

## THE SACREDNESS OF THE UNIVERSE IN THE HINDU SCRIPTURES

« If I were to ask myself, from what literature we here in Europe, — we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of the Greeks and the Romans and the one Semitic race, the Jewish — may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human, a life, not for this life alone but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India »<sup>1</sup>. This high eulogy showered on the sacred scriptures of the Hindus by the famous Orientalist, Prof. Max Müller, gives a good start to our study which seeks to bring into relief the sacredness of the universe as envisaged in those scriptures. —

As is well known, Hinduism is extremely rich in sacred scriptures. They come under two categories: Śruti (revelation) and Smṛti (tradition). Śruti which literally means 'what is heard' is considered to be a deposit of eternal, infallible truths experienced or 'heard' by the holy sages of old in their moments of spiritual illumination. Those sages are not regarded as their authors, but only as manifesters of the eternal truths which exist by themselves as « vāk » (verbum, logos). Smṛti, on the other hand, which etymologically means 'recollection' includes all the rest of the religious literature, which are authoritative only in so far as they are in conformity with the Śruti. Here we intend to make a rapid survey of two important sections of Śruti, namely the Rgveda Samhita and the principal Upaniṣads; while from the Smṛti we shall take into consideration the Bhagvadgītā (or Gītā) and the Dharmasāstras (the Law Books).

### I. - THE RGVEDA

About 2000 years before Christ the Aryans who settled down in the soil of India, struck by the wonders of the natural phenomena,

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Radhakrishnan: *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1969, pp. 304-305.

began to attribute supra-human powers to them and worship them. Those primitive men gave expression to their feelings of wonderment and helplessness, surrender and supplication before those powers in poetic outpourings. This is the main content of the Rgveda. There heaven and earth, sun and fire, wind and storm, all are as many divinities to be praised and propitiated for protection and prosperity.

In the hymn addressed to Heaven and Earth the Vedic seer looks upon them with awe as the divine couple who bear and sustain all that exists. Even the gods are said to be their children. This sense of the utter greatness of Heaven and Earth inspires him with a feeling of complete dependence on them, from which spontaneously arise prayers for help, protection and forgiveness. He implores: « As a son in his own parents' lap, may Heaven and Earth protect us from fearful evil »<sup>2</sup>. « May they guard us from fault and crime. As father and mother may they protect us with their help »<sup>3</sup>. Being dependent on the earth for life and sustenance, the Vedic poet is all the more eloquent in extolling her greatness. She is the mother who bears the heavy burden of the mountains, she is the goddess who gives fertility to the soil with her many streams, she is the powerful protector of the trees against thunder and floods<sup>4</sup>.

Not less divine is the resplendent Sun. He is the god among the gods, he is the highest light that illumines the whole universe, and « Away like thieves the stars depart,

By the dark nights accompanied,

At the all-seeing Sun's approach »<sup>5</sup>.

He is a far-seeing god who moves swiftly along the sky seated on a charriot drawn by seven bright mares. Flaming like a blazing fire high up in the sky he sees and knows all creatures that are born. He is the god who decides the duration of days and nights.

Much more ravishing is the Vedic vision of the Uṣas, the beautiful goddess of the dawn. She is the daughter of the sky, the lady of the light, the giver of riches and prosperity. She is seen as playing a vital role in the day to day life, not only of men, but of all other creatures also. The sage sings:

« Like a good matron Uṣas comes carefully tending everything:

Rousing all life she stirs all creatures that have feet, and makes the birds of air fly up »<sup>6</sup>. He is impressed by the fidelity and regu-

<sup>2</sup> Rgveda, I, 185, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, I, 185, 10.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, V, 84.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, I, 50, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, I, 48, 5.

larity with which the goddess of dawn appears day after day in order to rouse the creatures to work. Inspired by a feeling of dependance on her the poet exclaims: « In thee is each living creature's breath and life »<sup>7</sup>. It is she who bestows on them high felicity, abundant wealth, plentiful food, wide dwelling, invincible strength, freedom from foes. He therefore invites her along with all other gods to take part in the religious rite which he performs in her honour, and prays: « May Uṣas, whose auspicious rays are seen resplendent round about, grant us great riches, fair in form, of all good things, wealth which light labour may attain »<sup>8</sup>.

Fire too, another wonder of nature, is a god for the Vedic sages, and in fact an all-important god. He is called Agni, which only means fire. The importance of fire was due not only to the fact that he gave light and warmth to the people but also to the fact that for the sacrificial cult of the time he was an indispensable element.

Impressed by the phenomenal aspect of the fire the poet declares « By the power of his mind, by his greatness when kindled, his flame kindled heaven and earth with light. His flames are fierce; never ageing are the flames of him who is beautiful to behold, whose face is beautiful, whose splendour is beautiful »<sup>9</sup>. Again we read: « Thou who art beautiful, of like appearance on all sides, thou shinest forth even when afar, like lightning. Thou seest, O god, even over the darkness of night »<sup>10</sup>.

From the point of view of sacrifices, which consisted mainly in offering different objects in fire to placate the divinities, Agni is all in all. See for example what the sages have to say of him: « I magnify Agni, the *purohita* (priest), the divine ministrant of the sacrifice, the *hotr* priest, the greatest bestower of treasures »<sup>11</sup>. « As thou, O Agni, art the lord of worship, the messenger of the clans, conduct hither today the gods awakening with the dawn, of sun-like aspect, that they may drink Soma »<sup>12</sup>. « Being well lighted, O Agni, bring us hither the gods to the man rich in sacrificial food, O *hotr*, purifier, and perform the sacrifice »<sup>13</sup>. « For thou art the accepted messenger, the bearer of sacrificial food, O Agni, the charioteer of worship »<sup>14</sup>. « For whenever we sacrifice constantly to this or to that

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, I, 48, 10.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, I, 48, 13.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, I, 143, 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, I, 94, 7.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, I, 1, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, I, 44, 9.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, I, 13, 1.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, I, 44, 2.

god, in thee alone the sacrificial food is offered »<sup>15</sup>. Agni, therefore, is the priest par excellence, the link between heaven and earth, the mediator between gods and men. He plays the role of the divine host in welcoming, in the name of men, the gods to partake of the sacrificial food<sup>16</sup>. He is the messenger who carries to the gods the praise and the offerings of the devotees. It is said that 'the gods eat the sacrificial food that is offered in the fire'<sup>17</sup>.

Such a vision of the fire-god impells the Vedic sage to pray: « Thee, O Agni, we approach day by day, O (god) who shinest in the darkness; with our prayer, bring adoration to thee. ... O Agni, be easy of access to us, as a father is to his son. Stay with us for our happiness »<sup>18</sup>.

Wind too is a phenomenon that evoked the admiration of the poetic minds of the Vedas. They visualised it as a god that moves about at his will and pleasure without let or hindrance. He is called Vāta or Vāyu meaning precisely wind. The poet is puzzled to account for his origin. This god is seen as rushing forward with a roar crushing to pieces all that is in his way, whirling up the dust of the earth and moving the very skies.<sup>19</sup> In utter bewilderment the poet says: « The breath of the gods, the germ of the world, this god wanders at his will. His roarings are heard, not (seen) is his form. This Vāta let us worship with an oblation »<sup>20</sup>.

Storms also are deities, and are called Maruts or the storm-gods. Many hymns are dedicated to their praise. The Maruts are strong-voiced, powerful gods who march across the atmosphere carrying thunderbolt in their hands and arming themselves with golden daggers, the lightning<sup>21</sup>. They are said to release water for the benefit of men, fighting against the demon of drought, Vrtra, wielding their powerful weapons, the thunder and the lightning<sup>22</sup>. Their march is said to be so terrible as to make rocks tremble, heavens shiver and men fear<sup>23</sup>. The sages therefore try to placate them with praises and offerings, and pray: « O Maruts, whenever we call you from heaven, wishing for your favour, come hither towards us. ... O Maruts, bring to us from heaven enrapturing wealth, which nurishes many, which satisfies all »<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, I, 26, 6.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, I, 45, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, I, 94, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, I, 1, 7-9.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, X, 168, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, X, 168, 4.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, VIII, 7, 32.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, VIII, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, I, 166.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, VIII, 7, 11-13.

The greater part of the Rgveda is occupied by hymns that give expression to a naturalistic polytheism as delineated above. Those primitive Indo-Aryans found themselves surrounded by all sorts of gods; they were living and moving and having their being in the midst of the divinities. There are also, in those scriptures, flights of insight that transcend a pluralistic vision of the reality. Thus, for instance, we read there: « To what is one the sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśan »<sup>25</sup>. Elsewhere the Veda says: « One All is lord of what is fixed and moving, that walks, that flies, this multiform creation »<sup>26</sup>. And again: « The Puruṣa is this all, that which was and which shall be »<sup>27</sup>.

## II. - THE UPANIṢADS

The Upaniṣads form the concluding portion of the Vedas. They are also named Vedānta which means precisely the end of the Vedas. These texts contain the quintessence of all that is sublime in Hindu thought. They are by no means a homogeneous product which presents coherently a particular philosophical theory, nor are they the work of a single author. Rather, they embody the intuitions, insights and spiritual experiences of different sages and thinkers distributed along a period between 800 B. C. and 300 B. C. Though there are more than a hundred texts that bear the title of Upaniṣads, the genuine and canonical ones are only fourteen: Iśa, Kena, Katha, Praśna, Muṇḍaka, Māṇḍūkya, Taittirīya, Aitareya, Chāndogya, Brhādāraṇyaka, Svātāśvatara, Kauṣītaki, Mahānārāyaṇa and Maitrī.

Even a random look into the apparently unordered matter that constitutes the Upaniṣads will impress one of their overwhelming awareness of the divine reality embedded in the material universe. Often the emphasis on the Supreme Spirit as the principle of unity is so overpowering that the disconcerting multiplicity of the world experience is relegated to the background. « In all nations, in all times there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental unity. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian scriptures »<sup>28</sup>. Though these words of Emerson are true of many of the

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, I, 164, 46.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, III, 54, 8.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, X, 90, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in: *Vedanta for Modern Man*, ed. C. Isherwood, New York, 1972, p. 353.

Hindu scriptures, they are particularly so of the Upaniṣads. The impression these texts created on Schopenhauer is manifest in his famous remark: « And O! how the mind is here washed clean of all its early ingrafted Jewish superstition! It is the most profitable and most elevating reading which is possible in the world. It has been the solace of my life and will be the solace of my death »<sup>29</sup>.

The Iṣa Up. opens with a declaration: « By the Lord enveloped must this all be — whatever moving thing there is in the moving world »<sup>30</sup>. This envelopment of the material world by the Lord is of the nature of a deeper penetration and permeation, rather than that of an external wrapping. He is within it and at the same time outside it<sup>31</sup>. That is to say, the Lord is in the world without being limited by the world.

The Brhadāraṇyaka Up. presents the entire universe with the myriads of living and non-living beings it contains as the « body »<sup>32</sup> of the Supreme Spirit — the Brahman, the Ātman — who abiding in one and all of them controls them from within as their « Inner Controller » (Antaryāmin). The scripture says: « He who, dwelling in all things, yet is other than all things, whom all things do not know, whose body all things are, who controls all things from within — He is your Soul (Ātman), the Inner Controller, the Immortal »<sup>33</sup>. The importance attached to this vision of the creatures as the body which enshrines the Divinity can be gauged from the fact that the whole sentence just cited is repeated twenty times over in one stretch affirming each time specifically and individually about the earth, the waters, the fire, the atmosphere, the wind, the sky, the sun, the quarters of heaven, the moon and the stars, the space, the darkness, the light, the breath, the speech, the eye, the ear, the mind, the skin, the understanding and the semen that each one of them constitutes the body which is being governed by the indwelling Inner Controller<sup>34</sup>.

The Upaniṣads spell out the same idea with another powerful expression: the Inner Soul (Antarātman). The Supreme Spirit is the

<sup>29</sup> Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>30</sup> Iṣa Up., 1.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Here it is useful to bear in mind the definition of *body* given by Rāma-  
nuja: « Any substance which a sentient soul is capable of completely controlling  
and supporting for its own purposes, and which stands to the soul in an en-  
tirely subordinate position, is the body of that soul. ... In this sense, then, all  
sentient and non-sentient beings together constitute the body of the Supreme  
Person, for they are completely controlled and supported by Him for His own  
ends, and are absolutely subordinate to Him ». *Śrībhāṣya*, II, 1, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Brhadāraṇyaka Up., III, 7, 15.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, III, 7, 3-23; see also II, 5, 1-14.

Inner Soul of the manifold beings of the universe. As the Svetāśvatara Up. puts it, the Supreme Lord is « hidden in all things, body by body »<sup>35</sup>; He is the « One embracer of the universe »<sup>36</sup>; He is the « Inner Soul ever seated in the heart of all creatures »<sup>37</sup>. The multiplicity of the creatures is accounted for by the fact that the one Inner Soul « makes his one form manifold »<sup>38</sup>. « As the one wind has entered the world and becomes corresponding in form to every form, so the Inner Soul of all things is corresponding in form to every form, and yet is outside »<sup>39</sup>. Abiding in all creatures He gives them life and light; « this whole world is illumined by His light »<sup>40</sup>; « after Him, as He shines, doth everything shine »<sup>41</sup>.

As a body without a vivifying soul falls to pieces and loses its original unity and integrity, so too the universe becomes a scene of an immense variety of beings hopelessly separated from one another if one loses sight of the One reality that unites them all. The Upaniṣads which are at pains to find out the principle of unity in the midst of diversity, is never tired of repeating that that principle is the Supreme Spirit. « As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this Ātman all things, all gods, all worlds, all breathing things, all these selves are held together »<sup>42</sup>. He is the « warp and woof » of the universe<sup>43</sup>; « on him creatures here are woven »<sup>44</sup>; the one Ātman is the reality « on whom the sky, the earth and the atmosphere are woven »<sup>45</sup>.

The Upaniṣads envisage the world as emanating from within the Supreme Spirit and consequently as forming part and parcel of Him. The Muṇḍaka Up. employs different similes to illustrate this idea. « As a spider emits and draws in (its thread),

As herbs arise on the earth,

As the hairs of the head and body from a living person,

So from the Imperishable arise everything here »<sup>46</sup>.

The analogy of the sparks coming out of the fire seems more telling: « As from a well-blazing fire sparks by the thousand issue forth of like form, so from the Imperishable, my friend, beings ma-

<sup>35</sup> Svetāśvatara Up., III, 7.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, III, 11 seqq.; Muṇḍaka Up., II, 1, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Katha Up., V, 12.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, V, 10.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, V, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Muṇḍaka Up., II, 2, 10; Svetāśvatara Up., V, 4; VI, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up., II, 5, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, III, 8, 3-11.

<sup>44</sup> Maitri Up., VII, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Muṇḍaka Up., II, 2, 5.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, I, 1, 7.

nifold are produced, and thither also go »<sup>47</sup>. Against this background the following declaration of the Svetāśvatara Up. becomes all the more significant: « This whole world is pervaded by beings that are parts of Him »<sup>48</sup>. This idea is taken to its farthest limits when the universe is looked upon as a macrocosmic person animated by the Divine Spirit. As the Muṇḍaka Up. would put it: « Fire is His head; His eyes, the moon and sun; the regions of space, His ears; His voice, the revealed Vedas; wind, His breath; His heart, the whole world. Out of His feet, the earth, Truly He is the Inner Soul of all »<sup>49</sup>.

The One Lord is the total cause of the entire universe. He is, of course the efficient cause of it, the source of all things<sup>50</sup>, the maker of the creation and its parts<sup>51</sup>, the beginning and the origin of all being<sup>52</sup> the intelligent maker of all<sup>53</sup>. He is also the material cause of the world as is implied in the theory of emanation. The same is the implication of the doctrine according to which the Supreme Spirit is the 'warp and woof' of the world reality. It is also clearly brought out in the Chāndogya Up. which conceives the Supreme Being as the one and the only original reality from which this world was produced. The text declares that by knowing this Being all the rest of the reality is known, just as by knowing « one piece of clay everything made of clay may be known — the modification is merely a verbal distinction, a name; the reality is just 'clay' »<sup>54</sup>.

Hence when the Upaniṣads declare so emphatically that « truly everything here is Brahman »<sup>55</sup>, or again that « Brahman indeed is this whole world, this widest extent »<sup>56</sup>, they only condense into pithy expressions the different views already seen regarding the divine immanence in the material universe.

The Upaniṣadic seer apprehends Him who is incorporeal in the corporeal existence around him<sup>57</sup>; he sees the One among the many<sup>58</sup>; he sees the Constant amidst the inconstant<sup>59</sup>; he sees the Intelligent among the intelligences<sup>60</sup>; he sees the One God abiding in

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, II, 1, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Svetāśvatara Up., IV, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Muṇḍaka Up., II, 1, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Svetāśvatara Up., V, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, V, 14.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 5.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Chāndogya Up., VI, 1, 4.

<sup>55</sup> Māndukya Up., 2.

<sup>56</sup> Muṇḍaka Up., II, 2, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Svetāśvatara Up., V, 14.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 13.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*



all things<sup>61</sup>; he sees the One Controller of the inactive many<sup>62</sup>. It is this deep-rooted consciousness that inspires him to exclaim: « Thou art woman. Thou art man. Thou art the youth and the maiden too. Thou as an old man totterest with a staff. Being born Thou becomest facing in every direction. Thou art the dark-blue bird and the green one with red eyes. Thou hast the lightning as Thy child. Thou art the seasons and the seas. Having no beginning Thou dost abide with immanence wherefrom all beings are born »<sup>63</sup>.

For a speculative philosopher it might be an unsurmountable problem to reconcile the immanence of the Supreme Spirit in the world as delineated above with His absolute transcendence. But the intuitive minds of those sages found no problem whatsoever in visualizing Him as almost tangibly immanent in this imperfect world while at the same time proclaiming in most exalted terms His supreme transcendence. One cannot emphasise this fact too much. The Upaniṣads clearly state that He is the self-sourced source of all things<sup>64</sup>, without beginning and without end<sup>65</sup>, beyond the three times: past, present and future<sup>66</sup>, the mighty Lord of lords, the supreme Divinity of divinities and the supreme Ruler of rulers<sup>67</sup>. There is no likeness of Him in the whole world<sup>68</sup>. He is incomprehensible, unthinkable, unlimited<sup>69</sup>. Hence human eye cannot catch a glimpse of Him, speech cannot reveal Him, mind cannot attain Him. He is other than all that is known to us and also is above all that is unknown<sup>70</sup>. Kāṭha Up. asserts that the only thing that can be said of Him is that « He is »<sup>71</sup>.

It is this baffling consciousness of the transcendence of the Divine Being coupled with a vivid realization of His immanence that moved the sages to predicate to Him paradoxical attributes. As the Iśa Up. declares: « It moves. It moves not. It is far and It is near. It is within all this and It is outside all this »<sup>72</sup>. In the same strain the Muṇḍaka Up. says: « It is farther than the far, yet here near at

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 11.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 12.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, IV, 3-4.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 16.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, V, 13.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 5.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 7.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, IV, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Maitri Up., VI, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Kena Up., 3.

<sup>71</sup> Kāṭha Up., VI, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Iśa Up., 5.

hand »<sup>73</sup>. He who is the Inner Soul of all things is at the same time outside all things and so the imperfections of the world do not in any way affect His absolute perfection. The Kāṭha Up. would express it as follows: « As the sun, the eye of the world, is not sullied by the external faults of the eyes, so the one Inner Soul of all things is not sullied by the evil in the world, being external to it »<sup>74</sup>.

Such a vision of the reality is not the result of mere intellectual plodding; it is a revelation granted to His chosen ones<sup>75</sup>. One has to purify oneself of all attachments and learn to look upon everything in relation to the Ātman. As the Brhadāraṇyaka Up. repeatedly reminds: « Lo verily, not for love of the worlds are the worlds dear, but for love of the Ātman the worlds are dear. ... Lo verily, not for love of all is all dear, but for love of the Ātman all is dear »<sup>76</sup>. An internal purification of this nature accompanied by a constant meditation would take one to the realization of the Ātman<sup>77</sup> as « ever seated in the heart of all creatures »<sup>78</sup>, and especially as abiding in one's own heart, and that will culminate in eternal happiness, in immortality<sup>79</sup>.

### III. - THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ

Of all the religious literature of India, the Bhagavadgītā (The Lord's Song) is the most popular. It is often qualified as the New Testament of Hinduism. The exact date of its composition is not known. The scholars assign it to a time between 500 B. C. and 200 B. C. It is a philosophico-mystical work of exquisite beauty written in the form of a dialogue between Kṛṣṇa who is none other than the great God Viṣṇu incarnated in human form « for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil-doers, for setting up the law of righteousness »<sup>80</sup>, and Arjuna, His friend and disciple. In the course of the dialogue Kṛṣṇa reveals the doctrines concerning the deepest things of the world, man and God. The ostensible purpose of the revelation is that of persuading Arijuna to do his duty from which he was fleeing, namely that of fighting a 'just war' against the usurpers of his kingdom.

<sup>73</sup> Mundaka Up., III, 1, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Kāṭha Up., V, 11.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, II, 23; Mundaka Up., III, 2, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Brhadāraṇyaka Up., II, 4, 5.

<sup>77</sup> Mundaka Up., III, 1, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Svetāśvatara Up., IV, 17.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, IV, 20; VI, 12; Kāṭha Up., V, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Gītā, IV, 8.

In the Gītā we don't find any discontinuity of thought regarding the world from that of the Upaniṣads except that the incarnate God Kṛṣṇa assumes the position of the Supreme Spirit of the latter. The text constantly and consistently brings out the theory of unity in multiplicity. As Kṛṣṇa says so graphically and so suggestively: « On Me this universe is strung like clustered pearls upon a thread »<sup>81</sup>. The beauty and the harmony of the universe is derived from the divine reality abiding in and running through the multiple beings that constitute it.

Resounding the Upaniṣadic concept of the world as emerging from the Supreme Spirit as the spider's web emerges from the spider<sup>82</sup>, the Gītā states that the whole universe was spun by Kṛṣṇa, and hence in Him do all beings subsist<sup>83</sup>. In fact the total universe of spirit and matter is a veritable body of Kṛṣṇa, or better, the cosmic form of Kṛṣṇa envelopes and encompasses this immense universe. This is expressed very vividly in the account of the transfiguration of Kṛṣṇa narrated in the chapter XI of this book. Kṛṣṇa after asking Arjuna to behold the whole universe « as centered in One, with all that it contains of moving and unmoving things »<sup>84</sup>, was transfigured into an indescribable universal form. And Arjuna who was given for a moment « celestial eyes » to behold the glory of the Lord<sup>85</sup>, did see « the whole (wide) universe in One converged, there in the body of the God of gods, yet divided out in multiplicity »<sup>86</sup>.

The Gītā leaves no stone unturned to drive home the idea of the divine presence in the material world. The Lord declares: « I penetrate the earth and so sustain (all) beings with my strength »<sup>87</sup>. « As in (wide) space subsists the mighty wind blowing (at will) ever and everywhere, so do all contingent beings subsist in Me »<sup>88</sup>, says Kṛṣṇa. And again: « No being is there, whether moving or unmoving, that exists or could exist apart from Me »<sup>89</sup>. Whatever is good and sublime in every single being bespeaks the presence of the divinity in it, nay *is* the very divinity. See, for instance what the God incarnate states: « In water I am the flavour, in sun and moon the light, in all the Vedas (the sacred syllable) Om, in space (I am) sound, in

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, VII, 7.

<sup>82</sup> Mundaka Up., 1, 1, 7; Brhadāranyaka Up., II, 1. 20.

<sup>83</sup> Gīā, II, 17; VIII, 22; XI, 38; XVIII, 46.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, XI, 7.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, XI, 8.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, XI, 13.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, XV, 13.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, IX, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, X, 39.

men their manliness am I. Pure fragrance in the earth am I, flame's onset in the fire: (and) life am I in all contingent beings, in ascetics (their) fierce austerity »<sup>90</sup>.

The Gītā's doctrine on the sacredness of the world reaches its climax when it declares categorically: « In the region of the heart of all contingent beings dwells the Lord »<sup>91</sup>. The Lord Kṛṣṇa says elsewhere: « I am the Self established in the heart of all contingent beings: I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all contingent beings too »<sup>92</sup>. And with regard to man, He loves to repeat it with added emphasis: « I make my dwelling in the hearts of all »<sup>93</sup>, and this indwelling is the source of all their vital and spiritual powers. Kṛṣṇa underlines that He is present even in the wicked men who hate Him. But since they rely more on their own selfishness and pride they never attain Him<sup>94</sup>. The divine indwelling, which is the source of man's godly destiny, demands from him a life worthy of it, a life dominated by virtues such as purity of heart, truthfulness, freedom from anger, uprightness, tranquillity, compassion for all beings, forgiveness, courage, gentleness, renunciation, penance, and so on<sup>95</sup>. The Lord clearly states that any excess, even in the practice of penance and mortification, is highly offensive to His presence in man's body. What to say then of rank vices?

It is stated further that the realization of the unity in multiplicity, of the divine element that binds together the infinite variety of objects in the world, is a condition for the final liberation of the soul. The Gītā says: « When once a man can see (all) the diversity of contingent beings as abiding in One alone and their radiation out of It, then to Brahman he attains »<sup>96</sup>. Elsewhere the blessed Lord reassures: « Who sees Me everywhere, who sees everything in Me, for him I am not lost, nor is he lost to Me »<sup>97</sup>.

The Gītā too does not think that the immanence of the Divine in the world is in any way incompatible with His absolute transcendence. He is One and manifold at the same time<sup>98</sup>. « Though abiding in many a body [the Highest Self] does not act nor is It defiled »<sup>99</sup>. Just as the all-pervading ether, being very subtle by nature, is not

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, VII, 8-9; see also X, 21-38.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, XVIII, 61.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, X, 20.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, XV, 15.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, XVI, 17-20.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, XVI, 1-3.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, XIII, 30.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, VI, 30.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, IX, 15.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, XIII, 31.

defiled by the different objects, so too the Supreme Self, though abiding in every body, knows no defilement<sup>100</sup>. It is because of this conviction of the Lord's immanence coupled with His complete transcendence that the Gītā states: « The same in all contingent beings, abiding (without change), the Highest Lord, when all things fall to ruin, (Himself) is not destroyed »<sup>101</sup>. Hence the Lord Kṛṣṇa declares: « I transcend the perishable and am more exalted than the imperishable itself »<sup>102</sup>.

#### IV. - THE DHARMAŚĀSTRAS

The Law Books which regulate the personal, familiar, social and religious life of the Hindus are collectively called *Dharmaśāstras*. There are a number of such books among which the one attributed to Manu, named *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* or *Manu-smṛiti*, has the pride of place. In fact the other law books have very little to offer which are not traceable in the Laws of Manu. While the orthodox Hindus believe that it belongs to time immemorial, the scholars hold that it was compiled towards the beginning of the Christian era from very ancient legal traditions.

The Laws of Manu visualize the universe as being produced by the eternal Self-existent Being (Svayambhū) from His own 'body', and hence the supposition of the sacredness of creatures is maintained throughout the text. It proposes a hierarchical order of beings which is conditioned by its basic assumption of caste distinction among men. It says: « Of created beings the most excellent are said to be those which are animated; of the animated, those which subsist by intelligence; of the intelligent, mankind; of men, the Brāhmins »<sup>103</sup>. It never loses sight of the perspective of unity in multiplicity. As it declares: « The Self (Ātman) alone is the multitude of gods, the universe rests on the Self »<sup>104</sup>. Hence it exhorts: « Let (every Brāhmin), concentrating his mind, fully recognize in the Self all things, both the real and the unreal, for he who recognises the universe in the Self, does not give his heart to unrighteousness »<sup>105</sup>. And this realization of the unity of all things in the Ātman is the condition for attaining eternal bliss. « He who thus recognises the Self through

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, XIII, 32.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, XIII, 27.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, XV, 18.

<sup>103</sup> Manu, I, 96.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, XII, 119.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, XII, 118.

the Self in all created beings becomes equal-minded towards all, and enters the highest state, Brahman »<sup>106</sup>.

In the perspective of practically all the Law Books the realms of the visible and the invisible stand intimately inter-related. Hence the whole details of the day to day life of man is given a religious colouring; they are explained in terms of sacrifices (yajñā). A householder, for instance, is supposed to offer sacrifices not only to gods but to other men and to all living beings as well. In fact, the Law Books prescribe for him five sacrifices to be performed every day<sup>107</sup>. First of all he has to offer sacrifices to gods, which consist in the burnt oblations in the sacred domestic fire. The second sacrifice is to the holy sages, and it consists in reverently reading and teaching the sacred scriptures. In the third place comes the sacrifice for the manes, which is fulfilled by the libations of water and other oblations. The fourth sacrifice expected of him is the one intended for men, which is no other than the hospitable reception of guests and the charitable treatment of the needy. Manu declares: « The hospitable reception of guests procures wealth, fame, long life, and heavenly bliss. Let him offer (to his guests) seats, rooms, beds, attendance on departure, and honour (while they stay), to the most distinguished in the best form, to the lower ones in a lower form, to equals in an equal manner »<sup>108</sup>. And as regards the charity to be exercised, the law-givers specify the categories of people who deserve special attention, namely pregnant women, newly married women, infants and old and sick people<sup>109</sup>. And finally the sacrifice for all creatures, which consists in treating them gently and in feeding them according to one's ability. The householder is asked to give some food daily to animals, birds and insects<sup>110</sup>. It is to be noted that celestial felicity is promised to those who honour all beings in this manner<sup>111</sup>.

The law-givers carry the idea of the sacredness of all created beings to its logical conclusion when they prescribe penances for any kind of violation — even unintentional one — of that sacredness<sup>112</sup>. A whole range of penances is prescribed corresponding to

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, XII, 125.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, III, 70; Baudhāyana Dharmaśāstra, II, 5, 11; II, 11, 1; Viṣṇu Smṛti, LIX, 20-25; Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra, I, 102; Āśvalāyana Grhyasūtra, III, 1, 1-4.

<sup>108</sup> Manu, III, 106-107; Gautamiya Dharmaśāstra V, 38-39; Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra, I, 104; 107.

<sup>109</sup> Manu, III, 92; 114; Viṣṇu Smṛti, LXVII, 39; Gāutamiya Dharmaśāstra, V, 25; Baudhāyana Dharmaśāstra, II, 13, 5; Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra, I, 105; Āpastambīya Dharmaśāstra, II, 2, 4, 10-14.

<sup>110</sup> Manu, III, 92; Viṣṇu Smṛti, LXVII, 26; Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra, I, 103.

<sup>111</sup> Manu, III, 93.

the gravity of the guilt, penances such as fasting for a longer or shorter duration, giving gifts or alms worth more or less to the Brāhmins, repeating some sacred formula for a stipulated number of times, taking bath in a sacred river, practising control of breath (prāṇāyāma), eating clarified butter, and so on. The most striking feature to be noted is that not only is the injury inflicted on animal life to be atoned for by penances but also that done to plant life. Thus for instance, for killing a dog or a crow or a fish one has to fast for three days; for killing a monkey or a peacock one has to give a cow to a Brāhmin; for killing small creatures which have bones one should give some trifle to a Brāhmin for each animal which one has killed; but one becomes purified from the guilt of killing small creatures without bones by practising breath control for some time; for cutting down fruit-trees, shrubs, creepers or flowering plants one must mutter the Gayatrī (the Vedic formula) a hundred times. Here what is of interest to us is not exactly the nature of the penance imposed, but the fact itself that penance has been imposed even for cutting down plants and trees, inculcating thus the idea that life, in whatever form it may be found, is something sacred and so inviolable.

#### V. - CONCLUSION

Our rapid survey of the sacred scriptures of the Hindus clearly establishes the fact that according to all of them this world is something profoundly sacred. It is the image of God, it is His abode, it is saturated with His presence, it is divine. The Vedic men beheld gods in the bright sun, in the high mountain, in the wide world, in the expanse of the sky, in the immensity of the ocean. And as their religious consciousness developed all these different divinities merged into the One Supreme Spirit, who remaining the Inner Soul, the Inner Controller, the Lord that dwells in the very heart of all beings, rendered the latter always radiant with a deep spiritual significance. Every infringement therefore of this sacredness was to be duly expiated by proper penances.

Against this background one can appreciate better an episode in the life of Śankarācārya, the great teacher of non-dualistic thought in Hinduism. It is reported that he on his death-bed asked God pardon for having committed the 'sin' of going to temples for

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<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, XI, 132-146; Gautamiya Dharmaśāstra, XXII, 19-26; Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra, III, 268-276; Viṣṇu Smṛti, L, 25-50.

worshipping Him, denying thus in effect His omnipresence. When one realizes that this vast universe is a veritable temple where divine worship is to be performed incessantly, there is no wonder if one feels that to set apart a small temple and a particular time for worship would be nothing short of a sin. This, of course, would be an extreme case; but it brings to clear focus the basic attitude which the Hindu scriptures want to inculcate into the minds of their followers. Its impact is exemplified in the following words of Tukārām, the Maratha saint:

« Everywhere I see Thy footprints, Thou pervadest this universe. Lake, river and spring, all are sacred; all water, the holy Ganges.

Palaces and castles, homely dwellings, thatched huts and hovels Thy temple every one of them.

Every word I hear reminds me of Thy Name ».

The Vaiṣṇava mystic Śatakopa would express the same vision a little more abstrusely: « He is not; He is. Thus it is impossible to speak of Him Who has pierced the earth and the sky and has become the inner ruler in all. He is unaffected by defects. He is in all without intermission. He is the abode of bliss. Such a Person have I attained. All is He — that which is called that, this and that between (mid-thing). That man, this man, mid-man, that woman, this woman, mid-woman, what is that, what is this and what is in between, those, these and things in between, good and bad, past things, present things and future — all is He »<sup>113</sup>.

This mystic awareness of the nearness of God has an overtone of pantheism. In fact, many a passage from the Hindu scriptures taken in isolation will be found pantheistic through and through. But to stigmatise their teaching in its totality as pantheism pure and simple will be an unjustifiable oversimplification. As we have pointed out, the scriptures while laying emphasis on the immanence of God never fail to uphold His absolute transcendence. The world is sacred because God is abiding in it; but God Himself is infinitely beyond the world. If such a vision of the reality is pantheism, it will be a pantheism of its own kind, and will not fit into the ordinary definition of it. By and large it is a pantheism common to the mystics of nearly all the great religions of the world; in Hinduism it is expressed without inhibitions.

And in this 'pantheism' can we not hear a call to enthrone God in His creation? I suppose this is the message of it all. It is wisely

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<sup>113</sup> K. C. Varadacharya, *Ālvārs of South India*, Bombay, 1966, pp. 178-179.



said that the history of religions is largely the history of the loss and recovery of the sense of the sacred. We may be said to be living in a time when the 'profane' is drifting more and more from the sacred. Science has played a notable role in widening this split; and the tendency is to widen it unbridgeably. This seems to be the logical outcome of a world-view in which man is seen as the lord and master of the universe. Such a vision contains within itself the germ for blurring the figure of the Supreme Lord and Master of man himself and of the universe, and for encouraging a religious life confined to those acts which are strictly religious by definition. Now, if an individual reduces his religious living to three fourth of an hour a week, a time will come when he would consider even that as superfluous. There will be little wonder then if on a fine morning he eliminates even those few minutes of religion from his weekly programme so that he may apply himself full-time to his non-religious quests. Chances for a contrary reaction, that is, that of finding more time for a more intense religious living, are quite meagre in the ordinary circumstances.

As the hold of religion on life wanes, the grip of materialism becomes all the more pronounced, and its repercussions will be felt everywhere. It will upset the very foundations of family life. A family life not cemented with a sense of sacredness is destined to disintegrate; divorce will become normal; abortion will rouse no remorse; euthanasia will be only a question of time. It is to avoid tragedies of this kind that we need to rediscover the sense of the sacred, or better, integrate the sacred and the profane. I only hope that our presentation of the sacredness of the universe in the Hindu scriptures could shed a ray of light on the post-Conciliar endeavours to re-present the sense of sacredness to the modern man! Perhaps the words of Lord Linlithgow give a good conclusion to our study: « Even the most enthusiastic believer in Western civilization must feel today a certain despondency at the apparent failure of the West to dominate scientific discoveries and to evolve a form of society in which material progress and spiritual freedom march comfortably together. Perhaps the West will find in India's more general emphasis on simplicity and the ultimate spirituality of things, a more positive example of the truth which the most advanced minds of the West are now discovering »<sup>114</sup>.

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<sup>114</sup> Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, p. 305.