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VEDIC COSMOGONY AND VIṢṢNUTE BHAKTI

There are, not only in the eyes of the traditionalistic Indians themselves but also from an objective point of view, and in spite of theories to the contrary, many arguments for the thesis that the Indian culture which is expressed in and reflected by an uninterrupted literary production from the Ṛgveda onward is an continuum. While transforming and rejuvenating itself this uninterruptedly continued culture has always been subject to processes of adaptation and assimilation. There is no denying that typical features of the Indian culture of the Hindu period of say the last twenty centuries have developed from Vedic beginnings. For instance, the eager desire to be freed from the impending dangers of death and other worldly ills, the strong desire to attain the ideal of final emancipation, was already known to Vedic man in the period preceding the early Upaniṣads in which the relevant ideas came to be more developed and systematized. This continuance of important fundamental ideas can also very well be demonstrated by a study of one of the main Vedic solutions of the problem of the origin of the universe and its most important implications, which, after an introduction on the Vedic philosophical speculations concerning cosmogony in general, will be the first subject of these lectures.

It may, to begin with, be recalled that Vedic man provided an explanation for all processes in the universe, in nature and the world of men, by means of the hypothesis of the existence and activity of innumerable powers that could co-operate, exert influence upon each other or obstruct each other in functioning. These powers of manifold function and character could be viewed as persons or as substances or also as mere functions. These distinctions were vague and not essential. Nor was there much difference between what we would call natural and what in our opinion is supernatural, between qualities or attributes and their bearers, between what in our opinion is concrete and what is abstract, between spirit and matter, between animated and inanimate, between what is alive and what is lifeless. Often these powers had a name and

some of them acquired a reputation or mythological status as gods (*deva*) or demons. The collective activity of these powers—which mainly existed in their functions and functioning—keeps the processes in the universe going on and rules the destinies of men.

Man on his part possesses a very mighty means that enables him to influence the powers, to stimulate or propitiate them when they are believed to be persons or to activate or thwart them when they have no personality. This means is the ritual, the ritual technique. This ritual is considered the mightiest and most important human activity. The Vedic Indians were convinced that those who know to execute appropriate rites in the correct way could achieve almost anything and regulate for instance the processes in nature. It is however clear that a successful performance of the rites is only possible if two requirements are fulfilled. First, one must in every case know the powers which have to be influenced, their functions or sphere of action and their mutual relations, and secondly one must in every individual case employ the adequate ritual, the most effective special method. The discussion of these points is the double purpose of the authors of the voluminous prose works known as *brāhmaṇas*. The aim of the compilers is not to describe the practically all-powerful sacrificial rites from which all their discussions start and on which everything including the secondary themes of their books hinges. Their very aim is to explain the origin, meaning and *raison d'être* of the ritual acts, to prove their validity, the significance and suitability of the mantras (texts, formulas) used as well as the mutual relations of the acts and their connexions with the phenomenal reality. This means that the rites and ceremonies gave these authors occasion for speculative thought which was first and foremost to justify the ritual and to show their indispensability. Thus the authors of the *brāhmaṇas* endeavoured to expound systems of ritualistic speculations in order to explain, as far as man's interests are concerned, the world and the powers operating in it, and to establish the methods of controlling, or at least exerting influence upon, these powers by means of the ritual which, if properly understood and accurately performed, could, they believed, save man from evil and misfortune in this world and the beyond.

Now, the belief in the efficacy of the rites was founded on the conviction that all things, events and phenomena are connected with one another; that it is possible to detect these connexions; that there exist correspondences between ritual acts and the natural forces and supernatural influences; that it must be possible to maintain beneficial relations with the supra-mundane sacred order and that this possibility was most appropriately realized through ritual institutions; that knowledge of, that means power over, some ritual or phenomenal fact enables the man who knows and performs a rite perfectly to exert influence upon the unseen powers and all phenomena with which they are connected or correlated. This conviction made them establish a complicated system of macrocosmic-microcosmic correspondences and liturgic-

cosmical equivalences. These equivalences and attempts at explaining the relations between the ritual acts and their effects in the universe or in the sphere of the divine are mostly expressed in the form of homologies and identifications, that is to say as equations in terms of a more or less consistent classification system. And as such they are the key-stone of the brāhmaṇic science. Known only to the initiate—or as the brāhmaṇas have it—to « the one who knows » the discussion of these connexions and relations between man and the human world on one hand and the powers in the universe and the Unseen on the other as well as the relations between definite ritual acts and the powers and processes in the cosmos—collectively called the *bandhus*, that is « relations »—is one of the most prominent and characteristic features of these works. The authors provided the priests with systematic collections of relations, connexions, and equivalences and with the relevant theory. This knowledge enabled the priests to produce by ritual means effects upon the macrocosmic powers and processes and so to promote human interests, especially those of their patrons who commissioned them. These interests varied between such daily and bodily needs as food, health, possessions and the fulfilment of all wishes, continuance of life, redemption from death or survival in the beyond. So mighty is the ritual that it does not only regulate cosmic power and elevate man; it is also indispensable for the gods, who owe their authority to it. The ritual which must be repeated periodically because it is correlated with the periodical cosmic and natural processes is the means par excellence of regulating these processes so as to serve man's interests best; at the same time a method to transmute the profane into the sacred, to purify, transform and transubstantiate those who have it performed. It is finally interesting to notice that the discussion of the ritual theory in the brāhmaṇas which as a rule is carried on with minuteness and intricate argumentation does not always avoid speculative digressions. Here indeed we find serious and systematic attempts at explaining the world and its processes; here lie the roots of Indian philosophical thought.

It was moreover considered most important that the one who performed a potent ritual was fully acquainted with its potency, its significance and its origin, that is the occasion in the mythical past on which it was instituted and the purpose for which it was instituted. Thus the circles of those who composed the brāhmaṇas cultivated a sense of the value and importance of higher knowledge which was to remain one of the characteristics of Indian religion and of the Indian civilization in general. This belief in the great value of knowledge made the philosophical speculations of the upaniṣads and the later philosophical systems possible. But we should remember that this knowledge first and foremost meant power and that it pursued practical objects. Religion is in the traditional view of the Indian experts that endeavour which aims at man's well-being in this world and the beyond, and philosophy that branch of knowledge which tries to understand, explain

and demonstrate the correctness of the views and ways which have been intuitively and by way of inspiration found by the sages of antiquity.

Now among the many powers some are much more important, have a more influential function, than others. There are for instance *ṛta* (Universal [cosmic] Order and [in the human sphere] truth), *satya* (being, existence, reality); *brahman*. And these also have their places in the great classification system. For instance, *brahman* is not only occasionally identified with the sun, but also with *ṛta* and *satya*. This identification of high and general concepts or principles meant a reduction of the multitude and manifoldness of the more important powers. Moreover, the continual identification of powers that one thought to control with other powers which one desired to influence led the teachers and authors to raise the following question: If it is true that there exist interrelations between all the powers in the universe, if it is true that these can be identified and that by identifying them with one another we can control also those that hitherto were beyond our reach and beyond control, is it then not possible to find one fundamental principle, one superpower which is connected with all other powers, principles, or phenomena and on which all others depend? Is it not possible to gain an insight into the nature of that principle, possible to learn to know that with the result that we can exert influence upon all other principles?

Now it is interesting to see that already in the Ṛgveda, and also in mainly mythological contexts, there was a tendency to seek after the ultimate reality, after one single principle in which the universe, all existence, all beings and phenomena may be regarded to be one and on which all phenomenal reality depends. Thus, one of the most profound and difficult texts of the Ṛgveda, the long poem 1, 164 which attests to an ability to express philosophical thought in the outward form of beautiful images, parables and allegories contains a passage (39-46) which deals with the problem of the absolute. It is not possible to discuss these difficult stanzas thoroughly but one of them must be mentioned. The poet more or less implicitly raises the question as to whether Speech is the One Real from which emanated the unorganized material of the universe and the sacrificial ritual which is needed to organize it. But in the next stanza the same poet states that « they call it Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni. What is the One is given many names. The inspired sages (*viprāḥi*) give it manifold names, viz. Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan ». From this place it may be inferred that the problem was much discussed and that the sages had proposed different answers in the mythological sphere. Another poet (8, 58, 2) furnishes his hearers with a brief elucidation or argumentation: It is only one fire that is kindled in many ways (and places), only one sun which (with its rays) penetrates all existence; only one dawn which shines in this whole world. Verily, the One (One principle) has become manifest in and pervades this All (the whole universe). The verb which I translate by « has become manifest in and pervades » is the perfect *vi-babhūva*. It

is worth noticing that from the same root *vi-bhū-* derives the adjective *vibhu* which is frequently used to express such ideas as « far extending or all-pervading, mighty », which in the Ṛgveda is found to characterize great gods (Agni, Indra and others) and later is one of the epithets of Viṣṇu. The poet of 3, 54, 8 dwelling on the fact that heaven and earth bear or contain all creatures, even the great gods, arrives at the conclusion that there must be an *Ekam*, One ultimate principle, « which rules everything moving and stable, everything going and flying, the manifold and manifoldly born ».

Sometimes however a poet prefers a masculine form for « the One » to the neuter *ekam*. Both ways of referring to the Ultimate Source or Foundation of all existence are to remain usual up to the present day: modern Indians in discussing these problems and using words such as *brahman*, the Lord, God often pronounce the pronouns « he » and « it » alternately. A striking instance is already found in RV. 1, 164, 6 where the question of the Original One is to a certain extent raised in a more abstract form. In this stanza the poet asks: « What is then the One in the form of the Unborn that supports all six spaces of the universe (viz. the three heavenly regions and the three terrestrial regions) and keeps them apart? » The word used for « the One » is *ekam*, a neuter form but the words which I translate by « that supports » are in the Sanskrit text *vi yas tastambha*, that is « who (masculine) supports ». What however strikes us is that the ideas which these poets formed of a personal One were diverse and rather vague. The poet who in 3, 54, 8 spoke of the One that rules everything moving and so on continues in stanza 9: « From of old I know that ancient One from a distance: that is our descent from the great Father, the generator », adding that between that Father and the present world are the gods who pay homage to the Father.

The author of 10, 81 and 82 wrestles with the problem. On the one hand there is in this poem a clearly monotheistic tendency. Viśvakarman, literally « the maker of everything »—a god who elsewhere functions as the creator of heaven and earth—is here eulogized as the creator of the universe (10, 81, 1 ff.) and the only god (10, 81, 3), whose activity is described in four images, namely those of the priest or officiant who performs his task by means of a sacrifice, of the potter, the smith and the architect, and also (10, 81, 1; 82, 3) called « our Father ». He is, further, identified with the Unborn, the first germ borne by the primeval waters, in which—in the view of this poet—is fixed the One (*ekam*, neuter), the source of all worlds and their inhabitants (10, 82, 6). In those stanzas in which the source of all existence is described as a personal creator he is said to have eyes, mouths, arms and feet on all sides and the question is raised of the material out of which heaven and earth were fashioned. Another problem is not suppressed: where was he standing when he was performing his task, the work of creation? As to his relation to the impersonal One, after stating, by way of recapitulation, that Viśvakarman is pre-eminently

intelligent and powerful the poet abruptly adds (in the same stanza, 10, 82, 2): « There is the fulfilment of your wishes, where, as they say, is the One beyond the seven *ṛsis* »; the seven *ṛsis* are probably the constellation of the seven stars near the north pole, the Great Bear. « The fulfilment of our wishes » seems to point to the heaven of the blessed which then is located, together with the One, on the other side of the firmament. And in stanza 5 and 6 the poet recurs to the subject of the One. That which is beyond the heavens and beyond the earth, beyond the gods, and which the waters received as the first germ, and in which all the gods were seen together is this one; but here also the poet first uses a neuter pronoun and continues with the masculine *tam*: « Him the waters received as the first germ ». But then there follows: In the navel of the Unborn (masculine or neuter: *ajasya*) is the One (neuter: *ekam*) placed on which rest all the worlds and their inhabitants. Navel: as is well known the navel often plays a prominent part in speculations with respect to the origin of life or of the universe. It is not only a central place and place of origin, but also the place where things created, for instance the earth, were thought to be connected with their heavenly origin. It may be recalled that at later times Brahmā, the demiurge, that is the creative agent who fashioned the world, was represented as having been born from the navel of Viṣṇu, the Lord and Unborn, Eternal God.

As to the idea of the germ which was received by the waters this recurs in the famous poem RV. 10, 121, the so-called hymn to the unnamed god, because every stanza except the last ends with the question: « To what god shall we pay homage with oblation? » This poem—which perhaps contains some verbal reminiscences of one of the most beautiful hymns of the Ṛgveda, the clearly henotheistic one addressed to Indra 2, 12—gives an impressive description of a demiurge who is the creator, animator and ruler of the universe. The initial stanza runs as follows: « In the beginning was evolved the Golden Germ (*Hiranyagarbha*; the word is masculine), born it (the text has of course “ he ”) was the sole lord (*patih*) of all existence. He has established heaven and earth. To what god shall we pay homage with oblation? » In the following stanzas this unknown *Hiranyagarbha* is described as the giver of life, the giver of strength; as the one whose command all attend, even the gods; of whom life and death are the reflexion; who by his greatness has even been the sole lord of the world that blinks and breathes; who rules over these two-footed and four-footed beings and so on. The whole poem is a eulogy upon the primeval Golden Germ which is the creator, maintainer and ruler of all beings and everything existent.

Now it may be permitted to digress for a moment on the *Hiranyagarbha* conception¹ which has curiously enough long been neglected

1. See J. GONDA, *Background and variants of the Hiranyagarbha conception*, in *Studies in Indo-Asian art and culture*, III (Raghu Vira Commemoration Volume, New Delhi, 1974), p. 39.

by those authors who discussed the problems of the Vedic cosmogonic hymns. It is an undeniable fact that the Vedic Indians were deeply convinced of the unity of all fire, light and the sun, the source of light: all fire moreover was represented by the god Agni. Further they were of the opinion that there exists a close relation between the complex of ideas represented by this god and by fire and light on one hand and what we might call the « vital principle » on the other. Finally, the Vedic authors regarded gold as identical with fire and light and as intimately associated with divinity, calling it Agni's seed and considering it a manifestation of life and especially of continuance of life, the so-called immortality, and as a means of deification. On the other hand, Agni was believed to have originated in the waters. So was Hiranya-garbha, the Golden Germ. This Golden Germ however is not the only conception which these Vedic authors formed, in connection with this relation between gold and the vital principle, of the creation of the universe. We also find the conception of the Golden Egg from which Prajāpati arose (ŚB. 11, 1, 6, 1)²; that of the Puruṣa becoming Prajāpati and creating the waters with the Egg: ŚB. 6, 1, 1, 5 ff. where it reads: « That same Person (Puruṣa) became Prajāpati (that is the lord of generation). And that Person who became Prajāpati is this very Agni, that is the great fireplace, which (the text has " who ") is now (to be) built... Now this Puruṣa Prajāpati desiring to reproduce himself first created, by means of austerity (*tapas*), brahman (neuter), the triple Veda, which became a firm foundation for him and therefore is the firm foundation of everything here ». Then out of the Word of the Veda he created the waters. Thereupon, desirous of being reproduced out of these waters, he entered them with the threefold Veda. Then an egg arose. From this egg Agni came into existence. And so on. The belief in a divine presence in a golden cover seems to have been no less current than the ritual realization of birth or rebirth in a vessel consisting of that metal. A man who had been missing but returns alive after his death had been presumed had to undergo a ritual rebirth: he was shut up in a golden vessel just like a king who wished to secure his union with Hiranyagarbha³. Another idea conceived, in this connexion, with regard to Agni, an idea which appears also when there is question of Prajāpati, is that of his phenomenal incompleteness in the ratio three: one. Only one fourth of the divinity becomes manifest. This idea, which was to have a great future, is in connexion with Agni also put into words in ŚB. 1, 2, 3, 1 ff. where the god is said to have had four forms, three of which passed away.

2. Later texts do not always reflect later ideas. I am not convinced of the correctness of the view that the Golden Germ necessarily is a preliminary concept or prelude to the Golden Egg (thus e.g. K. F. GELDNER, *Der Rig-Veda übersetzt*, Cambridge Mass., 1951, III, p. 347 and L. RENOU, *Hymnes spéculatifs du Veda*, Paris, 1956, p. 252).

3. See GONDA, *Background*, p. 49.

I now turn to the cosmogonic hymn 10, 129 which has rightly been called the most profound, most coherent and least incomplete R̥gvedic poem dealing with the creation of the universe and allied subjects. Succinct and carefully worded it heralds highly important ideas that will be systematically elaborated in later periods. Tracing all things to one principle and declaring opposites such as day and night, death and continuance of life to be the self-unfoldment of this One it expresses the quintessence of monism. I quote the two initial stanzas: « There was not the undifferentiated "chaos" (*asat*) nor the reality of the "cosmos" (*sat*) then; there was not space nor the firmament which is beyond. What was moving intermittently? Where? Under whose (masculine or neuter) protection? Was there (the primordial) water, the deep unfathomable? » These questions, suggestive of the well-known Vedic riddle style, are not answered, but the poet continues: « There was not death nor (continuation of) life then. Day and night could not be distinguished. That One breathed without mind (breath) by its own nature. Other than that there was nothing else ». Then in stanza 3 it reads: « (There) was darkness. Enveloped in darkness was this universe in the beginning, indistinguishable, something waving. The virtual, viz. the One, which was covered by the void, assumed individual existence by the greatness of internal heating (*tapas*) ». Then the poet goes on to explain that in the beginning desire (*kāma*) « developed in the One which was the first seed of *manas*, that is thought, mind, will, feeling, consciousness » and which is perhaps identical with the One or its very essence. And thus there was a bond connecting the reality of the cosmos with the undifferentiated chaos. But how this happened and how creation which followed was going on, will remain a mystery. After mentioning some possibilities—such as (probably) the creative activity of an architect, biological generation with seed—the poet continues: (6) « Who knows for certain? Who can declare here, whence is the creation-in differentiation? », to state that even the gods are not able to answer these questions because they « were at this side », that means they did not exist before the creation of the universe. « Who then knows whence it has come into existence? » Then in the final stanza he concludes: « This creation, or rather: this emanation-in-difference, whence it has come into existence, whether it is the result of an act of founding or establishing or not, he who surveys it in the highest firmament, he only knows (it)—or else he (also) does not know (it) ». According to tradition the author of this poem is Prajāpati, the Creator-God himself, and we should say, rightly so, because he is the only one who is qualified for solving these problems. Another point which might interest us is the term used to denote this genre of poem: *bhāvavṛtta* « process of evolution ». What is dealt with is not « creation », but evolution: the One existed in the beginning, the One continues to exist, but what happens is a process of emanation or evolution. It is moreover clear that the poet must have stood on the shoul-

ders of predecessors who had likewise rejected some simple mythological or «theological» solutions of the problem.

Of the other cosmogonic hymns the Puruṣasūkta (10, 90) was to exert a powerful and permanent influence upon the speculative thought, not only of brāhmaṇas and upaniṣads but also on the philosophy of the great religious currents of the later period, especially of Viṣṇuism. Before entering into a discussion of this famous poem we must explain the meaning of the term *puruṣa*. Of course it often simply means «man, human being», in many cases in combination with various, as a rule specified, animals⁴. A closer study however shows that in later Vedic times it was often used to denote something like our «person», a human or humanlike being regarded in a somewhat abstract way as possessing personal identity and individual existence as a self-conscious being. Hence passages such as Chāndogya-Upaniṣad 1, 1, 2 *puruṣasya vāg rasaḥ* «the essence of a person is speech». The word is in these texts preferably used in the discussions of the important philosophical problems which constitute their main themes: «A person consists of "ingenuity, genius" (*kratumayaḥ puruṣaḥ*); according to the "genius, ingenuity" (*kratu*) which a person has in this world, so he becomes on departing hence» (3, 14, 1)⁵. And in statements illustrating aspects of the principle of macrocosmic-microcosmic parallelism: «Now the light which shines higher than this heaven,... above everything, in the highest worlds beyond which there are no higher, verily that is the same as this light which is here within the person» (3, 13, 7). Interestingly enough the word *puruṣa* is also, and already in the Ṛgveda, used for the spirit or intelligent principle in non-human objects. Thus in the dialogue hymn ṚV. 10, 51, 8 the god Agni expresses the wish to receive definite oblations, the nourishing part of the offering and «the *puruṣa* of the plants»⁶. The non- or superhuman being that leads the deceased who have travelled to the high regions of sun, moon and lightning to the world of *brahman* is likewise called a *puruṣa*⁷. Then there is the well-known theory of the presence of *puruṣas* in the two eyes—probably based on popular belief in connexion with the man or puppet reflected in the eye—in the long passage Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 10, 5, 2, 7 ff. where the *puruṣa* in the right eye is identified with Indra, the *puruṣa* in the left eye with his wife Indrāṇī; these two persons are said to descend to the cavity of the heart where they enter into a

4. Cf. e.g. Atharvaveda-Saṃhitā 5, 30, 6; 17; 8, 2, 5; 4, 3, 1; 5, 29, 1 (cow, horse, man); 8, 2, 25; 8, 7, 11; 10, 1, 17; 10, 1, 29 etc.; Taittirīya-Saṃhitā 1, 5, 7, 3; 6, 4, 5, 7; Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 6, 2, 1, 2; cf. Chāndogya-Upaniṣad 2, 6, 1; 2, 9, 7; 2, 18, 1.

5. See also ChU. 3, 12, 3 and 4; 3, 16, 1; 4, 10, 3. Cf. e.g. AVŚ. 8, 1, 1; 8, 7, 4.

6. For the various other explanations proposed. (wood, tree; *puroḍāśa* cake; *soma*; dead human body; the male part, germ, embryo) see K. F. GELDNER, *Der Rig-Veda übersetzt*, Cambridge Mass., 1951, III, p. 213; L. RENOU, *Études védiques et pāṇinéennes*, XIV, Paris, 1965, p. 15; 80.

7. ChU. 4, 15, 5; 5, 10, 2.

divine union with one another, a union which is described as the highest bliss⁸. And there is a man in the sun's disk who in the speculations of the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa is identified with the *puruṣa* in the human eye and the gold man placed in the great fireplace. This gold man, representing at the same time the creator god Prajāpati, the sacrificer, symbolizes so to say the transformation of the sacrificer's personality, the realization of his unity with Prajāpati by means of the fire-ritual⁹. So it is not surprising to read that there dwells a *puruṣa* also in the human body¹⁰.

There are other speculations likewise found in that part of the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (the books VI-IX) in which Śāṅḍilya is the teacher most frequently referred to and which has had much influence upon the development of philosophical ideas in later times. It may parenthetically be observed that this Śāṅḍilya was in later times to become the legendary author of an *upaniṣad* and of a well-known manual of *bhakti*, the Śāṅḍilya-bhakti-sūtra. By those Viṣṇuites who call themselves Bhāgavatas he is with another ancient authority, Nārada, recognized as a great teacher of their religion. Here, in the Brāhmaṇa, we read that in the beginning there was *asat*, that is chaos, which was identified with the seven vital airs (*prāṇāḥ*). There emanated by ritual means seven *puruṣas* which were made one Puruṣa who became the creator-god Prajāpati¹¹. Details need not detain us; what is interesting is that Prajāpati is said to be a Puruṣa composed of seven persons or individualities. Of this Prajāpati it is said that, in accordance with his very nature, he produced living beings and having completed this task he went upwards to the heavenly regions where the sun shines. And the same great divinity is already in the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa repeatedly called the Puruṣa or identified with the Puruṣa—we should write this word with a capital letter¹². It is expressly stated: Prajāpati is the Puruṣa. But this Puruṣa is, according to the same Śāṅḍilya, also as our « self » (*ātman*) in our heart, golden, as a smokeless light, greater than the sky, greater than space and yet also in our heart: « On passing away I shall unite with him. For him who knows this for certain there is no doubt » (ŚatBr. 10, 6, 3, 2). If we keep these speculations in mind it will be easier to understand on one hand why a human person (*puruṣa*) is explicitly said to be connected with Prajāpati or to be Prajāpati's (*prajāpatya*)¹³ and, on the other hand, how in later times philosophers could speak of a higher and a lower *puruṣa*. Such a distinction is for

8. See also Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad 4, 2, 2 f.; Maitrāyaṇīya Up. 7, 11.

9. Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 7, 4, 1, 17; 10, 5, 2, 1 ff.; 7, 4, 1, 15. See J. GONDA, *Die Religionen Indiens*, I, Stuttgart, 1960, p. 192 f.

10. PraśnaUp. 5, 5.

11. ŚatBr. 6, 1, 1, 1 ff.; 9, 2, 3, 44; 10, 2, 2, 1; 5.

12. ŚatBr. 6, 2, 1, 23; 7, 4, 1, 15; cf. also 6, 2, 2, 4.

13. Taittirīya-Saṃhitā 2, 1, 6, 5.

instance made in the Bhagavad-Gītā (15, 16 and 17): « In the world there are two *puruṣas*, perishable the one, imperishable the other, the perishable is all beings, the imperishable they call the aloof or sublime (*kūṣastha*) ».

Proceeding now to discuss the *Puruṣasūkta*, Ṛgveda 10, 90¹⁴, it must to begin with be observed that the poet—who no doubt lived before the *Satapatha-Brāhmaṇa*—speaks of *Puruṣa* without adding any name and without suggesting any identification. Whether or not the poem faintly re-echoes old popular notions about a primeval giant, *Puruṣa* or rather the *Puruṣa* is expressly described (st. 2) as being this All, not only now, but also in the past and in the future: « this all that has been and that will be ». Notice that the poet does not say: « the *Puruṣa* was this universe »; no, « he is this All ». But in stanza 1 it reads: the *Puruṣa*, having a thousand heads, eyes and feet—thousand expresses the divine and superhuman—covered (a verb in a past tense) the earth on all sides, extending a little beyond it. So the poem is to explain the unity as well as the origin of the universe. The same being, or principle, is the universe and is its origin; an idea with a great future in the history of Indian religion and philosophy. Notwithstanding a reference to another primeval being, which however is thought to be androgynous, in another Ṛgvedic hymn (3, 38, 7), the *Puruṣa*-hymn can be said to be the first expression of the idea that the creation of the universe is the self-limitation of a transcendent Person « who is this All », manifesting himself in the realm of our experience. But he does not manifest his whole being. « A fourth of him is all beings, three-fourths of him are what is immortal in heaven. With three quarters *Puruṣa* rose upward; one quarter of him here assumed a new status (that is, became the phenomenal world) » (st. 3 f.). That means that three-fourths remain transcendent. This idea—which we know already—was also to have a future. It is based on two very frequent ideas, viz. that of the possibility of the amplification of a triad—and triads are innumerable in the *Veda*—by a fourth whether or not the latter is homogeneous with the triad; and that of the fourfold whole, four, the number of the quarters of the universe, East, South, West, North, being the cosmic number par excellence¹⁵. Moreover, what is three-fold is said to belong to the gods, and the fourth is human¹⁶.

The poet continues: out of this *Puruṣa*—who is Ultimate Reality and in whom the Creator and the Universe are one and the same—arises (is born) *Virāj*. This grammatically feminine term denotes the idea of expansion of the One, the idea of a highest, universal, fundamental,

14. For literature etc. see GONDA, *Die Religionen Indiens*, I, p. 186 f.; *Vedic Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1975, p. 137.

15. See J. GONDA, *Triads in the Veda*, Amsterdam Acad., 1976, p. 115 ff., esp. p. 121 f.

16. *SatBr.* 5, 1, 4, 11.

creative power. Here she is the universe conceived of a developing, expanding and creative whole. Out of Virāj, whose name literally means « the One who expands mightily », Puruṣa was born as the world, « reaching beyond the earth behind and also before ». This is a variant of an idea that in ancient India occurs also in other forms: the husband is born, from his wife, as his son; the male fire enters the waters and is born again from the waters. What happens then is essentially a ritual. The poet goes on to describe the act of creation as a sacrificial ritual (st. 6 ff.) in which Puruṣa was the oblation as well as the ritual. It is worth noticing that the three seasons, spring, summer and autumn, are (st. 6) said to constitute the ghee (sacrificial butter), the fuel and the oblation respectively. The implication is that these seasons existed already: they were so to say parts of the Puruṣa because he, being the only thing existent, necessarily was also Time in the shape of its unit, the year, consisting of the three seasons. This primeval and exemplary Puruṣa now becomes the central, nay the only figure in a primeval and exemplary rite so that, as a kind of transformation, out of himself all phenomenal things and beings came into existence, the birds in the air, the wild animals and the domesticated, the hymns and chants of the Veda, His mouth became the brahmin order, his arms nobility, his thighs the third estate, his feet the *sūdras*. From his mind the moon came into existence, from his eye the sun; from his navel the air, from his ears the quarters.

Other details need not detain us. What must be emphasized is, first that the unity of all existence—mention of which is for instance made in ṚV. 1, 164, 46—is in this poem clearly stated. In the second place that in the process of creation the performance of a ritual is indispensable. The One can become the various creatures in the phenomenal world only through a ritual process. In the ritualistic sphere of the Vedic religion this was self-evident. When performed by the man who knew the how and the why of them rites were considered omnipotent. In the third place: the Puruṣa is no object of adoration; he is not invoked, he does not receive offerings. The rite is an *opus operans* in itself. It is a technique which, once started, goes on automatically and achieves its object automatically.

I now shall focus attention mainly on two points. First, on the significance of this hymn which, theopanistically coloured and being conceived in the spirit of the *brāhmaṇas*, no doubt belongs to the most recent period of the Ṛgveda. On its significance, because this cosmogonic poem was, as already observed, to exert a permanent influence upon the speculative thought of the *brāhmaṇas* and *upaniṣads* and in later times to become the foundation stone of Viṣṇuite philosophy. In the second place I purpose to say something on the *puruṣa* concept as it developed in the later periods.

As to the Puruṣasūkta, what strikes us most is its frequent and continued ritual application. As is well known Vedic hymns and parts

of them were to accompany ritual acts to consecrate them, and to make these acts effective. If these acts and ceremonies in general were to be performed successfully they had to be consecrated by these sacred texts. It was, and still is, part of the functions of those who recite these texts to infuse the sacred activities with the power that is inherent in these texts which are the products of the inspiration of the ṛṣis and as such eternal truth, transcendent reality revealed to the inspired poets. Since the origin of the universe is repeated in any act of creation, in every birth or rebirth its commemoration was necessary to keep these processes of generation and regeneration, of evolution and renewal, going. By identifying oneself with the mythical prototype, the Puruṣa, and by ritually repeating the mythical event and so reactivating its inherent power with a view to one's own reintegration one believed to achieve one's own rebirth. The Puruṣa is, moreover, immolated and the hymn embraces also the institution of sacrifice, which in the view of the Vedic ritualists is the counterpart and re-enactment of the great cosmic drama of disintegration and re-integration. So the Puruṣasūkta describing the primeval—or rather timeless, because ever-proceeding—ritual, is for instance recited when a mighty king has the *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) performed. This ceremony is the highest ritual manifestation of royal dignity; it results in the fulfilment of all the wishes of the royal sacrificer and makes him *sarva*, that is complete, safe and sound. His normal human, mortal personality is destroyed, he becomes a new and higher person, he is reintegrated, reborn and raised to a rank that is higher than normal human existence. When the text is recited one of the priests places a golden plate on the head of the royal sacrificer: we know that gold means immortality¹⁷. Another ritual use is of still greater importance. This text is according to some authorities¹⁸ also recited to consecrate, in building the great fireplace, a human figure made of bricks. One should know that this rite, the construction of a complicated structure on which to place the sacred fire means the periodical reconstruction—or rather reintegration—of Prajāpati who is identical with the erected structure: this reintegration is a necessity since the creator god is periodically exhausted and disintegrated because of the work of emanation or rather because he has become his emanated creation. But the sacrificer is, on the strength of the macrocosmic-microcosmic-ritual identifications, identified with the god with the result that he will be reintegrated, that is reborn in a higher form of existence. Now, during this protracted rite—it has to last a year, because Prajāpati is the year—not only the Ṛgvedic stanza of the Golden Germ (*Hiraṇyagarbha* 10, 121, 1) is used—according to a probably later interpretation of this poem the unknown god

17. Āpastamba-Śrautasūtra 20, 20, 2.

18. See W. CALAND, *Das Śrautasūtra des Āpastamba*, III, Amsterdam Acad., 1928, p. 56.

who is referred to in every stanza is Prajāpati himself—but also the Puruṣa-hymn RV. 10, 90 which is to promote the process of reintegration of the god and the sacrificer.

The belief in the inherent power of the Puruṣasūkta was not however limited to the circles of the Vedic ritualists. On the contrary, this cosmogony is up to modern times considered to be exemplary for any form of creation. It is for instance often used in rites which are performed by those who long for the birth of a son¹⁹, or in ceremonies that accompany the foundation of a temple. There are even now people who use it for private rites of renewal. They believe that drinking water mixed with the juice of consecrated fruits and reciting this hymn results in internal disinfection and that kind of renewal which we call recovery. Or it is recited by those who perform a bathing rite to free themselves of sins and evil or also in expiation rites. The transition from this life to the beyond is another form of rebirth; then also the hymn can help in conducting the soul to its new existence in the realm of the deceased. Similarly in initiation rites. An initiation (*dīkṣā*) is a spiritual rebirth: the devotee who is admitted to a religious community is sometimes consecrated with the Puruṣasūkta.

Special attention must be drawn to a few more points. The Puruṣasūkta consists of sixteen stanzas. Sixteen is in India long since an important number expressing a whole, completeness, totality²⁰. That means that a poem of sixteen stanzas is, also because of its outward form, pre-eminently suitable for making the reciter or the sacrificer whole, complete, sound. In the second place: tradition has it that the Puruṣa himself has also been the *ṛṣi*, the inspired poet of this hymn, and in this function he was called Nārāyaṇa. The origin of this figure, which is wrapped in mystery, need not be discussed. I only mention that according to the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (12, 3, 4, 1: 13, 6, 1, 1) the figure who sacrificed and became the all (*sarvam*) is called Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa. Here the Puruṣa has a name; but not only the Puruṣa, the sacrifice also is more defined: it is the so-called *puruṣamedha*. This human sacrifice—which as such has perhaps never been performed—is said to enable the one who performs it so to say symbolically to surpass all beings and to become *sarvam*, that is to identify himself with the totality of all existence. The text explicitly states that the one who, knowing the myth concerning Puruṣa-Nārāyaṇa's exemplary sacrifice, performs this *puruṣamedha*, or who only knows this—without performing the rite—will become *sarvam*, that is integrate himself. That means that the man who sacrifices himself in this human sacrifice will realize that he essentially is an indissoluble part of the whole, that he is not an isolated individual, but a component part of the great

19. Cf. e.g. Ṛgvidhāna 3, 26; Atharvaveda-Pariśiṣṭa 42, 2, 11; 44, 4, 2; 72, 4, 3; Manu 11, 251.

20. See J. GONDA, *Change and continuity in Indian religion*, The Hague, 1965, chapter IV.

whole, of the All. That means also that he has conquered all individuality, all separateness, finiteness, death. The text emphasizes the importance of knowledge: one should know the meaning of the rite. Spiritual identification by knowledge of the meaning of the myth and the rite leads to factual identification with the object of this knowledge. Those who spiritually and existentially understand that they are identical with the All, *are* identical with it; they have achieved their integration. These ideas survived. They were to become fundamental also for those who, while having the same ends in view, were no longer willing to execute the Vedic rites.

Let us now interrupt the discussion of the hymn and turn to the Puruṣa figure itself. First of all, after the Ṛgveda, the Puruṣa continues to play an important part in a variety of cosmogonies and while doing so, his figure was constantly enriched. In Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 11, 1, 6, 1 ff.—a place which I have already mentioned—we are told that in the beginning this universe was nothing but water: the well-known theme of the primordial waters. By means of *tapas*, austerities, the waters produced a golden egg which « floated about for as long as a year ». Then at the end of the year the Puruṣa was produced therefrom, namely Prajāpati, who broke open the golden egg. At the end of a year he began to speak. Pronouncing the words *bhūh*, *bhuvah*, *svah* which denote the earth, the atmosphere, the heavens he created the provinces of the universe and so on. Here Prajāpati²¹ is the Puruṣa and the myth has incorporated the motif of the golden egg.

Another interesting term occurs in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad, which constitutes the last section of the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa. At 1, 5, 1 f. it is related that the Father, that is Prajāpati, produced by his intelligence (*medhā*) and *tapas* seven kinds of food for all beings, gods, animals and so on. On this food everything depends. Now the question arises: How is it that these kinds of food which are being eaten all the time are not exhausted or do not diminish?; why do they not fail (*kṣīyante*)? The answer is: the Puruṣa is inexhaustibility (*akṣiti*), imperishableness, for he produces this food again and again. As to *akṣiti*, this is one of those terms with the privative prefix in which the idea opposite to that expressed by the second member of the compound is emphasized. The best translation is therefore something like « ever abundant source of food ». Here Puruṣa must be identical with the Father (*pitā*), that is with the Creator God. This section also ends with the statement that the one who knows this inexhaustibility (*akṣiti*) eats food, lives on nourishing food and goes to the gods. In a later paragraph of the same section the author adds that the person—and here he uses, no doubt on purpose, the term *puruṣa*—who knows this is himself Prajāpati with the sixteen parts who is the year. That is to

21. It is worth noticing that at ŚB. 6, 7, 2, 12 and 6, 7, 4, 7 Prajāpati creates offspring and the world by means of the three Viṣṇu strides.

say a person (*puruṣa*) who knows this realizes his identity with the Puruṣa (with a capital letter) who is Prajāpati, who is complete, the All and the complete Time cycle²². The importance of this knowledge is time and again emphasized in later texts.

The author of this Brhadāranyaka-Upaniṣad—who largely engages in forming an idea of the ultimate foundation of our personality, the *ātman*—enunciates the doctrine that it is the *ātman* which in the beginning was the only thing existent (1, 4, 1). And it was *puruṣavidhaḥ*: « in the shape of a person » according to the usual translations, but I would propose: « in the form of the Person, of the Puruṣa ». There follows a variant of the theme of the creative activity of an androgynous primeval being. The version preserved in the Aitareya-Upaniṣad (1, 1) is more complicated. Here the Ātman is said to have been, in the beginning, this universe; there was nothing else. He created these worlds, namely water above, light, the earth and water beneath. From the waters he drew forth the Puruṣa and gave him a shape. At this moment the theme of austerity is again introduced. By making the Puruṣa the object of his *tapas* he produced out of the Puruṣa the various components of the phenomenal world.

A long and much more profound, partly naturalistic, partly ritualistic and partly idealistic description of the Puruṣa occurs in the Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad 2, 1. It is also characterized by a reference, not only to the Puruṣa as the origin of all beings but also to his being their ultimate goal: (st. 1) « As from a blazing fire sparks of like form issue forth by thousands, even so manifold beings are produced from the Imperishable and they return also to him »²³. It may be noticed in passing that the term « the Imperishable » (*akṣara*)²⁴ was already at an early moment used, beside *brahman* and other terms, to denote the highest principle. After this statement the author continues: « The Puruṣa is divine and without a body. He is without and within, unborn, without life-breath and without "mind" (*manas* the seat of mind, will, consciousness in general), pure and higher than the high Imperishable (*akṣara*). From him are born (that is to say, are emanated, not created) life-breath, "mind" (*manas*), all the sense-organs, space, air, light, water and earth... His eyes are sun and moon..., his speech the revealed Vedas... Out of his feet the earth has come into existence. He indeed is the inner soul (*antarātmā*) of all beings ». From him proceed the words of the threefold Veda, the rites, sacrifices and ceremonies, the year—that is the time cycle, the worlds where the sun shines, the gods, all sorts of animals, seas, mountains and rivers, all the plants and their juices. This passage so to say foreshadows the famous

22. As to this Upaniṣad see also 5, 15, 2.

23. The image of the sparks occurs also in BĀU. 2, 1, 20 where all beings etc. come forth from the Ātman.

24. See P. M. MODI, *Akṣara*, Baroda, 1932; J. A. B. VAN BUITENEN, in JAOS 79, p. 176.

chapter XI of the Bhagavad-Gītā, the climax of that poem, in which Kṛṣṇa, at Arjuna's request for the sight of his universal form, transfigures himself and appears to Arjuna as the Omnipotent and Omnipresent Lord. In the final stanza (10) the author, recapitulating, comes to a conclusion: « The Puruṣa is all this, deeds done (*karma*), austerity (*tapas*), *brahman*, beyond death. He who knows that which is set in the secret place (of the heart), he, while being here on earth (that is, in his present life) cuts asunder the knot of ignorance », that means, he destroys that ignorance which prevents him from understanding his real nature, from seeing that he has no separate existence apart from the Puruṣa.

This belief is often attested to in other works, for instance Kāṭha-Upaniṣad, the same text which in 5, 8 identifies the *puruṣa* which is awake in those that sleep with *brahman* and « the immortal » (*amṛtam*). By knowing the all-pervading Person, who is not characterized by any mark (*liṅga*) whatever, a living being is liberated and goes to life eternal (*amṛtatvam*): Kāṭha-Upaniṣad 6, 8. It may be noticed that the term « all-pervading » (*vyāpaka*), used in this non-Viṣṇuite text, is one of the words that were often given by Viṣṇuites to their God and which indeed characterize him very well: « the one who pervades the universe and who by pervading, traversing etc. wins, secures and spreads power and influence for good »²⁵. At 4, 12 the same Upaniṣad, whilst inculcating the necessity to know the Puruṣa, furnishes us with a welcome supplement to the definition of 6, 8: after knowing the Puruṣa who resides in the middle of our body and who is the lord of the past and the future one does not shrink away from him, that is to say one realizes one's identity with him. This idea is very clearly expressed in Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad 3, 2, 8 « Just as the flowing rivers go home (that is disappear) in the ocean casting off name and form—this frequent expression, *nāmarūpe* means « individuality »—even so the knower, being liberated from name and form, attains to the divine Puruṣa, who is higher than the high »: « attains to » (*upaiti*) and similar verbs expressing movement often stand for « become », « realize their identity with ». And in Praśna-Upaniṣad 6, 6 it reads: « Know him in whom the parts (*kalāḥi*) are well established as spokes in the centre of a wheel as the Puruṣa who is to be known, so that death shall not afflict you ».

Leaving the striking minority of cases in which the Puruṣa conception combines with a belief in Rudra-Siva undiscussed I must now devote some moments to a text that at a comparatively early moment attests to the existence of those currents of thought which are collectively known as Viṣṇuism. In the Mahā-Nārāyaṇa-Upaniṣad, a breviary for ascetics who completely renounce the world (*saṃnyāsins*), which may have been compiled approximately in the 3rd century B.C., Nārāyaṇa

25. See J. GONDA, *Aspects of early Viṣṇuism*, Utrecht, 1954, ²Delhi, 1969, p. 54; 64 f. Compare e.g. Bhagavadgītā 11, 20.

is praised as the Absolute (st. 201-269) and glorified as the Supreme Lord of the Universe, Brahman, Prajāpati, the Eternal, the Highest Light (which is also Viṣṇu) and the Puruṣa, who fills the whole universe, is in the brilliant light of the sun, the highest *Brahman*, identical with *Rta* (Order) and *Satya* (Reality) and may assume every form (14; 25; 71 ff.; 226; 238; 263; 284; 289 f.; 536 etc.). It is further said that from this Puruṣa have arisen all divisions of time, seconds, minutes, hours, days and nights, seasons and year, and that it is he, who produces water, space and the heavens. Being also identified with the *ātman*, the Puruṣa is moreover addressed as if he were a divine person, given epithets elsewhere applied to deities, and implored to deliver those speaking from impurity and latent affections of the soul.

When in the Mahābhārata (see especially the Nārāyaṇīya section 12, *adhyaḥya* 321-339) Nārāyaṇa, expounding his own nature, appears as the founder of a religion of devotion, and at the same time as the Universal Spirit, the Exalted Being, the ultimate source of the world and its inhabitants, the Puruṣa, it is again the Puruṣa who is glorified. The last chapter of this Nārāyaṇīya section is a eulogy upon the Puruṣa. The first words of this eulogy are: « He is eternal, undecaying, imperishable, immeasurable, omnipresent. The eye cannot see him, but he is visible to higher knowledge (*jñāna*). He has no body but dwells in all bodies, and that without being defiled by performing deeds (producing *karman*). He is the internal *ātman* of all beings, an internal witness but he cannot be grasped. He has mouths, arms, feet, eyes and noses on all sides and goes everywhere as he pleases. And so on.

I now come to some comparatively early places which clearly attest to a tendency to differentiate a special aspect of the Puruṣa from what we might call the Puruṣa (or *puruṣa*) without qualifications. In Śvetāśvatara-Upaniṣad 3, 8 he is given the epithet *mahān* « the great »: « Yes, I know that Great Puruṣa of sunlike lustre beyond darkness. Only by knowing him does one pass over death. There is no other path for going there ». The adjective *mahān* is probably more than an honorific addition, because it is in other texts used to characterize the cosmic or universal aspect of a principle which is also assumed to be microcosmic or embodied. Thus Kāṭha-Upaniṣad 3, 10 and 11 speaks of the *mahān ātman* « the great, that is, the universal Self »²⁶. After characterizing the Puruṣa as « great » (*mahān*) the Śvetāśvatara states that all existence, the totality (*sarvam*) is filled by him and that he is the Lord, the Great Lord and the omnipresent Siva. In the important section 8, 7-12 of the Chāndogya-Upaniṣad, dealing with the progressive instruction of Indra by Prajāpati concerning the Real Self which is free from evil, the latter states that the body, though caught or appropriated by Death (8, 12, 1), is the seat or residence of the bodiless self (*ātman*) which is free from

26. Remember also the *mahat* (or *buddhi*) of cosmic significance in the Sāṃkhya school of thought.

death (*amṛta*). In the beginning of this passage it is stated that the one who has discovered the *ātman* and knows it to be free from evil, old age, grief and death obtains all *lokas* (worlds of safety) and all desires. As long as it is incarnate this Self (*ātman*) is not free from pleasure and pain, which on the other hand do not touch the one who is bodiless. There follows one of those well-known comparisons that are based on the principle of macrocosmic-microcosmic parallelism: « Just as the bodiless elements of nature, such as air, lightning, and so on arise from yonder space and reach the highest light to appear there each with its own form, even so that serene one, when he rises up from the body and reaches the highest light, appears with his own form. Such a one is the Highest or Supreme Person, *uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ* ». Here the term *ātman* which was used in the preceding part of the instruction²⁷ is no longer used. On the other hand, the condition of the one who has realized his identity with the Supreme Person (*uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ*)²⁸, that is of the emancipated one, the state of bliss which he enjoys is depicted in a way that clearly precludes the descriptions of the heavenly joys that in later times await the liberated in Viṣṇu's highest abode: « There such a one moves about, laughing, playing, rejoicing with women, chariots or relations, not remembering the appendage formed by this body »²⁹. At first sight this passage describes the heavenly bliss enjoyed by the one who has obtained final emancipation.

Moreover, this place can, if I am not mistaken, be viewed also in another light. One can, for instance with Radhakrishnan³⁰, say that the Self enjoys these pleasures as an inward spectator only and does not identify itself with them. Then one regards this description of the *Puruṣa* as anticipating the inward spectator, also called *puruṣa*, of the Sāṃkhya school of the later period; as is well known this philosophy establishes a dualism between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, nature and the material cause or source of all existence. The *puruṣa*, the so-called soul of the Sāṃkhya, does not identify himself with the pleasures enjoyed or pain suffered by the body which belongs to nature (*prakṛti*). While the idea of *prakṛti* or *avyakta* (the unmanifested) is also suggested in the earlier *upaniṣads*—compare e.g. Kāṭha-Upaniṣad 3, 10, 11 and 6, 7, 8: « beyond the unmanifested is the *puruṣa* » the Sāṃkhya doctrine of a plurality of *puruṣas* is however foreign to these treatises.

The identification of *ātman* and *puruṣa* calls for closer attention³¹. The term *ātman*, which in the later Vedic texts becomes more impor-

27. Cf. ChU. 8, 7, 1; 8, 11, 1 where in a certain aspect or situation *ātman* is said to be *brahman*.

28. These words were misunderstood by RAJA RAJENDRALAL MITRA and E. B. COWELL, *The Twelve principal Upaniṣads*, III, Adyar, Madras, 1932, p. 272: « He is (then) the best of men ».

29. See W. RUBEN, *Die Philosophen der Upanishaden*, Bern, 1947, p. 251.

30. S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *The principal Upaniṣads*, London, 1953, p. 509.

31. See J. GONDA, *Inleiding tot het Indische denken*, Antwerpen, 1948, p. 41 ff.

tant, should not be translated by «soul». Self is a better translation, because *ātman* can also denote that self that is the body: It is, first and foremost, our own self, our own person of which we are conscious in daily life. In psychological speculation however it comes to occupy a central position. In enumerations of our psychical functions it appears, after our visual faculty, sense of hearing, power of speech and so on as the seventh, that is as the representative of a number of totality; without a function of its own it occupies a central place and is characterized as the «complete one». The vital airs or vital forces (*prāṇāḥ*) which in their totality are our physical functions and maintain our physical existence are said to be based on the *ātman*. And the Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad (1, 4, 7) teaches that the *ātman*, it is true, is called breath when he breathes, speech when he speaks, eye when he sees, but that this is not his true nature. These names indicate activities. If one considers these functions of the *ātman* separately one does not know him. One should regard that or him as the *ātman* in which all these functions are one. Moreover, the *ātman* is said to be the «foot-print» of the All (*sarvam*), for by the *ātman* one knows the All. Since, however, the one who knows that he is the *brahman* is identical with the All, the *ātman* and *brahman* are essentially identical—one of the fundamental doctrines of this class of literature.

This is not to say that the *ātman* concept is in the early *upaniṣads* free from primitive ideas. The *ātman* is something substantial, it fills some space, at times no more than one ten thousandth part of the end of a hair; elsewhere it is regarded as a little man (*puruṣa*) of the length of a thumb. Moreover, man is not alone in having an *ātman*; other beings, the earth, water, fire, heaven too have an *ātman*. Of all beings, human as well as non-human, the *ātman* is the *antaryāmin* «the internal regulator or governor» who while being in them is other than them. The *ātman* is, according to the Chāndogya-Upaniṣad in a misshapen body not deformed; if the body is beaten the *ātman* is not affected by it. It is that which is still active when a being is sleeping and dreaming (8, 10; 11). In the well-known chapter of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka (chapter IV) which deals with the instruction imparted to king Janaka by Yājñavalkya concerning the *ātman* and its bodily and external relation it is taught that the *ātman* is man's light (4, 3, 6), because with the *ātman* as one's light one sits, moves, does one's work and so on. After this statement the question is raised as to the nature of that *ātman* («which is the *ātman*?»). The answer is «The person (*puruṣa*) here who consists of knowledge (*viññānamayaḥ*) among the vital forces (*prāṇeṣu*), who is the light in the heart. Remaining the same, he wanders along the two worlds seeming to think, seeming to move about, for on becoming asleep (getting into dream condition) he transcends this world and the forms of death». This means that the *ātman*, that is the *puruṣa*, is internal, but it is not he who thinks or wanders about. He does not sleep when the body is asleep. He overcomes death. This is clearly stated in 4, 3, 8 «This *puruṣa*, when he is born and obtains a body, becomes connected

with evils. When he departs, on dying, he leaves evils behind ». In paragraphs 11 and 12 the *puruṣa*, being himself sleepless but looking down on the sleeping body, is said to be golden, that is, indestructible (*hiraṇmayah puruṣah*) and the one unique *haṃsa*, in these works a favourite image: the high-flying migratory bird, the goose denoting the individual soul realizing its unity with the cosmic soul.

In 18 and 19 there follow two comparisons which emphasize this character of man's « soul » (*puruṣa*)—to use this word for a moment—which, even as a large fish moves along both banks of a river, can move along the state of waking and the condition of sleeping or dreaming, and which, as a falcon that having flown in the sky bears himself down to his nest, hastens to that state where he desires no desires and sees no dreams. And finally (4, 3, 36 ff.), at the moment of death, the *puruṣa* frees himself from the body just as a mango, a fig or a berry releases itself from its bond to re-incarnate himself in a new body. And then the author, in a last comparison, says that just as noblemen, village heads and chariot drivers welcome a king crying « Here he comes! Here he comes! », so all beings wait for him who knows thus—that means for the *puruṣa* or « soul » of the man who knows what has been taught on the *puruṣa*—« He is *brahman* (neuter) coming! Here is *brahman* coming! » So this chapter, which begins with the question « Which is the *ātman*? », after dealing with the *puruṣa* which obviously is the *ātman*, ends with the statement that this *puruṣa* is *brahman*. This statement is repeated by later authorities, for instance Manu 1, 11 (*puruṣo loke brahmeti kīrtiyate*).

I now proceed to say something on the *puruṣa* in the Bhagavad-Gītā. Here we witness some new and further stages in the development of this conception. First, this Puruṣa idea is more clearly and cumulatively defined. The Puruṣa, which in this most important poem also is explicitly described as primeval (11, 18), is as such closely associated with terms such as primeval God, the last prop-and-resting place of the universe, the highest presence (of divinity), the one of infinite forms, the knower and what is to be known, the one who has extended, spun, spread and so produced the universe (11, 38): it may be noticed that elsewhere in the same poem (10, 12) the highest presence of divinity is associated with the highest Brahman, and that (at 2, 17; 8, 22) the universe is said to have been extended or spun by the Imperishable that is Brahman. At 8, 22 it is the high(est) Puruṣa who is credited with this achievement, which is also said to be primordial creativity flowing forth from the Puruṣa (15, 4). This Puruṣa is however the Cosmic Person of ṚV. 10, 90 and implicitly also the sum total of all individual selves³², or in Sāṃkhya terminology, of all individual *puruṣas* (8, 4)

32. Explicitly for instance in Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa 26, 21 « there is one Puruṣa in all the bodies ». Compare also places such as Harivaṃśa 7355 *antaścaraṇi puruṣam*.

33. R. C. ZAEHNER, *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, Oxford, 1969, p. 261; 366 f.

and as such identical with Brahman³³. If we keep this aspect of the Puruṣa in view another place in the Gītā becomes clear: at 15, 16—to which I have already referred—the poet speaks of two Puruṣas (*dvau puruṣau*), one of them perishable, the other imperishable. There follows an explanation: the perishable is all beings, the imperishable is called the one who is aloof or sublime. This place has been much discussed, but it can hardly be doubted that the imperishable is that aspect that may be called the sum total of all liberated selves, « that are separated from all union with unconscious matter » to quote Rāmānuja, and that the perishable *puruṣa* is man—we remember that *puruṣa* also means man—or the person which is bound to material nature, or as Rāmānuja puts it, « spirit qualified only by its being attached to unconscious matter ».

Next, I invite attention to Bhagavad-Gītā 10, 12 and 13. Here Arjuna, who is speaking, confesses his partner, Kṛṣṇa, as the All-Highest, addressing him as follows: « You are the high(est) Brahman, the highest divine presence... All seers agree that You are the Person eternal (*puruṣam śāśvatam*) and divine, primeval God, unborn and all-pervading Lord. So (have declared) Nārada » and some other authorities whose names can be omitted. Now this Nārada on whose authority this all-important identification is proclaimed, is the well-known figure who in epic tales is on one hand a divine messenger who carries messages from the gods to the inhabitants of this world, or gives information on the latter to the former, and on the other hand maintains various relations with Kṛṣṇa-Viṣṇu whom he, in the Mahābhārata, worships. This *devarṣi* Nārada, whose name occurs already in the Atharvaveda and who in Vedic prose texts functions as a teacher and a pupil of Indra's domestic priest Bṛhaspati, occupies a prominent place in the history of Viṣṇuism. He is an important link in the chain of uninterrupted tradition of the true religion and all its doctrines which, beginning by God himself, continues up to the present day. In later times—see Bhāgavata-Purāṇa 2, 9, 32-35—he is regarded as a son of the God Brahmā who instructs him in the doctrine which he had himself received from Nārāyaṇa, that is God, the doctrine which, among other things, states the eternity of Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa and his identity with Brahman and further proclaims *bhakti* as the best form of religious practice. It is with *bhakti* that Nārada's name is specially associated, for he is the reputed author of a famous medieval manual of *bhakti*, the so-called Bhaktisūtras which are a codification of Viṣṇuite *bhakti* religion.

Now, interestingly enough, it is also in the Bhagavad-Gītā that we find the first unmistakable associations of the Puruṣa concept with *bhakti* that is with devout love, surrender and communion. At 8, 10 the poet says that that man goes to the supreme divine Puruṣa whose mind at the time of death is steady, who is connected with, that is controlled or integrated by, love-and-devotion (*bhaktiyā yuktaḥ*) and by the power of *yoga*, that is by a systematic course of self-control and

concentration. And in 8, 22 it reads: That Supreme (*paraḥ*) Puruṣa, in whom all beings abide, is to be won by *bhakti* (love-and-devotion) that is directed to none other. This *bhakti* does not exclude meditation for in 8, 8 it is stated that in order to go to that Supreme divine Puruṣa one should control one's mind by constant practice or spiritual exercise and meditation. In reading these texts we must remember that the literal and usual translation: « he goes to the Puruṣa » (*yāti* or *upāiti*) practically means « he becomes..., he realizes his identity with the Puruṣa ».

One place remains to be mentioned, Bhagavad-Gītā 15, 17 following the stanza which states the existence of two *puruṣas*. In 17 the teacher, that is Kṛṣṇa himself, adds: « But there is (yet) another Person—that means a third one, or rather, a third aspect of the Puruṣa idea—the Sublime (*uttama*), also named the all-highest (*parama*) *ātman*, who enters and pervades the three worlds, sustaining them, the imperishable Lord ». There is no doubt whatever that Kṛṣṇa, who is speaking here, while claiming these titles, denies them to the second aspect of the *puruṣa*, that is the liberated soul. This is perfectly intelligible: first, *paramātman* and *puruṣottama* are in Viṣṇuism to become frequent names of Viṣṇu, God himself; secondly, the one who pervades and sustains the world is God, Viṣṇu. In the third place, although according to Viṣṇuite philosophy the individual soul is an integral and constituent part (*aṃśa*) of the Universal soul, its individuality is not lost. The liberated do not merge their identity in God's, they come to Him. That is why Kṛṣṇa continues (18 f.): « Since I transcend the perishable and am more exalted than the imperishable, I am extolled in the world and the Veda as the Puruṣottama « the Person sublime ». And then: « Whoever thus knows me, unconfused, as the Puruṣottama, is omniscient (*sarvavid*) and loves and communes with me with all his being »³⁴. For loves and communes the text has *bhājati*, the verbal expression of the *bhakti* concept. That means: « that man is my true *bhakta* ».

I now return to the Puruṣasūkta. In course of time both the text and its central figure, the Puruṣa, came to occupy a position of considerable prominence, especially in Viṣṇuism. Puruṣa, the Primeval Person, is identified with Viṣṇu, God, who himself is the personal aspect of Brahman, and the hymn remains an important consecratory text in rites of creation, rebirth, establishment, and renewal. Fortunately, the development of ideas and practices can be traced in a variety of literary sources. I can mention here only a few of these. One characteristic that most of these texts have in common is the endeavour of the Viṣṇuite circles in which they were composed to give their doctrines a Vedic substratum; to support their own, essentially post-Vedic Viṣṇu religion, their own beliefs and theories, by Vedic authority; to bring them into harmony with Vedic lore. This means of course also that these authors

34. Needless to say that formulations such as the Supreme Puruṣa called Viṣṇu are frequent in Viṣṇuite texts.

adapted the Vedic traditions to the requirements of their own religion, to the beliefs of their own times and their own community. In these works the importance of the Veda—much of whose contents is no longer correctly understood—is not less emphasized than Viṣṇu's identity with the Original One and Highest, with Brahman and all other Vedic conceptions to denote the one eternal foundation of all existence.

In course of time the Puruṣa hymn came to accompany ritual acts related to Viṣṇu, to whose devotees the idea of reintegration—and hence final emancipation through a ritual on the basis of the identification of Viṣṇu and the Puruṣa—made a strong appeal. We must realize that a ritual identification with the god who himself is strengthened, renewed by that ritual and reintegrated means renewal, attainment of a condition of safety, discontinuance of all limitations of mundane existence.

A good instance of a rite requiring the recitation of the Puruṣasūkta is the Viṣṇu *bali* of the Vaikhānasa, described in the Smārtasūtra of that community, chapter 4, 11 and 12, a text which probably dates back to about the 4th century A.D. The Vaikhānasa are a Viṣṇuite community in the Tamil and Telugu speaking districts of the South which perhaps derives its origin from a group or class of ascetics which already at an early date worshipped Nārāyaṇa with strong leanings to Viṣṇuite ritualism but on the other hand claims to have clung to Vedic orthodoxy and possesses Vedic *sūtra* texts that are regarded as representing a school of the Black Yajur Veda. A detailed description of this ritual can be omitted. Only the main features may be mentioned. One should, in the usual way, meditate on Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa as being in the water of a jar which is placed beside the image of the god and as being in one's own heart; invoke the god as Puruṣa, Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu; sacrifice with the Vedic Viṣṇusūkta (RV. 1, 154) and the Puruṣasūkta, on the next day install the image of Viṣṇu; recite these hymns once more, worship God with many Viṣṇuite *mantras* taken from the Veda; praise him with the Puruṣa hymn and worship him devoutly. Then one will reach Viṣṇu's highest abode.

An interesting attempt at demonstrating the identity of Viṣṇu and the Puruṣa, the Primeval Person, is made in the Mudgala-Upaniṣad, a comparatively brief treatise of uncertain date³⁵. The teachings of this work are in substantial agreement with the main tenets of epic and postepic, especially pāñcarātric, Viṣṇuism with regard to the relations between the One and the evolved universe, the One being here also not only the origin of the world but also the ultimate goal, God whose very existence makes final emancipation possible. The method followed in explaining the *sūkta* in the brief first chapter of this *upaniṣad* is simple. The text runs as follows: In the first (stanza) of this (hymn)

35. See J. GONDA, *The Mudgalopaniṣad*, in Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens 12-13 (Festschrift E. Frauwallner, 1968-1969), p. 101.

Viṣṇu's universal pervasion (omnipresence) is stated with respect to place; in the second his universal pervasion is stated with respect to time. In the third it is then told that Viṣṇu—here identical with the Great Puruṣa—grants final emancipation; it should be remembered that in the third stanza it is stated that one fourth of the *puruṣa*— in the *upaniṣad* called Nārāyaṇa—is all beings, three fourths of him what is immortal in heaven. The reintegration of the Puruṣa means the absorption of the manifested fourth into the transcendent three fourths, their combination and his restoration to his original unity. The devout Viṣṇuite should by way of mental concentration realize (*bhāvayet*) the identity of his own I or self and the Highest Brahman which is the Puruṣa. If he succeeds he is emancipated.

We must now for a moment pay attention to the *bhakti* concept. *Bhakti*, which has been translated by devotion, love, surrender, affection; devout, mystic and confident adoration, is from the epic period onwards one of the most striking features of Indian religious life, and especially a very pronounced feature of Vaiṣṇavism. The Viṣṇuites as a rule consider *bhakti* to be the heart of worship, the sole true religious attitude towards a personal God, and the very foundation of the realization of man's relationship with him. In the Veda this *bhakti* is absent, but it is clear that such a mighty mental attitude must have been foreshadowed in the early literature by references to a personal relation between a worshipper and his god, the more so as every personal view of the divine can imply germs of theism and devotionism. And indeed places in the Veda are not wanting where a god is called a father, the worshipper his son, and where a certain emotion and tendency to communion assume the character of true devotion. Moreover, the oldest passages attesting to the use of the term in its religious sense, the Sivaite Svetāśvatara-Upaniṣad 6, 23 (about the 4th century B.C.) shows clearly that then already the concept of *bhakti* had a history. In this closing stanza the author of this *upaniṣad* states or rather promises that the subjects taught in this treatise will become clear and manifest to the high-souled one « who has the highest devotion (*parā bhakti*) for God and for his spiritual teacher as for God ».

Now, from an examination of the use of this term and the etymologically related words in the Mahābhārata and other works³⁶ it appears that among the semantic nuances expressed by the term are also those of « forming part of, having a share in, participating in, communing with, belonging to, being intimately related to or associated with, adhering to, clinging to ». These shades of meaning presuppose a certain reciprocity or at least the idea of participation, or participating in another being with which one can even unite. Thus in the closing scene of the Rāmāyaṇa Rāma, being identified with Viṣṇu, says « (my) *bhaktas*

36. See J. GONDA, *Het begrip bhakti*, Tijdschrift voor Philosophie 10 (Louvain, 1948), p. 607 ff., esp. 615 ff. (in Dutch).

must be loved » or rather « I must commune with them and love them » (*bhaktā hi bhajitavyāḥ*). From many places it appears that *bhakti* runs hand in hand with bending one's mind to God. Bhagavad-Gītā 12, 8 « On Me alone let your mind dwell, then in truth you will find your home in Me ». « The one who (in this way) participates in Me or devoutly loves Me (both expressions translate the verb *bhajati*), (Me) as abiding in all beings, abides in Me » (BhG. 6, 31). Now, interestingly enough, the object of religious *bhakti* is very often indicated by a term which derives from the same root, namely *bhagavān*. *Bhagavān* etymologically denotes « the one who has, possesses or consists of, the parts, especially the disintegrated parts ». The Indians themselves have often emphasized the relation between both words, *bhakti* and *bhagavān*. The title *bhagavān* is especially preferred by those Viṣṇuites who adore Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa-Vāsudeva and it is expressly taught that it is the *bhagavān* who in *bhakti* can be seen by means of *upāsanā*, that is that adoration and meditation which lead to identification³⁷.

The names and terms Īśvara « the Lord », Bhagavān, Puruṣa, Nārāyaṇa, Brahman, Puruṣottama or Supreme Puruṣa, Paramātman or « Supreme self » and others came in Viṣṇuism to be used almost promiscuously, although it is true that individual teachers or communities often prefer one of them. Thus in the Mandasore inscription of 404 A.D. the Thousand-headed Puruṣa is identified with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Hence also advices to meditate in case of danger upon the Puruṣa of old, Nārāyaṇa (Purāṇa-Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa)³⁸. Says the Assamese saint-poet Śaṅkaradeva: « O Lord, You are the only unchangeable reality of this world. You are the primal cause, the Primal and eternal Puruṣa, O Nārāyaṇa »³⁹. It is therefore not surprising that just as in the Bhagavad-Gītā the Puruṣa and the Puruṣottama are often the objects of *bhakti* notwithstanding the more or less abstract character the Puruṣa conception may have in our eyes⁴⁰.

It cannot even be said that the ancient Puruṣa idea receded into the background in those circles and communities which in the course of time came emotionally to adore such perfectly personal representatives of the divine as Viṣṇu's *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa. Combining traditional Viṣṇuite belief, the essential features of theist Sāṃkhya and emotional *bhakti* the poet of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa (10, 3, 13-22), described Vasudeva praising his son Kṛṣṇa who is the Omnipotent himself and the Puruṣa higher than *prakṛti*. His wife Devakī, understanding that her son is the eternal foundation of the world and the High Puruṣa (st. 31),

37. See e.g. the commentary on Viṣṇu-Purāṇa 6, 5, 69.

38. S. C. MUKHERJI, *A study of Vaiṣṇavism in ancient and medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1966, p. 57.

39. Śaṅkaradeva, *Bhaktiratnākara*, 134 ff., quoted by S. N. SARMA, *The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement and the Satra institution of Assam*, Gauhati, 1966, p. 29.

40. See e.g. Sāmarahasyopaniṣad in *Unpublished Upaniṣads*, Adyar, 1933, p. 220 and 246.

joins him. Kṛṣṇa himself, far from behaving like a new-born child, begins to speak as the Bhagavān. And also when the *gopīs* (milkmaids) come to him devoutly and in a *bhakti* frame of mind he is described as willing to fulfil as Ādi-Puruṣa and Paramātmā the wishes of those who long for final emancipation and not to fail, as the Bhagavān, those who are his *bhaktas* (cf. BhāgPur. 10, 29, 20 ff.). Or, to quote the *gopīs*: « Commune with (or love) your devout lovers » (*bhaktā bhajasva*).

Surdas, the blind poet of Agra who probably flourished in the latter half of the sixteenth century, likewise combined Kṛṣṇa religion and Sāṃkhya elements. Kṛṣṇa and his beloved Rādhā, the *gopī*, are really one; their love and her *bhakti* are eternal, but while Rādhā represents nature, *prakṛti*, Kṛṣṇa is the Puruṣa (with a capital) and at the same time the collectivity of the *puruṣas* who is the All. Kṛṣṇa distinguishes the Rādhā aspect of himself for the purpose of his *līlā*, that is the play or game of his effortless activity in the world which consists in making the beings believe that they are individuals, that is in imprisoning them in *saṃsāra* only to release them and unite them with himself.

In that modern popular and nowadays rapidly spreading form of devotional and congregational worship which is called *bhajana*, in which the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa story and cult are central, this indissoluble combination of *bhakti* and the Puruṣa conception is one of the most striking features. The constant and intense love of the *gopīs* (milkmaids) for the young cowherd Kṛṣṇa is a model of all human devotion. Because it is bestowed on God it is transmuted into a spotless and holy love, which ultimately will lead to salvation. If the devotees persist in their imitation of this love of the *gopīs* for Kṛṣṇa they will be rewarded by the state of bliss achieved by the *gopīs* and by the presence of Kṛṣṇa. Now, according to this Viṣṇuite *bhakti* faith all men and women are spiritually women, Kṛṣṇa the Lord, the Bhagavān, alone is male, the Puruṣa. The *bhakti* or devotional love and surrender of Rādhā and the other milkmaids, who represent the human souls, explains man's inclination to being drawn to the Puruṣa, and becoming merged in the Supreme Soul.