

## Chapter I

### ĀTMAN and MOKṢA in the Vedas

The history of Indian Philosophy begins with the Vedic Hymns. The Vedic Hymns were not composed by a single individual or by a body of individuals; they are supposed to be non-human (apauruṣeya) in their origin. The Vedas are supposed to have a Divine origin. The ancient sages, whose names are associated with them had not intentionally composed them in the form of verses, but it is believed that they were revealed to them in their intuitive experiences and they were uttered by them in their ecstasies. No script was devised in the Vedic period, and therefore, they had been transmitted to the later generations orally. There was every possibility of interpolations being made to them by the later sages who happened to receive them from their predecessors. It is therefore difficult to prove or disprove any authority as there never was any authoritative text or version of the Vedas.

Out of the four Vedas, the ṚgVeda, the Sāma-Veda, the Yajur-Veda and the Atharva-Veda, the ṚgVeda is supposed to be the basis of philosophical thought. The Vedas are

not in fact metaphysical works, written with any particular view, nor are they consistent philosophical treatises. The Vedas consist of verses which were the free utterances of the ancient Ṛṣis which they had given out in the inspired moments of their intuitions. The Ṛṣis seem not to have been motivated to compose the hymns (mantras) to propound any particular system of Philosophy. Although the hymns contain the germs of philosophical thinking, it is impossible to construct any definite system out of them. They are more religious than philosophical in character. The sages were impelled more by a poetic vision than by philosophical reasonings. The hymns exhibit a kind of religious humility and submission to the natural agencies. They are the verses sung in praise of the natural agencies like the wind, the fire, the rain, the mountains, the rivers, the sun, the moon, the dawn, the thunder etc. Some of them are the verses sung by the Vedic sages in praise of the beneficial things and forces of nature and others are prayers to appease the evil forces of nature to seek from them security and protection. Some of them seem to have been sung by being influenced by the sublimity and grandeur nature. The fresh and sensitive mind of the ancient man must have felt fear, joy, awe and adoration towards the

majestic natural agencies, which appeared to him extremely powerful to affect him in unknown ways. A. Barth says -- "Nature is throughout divine. Everything which is impressive by its sublimity, or is supposed capable of affecting us, for good or evil, may become a direct object of adoration. Mountains, rivers, springs, trees, plants are invoked as so many high powers. The animals which surround man, the horse by which he is borne in battle, the cow which supplies him with nourishment, the dog which keeps watch over his dwelling, the bird which, by its cry, reveals to him his future, together with that more numerous class of creatures which threaten his existence, receive from him the worship of either homage or deprecation. There are parts even of the apparatus used in connection with sacrifice which are more than sacred to purposes of religion; they are regarded as themselves deities."<sup>1</sup>

The thinkers of the Vedic period personified the natural agencies and things and ascribed to them desires and will good and bad with which they could affect human life. Naturally out of awe, and a desire for security the powers came to be looked upon as deities. Paul Deussen

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1. Barth A. -- The Religions of India. p.7.

says -- "... they ascribed to them not only will, like that of man, which was perfectly correct, but also human personality, human desires and human weaknesses, which certainly was wrong. These personified natural powers, were further considered as the origin, the maintainers, and, controllers of what man found in himself as the moral law, opposed to the egoistic tendencies, natural to man."<sup>1</sup>

The Vedic thinkers attributed power to everything in the world that affected them or impressed them with certain power in some way. They vaguely suspected some 'energising principle' actually investing all the things of the world with energy, and itself remaining imperceptible. The capacity to initiate activity in the various things of the nature evoked a belief in the minds of the Vedic sages in the existence of some mysterious power that manifests itself in and through the movements of the things but itself remains imperceptible. The power seems to be analogous to the 'mana' power which the primitive people believed to exist in all the things that possess power to affect human life in some way; such a belief in the so called mysterious power indicates the 'animistic' tendency.

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1. Deussen Paul -- Outlines of Indian Philosophy. p.9.

The Vedic thinkers also suspected the existence of such an 'energising principle' (Puruṣa) in the sun, moon, rivers, fire etc. and which being different from those things was responsible for movements of them.

It is found after a careful scrutiny of the hymns of the ṚgVeda that the words like Suparṇa, Ajo-bhāga, Satya, Ātman, Jīva, Prāṇa, Manas and Asu stand on equal par and denote factor in man which is subtler and is different from his gross body. Our main concern is with the word Ātman, which is usually derived from the root an 'to breathe' and is thus philologically related to Prāṇa. Sir Monier Monier-Williams explains it as follows : Ātman (variously derived from an -- to breathe; at to move : cf. tman, the breath in ṚgVeda; the Soul, principle of life and sensation -- in ṚgVeda and Atharva-Veda; the Self.<sup>1</sup> The word 'Ātman' is used with various meanings in the Vedas. It is used in the sense of 'essence' as the 'svarūpabhūtaḥ'; it is used in the sense of body or 'deha'.<sup>2</sup> It is further used in the sense of the 'intelligent principle' (cetana).<sup>3</sup> It is described in another place as

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1. Monier Willaims -- Sanskrit-English Dictionary. p.135.

2. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda.  
(RgVeda.I.162.20 and VII.101.6) Tr.Vol.I.p.217 and Vol.  
II p.96.

3. Ibid. RgVeda. I,164.4.

the 'controller' (dhārayitā).<sup>1</sup> It is used in the sense of 'oneself' 'swayam' elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The word soul is again mainly used to mean 'breath' (prāṇa) which is responsible for the various activities and movements.<sup>3</sup> It is further used to be truthful and joy-giving.<sup>4</sup> It is used as the Self of various plants and animals.<sup>5</sup> Thus it has been used with many shades of meaning and, generally it is supposed to be something which is intelligent, active, source of vitality, the doer or initiator of actions, abiding and the owning principle.

Some European scholars connect the word Ātman etymologically with the German word 'athmen' and derive it from the root 'an' -- 'to breathe'. Deussen thinks that the word must have originally meant 'This I' -- 'Dieses Ich' ... Max Muller prefers to translate it by "Self" -- "that is the true essence of man, free as yet, from all attributes". Roth Bohtlingk and Grassmann mention 'breath' as the first meaning of Ātman. It appears that the widely

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1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda. VII. 87.5.Tr.Vol.II. p.83.
  2. Ibid.VIII.3.24.Vol.II. p.113; IX.85.3. Vol.II. p.340.
  3. Ibid.X.16.3. Vol.II. p.402.
  4. Ibid.I.73.2. Vol.I. p.218.
  5. Ibid. X.97.4. Vol.II. p.533.

knowing meaning of Ātman is the 'breathing principle'. In reply to a question what is the soul (Ko nu Ātmā) the term Ātman is understood as the 'thinking or intelligent principle', which, although connected with the gross physical body constituted of the five elements, yet is consciousness (Cetanah).<sup>1</sup> Deussen also says "Thus Ātman means that which remains if we take away from our person all that is Non-Self, foreign, all that comes and passes away; it means the 'changeless, inseparable essence of our own Self, and on the other hand the essence of the Self of the whole world .... it means the only true essence of our nature, our ātman, our Self."<sup>2</sup>

In the compound 'Ajo bhāgaḥ' the word 'Ajaḥ' is used in the same sense as the Ātman; there the Agni (fire is asked not to destroy the 'unborn part' (Ajo bhāgaḥ) of the human body, but just to kindle it, so that after being purified it may be in a fit state to enter into the higher world. Sāyana explains Ajaḥ, as the unborn part of the body, as different from the senses of the body, and that which has the inner person's attributes.<sup>3</sup> It definitely

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1. ṚgVeda I.164.4. Pañcabhūtātmake śarīrasambaddha Cetanaḥ.
  2. Deussen Paul -- Outlines of Indian Philosophy. p.20.
  3. Sāyana -- ṚgVeda (Sanskrit Edition). X.96.47; 7. Ajaḥ jananaḥ hitaḥ śarīrendriyaḥ bhāgarahitaḥ antarapurusa-lakṣṇaṇo yo bhāgostī.

indicates the fine and indestructible portion of the body, which can survive the destruction of the physical body.

The word Jīva, though used a number of times, according to Sāyaṇa it is used twice to denote the 'individual soul' and also in the sense of 'life'.<sup>1</sup> Jīva means the active and animating principle of the individual, in whose body it resides. Similarly in the latter part of another hymn it is referred to as the 'immortal principle' which continues to live by subsisting itself in the offering of manas of the human body.<sup>2</sup> According to Sāyaṇa, the entire hymn drives to the meaning, that the human body is without essence, and the animating principle, which dwells in it, is eternal.

The word Prāṇa also is derived from the root an -- 'to breathe' and therefore, it must have been related to Ātman.<sup>3</sup> Here a reference is made to Hiranyagarbha who is described as the "Giver of vital breath of power and vigour ... The Lord of death, whose shade is life immortal.

.. who by his grandeur has become Sole Ruler of all, the

1. ṚgVeda. I.164.4

1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda. (RV. I.113.16; 164.30). Tr.Vol.I. pp.151,224.

2. Ibid. (R.V.18.8). Tr.Vol.II. p.407.

3. Ibid. R.V.I.66.1. Tr.Vol.I. p.90; R.V.X.59.6 Vol.II,p.463.

moving world that breathes and slumbers."<sup>1</sup> Hiranyagarbha is described as the world-soul to whom the individual soul owes its powers and knowledge. The universal soul, also described as the Puruṣa is the embodied spirit, or Man personified and regarded as the soul and original source of the universe, the personal and life-giving principle in all animated beings, is said to have a thousand, that is, innumerable heads, eyes, and feet, as being one with all created life. A space ten fingers wide; the region of the heart of man, wherein the soul was supposed to reside. Although as the universal soul he pervades the universe, as the Individual Soul he is enclosed in a space of narrow dimensions."<sup>2</sup> The same Self of the universe is thus the Self of the individual. The word Asu also is equivalent of soul and means the same as the 'breath' or 'vital-breath'.

All these words which are used synonymously point to the fact that the R̥gVedic thinkers were aware of some entity, known as the Ātman that is essentially the principle of vitality or animation, and it could not be identified with any part of or the whole body. It also survives the latter's destruction. It also possesses consciousness,

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1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda. R.V.X. 121.2,3. Tr.Vol.II. p.566.
  2. Ibid. Tr.Vol.II.p.517 (Note).

movement, imperceptibility, subtlety, eternity and essence.

The Vedic hymns exhibit a kind of primitive faith in polytheism as the various objects of the world are thought of separately and each of them is worshipped as a separate deity. Every natural powerful agency is approached separately as a deity, and its favour was sought separately. In the beginning the Vedic thinkers were not aware of a unitary principle working behind the manifold. But gradually the philosophic thought progressed and the new idea of the Rta begins to appear. Rta is the single power that maintains the regularity and order of the processes of the nature. It also maintains the moral order of the universe and remains at the heart of the reality. It testifies the natural tendency of the philosophic thought to pass from many to one, plurality to unity, separateness to synthesis. As all the notable natural agencies were looked upon as gods, the concept of godhood being shared in common, it can be taken to be an advance towards pantheism instead of monotheism. Garbe says -- "Old hymns of the RgVeda, which in other respects are still deeply rooted in the soil of polytheism, show already the inclination to comprehend multifarious phenomena, as a unity and, may, therefore be regarded as the first step in the path which led the old Indian people

to pantheism."<sup>1</sup> Among the Vedic gods Varuṇa, the god of rains wields a superior position. He is raised to the status of a sovereign over all others. He possess every power to do and to undo things as he pleases. He is the supreme both in the physical and moral spheres. He possesses a crushing power over others. He could mercilessly suppress all other deities. Nicol Macnicol says -- "Varuṇa's ordinances are fixed and sure so that even the immortal gods cannot oppose them. He places his fetters upon the sinner; his is the power to bind and the power also to release and he forgives sins even unto the second generation."<sup>2</sup> Thus Varuṇa possesses absolute power over others and rules the universe as a sovereign.<sup>3</sup> Varuṇa thus acts as the moral governor of the universe. In him the physical strength is combined with the moral authority. The principle of moral order, the Ṛta is embodied in him. As Nicol Macnicol says -- "Perhaps the most significant fact of all in regard to this Vedic deity, is the connexion of

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1. Garbe Richard -- The Philosophy of Ancient India. p.1.
  2. Macnicol Nicol -- Indian Theism. p.14.
  3. Griffith R.T.H. (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda.  
RgVeda.I.24-25 Tr.Vol.I.p. 30-33 and VII.84,86, Tr.Vol.  
II.pp.80-82.

the doctrine of Ṛta or the moral order with his name and authority."<sup>1</sup> In the hierarchy of gods Varuṇa stands as the supreme who has under his guardianship the cosmic and the moral order of the universe. Thus in the process of philosophical systematisation in passing from polytheism or numerous gods to one single all-in-all commanding figure like the Varuṇa to whom all others are subordinated, as Radhakrishnan remarks we pass from a polytheistic anthropomorphism to a spiritual monotheism.<sup>2</sup> But for the ethical authority of Varuṇa the monotheism could not have been called spiritual. Any power of the highest magnitude divested of its moral use for the betterment of human life turns demonic in nature.

Analogous to the idea of human soul a mention of the world-soul known as the Hiranyagarbha does not escape our sight in the ṚgVeda. The Hiranyagarbha is the first product of the primeval waters which are created by the first principle known as the Brahman. Brahman is supposed to be the ultimate reality, the final resort of all things of the world. It is the source, the sustainer and the final resort of all the things. From the Brahman is born

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1. Macnicol Nicol -- Indian Theism. p.14.

2. Radhakrishnan S. -- Indian Philosophy. Vol.I.p.91.

the world-soul, the Hiranyagarbha, as the first evolute. The world-soul is to the world as the individual soul is to the individual body. The RgVedic thinkers hold that the Hiranyagarbha is the mind of the world.<sup>1</sup> As the mind is always associated with living body, so the world as a body must be possessing its own cosmic mind, being possessed of consciousness and will. As Paul Deussen says about the Hiranyagarbha that as the individual subjects are mortal, they come into existence and pass away, but there must remain behind all these mortal subjects some stable and permanent subject that abides for the maintenance of law and order of the world. The Hiranyagarbha is the sustainer of the individual souls. As "Space and time are derived from this subject, it is itself accordingly not in space and does not belong to time, and therefore, from an empirical point of view it is in general non-existent. It has no empirical only a metaphysical reality."<sup>2</sup> The Hiranyagarbha can be broadly compared with the 'Nous' of Anaxagoras. His 'Nous' is the 'cosmic-reason' and is responsible for the order of the universe as it intelligently guides the affairs of the cosmos. The Hiranyagarbha

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1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda.  
R.V.X.121.1-3. Tr.Vol.II.pp.565,566.

2. Deussen Paul -- The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads. p.201.

possesses intellection and volition in common with the finite souls but its powers are highly magnified as compared with those of the souls. The Vedas speak of the omnipresent and all-pervading spirit which dwells in all things and remains imperishable in them. It is the spirit (manas) that goes to Yama, to earth and heaven, to the billowy mountains and all those things which live and move, and is all that is and is to be. It is thus the eternal spirit that pervades the whole universe.<sup>1</sup>

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa holds that every man has three births. He receives first birth from his parents, the second at the time of the wearing of the sacred thread, and, the third, after death. The third birth to which the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa refers here occurs after the death of the body. It has to be understood in a special context of a ṚgVedic verse in which the Agni (fire) is asked to temper the 'Unborn Spirit' and not consume it entirely so that it gets a fresh birth.<sup>2</sup> The ṚgVeda speaks elsewhere of the individual who at cremation leaves behind on earth all that is evil and imperfect and proceeds by those paths by which

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1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda.

ṚgVeda.X.58 (whole) Tr.Vol.II. pp.461,462.

2. ṚgVeda.XI.2.1,1.

his fathers travelled.<sup>1</sup> The mention of the third birth of the individual after death clearly shows that the Vedic thinkers believed in the survival of some non-physical or immaterial element after the destruction of the physical body. They also believed that the soul after abandoning the previous body assumes another body. The unborn-part of the body thus continues to exist by assuming many bodies successively. Their belief was that the state after death was not one of non-existence or void but one of continuence of life. As a result of this belief there was a widespread custom of burying with the corpse the things of utility for the person dead. The arms, sacrificial and other utensils used to be buried with the corpse that they may serve him even after death. Maurice Bloomfield says for the occupations and necessities of those who have gone forth (preta), as the dead are called euphemistically, are the same as upon the earth, sacrificing included.<sup>2</sup>

The dead persons rise to the land of Yama after death. Yama, the first Royal man had gone ahead and had secured for himself and his successors and descendants,

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1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) RgVeda X.14.8. Tr.Vol.II.p.399.

2. Bloomfield Maurice -- The Religion of the Veda. p.251.

a territory in heaven and the R̥gVedic sages hold that all dead persons go to the land of Yama.<sup>1</sup> The fathers of the old have travelled it, and this path leads every earth born and mortal there. There in the midst of the highest heaven, in the lap of the Goddess Dawn, beams unfading light and eternal waters flow. There Yama sits under a tree of beautiful foliage, engaged in an everlasting bout in the company of the gods; there mortals gather after death at Yama's call to behold Varuṇa. They have left all imperfections behind them on returning to their true home, the rich meadows of which no one can rob them. In that place there are no lame nor crooked of limb; the weak no longer pay tribute to the strong, all alike share with Yama and the gods the feast of the gods.<sup>2</sup> It appears from this description that the state after death according to the Vedas, is one of continuence of life in the land of Yama. All kinds of imperfections and shortcomings are absent in it and, it is full of happiness. The soul is not destroyed along with its body, but it remains even after

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1. Bloomfield Maurice -- The Religion of the Veda. p.250.

2. Ibid. p.251.

death. The dwelling place of Yama is the resting place for the departed souls.<sup>1</sup> When after death the soul enters the abode of Yama it shakes off all imperfections and bodily frailties.<sup>2</sup> The limbs are no longer lame or crooked and all sickness is cast off.<sup>3</sup> The departed soul enters a land full of butter and overflowing with milk, wine, curds and sweet waters.<sup>4</sup> There is eternal light and there all persons are equal and the weak are no longer subject to pay tribute to the strong.<sup>5</sup> There the person is united with a bright and glorious body and lives a life of eternal enjoyment. In this heaven, the sound of the flute and songs is heard.<sup>6</sup> There seems to be abundant scope for the sensual gratification also.

These Vedic passages throw light on the idea of the state after death imagined by the Vedic seers. It is

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1. Griffith (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda. R.V.X.14.9. Tr.Vol.II.p.399.
  - " (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the AtharvaVeda. XVIII. 2.37.Tr.Vol.II.p.232.
  2. Griffith (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda X.14.8. Tr.Vol.II.p.399.
  3. " (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the Atharva Veda.VI.120.3. Tr.Vol.II.p.311.
  - " (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the Atharva Veda.III.28.5. Tr.Vol.I.p.123.
  4. Ibid. A.V.IV.34.6. Tr.Vol.I.p.177.
  5. Ibid. A.V.III.29.3. Vol.I.p.124.
  6. Griffith (Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda. R.V.X.135.7. Tr.Vol.II.p.581.

similar to a happy and comfortable life on the earth. They believed in the verity of goodness of bodily and mental happiness and such a life is depicted by them in their description of their ideal heaven for which they strove. They sought a material happiness. The ancient people of the Vedic period did not stand for physical tortures and they did not look up for spiritual gains at the cost of flesh. Body was not looked upon with contempt but it was used as a means for the achievement of happiness. Whitney's observations give a clearer idea of their aim. It is said "The earliest inhabitants of India were far enough removed from the unhealthy introversion of their descendants, from their contempt of all things beneath the sun, from their melancholy opinion of the vanity and misery of existence, from their longings to shuffle off the mortal coil forever, and from the metaphysical subtlety of their views respecting the universe and its creator. They looked at all these things with the simple apprehension, the naive faith, which usually characterises a primitive people. They had a hearty and healthy love of earthly life and an outspoken relish for all that makes up for the ordinary pleasures of life. Wealth and numerous offspring were the constant burden of their prayers to their gods; success in predatory

warfare, or in strife for consideration for power, was frequently besought. Length of days in the land, or death by no other cause than old age, was not less frequently supplicated; they clung to the existence of which they fully appreciated all the delights."<sup>1</sup>

What the Vedic thinkers aimed at was not only a freedom from pain and misery in earthly life, and the life after death, but they sought positive happiness; wealth and health, progeny and power, victory over the enemies. They were fond of assertive and manly life. They took a positive joy and pride in enjoying a perfectly happy life here on the earth and similar there in the heaven. It is evident from their prayers for a life for one hundred autumns and for hundred cows and horses. They were afraid of going to the dark regions, the hell after death. They positively aimed at reaching the heaven to live a fuller and more perfect life. Their Mokṣa has a positive connotation. It lies in perfecting life rather than in withdrawing from it, or in attaining to desirelessness and void. They cherished a robust and optimistic outlook on

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1. Whitney -- Oriental and Linguistic Studies. pp.49 ff.

life. The ideal mokṣa is an elaboration of a rich and happy earthly life. It is an improvement over their life on earth. The life which they aimed at in heaven is not different in kind from their life that they lived on the earth. Their ideal was simple and within their reach.

The Vedic thinkers strove to attain immortality after death. Their desire for immortality and their idea of the perfect life towards which they aimed are expressed in the following prayer --

"O Pavamāna, place me in that deathless, undecaying world wherein the light of heaven is set and everlasting lustre shines.

Flow, Indu, flow for Indra's sake.

Make me immortal in that realm where dwells the King, Vivasvān's Son.

Where is the secret shrine of heaven, where are those waters young and fresh ....

Make me immortal in that realm where they move even as they list,

In the third sphere of inmost heaven where lucid worlds are full of light ....

Make me immortal in that realm of eager wish and stronger desire

The reign of the radiant moon, where food and full  
 delight are found,  
 Make me immortal in that realm where happiness and  
 transports, where  
 Joys and felicities combine, and longing wishes are  
 fulfilled."<sup>1</sup>

From the passage mentioned above it becomes clear that the ṚgVedic thinkers had an irrepressible desire for freedom, joy, immortality and light. They want to breathe quite healthy and sunny air "where pleasures, enjoyments, raptures and abiding bliss" existed. They recognise three kinds of heavens. The lowest of them is intimately associated with soma and moon. It belongs to Yama. It can be attained by those sacrificers and philanthropists who have at their credit ordinary merit. The other two heavens were situated in the higher region. Out of the two, the realm of Savitr̥ and Sūrya is the lower one. Men like Ṛbhus and Māruts who because of their exceptional merit attain immortality and divinity can be members of this region. The last and the highest heaven of Viṣṇu can be

1. Griffith -- The Hymns of the RigVeda. ṚgVeda.IX.113. 7-11.Tr.Vol.II. pp.381,382.

Yatrānandāḥ ca modāḥ ca mudāḥ pramuda āsate  
 Kāmasya Yatrāptāḥ Kāmāḥ tatra māmamṛtam Kṛdhiḥ.

reached only by those who have an immensely pious and holy life, because of their pure devotion for the gods. They are the great visionaries. The attainment of the last region, the region of Viṣṇu is regarded as the highest end that one can cherish and attain to.

The word 'immortality' (amṛta) occurs very frequently in the ṚgVeda. Sāyana takes it to mean in the majority of cases 'that which is not mortal' (amarāṇaśīla, maraṇadharmarahita, maraṇarahita). The other noteworthy meanings which it denotes are 'god' (deva) 'liberation' (mokṣa, sāyujya), 'continuity of the race' (santatyaviccheda), nectar (pīyūṣa), 'freedom from fatigue' (ālasyarāhitya), 'imperishability', 'eternity' (nityatva), 'sun' (Sūrya), 'herbal juice' (sudhā), 'divine-drink' (deva-pāna) etc. In spite of all these numerous shades of meanings, it is more probable that what they really implied by the word 'immortality' is 'imperishability' or 'eternity' (avināśitva, nityatva).

Immortality to the Vedic thinkers was not more than a continued existence after death in the company of the gods enjoying fully their privileges. It was a sort of apotheosis which to the individual meant a transfer of existence from earth to higher regions and a transformation

from mortality to divinity. While in this state he exercises influence over those, who were left behind. Like the gods he receives worship and oblations from the mortals and confer upon them, the benefits that they deserve. It means that the mortals on the strength of their merit can acquire godhood with its powers which they can use with their discretion and can participate in the running of the world. Human beings possessed a scope to attain higher kind of life. This must have been meant when it is said that R̥bhus and others of their class became gods by their pious deeds. The Vedic people possessed an optimistic outlook on life and the vigour and the enthusiasm to direct and master their destiny. They did not willingly submit to the cruel fate. They were not helpless fatalists. They had a conquering attitude and a belief in their latent powers and so, they hoped to be the masters of their fate.

This very fact is the implication of the doctrine of Karma. The virtuous and pious men who perform morally good actions and practise the prescribed religious rites rise to the heaven and, those who indulge in the evil actions, morally contemptible deeds and are addicted to irreligious deeds are sent by Varuna to the dark regions of the hell. There is an inseparable relation between the

two. A man's future birth is determined by the kind of his actions in his previous birth. Deussen thinks that the dark regions to which the ignorant and the vicious are sent is this one in which we live.

The Vedic hymns and sacrifices were supposed to be invested with certain inherent power from which the goodness or badness of the deeds was determined, and from that the nature of the subsequent births came to be determined. The utterance of hymns and the performance of sacrifices themselves possessed some potency of their own which ultimately was responsible for deciding the nature of the subsequent births. These actions seem to have been related particularly to the heaven and hell in the period after death. The Vedas seem to be silent over the exact mechanism of carrying the impressions of the deeds of the previous life to the subsequent. The Vedic hymns seem to have greater concern with the attainment of heaven rather than with the theory of transmigration of the soul. Bloomfield says -- "This 'death-anew' or 're-death' (punarmṛtyu) as the Hindus call it, is an exceedingly characteristic idea, but it is not yet transmigration of souls. As long as it is located entirely in the other world, and as long as it is thought possible to avoid or cure it by the ordinary expedients of

sacrifice, so long as the essential character of that belief is not yet present."<sup>1</sup> It seems from the above remarks of Bloomfield that the theory of transmigration of the soul is restricted only to the earthly existence. The relation of the virtuous and vicious deeds with their fruits in terms of the attainment or otherwise of the heaven, has no elements of transmigration theory in it, and hence, it would be highly risky to say that the Vedic people believed in the transmigration of the soul.

Moreover, the concept of transmigration also is not Aryan in origin. It seems to have been prevalent in India before the migration of the Aryans. It seems to have been a dominant and prevalent folk-belief in India and, the Vedic thinkers seem to have borrowed it from the old natives of India. Bloomfield further writes -- "The germs of the belief in transmigration are very likely to have filtered into the Brahmanical consciousness from below, from the popular sources, possibly from some of the aboriginal, non-Aryan tribes in India."<sup>2</sup> Richard Garbe also supports

him. He says -- "Under all circumstances the Aryan Indians

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1. Bloomfield Maurice -- The Religion of the Veda. pp.253-54.

2. Ibid. p.254.

can have received only the first impetus to the development of the theory of transmigration from the aboriginal inhabitants; the elaboration of the idea they borrowed -- the assumption of a constant changing continuence of life, and its connection with the doctrine of the power of deeds, having in view the satisfaction of the moral consciousness -- must always be regarded as their own peculiar achievement."<sup>1</sup> The Vedas describe the omnipotent, loving, merciful, sweet nature of God and hold that He gives eternal solace, rest peace and joy to His devotees. The state in heaven is described in the following hymn of the Vedas.

Like the Sun's glance, like wealth of varied sort,  
 like breath which is the life, like one's own son,  
 Like a swift bird, a cow who yields her milk, pure  
 and refulgent to the wood he speeds --

He offers safety like a pleasant home, like ripened corn,  
 the conqueror of men.

Like a seer landing, famed among the folk; like a steed  
 friendly he vouchsafes us power.

With flame insatiate, like eternal might; caring  
 for each one like a dame at home;

Bright when he shines forth, whitish mid the folk,

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1. Garbe Richard -- The Philosophy of Ancient India. p.5.

like a car, gold-decked, thundering to the fight.  
 He strikes with terror like a dart shot forth,  
 e'en like an archer's arrow tipped with flame;  
 Master of present and future life, the maiden's lover  
 and the matron's Lord.

To him lead all your ways; may we attain the kindled God  
 as cows their home at eve.

He drives the flames below as floods their swell  
 the rays rise up to the fair place of heaven.<sup>1</sup>

The Āraṇyakas and Brāhmaṇas belong to the post-Vedic period. The Upaniṣads are still later works than the Āraṇyakas. The Āraṇyakas and Brāhmaṇas stand midway between the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. The Upaniṣads are mainly speculative and philosophical compositions; they are more philosophical in character, while the Āraṇyakas and Brāhmaṇas deal mainly with the details of the performances of sacrifices. They deal with the nature and performance of the various sacrificial rites to be undertaken for the attainment of heaven, after death. They serve as the Karmakāṇḍa of the Vedas. They contain less of philosophy in them. However, the Aitareya Āraṇyaka makes a passing

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1. Griffith R.T.H.(Tr.) -- The Hymns of the RigVeda.  
 R.V.I.66.1. Tr.Vol.I. pp.90,91.

reference to Ātman. The Aitaréya Āraṇyaka inquires into the nature of the soul in the following manner and attempts to explain it in its own way. "What is the soul? that we may worship him? Which is the soul? Is it that by which (a man sees)? by which he hears? by which he smells odours? by which he utters speech? by which he discriminates a pleasant or unpleasant taste? Is it the heart (or understanding)? or the mind or will? Is it sensation? or retention? or attention? or application? or haste? (or pain)? or memory? or assent? or determination? or animal action? or wish or desire?"<sup>1</sup> Attempts were made to understand the soul in terms of the various psychic modes either by identifying the former with them or by projecting some agent behind them. The questions aim at understanding whether there is any entity like the Ātman behind all these mental phenomena who controls and regulates their activities.

In reply to these questions the philosopher of the Aitaréya Āraṇyaka proceeds thus -- "All those are only various names of apprehension. But this (Soul, consisting in the faculty of apprehension) is Brahmā; he is Indra,

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 1. Colebrooke H.T. -- Essays on the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus. p.29.

he is (Prajāpati) the lord of creatures; these gods are he; and so are the five primary elements, earth, air, the etherial fluid, water and light; these, and the same joined with minute objects and other seeds (of existence), and again other (beings) produced from eggs, or borne in wombs, or originating in hot moisture, or springing from plants; whether horses or kine, or men, or elephants, whatever lives, and walks and flies, or whatever is immovable (as herbs and trees); all that is the eye of intelligence. On intellect (every thing) is founded; the world is the eye of intellect, and intellect is its foundation. Intelligence is (Brahmā) the great one. -- By this (intuitively) intelligent soul, that sage ascended from the present world to the blissful region of heaven; and obtaining all his wishes, became immortal. He became immortal."<sup>1</sup>

This passage from the Aitaréya Āraṇyaka clearly states that the soul according to the Āraṇyakas is constituted of intelligence; it is an intelligent principle, present in all the things ranging from the inanimate things like the earth to the highest gods like Indra and Prajāpati, including the vegetative and animal kingdoms. It is

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1. Colebrooke H.T. -- Essays on the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus. pp.29,30.

according to them abstract, immaterial and conscious principle. The soul is a wider and subtler principle of intelligence present in all the things, though in different grades. They also believed that the realisation of this intelligent principle enabled the individuals to rise to the higher regions of the heaven. They agree with the Vedic idea that after death the individual can rise to the heaven, wherein all kinds of happiness can be acquired. All their desires become fulfilled eternally in the heaven and thus they become immortal. They believe with the Vedas that the end of human life is the attainment of the heaven where a fuller and more perfect life can be enjoyed. Their immortality is combined with positive enjoyment.