

# **Vedic Monotheism, not Polytheism: Upadhyaya**

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*Bhavāni Charan Bānerji (1861-1907). The Bengali Brāhman boy came under the influence of Keshab Chandra. Banerji became a teacher in a school at Hyderabad in Sind. He became an Anglican at the age of 30, and before the end of 1891 he had become a Roman Catholic, had chosen the name Theophilus. He translated it 'Brahmabandhab', 'the friend of Brahman'. In 1894, a Catholic sanyasin in saffron cloths, assumed the name, Upadhyaya (Teacher): Brahmabandhab Upādhyāya*

## **Not the Sun-god but God of the Sun**

Bahrmabandab Upadhyaya perceives in the apparent polytheism of the Vedas the hidden monotheism. There are so many gods spoken of, e. g. the Thunder-god, the Dawn-god, the sun-god etc. Does the Vedas inculcate the worship of subordinate deities?<sup>i</sup> No. Upadhyaya writes: “Vedas teach Theism, not Polytheism. The Vedic Rishis did not Chant hymns in praise of the Thunder-god, the Usha [viz. Dawn]-god and the Sun-god, but the God of Thunder and of the Dawn and of the Sun.”<sup>ii</sup>

## **Powers of the Nature (gods), force of the One Absolute**

The theism of the Vedic sages is ‘natural theism’ not the modern abstract and more refined theism. The Vedic sages saw the one Supreme God at times as thunder, dawn etc. „the Usha (dawn) descending from the skies clad in her russet mantle, the thunder-bolt tearing asunder the mountain cliffs with deafening roar, the sun ascending in heavens seated in his fiery chariot - . . . “.iii The experience of the power of natural phenomena led them to the natural/sensual (not abstract) awesome experience of the might of God in an immediate and personal way. The Vedic Seers began to see the different forces that animate the nature, symbolised in the Gods, as the force of the One Absolute.<sup>iv</sup>

## **God’s power reflects in the Nature as if many (gods)**

When the one sun shines it is reflected in the oceans, rivers, lakes and ponds as many. God’s powers reflects in all the nature as gods. “The sun and the moon, the dawn and the twilight, the seas and mountains were to them real reflections of the Divinity. The splendour of the orbs was God’s splendour. It was His immensity that appeared in the shoreless ocean, His invisible majesty that was made visible in the Himalayan heights, His holiness that shone in the fire. It was He who assumed in their Vision these various modes of being. Just as the name sun reproduces its countless images in the bosom of rivers, lakes and pools below, so the infinite Beauty has multiplied itself in the lights and shades,

unities and varieties, harmonies and divisions of this universe. He remains one and undivided and still he becomes many through reflection or communication.”<sup>v</sup>

### **Not personal gods, but personal experiences of God’s powers**

Whenever the sages saw any striking natural phenomena<sup>vi</sup> they “immediately realised the Free Agency causing them to come into being. . . . Their Theism was natural and vigorous, which did not allow an indefinite chain to stand between the creature and the Creator. The glorious break of day at once led them to the vision of a personal Being whom they called the Dawn-God, because He manifested himself in the rosy streaks of the dawn. They worshipped the Supreme under the name of Thunder-God because they felt his awful presence in the flash of lightning and the clap of thunder.”<sup>vii</sup>

### **The natural powers (gods), apertures to see the Author**

The Rishis saw a deeper connection between the manifest and the unmanifest.<sup>viii</sup> Upadhyaya writes: “Vedic Rishis in their rapturous apostrophies invoked the sun to open his golden gates and show the Person of Glory residing in the womb of splendour. They saw in the enveloping vapour the mysterious Varuna - the Pervading One. The genial rains which soothe the thirst of the parched soil revealed to them the Rain-God - Indra. Every remarkable phenomenon of nature was an aperture through which they saw the Author of nature.”<sup>ix</sup>

### **Worshipping gods: touching the ‘Untouchable’**

The Supreme Being for the sages was neither an abstraction nor a person who lived far, far away isolated.\* Whenever they touched the nature they touched the ultimate mystery behind the nature then and there without going through a process of abstraction: “They touched Him in the zephyr they embraced Him in the effulgence of the sun; they were immersed in Him in the waters of the Indus.”<sup>xi</sup>

Upadhyaya sees the nascent natural theism of Vedas inspiring the development of the transcendental idea of God in the Upanishads. In the Vedas in general there is a spirit of theism which was later developed into the Upanishads’ transcendent conception of the metaphysical unity of the Godhead.<sup>xii</sup>

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i Cf. Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 281.

ii Cf. Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 282.

iii Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 282.

iv Cf. Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 282.

v Upadhyaya, B. "Vedic Worship," *Sophia*: (15 July 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 286.

vi Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 282.

vii Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 282.

viii "The Rishis saw a deeper connection between the manifest and the unmanifest The sun and the moon, the dawn and the twilight, the seas and mountains were to them real reflections of the Divinity." Upadhyaya, B. "Vedic Worship," *Sophia*: (15 July 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 286.

ix Upadhyaya, B. "Vedic Worship," *Sophia*: (15 July 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 286.

x "To the Rishis this world was the expression of the divine nature. They beheld Him everywhere and their beholding was worshipping. The supreme Being was neither an abstraction nor a person who lived far, far away isolated by his regal dignity." Upadhyaya, B. "Vedic Worship," *Sophia*: (15 July 1900), in Lipner,

J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 286.

xi Upadhyaya, B. "Vedic Worship," *Sophia*: (15 July 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 286.

xii Upadhyaya says that one can safely affirm "that the Vedas are imbued with, the spirit of Theism, though we must admit that we do not find in them that transcendent conception of the metaphysical unity of the Godhead which we meet with in the Upanishads."

Upadhyaya, B. "Questions and Answers [Vedic Theism]," *Sophia*: (16 June 1900), in Lipner, J., and Gispert-Sauch, ed. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya*, 2002. (Vol. II), p. 283.