knowing mind; and in this sense He is limited by something outside Himself. If He should be the all-embracing Absolute He should cease to be a person, that is to say, He should not be an object to any mind. But intellect can work only with the object-subject relation. If it is true to itself it should conclude that this relation does not apply to Absolute Existence, and that, for this reason, it is unable, by its very nature, to form any adequate conception. It is this honest self-confession that is responsible for the second change in the meaning of the word Brahman. How else to conceive Brahman, is a problem which is incapable of solution by the intellect itself.

XI.

The transition to the age of Subjectivism was effected in a peculiar manner. In the age immediately preceding, elaborate rules and laws were laid down to regulate even the minute details of life. This bred a sense of a lack of freedom, the young were impatient of restraints and began to harbour inner rebellion; the old who lived through all the stages of Sacerdotalism, found that life was vapid. This state of affairs was potent with danger to society. But the genius of the people was equal to the task. A way was discovered to provide a safety-valve for the feelings of the malcontents, without in the least disturbing the stability of the social order. In the latter part of the age, a Brahmanical canon was promulgated dividing the life of a man into four distinct periods. The first period was devoted to his discipline and study; after this, he married, reared a family,

¹² Max Muller. *Origin of Religion*, p. 319.

attended to sacrificial and other duties, as became a man of the world; when his hair grew grey he abdicated his worldly functions, and retired to the seclusion of the forests, and lastly, after a period of probation, he became an ascetic, and died as such.

This permissive law led to an important result. To be able to appreciate it, we should leave those feverish activities, those castes, and sub-castes, those rules and regulations on which we stumbled in every page of the Brahmanas and the Sutras, and transport ourselves to the strange atmosphere of the forest life. Kings who flung away principalities as if they were but glittering toys, Kshatryas, who sought a safe retreat from the allurements of the pomp and and glory of war, Brahmins, who, realising that ceremonials and laws had no abiding meaning, longed to spend their remaining days in quest of the Unknown; all those, resorted to the forests and formed scattered colonies. They lived in huts, improvised with grass twigs and leaves; and the Southern slope of the Himalayas was strewn with such hermitages. They subsisted on roots, berries, and fruits, and drank at the purest of fountains. They spent their time in learning from each other, in the practice of meditation, and if possible in teaching the incoming novices. Their life was ruled by sincerity. They taught nothing which they did not practise, nor practise anything in which they did not believe. They had no fear, no anxiety, no ambition; no public to please, no critic to appease; on the other hand they were as free as the air they breathed, as joyous as the birds that warbled above their heads, and as pure as the water which bubbled up from under the Himalayan glacier. And there was a sweetness, a peace, and serenity in their atmosphere.

These men had large sympathies. No grass could sprout but did not strike a chord in their bosoms, and no bird could sing without elevating the spirit of their human comrades. They transported themselves into the heart of the surrounding objects and felt as as these themselves felt. Consequently they gained a sympathetic insight; and came to understand these objects in terms of their own souls. In other words they learnt the secret of the subjectivistic interpretation, subjectivistic in the higher sense of the word.

These new experiences vitally affected their religious beliefs. We saw that the age of Individualism ended with the confession that God could not be grasped by the intellect. This made one sage cry in despair "my ears vanish, my eyes vanish, and the light also which dwells in my heart; my mind, with its far-off longing

leaves me; what shall I say and what shall I do?" Says another, "Knowing nothing myself, I ask those who know, ignorant myself, that I may learn. He who established the six worlds, is He the one who exists in the form of the unborn being?"¹³ The forests announced the answer. Intellect had committed suicide, and there was no use in resurrecting it. But there was hope in the new life. The same process, which gave a thorough insight into the lives of birds, streams, and plants, ought to enable them to comprehend the Ultimate Reality. This Reality or God, if it be so, should be grasped by a method, which would not allow the distinction between the subject and the object to arise; for the apprehension should be that of an unlimited God. The artistic contemplation which they practised every day—and may we add, which is experienced by a man of genius like Goethe or Raphael—should satisfy the conditions. In such an intuition, there would be the experience of at-one-ment, without any subject-object distinction; this method, therefore, is the most adequate one to apprehend the all-Comprehensive God.

The new method would naturally lead to a new form of conception. If God and the soul could fuse in such a way as to leave no room for distinction, if, that is to say, God could become the soul and the soul God, in the act of knowing, then God should be of the nature of the soul.

Hence the formula, Brahman is Atman. But there is nothing, in experience, which is like the soul. The soul is something *sui-generis*; and what is like a soul should itself be the soul. This accounts for the secondary meaning of the formula that Brahman is the soul itself. Ultimate Reality, then does not admit of the subject-object distinction; and this is what our ancient sages meant when they called it "Advaitam." Thus the culmination of the development of the idea of God in the life of evolution which we named as the intellectual.

¹³ Max Muller; *Origin of Religion*, p. 322.