

Hindu Education in Ancient India

Arun Kotenkar

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(ca. 900 BCE – 300 CE)

A Synopsis

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Email: itsarun@gmx.net

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Approximate Chronology of Sources

Harappan Civilisation	5500-1300 BCE a) 2600-1900 BCE: Mature Harappan period b) 1900-1300 BCE: Late Harappan era and its decline
Steppe pastoralist migrants	2000-1000 BCE (from Central Asia bringing Indo-European languages, religions and cultures)*
Rigveda (samhita)	about 1300-900 BCE
Brahmanas	about 900-700 BCE
Upanishads	about 700-300 BCE a) Early: 700-500 BCE; b) Late: 500-300 BCE
Gruha-Sutra	about 400 BCE onwards
Panini's Grammar	about 300 BCE
Manusmriti, Brahma-Sutra	about 200 BCE-300 CE
Ramayan (popular versions)	around 200 CE
Mahabharat (popular versions)	around 300 CE

* According to: Joseph, Tony. *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors and Where We Came From*, Delhi, 2018

Abbreviations

Ait	Aitareya Upanishad
Ap.Dh.	Apastambha Dharma-Sutra
AV	Atharvaveda
BG	Bhagavadgita
Brih.	Brihadaranyaka Upanishad
Chand.	Chandogya Upanishad
Gaut.	Gautamiya Dharma-Sutra
Kath.	Katha Upanishad
Kaus.	Kaushitaki Upanishad
Kena	Kena Upanishad
Maha.	Mahanarayana Upanishad
Mait.	Maitrayana Upanishad
Mand.	Madukya Upanishad
Manu	Manusmriti
Mund.	Mundaka Upanishad
Nada.	Nadabindu Upanishad
Nris.	Nrisinhapurvatapaniya Upanishad
Prasna	Prasna Upanishad
RV	Rigveda
Sarva.	Sarvasara Upanishad
SB	Satapatha Brahmana
Svet.	Svetasvatara Upanishad
Tait.	Taittiriya Upanishad
Tejo.	Tejobindu Upanishad
Up.	Upanishad

(For easy reading, Sanskrit words are not transcribed)

I. Preliminary Remarks

The analysis of Hindu education in ancient India is indispensable for understanding the educational problems of modern India. According to the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, in the year 1978 approximately 64 per cent of the Indians were “illiterates”¹. These so-called illiterates have traditionally been excluded or restricted from every facility of contemporary formal education and professions, as well as from the socialisation process that takes place in schools, higher educational or professional institutions. Since ancient times, a majority of them have been members of the lower castes (Adivasi, Dalit) and women. The formal Hindu education had always been a privilege of the males of the upper castes². Others had to adjust themselves according to the “legal” regulations, religious rituals and social conventions, justified and derived by the upper caste rulers from the esoteric doctrines and philosophies³, which built up the ideological foundations of Hindu education. Though most of the Hindus

¹*Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. *The Gazetteer of India*, Delhi, Vol. 4, 1978, p. 500f.

²*Thapar, Romila. Social Mobility in Ancient India with Special Reference to Elite Groups. In: Sharma, R.S. (Ed.), *Indian Society: Historical Probing in Memory of D.D.Kosambi*, Delhi, (2), 1977, p.115.

*Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1978, Op Cit, p.459.

*<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/caste-discrimination-taints-corporate-india-912056.html> (04-11-2020, Bangalore)

³*Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste – Speech Prepared But Not Delivered*, Bombay, 1936.

*Shourie, Arun. *Hinduism: Essence and Consequence*, Sahibabad, 1979,

could not learn these doctrines and philosophies, the derivations from them have been successfully transmitted to a vast majority including the peasants, priests, workers, merchants, rulers and the oppressed. All have internalised common terminologies from the doctrines such as atman, karma, maya, moksha, dharma etc. and have learnt to apply them in different situations of life⁴, while interpreting them, according to their own social status. Dharma of the members of the lower castes for instance, differs considerably from that of the members of the upper castes⁵.

The historical role of Hindu education was not only to enable the members of the upper castes justify and reproduce their social dominance, but also to give them

p.3. Remarks by Arun Shourie made in this context: “Moreover philosophy and these esoteric texts provide ‘the ground for’ the rulers and their official ideologists as they go about their task of having the populace rationalize, accept and internalize the empirical order in which it finds itself trapped. The rulers and the ideologists do not use esoteric philosophical propositions to convince the common folk. They use the vulgar... and distorted forms. But the fact that the esoteric texts exist, the fact that the lineal ancestors of the vulgar propositions can be shown to exist in the texts, is a great help: “It has been all explained in the Upanishads,” they maintain. The less read the Upanishads are, the better for the ruler: for that makes it that much easier for them to attribute anything that suits them to those texts, to derive the convenient from them”.

⁴*Srinivas, M.N. *Changing Institutions and Values in Modern India*, in Unnithan, T. K. N. (Ed), *Towards a Sociology of Culture in India*, Delhi, 1965, p.436.

*Chandra, Pratap. *The Hindu Mind*, Simla, 1977, p.1f.

⁵*Creel, Austin B. *Dharma in Hindu Ethics*, Calcutta, 1977, p.30.

“hopes of salvation” through acquisition of the “esoteric knowledge” or jnana marga. The category “knowledge” or “vidya” is thus important in Hindu world-view. Numerous minutely detailed instructions and procedures had been formulated in Gruhasutra, Dharmasutra, and Dharma-Shastra up to ca. 300 CE to systematically transfer the well protected “knowledge” to the males of the ruling castes.

This paper analyses the primary sources and describes different concepts of “knowledge” as developed in the Brahmanas and the early and late Upanishads, and discusses their role in Hindu educational foundations. Further it aims to analyse the role of the “personified institution” of the guru that ensured that the knowledge would remain esoteric and not fall in the “wrong” heads, ears or hands in his gurukul. Finally, the paper discusses the characteristics of the socialisation process of the disciple in the context of gurukul, given that there were no non-personified institutions of Hindu education unlike in Buddhist stupas.

The historical period covered for this analysis spans a little over 1000 years if we fix the origin of the Brahmanas, the first Hindu “theoretical texts”⁶, to ca. 900 BCE followed by

⁶ The samhita of the Rigveda is the oldest literary source (prior to 1000 BCE) of Hindu thoughts (at least so long as the Harrapan texts are not decoded). As far as the questions of educational science are directly concerned the Rigveda does not contain any relevant

the Aranyakas, Upanishads, Vedangas,⁷ Shastras and Sutras. They are all associated with the “sanhitas” or a collection of the four Vedas, viz. Rigveda, ca. 1300 BCE, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda⁸, which chronologically precede the Brahmanas and are supposed to constitute the foundation of these texts. Altogether this is a huge corpus of divergent literature, collectively termed as “ved”, “veda” or “vedas” which also is used as a term to denote knowledge, transferred orally over the centuries, organised and categorised in groups, and are to some extent, chronologically ordered mainly during the 19th century. These ideas, rooted in scriptures and developed during this long period, characterise the term Hinduism used in this paper⁹.

There is a second stream of ideas in Hinduism developed around gods and mythologies that are not included in the analysis in this paper though they are equally important as they influence the socialisation of the people who do not have access to the above-mentioned Hindu scriptures. This second stream includes the epics of Mahabharat (except Bhagavadgita), Ramayan, the mythologies developed in

material, but it is a prerequisite to understand the historical development of the ancient society. There are also some possible relations to the Persian ‘Avesta’.

⁷ Shiksha/-phonetic, chandas/-metric, vyakarana/-grammar, nirukta/-etymology, jyotisha/-astronomy/astrology, and kalpa/-ritual.

⁸*Gonda, Jan. *History of Indian Literature*, Vedic Literature, Wiesbaden, 1975, Vol.1, Pt.1, p.360,

⁹*Walker, Benjamin. *The Hindu World - An Encyclopaedic Survey of Hinduism*, 2 Vols., London, 1968, Vol. I, p.446.

the Puranas and Tantra, and the spiritual thoughts of the medieval period transferred by means of bhajan, kirtan, aarati, abhanga, owi, bharud, doha, dhrupad or TV, storybooks etc. These two parallel streams of Hinduism, the one of the Vedic scriptures and the other of the gods and mythologies are very different world-views and concepts.

Unlike Buddhism or Jainism, that have prophetic and personalised roots since around the mid 1st millennium BCE, Hinduism cannot be linked to any one person, personality or school of thoughts. Hinduism has evolved over several centuries with contributions from divergent schools of thought and numerous personalities even though the term "Hinduism" itself was coined sometime in the late 18th century CE and has thenceforth become a popular term.

The Hinduism based on the primary sources like the vedas, shastras, sutras, Bhagavadgita etc. can be termed as the Aryan Hinduism that relates mainly to the region of northern India and shares historical relations with the Indo-Iranian/Indo-Germanic groups of languages. Ancient Brahmi script, which had linkages with the Aramaic and Kharoshthi scripts, and the Prakrit, Nagari and Devanagari scripts which are interlinked to Brahmi script have all been used in formalising these scriptures.

Textual analysis, linguistic and archaeological research relating to Hinduism had been focusing mainly on the northern regions of India while grossly neglecting the

ancient history of Southern region of India. The so-called Dravidian scripts, languages, different types of material resources, trade relations by land and water have been in existence since many thousand years. Despite of this, there had relatively been fewer academic efforts in archaeology, linguistics, trade or migration history, text analysis etc. to research the ancient history of the southern region of India. Furthermore, “DNA Studies”, a fast emerging discipline that analyses the ancient genes of populations migrating across the globe since millennia BCE, has been indicating the mixed genetic characters of the people and showing different types of genetic linkages of the population groups in North and South India with the outside world as well as within India¹⁰. Therefore the role of the southern Indian regions in defining the term “Hinduism” merits serious attention from different academic disciplines. Exclusion of this vital aspect of ancient history also constitutes one of the drawbacks of this paper.

^{10*}Joseph, Tony. *Early Indians: The Story of Our Ancestors and Where We Came From*, Delhi, 2018.

II. Importance of Knowledge

a) Association with the Vedas

The importance attached to knowledge (vidya) manifests in the term "Veda" which means knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of supernatural powers and of the methods that could influence them. According to Hindu traditions, this knowledge is eternal and ranks first among wealth, relatives, age and deeds (Manu 2.136). Vedas can be broadly categorized in two ways. The first category of Vedas is referred to as "revealed Vedas" (shruti which means: what is heard) as some believe that the Veda were "revealed" to inspired rishis¹¹. It is not explainable how this corpus of vast literature comprising of divergent ideas, knowledge, stories, critics, discussions etc. was "revealed" over centuries to anonymous select rishis. The books (mandala) 2 to 7 of the Rigveda mention the names of some such rishis. Samhitas of Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda and Atharvaveda, Brahmanas, Aranyakas, and Upanishads are considered as revealed Vedas. The second category of Vedas is referred to as "remembered Vedas" ("smriti") such as for e.g. Mahabharat, Ramayan, Purana, Tantra, Vedanga and so on.

A number of texts, which followed the Vedas in later centuries and which dealt with the ritual, social, medical or military subjects, stress the importance of knowledge by virtue of their formal association with a particular Veda.

¹¹*Gonda, Jan. 1975, op.cit., p. 7f.

Some of them were even considered as part of the Vedas. The Vedangas (angas or limbs of the Veda), for example, comprising of six disciplines viz. kalpa = ceremonial, vyakarana = grammar, chhandas = metre, jyotisha = astronomy, nirukta = etymology, and shiksha = correct pronunciation, are regarded as auxiliary to, and even in some sense, as part of the Veda. Their original purpose was to ensure that each part of the sacrificial ceremonies was correctly performed¹². The Ayurveda (medical knowledge or the knowledge of long life)¹³ has been associated with the Rigveda, Dhanurveda (the military knowledge, i.e. the science of archery) with the Yajurveda, Gandharvaveda (the knowledge of arts, i.e. the dramatic art, music, dancing etc.) with the Samaveda, Arthaveda (the knowledge of wealth) with the Atharvaveda and the knowledge of trade with the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda. All these various kinds of knowledge were categorised as Upaveda (supplementary knowledge). Even Itihasa and Purana were referred to as the fifth Veda (Chand. 7.1.2) besides the four so-called "revealed Vedas".

This association of 'knowledge' with the Vedas attains a very special significance in the Upanishads. The term upani-shad means to sit near a guru (teacher) from whom a

¹²*Stutley, Margareta-James. *A Dictionary of Hinduism*, London, 1977, p.329.

¹³*Highbury associates even erotics with the Ayurveda; See Ghurye, Govind S. *Vidyas*, Bombay, 1957, p.59.

* Chattopadhyaya counts Ayurveda to the "counter-ideology"; see: Chattopadhyaya, Debiprasad. *Science and Society in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1977, p.57ff.

pupil received sacred and esoteric knowledge (rahasya) or the knowledge of reality (tattvajnana). This knowledge was to be imparted strictly confidentially. Like the other texts, the Upanishads are also associated with different Vedas such as for e.g. Aitareya Upanishad and Kaushitaki Upanishad with the Rigveda, Taittiriya Upanishad with the Black Yajurveda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad with the White Yajurveda, Kena Upanishad with the Samaveda and so on. Thus Vedangas, Upavedas and Upanishads are all incorporated into the body of the sacred knowledge in a formal way.

b) Gains by Acquiring Knowledge

The association of the knowledge with the “sacred Veda” came with the promise of a variety of benefits. The knowledge becomes a tool to acquire power, and makes man “perfect”¹⁴. Should the aspirant, the pupil, the member of the higher caste acquire the knowledge, he could reckon different rewards or privileges. “One who knows this” (yo evam veda) is one of the most frequently used expressions in the scriptures (SB 1.7.3.18/ 10.5.3.12/ 10.6.1.6/ 11.3.3.7/ 11.5.7.6-9/ Mait. 7.9/ Chand. 4.5.3/ Kath. 3.15/ Brih. 1.4.7/ 5.11/ AV 2.1.2/ 10.7.41...).

Speech, truly, is a fourth part of Brahman. It shines and glows with Agni as its light. He shines and

¹⁴*Organ, Troy W. *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man*, Ohio, 1970, p.176.

glows with fame, with splendour, and with eminence in sacred knowledge who knows this (Chand. 3.18.3).

Verily, that is the supreme austerity when they lay a dead man on the fire. The supreme world, assuredly, he wins who knows this (Brih. 5.11).

One comes across this phrase in different forms. For example, one who knows the Atman, his evil action does not adhere to him, “as water adheres not to the leaf of a lotus-flower” (Chand.4.14. 3). Remission of sins and faults are promised to him who knows the Brahman (Mait. 6.18/ Nris.2.1) or he who worships Krishna (BG).

Even if a man of the most vile conduct worships me with undistracted devotion, he must be reckoned as righteous for he has rightly resolved (BG 9.30).

The one who has the knowledge of the Atman, “he is the maker of everything, for he is the creator of all; the world is his: indeed, he is the world itself” (Brih. 4.4.13). He is released from all fetters and rebirth (Svet. 2.15/ Prasna 1.10). “He who knows thus in its true nature, my divine birth and works, is not born again, when he leaves his body but comes to me, oh Arjuna” (BG 4.9) or “becomes merged in Brahman” (Svet. 1.7) or becomes immortal (Svet. 3.7). In case he should be reborn, his status in the next life would be defined according to his previous deeds (karman) and knowledge (Kath. 5.7/ Kaus. 1.2). With knowledge, the aspirant can destroy his enemies (Brih. 1.3.7), he can gain

power (SB 2.2.2.6), "his homestead (vastu) is prosperous, and he himself prospers in regard to progeny and cattle" (SB 1.7.3.18), "he leaves his sins in the body and attains all desires" (Tait. 2.5) and obtains "well-being, the world of heaven" (SB 12.2.3.12), whereas "hunger or thirst, evil-doers and fiends harass" the one who is without knowledge (SB 12.2.3.12).

The catalogue of rewards which motivated the members of the upper castes to accumulate the knowledge was not only rich but also helped to legitimatise their social status. It has been explicitly mentioned in Manusmriti (Manu 2.155) that the social dominance of the brahmins is based on knowledge. Referring to it they could claim respect, freedom, security "against oppression and security against capital punishment" (SB 11.5.7.1), and social privileges (SB 4.3.4.4/ 13.3.5.3/ Gaut.Dh. 2.10.10/ Manu 1.100). They were even considered on par with the gods.

Verily there are two kinds of gods; for, indeed, the gods are the gods; and the brahmins who have studied and teach sacred lore are human gods... With oblations one gratifies the gods, and with gifts to the priests the human gods, the brahmins... Both these kinds of gods, when gratified, place him in a state of bliss (sudha) (SB 2.2.2.6).

c) Disciplines of Knowledge

After the scripting of Brahmanas, the dimension and magnitude of the literature on Hinduism grew enormously. By the middle of the millennium BCE, a number of ideologies, concepts, schools, and formations had emerged, including Jainism and Buddhism with their independent paths of development. These concepts and ideologies displayed a tendency of incorporating and exercising control over as many spheres of individual and social life as there were while retaining the common premise of Vedas as the sole and sacred source of tradition (which in reality is a myth¹⁵). These texts had started classifying the knowledge into a number of fields, subjects or sciences quite early on in their span of existence¹⁶. In Chandogya Upanishad (Chand. 7.1.2) we find 19 different fields of knowledge as counted by Narada who had mastered them, but was still dissatisfied and longed to acquire the knowledge of the Atman from Sanatakumara. Besides the four Vedas, he had acquired the knowledge of the Legend and Ancient Lore (itihasa-purana), the Veda of the Veda (vedanam veda), Propitiation of the Manes (pitrya), Zodiacal Course (vasi), Mantic (daiva), Chronology (nidhi), Dialogue or Dialectic (vakovakya), Polity (ekayama), the Science of Gods (deva vidya), the Science of Sacred knowledge (brahma vidya), Demonology (bhuta vidya), the Science of Rulership (kshatra vidya), Astronomy (nakshatra vidya), the Science

¹⁵*Bowes, Pratima. *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, Bombay, 1978, p.29.

¹⁶*Ghurye, 1957, op.cit., p.29ff.

of Snake-charming (sarpa vidya), and the Science of Human Gods (devayana vidya).

The actual content of these “sciences” cannot exactly be reconstructed except in the case of the Vedas or some of the Puranas. There are only sporadic and scattered references of some of these subjects like dialogues or dialectics (vakovakya) (e.g. SB 11.2.6.9-17) or astronomy (nakshatra vidya) (e.g. SB 10.5.4). Though there is only an incipient knowledge of the contents, it is a very momentous realization that there was already a tendency to differentiate the knowledge, and to agglomerate and classify it under different disciplines at the time of early Upanishads (ca. 700-500 BCE). This early differentiation made it possible to develop, in the course of history, different hierarchies among the disciplines, thus, to emphasize the importance of some and to undermine others, and to promote some by adding further knowledge and to neglect the development of others.

The enormity of economic development of the ancient Indian society necessitated continual flow of innovations and realignment of the disciplines along with redistribution of the professional competence. Among the members of the upper castes, hierarchy was arranged according to the type of their profession. During the period of Brahmanas, for example, the knowledge of the sacrificial ritual had become so voluminous that as many as 16 priests were required to perform the ritual of sacrifice successfully. They were qualified as senior, junior or assistant priests and had to deal with their specific subjects and parts of the

ritual (SB 12.1.1.2-11).¹⁷ Any teacher alone could not teach all the disciplines. At least six types of teachers were defined and differentiated viz. guru, acharya, upadhyaya, pravakta, srotriya, and adhyapaka¹⁸. Each of them occupied himself with a particular discipline, that determined the individual status in the hierarchy. The acharya, for example, could initiate a young boy and teach him the Vedas (Manu 2.140), whereas the upadhyaya was allowed to teach only the Vedangas and ranked lower (Manu 2.141).

Unlike the ‘philosophical’ and ‘religious’ knowledge of the priests and gurus which promised “high” rewards, the professional and technical knowledge and its distribution depicted the social stratification in the society. In the Rigveda (9.112) we find the division of labour in its early stage. Only a few professions such as that of a carpenter, iron-smith, medicine man, singer, high priest etc. are explicitly mentioned here¹⁹. Whereas an advanced stage of the division of labour is depicted in Purushamedhakandha of the White Yajurveda, a chronologically later scripture that describes numerous types of professions²⁰. The

¹⁷*These were arranged in order of the initiation:

<u>Priest</u>	<u>Assistants</u>
adhvaryu	pratipasthotri, neshtri, unnetri
brahmi	Brahmanakshamsi, potri, agnidhra
udgatri	prastotri, pratihartri, subramanya
hotri	maitravaruna, achavaka, gravastut

¹⁸*See also Panini’s Asthadhyayi 2.1.65, in: Agrawala, V.S. *India as known to Panini*, Lucknow, 1953, p.282.

¹⁹*Kane, Pandurang V. *History of Dharmasastra*, Pune, (2)1974, Vol.11, Pt.1, p.43f f.

²⁰*Ghurye, G.S. *Vedic India*, Bombay, 1979, p.224.

Vajasaneyi Samhita 30, for instance, mentions more than 35 professions such as car-builder, carpenter, bard, potter, sower, bowyer, ropemaker and so on.

The differentiation of the professional-technical knowledge of the producers and craftsmen on the one hand, and those of the intellectual and religious knowledge of the members of the upper castes on the other, reflects the very fundamentals of Hindu education. The interrelationship between these two major fields of knowledge was characterised by two very divergent points of view. The members of the ruling castes were disdainful of the professional-technical knowledge and of the persons possessing this knowledge. The technical knowledge possessed by the producers and artisans was supposed to be inferior and impure (SB 1.1.3.12/ Jaiminiya Brahmana 2.266)²¹. Whereas the underprivileged viewed this relation as devoid of the prospect of acquiring the philosophical and religious knowledge. The knowledge of the underprivileged had the “competence of transformation” to produce all that was necessary for war, sacrifice, rituals, luxury or physical survival. The knowledge of the “rulers” had the “competence of ideological justification” to legitimatise the social control and educational authority, to define the values and norms in the society, and to interpret calamities, material and physical miseries. Armed with the “competence of

* Wagle, Narendra. *Society at the Time of Buddha*, Bombay, 1966, p.134.

* Zimmer, Heinrich. *Altindisches Leben*, Berlin, 1879, p.253.

²¹*Rau, Wilhelm. *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien*, Wiesbaden, 1957, p.28.

ideological justification”, the rulers concentrated in their hands the powers for education of the society.

Like in the case of other ancient societies, literary sources concerning the professional-technical knowledge of the farmers, slaves or craftsmen in ancient India are conspicuous by their absence. It is difficult to find any reliable evidence to trace back the socialisation and education of the craftsmen and workers of various categories. But a number of specific educational factors can be derived from the religious and philosophical sources which influenced them indirectly.

References to the earliest systematisation of the knowledge can be found in the Brahmana texts²². Later texts, such as the numerous Upanishads, however, bore no more any resemblance to these references in the earlier texts. From the concepts of the Brahmanas and those of the (major) Upanishads combined, the development can be traced and epistemologically classified into three conceptual approaches²³:

- i) Ritualistic knowledge: The Brahmana literature had the tendency to associate knowledge with rituals and rites.
- ii) Intellectual knowledge: The early Upanishads tended to elicit knowledge through analytical and speculative arguments.

²²*Gonda, 1975, op.cit., p.340.

²³*Jayatilleke, K.N. *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, Delhi, 1963, p.169.

- iii) Intuitive knowledge: The later Upanishads advocated the search for knowledge through meditation and contemplation.

While the dispositions of the Brahmana texts mainly reveal the influence of the priest, the Upanishads highlight the influence of the guru. The epistemological interest seems to be more vigorous in the concept of guru than in the concept of the priest with the latter's predilection for symbols and rites. With the advent of Upanishads, the guru came to attain a central position in Hindu education. "The priestly tradition started in the Samhita period, became firmly established in the Brahmana period and is still very much alive. The Smriti and the Dharmashastra enjoined duties to the priest on the one hand, and to the masses on the other, to follow the priest in the ritual matters. The philosophical minds starting with the Upanishadic thinkers never seem to care much for the priests, and no philosophical system has any place for him"²⁴. From a very early historical age, the guru claimed an "intellectual competence" in the Hindu mind, which has been preserved till now.

²⁴*Chandra, 1977, op.cit., p.93.

III. Concepts of Knowledge

a) Ritualistic Knowledge – Brahmana Texts

The primary structures of a theory of knowledge are embedded in the Brahmana texts²⁵ that provide the basis for systematically describing the empirical phenomena, searching for the possible causes and giving justifications for them. Sacrificial rituals form the unshakable basis of this theory. “The very aim of the compilers (of the Brahmanas -A.K.) is not to describe, but to explain the origin, meaning, and *raison d’être* of the ritual acts to be performed, and to prove their validity, and the significance and suitability of the mantras and chants used as well as the mutual relations of the acts and their connections with the phenomenal reality”²⁶. These compilers, with ingenuity and fantasy, developed a world-view of the priests in which any natural phenomenon or any interaction between the human beings and nature could be reduced to sacrificial parallels and analogies in order to keep the forces expected behind the phenomena at the priest’s disposal. Using the knowledge of “sacrificial reduction”, a causal link was established between the mysterious forces, the priest and the sacrificial rituals.

“The Brahmanas represent the intellectual activity of a sacerdotal class which had succeeded in arranging and systematising the older forms of belief and worship and in

²⁵We analyse mainly the Satapatha Brahmana for our discussion.

²⁶*Gonda, 1975, op.cit., p.339.

transforming them into a highly complicated system of sacrificial ceremonies”²⁷. The Vedas (samhita) provided an irrevocable curricular foundation on which the edifice of the Brahmanas was constructed (SB 1.7.2.3). They were regarded as the source of energy (SB 5.5.5.3-5), the essence of which the sacrificial rituals were supposed to contain (SB 10.5.2.21-23; see also SB 11.5.6-8/ 6.1.1.8).

There was no dearth of ways and means of deriving legitimacy for a sacrificial ritual. Human beings, nature, animals, objects, qualities, status or social relations, all had an interchangeable character. ‘Like the two eyes are placed in front of the head, the two butter portions (for Agni and Soma), representing the eyes of the sacrifice, are offered in front’ (SB 1.6.3.38). Any kind of similarity between two objects or attributes sufficed for defining their identity. The Udgatri (the priest who sang the Samaveda melodies), for instance, is an embodiment of the rainy season simply because the sound produced by the rain was perceived to resemble his singing. The Agnidhra (the priest who, after having sprinkled the altar or vedi thrice with water, lit the sacrificial fire to appease the god Agni) was considered the embodiment of spring, since this fire was seen as resembling the spring fire in the forest (SB 11.2.7.32). Speculations over meteorological or astronomical phenomena (SB 1.8.3.12/10.5), cosmic or cosmogony questions (SB 3.9.1.1/ 6.1.1.1), medicine or agriculture (SB 4.1.3.9/ 2.1.1.7), social or sexual relations (SB 2.1.2.4/ 2.5.2.20) were all projected using the analogy of sacrificial rituals. Any two

²⁷**ibid*, p.342.

objects or events were linked together with irrational and dry arguments for defining a sacrificial ritual. Milk, for instance, must be offered to the wind (vayu), because the former owes its creation to the latter. “Then as to why it is (offered) to vayu. Now vayu, indeed, is yonder blowing (wind); it is he that makes swell whatever rain falls here. But it is by the rain that plants grow; and on the plants being eaten and the water drunk, milk is produced out of that water. Hence, it is he (vayu) that produces it, and for this reason it is (offered) to vayu” (SB 2.6.3.7).

A debate between the two brahmins Svaidayana and Uddalaka Aruni (SB 11.4.1) could be cited here as a typical example to illustrate how the empirical observations in nature were connected with the phenomenon of sacrificial ceremony. Such a link was declared as knowledge and the one possessing it was qualified to enter heaven (SB 11.4.1.16):

Uddalaka Aruni, a chosen brahmin priest, travelled through a northern country and offered a golden coin to whosoever would prove superior to him in a debate. The people of that country accepted his challenge and chose an intelligent and clever Svaidayana as the opponent. Svaidayana posed his opponent some questions. He asked him what caused the teeth and hair to grow and the vitality of man to gain strength. “Whereby it is that creatures here are born toothless, whereby they grow with them, whereby they decay, whereby they come to remain permanently, whereby, in the last stage of life, they all again decay; whereby the lower ones grow faster than the upper ones...

whereby creatures here are born with hair... whereby the seed of the boy is not productive, whereby in his middle age it is productive..." (SB 11.4. 1.5-7). Uddalaka failed to answer these questions, accepted his defeat and willingly became Svaidayana's disciple and acquire more of this knowledge under his guidance.

Svaidayana imparted the following knowledge to him:
"And inasmuch as the fore-offerings are without inviting formulas (anuvakya), therefore creatures are born without teeth; and inasmuch as the chief oblations have inviting formulas, therefore (the teeth) grow, and inasmuch as the after-offerings are without inviting formulas, therefore (the teeth) decay... " (SB 11.4.1.12). And inasmuch as, after uttering the inviting formula, he offers with the offering formula, therefore the lower (teeth) grow first, then the upper ones; ...after uttering a gayatri verse (3x11 syllables) as inviting formula, he offers with a trishtubh verse (4 x 11 syllables), therefore the lower (teeth) are smaller, and the upper ones broader... " (SB 11.4.1.13).

Similar explanations are offered as regards to hair and semen too. "And inasmuch as the fore-offerings have ghee for their offering material, a boy's seed is not productive, but is like water, for ghee is like water; and inasmuch as, in the middle of the sacrifice, they sacrifice with sour curds and with cake, therefore it is productive in his middle stage of life, for thick-flowing, as it were, is seed... and... after-offerings have ghee for their offering material, it again is not productive in his last stage of life, and is like water, for ghee, indeed, is like water" (SB 11.4.1.15).

The sacrificer knowing thus qualified himself for entering heaven.

Analogy of sacrificial ritual is the sole explanation offered for the interrogations as to why one is born without teeth and hair and why the child's semen would be unproductive. A biological process involving growth and change is explained in terms of development and change in the sacrificial ceremony.

It is important to note here the technique of implying a kind of mutual relationship between the sacrificial ritual and an event, a desire or some experience in such a manner that one could get an impression of their being regulated through the blessing of sacrificial ritual. If a ceremony failed to bring about the promised result, there was always the strong and incontestable argument ready that the ritual had not been performed in a correct way. Bhallabeya once performed a sacrificial ceremony in which the "invitatory formula" was recited in the anustubh verse and the "offering formula" in the trishtubh verse. He hoped to utilise the favours of both these verses for the fulfilment of his expectations. But one day he fell down from his cart and he broke his arm. "He reflected: 'This has befallen because of something or other I have done'. He then bethought himself of this: '(It has befallen) because of some violation, on my part, of the proper course of the sacrifice'. Hence, one must not violate the proper course (of sacrificial performance); but let both (formulas) be verses of the same metre, either both anushtubh verses, or both trishtubh verses" (SB 1.7.3.19).

As the Brahmana texts came to be composed, the sacrificial rituals with their set of rules for performing the ceremonies and various theoretical justifications had become such a complex affair that knowledge had to be shared by various priests. We find four different priests (hotri, adhvaryu, udgatri, brahmi -RV 10.71.11) in the Rigveda itself. The number of the priests rose to 16 (see foot note 17) with the Brahmana texts. Their position and assignment displayed a rigid hierarchy. "As to this they say: Seeing that the work of the hotri being performed with the Rigveda, that of the adhvaryu with the Yajurveda, and that of the udgatri with the Samaveda, wherewith is the work of the brahmi? Let him reply: With that threefold science" (SB 11.5.8.7). In the preceding section (SB 11.5.8.6) there is a description as to how the brahmin used to control the performance of the rituals and how he could manage to avert the "damages" caused by any mistakes.

With sacrificial ceremonies, particularly those of warriors (e.g. ashva-medha), becoming more and more extensive, complex and pregnant with a wide range of actions, the brahmin priest enhanced his social dominance as a brahmin by virtue of his hierarchical position in the ritual. He was the sole authority for defining the mistakes and he alone had the privilege to interpret and correct them and to offer sacrificial analogy if necessary. The development of this powerful priest to a priest of brahmin caste is unique in Hinduism. "The brahmin priest was a professional priest without parallel in Aryan tradition elsewhere; in later India, he acquired virtual monopoly of almost all

rituals”²⁸. One was even supposed to worship him as human god (see page 4, SB 2.2.2.6). Some other fields of knowledge such as itihasa-purana, vakovakyam (dialogue)²⁹, narasamsi gatha (hymns of praise of heroes) and other uncertain “sciences” (vidya), probably magic and doctrine of gods and spirits (SB 11.5.6.8/ 11.5.7.9-10) linked with the liturgical and ritual knowledge are mentioned in the Brahmanas.

Further, the actual performing of sacrifice necessitated the knowledge of astronomy and that of geometrical constructions for making the sacrificial altar. Keeping the right time for sacrificial ceremony was an essential prerequisite for attaining success and it was fixed by observing the movements and constellations of stars and planets. That is why one can find numerous astronomical details in these texts (SB 1.6.4.18-20/ 3.1.3.17/ 3.1.3.20/ 5.3.1.2/ 7.3.1.35/ 12.3.2.5 etc.), which, although were not systematized, provided significant fundamental information for further development of this branch of knowledge. There are a number of instructions on exact measurements, geometrical constructions, numerical references and basic calculations³⁰. “For when Indra and Vishnu divided a thousand

²⁸*Kosambi, Damodhar D. *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, (2) 1975, p.99f.

²⁹*Chattopadhyaya, D. *What is Living and What is Dead in Indian Philosophy*, Delhi, 1977, p.8.

* Horsch, P. *Profanes Wissensgut im Vedischen Literaturkreis*, Asiatische Studien, Bern, XIV/1961.

³⁰*Bose, D.M.(Ed.). *A Concise History of Science in India*, Delhi, 1971,p.62f.

(cows) into three parts, there was one left, and hence they caused to propagate herself in three kinds; and hence, even now, if anyone were to divide a thousand by three, one would remain over” (SB 3.3.1.13).

There is even an arithmetical series consisting of as much as seven elements. “But, indeed, that fire-altar also is the metres; for these are seven of these metres increasing by four syllables; and the triplets of these make seven hundred and ten double syllables, and thirty-six in addition there to” (SB 10.5.4.7). $(24 + 28 + 32... + 48) \times 3 = 756 = 720 + 36$. (*The general formula of an arithmetical progression would be: $s(n) = n/2(2a + (n-1)d)$; $[756 = 7/2(2 \times 24 + (7-1)4)3]$). Although the general mathematical formulae are not given in the Brahmanas, there are, nevertheless, many useful instructions, which paved the way for the development of mathematics (numbers and geometry), which flourished and reached its peak mainly in the 1st millennium CE³¹. It is important to note here, that the underlying context of sacrificial rituals in the Brahmanas continued as a frame of reference even for the subsequent mathematical, astronomical and astrological discussions. Same was the case with the debates or dialogues (vakovakyam) (SB 11.4.1) on various branches of knowledge, on questions of social life,*

* Srinivasan, S. *Mensuration in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1979, p.118.

³¹*For example, the discussions on the "zero"; Datta, B and A.N Singh, *History of Hindu Mathematics*, Bombay, 1962, p.75f.

* Srinivasiengar, C.N. *The History of Ancient Indian Mathematics*, Calcutta, 1967, p.6.

philosophical speculations, empirical experience or sacrificial performance³². These debates were important, as they called various contents into question, helped recognise fundamentals and at the same time they demonstrated one's intellectual and social superiority (SB 11.6.2)³³. They left enough space for further speculations in the discussions even pertaining to those contents and questions that were not immediately connected with the sacrificial rituals. In the later scriptures, such as the Upanishads, such discussions are very frequent.

b) Foundations of Upanishadic Knowledge

Instead of the analogies in the sacrificial ritual, the construction of the Atman and the Brahman were the points of interest in the Upanishads. The premise of their existence and the necessity of their determination characterised the concept of knowledge in these texts. Even though the knowledge of the Vedas was not radically rejected and the traditions of the Brahmana texts were also not totally discontinued, they were rather given an epistemologically very clearly defined but a much subordinate role. The students were interested not only in the "knowledge of the scriptures"³⁴, i.e. well versed in the Vedas, but also in "Atman knowledge" (Chand. 7.1), for they heard, the

³²*Gonda, 1975, op.cit., p.379.

* Kamble, B.R. *Caste and Philosophy in Pre-Buddhist India*, Aurangabad, 1979, p.140.

³³*Bhagawat, Durga. *The Riddle in Indian Life, Lore and Literature*, Bombay, 1965, p.XXV.

³⁴*Chattopadhyaya, D. *Indian Philosophy*, Delhi, 1964, p.45f.

knowledge of the Rigveda, daiva, nidhi, vakovakya, brahma vidya, bhuta vidya... (a total of 19 subjects) were “mere names” (Chand. 7.1.4).

Narada who studied all these subjects, requested the teacher Sanatakumara: “Such a one am I, Sir, knowing the sacred sayings (mantra vid), but not knowing the Atman. It has been heard by me from those who are like you, Sir, that he who knows the Atman crosses over sorrow. Such a sorrowing one am I, Sir. Do you, Sir, cause me, who am such a one, to cross over to the other side of sorrow.” – To him he then said, “Verily, whatever thou have here learned, verily, that is mere name (naman)” (Chand. 7.1.3). Another student, Svetaketu too, had studied all the Vedas in twelve years and returned home, “conceited, thinking himself learned, proud” (Chand. 6.1.2), heard from his father about the doctrine of the Atman which he had not learnt from his teachers and by which “what has not been heard of becomes heard of, what has not been thought of becomes thought of, what has not been understood becomes understood” (Chand. 6.1.3). In the Late Upanishads the knowledge of the Brahman even rose to be the “higher knowledge” (para vidya), while at the same time the Vedic knowledge without digression degenerated into the “lower knowledge” (apara vidya). The concept of knowledge in the Upanishads shows a tendency to emancipate itself from the Vedic tradition³⁵.

³⁵*Bowes, 1978, op.cit., p.23f.

But the Upanishads neither show a homogeneous system nor coherent thoughts concerning the knowledge of the Atman and the Brahman. Nevertheless, one can see an unflinching endeavour throughout the Upanishads to not only substantially apprehend, epistemologically categorise, and ideologically mould the knowledge of the Atman and Brahman, but also to forge the latter into a relationship with the existence of man in manifold variations. The Brahman and the Atman are invariably characterised in terms of models, described allegorically and illustrated with cosmogony, secular, physiological or psychological examples.

The Brahman, for example, is the whole world, immortal and limitless (Chand. 3.14.1/ Brih. 1.4.10/ Mait. 6.17/ Mund. 2.2.11). It is as a part of the primeval water the Real (Brih. 3.6/ Brih. 5.5.1) and the eternal cause (Svet. 1.1/ 1.7). It has been identified with personified gods (Brih. 3.9.9/ Svet. 4.2). But the gods ignore it (Kena 3.14-15). The immanent Brahman is the soul (Atman) which is in all things (Brih. 3.4.1-2/ Mait. 6.38/ Chand. 3.12.7-9) and has contrary forms: the formed and the formless (Mait. 6.3), time and the timeless (Mait. 6.15), sound and non-sound (Mait. 6.22), the mortal and the immortal, the stationary and the moving, the actual (sat) and the yon (tya) (Brih. 2.3.1) etc. Knowledge and Un-knowledge or ignorance (avidya) is hidden in the Brahman (Svet. 5.1). In Tait. 3.2, Mait. 6.11 or Chand. 7.9.2 food is the highest form of the Brahman, but in Brih. 5.12 this opinion has been contradicted. According to the Chand. 4.10.5, the Brahman is life (prana), joy and the void or just the breathing spirit, but in the Brih. 5.12

this view has been rejected. In Svet.1.12, Brahman is three-fold (the enjoyer, the object of enjoyment, and the universal actuator) and in Chand. 3.18.1-6 he is fourfold. It is, as stressed often, the real (satya), the knowledge (jnana) and the infinite (ananta) (Tait. 2.1). However, the Brahman is also hidden, unexpressed, unthought, unseen (Kath. 5.1/ Kena 4-8).

Like the Brahman, the Atman is also characterised as exemplary. It is postulated as being a part of the Brahman in man (Chand. 8.12.1/ Mait. 3.1). In the texts, both the terms, Atman and Brahman are often treated identically or qualified by similar attributes, such as eternal, dimensionless, indestructible, without beginning, incorporeal etc. The Atman is the beginning of the manifold world (Ait. 1.1/ Tait. 2.1), a resting-place of all being (Prasna 4.7) and embodies god (Sarva 2.3/ Mait. 6.8/ Brih. 4.4.15/ Kaus. 3.8). It is a part of the beings (Kath. 2.22/ Svet. 1.15.16/ Chand. 6.9.4), stays in the hearts (Kath. 2.20/ Chand. 3.14.3) and is the agent of all the senses (Kath. 4.3/ Mait. 6.31). It can be the whole world (Chand. 7.25.2) but can also be smaller than a grain of rice, or a barley-corn, or a mustard-seed (Chand. 3.14.3). It is unseeable, indestructible, unattached, unbound (Brih. 3.9.26/ Chand. 3.7.3/ Mait. 6.17) and the Real (Chand. 8.7.1). Such descriptions of Atman and Brahman in relation to Krishna are found in Bhagavadgita too.

It is impossible to achieve an integration of all these meanings of the Atman and the Brahman into a significant whole because different schools of thought speculated over them at historically different times and the contents

were liable to constant interpolations³⁶. It probably does not matter much, as the aim of the different meanings is first and foremost the creation of a far-reaching speculative construction, which allows secret qualities to be supposed in them. At the same time, the different meanings denote the fact that the Brahman or the Atman appear as the “substance” or the “true essence” of the diversity of the empirical world. This “substance” attains the absolute character and is declared as the only reality which, reduced to the category of secret knowledge, becomes itself a speculative object of discussion or determination or attainment, or discovery. The ones who have the “knowledge” over this object at their disposal, enjoy similar prominent position as the Brahman or the Atman, which can be characterised as ranging from mere respect to social power in the society³⁷.

An important premise in relation to the terms Brahman and Atman, pertains to their identity. This fundamental assumption forms a central object of debate in the scriptures and was continually addressed in many thematic variations. The Brahman is only identifiable through the Atman and vice versa. “Containing all works, containing all desires, containing all odours, containing all tastes,

³⁶*Kosambi, D.D. *The Historical Development of the Bhagavat-Gita* in Chattopadhyaya, D. (Ed.), *Studies in the History of Indian Philosophy*, Calcutta, 1978-79, Vol.1, p.243ff.

* Bazaz, Prem N. *The Role of Bhagwad Gita in Indian History*, Delhi, 1975, p.241.

³⁷*Varma, V.P. *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and its Metaphysical Foundations*, Delhi, (3)1974, (1)1954, p.61.

accompanying this whole world, the unspeaking, the unconcerned. – This is the Atman of mine within the heart, this is Brahman. Into him I shall enter on departing hence” (Chand. 3.14.4 and see also many other evidences: Brih. 2.5.19/ 3.4.1-2/ 4.4.22/ Tait. 2.5/ Maha. 6.9-14/ Chand. 4.15.1/ S.3.4/ Tejo. 1.7.11/ Sarva. 21/ Svet. 1.12/ Mait. 2.2/ BG 10.20/ 14.3/ 14.27...).

The Atman, which is a part of the Brahman (or vice versa), does not have any other basis for its definition³⁸. A difference or duality or plurality between them is strictly refused. The scriptures are vehemently critical of such thoughts. By the mind alone is it to be perceived.

There is on earth no diversity.

He gets death after death.

Who perceives here seeming diversity.

As a unity only is it to be looked upon –

This un-demonstrable, enduring Being,

Spotless, beyond space.

The unborn Atman, great, enduring.

(Brih. 4.4.19-20) (see also: Kath. 4.10/ Kaus. 3.8/

Chand. 6.2.1-2/ Mandu. 2.4/ 3.15/ Prasna. 4.7/ Mund.

1.1.7/ Sarva 2-3/ BG 6.31 ...).

Identity of the Atman and the Brahman is affirmed to such an extent that they cannot be demarcated against each other. They flow into each other and are structurally and

³⁸*Dasgupta, S.N. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Cambridge (Reprint), 1957, Vol.1, p.45.

conceptually interchangeable in many aspects (so that we can use Atman/Brahman as one term if necessary).

Two conceptions of knowledge have been developed in the Upanishads whereby the evidence of the one is sometimes recognized in the other. The conception of knowledge in the Early Upanishads is referred to as intellectual knowledge while its counterpart in the Late Upanishads is known as intuitive knowledge.

c) Intellectual Knowledge – Early Upanishads

The general assumption of the compilers of the Early Upanishads (Brih., Chand., Ait., Kaus., Tait., Kena etc.) is that Atman/Brahman can be seen, heard, described, analysed, or logically derived. Thus the descriptions of Atman/Brahman are associated mostly with materialistic characters and empirical experience. The compilers try to define the knowledge of Atman/Brahman by analytical discussions, deductive derivations, logical reasoning and rational arguments. However, they did not succeed in satisfactorily proposing the knowledge of Atman/Brahman with this disposition. Their attempt either proved insufficient, or led to contradictions. Consequently, these intellectuals then presented metaphysical explanations which neither needed any rational analysis nor did they contradict all those extraordinary attributes of Atman/Brahman which we have described above.

A theory of knowledge in these texts generally begins with a hypothesis which is systematically verified in the long

treatise. We find many intellectual theoreticians in the early Upanishads, each defending his own hypothesis on Atman/Brahman. The theory of the guru Prajapati is discussed here as an example to illustrate how the knowledge in these texts is weaved together with the help of rational arguments, logical reasoning and metaphysical speculations.

Prajapati begins his theory with the premise concerning the nature of the Atman and the omnipotence gained by its knowledge. “The Atman, which is free from evil, age-less, death-less, sorrow-less, hunger-less, thirst-less, whose desire is the real, whose conception is the real. He should be searched out. Him, one should desire to understand or to know. He obtains all worlds and all desires who has found out and who understands that Atman” (Chand. 8.7.1).

The discussion is carried out in the form of a dialogue between the guru Prajapati and his two disciples, Indra and Virochana. Both desire to be informed about Prajapati’s conception of the Atman. Virochana, the demoniac, spent only 32 years with his guru. He is satisfied with the guru’s first explanation about the Atman that is deficient. He does not ask any more questions, and therefore is excluded from the discussion and loses his status as a disciple. Indra, the divine, stays 101 years with his guru. He is as enthusiastic as ever before to continue the discussion till he ceases to entertain any doubts about the metaphysical explanations of the Atman. The following description shows how Prajapati carries out the argumentations step by step till Indra is fully satisfied:

(i) First Prajapati explains that the Atman has a physical appearance of beings. Atman is put on par with the body. “That person, who is seen in the eye, he is the Atman of whom I spoke. That is the immortal, the fearless. That is the Brahman” (Chand. 8.8.4).

(ii) The empirical experience, however, reveals that the body dissolves after death. Putting the Atman on par with the body means, that the Atman “perishes immediately upon the perishing of this body (sarira)” (Chand. 8.9.1). This statement also contradicts the hypothesis which postulated that the Atman is immortal. Hence, the statement that the Atman is to be identified with the body has been rejected by Indra. After another 32 years he again asks Prajapati about the nature of the Atman.

(iii) Prajapati now regards the Atman and the spirit as one and the same entity: “He (the spirit) who moves about happy in a dream – he is the Atman, that is the immortal, the fearless. That is the Brahman” (Chand. 8.10.1).

(iv) The empirical experience, however, reveals that “bad dreams” exist. In such a dream the Atman – the spirit – appears “as it were (iva), they kill him; as it were, they unclthe him; as it were, he comes to experience what is unpleasant; as it were, he even weeps” (Chand. 8.10.2).

(v) Indra again cannot accept this explanation because “I see nothing enjoyable in this” (Chand. 8.10.2). The explanation does not correspond to the statement of the premise which is based on the hypothesis that the Atman does not suffer. Therefore, the Atman cannot

be considered equal to the spirit which is tortured by bad dreams.

(vi) Guru Prajapati further explains that deep sleep is identical with the Atman. “Now, when one is sound asleep, composed, serene, and knows no dream – that is the Atman,” he said (Chand. 8.11.1).

(vii) Again, the experience differs from the statement of the premise. In the state of deep sleep consciousness, memory and perception do not function. Indra thinks, “Assuredly, indeed, this one does not exactly know himself (atmanam) with the thought ‘I am he’, nor indeed the things here. He becomes one who has gone to destruction” (Chand. 8.11.1). The premise, however, runs as follows: “He should be searched out; him, one should desire to know or to preserve in mind.” This explanation, too, does not correspond with the premise because in the state of deep sleep nothing can be perceived. Therefore, pointing at the state of deep sleep does not make for the evidence of the existence of the Atman.

(viii) All the explanations being contradictory to the content of the premise result in pointing out that the Atman cannot be compared either with the physical or with any psychological state. Now Prajapati reaches a point where he does not indulge any more in an analytical discussion of the Atman by referring to worldly experience. He now switches to a meta-physical explanation, which seems to coincide with the content of the premise. Concerning the Atman he makes a distinction between the body or the psychological state and the Atman. He explains: “Oh, Maghavan, verily,

this body is mortal. It has been appropriated by death (mrityu). It is the standing ground of that deathless, bodiless Atman” (Chand. 8.12.1). The body sleeps, dreams, suffers or dies without being in contradiction with the nature of the Atman. Being bodiless – like the Atman – one is free from pleasure and pain. “Verily, while one is bodiless, pleasure and pain do not touch him” (Chand. 8.12.1).

(ix) Prajapati gives some more explanations to emphasise the structure of his reasoning: “The wind is bodiless. Clouds, lightning, thunder – these are bodiless. Now as these, when they arise from yonder space and reach the highest light, appear each with its own form, even so that serene one (sampled), when he rises up from this body and reaches the highest light, appears with his own form. Such a one is the supreme one (uttama purusha). There such a one goes around laughing, sporting, having enjoyment with women or chariots or friends, not remembering the appendage of this body” (Chand. 8.12.2-3).

(x) Even the gods of the brahmaloka worship such an Atman as described by Prajapati. He winds up the discussion of his theory explaining in detail the attributes of omnipotence of the knower of the Atman which he had referred to at the outset: “He obtains all words and all desires who has found out and who understands that Atman” (Chand. 8.12.6).

While answering the questions concerning the attributes and localisation of the Atman, Prajapati first refers to the physical phenomena and empirical events which can be

perceived by human senses. What is of particular significance to us, is his analytical approach, and the way he encouraged Indra to examine carefully all those characteristics which he was putting forward. The discussion in the form of a dialogue comprises analysis and verifications on the basis of the premise. Defining the premise is the first step which also reveals the basic position of the guru Prajapati. Then he proceeds to explain one by one the assumptions constituting his premise, while referring each time to one or the other empirical experience. The disciple examines them carefully and points out those contradictions which Prajapati is aware of and is expecting him to discover. It is not until then that the disciple would reject various assumptions and finally end up by resting content with the metaphysical explanations³⁹.

This analytical and intellectual approach (*vijnatam*) is characteristic of the theories of many other gurus of the early Upanishads (e.g. Uddalaka Aruni in Chand. 6.1-16/ Satyakama in Chand. 4.10-15/ Sanatakumara in Chand. 7.1-26/ Yajnavalkya in Brih. 4.1-4/ Brih. 3.1-9/ Tait. 2.1-9/ Kena 1-13 etc.). The discussions were preferably carried out in the form of debates (*brahmodya*) or dialogues (*vakovakyam*) whereby the exchange of thesis and anti-thesis with regard to Atman/Brahman could take place. One can even find a mention of “wandering disciples” (*charaka*) who participated in the debates (Brih. 3.3.1/ 3.7.1) and who may have made a substantial contribution to the spread of such ideas in ancient India. Through

³⁹*Mainkar, T.G. *Mysticism in the Rigveda*, Bombay, 1961, p.48.

debates it was possible to discuss theories postulated by others, modify or refute them, or even present one's own premises and seek approval of other participants (Brih. 4.1-4/ 6.2/ Chand. 6.1-2/ 8.7-12/ Tait. 2.1-9).

Even during the period of the early Upanishads, the intellectuals generally believed that it was possible not only to see, hear and understand Atman/Brahman, but also to define him in metaphysical terms. Since the highly abstract structure of Atman/Brahman could not be made evident by way of arguments and debates, the late Upanishads put through such theories, which categorised the act of seeing and knowing Atman/Brahman as an "intuitive", "inner" and "subjective" experience⁴⁰.

d) Intuitive Knowledge – Late Upanishads

The main premise of the late Upanishads is that Atman/Brahman "is not to be understood by anyone either through the ritual part of the Veda nor logical reasoning"⁴¹. The knowledge of the Vedas and that of the sacrificial ritual was not outrightly rejected, but was unambiguously downgraded as "the lower knowledge" (apara vidya)⁴². The secret knowledge of Atman/ Brahman became the higher knowledge (para vidya or jnana). "There are two

⁴⁰*Chaitanya, K. *A New History of Sanskrit Literature*, Delhi, (2)1977, p.73ff.

⁴¹*Radhakrishnan, S. *The Brahma Sutra. The Philosophy of Spiritual life*, London, 1960, p.249.

⁴²*Ghurye, 1957, op. cit., p.34f.

knowledges to be known – as indeed the knowers of Brahman say: a higher (para) and also a lower (apara). Of these, the lower is the Rigveda, the Yajurveda, the Samaveda, the Atharvaveda, siksa (pronunciation), kalpa (ritual), vyakarana (grammar), nirukta (definition), chandas (metrics), and jyotisha (astrology). Now, the higher is that whereby that imperishable (akshara) is apprehended” (Mund.1.1.4-5; also: Mait. 6.22/ Mund. 1.2.7/ BG 9.20-22).

Even the analytical argumentations and logical reasoning of the early Upanishads were rejected. “Not, when proclaimed by an inferior man, is he (Atman) to be well understood” (Kath. 2.8). “Not by reasoning (tarka) is this thought (mati) to be attained” (Kath. 2.9). “This Atman is not to be attained by instruction, nor by intellect, nor by learning” (Mund. 3.23) or “not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can Atman be apprehended” (Kath. 6.12), and so on. Thus, as a matter of course, the experience of Atman/ Brahman was brought into the region of intuition, which could most easily be attained by imposing on oneself the limitations of the highest order, by taming one’s passions, desires, and senses and by independent thinking and exercising control over the mind. “When all the desires that lodge in one’s heart are liberated, then a mortal becomes immortal; therein he reaches Brahman” (Kath. 6.14; see also Mund. 3.2.1-2/ Kath. 3.7/ 3.13/ BG 2.60-61/ 2.71-72/ 3.7/ 3.40-41/ 6.18/ Mand. 3.42).

So long the mind should be confined.

Till in the heart it meets its end.

That is both knowledge and release,

All else is but a string of words.
(Mait. 6.34)

By taking total command over one's senses (indriya), through complete sublimation of the passion and control of the mind and all mental faculties, the individual was supposed to become free from external influences and stimuli and turn "inward", into a region, where the "invisible" and "hidden" (Kath. 3.12) Atman was seated.

A method was now required to realise the goal of perfect control over the senses and thoughts, for only then an individual could enter that state which was supposed to facilitate the experience of knowledge of Atman/Brahman. This method, which is the integral part of Hinduism, is contained in the conception of yoga⁴³.

When cease the five (senses) knowledges, together
with the mind (manas),
And the intellect (buddhi) stirs not – that, they say is
the highest course.

This they consider as yoga – the firm holding back of
the senses.

Then one becomes undistracted. Yoga, truly, is the
origin and end. (Kath. 6.10-11)

(See also Svet. 2.8-15/ Yoga Sutra.1.2/ 1.12/ 1.16/
Nada. 18/ Mait. 6.18-30/ BG chapter 6/ Yoga-
Upanishads).

⁴³*Gonda. J. *Die Religionen Indiens*, Stuttgart, (2) 1978, p.308f.

* Kosambi, D.D. *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Delhi, 1970, p. 105.

The point of departure for the development of yoga techniques was also the belief that only by giving up all desires and sublimating passions, which are the products of senses and mind, it was possible to reach the highest goal, that of the personal experience of Atman/ Brahman. The techniques were perfected in the course of centuries in order to gain total control over the body. Along with the techniques, the theoretical justifications too were enriched such as for instance a whole series of independent Upanishads dealing with yoga were composed. They are all summarised in the Yoga-Upanishads such as Brahma-vidya, Yogatattva, Yogasika, Hansa, Tejo-bindu, Nada-bindu, Dhyana-bindu etc. A number of schools, each with a different approach entered the scene. They criticised one another and defended their own ideologies. The fundamental thought, about the necessity of controlling the senses, mind and spirit, was, however, never called into question. This premise was regarded by all as irrevocable.

Thus yoga established itself as the cornerstone of Hindu world-view and was soon to dominate the field as the sole method of the “intellectuals” and “elects” which could provide them with the desired salvation. Precisely at this juncture one can encounter the reason why the orthodox Hindu world-view ossified, for the method itself generated barriers which became firm and insuperable as the dominance of the method increased. At the same time, yoga itself became the content of the holy knowledge, as numerous techniques and their legitimacies continued to receive increasing importance. As a result, the initially proclaimed goal of knowing Atman/Brahman gradually

receded to the background and historically lost all significance. It was no more necessary to indulge in their speculations, for the yoga techniques and their justifications were so complicated, comprehensive and rich in speculations that the succeeding generations of Hindus did not deem it necessary to make the knowledge of Atman/ Brahman an issue.

The intellectual achievement of the theoreticians of the late Upanishads consisted also in injecting or carrying over the abstract knowledge of Atman/Brahman into the knowledge of yoga which offered an ideal basis, both for the speculative theoretical discussions, for it was rooted in Atman/Brahman, as well as for the practical realisation for personal satisfaction. Herein lies the secret of its historical stability over many centuries and that of its fame and popularity among the intellectuals and practitioners. The following advice was given to the aspirant (Mund. 2.2.3):

Taking as a bow the great weapon of the Upanishads, one should put upon it an arrow sharpened by meditation. Stretching it with a thought directed to the essence of Brahman, penetrate that imperishable as the mark, my friend.

In the conception of yoga meditation (dhyana), asceticism, penance and austerity (tapas) have been particularly prescribed by some as necessary exercises (Kena 4.33).

Those who practised meditation attained greatness among the human beings and by virtue of their austerity (tapas) “depart passionless (vi-ragya) through the door of the sun, to where is that immortal person (purusha), the imperishable Atman” (Mund. 1.2.11). The Bhagavadgita recommended (BG 8.8): “He who meditates on the supreme person with his thought attuned by constant practice and not wandering after anything else, he reaches the person, supreme and divine” (see also Mait.1.2/4.4/ Mund. 3.1.5/ BG 6.10-18).

Entry into one’s realm through yoga was closely linked with the call for remaining aloof from the distressing social environment, because that environment was presumably the cause of “desire” and “passion”. Only some ascetics have tried to be thoroughly consistent in meeting this requirement⁴⁴. For the overwhelming majority of Hindus, however, this salvation remained merely a distant goal⁴⁵. While leading worldly life⁴⁶, the members of the upper castes could practise yoga in the hope that they would gradually reach a goal. Action (karma) was the basis of the worldly life and actions recommended by yoga were considered as of the highest order (BG 18.42-44/ Mait. 6.29).

This idea of intuitive and meditative knowledge has, by and large, survived up to the present day. The “spiritual

⁴⁴*Bhagat, M.G. *Indian Asceticism*, Delhi, 1976, p.236f.

⁴⁵*Thapar, R. *Ancient Indian Social History*, Delhi, 1978, p.66f.

⁴⁶*Basham, A.L. *The Wonder that was India*, N.York, 1959, p.9.

experience” of the “Highest” (Brahman, Atman) which is the salvation, would remain as much as ever the supreme and distant goal that an upper caste Hindu seeks to reach by turning inward.

IV. Role of the Guru

A guru is described as being a wise teacher who is a religious, spiritual or intellectual mentor and whose authority is based on the supposition that esoteric truth and the highest enlightenment can only be attained through personal concurrence with him. The doctrine of salvation made it possible for the guru to take on a central position in the ancient Hindu philosophy since it was supposed that the path of personal salvation could be found through him. For his followers and disciples he was an almighty person, the absolute authority. His views were considered to be profound, his decisions were respected and unconditionally obeyed, his wishes were fulfilled, and his favours were unflinchingly sought for. For his followers, he personified the “highest truth” and knowledge. On him fell the responsibility of establishing and transferring the generally accepted ideas together with his own interpretations, and supervising their transposition. The guru attained an omnipotent position very early on in the minds and emotions of his disciples⁴⁷.

The position of the guru in Hindu philosophy could be traced back to the rishi (means seer, inspired singer, spiritual leader) of the rigvedic times⁴⁸. It is possible to conceive the guru as an institution that might have developed as a branch of intellectuals under rishis. In popular terms,

⁴⁷*Chaudhuri, N.C. *Hinduism*, London, 1979, p.302.

⁴⁸*Kulkarni, C.M. *Vedic Foundations of Indian Culture*, Bombay, 1973, p.14.

it is the rishi to whom the collections (samhita) of the Vedic hymns were supposed to have been “revealed”. The books (mandala) 2 to 7 of the Rigveda mention the names of some rishis⁴⁹. These rishis to whom the hymns were “revealed”, were called maharishis distinguishable from the srutarishi, who acquired the holy knowledge of the Vedas through word of mouth and to whom the interpretations of the Vedas were “revealed” only as a result of strict religious penance (tapas). The rishis as composers of the Vedas were valued as a holy authority with whom the later gurus identify themselves.

Sociologically speaking, it is a rather difficult task to clearly define the term guru as it is characterised as encompassing a diverse set of roles such as a guide, a teacher, an ascetic, a religious or spiritual leader, a common-place priest, a royal priest (purohit) etc. Whilst the ascetic guru by and large represented the ideal guru figure as a wise teacher, a spiritual and intellectual mentor, it was the priestly guru who held a stronger position in imparting religious texts and was engaged in carrying out rituals (Manu 2.143). The purohit possessed a very special position. He was responsible not only for priestly and teaching activities but was also the political and legal advisor of a despot in protecting his realm from enemies and other calamities.

As the contents of the knowledge increasingly acquired meditative and contemplative foundations in the late

⁴⁹*Bhargava, P.L. *India in the Vedic Age*, Lucknow, 1971, p.166.

Upanishads, and yoga became to be considered as an indisputable method for the desired salvation, the guru attained an irrevocable intellectual dominance. He more or less rose to become an educational institution and made himself educationally indispensable, which is a feature quite unique in Hinduism. With the Upanishads, he separated himself clearly from the religious priest, even though both belonged to the brahmin caste (Manu 10.1) and took upon himself the responsibility of initiating the selected disciples into the “higher knowledge” of the Brahman. He alone could teach the complicated yoga techniques, independent of religious rituals.

The contents and interpretations of the knowledge were transmitted for a long time (“since eternity” as the tradition says) only orally wherein the student was supposed to hear the scriptures. While learning them, a very precise recitation of the melodies of the hymns and chants (mantra) was necessary, as the desired effect supposedly depended on the methodological adherence to rules⁵⁰. These melodies could only be heard and learned from a guru. Beyond that, the contents of the knowledge were not only considered to be confidential but also an intimate communication.

The oral transmission of knowledge made it possible that the “word” of the guru was understood as the “higher knowledge” pertaining to which no scepticism was tolerated. But even after the scriptures had been established in

⁵⁰*Chaitanya, 1977, op.cit., p.33 and 53.

the written form, the guru still retained his sole authority since the ability to teach this knowledge and rightly interpret it was granted only to him⁵¹. There existed many explanations, opinions and doubts on what constitutes correct knowledge and its interpretations. Even the contents of the Vedas offer a lot of material for commentaries and speculations. Only the guru was supposed to be capable of judging the interpretations, attitudes, and correct deeds and guiding. Without him the acquisition of knowledge was supposedly impossible.

Not, when proclaimed by an inferior man, is he to be understood, (though) being manifoldly considered. Unless declared by some teacher, there is no going thither. For he is inconceivably more subtle than what is of subtle measure. (Kath. 2.8)

For the sake of this knowledge let him go, fuel in hand, to a spiritual teacher (guru) who is learned in the scriptures and established on Brahman. Such a knowing (guru), unto one who has approached properly, whose thought is tranquillized, who has reached peace, teaches in its very truth that knowledge of Brahman, whereby one knows the imperishable, the person, the true (Mund. 1.2.12-13).

The rank of the guru was linked with the noblest of qualities. He was the “seer” (in contrast to the “blind”), he

⁵¹*For a critical position towards the guru, see, Jha, A. *Intellectuals at the Crossroads. The Indian Situation*, Delhi, 1977, p.26ff.

was characterised as the Brahman and the Atman and symbolised therewith the highest ideal, he was even glorified as god (Yogashikshopanishad 5.56-59) and became often an object of religious worship⁵².

It is important to note here that the position of the guru was combined with his social antecedents. The right to become a guru, to teach and propagate the speculations was granted mostly to brahmins. "It is declared in the smritis that a brahmin alone should be chosen as teacher" (Ap.Dh. 2.2.4.24/ see also Manu 10.1). Only exceptionally and in few cases could people belonging to the next lower castes (kshatriya and vaishyas) teach (Manu 2.241/ Gaut. Dh. 7.1). With the creation of the institution of the guru, the brahmins also claimed monopoly over the intellectual interpretations of perceptive questioning for themselves so that the brahmin, essentially as a guru or priest had ideological and ritual control over the Hindu society as even lower castes and tribes, otherwise isolated in the society, often have a brahmin as a priest.

The central duty of a guru was not only the transmission of his teachings, but also the careful selection of his disciples who could propagate his doctrine further, who were prepared to assimilate them unflinchingly and unquestioningly and who were capable of obeying him perfectly. He was prohibited from teaching someone who expressed doubts, who was not "quiet" (obedient). The

⁵²*Gonda, J. *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, London, 1965, p.280f.

one who doubted was condemned severely. “But the man who is ignorant, who has no faith, who is of doubting nature, perishes. For a doubting soul, there is neither this world nor the world beyond nor any happiness” (BG 4.40). It was not until a full identification with him was assured that the guru was allowed to teach the disciple; then only were his actions right and he could be assured of a reward. “Even in times of dire distress a teacher should rather die with his knowledge than sow it in barren soil” (Manu 2.113; see also BG 18.67-68). It was admonished to look upon the teachings as “most secret” (Tait. 6.29).

The supreme mystery in the Vedanta,
Which has been declared in former time,
Should not be given to one not tranquil,
Nor again to one who is not a son or a pupil.
To one who has the highest devotion (bhakti) for god,
And for his guru even as for god,
To him these matters which have been declared
Become manifest (if he be) a great soul.
(Svet. 6.22-23)

Verily, a father may teach this Brahman to his eldest son or to a pupil, but to no one else at all. Even if one should offer him this (earth) that is recomposed by water and filled with treasure, (he should say): ‘This, truly, is more than that!’
(Chand. 3.11.5).

The brahmins believed without a doubt that their own sons are able to carry on their teachings. Among the alien

sons, the guru was compelled to closely examine their dispositions, capabilities and readiness. The guru received the disciples into his own family and let them work for him (Chand. 8.15). The disciples had to prove their unconditional willingness for adaption by a number of means. Thus, students who came to Pippalada to experience the Brahman had to live for one year with him in a state of asceticism, celibacy and faith and thus demonstrate their willingness and capabilities before he taught them the knowledge of the Brahman (Prasna 1.2). Indra and Virochana had to live for 32 years in this way before they were asked: "What do you desire, that you have lived here so long as students?" (Chand. 8.7.3).

Satyakama Jabala had to demonstrate his capabilities in another way. He had to first trace his social descent as a brahmin before he could be admitted as a disciple. He could not achieve this easily as his mother Jabala had travelled much as a young maid and she could not tell him who his father was (Chand. 4.4.4-9). Convinced by Satyakama's frankness about his antecedents, the guru Haridrumata Gautama was satisfied that he could be a brahmin son as, in his opinion, only a brahmin could talk with such frankness. But before he accepted him as a disciple, he gave Satyakama the 400 leanest and weakest cows he had to watch over. Satyakama came back after many years from far away with a well-fed and well-grown herd of 1000 cows and thus could show his loyalty and willingness to serve the guru and to experience that knowledge of the Brahman which led one "most reliably" to the goal (Chand. 4.9.3).

It was also expected that the guru assured himself of the social antecedents of his students (Chand. 4.4.4-5) because only people belonging to the upper castes were allowed to acquire the knowledge (Manu 2.37). In Manusmriti, the circle of people eligible to be taught was widened and precisely defined: “According to the sacred law, the (following) ten (persons): the teacher’s son, one who desires to do service, one who imparts knowledge, one who is intent on fulfilling the law, one who is pure, a person connected by marriage or friendship, one who possesses ability, one who makes presents of money, one who is honest, and a relative, may be instructed” (Manu 2.109).

The important act that the guru had to accomplish when he took on an aspiring student was the ritual of initiation (upanayana = to take to oneself or to lead)⁵³. The disciple entered the studenthood (brahmacharya) after this initiation. The initiation ceremony was endowed with the (second) birth (dvija). For this reason, the guru received the highest respect (as for a god, Ap.Dh. 1.2.6.13), even higher than one’s own parents. The parents were responsible for the physical existence, whilst the guru was responsible for the social and intellectual activities of the individual (Ap.Dh. 1.1.1.15-17). “Of him who gives natural birth and him who gives (the knowledge of) the Veda, the giver of the Veda is the more venerable father; for the birth for the sake of the Veda (ensures) eternal (rewards) both in this (life) and after death” (Manu 2.146).

⁵³*Bhattacharyya, N. N. *Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*, London, 1975, p.70.

The guru was not only expected to be a strict follower of the scriptures but also to display exemplary behaviour. “The requirements of a guru – who may not be disabled – were many and manifold; he should be of good descent, learned in secret tradition (srotriya), of proper conduct and appearance, pure and steady, and knowing ins and outs of correct behaviour; he must have undertaken vows and restrained his passions etc., be familiar with the problems of peace and war, know the magic (“illusionary”) rites etc., have given up using abodes and seats, be able to endure cold, heat and rain, be modest and honest, be completely free from passion and giving himself up to liberality, compassion and self-control, be energetic, profound (serious), and characterised by tejas (“spiritual, intellectual, moral, moral-religious efficacy and dignity, influence and prestige deriving therefore”)”⁵⁴.

In case the guru transmitted his knowledge irresponsibly to people who did not satisfy the social preconditions, he was condemned to be a sinner and was threatened with hell (naraka). “For he who explains the sacred knowledge (to a sudra). Or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that (man) into the hell called Asamvrita” (Manu 4.81). Such punishments against teachers who dared to communicate the esoteric contents to the wrong persons are also mentioned in the Brahmana texts. Indra threatened such a “rebellious” or “faithless” teacher even with his beheading (SB 14.1.1. 18-19).

⁵⁴*Gonda, 1965, op.cit., p.244.

The guru had to pay attention that his students maintained the caste duties. In case of offenders, he could punish him with “adequate” penalties. When the student refused to confess and show repentance, he could perform a death ceremony along with his family and declare the student dead. After that, the social restrictions and the expulsion of the student became effective⁵⁵.

“The life of the student was regulated on the principle that he must do what is pleasing and serviceable to his teacher (Gautama 11,30; Vishnu XXXVI-II,7). One text sums up the position by stating that the pupil is to serve his teacher as a son, supplicant, or slave”⁵⁶. The student was not allowed to do anything without the permission of the guru, not even talk with his parents and relatives (Manu 2.205). The student had to learn to show respect for the authority. The personage of the guru not only represented symbolically the father figure⁵⁷; he was also to be experienced as the father figure and assimilated as such. Individual freedom meant only so much as was compatible with the will of the guru. In the scriptures one finds no descriptions of the education of the youth in any other institution than that of the guru thus emphasising the importance and rank of the guru.

⁵⁵*Jolly, J. *Recht und Sitte*, Strassburg, 1896, p.119f.

⁵⁶*Mookerji, R.K.: *Ancient Indian Education*, Delhi (2) 1974, London (1) 1947, p.185.

⁵⁷*But see for psychoanalytical interpretations; Kakar, S. *The Inner World. A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Delhi, 1978, p.138f.

V. Socialisation of the Disciple (Shishya)

With the penetration of the ideas of salvation in Atman/Brahman and with the development of the methods for its realisation many differentiations and graduations relating to one's entire life were demarcated. One such graduation scheme divided the worldly life of an individual into four stages or ashramas⁵⁸, which is one of the highly theoretical constructions in Hinduism:

- (i) Brahmacharya: Student phase for the acquisition of knowledge
- (ii) Gruhasthya: Domestic phase for the assurance of the well-being and succession of the family
- (iii) Vanaprastha: Living a part of one's life in the forest
- (iv) Sanyasa: Wandering ascetic as a preparation for salvation

There were many opinions concerning the sequence and duration of each individual stage (Ap.Dh. 2.9.21.1/ Gaut.Dh. 3.2/ Manu 4.1/ 5.169/ 6.1-2/ 6.33). On the whole, the age upon which the brahmacharya was entered into was quite flexible (Jabala Up. 4). This type of stage-wise division of life does not figure in the earlier texts. It is only in the Upanishads that individual stages are frequently mentioned (Chand. 2.23.1/ 8.4.3/ 8.15/ Brih. 4.4.22/ 4.5.1). The Sutra literature for instance lays great emphasis on the first two stages that became the principal subjects of the Dharmasutra and Gruhasutra respectively.

⁵⁸*Kane, P.V. *History of Dharmasastra*, op.cit., p.416ff.

In this theoretical discussion of the life of a higher caste individual in ashramas, the period between the birth and the commencement of the brahmacharya was not considered at all. From the viewpoint of the guru ideology, the socialisation of the child in the family had little intellectual significance. Many sacred rituals (samskara) were performed which were supposed to protect the child from misfortune while the priest exerted utmost influence during this phase. The rituals did not make any intellectual demands regarding the child's development.

The definition of the ashrama theory was an achievement of the guru, who took over the education of an adolescent upon himself, and showed a clear division of competence between himself and the priest. As the education of the youth was strictly separated from his home life, his socialisation in the family during his childhood meant a sort of a "latent phase"⁵⁹. The parents could, therefore, have a direct relationship with their sons only in this "latent phase". Thereafter the parents lost most of their educational influence on their sons. With the theories of salvation in the Upanishads, there commenced a process of individualisation which began with the dissociation of the youth from his family (see, e.g., Svetaketu in Chand.6.1.2). The concept of speculative knowledge which suggests that Atman/Brahman could be experienced inwardly and individually, brought about a catalytic effect on the acceleration of this process of individualisation.

⁵⁹*Kakar, 1978, op.cit., p.113ff.

The term brahmacharya (literally: ‘to go with Brahman’) has been translated variously such as the life of a religious disciple, a religious life, a life in renunciation, regulations which the student has to follow under the guidance of a guru, chastity etc. When one considers brahmacharya as a stage where the aspirant experienced the contents of knowledge as well as his social and individual limitations, then one can understand it as a socialising institution outside the family with its own rules and regulations, codes of conduct and principles. It would not be correct to emphasize this stage as a religious life or the life of a religious student because, as far as one can speak of religious contents in the Vedas, Brahmanas or Upanishads, these contents and rituals characterise only a part of the knowledge which a brahmachari acquired. Even prior to the Upanishads, when Atman/Brahman were not the focal point of interest, the students studied various subjects of a worldly nature, even though they were linked to the Vedas (Chand. 7.1). It would similarly be incorrect to understand brahmacharya as sexual abstinence or chastity, because chastity was only a precondition of brahmacharya.

The brahmacharya is inseparable from the personage of the guru. In the Atharvaveda, brahmacharya was already a state in which the student acquired unusual powers after the teacher carried him for three nights with him and then “gave (second) birth to him” as a brahmachari (dvija AV 11.5.3). Through this ritual the teacher transferred his powers to the brahmachari. It is not possible here to discern if the knowledge is systematically acquired by the students. One rather gets an impression that in the

framework of the initiation ceremony the brahmachari acquired all the powers as knowledge mentioned in detail in the Atharvaveda (AV 11.5). With these powers the brahmachari could move heaven and earth, appease all the gods, create plants, trees, night, the seasons etc. (see also Manu 2.148).

This meaning of brahmacharya has been modified in the later texts. In the Brahmanas, the brahmacharya extended to a state in which one could acquire unusual power in lengthy steps. “He who enters a brahmachari’s life, indeed enters into a long sacrificial session...”(SB 11.3.3.2). In the Upanishads one reads of studies that last several years. Svetaketu, for example, started with 12 and finished with 24 years (Chand. 6.1.2; see also Manu 3.1/ Ap.Dh. 1.1.2.12-16/ Ashrama Up.1). Others spent even longer time (Chand. 2.23.1/ 8.15/ Manu 2.243). However, during the period of the Upanishads it became a common custom for a brahmachari to live at least for some time in the house of his teacher and work for him to acquire the knowledge (Brih. 5.2.1/ Chand. 8.7.3). This made it possible to strictly protect the knowledge from persons who were declared incapable and unworthy of its acquisition. The student who lived in his teacher’s house was called antevasin.

The aspirant displayed his readiness to become a brahmachari by coming to the teacher with a bundle of firewood and expressing his desire to become his student (SB 11.4.1.9/ Prasna 1.1/ Chand. 4.4.5). After he became a brahmachari, it was his duty to bring firewood as only the student who brought in firewood regularly every evening

retained his full life (yama could not harm him), otherwise he deprived himself of one evening of his own life for every evening that he neglected to bring firewood (SB 11.3.3.1).

As already mentioned, only a young boy belonging to a high caste was permitted to enter into the brahmacharya (Manu 2.36), whereas women and the men of “lower birth”(BG 9.32) were excluded from it. The wish to have sons which necessitated a ceremony called pumsavana for its fulfilment, was evident even in the early scriptures (RV 1.91.20/ 1.92.13/ AV 3.23.2-5). If the coition took place on even numbered days, a son was to be expected. Whereas a daughter was to be expected on odd numbered days (Manu 3.48). Similarly, if a man’s flow of semen was excessive, a boy would be born (Manu 3.49).

The boy received special ritual preference from his birth onwards and was prepared systematically for his role as a brahmachari. The ritual of birth (jatakarman) was performed on him even before the umbilical cord was cut. He was given honey and butter in a “gold cup” to eat as holy mantras were recited (Manu 2.29). The jatakarman was followed by the name giving ceremony (namakarana) on the 10th or 12th or another auspicious day at an auspicious hour (Manu 2.30). The name comprised of two parts of which one indicated his caste (Manu 2.31-32). Four months after namakarana, the ritual of nishkarmana was performed after which a child could leave the house for the first time. In his 6th month, the child received solid food for the first time through a ceremony called annaprasana

(Manu 2.34). In his 1st or 3rd year, chudakarana, the hair-cutting ceremony took place to protect the “intellectual well-being” of the boy (Manu 2.35). Thereafter followed upanayana, the initiation ritual which led him into the brahmacharya phase with snana, a ritual bath as the concluding step.

The upanayana ceremony was modified in the Brahmanas as compared to the Atharvaveda. In the former, the teacher first examined the social position and the capabilities of the aspiring student (SB 11.5.4.1). He then, taking the aspirant’s hand, declared him to be a student of Indra and Agni and his own student, put him under the protection of other objects (heaven, earth, plants, water) and received him as a brahmachari. (Details of upanayana are described in SB 11.5.4). The brahmachari had to obey certain rules such as to sip water, to do his work, sustain fire, not to sleep in the daytime and so on. Only then was he given the savitri/gayatri mantra and he was born again after the teacher carried him (symbolically) for three days (the teacher becomes pregnant conceiving his disciple by laying a hand on the latter’s shoulder). The brahmachari was not permitted any sexual activity as he was still in an “embryo stage” (SB 11.5.4.16).

These rudimentary descriptions of upanayana in the Brahmanas were enlarged upon in the Gruhasutra as the significance of the brahmacharya grew to become a permanent stage in the development of the young man of a higher caste. With this, the upanayana, however, slowly became detached from the intrinsic purpose of the

brahmacharya. Consequently, every brahmin came to be initiated, whether he became a brahmachari or not, so that the priest was present to carry out this ceremony instead of the guru. Every person to be initiated was able to improve his social standing enormously as the initiation was generally assigned a higher social status. In the Sutra and Shastra texts we find references to the initiation of the members of the kshatriya and vaishya castes too⁶⁰. However, the rules and regulations for the initiation were different for each caste in order to preserve the hierarchy in the social status.

According to Manu (2.37), for example, the age of initiation of a brahmin should be five years but that of a kshatriya six and a vaishya eight years. As per Sankhayana Gruhasutra (2.1) the age should be 8, 11 and 12 years respectively for a brahmin, kshatriya and vaishya. According to Gautamiya Dharmasutra (1.19-22), the colour of a brahmin's clothes for the initiation ceremony should be red, that of the kshatriya madder and of a vaishya turmeric, and so on.

There are many instances of such a classification. Gruhasutra and Dharmasutra/Dharmashastra texts contain such lists in various combinations. Every author propagated his own rules to reckon a variety of rewards. According to Apasthamba, for instance, the age of initiation was stipulated contingent upon a disciple's desires and wishes as

⁶⁰*Pandey, R.B. *Hindu Samskaras, Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu Sacraments*, Delhi, (2)1969, (1)1949, p.126ff.

follows: If one wished success in learning, one should be initiated at the age of 7 years; for long life, the right age would be 8 years; age of 9 years for attaining manhood; age of 10 years for abundance of food; age of 11 years for vigour and vitality; age of 12 years for possession of many cattle and so on (Ap.Dh. 1.1.1.20). Although such ritual precepts are devoid of any meaning, the point to be noted here is that they hold out a prospect of fulfilling one's desires. Not only such formal rules were prescribed and modified depending on the context, but even the ceremonial procedure had a pre-set frame with its contents adjusted according to the pattern of the school of thought. Besides, certain acts like touching the heart, the shoulders, ritual bath, tying the girdle, putting on the holy thread, handing over the stick, recitation of various mantras etc., were to be performed in a prescribed order.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, it was almost an imperative for a student to go in quest of a guru who would be well-versed in the knowledge and whose authority could not be doubted, and once having found him, remain loyal to him, surrender himself unconditionally and face him "with a mind serene and heart tranquil". The disciple was always expected to worship the guru as God ("honour the teacher as God" -Tait. Up. 1.11.2; as an incarnation of God -Brahmavidya Up. 47). Respect, obedience and devotion to the point of complete subservience were expected from the disciples. Likewise he was supposed to respect the family of the guru (Manu 2.207/ 2.210 / Paingala Up.6.8) and even his shadow (Manu 4.130). The disciple gathered the necessary firewood every day, collected food

by begging which he was not supposed to eat by himself (Manu 2.188), and brought water, cow dung, soil and grass to the guru (Manu 2.182). It was essential that he always had his body, his speech, his senses and his mind under control and stood before the guru with reverence (Manu 2.192) and sat down only after the guru had allowed him to do so (Manu 2.193).

Some other rules to be followed were: In his presence, the disciple must not be dressed poorly and eat bad food; he must get up before the guru and go to bed after him (Manu 2.194); he should not talk to the guru while lying down, sitting, eating, standing or with the face turned away (Manu 2.195); he must sit lower than the guru (Manu 2.198) and should by no means mention his bare name, not even in his absence (Manu 2.199); he should not serve or disturb him if he is in a bad mood or if a woman is with him (Manu 2.202); before and after the lesson, the disciple should touch the feet of the teacher in the manner it is expected (Manu 2.71-72); if the guru goes, he must follow him; should he run, the disciple must follow suit (Manu 2.196); the disciple should not share his knowledge with anybody without the permission of his guru; he must pretend to know nothing (Manu 2.110); and so on and so forth.

If one were to consider also what has been stated in other Sutra and Shastra texts, a long list of instructions could be prepared that would reveal the fantasy of the preceptors. This fantasy endeavoured to include each and every sphere of individual and social life such as one's attitude towards the authority, one's behaviour towards the

members of the lower castes, sexuality, routine, one's conduct while bathing or answering the call of nature, rules for sleeping, activities for oneself and those performed for the teacher and so on. These mechanisms, worked out in detail, aimed at regulating the socialisation process in such a way that the conduct of the disciples would be uniform without room for any individual digression. The bias for an authority was to be absolute and unconditional so that the structures of education and, above all, the educators were artificially upgraded. The one who went through this discipline was automatically assigned a higher value, for he had successfully gone through the "hard school". Many "holy" scholars evolved such rules and regulations in a still more differentiated and subtle manner so as to secure and consolidate the position of the guru in all aspects and make the idea of submission to him incontestable.

In case the disciple wounded the honour of the teacher or failed to subjugate himself, he was threatened with repression (e.g. SB 1.3.3.1). "By censuring (his teacher), though justly, he will become (in his next birth) an ass, by falsely defaming him, a dog; he who lives on his teacher's substance, will become a worm, and he who is envious (of his merit), a (larger) insect" (Manu 2.201). For a person, who had deeply internalised the Hindu ideas, such threats themselves must have meant a colossal punishment.

Much emphasis was laid on chastity and sexual restraint of the brahmachari. If he wished to be successful in his studies, he was supposed to keep all his senses and organs

(Manu 2.91) under control and tamed, in particular the organs of experiencing gratification (Manu 2.93). Had just one organ escaped his watching eye, the knowledge could slip through the feet like water (Manu 2.99). That is why he was supposed to forego honey, meat, perfume, garlands, items of luxury and women (Manu 2.177), sleep alone and even refrain from masturbation (Manu 2.180). In the case of nocturnal discharge, the brahmachari was to take a bath, worship the Sun and recite the prescribed verses of Rigveda, beginning thus, "May my vitality return to me" (Manu 2.181). Rules were adopted to check homosexual and heterosexual indulgence. The disciple was strictly prohibited from cleaning the body of the teacher's son, bathing with him, eating his leftovers, and washing his feet (Manu 2.209). He was also not permitted to apply ointment on any part of the body of his teacher's wife, accompany her to bath, wash her body, comb her hair (Manu 2.211) and touch her feet while greeting. Since the senses of even a scholar are powerful and may dominate him, the brahmachari was advised not to remain alone in the company of a mother, sister or daughter in a solitary place (Manu 2.215).

Despite the fact that some sort of spiritual relation might have existed between the guru and the disciple, the stay of the disciple for the purpose of educational training had already been characterised in terms of rewards and liabilities in the Brahmana texts. The liability or the debt of the disciple was four-fold, three parts of which he redeemed by collecting firewood, begging alms and accomplishing any job the teacher asked him to do,

respectively. Only the fourth part concerned him alone (SB 11.3.3.2-6).

Studies in the gurukul officially terminated with a bathing ritual (snana or samavartana), unless, of course, the brahmachari wanted to serve the guru lifelong (Manu 2.243). The disciple was now called snataka, “the bathed one”. Before taking leave from his guru, the snataka was expected to make a gift (guru dakshina) in which case the guru was most pleased to receive a piece of land, a cow, gold, a horse, a sunshade, shoes, a cushion, corn, vegetables etc. (Manu 2.246). A brahmin who thus ended the brahmacharya without breaking his vow or neglecting his duties deserved to attain the “highest” after his death and to be free of rebirth (Manu 2.249). But before he died, the snataka could live in the society as the head of the household, practise his profession and, what was of great importance, perform his daily rituals adhering to the rules. It was absolutely necessary for the snataka to be always ‘pure’. Depending upon the caste one belonged to, a whole lot of things were classified as ‘pure’ and ‘impure’⁶¹. And if one happened to come in touch with some impurities, one always had a chance to cleanse oneself with the help of rituals (Manu 2.57ff).

After brahmacharya the snataka could establish a family, work for his material and caste welfare, fulfil his duties, and as a member of a higher caste, watch over the performance of duties by the fellow members of the society

⁶¹*Thapar, 1978, op. cit., p.156.

and ensure his social dominance historically. Should he not wish such a life, he also had the option to live “alternatively” as a sanyasi and seek salvation.

VI. Final Remarks

To sum up, the development of the Hindu ideology of education can be described as follows:

During the time of the Upanishads there were several schools of the Vedic tradition. There were the brahmins who regarded the rituals of the sacrifice, justified by the Vedas, as the most sacred source of knowledge. There were the meta-physicians who hoped to attain supreme knowledge of Atman/Brahman by rational argumentation and speculation. They did not accept the Vedas (samhitas) as absolute authorities. They merely respected them. Furthermore, there were the meditators believing the supreme knowledge about Atman/Brahman to be an individual, intuitive experience achieved by applying certain techniques such as yoga. The aspirant was to, as it were, extract the Atman from within his body, the same way one pulls a stall from within its reed (Kath. 6.17). Here the supreme knowledge was liable to be reduced to a knowledge of acquiring the techniques and observing the duties, till the aspirant "experienced" Atman/Brahman. However, as soon as this knowledge (yoga) became independent, the Atman and the Brahman lost their significance while the yoga techniques came increasingly into the focus of interest.

After the Upanishads, no important conceptions of thoughts have been developed in Hinduism except later the bhakti movement that would have essential impact on the orientation of Hindus. The fundamentals of the

Upanishads, supported by the Bhagavadgita (the theories of transmigration, of yoga, of karma, and of caste) have proved to be stable and are still well maintained. Not even the philosophical ideologies which evolved subsequent to the Upanishads, and which were classified in six orthodox systems or darsanas viz. Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Samkhya, Vedanta, Yoga, Purva Mimamsa, succeeded in decisively dis-affirming them. Seen in the light of human thought, the Hindus of ancient India performed a historical achievement that so far has not been challenged by any other concept of thought in India. Not even the concept of castes, which has been interpreted decisively in favour of the ruling class, has been abolished so far, although this is a declared aim of the Constitution of the Indian Republic. The “model of society” that “our former ruling class” had formed, served as a means to ensure its social predominance. Even today, the model has the desired effect.

It is the task of pedagogy, applying “its very own devices”, to bring about a change in the essential structures of such a model of society⁶², so that constructive and social ideas in favour of ‘everyone’ may be spread, further developed and translated into action, whereas those forms of the model exerting repressive and degrading effects on “men” may be abolished. This will be a liberation for any of those serfs, “Harijans” and Dalits who have been enslaved and declared untouchables for generations, and probably for the rulers and oppressors too.

⁶²*Naik, J.P. *Equality, Quality and Quantity. The Elusive Triangle in Indian Education*, Bombay, 1975, p.110f.

As one can see from the texts, the ancestors of present Hindu society tried beyond all doubt, seriously and courageously, to probe into the depths of the sense of being, the individual and the social being. Nevertheless, today one ought not to forget in retrospect that some of their concepts and assumptions historically have developed their own intrinsic dynamics and values which must be rejected. Even today one must question oneself time and again whether the rational and analytical modes of thinking of the early Upanishads or the contemplative and meditative perception of the late Upanishads can be useful in helping to penetrate the meaning of human existence. Also, one must not tolerate that only a few may be allowed to do so and while making them "saints" and "chosen ones". Otherwise, such concepts and perceptions would forfeit their value both epistemologically and pedagogically and become means of power that can be misused socially. Thus education would be reduced to safely passing on those means of power to the "chosen ones" of the succeeding generations as well as to find historically adoptable means to maintain the discrepancy between those chosen ones, the "knowing" and those other "un-knowing" ones in society.

It is true that in the historical development of Hindu ideology, this discrepancy between the "knowing" and the "unknowing" occurred rather early enabling the confirmation of social hierarchy. Conceptually however, irrefutable dogmas have "never been laid down and have never prevailed" in this ideology. Centralized administrative and hierarchically organised institutions for the

control of the thoughts such as in the Christian churches do not exist in Hinduism, while the existence of various schools of thought is one of the most important characteristics of Hinduism. Leaving the period and the frame analysed in this paper, one will find numerous movements, sects, religions in Indian history such as Buddhism, Jainism, the Bhakti movement, Saivites, Vaisnavites, Reformed Hinduism, Neo-Hinduism etc. that are representative of essential constituents of Hinduism and at the same time demonstrate the dynamic nature of this ideology. This is the strong point of Hinduism which is not a doctrine established and etched in stone. The way its fundamentals have been developing historically into consistent structures until now, they ought to be modified further in the above-mentioned connotation and applied into educational practice for the benefit of all.

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