



IMPORTANT DATES OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

by

PROFESSOR SILPA BHIRASRI

SILPAKORN UNIVERSITY



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Published by the Faculty of Painting and Sculpture

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BIOGRAPHY

The late Professor Silpa Bhirasri (C. Feroci) was born in Florence, Italy and graduated from the Royal Academy of Art of Florence. He entered the Thai Government service (Fine Arts Department) in 1924. He has to his credit a multitude of outstanding works chiefly in bronze such as the statue of King Yodfah at the Memorial Bridge and that of King Vajiravudh at Lumbini Park. As Dean of the Faculty of Sculpture and Painting, Silpakorn University, he was the mainstay and livewire of art study in Thailand. Professor Bhirasri devoted himself for over thirty years to the study of Thai art and was universally acknowledged as an authority. He did much to introduce Thai art to the world by writing extensively and with an insight on the subject and by organizing a warmly received exhibition of Thai painting and sculpture in 1947. He also initiated the Bangkok annual art exhibitions. Professor Silpa Bhirasri was officially recognized as the founder of modern art in Thailand and was the first President of the National Committee of the International Association of Plastic Arts (IAPA) in 1954.

He died in Bangkok on May 14, 1962 at the age of seventy. In honour of his accomplishment and his service to Thai art he has been awarded the Knight Grand Cross (First Class) of the most Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand, and the Dushdi Mala Medal. The late Professor Silpa Bhirasri will always retain an honour place in the affection of his many students, and his friends in Thailand.

IMPORTANT DATES OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Third Millennium B.C.

Indo-Sumerian Civilization, Pre-Aryan.

Second Millennium B.C.

Aryan or Vedic Period

700 B.C.

Yogi System

Upanishads

Aranyakas

Brahmanism

Uttaramimansa

Vedanta Schools

Puryamimansa

600 B.C.

Buddhism

Jainism

Hinduism

Sivaism

Vishnuism

Bakti System

For thousands of years Indian high philosophy intermingled with local beliefs; hence the worshipping of trees, snakes, mountains etc.

Belonging to the third millennium, in the Sind Valley, particularly in Harappa and Mohenjo Daro, has been found remains of a high civilization termed Indian-Sumerian culture which spread to the Ganges river.

In the second millennium Aryan people gradually conquered India. This people had not a high civilization and borrowed from the Indian-Sumerian culture gods and other ideas.

The Aryans were a pastoral people which once settled in India divided in groups such as priests, warriors and agriculturists.

The Aryans developed a very high literature in the Vedas, which means sacred scripts. Their religion conceived a Unity called Rita meaning the Existing Reality. This Reality may be called Varuna, Agni, Indra, Yama, or other gods, but is always the same Reality under different forms.

The sacrifices were done in the open on a stone-altar and the fire Agni was the carrier of the offering to the gods. The gods were asked to observe the natural law from which depended the welfare of the people. Hence it was the material side of life that those old people looked for.

Besides religious ceremonies, there were also the civil ones performed by the head of the family. Food was offered to the Pitaras (fathers), the father would teach his son to perform such ceremonies: hence the necessity to have boys while the girls were not welcomed and sometimes even killed. For the old Aryans the gods were givers of wealth and prosperity, but this depended from the Brahmins who interceded for men and accordingly the Brahmins were believed still more important than the gods as the following quotation clearly shows:

“.....the whole universal mechanism rests on the head of the gods, but gods depend from the prayer of the Brahmin, thus the Brahmin is my god.....”

About Brahmins there were three classes:

Hotri, those who sacrificed

Udgatri, the singers

Advaryu, workers of the rites.

The vedic literature was formed by sacred books whose content was memorized by the Brahmins. Towards the fourth century B.C. the literary additions of the scripts was so vast that it was necessary to summarize it in aphorisms called Sutras. There were Srauta sutras for sacrifices, Grhya sutras for domestic ceremonies and Dharma sutras for the conduct of men. The sacred books are :

Rigveda. 1028 hymns for invoking gods.

Samaveda, songs and tunes as accompaniment of the hymns.

Yajurveda, sacrificial formulae.

Atharvaveda, later addition for invoking protection against diseases and malignant spirits.

Although the hymns hint to a DYAUS PITAR (god father) this figure was never defined.

Someone thinks that the principal god was VARUNA brother of ADITI mother of fecundity. Afterwards Varuna shifted in a lower position becoming the god of water (see allegiance and oath of the water).

After Varuna, INDRA became the principal god. Indra is the god of hurricane who after having been intoxicated by the soma he fights the enemies, in his combat is helped by the MARUT (clouds).

SURYA, the sun who drives on seven horses, is a god for poets, not practical for the Aryans. Of course being one of the keeper of the natural order he too has to accomplish his duty respect to the natural mechanism.

USHAS, the aurora, Surya, are invoked against ghosts and bad dreams.

AGNI is important for the fact that he carries the votes of the brahmin to gods.

SOMA has a good cult because he intoxicates gods giving them courage to fight the ASURAS who try to subvert the cosmic order.

VISHNU, RUDRA (who afterwards became Siva) and YAMA emerged in important position in later vedism.

RUDRA was the god of desolation, of destruction bringing ailments and misfortune, but was much worshiped because thought to cure also the misfortunes he himself caused to human beings.

In the RIGVEDA, Vishnu is referred to as the god who with three steps conquered the universe for the god. One step the earth, one step heaven and one step the lower world.

PURUSHA is the primordial man sacrificed by gods to create humanity.

From his mouth came out the BRAHMIN.

From his arm came out the KASHATRIYA, nobles and warriors. From his thigh came out the VAISYA, treaders, artisans, cultivators, cattle breeders and merchants.

From his feet came out the SUDRA, to whom is not imparted education.

Every ceremony was bound to scrupulous rituals assisted by brahmins. In general Indian religion has a strong eroticism and some ceremonies include even obscene orgies.

In old Vedism the creator and giver of wealth and progeny was PRAJAPATI who afterwards inspired the god Brahma.

The conception about death in Vedism is that the body does not lose any of his characteristics so AGNI is begged to bring intact the dead body to the world of YAMA, (disregarding whether the corpse was cremated or buried). "Let the defunct go back in the plants, in the waters, or in the earth as it is his destiny. Let his eyes go back to the sun or let his breath go back to the wind....."

Towards the 700 B.C. coins were introduced and writing too which was imported by Babylonian merchant. This period is the beginning of a new religious conception.

In later Vedism the metaphysical idea is manifest. The poet asks himself "what is the world? How it arose, how it developed? How long was the time for this creation? Who can say it if also the gods were born afterwards?"

Later on, social dissatisfaction brought also to religious reforms. Without detaching themselves from Vedism, many ascets formed the school of the yogi system. It was in this period towards the 700 B.C. that UPANISHADS and ARANYAKAS were written as addition to the Vedas.

Upanishads with its transcendent, metaphysic and poetic style and ideas is one of the greatest writing ever written by men.

Upanishads treat the problem of the Universe and the purpose of religion. So the faint idea of old time of the "I AND THE REALITY" which before could be called PRAJAPATI or any other names and whose essence was everywhere, becomes concrete in Upanishads and became also mystic and personal.

Contrary to old Vedism wherein the fate was common and the blessing was concerned principally with wealth and prosperity, the later philosophy is inherent to a personal and continuous experience.

The cult of general blessing is refused. It is said that in a world so uncertain and in a physic so frail and so repulsive, joy cannot be its final goal, so much the less fate cannot be shared by a community, but is quite individual. Therefore in this period the thinker forms his own faith and his own fate which reflects his ATMAN (ego).

The personal experience may find a mystic formula for every citizen: study under the tutelage of a brahmin for 12 years. At 25 marry and when the children are grown up retire with the wife in meditation. Or, leave the world, renounce to everything

and everyone, do your own funeral and wonder as a beggar. This brings to the formation of his own KARMA.

From old Vedism sprung up Brahmanism referred to as TRIMURTI (OM) symbolizing night, sun rising and its cycle till sunset.

HERE BRAHMA, VISHNU AND SIVA are the supreme manifestation of ISHAVARA meaning the state of the UNIVERSAL BEING when it awakes. The glory of ISHAVARA is displayed by the means of his divine force called SAKTI, the fecundity which gives origin to *PRAKRITI* taking form under three aspects called TRIMURTI.

As we have seen the idea of the soul (ATMAN) is clear in the Upanishads and is emphasized by saying that it is stronger than all other senses which may be controlled or abolished." The soul is conceived as in a dream wherein the physic remains immobile while the soul vagues in other spheres. So while the soul is always alive, the other senses are dormant.

In Vedism there is not hinted social injustice on the Upanishads this are explained by the individual Karma which will repeat suffering and rebirth till the complete emancipation when the soul goes back to the REALITY.

This idea is explained as follows :

Brahman is the NEUTRAL WORLD SOUL, THE ATMAN OR SELF OF THE UNIVERSE... I AM ATMAN, MY INDIVIDUAL SOUL. HENCE THE TWO ARE IDENTICAL... ACCORDINGLY BRAHMAN IS IN ME AND I AM BRAHMAN. HE WHO UNDERSTANDS THIS REALITY OBTAIN RELEASE. This means that if one act purely will not come back to the suffering of the world.

The Upanishads created two School :

PURYAMIMANSA and THE UTTARAMIMANSA known as the VEDANTA which means the end of the Vedas.

From Vedantism sprang up many schools of philosophy, the principal ones being :

SANKHAYA School : teaches atheism; says there is no gods, but only the soul **PURUSHA** and the matter **PRAKRITI**. In its transmigration the soul is accompanied by a light part of the body which is the result of its **KARMA** till its complete emancipation.

The **YOGI** school is against the Sankhya School because they admit an eternal god. (The idea about Karma is the same)

CARNAMA or **LOKAYATO** says there is not a separated soul, but all is matter and from its decomposition emerge other lives. For this reason man must enjoy life **ALTHOUGH HE MUST HAVE PRESENT THAT LIFE HAS ITS PART OF SUFFERING**.

JAINISM.

MAHAVIRA, which means the great Hero, born in Vaicali in the 6th century. At 30 Mahavira started to study religion and after 12 month was enlightened. He too, like the other yogis, imposed himself self tortures.

The Jainism doctrine was written in 46 A.D. in Pali, the vulgar language, while Brahmanism and Vedism were written in Sanskrit.

There are two sects of Jainism, the **SAVETAMBARA** dressed in white and the **DIGAMBARA** air dressed (nude),

As usual the soul cannot see the reality because obstructed by a veil of oily matter which attaches to the soul according to its karma. Plants, water, fire, earth, animals, insects etc, have life, therefore is a sin to kill any form of life. Jainism has 24 **TIRTANKARAS** (saints).

Jainism is more dogmatic than philosophic, it has few adherents and cannot be exported in other countries.

BUDDHISM

As aforementioned, in the 7th century in the Upanishads the pantheistic idea is definite (pantheism means that God is everything and everything is God). The adherents to this philosophy sought salvation through the attainment of the union with the Reality. Thus no more ceremonies.

Buddhism being one of the schools protesting against formalities denounced the Vedic rituals.

Buddha was the son of a King of the Sakyas, a people belonging to the Gautama clan. At 29 he left home and for six years looked for Light. Under the Bho Tree at Gaya he received Enlightenment. In the Deer Park at Benares, Buddha delivered his first sermon. Summarizing Buddha's theory we may say that he thought life a continuous suffering.

Birth is pain
Sickness is pain
Old age is pain
Death is pain.

To renounce to life by renouncing to craving, Tanka, for the worldly pleasure is to find happiness. The emancipation from suffering is obtained by following Eight Truths; right view; right intentions; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right efforts; right mind fulness; right concentration.

This doctrine is called the middle way in contrast with both the indulgence for sexual pleasure and the uselessness of the self-torture.

Buddha denied any god and so was against Hinduism and also denied a "self" Atman, but from Hinduism retained the idea of the transmigration.

The individual and all the world surrounding him consists in a multitude of elements which in their interplay produce the appearance constituting the world of the phenomena,

All the elements are referred to as Dharma, hence the theory of Anatman, the being devoided of the "I" because everything is devoided of the essence. Hence the teaching of Anitya, the perishableness of the phenomena which have a momentary impermanence and the consequent teaching of Dukha showing that suffering is due to this impermanence.

The return of life is explained as the reflex of a flame not as individuality; it is like the flame which has been put off and relit gives light again, but is not the previous flame and its reflex depends from the matter.

Another great significance in Buddha's teaching is that moral rules do not have anything to do with the rules prescribed by ritual performances. It is not because one is performing the duty of a religion that he is moral.

Thus the reform moralized the doctrine of the Karma of Hinduism which relied on a number of sacrifices and gifts to the Brahmins.

Buddha was against castes because they meant desire of power.

The teaching of "non injury, forgiveness of the enemies and friendliness to all," must in that time have been a revelation to Mankind.

In the old canon only 24 Buddhas are thought the last one will be Matreya.

MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

The old Buddhism which was agnostic (nothing is known about the existence of god or anything beyond the material phenomena) towards the 2nd century B.C. became polytheistic.

This brought to a schism under the Kushana dynasty.

To counterbalance the power of Hinduism and also to meet the popular need for a religion offering more individual

hopes than what pure Buddhism offered, Mahayana Buddhism embodied Hindu ideas.

In the Mahayana is thought that Buddha does not come on the Earth but sends the reflex of himself. From this the idea of the primordial Buddha ADIBUDDHA who, meditating, creates other five Buddhas which they themselves form other five BODDHISATTVAS who come among men interceding in their favour.

The five Buddhas are referred to as follows;

Buddha	His Boddhisattva	Symbol
BAIROCANA	SAMANTABHADRA	Lion
AKSHOBHYA	VAJIRAPANI	Elephant
RATANASAMBANA	RATAPANI	Horse
AMITABHA	AVALOKITESVARA	Peacock
AMOGHASIDDHI	VISNAPANI	Another bird.

These Boddhisattvas create the perishable universe.

Now we are in the period of AVALOKITESVARA. This Boddhisattva is full of compassion interceding in favour of men towards AMITABHA who remains immobile in his paradise SUKHAVATI. Thus man can find salvation by the faith on Amitabha, an idea which is much like the Bhakti system of Hinduism.

In the Mahayana there is also the SAKTI (female potency of the Buddha) as goddess TARA who gives principle to the evolution of the world.

HINDUISM

While the gods of the Vedic period are vague, those of the Hinduism are definite.

Of the Veda gods only Siva, Vishnu and Yama maintained their primordial entity, the other changed or were forgotten.

Rivers, trees, mountains, animals are worshipped as deities or semi-deities. The rivers Ganges, Jamna and Narbada are the most important. There is also the spirit of the ancestors, of the villages, of the houses and, all are worshipped.

BHAKTI means to purify himself through the absolute devotion to God. He who practices the doctrine of Bhakti is called BHAKTA or BHAGAVATA. The famous book BHAGAVAGITA is the text book of the Bhaktas written during the MAHABHARATA period, about 400 B.C. Here the god is KRISNA VASUDEVA. The figure of Krisna as companion of the shepherds and lover of Radha are sources of high devotion particularly in the north-west of India.

Towards 500 B.C. was instituted the matrimony of children—only girls who remained widows could marry again.

RAMABHAKTI in his morality is opposed to the cult of Krisna and Radha. The figures of Rama and Sita inspire purity of ideas and acts. This sect began in the 11th century A.D.

RAMANUJA'S system is recorded from the 10th century and is referred to the cult of SRI. Here there is one unique god ISAVARA: the individual soul and all the things are ISAVARA. SRI stays at the side of Isavara and intercedes in favour of men.

Among many philosophers who tried to eliminate the systems of the caste there were NANDEV of the 13th century and TUKARAM of the 17th century. They are two prominent figures who preached that god is conquered with our own work, goodness, compassion and devotion.

SIKHS (pupils) rejects the system of the caste and so this sect is not considered Hindu. For the Sikhs the devotion to the GURU (teacher) is the most important. After the 15th century the religious idea took military form and this brought to wars with the Mohammedan authorities.

The Sikhs became a military caste which cannot have contacts with other of different faith. Their sacred book is ADI GRANTH-SAHIB.

SIVAISM

While Vishnu is adored for his benevolent qualities, Siva is adored for the fear he incuses. But because a destructive god

is also giver of benefices so Siva is worshipped as the saviour by the merchants, soldiers, agriculturists and men of science. Likewise Vishnu, from the 2nd B.C., also Siva has many forms of Bhakti.

Siva's Sakti is called with various names according to his activity. Uma and Parvati, the daughter of Himalaya, means purity and spirituality. Durga means the destroyer of evil. Kali the ender of time and giver of Nirvana.

The idea of the duality of a god is also in vedic period as the consort of Rudra is called Rudrani and was very important in symbolising the potential fecundity of the god.

TERMS REFERRING SIVA (HARA)

Siva Nilakantha. Siva drinking the poison which arose from the churning of the sea of milk.

Siva Mahadeva. Siva as the Lord of the Gods, the Great God.

Siva Tandava. Siva trampling upon the corpse of the demon Tripura; Siva will dance the same dance at the end of the present Kali- Yuga.

Siva Yogisvara. Lord of yogis.

Siva Nandi. Siva under the form of the cow which is also his mounty.

Siva Androgynous. Half male and half female.

Siva Bhairava. Both Dionysian and terrible.

SAKTI of SIVA

Parvati or Uma, daughter of Himalaya; goodness and graciousness.

Durga, killing the buffalo-demon Mahishasura.

Kali, the Black One, the ender of world and giver of Nirvana.

Bhairavi, the terrifying.

Kumari, the virgin.

TERMS REFERRING VISHNU (HARI)

VISHNU'S AVATARAS

As Fish. To save manu from the flood.

As Turtle. To enable the gods to recover the treasures lost in the flood.

As Boar. Rescued the Earth from the depth of cosmic ocean kept there by the giant Daitya.

As Man-lion. To devour the impious who offended him.

As Dwarf brahmin. To re-conquer the world which had been usurped by a giant. Having he made some small services to the giant asked for reward as much land as could be included in three steps.

One step conquered the Earth, one step the Sky and one step the Lower World.

As Rama, of the Ramayana.

As Buddha.

The last one to come as a horse-headed-man to reward the good and punish the evil.

Vishnu's wife is Laksmi, or Sri, often represented seated on lotus and sided by two elephants.

One of the stories of the Hindu literature often represented in art is the "Churning of the Sea of Milk."

Vishnu advised the gods to make alliance with the asuras. The holy mountain Mandara serves as stick for churning the ocean. Ananta, the serpent of Vishnu serves as rope (the serpent means the eternity), Vishnu under the form of a tortoise serves as pivot. The demons take place near the mouth of Ananta while the gods take place near the tail.

From the churning comes up:

Airavata, the white elephant which Indra took as his steed.

Kamademi, the cow murrishing humanity with milk.

Parijata, the tree which with its fruits and flowers blesses the Earth.

Apsaras, joy and dance.

Moon, which was taken by Siva and hence he is called Siva Mahadeva,

Poison, to save humanity Siva drinks the poison; hence is called Nilakantha (the blue throat)

Dhanvantari, the divine chemist, holding the cup of the nectar Amarita which was taken by the gods through a trick of Vishnu who changed himself as a beautiful woman and the demons went after her forgetting the nectar.

The Indian Conception of the God from the Mahabharata
Krisna bestows Arjuna the divine eye to see himself as
real God.

..... God. In thy body I see all the Gods.
And all the varied hosts of living things.
And sovereign Brahma on His Lotus-throne,
And all the rishis and the snakes divine.
I see Thee unnumbered arms and breasts.
And eyes and faces infinite in forms.
I see not either sources or mean or end
Of Thee Universal Form and Lord,
Bearing Thy diadem, Thy club, and disc
I see Thee glowing as a mass of light
In every region, hard to look upon,
Bright as the blaze of the burning fire and sun
On every side, and vast beyond all bound.
The undivided Thou, the highest point
Of human thought, and seat supreme of all
Eternal Law's undying guardian Thou;
The everlasting causes Thou seem'st to me.
I see not Thy beginning, mean or end;
Thy strength, Thy arms, are infinite alike,
And into Thee the sun and moon are eyes
I see Thy face, that glows as sacred fire,
And with its radiance heats the Universe;
For all the heavenly regions and the space
Twixt earth and heaven are filled by Thee alone.



The Indian conception of Life from the Mahabarata
IMPERISHABLE LIFE—Krishna to Arjuna.

..... "That is not born, nor doth it die; nor, having been, doth it ever cease to be; unborn, everlasting, eternal, and ancient, this is not slain when a body is slain.

As a man casting off worn garments taketh new, so the Body-Dweller, casting off a worn out body, enters into another that is new.

For this Body-Dweller may never in any body be wounded, O son of Bharata; therefore, thou shouldst not grieve for any creature.

..... This means that the body comes and goes, but the life that manifests in all is undying and unhurt, this neither slayeth nor is slain.

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7. DEL. 27.



Printed at
Thammasat University Press
Phra Chan Road, Bangkok, Thailand
Miss. Aranee Intrasuksri, Printer and Publisher
1965