

# Beyond the Weary World

**Baidyanath Saraswati**

The sacred science concepts of space, time, matter and life present a world view which contrasts with the materialistic world view of the Newtonian science deeply ingrained in Western culture, compares with quantum physics, and illuminates man's relationship with the cosmos. There is a world beyond this world. Life moves from the invisible to the visible. The two are inseparable. What binds them together is the inexorable Law named Brahman, God, Allah and countless others, in effect, affirming that it is comprehensible in simple terms in everyday life, and helpful to man in his movement from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.

## **Beginning**

Traditional cosmology is remarkable in its vision and interpretation of the world. The Rigveda (X, 129) reveals the mystery of the beginning-before-the-beginning by a series of negatives:

At first was neither Being nor Nonbeing.  
There was not air nor yet sky beyond.  
There was no death then, nor yet deathlessness;  
Of night or day there was not any sign.  
The One breathed without breath, by its own impulse.  
Other than that was nothing else at all.  
Darkness was there, all wrapped around by darkness,  
and all was Water, indiscriminate. Then  
that which was hidden by the Void, that One,  
emerging, stirring, through the power of Ardor, came to be.

The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (1.2.1) interiorizes the Vedic message:

In the beginning nothing whatsoever was here. This (world) was swathed in Deaths in Hunger — for hunger indeed is death.

The “beginning” of the cosmological hymns follows the origins. In the beginning arose *hiranyagarbha*, the Golden Germ, — the first step in creation, the existential leap, the origin of reality, the internal “divine” life. A historical beginning or a temporal origin is marked by the “creation sacrifice.” The Rigveda (X, 90) unfolds the cosmic condition of reality, the emergence of *purusa*, the cosmic Man:

A thousand-headed is the Man  
with a thousand eyes, a thousand feet;  
encompassing the Earth all sides,  
he exceeded it by ten fingers breath.

From the sacrifice of *purusa* came all things both animate and inanimate: animals of every type, liturgical formulas, the four castes of men, the cosmic powers. From his mind came the Moon, from his eyes the Sun, from his mouth Indra and Agni, from his navel the Air, from his head the Sky, from his feet the Earth, from his ear the four directions — nothing, nobody is omitted. Thus have the worlds been organized.

### Expanding Universe

The key-word of the sacred science is the universal self. The Sanskrit word *brahman* (from *brh*, to expand) has acquired a series of technical meanings. It refers to the “expanding universe.” It is identified and interpreted as the potency or principle from which all things are derived, as the ultimate basis of the world, as the inner power and essence of things, as the unity of all that is named, as the form of time (*kala*) and the refuge of all beings. Traditional vision affirms that the universe did not start off at any particular time. Although temporal space and time have a beginning and an end, both continue back forever through a cosmological scheme that repeats itself endlessly. This, however, does not make the universe of *brahman* a deterministic machine in the Newtonian sense. The universe at large has an ontological independence of its own. It is characterized as *shabda brahman*, the cosmic sound. Related with the notion of sound is *bindu*, the dimensionless point, literally a drop. It consists of a unity of two, one static and the other dynamic. It is the dynamic aspect that expresses itself in the universe of multiplicity; but it essentially remains one, the epitome of all. The concept of zero, when applied to *brahman*, is unthinkable in itself. Metaphysically it is identified with both fullness and emptiness. Fullness is non-dual infinity of *brahman*. The universe that is unborn and that which is born is full. The opposite of fullness is emptiness; *brahman* is described as lacking positive attributes. The description of *brahman* as full-and-empty shows that it is beyond dialectical opposition between time and timelessness, formed and unformed, mortal and immortal, actual and beyond.

The idea of the universe is further elaborated as both absolute and relative. The absolute universe is beyond creation and beyond the categories of space and time. But the same becomes manifested as relative space in the form of the four regions which is but another form of the world with a centre which expands into the circumference through the diameter. The idea of the universe as *brahman* is represented by a mathematical paradigm:

$$a - a = \phi; a + \phi = a; a - \phi = a; a \times \phi = \phi; a/\phi = \text{becomes infinity}.$$

The analytical geometry of the universe is a point at the centre that breaks into plural-

ity of forms — the square, the circle and the triangle.

This raises a number of questions: What is the nature of visual reality? How do physicists and philosophers understand it? Can there be a theory of physical reality without having trust in the cosmic creation? Can one visualize the invisible objectively? Can man escape cosmic feelings? How does one differentiate between the inner and the outer? Is there a way to find a common ground? Where do we turn for understanding the fundamental human trust that seems beyond the physical reality?

Seeing (with the outer eye) is quite different from understanding. In general relativity, bodies always follow straight lines in four dimensional space-time, but they nevertheless appear to us to move along curved paths. Thus, appearance does not necessarily lead to a correct understanding. Also, what is seen at the present is that which happened before. As a man at the present epoch observes the distant galaxies of the universe he sees them not as they are today but as they were a billion years ago. Notwithstanding the fact that the visual reality is complex and the present moment is elusive, scientists have tried to grapple with the problem. The modern theory of “expanding universe” explains how the invisible can be visualized (Davies and Gribbin 1992):

The expansion of the universe is caused not by the assemblage of galaxies expanding out through space, but by space itself expanding, so that the gaps between the galaxies stretch. The light from distant galaxies is red-shifted because it comes to us across an expanding gulf of space, and the waves can't be seen — the frequency is too low. This marks the horizon. The universe beyond is still there but it is invisible to us.

The idea of the expanding *brahman* might appear as a creative imagination which finds concrete expression in modern science. But it must be remembered that sacred science is far from being Godless. The helpful way to understand the technical mystery of the universe is to realize the highest principle of the First Threes: The Three orders of space, or the Three world totality (earth, atmosphere and heaven). The Three orders of time (past, present and future). The Three qualities (purity or light, passion or activity, and inertia or darkness). The Three principle of life assimilation and elimination, growth and procreation. The Three Gods (Brahma, the God of creation, Vishnu the God of life-sustaining force, and Mahakala Shiva, the God of Death and dissolution). One God assumes many forms out of nothing. Thus there are many Gods with many names and forms. They are so much a part of the form and function of the universe that with the extinction of the observable universe they all dissolve in the same manner and at the same moment as the world of the creatures dissolve.

Faith implies a holistic vision. Kabir, a medieval saint poet and an excellent weaver of instant faith, describes the mystery:

No one knows the secret of the Weaver  
who spread his warp through the universe.  
He dug two ditches, Sky and Earth,  
made two spools, Sun and Moon,

filled his shuttle with a thousand threads,  
and weaves till today; a difficult length!  
Kabir says, they are joined by actions.  
Good threads and bad,  
that fellow weaves both.

The spiritual metaphor and the scientific metaphor converge with a common insight. Creation mythologies and quantum mechanics meet in their intuition about the universe.

## Space

The Sanskrit word *loka* (world) pervades throughout the Vedic, Buddhist and Jain cosmologies. Hinduism mentions the Three worlds (*triloka*) — the Earth, the middle region, and the Heaven. There is also a reference of many other types of world. The Gods, mounted on the revolving wheel (which is the year), move round all the worlds — the world of Gods, the world of ancestors, the world of the living, the world of fire without water, the world of wind which is the residence of order-and-truth, the unconquerable world of Indra, the world of water which is over the Sky, the further higher heaven which is the world of Death, the bright or luminous sphere, the world of Brahma, the vault of heaven which is the most real (true) of the worlds.

In Buddhism, the common Sanskrit word for universe is *loka-dhatu* which refers to a place that has come into existence through the *karma* (actions and their enduring results) produced by living beings. The universe is maintained by *karma*. It exists within the human mind. A circle of wind floats in space (Sky). Resting on the wind circle is a disc of water. Above the water circle is a disc-shaped layer of golden Earth. Its upper surface supports mountains, seas and islands. Living beings are of five types — Gods, humans, animals, spirits of the dead, and inhabitants of the hells. They reside within the ‘realm of desire.’ Human beings and animals live together on the surface of the Mount Sumeru, the pillar that stands in the centre of the world. Spirits and demonic Gods live under the Earth and the inhabitants of the hells, even deeper. Gods of various types live in the upper places in the realm of form and beyond that in the realm of formlessness. The realms of desire, form and formlessness are known collectively as the Three Realms, the kinds of worlds in which living being exists. Mahayana Buddhism comes closer to Hinduism. One of its premises is that the Buddha is omnipresent in our own realm. With this idea the Buddha came to be equated with the world. The concept of bodhisattvas is strongly associated with the Hindu theory of transformation and incarnation. The cosmology of the Lotus Repository World describes twenty worlds existing along the vertical axis through the centre of the world system, each of these worlds surrounded by countless worlds. The lowest of these twenty worlds is called “omnipresent illumination of Supreme Light”; it is surrounded by worlds as numerous as the atoms in one of the Buddha-fields (*buddha-ksetra*). There are many Buddha fields. The worlds are innumerable.

The Sanskrit word *ksetra* (Pali, *khetta*) refers to field, landed property, enclosed

spot or ground, position of space, place of origin, dominion, region, etc. Its core meaning is extended to a conglomeration of wide ranging aspects from geometric forms to metaphysical expressions — plane figure as triangle, circuit, superficies, a house, a town, seat, sphere of activity, source, extent, wife, womb, body, primeval soul or matter. The total field of spatial meaning is transformed when used in psychical and spiritual contexts. As a categorical term it reflects various layers of conceptual thinking. It refers to physical and metaphysical (body and mind), mathematical and mystical (spatial phenomena measured and drawn up in relations of forms such as a perfect geometric form called the cosmic image panel), outer and inner (body is *ksetra* and that which dwells in the body is *ksetrajna*, the knower of the body), macrocosm and microcosm (the whole Earth, the position of stars in the Sky and the place of pilgrimage conceptualized as microcosm).

The Jain places of pilgrimage are of two classes: *siddhaksetra*, the place where holymen have attained salvation, and *atisayaksetra*, the place which has assumed importance because of temples, idols or certain miraculous events. Larger than *ksetra* is *mandala* by means of which a pupil is consecrated. It is inscribed in a spot or in a house, as sacred drawings of small size, generally three cubits plus three inches, using the sacred writing colour or powder made from the five gems or the grains of rice.

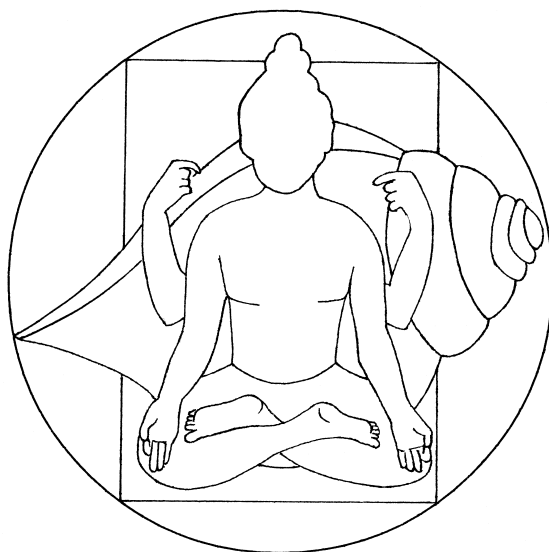
The Sanskrit term *tirtha* applies to all things held to be sacred and pure. As a conceptual category it exists in various forms — speech, water, land, body, limbs, time, trees, places resorted to by God. The feet of a holy man, the back of a cow, the limb of one's own wife, one's own eyes and the right ear are the *tirthas*. The part of the little finger of a holy man is called the *tirtha* sacred to Prajapati, the Lord of Creatures; the part of the root of the thumb is sacred to Brahma, the creator; the part at the top of the fingers is sacred to the Gods, and the part of the root of the forefingers is sacred to the manes. Places where fire-sacrifice and ancestral rites are performed, a temple, a house where the Veda is being studied, a place where the *Purana* is being recited, a cowpen, a place where the banyan tree exists or where one's teacher stands or where a chaste housewife dwells, or where a father and a worthy son dwell are the *tirthas*. Sanctity is caused to a place by the presence of lotus plants, basil plants and wood apple trees. Water is considered as a potent agent in the removal of sin. Particular sanctity is attached to river fords, certain divine waters, mountains and forests. The Buddhist *tirthas* are the places associated with the life of the Buddha. For the Jains, the *jin-sasan* or *dharma* itself is the *tirtha*, and the one who creates *tirtha* is *tirthankar*. There are three classes of *tirtha* — mind (*manas*) *tirtha* such as the virtuous ones, parents, preceptors, husband and wife; and fixed (*sthavar*) *tirtha* such as place of pilgrimage. The *Matsya Purana* declares that there are thirty five millions of sacred places in the Sky, in the aerial region and on the Earth. Thus, infact, the whole universe is sacred.

Functionally, all 'sacred-effective spaces' can be classified into 'purity' space and 'protection' space. A purity space is that which purifies the body, and elivates the soul. Such are the shrines of God. A protection space is that where one is protected from the incursions of the evil spirits from outside. In such cases a diviner draws a

circle about the place, chanting sacred-effective words. That prevents the evil from causing any harm or hindrance to the performer and performance within the protected space.

The Hindu sacred space has a vision that presents sacred-secular continuum. The kitchen, for instance, is not merely a cooking spot but a *sanctum sanctorum* enshrining the family deity. A raised square-platform, located generally in the south-eastern corner of the room, serves as an altar. The inner courtyard, which is rectangular in shape, has a mound reserved for the sacred basil plant, and a flag pole hoisting the insignia of the family God. In the courtyard some families enshrine ancestral spirits and minor deities. Depending on its size and composition, every village has a number of sacred structures. On the village boundary a triangular or pyramid-shaped mound represents the Mother Earth, the guardian deity of the villagers, regardless of their being a Hindu or a Buddhist or a Muslim or a Christian. Crossing the threshold of his house, one moves into larger and larger spaces through the centres and network of pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage is a self-organizing system and a self-amplifying interactions between the people and their landscapes. The grand design of a sacred space (Figure 1) is hidden in the geometric scheme. Here the *ksetra* of Kashi is represented by a holy circuit, a conch and the image of God Shiva, signifying the cosmos. The circle symbolises the cosmic space, the quadrangle symbolises the cosmic time, the conch symbolizes the life-principle, and the anthropomorphic image symbolizes the universal self. At another level this *ksetra* is conceptualized in mathematical arrays. It is situated on Shiva's trident at the centre of space and time. Its cosmological structure, marked by a holy circuit in the radius of five *kosa* (16 km) represents the Five fundamental configurations: Five sheaths (food or matter, vital air, mind, intelligence or



**Fig. 1** The Geometry of Kashi-ksetra

consciousness, and bliss), and Five materiality (Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Sky). Its three segments signify the totality of the universe: three worlds, three microcosmic-macrocosmic property, three Gods, three principles of life, three stages in life, three aspects of time, three kinds of knowledge, three fires, etc. All of them co-exist and co-operate. The inner complexity of the cosmic Kashi is made simpler and comprehensible at the level of finite (earthly) Kashi which is a paradigmatic model that highlights the reality of position and pattern in all other sacred spaces. All the rivers and mountains, all the planets and stars, and all the Gods and Goddesses are manifest here in their revealed aspects. The clock-wise circumambulation of the *ksetra* may be conceived as an imitation of the great solar system.

The relationship between the traditional vision and the modern conception of the expanding universe is thus one of the greatest complexities in human thought. Man cannot escape the space of his consciousness; his interpretation varies because of cybernetic thinking. For a religious man, the whole universe — to which he assigns sacredness — is an ordered self-organized system independent of him. He considers space as a form of inner organisation of the world system whose quality is defined by the sacred Law. Of the visible space, Jambudwipa is traditionally viewed as sacred space on the Earth. It is a landmass shaped like India with ever present Himavat, the mountains of snow, and Mount Sumeru on the top of the golden Earth. The triangular form, covering South and Southeast Asia today, is the most-sacred-effective space. All the great religious leaders of the world — Buddha, Confucius, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammad — were born in this space called Asia. The quality of a space may vary in time, like the waxing and the waning of the Moon. A sacred space may cease to be sacred, and an ordinary space may become sacred in a special way. The celestial space is eternally sacred and powerful.

## **Time**

Space and time are inseparable. The rhythms of life on the Earth are tuned by the Sky. Life and Death are not in opposition, they are the rhythms of biological time. Biological time is the rhythm of cosmic time, and cosmic time is the rhythm of the infinite rhythms of transcendental time. The visible order of the endless repetition of events of birth and death, light and darkness, and sound and silence tacitly affirms the permanence of time. The continual process of creation and dissolution is a clear proof of its impermanence. The implications are two fold: if there were no change there would have been no time, and if there were no time there would have been no existence. This dialectic of permanence and impermanence has found its way through all religions, all philosophies, and all sciences of the world.

The Hindu God of Death and destruction is Mahakala, the Great Time; he is also Shiva, the auspicious one. The Great Time is fundamental. It creates all forms and destroys them all, but in itself remains formless. It transcends everything but nothing transcends it. It is both linear and cyclical, measurable and immeasurable, with and without quality. What constitutes the cosmos is the rhythm of time. The Sky is the



abode of God, the eternal home of all that exists on the Earth. The Sun, the Moon, the Stars and the seasons are the divine manifestations, each having a name a form and an attribute of the Gods, demons, men and animals. The ancient sages, the ancestors of men, assumed the form of stars. The Sun and Moon have kinship with the human beings. Man's rhythm of life is tuned with the Sky. His daily routine is organized by the cycle of the Sun, his sustenance by the cycle of the seasons, and his joys (festivals) by the cycle of the Moon. Like humans, the citizens of the Sky are governed by the fourfold caste system; and in their interpersonal relationship they are also friends, enemies and neutrals. They thrive on man's offerings and oblations. The Sky, the book of God, is the manual for man's journey in life. The cosmic cycle is identical with the biological cycle. Life in the Sky has patterned the life on the Earth. All types of artistic manifestations have a divine origin. These have been revealed or otherwise brought down from the Sky to the Earth. All the Suns, the Moons, the Stars, the seasons, the directions, the divisions of time, and the countless God and Goddesses, demons, ancestors and primeval sages are enshrined in holy places all over the Earth. The correspondence between the Sky and the Earth is not in appearance but in operation. They together form the cosmic rhythms of time. The Chinese *tiansi* (Heavenly Time) and the Indian *mahakala* (Great Time) follow the same idea of cosmological time.

The Indian almanac (*pancanga*, 'Five limbs') serves a twofold purpose: it schedules religious ceremonies and records the cosmic events in due consideration of luni-solar-stellar situation. The 'Five limbs' of time are: a day of the Moon, a day of the Sun, the stellar position, a favourable or unfavourable time determined by the relation of the Sun and Moon, and a unit (half) of the lunar day. The unit of time in respect of each lunar day and the corresponding solar day are: the position of the Moon in the zodiac, the total duration of the day, the Sun rise, the Sun set, the First rising sign of the zodiac, the lunar month of thirty days, fortnight, the era, season, solstice, quadrant, the mid point of the year, cosmic ages, aeon, etc. The quality of time is expounded in terms of divinity of the year, the horoscope of the year, the auspicious time for domestic rituals, agricultural operations, house building, etc. All the prescribed festivals, rituals and fasts, the astronomical tables, the appropriate code (*mantra*) for ritualistic performances, and such other useful information are provided in the almanac. Traditional texts proclaim that the knowledge of almanac frees from all sins, prolongs life, gives immunity from diseases, and leads to success in all endeavours.

Time has a form, a heavenly body and a quality. The limbs of the year are named. The twelve signs of the zodiac, respectively represent the head, face, breast, heart, belly, navel, abdomen, genital organ, tooth, eyes, two anklets and the two feet of *kalapurusa*, the cosmic Time Person. They cause the division of seasons and influence man's future — his rhythms of life. Naksatrapurusa is the Lord of the planetary direction. Each sign has a name and a form. The Sun, the Moon, and the stars are Gods; the Great Bear is the constellation of the Seven sages. Also there are Dragon's head, Rahu, and tail, Ketu. The *Puranas* refer to *kalatirtha*, the sacred form of time



identified with Gods and Goddesses.

Ritual act (*karma*), ritual order (*krama*) and ritual time (*kala*) are the aspects of the primeval procreation, preservation and dissolution. They are inconceivable without one another, and can be understood best by the analogy of body, mind and spirit — each one subject to contingent process of creation and existence. Their essential connection lies in the fact that a ritual act is realised only by virtue of the ritual order that occurs to create a capacity to time. Ritual time is not an independent reality. It is set into motion by a linear continuum of ritual order within which change occurs in a kairological moment and *not* in a linear chronological order. The change is neither the sum total nor the geometric progression of the ritual order. It occurs only in ‘no-time’ — the kairological moment, the rhythm of Great Time, the leap into timelessness as defined by the Sanskrit *ksana* and the Chinese *shih*. What really matters in ritual time is not the ordinal duration but the spiritual moment associated with the ‘infinite time’ that present itself in a subtler way to effect or affect the event happening in a finite time. This moment is the pure ‘experiential time’ of a *yogi*, when the past, the present and the future are fused into one. It is possible for a *yogi* to ‘see’ the past and the future and to create objects or events ‘out of order’ and ‘out of time,’ precisely because he can live that moment which remains unmanifest for the common man. In brief, the change occurs in the concatenation and not at the completion (ordinal duration) of the orders of time. What works in the *yogi*’s selection of “efficient moment,” out of a great number of possible stages in the orders of act, is unknown.

The more common expressions for the human life-span in Indian thought are: a ‘spidery thread,’ a ‘tree,’ a ‘river,’ and a ‘lamp’ imaging progression with occasional sidetracks. The form of time is like a spider’s web (angular), like a tree with branches spread out, like a river with tributaries progressing relatively in relation to the surface of the Earth, or like a lamp flickering, but not an arrow-like movement. This vision of time is incompatible with the Newtonian notions that absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself and from its own nature, flows equally without relation to anything external.

If ritual is an act *par excellence* by which man and the world exist, then, properly speaking, there is no time other than the “ritual time.” Man offers ritual for the preservation of his own life as also of others. By entering into a ritual (the illuminant womb) man and time reach a state of purity and harmony, essential for the well-being of all. Ritual is thus the proper context of man-time interaction. Precisely it is in this context alone that man’s perception of time can be nearer to what is true.

In view of the multiplicity of temporal time-systems, even if the astral time is the same, the ritual time for two observers is different. Ritual time is derived from event and the event is dependant on the temporal order (caste, age, sex, place, etc.). The order of ritual time changes, therefore, by effecting change in the temporal order. Due to this special relativity, which is similar to Einstein’s theory of relativity, ritual time cannot be brought into a single objective time-sequence.

Like space, time is also of uneven quality. All time is not suitable for sacred perfor-

mances. Ritual event takes (ritual) place. Ritual time and ritual space are inextricably bound together. Directions and time are interlinked. Tradition presents the rules relating to travel. It considers not only the propitious time to start with on a journey, but also the direction in relation to time. This is an important matter for all such events as constructing a house or a temple, etc. The sacred-effectiveness of a ritual act increases by manifold on the interpenetration of space and time. Kashi, a spiritually perceived microcosm, enshrines not only all the sacred places on the Earth but also all the heavenly bodies (Sun, Moon, Stars and Planets) and all the divisions of time in their essence. All bathing rituals and festivals are observed on special occasions in the sacred space-time. This agrees with Minkowski's theory that henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality.

In Hindu thought, the aeons of time on a cosmic scale are vast and immeasurable, yet the whole cosmic process is epitomized in each moment of time. In ascending order the basic units range from *ksana*, the twinkling of an eye, to *manvantara*, Day and Night of the Creator (see Appendix 1). The Buddhist notion of eternal round of birth and death introduces the basic units of time in terms of daily life: *ksana* (1/75 second), *tatksana* = 120 *ksanas* (1-3/5 seconds), *lava* = 60 *tatksana* (1 minute 36 seconds), *muhurta* = 30 *lavas* (48 minutes), *ahoratra* = 30 *muhurtas* (24 hours, day), *masa* = 30 *ahoratras* (month), *samvatsara* (year). In Hindu thought a *muhurta* more or less corresponds to an hour, a *lava* to a minute and a *tatksana* to a second. A *ksana* represents a tiny unit of time for which we do not possess any modern unit. There is another way to explain a *ksana*'s small size. A *ksana* is the time it takes "for a *dharma* to arise when all the causes and conditions have come together," that is for certain existence, thing, or being to emerge when all the conditions are in place. For Buddhists, the universe eternally repeats a cycle of fourfold change. Each of the four periods lasts for twenty intermediate *kalpas*, so one complete cycle takes eighty intermediate *kalpas*. The cycle includes the *kalpa* of dissolution; the *kalpa* of nothingness, during which the world remains dissolved; the *kalpa* of creation; and the *kalpa* of duration of the created world. That the cycle starts with dissolution is very Hindu way of thinking, as is the custom of calculating the month from the full moon.

## Nature

The structure of the natural world is made of Five primal elements (*panca bhuta*) or raw material: Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Sky. They are described as a series of increasingly subtle levels in the appearance of the world. On the one hand each element is found to overlie the next in this order of raw material. On the otherhand, in the cosmological accounts of creation, the same elements arise in reverse order as a progression of increasingly gross levels. Accordingly, from a philosophical view-point, the Five elements may be interpreted as a division of experience into five levels (Table 1). The primal elements are linked with other elements, or aspects of Nature, such as property, physical character, sensory organ, psychological attributes called *guna*,

biological representative called *dosa* responsible for psychological functions in the state of homeostast and the pathological disorders in the state of imbalance, colour, form, and presiding deity (Table 2). The Three principal constituent-aspects (*gunas*) characterise the individual — a mixture of knowledge and luminosity (*sattva*), passion and mobility (*rajas*) and ignorance and passivity (*tamas*), in varying proportion.

The Indian theory of primal elements is slightly in advance of the Greek and the Chinese. In the classical Chinese the five elements are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water (Table 3). Each of these is linked with natural development, colour, taste, season, climate, sensory organs, and emotions. In Chinese astrology, these elements form a circle of one containing the other.

Elements of nature are subject to a fivefold order: origination, building, interlocking, overlapping, and transcending. Elements originated in phases. Hindu scriptures describe origin from *hiranyagrabha*, the Golden Germ, and *purusa*, the cosmic Man. Elements have a binding ability. They constitute human and other forms, both individually and collectively. Each major organ is said to have its own builder. Elements

**Table 1 :** The Five Elements — Function and Experience

Element	Function	Level of Experience	Correspondence with Modern Science
Earth	Differentiation	Particular objects	Pieces of matter
Water	Change and transformation	Changing form	Moving configuration
Fire	Representation and property	Intelligible meaning	Propagation of energy
Air	Qualification and conditioning	Relative characteristics	Field conditioning space and time
Sky	Underlying continuity	Continuing background	Space-time continuum

**Table 2 :** The Five Elements in Indian Tradition

Element	Property	Character	Organ	<i>Guna</i>	<i>Dosa</i>	Colour	Form	Deity
Earth	Smell	Roughness	Nose	<i>tamas</i>	<i>kapha</i>	Yellow	Square	Brahma
Water	Taste	Liquidity	Tongue	<i>tamas</i>	<i>kapha</i>	White	Half-moon	Vishnu
Fire	Form	Heat	Eyes	<i>sattva</i>	<i>pitta</i>	Red	Triangle	Rudra
Air	Touch	Movement	Skin	<i>rajas</i>	<i>vata</i>	Dark	Hexagon	Isvara
Sky	Sound	Absence of resistance	Ears	<i>satta</i>	<i>vata</i>	Crystal White	Circle	Sadasiva

**Table 3 :** The Five Elements in Chinese Tradition

Element	Development	Colour	Taste	Season	Climate	Organ	Emotion
Wood	Birth	Green	Sour	Spring	Windy	Eye	Anger
Fire	Growth	Red	Bitter	Summer	Hot	Tongue	Excitement
Earth	Transformation	Yellow	Sweet	Late summer	Humid	Mouth	Anxiety
Metal	Collection	White	Metallic	Autumn	Dry	Nose	Grief
Water	Storage	Black	Salty	Winter	Cold	Ears	Fear

are also known to have caused bio-social types. For instance, the ironsmiths relate themselves with Earth, carpenters with Water, coppersmiths with Fire, sculptors with Wind, and goldsmiths with Sky. Forms and life are cross-linked. By entering into a form, the formless life acquires qualitative distinctions. It gives different expressions to different forms or species. The Five primal elements are linked with other elements such as colour, form, sense organs, etc. They are also linked with psychological attributes, and tied with divinity. The primal elements have both personal (material) and universal (spiritual) attributes. They overlap in their formation and so also the world of matter with the other worlds. Life in this world is repeated in the other world in a similar order. The spatial order of the pluriverse is transcended by overlapping of spheres. Life transcends the limits of the form; Death transcends all attributes of Nature, including the limits of the terrestrial time. There is no intrinsic disorder in Nature — dissolution is an integral aspect of the transcendent order of Nature. Transcendence is the order of all orders. It is inviolable.

## Man

The transcendental vision nullifies the polaristic position of nature and culture. Nature in its essence is not a machine. Living matter exists only by the order of the transcendent life, the one which is formless, invisible, but knowable through its effects. Nature constitutes a set of self-originating, self-organizing and self-sustaining forms. Life renders matter the binding abilities, interlocking powers, overlapping characters, and a transcendent state. The transcendent order of Nature is that (divinity) which nurtures Nature. Elements of Nature, in their living state, may appropriately be described as codes. They are set into a technical order that causes almost miraculously the multiple form. Like natural forms, the forms of culture are also subject to the fivefold order of origination, binding, interlocking, overlapping and transcending. Man of matter is culturally processed through Four channels — instincts and natural desires, craving for power and prosperity, social aims, and spiritual urge. These channels are related respectively with the Four ends of Life, namely *kama*, *artha*, *dharma* and *moksa* — the first three ends have a relevance to empirical life while the last refers to spiritual life. These Four ends, called *purusartha*, build up a truly integrated personality. Thus is man transformed into a moral person. The gross body undergoes through a transcendental superpsychic process of cultivation and purification. Man discovers major points of power in his subtle body that functions as an instrument for the inner meditative experience. According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2. 1–5), man's nature is delineated from the most physical to the psychical and finally the spiritual. The fivefold constitution (*pancakosa*) of man, each called sheath or envelope (*kosa*), consists of beatific (*anandamaya*), intellectual (*vigyanamaya*), mental (*manomaya*), vital (*pranamaya*), and vegetative (*annamaya*) sheath. These are hierarchically organized. The Indian vision of the ultimate cosmic reality can be understood by reading the theories of *pancabhuta* and *pancakosa* together.

The cosmocentric view of creation is different from the God-centric view. Both

stand opposed to the anthropocentric view — the naturalist’s theory of evolution of any kind (Lamarckian, Darwinian). The term *brahman* is neuter (neither masculine nor feminine), neutrino (zero) and neutral (impartial). The Vedic classification of organism is based not in terms of kingdom, phylum, class. In it there is nothing like *Homosapiens sapiens*. Everything is clearly a limb of *purusa*. The limb refers to both structure and function, signifying unity and implying the manner in which an organ works in the maintenance of the organism as a whole. From the integral sacrifice of *purusa* (person) the whole universe is born. From his thousand (infinite) limbs come all things. Within his body there are power-centres, the nodes of power of life-energy. The Four castes (*varna*) of men (Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) are linked to each power-centre of the body, each organ signifying ontological function and unity.

Mouth	Brahman (utterance of the primal creative sound)
Arms	Kshatriya (protection from forces)
Legs	Vaishya (movement of life)
Feet	Shudra (fundamental starting power and ground of being)

Who can deny the power of mouth? Who can deny the power of feet? Who can deny the essentiality of arms and legs? Yet, these Four represent not individual limbs of power but harmonies of the human world — the Four castes of men.

The Four castes form a conceptual model. They are archetypes or aspects of existence here (the Earth) and there (the Sky). There are Four castes of planets: Jupiter and Venus are Brahman; the Sun and Mars are Kshatriya; the Moon and Mercury are Vaishya; and Saturn is Shudra. Of the signs of zodiac, Pisces, Scorpio and Taurus are Brahman; Sagittarius, Aries and Leo are Kshatriya; Aquarius, Gemini and Libra are Vaishya; and Virgo, Capricorn and Cancer are Shudra. There are Four castes of soil: The Brahman soil is white in colour, it smells like clarified butter and is stringent to the taste. The Kshatriya soil is blood-red in colour, it smells like blood and is bitter to the taste. The Vaishya soil is yellow in colour, it smells like alkaline earth and is sour to the taste. The Shudra soil is black in colour, it smells like faeces and has a taste like that of wine. There are Four castes of temples, depending on the division of the temples walls: Brahman type is characterized by 9, the Kshatriya by 7, the Vaishya by 5, and the Shudra by 3 *rathakas*. There are Four castes of animals, plants and music. Among the animals, cow is Brahman; among the trees banyan is Brahman. In music *dhrupada* is Brahman. The Four castes have been repeated or replicated on a variety of levels and in different modalities. The levels and modalities are hierarchical, and relations are hieratic.

The sacred science has revealed that all realms are hierarchical or else chaotic. The order of life originating from *purusa* relates to the cosmic order of Nature (*mula-prakriti*), a conscious intelligent force. The *Bhagavad Gita* (chapter XIV) expounds the cosmic connotation of man’s nature. Both *purusha* and *prakriti* are beginningless; and all modifications and qualities (*gunas*) are born of *prakriti*. In the creation of the

body, *prakriti* is the cause; in the experience of joy and sorrow, *purusha* is the cause. Of the three qualities or modes of Nature, *sattva* gives enlightenment and health, and binds man to happiness and attachment to knowledge. Predominance of *rajas* causes greed, activity, undertaking of works, restlessness, and desire. As the ruling quality, *tamas*, arising from ignorance, deludes all embodied beings and binds them by misconception, idleness and slumber. Human nature is a mixture of good and evil. Sometimes *sattva* is predominant, overpowering *rajas* and *tamas*; sometimes *rajas* pervades, not *sattva* or *rajas*; and sometimes *tamas* obscures *sattva* and *rajas*. Though all mortals — that is, unenlightened men — are subject to the Three modes of *prakriti*, each person betrays by his life which of the three qualities is habitually dominant in him.

There is another perception of truth that enables a *yogi*, the liberated man (*jivana-mukta*), to enter into the pure omnipresent cosmic light beyond all relativity. Having transcended the Three qualities of Nature — the cause of physical embodiment — a man is released from the sufferings of birth, old age and death; he attains immortality. The signs of a “man freed while living” in a body have been enumerated in the *Gita* (XIV, 22–25):

He who does not abhor the presence of the *gunas* — illumination, activity, and ignorance — nor deplore their absence; remaining like one unconcerned, undisturbed by the three modes — realising that they alone are operating throughout creation; not oscillating in mind but ever self-centered; unaffected by joy and sorrow, praise and blame — secure in his divine nature; regarding with an equal eye a clod of clay, a stone, and gold; the same in his attitude towards pleasant or unpleasant (men and experiences); firm minded; uninfluenced by respect or insult; treating friend and enemy alike; abandoning all delusions of personal doership — he it is, who has transcended the triple qualities!

Mahayana Buddhism posits its own theory about the enlightened man. There are three kinds of body (*kaya*): Those forms which are assumed by Buddhas to render service to the beings of the various worlds are called *nirmanakaya*. This body generally refers to the human form that the Buddha takes in order to make a show of acquiring the ordinary arts and crafts required by the average man, living a family life and then retiring from it, and ultimately attaining liberation (*nirvana*) by recourse to ascetic practices. The *bodhisattvas*, after attaining enlightenment take a body endowed with thirty-two major and eighty minor signs with a view to preach the doctrines of Mahayana and at the same time to arouse in their minds joy, delight, and love for the excellent *dharma*. This body is called *sambhogakaya*. The *dharmata* Buddha is without any substratum and lies beyond the functioning organs of senses, proofs or signs, and hence beyond the vision of the non-Mahayanists. It is to be realized within one's own self. This is called *dharmakaya*.

The Hindu theory of incarnation (*avatar*) speaks of God transmitting divine potencies to creatures. This is a biological law of the greatest spiritual value; it makes life divine. God takes Three kinds of incarnations: that which has full power, that which has power only for the time being, and that which is only partial incarnation. Com-

plete incarnations are ten in number. Of these, the First Three are animal forms (Fish, Turtle, Boar), the fourth is a composite form (Lion-Man), the fifth is a dwarf, and the next five are fully developed humans. In Mahayana Buddhism, Gods are above the realm of human beings, but the Buddha-realm is above all existence; and it is human being, not the Gods, that are able to reach this state. In Judaism and Christianity it was God who created man and his universe; God exists in contradistinction to his creatures. In Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha himself is the universe and there is no distinction between him and the universe. The Buddhist idea is close to the Hindu conception of *brahman* as universe.

The idea that man makes himself by his action (*karma*) is a distinctive feature of all religions, particularly emphasized in Hinduism and Buddhism. The term *karma* does not mean only action, it includes the effects thereof. The implication is that man cannot escape from the effect of his action. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* (IV, V) explains the working of the Law:

Just as a goldsmith, taking apart a little quantity of gold, moulds another — a newer and better — form, even so does this self, setting this body aside — making it senseless — create another — a newer and better — form fit for the manes, or the celestial minstrels, or the Gods, or other beings.

The individual self goes to the next world surrounded by fine particles of the five gross elements, which serve as the material for building the new body.

Man is mind. It is by mind that he sees, hears, thinks, acts and experiences. The sages have characterized the nature of mind. Beings here are born from mind, when born they live by mind, on deceasing they enter into mind. The mind is like the reins of a chariot driver. A man who reins in his mind reaches the end of his journey, the highest place. Control of the mind is a means of obtaining release.

The mind is said to be twofold;  
The pure and also the impure;  
Impure — by union with desire;  
Pure — from desire completely free!

By making mind all motionless,  
From sloth and from distraction freed,  
When unto mindlessness one comes,  
Then that is the supreme estate!

So long the mind should be confined,  
Till in the heart it meets the end,  
That is both knowledge and release!  
All else is but a string of words!

The mind, in truth, is for mankind  
The means of bondage and release;  
For bondage, if to object bound;  
From objects free — that is called release!

— *Maitri Upanishad* (6, 34)



The Indian theory of man is expounded within the cosmic adventure. It makes man aware that he fits harmoniously into the complex pattern of the universe. Originating from the sacrifice of *purusha*, he becomes a “ritual being.” Made up of five primal elements of *prakriti*, he is a “cosmic being.” Possessing a self (*atmanam*), as the embodied one, man becomes embodied indeed. Man sees his own light. Seeing the light within he can see the light without. The symbol of light is the best symbol that traditional cultures have used to explain the relatedness of two extremes. The Sun is both matter and spirit, physical and metaphysical, exterior and interior. The modern science concept of light, as being a physical body emitting beams, stands in sharp contrast with the symbol of light visualised in the sacred science. In traditional thought space and time, matter and spirit, life and death, light and darkness are understood as facets of the One Single Reality, the inexorable Law, named *brahman*.

The Indian philosophical thought differs pronouncedly from the Western philosophical thought represented in the words of Protagoras (500 BC): “Man is the measure of all things.” According to Indian thinkers, man cannot be regarded as, in any way, standing apart from the universe, much less as enjoying any preponderance in it. They never tended to be anthropocentric; they held a cosmocentric view — man as part and parcel of the universe.

### **Culture Cycles**

Culture consists in the collective knowledge of being and becoming. Knowledge, originally self-manifest, creates a community of thought, action, ideal and tradition. Human knowledge is cultivated, preserved and transmitted from one generation to the next in three different ways: oral, textual and transcendental. Each culture adopts one of these as the essential mode of survival and changes effectively when the mode is changed. What one views as the core of one’s culture is not its outer manifestation but the inner mechanism that operates within it. This is especially true of cultures founded on universal consciousness that moves from the “inner” to the “outer.” Drawing upon the upanisadic imagery of *ashvatha* tree (*ficus religiosa*), it can be said that cultural tradition (*sanatan dharma*) is an inverted tree whose stem represents ritual process and socialisation (*samskara*) and whose tender leaves form the fourfold stages of life (*asrama*): learning, performing, indifference, and withdrawal. The branches of this tree (the fourfold castes), nourished by the fourfold action without attraction and repulsion (*purushartha*), extend both downward in materiality (*artha*) and desireability (*kama*) and upward in spirituality (*dharma*) and ultimately transcending the human order of life (*moksha*).

Traditional cultures adhere to the Law of the “limits to change.” Limits are imposed at each level and in all aspects of “internal life.” Change necessarily leads to a state of disequilibrium, which means upsetting the balance. If it is not circumscribed by the law of the limits, it would lead to a total destruction. No sane society would like to destroy itself by changing endlessly. Hence in changing times a culture stops at certain points to maintain its equilibrium. Such points are the limits between the two

states of disequilibrium which must be maintained at all costs. These are the points of distinction and points of harmony. They represent the limits — the limits of the norms and values of a society — the core elements of a culture, which can be transcended only at the price of total destruction. The Sanskrit term *maryada* (limit, boundary) adequately explains this law of limits. There is another word of Sanskrit origin, *parampara*, which in current usages is synonymous with tradition. By definition, it refers to the changeability of things handed down from one generation to the next. In a certain sense, each generation organizes its tradition in a manner which may differ sharply or slightly from the preceding generations and also from the generations to come. Thus *parampara* is a certain mixture of the past and the present — a chosen way of life. Changes in this order of life are, therefore, not to be taken as unnatural or destructive. But the points where one stops and where no change is desirable are the culturally defined limits called *maryada*. What has been repeatedly transmitted in Hindu society and culture is *not* to transcend the *maryada* of ones family, caste and country at any cost.

The key concept, which can be used for building a Buddhist theory of cultural change, is “impermanence and void of the self.” Impermanence is the characteristic of a culture (*samskara*), which perishes in each instant; it is also the void of the self, the “I” of man. Impermanence is examined by five aspects: transformation, destruction, separation, closeness and true nature. Of these Five, the First Three are the processes of cultural change and the last two the integrating forces that equipose the phenomenon of change. Self in the context of culture may be viewed as “cultural ego”, the collective consciousness of the people. Culture as a process of self-cultivation of human nature is permanent, but as a product of human activities it is impermanent. This can be explicated by the simile of the earthen jar. An earthen jar is subject to origination and destruction, while the earth is indestructible. Another simile appropriate for understanding change is of the ocean and the waves. The waves (human attributes and activities) may be high or low (transforming) according to the force of the wind (of change), but the waters of the ocean (self-cultivation of human nature) neither increase nor decrease; it remains unfathomable and immeasurable. However, the quintessential Buddhist contribution to the theory of culture is the concept of “non-self” which constructs an intellectual model defined as “culture without ego.”

Time cycle determines culture cycle. Change is cyclical, but within the cyclical order there is a linear progress, and within that the layers of progress and decay. Hindus refers to the repetitious cosmic cycles of the Four ages, each with a definite epoch of calculated duration. The quality of human life in each of these ages is pre-determined. The Four virtues — truthfulness, kindness, devotion and character — practised in the First age (*satya*) fall short by one-fourth in the Second age (*treta*), diminished half in the Third age (*dvapar*), and only one fourth of it remains as a residue in the Fourth age (*kali*), the age of darkness. The quality of the Four ages (*chaturyuga*) is symbolically defined by the value of metal: gold, silver, brass, and iron, respectively. The scriptures have given a monumental description of the Fourth age, the dark (iron)

age of our times. The Buddhist idea of the period of decay of *dharma* is similar to the Hindu conception. The Buddha's teachings degenerate over Three periods: the period of the true *dharma*, the period of the counterfeit *dharma*, and the period of the decay of the *dharma*. This Law of time has been the greatest generalization achieved by the human mind. The Buddhist *Digha Nikaya* predicts the decay of *dharma*:

There will come a time, brethren, when immoral course of action will flourish excessively; there will be no word for moral among humans — far less a moral agent. Among such humans, homage and praise will be given to them who lack filial and religious piety, and show no respect to the head of the clan; just as today homage and praise are given to the filial-minded, to the pious and to them who respect the heads of their clans. Among such humans, there will be no such thoughts of reverence as are a bar to intermarriage with mother or mother's sister, or teacher's wife, or father's sister-in-law. The world will fall into promiscuity, like goats and sheep, fowls and swine, dogs and jackals. Among such humans, keen mutual enmity will become the rule, keen ill will, keen animosity, passionate thoughts even of killing, in a mother towards her child, in child towards its mother, in a father towards his child and a child towards its father, in brother to brother, in brother to sister, in sister to brother. Just as a sportsman feels towards game that he sees, so will they feel.

The Hindu *Vishnu Puran* has also described the tribulation of the *kali*, the dark age:

Wealth and piety will decrease day by day, until the world will be totally depraved. Then property alone will confer rank; wealth will be the only source of devotion; passion will be the sole bond of union between the sexes; falsehood will be the only means of success in litigation; and women will be objects merely of sensual gratification. Earth will be venerated but for its mineral treasures; the brahmanical thread will constitute a Brahman; external types will be the only distinction of the several orders of life; dishonesty will be the universal means of subsistence; weakness will be the cause of dependence; menace and presumption will be substituted for learning; liberality will be devotion; simple ablutions will be purification; mutual assent will be marriage; fine clothes will be dignity; and water afar off will be esteemed a holy spring. Amidst all castes he who is the strongest will reign over a principality, thus vitiated by many faults. The people, unable to bear the heavy burdens imposed upon them by their avaricious sovereigns, will take refuge amongst the valleys of the mountains, and will be glad to feed on wild honey, herbs, roots, fruits, flowers and leaves; their only covering will be the bark of trees, and they will be exposed to the cold and wind and sun and rain. No man's life will exceed three and twenty years. Thus in the *kali* age shall decay constantly proceed, until the human race approaches its annihilation.

Kabir, has aptly described the mind of the dark age.

The body is a pitch dark forest and  
Mind is an Elephant gone mad.  
The Jewel of wisdom is the goad  
but few are the saints who can apply it.  
The three worlds were plundered,  
they all were stripped off their all.  
But Mind is a faceless Thief,  
whom no one could recognize.  
Defeat of the Mind is the real defeat,  
victory over the Mind is the real victory.  
Strike the mad Elephant, force it inside the body,

And if it turns round and run away,  
bring it back again with the goad.

According to Indian astrology, the 12 signs of the zodiac affect man's future. Ritual time also predicts the future. As the tradition has it, every year the Goddess visits men on the earth for nine days, marking the presence of the future time. The vehicles used by the deity for her journey foretell the events of the year (Table 4) affecting the common man.

### Amidst Darkness, Light Persists

Modern conception of man and culture is grounded in the theory of evolution which makes man the *telos* of his own thoughts, works and deeds. It becomes apparent that man makes his own history and civilization by virtue of his "rational powers." He has landed on the Moon, and is trying to move on to the other planets. Overwhelmed by the prospect of an evolutionary leap, he plays the bongo drums of the New Age, the New Space, the New Culture, the New Man. But in reality, events such as the holocaust, the depression, the two world wars, and the arsenal of nuclear weaponry have jolted the human world into the realization that the demonic face of technology threatens the very existence of life on the Earth. There are warning signs that our Earth is becoming tired and exhausted. Man's ceaseless chatter on progress hides a deep inner terror of silence. The prophetic words of W. B. Yeats resound:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Commenting on Yeats poem, Kathleen Raine wrote:

Few who have lived through the Second World War, the Holocaust and subsequent world events to the present day would be prepared to defend the complacent faith in 'progress' of earlier decades.

**Table 4 :** The Presence of the Future Time

Journey	Day	Vehicle	Consequence
Arrival	Sunday, Monday	Elephant	Flood
	Saturday, Tuesday	Horse	Disaster to the regnant
	Thursday, Friday	Palanquin	Death
	Wednesday	Boat	Success
Departure	Sunday, Monday	Buffalo	Sickness and sorrow
	Saturday, Tuesday	Cock	Chaos
	Wednesday, Friday	Horse	Good rain
	Thursday	Man	Auspicious

. . . It seems all but incredible that there are still those who see as 'progress' genetic engineering, the 'cloning' of animals, the building of artificial brains — a world that treats living creatures as pieces of mechanism, as 'commodities,' as 'links in the food chain'; while at the same time attributing to machines 'intelligence,' abdicating our very humanity to mechanistic theories which reduce thought and feeling to chemistry, ultimately of course life to *nihil*, since Plato's God, Truth and Beauty have no place in a materialist science.

Does man know where he is going? There is a Zen story about a monk who was galloping down the road, with his robes flapping in the wind. An old farmer sitting on the gate, yellowed out as the monk chattered by: "Sir, where are you going?" The monk shouted back "Don't ask me, ask the horse."

Most religious cosmologies view man as microcosm, and Hinduism is no exception. Like the structure of the universe, the body is made of the Five elements of Nature. Now the "universal self," residing in the body, is called the "elemental soul," which is overcome by Nature (*prakriti*, *swabhava*, *maya*). In their nature and function the Three qualities — light, darkness and passion — are opposed to one another. Nature remains in a state of equilibrium when the opposition of these qualities is kept in check. The quality of goodness (light) is primarily responsible for the self-maintenance of Nature. All activities are caused by passionate quality; the dark quality is responsible for inertia and restraint of activity. These qualities have different expressions in the material and psychological contexts of human attainment. Only a few persons are pure, of good nature. Also, only a few impure, of dark nature (that is, those who are effortlessly disposed to commit evil). But the greatest number of human beings are impelled by passion; they remain absorbed in this-worldly and selfish interest. The Three qualities combine also in space and time in an extraordinary manner. The divine hierarchy exists within and between the species; it appears in different forms, though most people think that it is peculiar to man.

One cannot separate space from time. The good man knows that the power of truth is positive and the power of untruth is negative, and that he has to live with both. By conserving the power of truth, he destroys the negative power of untruth. Freed from the passion of the body, he discovers the *glory of suffering*. Ordinary men in distress pray to God for health, wealth and worldly powers. Finding relief by God's grace they easily forget God and retreat to their narrow interests in material solace. But those who unconditionally seek wisdom and grace conserve the power of truth; they are better than the selfish men who hang around the power of untruth. In the Hindu wisdom tradition, there have been many seekers of truth who disport themselves in the life of suffering. The *Mahabharata* gives an example: At the end of the great war, Lord Krishna spoke to Kunti, the mother of the victorious Pandavas: "Your sons desired the kingdom of Hastinapur, and I gave them. Now ask a boon for yourself." Kunti said: "My Lord! give me suffering, so that I remember you all my life!" Other religions have also taken such a view of life. Christians talk of the principle of Holy poverty which is good — just as charity is a good and obedience is a good. In Islam, voluntary poverty is a value. It is only in love that suffering can be embraced. Think

of Socrates, think of Jesus Christ, and think of Gandhi. A new life for the humanity came out of their suffering and death, the resurrection from crucifixion. This world view gives suffering a positive meaning.

Spiritually, man's conscious suffering consists of fear and love. Fear implies resignation to the will of God. Love implies trust in God's mercy. Socially, it reflects humility, truth-power and virtue. For Gandhi, *satyagraha* and its offshoots — non cooperation and civil resistance — were nothing but a new name for the Law of suffering. He gave it a special meaning and value for larger good:

Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil doers, but it means puffing of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul, and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.

Gandhi believed in God. He called the poor people *daridranarayan*, the God's chosen people, but did not mythologize poverty. He confronted social suffering and injustice with what he called, the 'truth-force,' without reference to God.

Buddhism does not see the hand of God in the existence of the universe. It explains suffering as a reality intrinsic to the world. But in course of time, as its conception of the universe underwent changes, it gradually ceased to regard life as suffering. Now suffering was considered a personal problem. The earliest and the most important expression was the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths: that suffering exists, that it has a cause, that there are means to annihilate suffering, and that the Eightfold Path (right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration), is the means.

Like the early Buddhists, the medieval Hindu saints and mystics believed that it is not easy to escape the worldly suffering. Most of them came from poor families and lower castes. Namdev, the tailor; Kabir, the weaver; Ramdas, the cobbler; Dadu, the cotton comber; Tuka Ram, the grocer, Gora, the potter, Sena, the barber, and Sawat, the vegetable grower are the great names. They believed that by prayer alone can the poor people leap out of the fire of misery — fire being initially the symbol of the divine creativity. Gandhi was neither a Brahman nor a Kshatriya. Born in a Vaishya family, he was third in the caste hierarchy. Like Kabir, who continued to live the life of a weaver, Gandhi remained a man of this world; he discovered a new religion of man and believed in the power of prayer. He said, "I can give my own testimony and say that heartfelt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming and all other bad habits." Gandhi was in search of Truth, unbounded by any rigid convention. So he said:

It is unnecessary to believe in an extramundane power called God to sustain our faith in *ahimsa*, non-violence. How am I to talk to God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread and butter.

At the same time, he was firmly rooted in religion, which he interpreted broadly:

It is because I am a *sanatani* (orthodox) Hindu that I claim to be a Christian, a Buddhist and a Muslim. It is in all the great prophets and saints of every religion, I shall continue to ask God to give me the strength not to be angry with accusers; but to be prepared even to die at their hands without wishing them ill. I claim that Hinduism is all inclusive . . . Mine is not a religion of the prison house. It has room for the least among God's creation. But it is proof against insolence, pride of race, religion or colour.

His another noblest conception illustrates what he was trying to say about the opening of hearts:

I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and windows to be stuffed. I want cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.

One of Gandhi's favourite multi-religious prayers was:

Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead Thou me on.  
The night is dark and I am far from home,  
Lead Thou me on.

Prayer is not asking, but a call to self-purification and inward search. Gandhi's religion was a truthful way of life.

There are various types of religions, each originating in different space and time, each characterised differently, each influencing the human universe, and each reflecting its own regularities. All religions do not necessarily share the same world-view. Hence there is no one single hallmark theory attached to the future of religion. Hinduism has a theory of cyclical extinction and creation. We live in *kali*, the dark age, which is said to have a period of 12,00 celestial years, i.e.  $1200 \times 360$  terrestrial years. Gloomy and elaborate predictions occur in the *Mahabharata*. The great war took place in the transition from *dvapara* to *kali*. The Kuru king Duryodhana is said to be an embodiment of *kali*. The spirit of *kali* possessed Nala and he won the game of dice. Happenings of our times lead us inevitably to the conclusion that *kali* dominates over all the dice.

China has an awful experience of the dark age. Confucianism is its traditional faith. Buddhism received its official introduction from India. The basic interest of both these religions is man. Confucianism is concerned with man's social life, Buddhism with man's self-understanding. Today, both have fallen into the political trap of the atheistic communist force. Confucianism is no longer a living faith. Tibet, the divine nation of the Buddhist, was captured by the Chinese army. Thousands of monks were massacred, holy cities were desecrated, and a very large number of innocent people were beheaded, beaten to death or buried alive. The Chinese communist atrocities in Tibet are unsurpassed in their gravity. The 14th Dalai Lama, accompanied by a hundred thousand Buddhist, had to leave Lahasa under the cover of darkness; he arrived in India in April 1959. And now the 17th Karmapa of Tibetan Buddhism fled from China to find a place in India's spiritual sanctuary.

What is happening today in Bosnia is another horrific story. It has been reported as



a purely religious conflict. Christianity against Islam, Serbian orthodox Christians against Bosnian Muslim, Western Christianity against Eastern Islam. In reporting this event, there is a constant reference to Serbs attacking Muslims, but no mention is made of Christian Bosnians or Muslim Serbs, let alone of the individual who are the offspring of intermarriages between, say, Christian Serbs and Muslim Bosnians. Sadly, nobody says that both the nations have fallen into the political trap of the affluent nations.

Another great tragedy. India's non-violent Freedom movement turned into a Hindu Muslim riot. The British sovereign asserted that there are deep religious differences between Hinduism and Islam and hence the division of India unavoidable. India was divided. A nation with the Muslim majority called itself Pakistan, and the rest of India, which did *not* call itself Hindustan, became the secular India. Within two decades the two-nation theory, built on communal consideration, proved itself wrong. The Islamic state of Pakistan was sub-divided, and Bangladesh emerged as a new nation of the Bengali-speaking Muslims. Soon after the partition, Gandhi, the *mahatma* (the great soul), who was responsible for freeing India from the foreign rule, was killed at his prayer congregation by a fanatic 'Hindu.' With this was born the "selfish gene" of Hindu nationalism. All the three nations today are riven with communal riots, ethnic violence, militancy and terrorism.

Nation is an unnatural construct of imagined 'political communities' thriving on a technical order. It destroys the primordial identities, provides a new identity without which there is only rejection or excommunication. Nation is a false God whose worship does not truly liberate but gives an unduly high opinion of oneself in a dreamlike state of mind. When made above and beyond religion, nationalism creates chaos and confusion all around. Nationalism is responsible for the massacre of about 100 million people during the 20th century. Nations today are engaged in cold war, the heady pursuit of nuclear arms.

Prosperity threatens religion, when it becomes quasi religion itself. There is a clear indication that 'wealth-gaps' are widening, 80 per cent of the world's wealth is in the hands of 20 per cent of its people. The demon of affluence propagates materialism, conspicuous consumerism, and claims that happiness can be brought in this life so why bother for the next. For a religious man, material prosperity is an enemy of faith. Traditional religions emphasise on charity (*dana*), holy poverty and *purusartha*. The religion of the future will have to face the mindless pursuit of material prosperity (*artha* and *kama*).

Man's living relationship with his world demands faith. The ways of the faithful are three: 'acting faith,' 'thinking faith' and 'loving faith,' each deeply rooted in the human heart. Faith brings firmness, solidarity and consistency, enables man to realise that he is not his own foundation. But when one reverts only one's own faith and hates all others equally — making an idol of the self — that becomes 'egoistic faith.' Traditional religions refer to the universality of faith, i.e., faith is not the peculiarity of man. There is a story of Devadatta, the wicked cousin of Lord Buddha, who sent a

mad elephant to kill him, but the elephant became docile in reverence to the sight of Buddha. No such vision exists among the modern man.

The Asian foundation of faith is shaken by westernization, modernization, globalization, secularization and all that cause contention and assertion of militant nationalism. Modernists are turning their backs on traditional religions. Now intellectuals look for a reasonable religion, i.e. secular quasi religion, self-secralization, and instant communication. These are the indicators of the New Age movement which seems lightly organized but widely spread. This movement is a swamp into which every kind of fashionable faith drains. What is now perceived and propagated as “spirituality” is an esoteric or even a bizarre way of preserving the body (machine) and getting away from what is called the “superstition of the liberation of the soul.” It has gained wide popularity in recent years among the modern intellectuals and the city-dwellers, mainly because it responds to trivial anxieties which characterise the urban life. Yet, such weird fashions in belief may make some people realize that religion is an inescapable part of being human.

The so-called “religious pluralism” or multiculturalism in a “global village” is a sociology of religion programmed for self-destruction. The societies subject to this ideology demand homogenization uniformity, and those who dissent to this religious form of fascism are condemned. The modern sociological concept of religious pluralism stands in a striking contrast with the cosmological bases of the old polytheistic religions such as Hinduism, Shinotism and Mahayana Buddhism which accept unity in diversity at the cosmological level. To them plurality is not a historians’ fact but a mathematical equation of infinity. Hinduism, the natural religion of India, is a federation of faiths, each having a cosmic awareness that the existence of Earth is tuned with the cosmic cycle of the Four ages, and human identity is changing with the biological cycle of birth and rebirth. Therefore, when Gandhi said that he is a Hindu, a Christian, a Buddhist, and a Muslim at the same time, he spoke of the soul Truth. This kind of amalgamation is found also in Shintoism, the natural religion of Japan. A Japanese may belong simultaneously to Shinto, Confucianism, Taoism, the Yin-Yang school, Buddhism and other religious traditions. The term ‘Shinto’ is usually translated as the ‘way of the *kami*’ (*shin*: unfathomable spiritual power; *to*: way, path, or teaching). Like Hinduism, in real sense, Shinto is an ensemble of contradictory and yet peculiarly Japanese types of religious beliefs and practices.

Current conditions in Asia indicate that the more a religion is closely organized at pragmatic levels the greater the chance of creating conflict and war, encouraging militancy and religions fundamentalism, causing social instability, and disturbing the world peace. Irreligion masquerades religion. Today, freakish sects and syncretic cults draw people’s attention. But eventually scientific progress will stimulate cosmocentric religions. Thus, for example, Hinduism and Shintoism will find new ways of coping with the demands of the situation and will rise with greater confidence. Revival of religious art and architecture and fascination for festivals and pilgrimage will also strengthen man’s religious quest. Religions truest to their tradition will sur-

vive mainly among individuals and family groups, largely in rural areas and sacred cities. Charismatic persons will be regarded as semi-saviours. Hindu deities, Shinto *kami* and Buddhist *bodhisattvas* will be worshipped by the masses, not for enlightenment but for the amelioration of worldly condition. Gandhi will be remembered and venerated as a great man who achieved India's independence without bloodshed, his method of passive resistance will be applied for untruthful purpose, his design for living will be appreciated but not followed. The modern mindset will not step out from the vicious circle of violence and exploitation. Humanity today is losing its vigour; it is limping, but not dead.

What may appear chaotic outside is not necessarily continuous with the inside. There is another dimension to be considered, and it is the cosmic dimension of diversity. The truth which Gandhi saw was that amidst death life persists, amidst darkness light persists, amidst violence nonviolence persists. Hence God is life, truth, love and light and the supreme good. Following Gandhi's vision, the light can still be seen in the darkness of the modern age.

Beyond the cities of "gold" — where people crave for greater bodily comforts, more and more consumer goods, more and more greed and yet notoriously unhappy, lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive and dependent — there lies the village India. Gandhi's perception of the village was entirely different from the modern man's thinking and planning. He called the villagers the salt of the earth, the sheet-anchor of democracy. Describing them he said:

An age-old culture is hidden under an encrustment of crudeness. Take away the encrustment, remove chronic poverty and his illiteracy and you have the finest specimen of what cultured, cultivated free citizen should be. The moment you talk to them and they begin to speak, you will find wisdom drops from their lips. Behind the crude exterior you will find a deep reservoir of spirituality. I call this culture; you will not find such a thing in the West.

Of the Western city civilization he had warned, as early as 1908, "it is such that one has only to be patient and it will be self-destroyed."

There can be no mistaking the uniqueness of India, which is as large as Europe. With eighteen major languages, over more than three hundred dialects, one billion people and five lakh sixty four thousand villages, it is a real "global village" with a single class of cultural heritage. There are different types of villages such as the "artist village," the "scholastician village," the "ecological oriented village," the "shrine village," the "epic village," the "soft village" and even the "hard village." In these villages light can still be seen. For instance, around Gaya, the place where the Buddha saw the boundless light, violence stinks today in the nostrils of terrorist organizations all over. But there are also "soft villages" of the Kabirpanthis demonstrating an unmistakable atmosphere of peace and tranquility — no murder, no rape, no caste and communal struggle, no rival group crime, no serious type of atrocity, no ban on any productive activity. The apparent positive factors are the gentle village chief, honest people, good green fertile land, multi-caste society, villagers conscious of honour,

prestige and reputation of their village. Such examples of “peace amidst violence” have been found in Tripura, Assam, and even in Kashmir during the recent Kargil war. There has been not a single instance of religious riots in village India. Taking the local realistic view of endogenous reform, one finds that the villagers have not disowned the glory of Gandhi’s, *sarvodaya* movement. The joint-family system has weakened but not dead, and if happiness is taken as a parameter of human development the villagers rank above the city people.

Light is linked with the principle of relativity, not with the principle of absolute-ness. The scientists have predicted the demise of civilization and have expressed alarm regarding the planet in the 21st century. Their prediction is based on the scientific data on ecological condition mathematically treated. This undoubtedly is a limited view of both nature and culture. The sacred science takes us to a different reality which is unmathematical. There is an existential connection between nature and culture. Elements of nature are by themselves inert and incapable of self-movement. They move by an extraneous agent called divine. All living matter exists by the transcendent order, the one which is invisible but knowable through its effect. Like nature, forms of culture are also subject to the transcendent order of life. We can imagine that on moments of forgetfulness some analysis of the best moves, or the good moves or the bad moves. Entering into a deep kind of reasoning, we find that the quality of life in each of the four cosmic ages is different. We live in the age of contra-culture, the age of darkness, the age of instability. Nature and culture are interlinked; the divine law operates in both the realms. In every age the course of change is complex. The proportion of the Three qualities — light, darkness and passion — vary in all ages. The light dispels darkness. Cultures with light will survive and those with passion will become extinct. This is true also of the individuals. Every man is unique in his composition. The variability among individuals is extreme. Culture selects only those whom it tends. Every selected character is fully exercised by human culture. The individuals placed under the powerful One (God) will survive human chaos. The larger organization with technology at the centre will collapse, and the smaller ones will stay throughout the world. According to the Indian astronomical calculation, the *kali* age of darkness has still to go a long way. So, no dissolution of the Earth in the near future. It is time to mend ways.

## Appendix

### The Hindu Eons of Time

1 twinkling of an eye = 1 *nimesha* or *ksana*

2 *nimesha* = 1 *truti*

10 *trutis* = 1 *prana* (breath)

6 *pranas* = 1 *vinadika*

60 *vinadika* = 1 *nadika* or *ghati* (24 minutes)

60 *nadika* = 1 *ahoratra* (day and night).

15 *ahoratra* = 1 *paksha*  
 2 *paksha* = 1 *masa* (month)  
 6 *masa* = 1 *dakshinayana*  
 6 *masa* = 1 *uttarayana*  
 2 *ayana* = 1 *varsa* (year)  
 1 *dakshinayana* = 1 divine night  
 1 *uttarayana* = 1 divine day  
 30 *varsa* = 1 divine month  
 360 *varsa* = 1 divine year  
 3,030 *varsa* = 1 divine year of *saptarsi* (7 sages)  
 9,090 *varsa* = 1 divine year of *dhruva* (polar)  
 96,000 *varsa* = 1 divine thousand year  
 17,28,000 *varsa* = 1 *satyayuga* (*krita yuga*), the First age  
 12,96,000 *varsa* = 1 *tretayuga*, the Second age  
 8,64,000 *varsa* = 1 *dwaparyuga*, the Third age  
 4,32,000 *varsa* = 1 *kaliyuga*, the Fourth age  
 43,20,000 *varsa* = 1 *chaturyugi* (a period of four ages)  
 30,67,20,000 *varsa* = 1 *manvantara* (71 *chaturyugi*)  
 4,29,40,80,000 *varsa* = 14 *manvantara*  
 2,59,20,000 *varsa* = 1 *manvantarsandhyansa* (divine evening)

One thousand of *manvantara* represent the Day of the Creator Brahma and another thousand as his Night. This is all a matter of arithmetical computation reduced to the limits of accurate expression. According to the Indian astronomical calculations 1,96,08,53,064 human years have elapsed since the beginning of creation, and these may be said to be the age of the solar system or roughly of our Earth. In terms of modern science it is something like 2,000 million years (Agrawala 1963).

## References

- Agrawala, Vasudeva S. *Matsya Purana: a Study*. Varanasi, All India Kashiraj Trust, 1963.  
 Dandekar, R. N. *Insights into Hinduism*. Delhi, Ajanta Publication, 1979.  
 Davies, Paul and John Gribbin. *The Matter Myth: Beyond Chaos and Complexity*. London, Penguin Books, 1992.  
 Gandhi, M. K. *All Men are Brothers*. Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1992.  
 ——— *India of My Dream*. Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1992.  
 Hume, Robert Ernest. *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*. Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1984.  
 Kitagawa, Joseph M. *On Understanding Japanese Religion*. Princeton University Press, 1987.  
 Lalye, P. G. 'The Panca Mahabhuta'. In: *Prakriti — the Integral Vision*, vol. 4, (ed.) Jayant V. Narlikar. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995.  
 Larre, Claude. The Empirical Apperception of Time and the Concept of History in Chinese Thought. In: *Cultures and Time*. Paris, The Unesco Press, 1976.  
 Panikkar, Raimundo. *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari*. London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1977.  
 ——— 'Time and History in the Tradition of India: Kala and Karma (with an appendix by Bettina Baumer, on the Apperception of Time)'. In: *Cultures and Time*. Paris, The Unesco Press, 1976.  
 Raine, Kathleen. *W.B. Yeats and the Learning of the Imagination*. Ipswich — England, Golgonooza

- Press, 1999.
- Reader, Ian. *The Simple Guide to Shinto*. Kent-England, Global Books Limited, 1998.
- Sadakata, Akira. *Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origin*. Tokyo, Kosei Publishing Co, 1997.
- Saraswati, Baidyanath. *Contributions to the Understanding of Indian Civilization*. Dharwar, Kanataka University, 1970.
- *Traditions of Tirthas in India: the Anthropology of Hindu Pilgrimage*. Varanasi, N. K. Bose Memorial Foundation, 1983.
- ‘Ritual Space: Tribal-Nontribal Context’. In: *Concepts of Space: Ancient and Modern*, (ed.) Kapila Vatsyayan. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1991.
- ‘Ksetra’. In: *Kalatattvakosa: a Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of the Indian Arts*, (ed.) Bettina Baumer. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1992.
- ‘Culture as Inverted Tree’. In: *The Contribution by Religions to the Culture of Peace*. Barcelona, UNESCO, 1993.
- *The Sacred Science of Man*. Calcutta, Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology, 1993.
- ‘Elements of Nature and the Order of Culture’. In: *Prakriti — the Integral Vision*, vol. 5, (ed.) Baidyanath Saraswati. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1995.
- ‘The Living Universe: a Unitary Vision’. In: *Universal Responsibility: a Collection of Essays to Honour Tenjin Gyatso the XIVth Dalai Lama*, (eds.) Ramesh Chandra Tiwari, Krishnanath. New Delhi, The Dalai Lama’s 60th Birth Celebration Committee, 1995.
- ‘Ritual Time: Exegesis of Time and Great Time’. In: *Concepts of Time: Ancient and Modern*, (ed.) Kapila Vatsyayan. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1996.
- ‘Making the Nation Above and Beyond Culture’. *Cultural Policy* (The Netherlands), 3(1): 133–143 (1996).
- *The Sacred Science of Nature*. Shillong, North-Eastern Hill University, 1997.
- ‘Toward a Theory of Visual Anthropology’. *Anthropologist* (New Delhi), 1(1): 19–24 (1999).
- *Village India: Identification and Enhancement of Cultural Heritage*. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1999.
- Sarma, S. R. ‘Sunya, Mathematical Aspect’. In: *Kalatattvakosa: a Lexicon of Fundamental Concepts of the Indian Arts*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1992.
- Sethi, V. K. *Kabir: the Weaver of God’s Name*. Amritsar, Soami Satsang Beas, 1984.
- Tamaru, Noriyoshi and David Reid (eds.). *Religion in Japanese Culture: Where Living Traditions Meet a Changing World*. Tokyo, Kodansha International, 1996.
- Vatsyayan, Kapila. ‘Indian Art: The One and the Many’. In: *The Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture*. London, The Nehru Centre.
- Vaudeville, Ch. *Kabir*, vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 1974.