

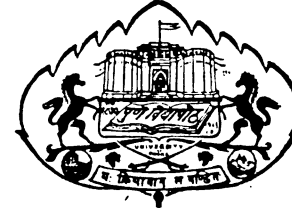
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# The doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla in the Mahābhārata and other old Sanskrit works

by

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The prevailing general trend of philosophical thought in the *Mahābhārata* is, as is well known, characterized by the Aupaniṣadic doctrine of Brahmaism or Atmaism, and also by doctrines, in their earlier stages of development, of the Sāṃkhya, the Yoga or of the Kṛṣṇaite or Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva theism. These doctrines, with all their emphasis on the inexorable law of Karma, still recognize man's moral responsibility for his actions and leave some scope, though small, for human endeavour and for the exercise of the human will for the attainment of Emancipation.

## *The doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla ascribed to the demons*

There are, however, certain parts in the philosophical texts of the *Mahābhārata* which, in the views they express, stand quite apart from the prevailing general trend of philosophical thought. They deal with theories which aim at explaining the world on the basis of Svabhāva (self-existence or Nature), Niyati (Fate or Destiny), Yadṛcchā (Chance or some invisible force of Cosmic Will), and Kāla (Time). All these doctrines are characterized by a strong determinism which is an utter negation of human endeavour or free will. Perhaps to mark these doctrines off as emanating from heterodox sources, their promulgation is associated with the demons—the enemies of the gods. Before we deal with their historical and ideological implications, we shall first present, in brief, the prominent features of these theories as found in the passages of the *Mahābhārata*, especially of the Mokṣadharmā Section which contains the largest number of philosophical passages in the *Māhabhārata*.

XII. 172<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter, in reply to Yudhiṣṭhira's query as to how a man can be free from grief and can attain the Highest State (Paramā Gatih), Bhīṣma narrates an ancient dialogue between Prahāda, the King of the demons and Ajagara Muni. In that dialogue, Prahāda, struck by Ajagara's wonderful equanimity, childlike innocence and freshness of mind (3-4)<sup>2</sup>, asked the sage the secret of his mental equipoise. In reply to that question, the sage Ajagara discourses on his doctrine of Svabhāva. He says:

1. This and further references to the *Mahābhārata* are from the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona 4.
2. The figures refer to the verses in the Chapter under consideration.

“All activities, O Prahrāda, are due to and find their consummation in Nature (Svabhāva). (11)<sup>3</sup>. There is no cause why things arise, grow, decay and perish<sup>4</sup>. Strengthened by this knowledge, I neither feel elated nor dejected (10). All things, big or small, have an end (13). The luminaries in the sky are also seen falling down when their *Time* comes (‘Yathākālam’ 17). Whatever fare, rich or coarse, I get by *Chance* (Yadṛcchā 19) is welcome to me. I pass days together without anything to eat. Whatever has come my way by *Chance* (24), I never reject, nor do I go after what is difficult to get. I see that pleasure and pain, fortune and misfortune, love and hate, life and death are all *ordained by fate* (Vidhiniyata 30). Fortified by this knowledge, I live the Ājagara life of vow in order to restrain my thirsty and unsteady mind. (33)<sup>5</sup>”.

The characteristic feature of the doctrine of Svabhāva as described in the above passage is that all events, occurrences and effects in this world and human life come about without any cause. So also from the words which have been deliberately italicized in the above passage, it will be obvious that the doctrine of Svabhāva (Nature) is closely associated with or closely impinges on the doctrines of Time, Fate and Chance.

XII. 215. Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma whether man himself is the doer of the actions, whether good or bad, which visit him with their fruits. In reply, Bhīṣma narrates a conversation between Prahrāda and Indra in which Prahrāda propounds his theory of (Svabhāva) Nature to Indra. Prahrāda, the demon-king, is defeated and has taken to a desolate place. Indra seeks him out and inquires of him:—“O Prahrāda, you are so innocent like a child. Your condition should make you feel sad and miserable. But you do not appear to be so. What is it due to?—Is it due to the possession of some knowledge (Prajñā) or a quality of courage (Dhṛtimattā)?” (12). In reply, Prahrāda discourses to Indra on the doctrine of Svabhāva. He says:

“It is through Svabhāva that all things come into being and go out of being. There is no scope for human effort (15)<sup>6</sup>. One who regards himself to be the doer of good or bad things, is mistaken (17). I am convinced that it is all due to Svabhāva (23)”. Prahrāda tries to explain rather cryptically with a quaint simile the connection between Karma and Svabhāva: “As a crow proclaims the presence of cooked rice by its repeated cawings, so also man’s actions are only the tokens of his Svabhāva”. (25)<sup>7</sup> Prahrāda

3. स्वभावादेव संदृश्य वर्तमानाः प्रवृत्तयः ।  
स्वभावनिरताः सर्वाः परितप्ये न केनचित् ॥ Mbh. XII. 172.11.
4. पश्यन् प्रह्लाद भूतानामुत्पत्तिमनिमित्ततः ।  
हामं वृद्धिं विनाशं च न प्रहृष्ये न च व्यथे ॥ ib. 10.
5. तृषितमनियतं मनो नियन्तुं व्रतमिदमाजगरं शुचिश्चरामि ॥ XII. 172:33.
6. स्वभावात्संप्रवर्तन्ते निवर्तन्ते तथैव च ।  
सर्वे भावास्तथाभावाः पुरुषार्थो न विद्यते ॥ XII. 215.15.
7. यथा वेदयते कश्चिदोदनं वायसो वदन् ।  
एवं सर्वाणि कर्माणि स्वभावस्यैव लक्षणम् ॥ XII. 215,25.

goes on to say: “When one is convinced that everything comes into existence through Svabhāva, he remains unaffected by the effects of pride or arrogance (27). It is through Svabhāva that one gets knowledge; it is through Svabhāva that one gets Tranquillity; whatever you see is all due to Svabhāva (35).”<sup>8</sup>

In this passage also, it is clear that the doctrine of Svabhāva means the negation of human effort. It is also significant that in the above passage the working of the inexorable law of Karma is ultimately traced to Svabhāva. As the simile of the crow puts it, Karma, like the cawings of the crow, which reveal their cause—the rice, merely reveals its cause, which is the Svabhāva.

XII. 219. This chapter sets forth the doctrine of Destiny or Fate. Bhīṣma narrates the conversation between Indra and Namuci. Namuci, the demon-king, was defeated. Still he remained unruffled and calm ‘like an ocean’ (2). Asked by Indra as to how he took his present disaster, Namuci propounds his doctrine of *Destiny*: “There is one ruler without any second. He rules over man from the time he is in the womb. Under his instructions, and as directed by him I carry on like water running down the slope (8).”<sup>9</sup>

“Everything has an end and is struck down in course of time. (Paryāya) (13)<sup>10</sup>. One born in this world experiences only what has been already ordained (21). Nothing can prevail against it. No effort can help man to get what is not to be got (20)<sup>11</sup>. One gets only what has been pre-ordained, whether happiness or misery.”<sup>12</sup>

In this passage, in the beginning, destiny appears to be cast in the theistic guise of a Personal Ruler (Śāsta); but the whole tenor of the description following after it suggests that what is meant is some mythopoeic power of Fate or Destiny endowed with a will, before which, human effort and will have no place. It should also be noticed that, in the above passage, Destiny stands associated with ‘Paryāya’ i. e. Time i. e. the Time-process.

XII. chapters 217 and 220. These two chapters contain a very powerful advocacy of the doctrine of Time at the hands or rather from the mouth of Bali—the king of the demons. In reply to Yudhiṣṭhira’s question as to how those who are hit hard by Time behave, Bhīṣma narrates in this connection

8. स्वभावाल्लभते प्रज्ञां शांतिमेति स्वभावतः ।  
स्वभावादेव तत्सर्वं यत्किञ्चिदनुपश्यति ॥ XII. 215.35.
9. एकः शास्ता न द्वितीयोऽस्ति शास्ता गर्भं शयानं पुरुषं शास्ति शास्ता ।  
तेनानुशिष्टः प्रवणादिवोदकं यथा नियुक्तोऽस्मि तथा वहामि ॥ XII. 219.8.
10. पर्यायैर्हन्यमानानामभियोक्ता न विद्यते ।  
दुःखमेतत्तु यद् द्वेष्टा कर्ताहमिति मन्यते ॥ ibid. 13
11. न मन्त्रबलवीर्येण प्रज्ञया पौरुषेण वा ।  
अलभ्यं लभते मर्त्यस्तत्र का परिदेवना ॥ ibid. 20
12. लब्धव्यान्येव लभते गन्तव्यान्येव गच्छति ।  
प्राप्तव्यान्येव प्राप्नोति दुःखानि च सुखानि च ॥ ibid. 22

an ancient dialogue between Indra and Bali: Bali once reigned supreme. It was he who once made the Sun rise and set, the rains fall and the fire burn (216.5 ff). He was, however, vanquished by the gods and passed his days in obscurity, reduced to the life of an ass grazing on husks and chaff. Indra, mounted on his elephant Airāvata, sought him out and asked him how he took his present lot (216.13). Bali first taunts Indra for his coarseness and then proceeds to expound his doctrine of *Time*. He says: "I do not grieve, Oh Indra. For I know that everything has to perish in course of Time. The events in Time are so fleeting and evanescent (217.5)<sup>13</sup>. Time, with its power, seizes everything (19). The ultimate fate of things is destruction (9). A man who kills and the man who is killed—both have already been struck down before by Time (14).<sup>14</sup> One burns what has already been burnt, kills what has already been killed (20)<sup>15</sup>. "Earth, Wind, Space, Water, and Light the fifth—These are the source of creatures (17).<sup>16</sup> (Time presides over these). Time seizes everything; it is Time that dispenses things; it is Time that holds everything. Human effort is vain (25)<sup>17</sup>. Prosperity or otherwise is all brought about by Time (36)<sup>18</sup>. My turn to rise and be aggressive is now over; it is now my time to suffer (39 and 44). It is Time that puts everything in its position; it is Time that ripens or cooks everything (39)<sup>19</sup>. All things are subject to Time. Whether you run or stop in one place, Time will not leave you (51). Time can not be grasped by the senses. It consists of seasons, months, fortnights, days, morning, noon, evening and moments (52-53). Oh Indra, you are now so powerful; but you will also be 'put out' by Time (55). Time takes me away in my time and will take you away in your time (220.29). It is on account of Time that I had conquered you; it is on account of Time that you have now conquered me (220.35)<sup>20</sup>.

13. अनित्यमुपलक्ष्येदं कालपर्यायमात्मनः ।  
तस्मात् शक्रं न शोचामि सर्वं ह्येवेदमन्तवत् ॥

14. हृतं हन्ति हतो ह्येव यो नरो हन्ति कंचन ।  
उभो तौ न विजानीतो यश्च हन्ति हतश्च यः ॥

It will be seen that the role of Kāla here is eulogized in terms reminiscent of Ātman in the *Kāthopniṣad* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

15. दग्धमेवानुदहति हतमेवानुहन्ति च ।  
नश्यते नष्टमेवाग्रे लब्धव्यं लभते नरः ॥

16. पृथिवी वायुराकाशम् आपो ज्योतिश्च पञ्चमम् ।  
एतद्योनीनि भूतानि तत्र का परिदेवना ॥

17. कालः सर्वं समादत्ते कालः सर्वं प्रयच्छति ।  
कालेन विधृतं सर्वं मा कृथाः शक्र पीरुषम् ॥ XII. 217.25

18. न कर्म तव नान्येषां कुतो मम शतक्रतो ।  
ऋद्धिर्वाप्यथ वा नद्धिः पर्यायकृतमेव तत् ॥ ib. 36

19. कालः स्थापयते सर्वं कालः पचति वै तथा ॥ ib. 39

20. कालेन त्वाहमजयं कालेनाहं जितस्त्वया ।  
गन्ता गतिमतां कालः कालः कलयति प्रजाः ॥ 220.35

"Time first overtook me and is now running after you (220.68). Thousands of kings of the demons have passed away in the course of Time. It is difficult to transgress Time (220.41)<sup>21</sup>. See, there is this dark terrible Man of Time, hard to overcome, who has bound me like an animal with a rope. (220.82)"<sup>22</sup>. Towards the end, Indra compliments Bali to the effect that Bali is 'the Philosopher of Time' and that he has the closest and the most intimate knowledge of Time<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, according to the doctrine of Kāla, everything in this world has been pre-ordained—victory and defeat, prosperity and poverty, the coming together of the elements and their disintegration. Man is but a helpless creature in the hands of this dreadful Time.

Besides the above passages, there are also some other passages in the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* which associate the doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla with materialism. It is said that thinkers who philosophize over the primary material Elements, posit the ultimate principle of Svabhāva<sup>24</sup> or of Kāla<sup>25</sup>. According to these thinkers, all things, whether sentient or insentient, are the product of the Elements which come together or dissolve by nature i. e. by Svabhāva or under the influence of Time or Kāla.

It will be seen from the above references in the *Mahābhārata* that the doctrines of Svabhāva, Niyati, Yadrçchā, and Kāla preach a strong determinism, leaving no scope for human effort. The conceptions underlying these different doctrines appear to overlap, and are almost identical with one another. Whether it be the inherent nature of things (Svabhāva or Naturalism), or the inevitable Destiny (Niyati or Fatalism), or some mysterious Will or Whim immanent in things (Yadrçchā or Accidentalism) or whether it be Time (Kāla) which presides over the present, past and future of things—all these agree in that they pre-determine the course of events in this world and in man's life—in fact the whole gamut of existence from birth, growth and decay to final dissolution. The two ideas fundamental to all these doctrines are the impermanence of the world and man, and the negation of human will and effort. The thorough-going determinism of these doctrines is based on crass materialism, according to which everything

21. बहूनीन्द्रसहस्राणि दैतेयानां युगे युगे ।  
अभ्यतीतानि कालेन कालो हि दुरतिक्रमः ॥ (220.41)

22. अयं स पुरुषः इयामो लोकस्य दुरतिक्रमः ।  
बद्ध्वा तिष्ठति मां रौद्रः पशुं रशनया यथा ॥ ib. 82

23. (भवान्) कालचारित्रतत्त्वज्ञः । ib. 105  
कालं पश्यति सुव्यक्तं पाणावमलकं यथा । ib. 104

24. केचित् पुरुषकारं तु प्राहुः कर्मविदो जनाः ।  
दैवमित्यपरे विप्राः स्वभावं भूतचिन्तकाः ॥ XII. 224. 50

25. येभ्यः सृजति भूतानि कालो भावप्रचोदितः ।  
महाभूतानि पञ्चेति तान्याहुर्भूतचिन्तकाः ॥ XII. 267. 4  
विद्धि नारद पञ्चेतान् कालपष्ठान् स्वभावतः ॥ ib. 6

in the world including human life is the product of the Material Elements ( Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Space ) which come together and go off at the behest of Svabhāva, Kāla etc. The eloquent way in which these powers have been described in the above passages suggests that each power is conceived as a mythopoeic personification invested with a will of its own, governing in its supreme sway, the whole course of the world and of human life. It is also, further, significant that these doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla presented in these passages are advocated by or associated with the demons—the enemies of the gods. It probably implies that these doctrines were considered by the redactors of these passages as heterodox or heretical, as emanating from a non-Vedic tradition.

### *The Mythopoeic idea of Time*

Looked at historically, from the point of evolution of ideas, the ideas underlying these doctrines may belong to a very early stage in the history of cosmological thought. Early man, confronted with things and nature-forces around him, experiencing a feeling of an undifferentiated existence or solidarity with them, conceived of them as a living presence endowed with a will. In early man's thinking, a human being was a part of society and society was imbedded in nature and dependent on cosmic forces. Natural phenomena were conceived in terms of human experience and human experience was conceived in terms of cosmic events. Early man felt with his whole being that there was some inherent power endowed with life and will which determined the constitution, nature and the 'shape' of things.<sup>26</sup> This mythopoeic thought, which conceived things as endowed with life and will, also embraced early man's conception of *time* which he conceived not as uniform duration or a sequence of moments but as a power endowed with life and will which governed the days and nights, seasons and the origin, growth and end of things.<sup>27</sup>

26. Vide the following:—

"The world appears to primitive man neither inanimate nor empty but redundant with life; and life has individuality, in man and beast and plant, and in every phenomenon which confronts man—... Any phenomenon may, at any time, face him, not as 'It', but as 'Thou'. In this confrontation, 'Thou' reveals its individuality, its qualities, its will. 'Thou' is not contemplated with intellectual detachment; it is experienced as life confronting life, involving every faculty of man in a reciprocal relationship. Thoughts, no less than acts and feelings, are subordinated to this experience." —*Before Philosophy* by HENRI FRANKFORT, MRS. HENRY FRANKFORT etc. ( Pelican books ) ( p. 14 ).

27. For early man's conception of time, see the following from *Before Philosophy*, loc. cit. p. 32.

"Early man does not abstract a concept of time from the experience of time... Time is experienced in the periodicity and rhythm of man's own life as well as in the life of nature. ... The manifestation of time in nature, the succession of the seasons, and the movements of the heavenly bodies were conceived quite early as the signs of a life-process similar, and related, to that of man. Even so, they are not viewed as 'natural' processes in our sense. When there is change, there is a cause; and a cause, as we have seen, is a will."

These mythopoeic ideas arising at some early stage of development of human thought continued for a long time to have a strong hold on human thinking so that the inherent Nature of things and Time came to be conceived as sovereign rulers of the universe. We find the echoes of such 'substantiation' of Svabhāva and Kāla in the above-mentioned passages of the *Mahābhārata*. As another early instance of the mythopoeic idea of Time gripping the minds of the people, we might refer to the two famous Kāla-hymns (Kāla-Sūktas) of the *Atharvaveda* (XIX. 53 and 54), in which we find graphically enshrined the old idea of Time as the supreme ruler of the Universe.<sup>28</sup>

"He (Time) surely did bring hither all the beings ( worlds ), he surely did encompass all the beings ( worlds ). Being their father, he became their son; there is, verily, no other force, higher than he."<sup>29</sup>

"Time begot yonder heaven, Time also begot these earths. That which was, and that which shall be, urged forth by Time, spreads out."<sup>30</sup>

"By him this (universe) was urged forth, by him it was begotten, and upon him this universe was founded. Time, truly, having become the brahma (spiritual exaltation), supports Parameṣṭhin (the highest lord)."<sup>31</sup>

"... having by means of the brahma (spiritual exaltation) conquered all the worlds, Time, the highest God, forsooth, hastens onward."<sup>32</sup>

As human speculation with regard to the universe and man's place in it progressed, and as human thought grew conscious of its power and formulated such doctrines as the doctrine of the Ātman, of God, of the law of Karma, it freed itself of these mythopoeic ideas, as a result of which the deterministic theories of Svabhāva and Kāla which had served for early man as complete and independent explanations of the nature of the world and of man, came gradually to be looked down upon as emanating from heterodox circles and were consequently thrown into the background. The history of these deterministic theories of Svabhāva, Niyati, Kāla, as far as it can be reconstructed from ancient and early literary sources leads us to conclude that these deterministic doctrines, in certain stages of their development, had come to be associated with non-Vedic sects and were considered as materialistic and as such, repugnant to moral values. We propose to trace here

28. Translation by M. BLOOMFIELD. *Hymns of the Atharvaveda*, S. B. E ( 1897 ), p. 224-225.

29. स एव सं भुवनान्यारभत् स एव सं भुवनानि पर्येत् ।

पिता सन्नभवत् पुत्र एषां तस्माद्देवान्यत्परमस्ति तेजः ॥—Av. XIX. 53-4

30. कालोऽम् दिवमजनयत् काल इमाः पृथिवीरुत् ।  
कालेन भूतं भव्यं चेषितं ह वि तिष्ठते ॥ ib.5

31. तेनेषितं तेन जातं तदु तस्मिन्प्रतिष्ठितम् ।  
कालो ह ब्रह्म भूत्वा विभति परमेष्ठिनम् ॥ ib.9

32. सर्वाल्लोकानभिजित्य ब्रह्मणा ।  
कालः स ईयते प्रथमो नु देवः ॥ ib. XIX. 54-5

a short history of these doctrines from early literary sources, so that it will provide us with a rough historical perspective for the statement of these doctrines in the *Mahābhārata*.

*Svabhāva and Kāla : in the Svetāśvatara*

That these doctrines of Svabhāva, Kāla, Niyati and Yadṛcchā were considered as heretical is implied in the passages of the *Svetāśvataropaniṣad*. Out of the two passages in that Upaniṣad, the one questions the validity of these principles as the cause of the world,<sup>33</sup> and the other calls the protagonists of these doctrines as 'misguided'.<sup>34</sup>

*Makkhali Gosāla*

Perhaps the earliest powerful protagonist of the doctrine of Svabhāva (Naturalism) was Makkhali Gosāla, an eminent contemporary of Buddha. This founder of the non-Vedic Sect called the Ājīvikas held that the characteristics of all things were predetermined and that there was no cause or condition which predetermined them.<sup>35</sup> He did not believe in human effort and held that all creatures were helpless against destiny. "Every being, whatever breathes, every existing, living thing is powerless, strengthless, energyless. Through Fate, Chance and Nature, it experiences joy and sorrow in the six kinds of birth."<sup>36</sup> "As a ball of thread, thrown down, rolls itself off, and goes to the end, even so the fools and the wise, while they wander in the cycle of being, make an end of their misery."<sup>37</sup>

*Moral laxity of the Svabhāvavādins*

The protagonists and the followers of these deterministic doctrines denying the free will of man and his moral responsibility for any good or evil must have, in practice, tended to degenerate into parasites of society, leading a vagrant, idle and immoral life. In fact, Makkhali Gosāla, the champion of this doctrine, in practice, is said to have led an immoral life.<sup>38</sup> Such

33. 'कालः स्वभावो नियतिर्यदृच्छा ... इति चिन्त्यम् । Śv. I. 2

34. 'स्वभावमेके कवयो वदन्ति कालं तथान्ये परिमुह्यमानाः' ib. VI. 1

35. "The essence of Makkhali's system is this, that there is no cause, either proximate or remote, for the depravity of beings or for their purity. They become so without any cause. Nothing depends on one's own efforts or on the efforts of others."

—S. N. DASGUPTA, *A History of Indian Philosophy* I, p. 79-80.

36. vide *Dighanikāya* II. 20 : "सर्वे सत्ता सर्वे पाणा सर्वे भूता सर्वे जीवा अवसा अवला अविरिया नियति-संगति-भाव-परिणता छस्स एवाभिजातिषु सुखदुक्खं परिसंवेदेन्ति."

37. ibid. II. 20 : "सेयत्था पि नाम सुत्तगुळे खित्ते निब्बेठियमानं एव फलेति एवम् एव वाले च पण्डिते च संभावित्वा संसरित्वा दुक्खस्स अन्तं करिस्सन्तीति ॥"

38. See: "Buddha charged him (Gosāla) with incontinency, Mahavira accuses him of teaching that an ascetic commits no sin if he has intercourse with women. He charges his followers with being 'the slaves of women'. To this charge Gosāla laid himself open by his own action in choosing for his headquarters the premises of a woman"

—A. F. R. HOERNLE, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (on 'Ājīvikas') vol. I p. 261,

dubious conduct on the part of the chief protagonist must have led to slackness in morals among his followers and must have been the cause of bringing on the doctrine the disparagement of society.

Viewed in this light, the condemnation of the doctrine implied in the *Svetāśvataropaniṣad* and the fact that the propagation of this doctrine is attributed in the *Mahābhārata* to the kings of the demons become easy to explain. In chapter 218 of the *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Sāntiparvan*, a story is told how the goddess of Sovereignty or Prosperity left Bali the demon-king when the latter fell from Virtue. There is also another story in the *Rājadharmā* section of the *Sāntiparvan* showing how Prahrāda, the king of the demons, having been deprived of morality, was subsequently forsaken by Prosperity. These stories, shorn of their mythological trappings, probably indicate the climate of opinion in which the champions of these deterministic doctrines found themselves.

*The statement of Svabhāvavāda : by (i) Aśvaghōṣa*

The next early statement of the views of the Svabhāvavādins is found in the work of Aśvaghōṣa<sup>39</sup> (c. 1st century A. D.).—"Some explain that good and evil and existence and non-existence originate by natural development ('Svabhāvāt'); and since all this world originates by natural development, again, therefore, effort is vain<sup>40</sup>. . . Who fashions the sharpness of the thorn or the varied nature of beast and bird? All this takes place by natural development ('Svabhāvāt'). There is no such thing in this respect as action of our own will, a fortiori no possibility of effort."<sup>41</sup>—This statement of the views of the Svabhāvavādins—"one of the fullest statements of their position that we have"<sup>42</sup> by Aśvaghōṣa<sup>43</sup> brings out their thorough-going determinism.

(ii) *Paramārtha*

The next important references to the positions of Svabhāvavādins and Kālavādins are found in the Chinese Commentary by Paramārtha (548 A.D.) on the *Sāmkhyakārikā*. Paramārtha under S. *Kārikā* 61 refers to the heretical

39. *Buddhacarita* (IX. 58-62), edited and translated by E. H. JOHNSTON (Calcutta, 1936).

40. केचिस्वभावादिति वर्णयन्ति शुभाशुभं चैव भवाभवौ च ।  
स्वाभाविकं सर्वमिदं च यस्मात् अतोऽपि मोघो भवति प्रयत्नः ॥ ibid. IX. 58.

41. "स्वभावतः सर्वमिदं प्रवृत्तं न कामकारोऽस्ति कुतः प्रयत्नः"—Translation by E. H. JOHNSTON.

42. E. H. JOHNSTON—in the Introduction to the *Buddhacarita*,—loc. cit. (p. liv.)

43. Aśvaghōṣa also refers to Svabhāvavāda and Kālavāda in *Saundaryānanda* XVI. 17.

views which hold that Svabhāva and Kāla are the cause of the world:<sup>44</sup> “Teachers holding that Svabhāva is the cause of the world argue: It is not proper to say that Puruṣa is freed after having seen Prakṛti, because Freedom comes according to Svabhāva. As it is said in a verse previously quoted: ‘He who made the swans white, the parrots green, the peacocks of variegated colour, will provide for us’. Thus the whole world is caused by Svabhāva. There are also texts which say that Kāla or time is the cause of the world. As it is said in the following verse: Kāla brings all creatures to maturity; Kāla withdraws the world; Kāla is awake while the rest are sleeping; it is hard to transgress Kāla.’ Everything happens through Kāla.”

The above-mentioned verse illustrating the doctrine of the Svabhāvavādins is also quoted by Paramārtha under *Kārikā* 27 where he refers to it as coming from the school of materialists, thereby implying that the Svabhāvavādins were considered as a school of the materialists.<sup>45</sup>

(iii) *Sāntarakṣita*

Another important statement of the views of the Svabhāvavādins is found in a Buddhist work—the *Tattvasamgraha* of Sāntarakṣita (A. D. 705-762 A. D.). “The effects are self-existent and are produced neither by different things nor by themselves; for no cause can be found for the filament of the lotus or the eyelike marks on the peacock’s tail. If the cause can not be found, it certainly does not exist. Such is the case with this diversified Universe. Similarly, the feelings of pleasure, pain etc. have no causes, because they appear only at times.”<sup>46</sup>

44. Vide the following from *Suvarṇasaptatiśūtra with a commentary reconstructed into Sanskrit from the Chinese translation of Paramārtha* by N. AIYASWAMI SASTRI (Tirupati, 1944). “अथ स्वभावकारणवादिन आचार्या आहुः । (पुरुषः) प्रकृतिं दृष्ट्वा मुच्यते इतीदं न युज्यते । मोक्षस्य स्वभावबन्धत्वात् । यथाह पूर्व श्लोकः—

येन शुक्लीकृताः हंसाः शुकाश्च हरितीकृताः । मयूराश्चित्रिता येन स नो वृत्तिं विवाश्रयति ॥  
एवं सर्वो लोकः स्वभावकारणकः ।...पुनर्वचनानि सन्ति यत् कालः कारणं भवति इति ।  
यथोक्तं श्लोके—कालः पचति भूतानि कालः संहरते जगत् । कालः सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कालो हि  
दुरतिक्रमः ॥ सर्वाणि कार्याण्यपि कालेन भवन्ति ॥” —p. 88-89.

45. “लोकायतशास्त्र उक्तम् । ‘येन शुक्लीकृता हंसाः etc.’ इदं लोकायतिकवचनम् ।’  
ibid. p. 41.

46. *Tattvasamgraha* of Sāntarakṣita with the commentary of Kamalaśīla, Gaekwad’s Oriental Series. XXX (1926) verses 110-112. The translation is from the Foreword (p-c 1) to the above edition of the *Tattvasamgraha* by BENOYTOSH BHATTACHARYA. The relevant verses are :

सर्वहेतुनिराशंसं भावानां जन्म वर्ण्यते ।  
स्वभाववादिभिस्ते हि नाहुः स्वमपि कारणम् ॥  
राजीवकेसरादीनां वैचित्र्यं कः करोति हि ।  
मयूरचन्द्रकादिर्वा विचित्रः केन निर्मितः ॥  
यथैव कण्टकादीनां तैक्षण्यादिकमहेतुकम् ।  
कादाचित्कतया तद्वदुःखादीनामहेतुता ॥ 110-112. p. 62.

[ Continued on the next page.

(iv) *Gauḍapāda*

Gauḍapāda (c. 800 A. D.)—the grand-preceptor of Shri Śankarācārya, in his *Kārikā*, while alluding to a variety of views regarding the creation of the world, refers to the doctrine of Kāla as one among them<sup>47</sup>.

We have collated above, as far as we could, in a rough historical sequence, a number of passages bearing on the doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla covering a period of over 1500 years from the *Svetāśvataropaniṣad* to the time of the *Tattvasamgraha*. It shows that these doctrines had been developed as complete, independent doctrines to explain the world and human life. They appear to have been regarded as heterodox or different from prevailing beliefs and by some as materialistic. The general trend of thought characterizing the history of these doctrines confirms what we have seen of these doctrines in the passages of the *Mahābhārata*. There, these doctrines, as we have said before, stand apart from the prevailing current of philosophical doctrines in the *Mahābhārata*. The heterodox nature of the doctrines of Kāla and Svabhāva is implied by their being ascribed to the demons.

*The Iranian Doctrine of Zervanism*

An interesting and at the same time, an intriguing parallel to the above doctrines of Kāla, Svabhāva and Niyati is found in the Iranian doctrine of Zervanism. Zervanism regarded *Zurvan* (the Iranian word for ‘Time’) as the ultimate governing principle of the universe. *Zurvan*, according to that doctrine, was intimately associated with Fate, Chance and Nature. Zervanism professed a thorough-going determinism, leaving absolutely no scope for human will and effort. It was also materialistic. *Zurvan*, the god of Time, may have belonged to remote antiquity. On the strength of Iranian sources, it has been definitely established that a religious sect professing Zervanism was dominant in Iran in the beginning of the 3rd century A. D. In order to introduce the readers to the tenets of Zervanism, we quote below a few extracts in extenso from a recent, scholarly study<sup>48</sup> of this subject by Prof. R. C. ZAEHNER of the Oxford University:

[ Continued from the preceding page. ]

Kamalaśīla—the commentator who was the disciple of Sāntarakṣita—commenting on स्वमपि कारणं in the above verse 110, says: “ते (स्वभाववादिनः) एवमाहुः न स्वतो नापि परतो भावानां जन्म...। स्वमिति । स्वरूपम् । अपिशब्दात् पररूपमपि । पूर्वकास्तु स्वभावकारणमिच्छन्ति एते तमपि नेच्छन्ति ।” Thus Kamalaśīla seems to suggest that there were two schools of Svabhāvavādins: One school maintaining at least Svabhāva—‘the nature of the things itself’—as the Cause to the denial of other things as causes, the other school denying even Svabhāva as the cause. The distinction tends to be metaphysical and abstract.

E. H. JOHNSTON in his “Notes on some Pāli words” [ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1931)—pp. 566-568 ] while discussing the word ‘अधिच्च-समुत्पन्न’ points out how the concept underlying this word is identical with Svabhāvavāda. He notes that अहेतुवाद is identified with स्वभाववाद in the Jātakamāla version (XXIII. 17).

47. कालात् प्रसूतिं भूतानां मन्यन्ते कालचिन्तकाः । I. 8.

काल इति कालविदः । II. 24.

48. *Zurvan: a Zoroastrian Dilemma*—R. C. ZAEHNER. (Oxford, 1955 ).

"That heterodox branch of Zoroastrianism which habitually goes by the name of Zervanism differed from the orthodox dualism in that it elevated Time to a supreme position over the powers of good and evil and that it laid great stress on the operations of fate" (p. 265).

"NYBERG long ago suggested that a form of Zervanism might well have existed in its own right—a religion of Time which took no cognizance of Ohrmazd and Ahriman. Our researches seem to substantiate this. The Pahlvi sources tell us of the birth of Cosmos (Spihr) which is the body of the finite Time from the Infinite (p. iii). Material creation evolves from this. Spihr is Primal Matter: from it derives the 'first form', the four elements<sup>49</sup>; thence the 'second form' or the mixing of the primary properties, and finally the 'third form,' man and animals, that is organic life. With the advent of the 'third form' we have the fully developed Cosmos which exists for twelve thousand years<sup>50</sup> when the whole is taken up into the 'last form' or 'final body' (tan i pasēn) which is in turn absorbed into the infinite."

"The Cosmos itself derives from the 'Seed' into which Time enters: Time-space is itself the source of this 'Seed'. Thus the finite Cosmos is represented as having been born from the Infinite and at the appointed moment it will be reabsorbed. In this finite world, Zurvān-Time who is the macrocosm, and as such the fountain-head and source of the human race, continues to manifest himself as natural law and fate. He is quite unconcerned with spiritual values: he is not only the god of nature (cihr) but nature itself. He is the first cause of all physical phenomena, the Absolute conceived of as the origin of primal matter. Even when this purely physical conception of the Universe combines with the genuine Mazdean ethical dualism, Time and Fate continue to control only the physical universe: they have no part in the ethical struggle between good and evil."—p. 266.

"This again is clearly borne out by the testimony of Firdausi who presents us with a purely Zervanite theory of the world of man dominated (p. 267) by Time, Fate and the heavenly bodies. Of salvation and damnation there is not a word."

"This doctrine is, in fact, quite plainly that of the Daharis who derived the whole Cosmos from Infinite Time, denied the existence of spiritual values, of rewards and punishments, heaven and hell (p. 23)."

49. We find an interesting parallel in the already mentioned *Mahābhārata* passage (XII. 217) where Bali, the demon-king who is discoursing to Indra on the all-suzerainty of Kāla (Time) says that the creatures are but the products of the elements (over which Kāla presides):

पृथिवी वायुराकाशमापो ज्योतिश्च पञ्चमम् ।

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि तत्र का परिदेवना ॥ XII. 217.17

50. We find another interesting parallel in the Indian computation of the total number of years which comprise the four Yugas—the Kṛita, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali. In Vyās's discourse to his son Śuka, *Mahābhārata* XII, 224.19 (ff) the number of years calculated for 4 Yugas amounts to 12000 years.

"This form of Zervanism which we may call 'Zervanite materialism' can be deduced from certain passages in the Dēnkart. It is concerned with matter in the Aristotelian sense. Zurvān as the Infinite is simply the source of all matter, and his limitation, regarded as the birth of the finite from the Infinite, is the origin of the universe. The differentiation of the Universe we know is regarded as the imposition of 'form' on undifferentiated 'matter'—p. 267.

"Thus we seem to be driven to the conclusion that Zervanism is a pessimistic a creed as is likely to be found on the surface of the globe. The general impression is one of gloom. In this life, man must be content with his lot, extinguish his passions, and resign himself to fate:—p. 272.

#### *Intriguing parallelism*

The above rather long extracts will show how the tenets of Zervanism are strikingly similar to the inter-related doctrines of Kāla, Svabhāva and Niyati attributed to Bali, Prahrāda and Namuchi in the passages of the *Mahābhārata*. It will be seen that in both there is a similar stress on determinism, negation of human effort and will, on resignation to fate and on materialism.

The parallelism is striking and, as we have said, also intriguing. The *Mahābhārata* passages ascribe the doctrines of Kāla, Svabhāva and Niyati to the kings of the demons. In the literary history of these doctrines, these doctrines were regarded, as we have already seen, as heterodox and materialistic. The similarity with the Iranian doctrine of Zervanism may, perhaps, be considered as indicative of the relations between the Indo-Iranian communities in the prehistoric past. As is testified by the history of the opposite meanings which were acquired by the words Deva and Asura in course of time among the Indian and Iranian communities, there probably arose at some time in the ancient past a schism among the Indo-Iranians which led the Indians and Iranians to view with hostility each other's doctrines and objects of worship. The *Mahābhārata* view that the Kālavāda and the Svabhāvavāda emanated from the demons may, perhaps, be reminiscent of that schism. It is probable that there were some among the Indo-Iranians who professed the deterministic and the materialistic doctrines of Kāla and Svabhāva. After the schism, the group that migrated to India, carried lively memories of those doctrines. Perhaps, there might be among the immigrants some who professed those doctrines. But as religious and philosophical thought in India shaping itself under the influence of Upaniṣadic Brahmaisism or Atmaisism, gradually developed the Sāmkhya and Yoga, as also Vaiṣṇavaite and Śaivite theistic doctrines, the independent doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla still prevailing among their erstwhile brethren and comrades—the Iranians—came to be regarded as heterodox and as such came to be ascribed to the demons.

#### *Refutation of Svabhāva and Kāla*

We have already seen how the author of the *Śvetāśvataropaniṣad* questioned the validity of the doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla. There is



also ample evidence in the Mahābhārata to show that these deterministic doctrines were stoutly opposed by thinkers belonging to the Vedic tradition. For instance, in the *Śukānupraśna* chapter of the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (XII. 229), we find a systematic refutation of the doctrine of Svabhāva. In that passage, Vyāsa in his discourse to his son and disciple Śuka, runs down the Svabhāvavādins and upholds the role of human intelligence and effort. He says: "Those, who say that Svabhāva alone is the final cause of things-winnow but hay and get nothing but chaff. It is knowledge or intelligence which secures human welfares."... "Operations such as tilling the land, harvesting of grain, building houses, making vehicles, laying out gardens and prescribing medicines against illness are devised by men of intelligence. Even the sequence of events ('Pārāvaryam') in creation is, after all, known only by intelligence or knowledge. It is therefore knowledge which is the highest refuge of creation." 51

Similarly, we find a spirited refutation of the Kālavāda in a passage in the 'Pūjani-Brahmadatta-Sāmvāda' in the *Āpad-dharma-parvan* of the *Śāntiparvan* (XII. 137.45-53).

#### *Svabhāva and Kāla incorporated into Vedic tradition*

While some thinkers belonging to the Vedic tradition stoutly opposed Kāla and Svabhāva as an ultimate principle, others adopted a conciliatory 'containing' attitude. They recognized that these doctrines had a certain element of truth in them, though as independent theories of explaining the world, they were preposterous. The material Elements, while conglomerating to make this world, do evince a certain specific tendency or Svabhāva; so also there is seen in the world a priority and a posteriority (Paurvāparya), a certain sequence or order in the events or occurrences in nature and in human affairs, which must be ascribed to the principle of Kāla. They, therefore, realistically conceded a secondary position to these doctrines in their cosmological and cosmogonical schemes. Thus, they took the edge off their heterodoxy, knocked the bottom out of their opposition and finally assimilated them within the Vedic fold. This process is seen in the *Mahābhārata* itself; e. g. in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*, *Pañcaśikha*

51. येषां चैकान्तभावेन स्वभावः कारणं मतम् ।  
पूत्वा तृणबुसीकां वै ते लभन्ते न किञ्चन ॥ 4  
...कृष्यादीनि हि कर्माणि सस्यसंहरणानि च ।  
प्रजावद्धिः प्रकलृप्तानि यानासनगृहाणि च ॥ 7  
आक्रीडानां गृहाणां च गदानाम् अगदस्य च ।  
प्रजावन्तः प्रवक्तारो ज्ञानवद्धिरनुष्ठिताः ॥ 8  
...प्रजा संयोजयत्यर्थः प्रजा श्रेयोऽधिगच्छति । 9  
...पारावर्यं तु भूतानां ज्ञानेनैवोपलभ्यते ।  
विद्यया तात सृष्टानां विद्यैव परमा गतिः ॥ 10

—XII. 229.

in his scheme of 12 principles explaining the composition of the world and of man, includes Svabhāva as one of the principles by which the elements come and stand together and finally dissolve. 52

Again, Sulabhā in her discourse with Janaka propounds a scheme of thirty principles in which she concedes the 20th place to Kāla. 53 In the *Bhagavadgītā* we find outstanding examples of the Svabhāva and Kāla being pressed into the service of the central argument of the poem. Thus Svabhāva approximates, in one place, to Prakṛti 54, to the empirical Brahman as conditioned by Prakṛiti in another 55, and to a disposition as determined by Karma in still another. 56 Similarly Kāla is conceived as an aspect of the Godhead, especially its terrible aspect. 57 and again as calculation of terrestrial time. 58 Similarly, Kāla, in many other passages of the *Mbh.*, represents the time or the moment of the fructification of man's Karma. Thus, when any calamity, disaster or death befalls, or a man acts at a particular moment in a particular way, it is said that such occurrences or events occur under the impulse of Kāla, implying thereby that that particular occurrence or event represents the fructifying moment of the past Karman. 'Kālacodita' 'Impelled by Time' is one of the stock phrases of the *Mahābhārata* in such contexts.

52. घातवः पञ्चशाखोऽयं खं वायुर्ज्योतिरम्बु भूः ।  
ते स्वभावेन तिष्ठन्ति विद्युज्यन्ते स्वभावतः ॥ 7  
...इन्द्रियाणीन्द्रियार्थाश्च स्वभावश्चेतना मनः ।  
प्राणापानौ विकारश्च घातवश्चात्र निःसृताः ॥ 9 XII. 212

Propos of this topic, it may be mentioned that Prof. E. FRAUWALLNER [ ' Untersuchungen zum Mokṣadharmā: Die Sāṃkhyistichen Texte', *WZKM*, Band 32. Wien (1925) p. 194 ] has brought out the significance of Svabhāva in such passages of the *Mahābhārata* as the above in the following words: "If we try to ascertain the meaning of the passages where Svabhāva occurs, we see that the word is used predominantly in those places where the Atman's remaining untouched (' unberührtheit ') and its inactivity as against Matter is described. Especially explicitly this is shown in the piece XII. 222 (cr. ed. 215) where the theme is formed by this idea." XII. 222 (cr. ed. 215) is the passage setting forth the Svabhāvavāda of Prahrāda, which we have already summarized in the beginning.

53. ऊर्ध्वम् एकोनविंशत्याः कालो नामापरो गुणः ।  
इतीमं विद्धि विंशत्या भूतानां प्रभवाप्ययम् ॥ XII. 308, 109
54. *Bhagavadgītā* 5:14.
55. ib. 8:3.
56. ib. 17:2; 18:41. OTTO STRAUSS in his *Ethische Probleme aus dem Mahābhārata* deals with the doctrines of Kāla, Svabhāva and Niyati, under 'Pessimism'. He says: "The two main pillars of Epic Pessimism are Perishability and want of Freedom." (p. 25). As illustrations, he discusses the doctrines of Kāla, Svabhāva, Vidhāna or Vidhi in the Epic. While tracing the changes in the connotations of the word Svabhāva, he notes (p. 51-52), how Svabhāva from its individual sense of 'Specific character of an individual' and group sense of 'character of a group' assumes the cosmic sense of the special character of the empirical world.

57. *Bg.* XI. 32.  
58. ib. X. 30

## Summary of Conclusions

We have traced above, in broad outline, a short history of the doctrines of Svabhāva-vāda and Kāla-vāda with the *Mahābhārata* passages (especially in the *Mokṣadharmaparvan*) as the starting and also the leading point of our inquiry. The broad conclusions, to which our inquiry leads, may be summarized as follows:

(i) The doctrines of Svabhāva, Kāla, Niyati—every one of them independently claiming to explain the universe and man's place therein—arose very early—at least five or six centuries before the Christian era. Makkhali Gosāla, the contemporary of Buddha and Mahāvira, was one of the earliest Svabhāvavādins.

(ii) These doctrines preached a thorough-going determinism which was a negation of human will and effort. They were considered as materialistic and heterodox and as emanating from non-Vedic sources.

(iii) A theoretical profession of these doctrines most probably led, in actual practice, to laxity in morals among their protagonists and adherents. They were regarded with disfavour by thinkers belonging to the Vedic tradition. The fact that the *Mahābhārata* passages attribute the promulgation of these doctrines to the leaders of the demons suggests that these doctrines were regarded as heterodox and stemming from non-Vedic sources.

(iv) The doctrine of the Kālavāda finds a striking parallel in the old-Iranian doctrine of Zervanism. Before the 3rd century A. D., there was prevalent in Irān a religious doctrine named Zervanism which elevated Time to the position of the Supreme God who was also the God of Fate and Chance. Zervanism was a thoroughly deterministic creed negating human will and effort. The striking parallelism between the Kālavāda and Zervanism leads us to conjecture that both in their early forms may have had a common source. The hostility with which the Vedic Indians came to view the doctrines and the gods of the non-Vedic Iranians was probably the reason why the Kāla-vāda and the Svabhāva-vāda were attributed to the demons, as we find it in the passages of the *Mahābhārata*.

(v) The successive thinkers belonging to the Vedic tradition condemned these doctrines of the Kālavāda and Svabhāva-vāda as they meant negation of man's free will and moral responsibility, and established against them the relative supremacy of human intelligence, of human effort and of the law of Karma.

(vi) Gradually, however, the doctrines of the Kālavāda and the Svabhāva-vāda were incorporated and assimilated in the general current of the Vedic tradition, after being assigned a minor, secondary place in the scheme of the philosophical and religious schools. We find this process already at work in the *Mahābhārata*.

## \* The Conception of Mantra-Devatā (An Exegesis and an Exposition)

by

G. K. Bhat

(I)

The hymns of the *Rgveda* are addressed to various 'deities'. So far as Agni, Indra, Varuṇa etc. are concerned there is no difficulty in understanding them as deities, with the implied attribute of 'divinity'. But there are purely secular objects like *grāvāṇā* (pressing stones), *akṣa* (dice), animals like *aśva* (horse), objects like *ratha* (chariot), *iṣudhi* (quiver), abstract concepts like *śraddhā* (faith), to which the Vedic poets address themselves either in whole or a part of a hymn or in single verses. In what sense are these latter to be called 'devatās'? The question does not present any difficulty to a modern student of the *Rgveda* who is prepared to understand the term *devatā* in the simple sense of the 'subject of a hymn', or the 'object to which a hymn is addressed'. But the designation of ordinary objects like the above by the term *devatā* has occasioned an interesting discussion in the ancient exegesis of the Veda. The object of this writing is to examine this discussion, correct the interpretation where necessary and discover, if possible, the circumstances that occasioned the discussion.

(II)

- A. The word 'devatā' itself occurs 12 or 13 times in the *Rgveda*:
- (1) In connection with Agni: RV. IV. 58.10 (*ghṛta-stuti*), VI. 4.7, VII. 1.23; (3)
  - (2) In connection with Indra: RV. I. 55.3, I. 100.15, I. 165.9 VII. 85.3 (with Varuṇa), VIII. 3.14, X. 49.4 (Vaikuṇṭha-Indra) (6)
  - (3) With reference to Aśvinā: RV. IV. 44.2; (1)
  - (4) With reference to Savitr: RV. I. 22.5; (1)
  - (5) With reference to Dyāvāpṛthivi: RV. VI. 70.5; (1)
  - (6) General reference: RV. *Khila*, I. 191.4. (1)

In all these cases the allusion is to the omniscience or might or the power to bestow gifts of wealth; and thus, there is no doubt about the attribution of divinity.

The form 'devatātā' occurs in RV. I. 128.2 (in connection with Agni and the path of *Rta*); in RV. VII. 1.6 (in connection with Savitr and Bhaga); in RV. VII. 7.8 and 38.7 (where the *vājinaḥ*, horses, are referred to).

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