



Dwapur Yuga

It is the moment of transition, when the fall is emphasized. History changes its course, as man inverted his values. Form takes priority over thinking, over feelings. Having over being. Perfection, previously registered in thoughts, is now a mere ideal projected onto a mystical horizon.

It is the beginning of the search for a Supreme Being as a possible source for lost knowledge. Copper Age is epitomized by the long and varied journey of spiritual paths, which still marks India and its people.

Realization and beauty were then related to the metaphysical, to the spiritual. Even though duality was visible, there were still eight 'celestial degrees' of light in the human soul.

"Tat Savitur Varenyam"
We meditate before that adorable light...
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

Bhakti

Somnath used to be one of the most beloved temples of India as well as one of the wealthiest. Records speak of at least three thousand camels being used to transport all its treasures the day it was destroyed. The incursion, led by Mahmud of Ghazni, left more than fifty thousand victims.

Somnath was at the time served by over a thousand *Brahmin* priests, besides hundreds of musicians, astronomers, dancers and servers, and was sustained by donations of more than ten thousand towns.

It wasn't, however, only the loss of invaluable lives and incredible wealth. The event seemed to be a sign of change, a turn in the fate of a land now edging into the uncertainty of medieval times.

Somnath was supposedly built by the legendary king Vikramaditya, at the time when the quest for understanding and the need to preserve an ancient heritage had given rise to a variety of paths. Much later, the destruction of a number of Hindu temples seemed to point to an end to that era.

The silent practices of *yoga*, for which India became famous, were slowly dissolving into physical disciplines and rituals. Peace of mind, with all its treasures and powers, became an ideal of attainment rather than a common experience.

Somnath - 'the Lord of Nectar' - was dedicated to Incorporeal Shiva. *Soma* was also known as an elixir whose 'mystic formula' was later replaced by a stimulant herb.

A precious oval shaped image was believed to be suspended from the central dome of the temple. *Koh-i-noor* - the 'Mountain of Light', a famous diamond of 108 carats, is said to have once been part of the *lingam* symbolizing 'the One without an Image'.

Temples built during this period were inlaid with gold and precious gems, donated by the greatest kings and patrons during the course of many centuries. The royalty devoted much of their possessions towards the foundation of what was to be a characteristic of the land. There was a genuine interest in the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of life. The development of theories about the universe and the nature of man were then born, and until recently considered the most profound philosophical investigation of human thought.

Whole generations became inspired to carry on systems and practices with the intention of respecting the laws that governed the world. Knowing one's self and realizing the true nature of the Supreme were considered the highest goals. Turning to *dharma* meant to understand and bring out those qualities and talents that made life worth living.

The rulers of India had the duty to protect the systems created by *Brahmin* sages. The priests, in turn, performed their role on the basis of a legacy they sought to understand and preserve. This inherited knowledge was the sustaining core for temporal power and it managed to hold, in relative unity, an already fragmented system. India was a land that had once seen an undivided kingdom of harmony and abundance. It was this nostalgic past, governed by the legendary emperors *Chakravartins*, which kept the memory of the deities alive.

*"When you see his face, praise him with joy
adore him with joined palms, bow before him,
so that his feet touch your head."*

*Pattuppattu, Tirumuruganarrupadai
Tamil Devotional Poem*

Self-sovereignty, lost, was now transferred to a pedestal. Images of ancient rulers became symbols of spiritual achievements. The attributes of perfection returned, carved in stone. Beautiful statues, richly decorated, were turned into objects of devotion. A collective invocation of Paradise - the lost Kingdom of *Sat Yuga* - was born.

Different manifestations of devotion would soon multiply into different paths. All emerging civilizations were now establishing their own particular worldview and religious code. No other place, however, synthesizes the beginning of this period so well as India, as this was not only the place where memorials of a perfect world were born but where they've been continuously kept alive.

"Maybe that which most impresses us as we read the hymns of the Vedas, is that instead of being commandments prescribed by priests or prophets, they bring us a poetical testament of the collective reaction of a people before the wonder and awe of existence. A people of vigorous and genuine imagination, awoken by a feeling of the inexhaustible mystery implicit in life. It was a simple faith of theirs that has attributed divinity to each element and force of nature, a courageous and joyful faith, in which the fear of the gods was balanced by confidence, in which the feeling of mystery only brought enchantment to life, without the burden of perplexity..."

The first authors were almost childish in their reactions, fascinated by what they observed, and naively searching to adjust that to their own hopes and fears. But as children grow up and gain a broader perception of themselves, the later authors searched more and more to a centre of reference in their own consciousness, a subjective correlative to the greatness that has kept them for so long captivated, an answer in their own being to the cosmic challenge of the visible universe..."

The Hindu Scriptures - Introduction by Rabindranath Tagore

Beginning Once Again

According to the cyclic perspective, the movements of history are synchronized with changes in the human soul, a process which influences and transforms customs and systems.

As long as our perception is capable of acknowledging subtle levels of thinking and we maintain our self-dignity, the energies of the mind and intellect are unlimited.

As we become unaware of the movements of our inner self, we are confined to what reach us through the senses. The power of knowing and controlling one's mind reduces. Soul consciousness is eventually replaced by the limitations of the physical body.

The imbalance of human consciousness over a period of time directly affected the very structure of the planet. Huge cataclysms followed, causing new continents of land to emerge after floods and earthquakes. These changes also affected the body, which started to experience sicknesses and anomalies. Special techniques were developed in order to alleviate physical pain and deficiencies. The interaction between mind and body began to be researched.

In many parts of the world efforts were made in an attempt to reduce the changes in nature. There was still a level of information, a knowledge that would soon become inaccessible, as it not only combined mathematics and geometry, gravity and electromagnetic fields but also the interactive process between mind and matter. One example is the construction of the pyramids, where huge stone blocks could be built and transported by highly

sophisticated techniques, derived from principles ignored even by the following generations.

Work now no longer expressed the highest abilities of the self but was increasingly becoming a means of survival. The human intellect would however soon compensate for the reduction of its natural capacities by creating new inventions.

The first records of Indian history appeared at this time, giving rise to the Vedas and other scriptures. Sciences and schools of thought started developing. In the field of mathematics, the decimal system of notation, the conception of zero and the value of infinite; the extraction of the square and cube roots, the rule of three, plus the precise value for π were some of the legacies of India.

From astronomy to advancements in the field of trigonometry, spherical geometry and calculus were made. Indians were able to draw the zodiac; to study the planets' rotation and gravitational influences; to compute the eclipse cycles; precession and retrogression. In the medical field, the Ayurvedic treatises covered an extensive study on herbs, minerals and organic functions. The Ayurveda greatly influenced Hypocrites, the founder of Greek medicine and father of western medicine.

Throughout this period, the intelligent minds of India searched for the mysteries of creation. A whole culture laid its foundation on the many interpretations of an ultimate reality. Sciences and philosophies tried to understand the forces behind the movements of nature. Self-analysis developed along with speculation over observed effects. Was there a unique essence which had transmuted? Did the forces of individual life actually derive from it?

*"But after all, who knows, and who can say
whence it all came, and how creation happened?
The gods themselves are later than creation,
so who knows truly whence it has arisen?"
Rig Veda X, 129*

*"Some sages say that inherent nature, others that time, is this world's
cause. Both are mistaken. It is the grandeur of God within this world by
which this wheel of Brahman is made to turn.*

*"...Let us know the most elevated Lord of the lords, the Master of the
masters, the highest on high, as God, the Lord of the World, the
adorable...
There is neither cause nor effect for Him, nobody is like Him; His power
is revealed in many forms, it is inherent and it acts as strength and
knowledge..."
Svetasvatara Upanishad VI, 1*

In the attempt to understand and control his physical surroundings, man developed his capacity of observation and abstract reasoning. Astronomy and astrology were integrated into metaphysical thought. Life was ruled by the rhythm of nature and those who observed it came to realize the dimension of their being within a vast and unlimited plan. They revered the sacred nature of existence and in this way sustained their devotion to the spiritual.

Despite the loss of inner strength, supernatural phenomena could still be produced by a few. Occult powers came to be considered as belonging to esoteric and magical orders and were inserted within religious practices and rituals, not always with positive intentions and results. Many beliefs and cults have also been formed around those who possessed what was left from ancient knowledge:

"That self is hidden in all beings and don't irradiate, but it is seen by the subtle seer through his sharp and subtle intellect.

A sage should reserve himself in his mind and speech; should keep the knowledge inside himself who is grandiose; and should keep the self silent.

The one who has perceived that which has no sound, no touch, no form, that which does not decay, which is tasteless, eternal, without smell, without beginning, without end, is free of the claws of death.

And the one who repeats this great mystery in the assembly of the Brahmins, or with total devotion at the time of the sacrifice of Sraddha, obtains infinite rewards..."

Katha Upanishad - Third Valli

Kala - The Spirit in the Art

"The celebrated beginning to the ancient text of the Vishnudharmottaram describes the predicament of the king who wished to learn the art of painting - chitra kala. He was informed that to paint, to render figures in plastic volume, he must first learn to sculpt. To attempt sculpture, to understand gesture and movement, he must apply himself first to the principles of dance. And to dance he must have recourse to the appreciation of rhythm, of tala of instrumental and then vocal music. And music, of course, seeks its inspiration from poetry. Thus the king learnt that to be skilled in one of the arts, he must be informed about all of them."

Indian culture was now impregnated with spiritual motifs, its inspiration drawn from devotional feelings. The arts still expressed joy and recognized the beauty of life; creative thought was naturally spiritual and filled with enthusiasm.

Symbols began to be used to portray ideas or subtle meanings. Art was dedicated to reveal the divine nature of the ancient deities, often depicting them in an abstract form; the body as a representation of the spirit, the face expressing withdrawal from the physical.

Myths, folktales and religion, with all its verbal and visual expression, have provided the means to express the feelings and thoughts about the divine. Mental visions were invoked in meditation with the purpose of obtaining *samadhi*, a state of super-consciousness. Images could represent a mental attitude or activity. The movement of the eyes, the smile and the posture of a dancer's hand were the means of transmitting a message.

This deep understanding of emotion and the language of gesture came to be used in sculpture, dance and theatre.

"Rasa is the aesthetic experience of an artistically engendered emotion. Rasa cannot be experienced at the level of the mundane or the empirical, it belongs to the world of art. Life provides the raw material and actual experiences are the springboard for the artist, whose creation is unique and unlike anything in real life. It is this otherworldly - alokik - character of the aesthetic experience that Bharata, author of the Natya Shastra, has in mind when he describes the various features that contribute to the experience of rasa."

Rasa, according to Bharata, is a combination of vibhavas (determinants), anubhavas (consequents) and vyabhichari bhavas (transitory moods). The crucial difference between actual emotion and the aesthetic one is that while the cause and effects of worldly emotions are personal, the aesthetic mood suggests the universal through stylized depiction. While in real life, latent emotions - vasanas - are aroused by actual events with the involvement of the ego bringing pain, in art they are aroused by imaginary situations. Thus

the act of detached contemplation of a mood is what makes the artistic experience delightful and even morally elevating.

For a work of art to have this element of the universal it must be motivated by sthayi bhava or a dominant mood, the transitory or minor ones serving only to embellish it.

Indian aesthetics, which has Hindu philosophy animating it, believes that in the endless cycle of birth and death we have had every imaginable experience. These experiences that form the fiber of life are not destroyed at death but remain as latent impressions in our subconscious (sanskaras). And only an art form that reflects this, is instantly identifiable with, because the spectator 'knows' these emotions.

Rasa - Mandakini Trivedi

The images of the deities have been always depicted with a variety of symbols. They are meant to indicate the path of righteous efforts – of what one needs to assimilate in order to be empowered. Devotees were not meant to be spectators at first. They wanted to see themselves reflected in their heroes; they aimed to follow their steps. In this way their reality could be amplified and made relevant.



The deity holds in her many arms the weapons that are attributes of her divine personality. A discus spins in one hand, showing her understanding of time. The mace she is holding symbolizes mastery over thoughts and actions; the lotus indicates her inner purity and the conch-shell, her intellectual ability of sharing spiritual wisdom. The bow and the arrow translate her power to deal with the negative while the trident represents the three existing realities: matter (*prakriti*), soul (*atma*), and Supreme Soul (*Paramatma*).

senses.

Her spiritual strength and nobility is visible through her aura and crown. The mark on her forehead indicates that the soul has achieved control over mind, intellect and inner traits. Her jewels, placed on specific *chakras*, carry the meaning of mastery over the physical

The goddesses are frequently shown riding a tiger or a lion, an evidence of their fearlessness and a reminder of their victory over the illusions caused by ignorance. The female deities are often called *Shivshaktis* – those who inherit the powers of God. They also point out to the virtues of surrendering, renunciation and the potential for learning that women generally possess.

Deities are considered to be images of support - *Adhar Murat* - and methods of achieving fortune - *Takzir Takdir*. Devotees are used to facing long queues and withstanding extremes of cold and heat, just to have a glimpse of their images. The eyes of the *devtas* are said to be like jewels - *nure ratan*. They reflect a state of consciousness, one in which the inner eye can see the eternal self.

The Ancient Deities

Changes in geography caused the tree of humanity to stretch out its branches in all directions. Migrations carried with them traces of an ancient culture that mingled and developed into new costumes, languages and systems.

Travelers and explorers started coming to India, where they already found a culture which was conscious of its antiquity. Pilgrims and philosophers from China, Egypt, Greece, Persia and other lands came in search of metaphysical knowledge. Early accounts tell of the generosity and religiousness of people, the wealth of kingdoms and the abundance of resources. Fa-Hsien, a Chinese monk who lived in the country, wrote:

... "There was such peace and gentleness in the administration of India that no serious crime was seen. It was possible to travel from one place to another without the need of travel permits. Everyone was respectable and vegetarian; meat was only eaten by the lower castes"...

As they approached the Sindhus, Persians started to refer to the locals and their rituals by the name of that river. In their characteristic pronunciation they called them 'Hindus'. It was by this name that the *Bharatvarsas* - 'the sons of Bharat' - are still known today.

The manifold paths of Hinduism have continuously preserved the memories of an earlier stage of mankind. They represent what was left from an ancient civilization, once known as *Adi Sanatana Devi Devata Dharma* - the Ancient and Eternal Deity Dharma.

What we know as Hinduism is in fact a collective invocation of a long lost Golden Age, systematically remembered within Indian culture. The loss of the original *dharma* and the many attempts to restore it formed the basis for the variety of spiritual manifestations, which in the course of time, became known as the Hindu religion.

The cults to the ancestors traveled throughout the continents. Each culture reproduced or created its own version of history according to regional tendencies. The civilizations that directly or indirectly descended from the ancient trunk of humanity had, however, a few features in common. Life in the community was centered on its particular cosmogony. The new kingdoms considered their kings to be direct descendants of the gods. The first dynasties of antiquity maintained temporal as well as religious power. The kings were also the priests, and were considered to be noble souls, capable of performing a double role.

In India, the crystallization of the caste system separated these two functions. The *Brahmins* became priests and educators, while the *Kshatriyas* - who were also strategists and warriors - became rulers. The sacred character conferred to the Pharaoh in Egypt, to the Son of Heaven in China, to the Mikado in

Japan, was not conferred to the ruling *Kshatriya* caste. The *Brahmins* – with their specific ethics and codes of conduct – were entitled to play the role of intermediaries with the spiritual world.

"Through contemplating sense-objects inwardly, visualizing and brooding over them, one brings into existence attachment to the objects; out of attachment comes desire; from desire, fury, violent passion; from violent passion, bewilderment, confusion; from bewilderment, loss of memory and of conscious self-control; from this perturbation or ruin of self-control comes the disappearance of intuitive understanding; and from this ruin of intuitive understanding comes the ruin of man himself."

Bhagavad Gita II - 62.63

Religion - In the Attempt of Reconnecting

The ideal of attaining self-realization and recovering lost knowledge had occupied the *Brahmins* for a long time. Much had been investigated and the hundreds of scriptures are proof that no efforts were spared to reach one sole essence. But this aim would not be achieved and many versions emerged as time went by.

Despite the contradictions concerning its sermonizer, the *Bhagavad Gita* summarizes the thought and basic disciplines of the complex religious tradition of this period. Within a humanistic approach, the *Gita* emphasizes spiritual power as the means of overcoming obstacles, and self-discipline as the foundation for its attainment. By means of knowledge and love, the *Gita* proposes sacrificing desire instead of the object, and renouncing of one's ego whilst living in the world. Happiness was believed to be achieved through a life based on righteousness and loving detachment.

There used to be a real concern to maintain *dharma*. However, the loss of strength inherent to a state of soul-realization opened the mind to waste and imbalance. Duality and conflict remained, as the tendency to decline continued.

The world drama seemed now 'ready' for the paths we know as religions, as people still tried to refrain from negativity and valued one's virtuous potential. New actors were now coming, some with prominent roles. The founders of religions came onto the scene bringing particular qualities. They established new communities and influenced the way of thinking and living in different places.

They also brought messages that served to establish new codes of conduct and recover social standards that were rapidly deteriorating. The main world religions were born with great power as there was genuine purity and faith in their founders and first followers. The compilation of teachings into scriptures and the establishment of institutions were later organized by disciples. Methods and systems traveled far and wide, suffering translations and interpretations as centuries went by.

India, in its turn, was to receive the first hordes of invaders, which would later dominate and deprive her of its treasures. Many of her ever-shrinking kingdoms were becoming hostile to one another, leaving the subcontinent's frontiers open for the Turks, Afghans, Persian, Greeks and Moguls.

The Castes

For a long time India was able to adjust and often absorb the variety of people who settled on her soil. This was a place where religious and cultural practices so diametrically opposed lived very close, often sharing the same space and yet preserving their own worldview. There was probably no other region where such a developed stage of civilization coexisted alongside almost primitive ones, leading completely different lifestyles.

The caste system also played a role in preserving traces of the ancient *dharma* for without its disciplines and traditions the land would have lost its connection with the past.

One thing has remained constant amidst the invasions India has suffered: the *Brahmins* and their teachings. They were responsible for trying to maintain the ideal of a noble culture and thereby organized a system of education and ethics that molded Indian civilization after the Fall.

The many *brahmanic* schools were the basis on which a spiritual and philosophical foundation was created. Their teachings gradually penetrated the four corners of the subcontinent, creating a link impossible to be achieved by any secular authority. Even though the system was far from perfect, it still managed to interconnect diverse creeds into a common pattern, maintaining the diversity of traditions, costumes and beliefs of different people.

The groups or clans were initially divided into four and each possessed an ideal role: the *Brahmins*, to study and teach as well as to preserve religion; the *Kshatriyas*, to administer and protect the country through temporal and military power; the *Vaishyas* or traders, to sustain the economic system through trade and charity; and the *Shudras*, to carry out the physical work. This system survived in part due to the autonomy and sense of community maintained by the groups within the structure.

One of the aspects which differentiated the castes was their understanding and view of the world through the *gunas*. These were considered the qualities or intrinsic 'forces' present in consciousness as well as matter; qualities which, in turn, influence desires, thoughts and actions. The three codified qualities ranged from the purest – *sato*; through the medium – *rajo*; to the lowest – *tamo* stage. The diversity of food was selected according to its qualities, and even intentions and desires were discriminated within this context.

The castes were not so much a social class system as they were a complex arrangement of different groups living together, each possessing their own qualities and duties in society.

But as time went by, dispersion of groups grew, causing the responsibilities of the clans to disappear. Due to the increasing in population and social strata, the system eventually lost its significance and tended towards discrimination, prejudice and exploitation.

In its best, this was a structure that tried to take innate tendencies into consideration in order to preserve them within a social group. Like other aspects of the ancient Hindu society, this system was based on the philosophy of a universal law, which was believed to be naturally responsible for the distribution of duties and rights of every human being.

The Four Stages of Life

The idea of enjoying life to its fullest was central to Indian culture. It also implied that reaching old age, all cravings for worldly things would have been satisfied. Desires could then be directed towards the spiritual adventure and the preparation of a new existence.

According to these ancient principles, the first stage of human development comprised the period of learning - *Brahmacharya*. An exclusive characteristic of Indian culture was the master-disciple tradition, which meant more than just a process of imparting and absorbing knowledge. The disciple dedicated his life and time to learning, frequently moving into his teacher's home. More than a simple teacher, the *Guru* was supposed to be the embodiment of the teachings. According to the disciple's capacity and vocation, the master would entrust him all his techniques and secrets. It was a relationship that created skilled successors in the arts, the philosophies and sciences.

The time of maturity - *Grihastha* - meant the establishment and sustenance of a family and all pleasures and responsibilities related to that. The third stage started with the approaching of old age. More than simply renouncing work, retirement - *Vanaprastha* - meant a gradual abandonment of an entire life, which included family and possessions. The household could be entrusted to one's married children in case one wanted to move into a life of retreat and meditation.

The old traditions of India have always praised the ideal of *moksha* or *mukti* - a state of liberation from the inner bondages that cause us to suffer. In order to attain that, one made the effort to transcend the senses and remain identified with a non-temporal reality. This stage of life was called *Sannyasa*, a time when the soul longed to return to a state of peace and contentment.

Creation is a mystery: *Ko Veda?* - Who knows?

At the beginning of Copper Age the human mind began searching for the cause which has led it into the experience of fall. Over time, the quest developed into attempts to creating means to prevent further losses.

Indian civilization was sustained by its own investigations and many experiences and feelings from this period survived recorded in the pages of her Vedas and scriptures. Her legacy was expressed through a set of beliefs related to the understanding of the soul's immortality and rebirth. This was a place that created and sustained a complex polytheism, based in a monotheistic principle in which all smaller deities are related to one God. In fact, there is no other region where the love for the Divine has been manifested in such a profound and intense way.

There was neither any other system which had established its existence on such fascinating interpretations of life, and until the last century there had been no similar enterprise in trying to comprehend the movement of the human mind and the universe in its totality. India was once a sophisticated culture, where the ideal of perfection sought to combine the intellectual skills of the philosopher, the faith of the saint and the aesthetic sense of the artist in man.

The desire for attaining a complete universal knowledge had generated a strong tendency of assimilating other views rather than excluding them. This characteristic radically separates the ancient *Dharma* from other religions, which consider false all creeds except their own. In Hinduism, all have some validity, as it is mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"...Whatever god someone adores, it is I who answer their invocation"...

The world population expanded and witnessed the ascension and fall of great and small empires. The multiplicity of languages and creeds as well as the geographical distance among people had enabled the development of deeply different cultures. These differences were however increasingly becoming causes for incompatibility and discord. And confrontation had long since become part of the routine of the kingdoms.

The human soul did not realize that it had lost the ideal of fighting against its inner resistance. 'Evil' was now to be found externally. Armies were created to fight 'the enemy'. The first battles were fought on the outskirts of the cities; the wars had a fixed time and place. After some time this rule was no longer considered; the enemy could be anywhere, anytime. The cities, together with its women and children, were no longer respected. The decline of human character was vertiginous. There were no customs or systems that could staunch the growing suffering.

Conscience, once free and creative, a space to experience joy, could no longer recognize itself. Self-awareness was limited to physical references. One was reduced to the origin, gender and status; to the color and religion into which the soul was born. One's original attributes were forgotten, the consciousness of being a soul gave way to the perishable identity of being 'some' body.

Desires, unfulfilled, engendered and multiplied into negative tendencies. Vices became 'habits'; violence was but a part. Everything was incorporated within the established moral. The *dharma* was over.

Swadharma - the path of self-rule, inner peace and love, was no more the ideal to be achieved. Religions became 'corporeal'. They were embraced to the extent that they guaranteed credibility, or else, became a way of life. They were no longer the adopted means towards an inner experience; one was just born within it. It came with the parents of the body and it existed within the body of society. There were exceptions to the rules, but these were rare.

In fact, religion had inverted its role, becoming established ideology and making use of force to exercise power. Inquisitions persecuted and punished; plunderers hid their weapons behind the banners of indoctrination. Everywhere, massacres and conquests started happening behind the masks of religions. The conquerors began enjoying their achievements and 'discoveries' of new lands. Power had never been so desired and exercised. The world entered the Iron Age.