

## Theories in Comparative Mythology

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**[Page 1]** THE contributions of Professor Max Müller and Mr. Andrew Lang to the literature of comparative mythology and their recent controversy in the *Nineteenth Century*, have done much towards a general comprehension of the labours of scholars in that field of study. The solar hypothesis, as well as the anthropological theory, has been placed before the general reader by able exponents; but the subject cannot be said to have been settled one way or another. In these circumstances a few observations from the point of view of the mythologists of India, or Purānists as they may be called, will not, perhaps, be entirely out of place. Samskrt scholars are aware that, in the ancient literature of India, especially of the Purānic period, there **[Page 2]** is an attempt at a rational explanation of some of the myths which, in various disguises, have roamed over the whole range of ancient literature and have counterparts yet enduring among the less advanced families of the human race. The chief ground upon which consideration is denied to the Purānic interpretation of myths, is that it leads to mysticism. But it would seem that, if the interpretation is consistent with itself and otherwise satisfactory, it possesses great interest and importance, as throwing light upon the psychological evolution of man and quite independent of the merits of the philosophical doctrines it embodies.

That psychology is the most important element in the science of comparative mythology, has been practically agreed upon by the rival schools. But they are at issue as to its application. The method of the solar theorists is to trace a mythic name to its root etymologically, and then to build up an interpretation of the myths clustering round that name, with the help of the rational imagination of a cultured mind of the present day. Thus, the psychology applied by the etymologists to the construction of comparative mythology is the psychology of **[Page 3]** the civilization of the nineteenth century. It would no doubt be the psychology of the age of myths, if it could be proved that psychology is not governed by the law of evolution, and that knowledge does but expand in surface and never grows in depth. Without going into abstruse problems, it may be asked whether, in point of fact, during the development of a human being from infancy to old age, the mind itself remaining unchanged only receives an accretion of facts. There is little doubt how every careful psychologist will reply to the question. If the mind had been constant in quality, there would have been no value in education, and the human race accumulating all knowable facts would have reached its absolute limit of perfection in a few centuries.

The method of the anthropologists seems to be founded on a sounder psychological basis. Myths of the world are to be collected, as far as trustworthy information is available about them. The psychology of the peoples believing in myths has to be studied, and then inferences are to be drawn according to recognized canons of reason. This is briefly the method of the anthropologist. "Employing this method", **[Page 4]** says Mr. Andrew Lang, "we study the myths and the psychology of the savages". **[Nineteenth Century, January, 1886]**. But the savages are not the only peoples for whom myths are truths. Accepting the principle adopted by the anthropologists, it is clear that the best source for information as to the psychological condition of a people who believe in myths or have believed in them, is the professed

psychological treatises produced by the people themselves. Clearly no such treatises are to be found, so long as the investigation is confined entirely within the savage races. But India is a country where, through the ages, myths have prevailed as genuine articles of belief and are so accepted by the bulk of its present Hindu population. A mass of writings of the ancient Indian psychologists, who implicitly believed in gods and the marvellous powers of man, has come down to us, and a large portion of it is available to the European student through translations. The purely rationalistic foundation of the Sāmkhya School of Indian philosophy is admitted by all, and yet it treats of gods and super-human powers in the same way as any question of pure psychology — sensation, [Page 5] for instance. [Sāmkhya Karikā, Colebrooke and Wilson, pp. 113, 83. ) — It may also be mentioned that most of the Purānas and Tantras have the thread of Sāmkhya philosophy running through and through them. References and citations are useless, as most of these writings are as yet untranslated. [ The student of Samskrt may be referred to Visnu Purāna., Bhāgavata Purāna *passim*, and especially to Kūrma Purāna, Ch. xlii — iii, Padma P. Sarga Kh. Ch. ix, Brahmajñana Tantra *passim*]. A study of Samskrt is therefore of invaluable service to comparative mythology, but, it will not yield its best fruit unless pursued in a spirit of psychological research. [ An instance will illustrate the position. The technical term Buddhi of the Sāmkhya philosophy is universally translated as intellect or its equivalent. But this Buddhi evolves egotism. It is difficult to see how there can be intellect anterior to egotism. Before this difficulty can be fairly chargeable on the philosopher, it must be proved that he would have used the word intellect if writing in English. For want of such proof he may, at best, be accused of unintelligibility, but his view ought not to be distorted by mistranslation]

Samskrtists who accept the solar hypothesis ignore the current Indian interpretation of myths on account of its mystical tendencies. But what reason have we for supposing that mysticism was not the religious faith of the ancient races? It is not necessary to affirm that it was so; nor is it justifiable to assume that it was not. The fact is there are as strong grounds for accepting mysticism as a [Page 6] working hypothesis as any other. Professor Max Müller has nobly won his mead of praise by his scholarly researches in a region of thought so little accessible to the public. And that is exactly the reason why the present charge of omission obtains relevancy.

When the taboo is removed and the Purānic hypothesis is allowed to enter the lists as a theory deserving of consideration, it will find an ally in the anthropologists, whose ranks it will strengthen and enlarge, and whose present generalisations it will in some respects modify. Briefly stated, the Purānic method starts with the postulate that there is a basic unity in all things that live. That the Indian Purānists believed their pantheistic postulate to be the absolute truth does not concern the comparative mythologist otherwise than as a historical fact. With its philosophical aspect he has nothing to do. For the Purānist building upon this pantheistic foundation the natural corollary follows. Whatever can be discovered in man by psychological analysis must also exist everywhere around him. All myths are then to be explained as embodying some account of the psychological elements [Page 7] of man's constitution and their actions and reactions with the whole of nature. That this is the method of mythologists in all countries admits of no doubt. This statement, so far as it bears upon the position of Indian Purānists, can be demonstrated by a reference to the Adhyātma Rāmāyana [ The Nrsimha, Rāma and Gopāla Upanisads may also be cited as instances] which forms part of the Brahmānda Purāna. It is an attempt to give a spiritual interpretation to the great epic of Vālmīki, upon the basis of Sāmkhya philosophy.

To develop the Purānic method fully would require an introductory treatise on Sāmkhya, which forms the logical, though not the chronological, groundwork of the psychology and ontology of all peoples believing

in myths. All the peculiarities of the savage mind, — his belief in the medicine-man and his powers, his Totemism and other fantastic forms of the doctrine of metempsychosis — have all philosophical counterparts in Kapila's Sāmkhya system. Here we must be content with general statements; to go into details would violate the present plan. [Page 8]

The peoples under consideration believe that there is in nature a universal, immutable principle of consciousness, inhering in a universal substance which evolves, in obedience, to forces of which it is itself the embodiment, this universe of names and forms. In the process of this evolution, the principle of consciousness has the appearance of itself evolving, in the same way as light, proceeding from a stationary source, appears to change with the changes of the surface on which it falls. If the material of the objective universe, or rather that part of it which forms the human body and its surroundings, is taken as the reflecting surface, and the light as spirit or consciousness, then the forces which produce change, as well as the source of light, will represent the soul. So long as the principle of consciousness or the notion of ego appears to follow the body and its destiny with the notion of identity attached to it, the life of the human being continues subject to the bonds of matter; when by abstraction it is realized that consciousness remains constant through all possible changes, the soul is supposed to be freed from such bonds. [Page 9] Besides this, it is to be remembered that in deriving an infinite variety of forms from one common substance, a vast and complicated scheme of correlations naturally arises. Of course these doctrines in their present form will not be detected in the self-consciousness of the savage. But the germs or survivals (whatever may be ultimately proved) are there. And it is a safe inference, from observation of philosophical systems evolved among races believing in myths, that a similar result will follow, if a philosopher arises among savages.

It must, moreover, be stated at the outset, that if the Purānic method is right, many myths will present certain inconsistencies, difficult of explanation. For every disorder in the psychological machinery is bound to be reflected in the constructions of myths. But these difficulties and inconsistencies are not of a description calculated to blind us as to the direction in which the explanation lies.

Mr. Andrew Lang [ *Nineteenth Century*, January, 1886 ] — has clearly shown how premature it is for Mr. Max Müller to claim that “the solar theory is no longer a theory, but has now been recognised as a fact”. He [Page 10] has also demonstrated the insecurity of the equation, Ahanā = Daphne = Dawn. We shall, therefore, for the purpose of testing the comparative merits of the Solar and the Purānic theories adopt another group of myths which Mr. Max Müller puts forward in support of his theory. The story of Purūravas and Urvas'ī, found in the S'atapatha Brāhmana, has been claimed as a solar myth and identified with the legend of Orpheus and Eurydikē. Mr. Max Müller interprets Purūravas as the sun. “That Purūravas is the appropriate name of a solar hero”, he says, “requires hardly any proof”. [ *Chips from a German Workshop*, ii, 101 ] He gives in support of this statement an etymological argument which, however, does not seem quite satisfactory. [ “Purūravas”, the learned pandit goes on, “meant the same thing as πολυδευκης — endowed with much light; for though *ravas* is usually applied to sound, yet the root, *ru*, which originally meant to cry, is also applied to colour in the sense of loud or crying colour, *i.e.*, red. This application of the root, *ru* to colour is sought to be established from two quotations from the Rgveda. The first of them says, “the fire cries out with light” (Rv. vi, 3, 6). Here it is difficult to see how crying is applied to light and not to the crackling and hissing noise of burning fire. The next is, “the sun cries like a new-born babe” (Rv. ix. 74, 1). Nor is this ground firmer. There is nothing to show that the text ascribes crying to light and not to awakening Nature, who hails with a cry of joy the new-born king of day. In further justification of the position he compares *ruber*, *rufus*, *Lith-vanda*, *O. H. G. rot*, *rudhira* ῥουθρός;

and the Samskrt ravi, sun. The last word must clearly be excluded; for the connection of ravi with *ru* is itself in question; the current Indian etymology of the word is quite different. As regards the other words, if they are to be traced to the root *ru*, it must be from the homonymous root, meaning to kill. The Samskrit rudhira, blood, is commonly derived from *rudha*, to kill]. He then contends that Purūravas [Page 11] calls himself Vasistha, and “Vasistha, though best known as the name of the Vedic poet, is the superlative of *Vasu*, bright, and as such also a name of the sun”. That Vasistha is the sun is further proved according to the same authority, by the fact that he is said to be the son of Mitra (day), Varuna (night), and Urvasī; and the offspring of the Dawn is an epithet of the sun! [Chips, ii. 101]. Now, If this pedigree is a justification there is another Vedic poet, Agastya, who has exactly the same parentage, and must be equally entitled to the honour. But there is nothing either in the etymology of the name Agastya or in the myths about him, which would support the solar theory. The myth, which makes him the regent of Canopus, cannot justify the identification, for, in that case, Dhruva, the regent of the Pole star and son of king Uttānapāda, who gives every indication of having been a real man, [Page 12] must also share the same fate. May it not therefore be that the word *Vasistha*, when applied to king Purūravas, means simply resplendent with light or glory without any reference to the sun ?

No doubt the solar theory will gain considerable strength, if Urvasī is clearly demonstrated to be the Dawn. Rejecting the etymology of the name as given by the great grammarian, Pānini, [ The ground for this rejection, however, does not seem very strong. There is no such word as *urva* from which Pānini derives the name, is Mr. Max Müller's argument. But he overlooks that the grandfather of Jamadagni was called *Urva*. The other objection founded upon the want of conformity between this name and other words formed by the same inflection, is not conclusive. In every language a number of irregularities is always to be found ]. Mr. Max Müller proceeds: “I therefore accept the common Indian explanation by which this name is derived from *Uru*, wide, εύρου and a root as', to pervade, and thus compare *Uru* as'i with another frequent epithet of the Dawn, *Urūcī*, the feminine of *Uru-aci*, far-going”. [Chips, ii. 101] — “The common Indian explanation of the name” is to be found in the *Harivamsa*, where it is derived from *ūru* (not *Uru*), meaning a totally different thing. Accepting this corrected etymology, how can we follow Mr. Max Müller, [Page 13] when he identifies *Urvasī*, which does not mean wide-going, with *Eurydikē* and the Dawn ? But of that hereafter. It is held that “the best proof that *Urvasī* was the Dawn is the legend told of her and her love to Purūravas, a story that is true only of the sun and the Dawn”. [Chips, ii, p. 103]. The story is well told by Mr. Max Müller in his usual fascinating style. The incidents that relate to our present purpose are, that *Urvasī*, a heavenly nymph, marries a mortal, king Purūravas. She is allowed to live with him only so long as she does not see him unclothed. Her celestial friends wishing her return from earth, one night pretend to steal her animal pets. In anguish she cries out “Is there no man, no hero, on earth that my darlings should be stolen?” Purūravas, unclothed as he was, jumps up, exclaiming, “Let it not be said the earth is without heroes, so long as Purūravas lives”. Just then a flash of lightning caused by the heavenly beings shows Purūravas to *Urvasī*, and the condition is broken; Purūravas is disconsolate at the loss of his beloved. After some time he meets her in [Page 14] the disguise of a bird, but she soon reveals herself to him. She, however, refuses to come back saying, “I am gone like the first of dawns. ..I am hard to be caught like the wind”. Finally she relents, and through her instruction Purūravas becomes an immortal by initiation into the mysteries of the *Gandharvas*, celestial beings tied in kinship to *Urvasī*.

*Urvasi's* comparison of herself to the first of dawns may appear at first sight to support the solar theory, but on close examination it will be found to tend quite the other way. In this figure of speech Mr. Max Müller sees “a strange glimmering of the old myth in the mind of the poet”. But as he also says that in a *Rgvedic* text the word *Urvasī* is used in the plural, signifying many dawns, it is difficult to say why the

poet was content with glimmering, when so little trouble would have brought him into the noon-day blaze. On the other hand, if the poet had any suspicion that his Urvas'ī was the Dawn, would he have marred the poetical effect of the passage by using a bare-faced simile, especially as his object was not to interpret [Page 15] the myth, but to show the importance of a peculiar rite? The fact is, Urvas'ī never meant the Dawn, otherwise, the author of S'atapatha Brāhmana, a work so closely connected with the Vedas, would surely have known it. The theory of bad memory cannot operate to an unlimited extent, especially with regard to an idea which once becomes fixed by a position in the most important literature of a people. Hence it is reasonable to believe that no trace of the solar character of Urvas'ī is to be found in the Vedas.

The connection of this legend with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydikē is not very striking, so far as incidents are concerned. In both cases the husband loses his wife (though only temporarily in one myth) under circumstances which have something to do with a look. Etymological considerations do not strengthen the bond. Professor Max Müller, admitting that the name Orpheus "is inexplicable", yet identifies him with the Vedic Rbhu or Arbhu. In view of the admission it would appear that the identification has proceeded entirely from the similarity of the sound of the names. The question, therefore, remains [Page 16] wide open. Eurydikē is interpreted, through its etymological meaning, as the Dawn, whom the Vedas often call the "wide-going". This by itself is no firm foundation for the solar theory. But we must not forget that in spite of all we have said, the theory will be greatly strengthened, if both these myths sufficiently respond to one and the same solar interpretation. In fact that may be called the crucial test.

Mr. Max Müller's interpretation of these myths has been generally followed by the solar theorists with but slight divergencies in matters of detail. The essence of the interpretation lies in the "Correlations of Sun and the Dawn, the love between the mortal and the immortal, and the identity between the Morning Dawn and the Evening Twilight". [ *Chips*, ii. 98]. The great objection to this generalisation is the ascription of mortality to the Sun and not to the Dawn, who, under the name of Eurydikē, actually dies, bitten by the serpent of night [ *Ibid.*, ii. 127] or winter-frost, [ *Cox, Myth of the Ar. Na.* p. 74] as it is [Page 17] variously understood. Apart from that, an examination of the details does not yield any better results. The solar hypothesis can make the Orphic myth intelligible only by taking Eurydikē as the Evening Twilight, beloved of the Sun. She is killed by the Serpent of Darkness, and the Sun, wandering the livelong night in search of her, recovers her the following morning, but only to lose her again through the deadly influence of his look, as he mounts the sky. This, in substance, is the explanation given by Mr. Max Müller. But it has fatal defects. Etymologically Eurydikē can only be connected with the Dawn, as we have seen. Her conversion into the Evening Twilight is due to a subsequent process. The Dawn idea ought, therefore, to be predominant in the myth, especially as the essential features of it must be supposed to have originated before the separation of the Āryan people into different groups. The analogy of original Āryan words which have preserved different shades of their primitive meanings in different languages, is evidently inapplicable to the present case. Because, being connected with religious emotionalism, [Page 18] myths are better guarded by the conservative instinct of human nature than mere words. The least that may be asked for, before the case is closed, is some indication, in Greek mythology itself, that Eurydikē at any time meant the Dawn primarily and the Evening Twilight only in a subordinate manner. In the absence of such proof a comparison of this myth with the legend of Purūravas makes the weakness of the solar theory more glaring. Purūravas is reunited to Eurydikē in the end. To preserve consistency with the preceding myth, this can only take place in the evening. Urvas'ī is therefore the Dawn, who disappears from the Sun by gazing upon his increasing splendour. But at the end of the day she reappears as the Evening Twilight to be happily reunited to him. Remembering how short-lived the Evening Twilight is in

India, it is quite certain that it would never have struck the imagination of an Indian poet to select that as the fitting period for such an event. It is not maintained by the solar theorists that the myths were carried by the Āryan emigrants, full-formed from their original home and not developed in their [Page 19] countries of adoption. We hold that if the solar theory be true, the myth of Urvas'ī and Purūravas would never have received its present form in India, and it can be easily seen from what has been said whether this position is tenable.

To remedy some of these inconsistencies, later writers of the Solar school have explained both Urvas'ī and Eurydikē as the Morning Dawn, on whose mist the smile of the Sun plays in many-coloured ripples, [Goldstucker, Dictionary, S. V. Apsaras; (Cox, Myth. of the Ar. Na. pp. 32, 218] "but the brightness of his glare is fatal, as he rises higher in the heaven". This consistency, however, loses the unity of poetical conception, so beautifully preserved in Mr. Max Müller's explanation.

Nor is this consistency long kept up. No sooner is it born than it becomes the mother of inconsistencies. Sir George Cox explains the serpent that killed Eurydikē as winter-frost, thus stretching out the story over different seasons. In view of the community of origin of the two myths under discussion, the same explanation ought to apply to Purūravas and [Page 20] Urvas'ī; or reason must be shown for the non-application. Urvas'ī is neither killed by the serpent of winter-frost, nor does she finally become lost to Purūravas. The Solar theory, therefore, has proved its inability to construct a valid induction to explain the origin of these myths. It makes totally different conditions produce the same result without any psychological necessity. True, objects affect different persons differently, and the workings of the law of association of ideas is almost inexplicable. But before the Solar theory can be established upon a scientific foundation, it is reasonable to expect that, starting upon a given basis, it would explain some of the divergent operations of a common law.

What conclusively proves the insufficiency of the Solar hypothesis in regard to myths of this family, is the Orpheus' story, which occurs in the Mahābhārata. [Adi P. viii-ix ]. Curiously enough it does not seem to have attracted notice. But its incidents agree so well with the Orphic legend, except in the ending, that, in the absence of any *vera causa* to explain the [Page 21] difference, the Solar theory receives a great blow.

Ruru, a Brāhmana of the family of Bhrgu, is betrothed to the beautiful Pramadvarā, daughter of the celestial nymph Menakā, and adopted by the sage Sthūlakēs'a. A few days before marriage while playing with her companion, she accidentally treads upon a sleeping serpent, hidden in the grass. The bite of the enraged reptile proves fatal. Ruru in his grief roams wildly in the forest, uttering most pathetic lamentations. Attracted by his sorrow, a heavenly being appears before him, and says his bride will be restored to him, if he consents to give her half the length of days that yet remains to him. Ruru readily agrees, and at the intercession of the immortal, the King of Death sends back Pramadvarā. They live a happy, united life, Ruru engaging in the destruction of serpents to avenge what he has suffered. His career of slaughter comes to a close, when he discovers in one of his intended victims a human being undergoing punishment for some crime.

Applying the method of Mr. Max Müller and his school, all the elements of a Solar [Page 22] myth are to be found here. The name Ruru contains the root, *ru*. Bhrgu can be etymologically connected with the Sun. Pramadvarā maddens the hearts of men with delight and is, therefore, a fit epithet of the Dawn. Besides, she is the daughter of a celestial nymph of the Apsaras order, interpreted by Goldstucker [ Dictionary, B.

V. Apsaras] “as personifications of the vapours which are attracted by the Sun and form into mists or clouds”. The equations Ruru = Sun and Pramadvarā = Dawn, can therefore be put forward as safe. But then the ending of the story resists the Solar theory to the last. And it may here be added that, as in the grouping of languages, grammatical structure is more important than vocabulary, so in the interpretation of myths incidents dominate our etymology. Perhaps the Solar theory will here call in the aid of the *deus ex machina*, the theory of forgetfulness. But there is such a thing as riding a theory to death and bursting a hypothesis by overstrain.

It is very difficult to accede unlimited operation to the theory of forgetfulness, [Page 23] especially when applied to the Brāhmanas, who have always shown such a remarkable development of the faculty of memory.

To proceed to examine the working power of the Purānic method. The resemblance between the myths deepens by the introduction of the legend of Ruru. The incidents allow the arrangement of the myths in a certain order. Orpheus, who does not win back his lost Eurydikē, stands at one end, and Ruru, who lives happily with Pramadvarā, restored by death, at the other. The link between them is supplied by Purūravas, who is re-united to Urvasī only when he achieves his own immortality with the help of celestial beings.

In interpreting these myths we must remember what attributes were attached to the soul by the religions of the peoples among whom they were current. From the present point of view, religions are to be looked upon merely as philosophical and emotional representations of the psychology of their followers. Proceeding upon this basis no great difficulty will be experienced on the way. The male characters naturally enough stand for the [Page 24] Man and the female ones for the Soul. It will be remembered how frequently, in the languages of the world, words signifying the soul have the feminine form. Orpheus is the Man, whose life begins in union with the Soul. But in the fair meadow of manhood, by the side of the running river of life, Eurydikē is taken away from him, killed by the serpent of sin and passion, which lies hidden among the beautiful things of this earth. The unhappy man, who once realizes the higher life of the soul, faintly though it be, can know no joy while away from her. He grows a disconsolate and restless wanderer on the face of the earth, making the heavens ring again with the agonized outpourings of his heart. In the midst of his suffering, some compassionate soulful man gives him the glad tidings she may yet come back, if he can, with patient self-abnegation, pass through trials and sorrows. Manfully he makes the effort, but, alas! he fails, the desire for present enjoyment is too strong for him and his faith is feeble. He is not content cheerfully to struggle through the dark valley of tribulation, with the full consciousness of the unseen presence of the [Page 25] soul resting upon him. But the doubting eye of the mortal must seek to behold the immortal. The last hope now flies from him. Eurydikē leaves him for ever and he falls a victim to the jealous fury of the Thracian women, the Passions, to whom full sovereignty was denied by the memory of the lost soul. When a man rises high, great is his fall, when he does fall.

Eurydikē, the wide-pervading, is a fit epithet of the soul, for whom, the religions say, the mortal limitations of time and space do not exist. The etymology of the name Orpheus is admittedly obscure. It is probable, then, in view of Orphic traditions, that he was a living human being, who taught this doctrine and thus became a mythical man, when his doctrine became a myth, and it is also justifiable to assume that many incidents of his life were laid under tribute to furnish a mythical garb for his doctrine. These remarks, with obvious alterations, apply to all myths of this class.

The love of Purūravas and Urvasī can be explained as another aspect of the same doctrine. The soul remains in subjection to the man, only so long as the truth about his nature is not realized. While she lives with [Page 26] him, his life is filled with noble and daring deeds of heroic goodness, although he does not know the source from which his inspiration comes. King Purūravas is a man of kingly acts and not of philosophic thought. He has a soul, but, in the pride of his manhood, fancies the charms of the soul are his subjects, to be controlled by the human part of his nature. The soul remains his obedient and loving wife, until a flash of inspiration descends from her true home, sent by her kindred. The true character of this life becomes manifest. There is no real satisfaction in this life, even when illuminated by great and good deeds. For all things have an end. To work for humanity is also vain; for what is the good of fattening the animal that will be one day sacrificed? Nothing will escape the universal doom. "The Sun himself will sink with age". Man will not be satisfied with aught but immortality. He never will know contentment, until united to his beloved in a home, where the pulse of time no longer beats. This thought casts Purūravas from the peak of his human greatness into the depths of despondency. The man of action loses his soul in the solitude [Page 27] of his heart. Urvasī leaves Purūravas, because he wished her to come down to his level without raising himself to hers. When Urvasī goes, the joys of life take their flight after her. But in moments when the pangs of this joyless life grow intense, visions of the soul, veiled in disguise, burst upon the mortal man — maddening visions as difficult to be caught as "the wind". [Cf. *Bhagavad Gītā* VI, 34: "The mind is as difficult to control as the wind"] But the perfect union does not come until the celestial beings, the higher faculties, open the gate of immortality. Then, indeed, "the one bound to death" rejoices in heaven, and his rejoicing will increase, as others tread the path he has followed.

Ruru is a Brāhmana and thus a man of contemplation, unlike king Purūravas, who will not let it be said that the earth is without heroes so long as *he* lives. A temporary check is given to the even flow of his philosophic life, by the serpent of Passion that over-masters him, but he soon recovers himself and establishes a greater harmony between the man and the soul than ever existed before; the length of days is evenly divided [Page 28] between him and his bride. He is not for long in need of help from without; his philosophical training comes to the rescue and the strength of soul wells out from the springs within. When he recovers his lost bride, he slaughters a vast number of serpents, and desists from the moral crusade only when he perceives the educational value of sin and suffering. In tearing out deep-seated evils without patient judiciousness, we may pull out the roots of much that is good.

The comparative study of these myths throws into relief an important feature common to them. The Muse-born Orpheus is a poet and musician, an artist; king Purūravas is a hero, while the Brāhmana Ruru is a teacher.

Thus, they represent the three types of the flower of humanity, the artistic, the practical, and the contemplative. The connection with the Platonic trinity is obvious. To Orpheus, the artist, his soul is his art, the embodiment of all that is beautiful in nature. He loses his soul from the influence of the world; his heart grows joyless, till his faith is restored in his ideal. But her subtle form escapes him as he seeks to give it shape. Despair spreads her [Page 29] gloomy wings around him, and the world, proves too strong for the divided heart. Art never realises the ideal without practical morality.

Purūravas, the man of action, finds his soul in goodness, which urges him on the path of duty. The darlings of the soul must not be stolen; the highest aspirations of our nature must not sink in the Lethe. But even the veriest enthusiasm will cool, if the inner light does not burn clear. Who does not sigh that



things were always right or always wrong? Action without knowledge is useless. We will none of it. The marriage of Knowledge and Action is the highest good; for, its off-spring is Truth.

Ruru, the sage, divorces knowledge from action and finds its futility. There is in us something, which overbears the theories of the lonely man of contemplation. Real life is not what the philosophy of the recluse wishes it to be. Passions rise in our breast, which knowledge alone cannot quell. So long as Ruru did not experience suffering, he lived and worked for himself alone. But suffering generates sympathy and teaches us that we [Page 30] can live for ourselves only by working for others. Man, to be perfect, requires, in the words of George Eliot, “the super-added life of the intellect”, to be united to “the super-added moral life”. [ Letter to J. Sibree. *Cross's Life of George Eliot*, i, 176]

It is clear that the interpretation above given knits these three myths into one coherent whole, explaining many details, not touched upon by any other theory, and may therefore be put forward as a valid induction. And we may remark, how it throws light on the religious emotion with which myths are associated in the minds of those who believe in them. Religious feeling of a very much loftier character than is met with among savages, has been evoked by myths. The Solar theory is quite unsatisfactory with regard to this point. It seeks to explain the evolution of religious emotion, by the obvious effect that natural phenomena have upon the material prosperity of man and the awe they excite in unscientific minds. If this view were correct we should have found sublimer cosmic emotions in the savage than in the civilized man of the present day. Besides that, the explanation [Page 31] misses the essence of religious feeling, a sense of security among the dangers of life and of triumph over evils. Furthermore, a belief in an afterlife is to be found among all races, high and low, and its existence in the remote antiquity is proved by the oldest literature of mankind, the Vedas. A belief in survival of the individual after death, involves a conscious or unconscious belief in the soul. Is it not therefore reasonable to expect a consciousness of the destiny of the soul, in the minds that produced myths and believed in them as religion ?

The subject may be pursued to a much greater length than is permissible here. But, for the present, it must rest with the conclusion that the Solar theory requires limits to be prescribed to its operation, and that the psychological or Purānic method, properly applied, is capable of yielding valuable results. [Page 32]

**Questions by members dealt with by Mr. Mohini**  
at a meeting of the London Lodge held on the 11th June. 1884

( Originally published in the first Transactions of the London Lodge)

**Q. 1.** At what stage in the evolutionary process does the One Life or One Element become individualised into distinct Monads ?

**A. 1.** This has been partially answered in *The Theosophist* under the heading of “Monads”, one of the headings to “Replies to all English F. T. S.”

In one sense the Monads are eternal, but the manifestation of these distinct Monads takes place with the evolution of animals.

**Q. 2.** What is the explanation of “Unconsciousness” and in particular the partial or total unconsciousness of man during sleep ?

**A.2.** The word unconsciousness does not mean the utter absence of all consciousness, because if the one element is absolute consciousness — and that is the only reality, then unconsciousness has no objective existence. By unconsciousness is to be understood the consciousness of nothing. [Page 33]

The word is also used in this sense: the different states of consciousness are considered as unconsciousness because they are not that consciousness which is taken to be the standard; thus to a waking man, sleep would be unconsciousness, but the very fact that the identity of the man is preserved through sleep shows that there is some kind of consciousness underlying that state.

**Q. 3.** Of the seven states of matter, solid, liquid, *etc.*, is the seventh still “matter” in the scientific sense, or is it matter under its aspect of force ?

**A. 3.** The ordinary scale of the division of matter into solid, liquid, *etc.*, is not the septenary one mentioned in treatises on Occultism. They form the subdivisions of the lowest of those seven planes of matter.

Matter means objective reality in its highest state of abstraction.

The seven divisions of the Occultists are the seven planes of consciousness, the last of these is the objective plane, and the scientific classification of matter by states are the subdivisions of the functions of consciousness on the lowest plane. [Page 34]

Thus the seventh state of matter according to the occultist is not the seventh state in the scale of solid, liquid, *etc.*

**Q. 4.** Does Prana or Jiva belong to the same series as gravity, *etc.* ?

**A. 4.** Prana does not belong to the same series as gravity. To each of the seven grand divisions of matter belong certain special properties. The properties on the lowest plane include such forces as gravity, those of the immediately higher plane life or Prana; therefore gravity stands in the same relation to Prana as the lowest state of consciousness does to the one above it.

**Q. 5.** What is the correct order of the known forces — heat, light, electricity, chemical affinity, *etc.*, counting from matter up towards spirit ?

**A. 5.** If by the question is meant: do the different forces pertain to different states of matter ? the reply would be that they pertain to the different subdivisions of one of the great divisions, and admit of different classifications according to the point of view from which they are considered.

**Q. 6.** Is there not a limit to the amount of differentiated energy which we call life, that can [Page 35] exist at any one time on the earth ? *i.e.*, were it possible to assign a definite proportional value to the life force in each plant, animal and man on the earth, would not the sum total be a constant ? If this be so, and if the Mahatmas are in possession of an immensely greater aggregate of life force than the same number of human beings, is not this one reason why but few can attain to their height ?

**A. 6.** It is true that during a given period there is a limit to the amount of life force that can be utilized on any particular planet; though the whole amount is unlimited. A Mahatma certainly has more life force than an ordinary human being, and there is a limit to the number of Mahatmas that can exist at any one point of time. Whenever the population of the earth is on the increase, the number of Mahatmas is on the decrease. The population of the earth is greater during periods of spiritual depression than during periods of spiritual activity. The number of Mahatmas bears an inverse ratio to the earth's population. Ancient Indian writings tell us that the Brahmins who led the lives of house-holders had to give up married life after the birth of one child. [Page 36]

The fixed amount of life force above-mentioned does not remain constant during the whole life of the planet, but only during certain periods or cycles.

**Q. 7.** If a fresh incarnation is sometimes necessary to redeem the spirit or expiate some crime, why should the fact remain unknown ?

If there is a divine purpose in incarnation, would not the Ego be better capable of progressing to its final goal if the grand purpose of its existence were revealed in life ?

Which is most favourable to the rapid evolution of an individual man into the higher forms of humanity — long periods of Devachanic existence, or frequent incarnations, with shorter periods in Devachan?

**A.7.** The question contains one of the old objections to the doctrine of reincarnation and is sometimes stated in this way: is it just that one personality should suffer for the deeds of a different personality ? or at least a personality of which the identity is not perceived by the sufferer ? or again, is not the knowledge of the cause which produced the suffering an essential element in the justice of such suffering ? [Page 37]

The arguments used may be stated thus: It is argued that the knowledge of the cause of punishment is always necessary to serve the ends of justice; in the succeeding incarnation that knowledge is not preserved, therefore there is no justice in the punishment.

On reflection it will be found that the word justice is here used in two different senses. It is an element of human justice that the person punished should know on what grounds the punishment is awarded, and the necessity arises from the fact that human justice is admittedly imperfect; therefore for the well-being of society, and in order to secure confidence in the sovereign power, it is absolutely necessary to show that, apart from this inherent imperfection of human justice, no other injustice has been committed.

But when justice is absolute, and partakes of the nature of a law, the conditions which render such knowledge necessary do not exist.

From this it will be clear that the question of justice cannot be raised in the case of a personality suffering or enjoying the fruit of its acts in a previous incarnation. [Page 38]

Again, we all know that there is no hard and fast line of demarcation between the different planes of nature; on the ordinary physical plane we have no idea of the precise moment at which we were attacked by a disease-germ nor do we know exactly which particular natural law it was, the infraction of which resulted in the appearance of the disease: therefore the argument does not hold that the action of karma is unjust because contrary to experience.

The true spirit of the man is in a state of absolute bliss, and can know no suffering.

There are always seven states of existence in the individual. Our Karma produces effects on the different planes: the effect produced on the physical plane is perceived by the physical body. Take the instance of a man who has done harm without intending it: as he intended to do good instead of harm, that intention will produce effects on the higher plane — the mental plane — while the same action, inasmuch as its effects were harmful, will still produce evil on the physical plane. [Page 39]

The inner personality suffers in Devachan or Avichi.

This law of Karmic disturbance on the different planes explains the doctrine of Devachan and Avichi, and also the Karmic influences moulding the future Monad.

The higher sixth and seventh principles are never reached by Karma.

In considering the action of the law of Karma it is better to divide man into three planes: the physical, mental and spiritual. Karma produces effects on each of these planes.

When the man is in Devachan, the lower plane being absent, all the causes which require the lower principles for their manifestation are in abeyance, existing merely in the causal state; but when the forces on the higher planes are exhausted, the lower forces turn it round in a curve, and the next incarnation results. The incarnation is always higher than the one which preceded it.

The forces are not exhausted by unfolding themselves in Devachan. The longer a man remains in Devachan, the better he finds the world when he returns to it. [Page 40]

A man has certain store of energy: if he uses it on the higher spiritual plane, he will produce causes which will keep him very long in Devachan.

The worst kind of Karma is spiritual sin. The worst of all is spiritual suicide; this occurs when a man denies that he has any spiritual nature and acts up to this belief. It is only the most brutal men who are guilty of this crime.

The mere intellectual disbelief in the existence of a future state tends to produce a blank Devachan. Whether this effect is actually produced or not depends upon the amount of thought energy which has been expended in this belief. If a man wills that there should be no future life, then there is no future life for him. The real meaning of atheism is disbelief in a future life.

It is possible for a person, otherwise kind and good and in all respects leading a useful and moral life, to develop such an intellectual belief in the non-existence of a future state as to cause his Devachan to be a blank one, which is the state of consciousness of no definite object nor of transcendental existence. [Page 41]

The following illustration will serve to explain what is meant by being in Devachan, while existence there is an absolute blank: suppose I find in a newspaper that the Queen has awarded £ 50,000 for my use, but the name is wrongly given in the paper; until I find out the mistake, the money does not exist for me.

This is because the evidence on which such belief rests is plainer to the spiritual than to the intellectual nature of man, and as Devachan is a spiritual state, there can be no such state for a person whose spiritual faculties have been smothered and crushed out of existence by the intellectual ones.

The sin consists in the subordination of the spiritual to the intellectual principles in man.

The duration of blank Devachan is determined by the force of will that was generated by the disbelief in question.

The Karma comes from allowing oneself to dwell upon the consequences of one's action.

**Q. 8.** Does Karma operate with animals at all? Does it operate with man before responsibility sets in during the fourth round ? [Page 42]

**A. 8.** The sense in which the word "Karma" is used in Eastern books is not always properly realized.

It means that the broad law of causation which applies to the moral conduct of responsible human beings. The moment a particular congeries of forces in nature is concentrated on a particular person and acts through that person's wishes and desires, a personal responsibility is created. When a person is an Adept, there is no Karma for him because he has perfectly assimilated himself with nature and is only a bundle of forces, colourless of personal desires, with pleasure or displeasure.

**Q. 9.** Since during the Devachanic state all the higher tendencies and aspirations in a man attain their full fruition, what force remains to balance and modify the effect of his evil Karma on the next incarnation ?

**A. 9.** When the higher forces exhaust themselves in Devachan they produce some effect, and this effect is operated upon by the physical forces and the combined action of the two sets of forces determines the next incarnation of the man; therefore [Page 43] roughly speaking, it may be said that not only do the higher forces give a man Devachan, but they also give him his next incarnation.

**Q.10.** Is it that the force constituting or embodied in these tendencies and aspirations becomes absorbed into the Atma as latent potential energy, to be again manifested in determining the conditions, etc., of the next incarnation ?

**A. 10.** It is not absorbed into the Atma, but remains in what we call the causal body of the person — the united 5th and 6th principles.

In the differentiation of species, some organs are eliminated while others are evolved, according to the change of environment; in this way we get a glimpse of the same law which causes a person to incarnate again; all the earthly desires that a man had remain in abeyance in the state of Devachan, but, while the other forces exhaust themselves, they give the person another incarnation.

**Q.11.** Are any fresh factors introduced into man by or at a reincarnation, other than those necessitated by the Karma of the last ? [Page 44]

**A.11.** The man has fresh will every time he is born and therefore he has fresh opportunities of Karma.

The inductions of Astrology are correct in themselves, but it is wrong to connect them as cause and effect. It is really only a correspondence.

**Q.12.** What is the relation between Karma and heredity ?

**A.12.** We say that heredity gives a person character but heredity itself is governed by Karma.

**Q.13.** What is the nature of the Karma that determines the sex ?

**A.13.** It is absolutely necessary for each Monad before it can be perfect, so far as perfection is possible, to pass through incarnations in the male as well as in the female sex. The principal cause determining sex, is the cultivation of abstract thinking. The difference between a man and a woman is that the man has more capacity for abstract and the woman for concrete thought. All Karma which has the tendency to produce one or other of these capacities determines the sex. [Page 45]

**Q.14.** Can a Monad attain the highest perfection in any round without incarnating in both sexes?

**A.14.** No; when a person cultivates a certain expansiveness of mind, he cannot by so doing transcend the average of the race unless he is an Adept. He must on reaching that point return and reincarnate as a woman.