

THE SIX SYSTEMS  
OF  
INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

BY THE

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NEW IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON

FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK

BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS

1919

## PREFACE.

IT is not without serious misgivings that I venture at this late hour of life to place before my fellow-workers and all who are interested in the growth of philosophical thought throughout the world, some of the notes on the Six Systems of Indian Philosophy which have accumulated in my note-books for many years. It was as early as 1852 that I published my first contributions to the study of Indian philosophy in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*. My other occupations, however, and, more particularly, my preparations for a complete edition of the Rig-Veda, and its voluminous commentary, did not allow me at that time to continue these contributions, though my interest in Indian philosophy, as a most important part of the literature of India and of Universal Philosophy, has always remained the same. This interest was kindled afresh when I had to finish for the Sacred Books of the East (vols. I and XV) my translation of the Upanishads, the remote sources of Indian philosophy, and especially of the Vedânta-philosophy, a system in which human speculation seems to me to have reached its very acme. Some of the other systems of Indian philosophy also have from time to time roused the curiosity of scholars and philosophers in Europe and America, and in India itself a revival of philosophic and theosophic studies, though not always well directed, has taken place, which, if it leads to a more active co-operation between European and Indian

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

*First printed 8vo, June, 1899.*  
*New Edition, Cr. 8vo, in the Collected Edition of*  
*Prof. Max Müller's Works, October, 1903.*  
*Reprinted, January, 1912; March, 1916; September, 1919.*

was originally embodied in the lord of created things (Pragâpati) and the maker of all things (Visvakarman). In spite of their mythological disguises, these modern gods have always retained in the eyes of the more enlightened of their worshippers traces of the character of omnipotence that was assigned even in Vedic times to the one supreme god, the god above all gods.

**Brahman, Âtman, Tad Ekam.**

We have now to take another step in advance. By the side of the stream of thought which we have hitherto followed, we see in India another powerful movement which postulated from the first more than a god above, yet among, other gods. In the eyes of more thoughtful men every one of the gods, called by a personal and proper name, was limited *ipso facto*, and therefore not fit to fill the place which was to be filled by an unlimited and absolute power, as the primary cause of all created things. No name that expressed ideas connected with the male or female sex, not even Pragâpati or Visvakarman, was considered as fit for such a being, and thus we see that as early as the Vedic hymns it was spoken of as Tad Ekam, that One, as neither male nor female, that is, as neuter. We come across it in the hymn of Dîrghatamas (I, 164, 6<sup>1</sup>), where, after asking who he was that established these six spaces of the world, the poet asks, 'Was it perhaps the One (neuter), in the shape of the Unborn (masc.)?' This should be read in connection with the famous forty-sixth verse:—

'They call (it) Indra, Mitra and Varuna, Agni: then (comes) the heavenly bird Garutman; *that which is the One*, the poets call in many ways, they call it Agni, Yama, Mâtarisvan.'

Here we see the clear distinction between the One that is named and the names, that is, the various gods, and again between the One without form or the unborn, that

<sup>1</sup> This hymn, the author of which is called Dîrghatamas, i.e. Long Darkness, is indeed full of obscure passages. It has been explained by Haug (Vedische Râthselfragen und Râthselfprüche, 1875) and more successfully by Deussen, in his Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie, p. 108, but it still contains much that has to be cleared up.

is, the unmanifested, and those who established the whole world. This One, or the Unborn, is mentioned also in X, 82, 6, where we read 'The One is placed in the nave of the unborn where all beings rested.' Again in a hymn to the Visve Devas, III, 54, 8, the poet, when speaking of heaven and earth, says:—

'They keep apart all created things, and tremble not, though bearing the great gods; the One rules over all that is unmoving and that moves, that walks or flies, being differently born.'

The same postulated Being is most fully described in hymn X, 129, 1, of which I likewise gave a translation in my 'History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature' (1859), p. 569. It has been frequently translated since, but the meaning has on the whole remained much the same.

**Nâsadiya Hymn.**

1. There was then neither what is nor what is not, there was no sky, nor the heaven which is beyond. What covered? Where was it, and in whose shelter? Was the water the deep abyss (in which it lay)?

2. There was no death, hence was there nothing immortal. There was no light (distinction) between night and day. That One breathed by itself without breath, other than it there has been nothing.

3. Darkness there was, in the beginning all this was a sea without light; the germ that lay covered by the husk, that One was born by the power of heat (Tapas).

4. Love overcame it in the beginning, which was the seed springing from mind; poets having searched in their heart found by wisdom the bond of what is in what is not.

5. Their ray which was stretched across, was it below or was it above? There were seed-bearers, there were powers, self-power below, and will above.

6. Who then knows, who has declared it here, from whence was born this creation? The gods came later than this creation, who then knows whence it arose?

7. He from whom this creation arose, whether he made it or did not make it, the Highest Seer in the highest heaven, he forsooth knows; or does even he not know?

There are several passages in this hymn which, in spite of much labour spent on them by eminent scholars, remain as obscure now as they were to me in 1859. The poet himself is evidently not quite clear in his own mind, and he is constantly oscillating between a personal and impersonal or rather superpersonal cause from whence the uni-

verse emanated. But the step from a sexual to a sexless god, from a mythological *πρώτος* to a metaphysical *πρώτον*, had evidently been made at that early time, and with it the decisive step from mythology to philosophy had been taken. It is strange to meet with this bold guess in a collection of hymns the greater part of which consists of what must seem to us childish petitions addressed to the numerous Devas or gods of nature. Even the question which in Europe was asked at a much later date, where the Creator could have found a *πῶς οὐρανὸν* for creating the world out of matter or out of nothing, had evidently passed through the minds of the Vedic seers when they asked, Rv. X, 81, 2 and 4: 'What was the stand, what was the support, what and how was it, from whence the all-seeing Visvakarman produced by his might the earth and stretched out the sky?' These startling outbursts of philosophic thought seem indeed to require the admission of a long continued effort of meditation and speculation before so complete a rupture with the old conception of physical gods could have become possible. We must not, however, measure every nation with the same measure. It is not necessary that the historical progress of thought, whether religious or philosophical, should have been exactly the same in every country, nor must we forget that there always have been privileged individuals whose mind was untrammelled by the thoughts of the great mass of the people, and who saw and proclaimed, as if inspired by a power not themselves, truths far beyond the reach of their fellow men. It must have required considerable boldness, when surrounded by millions who never got tired of celebrating the mighty deeds achieved by such Devas as Agni, Indra, Soma, Savitri, or Varuna, to declare that these gods were nothing but names of a higher power which was at first without any name at all, called simply Tad Ekam, that One, and afterwards addressed by such dark names as Brahman and Atman. The poets who utter these higher truths seem fully conscious of their own weakness in grasping them. Thus, in I, 167, 5 and 6, the poet says:—

'As a fool, ignorant in my own mind, I ask for the hidden places of the

gods; the sages, in order to weave, stretched the seven strings over the newborn calf<sup>1</sup>.

'Not having discovered I ask the sages who may have discovered, not knowing, in order to know: he who supported the six skies in the form of the unborn—was he perchance that One?'

And again in ver. 4 of the same hymn:—

'Who has seen the firstborn, when he who had no bones (no form) bears him that has bones (form)? Where is the breath of the earth, the blood, the self? Who went to one who knows, to ask this?'

In all this it is quite clear that the poets themselves who proclaimed the great truth of the One, as the substance of all the gods, did not claim any inspiration *ab extra*, but strove to rise by their own exertions out of the clouds of their foolishness towards the perception of a higher truth. The wise, as they said, had perceived in their heart what was the bond between what is and what is not, between the visible and the invisible, between the phenomenal and the real, and hence also between the individual gods worshipped by the multitude, and that One Being which was free from the character of a mere Deva, entirely free from mythology, from parentage and sex, and, if endowed with personality at all, then so far only as personality was necessary for will. This was very different from the vulgar personality ascribed by the Greeks to their Zeus or Aphrodite, nay even by many Jews and Christians to their Jehovah or God. All this represented an enormous progress, and it is certainly difficult to imagine how it could have been achieved at that early period and, as it were, in the midst of prayers and sacrifices addressed to a crowd of such decidedly personal and mythological Devas as Indra and Agni and all the rest. Still it was achieved; and whatever is the age when the collection of our Rig-veda-samhitâ was finished, it was before that age that the conviction had been formed that there is but One, One Being, neither male nor female, a Being raised high above all the conditions and limitations of personality and of human nature,

<sup>1</sup> This calf seems meant for the year, and in the seven strings we might see a distant recollection of a year of seven seasons; see Galen, v. 347. Pragâpati is often identified with the year.

and nevertheless the Being that was really meant by all such names as Indra, Agni, Matarisvan, nay even by the name of Praṅgāpati, lord of creatures. In fact the Vedic poets had arrived at a conception of the Godhead which was reached once more by some of the Christian philosophers of Alexandria, but which even at present is beyond the reach of many who call themselves Christians.

Before that highest point of religious speculation was reached, or, it may be, even at the same time, for chronology is very difficult to apply to the spontaneous intuitions of philosophical truths, many efforts had been made in the same direction. Such names as Brahman and Ātman, which afterwards became so important as the two main supports of Vedānta-philosophy, or Purusha, the name of the transcendent soul as used in the Sāṃkhya system, do not spring into life without a long previous incubation.

#### Brahman, its various Meanings.

If then we find Brāhman used as another name of what before was called Tad Ekam, That One, if later on we meet with such questions as—

‘Was Brahman the first cause? Whence are we born? By what do we live? Whither are we hastening? By whom constrained do we obtain our lot in life whether of happiness or of misery, O ye knowers of Brahman? Is time, is the nature of things, is necessity, is accident, are the elements, or is Purusha to be considered the source?’

We naturally ask, first of all, whence came these names? What did Brāhman mean so as to become fit to signify τὸ ὄντως ὄν? It is curious to observe how lightly this question has been answered<sup>1</sup>. Brāhman, it was said by Dr. Haug, means prayer, and was derived from the root Barh or Br̥ih, to swell or to grow, so that originally it would have meant what swells or grows. He then assigned to Brāhman the more abstract meaning of growth and welfare, and what causes growth and welfare, namely sacred songs. Lastly, he assigned to Brāhman the meaning

<sup>1</sup> M. M., Theosophy, p. 240.

of force as manifested in nature, and that of universal force as the Supreme Being. I confess I can see no continuity in this string of thought. Other scholars, however, have mostly repeated the same view. Dr. Muir starts from Brāhman in the sense of prayer, while with the ordinary change of accent Brahmán means he who prays.

Here the first question seems to be how Brāhman could have come to mean prayer. Prof. Roth maintained that Brāhman expressed the force of will directed to the gods; and he gave as the first meaning of Brāhman, ‘*Die als Drang und Fülle des Gemüths auftretende und den Göttern zustrebende Andacht*,’ words difficult to render into intelligible English. The second meaning, according to him, is a sacred or magic formula; then sacred and divine words, opposed to ordinary language; sacred wisdom, holy life; lastly, the absolute or impersonal god. These are mighty strides of thought, but how are they to be derived one from the other?

Prof. Deussen (p. 10) sees in Brāhman ‘prayer,’ the lifting up of the will above one’s own individuality of which we become conscious in religious meditation. I must confess that here too there seem to be several missing links in the chain of meanings. Though the idea of prayer as swelling or exalted thought may be true with us, there is little, if any, trace of such thoughts in the Veda. Most of the prayers there are very matter-of-fact petitions, and all that has been said of the swelling of the heart, the elevation of the mind, the fervid impulse of the will, as expressed by the word Brāhman, seems to me decidedly modern, and without any analogies in the Veda itself. When it is said that the hymns make the gods grow (*Vridh*), this is little more than what we mean by saying that they magnify the gods (Deussen, l. c., p. 245). Even if a more profound intention were supposed to be necessary for the word Brāhman in the sense of prayer, there would be nothing to prevent its having originally grown out of Brāhman in the sense of word. Of course we cannot expect perfect certainty in a matter like this, when we are trying to discover the almost imperceptible transitions by which a root which expresses the idea of growing forth