Time and Mysticism

TIME is indeed one of the most important categories which had varying fortunes in the history of Philosophy.

It is well-known that time walks at divers paces with divers persons. There is such a distinction as subjective time and objective time or subjective duration and objective times, or standard times which vary from place to place. But the Indian conception of time is that Time can be defined generally as having triple stages or successive moments such as the past, present and the future. It is irreversible though events may be cyclical. Time extends both sides up to infinity. And the

secret of Time is its present tense according to some well-known thinkers not because of the other two being irrelevant but because the present has the consequence of the past within it and has the potency of the future within it. If we know the 'Now' then we know 'all' about the Time. But some thinkers hold that this approach to the problem of Time as successive triple moments connected closely with the concept of Negation (abhava) is unsatisfactory as also the theory that time is but the divisions of the day or month or year into arbitrary 24 parts or 60 ghatikas and 60 minutes and seconds etc., till we come to the infinitesimal indivisible span of time (truti). This is spatialised Time say some thinkers.

Astronomical times are different from the temporal times and differ according to some arbitrarily

chosen measuring rod, very valuable for close social work. Thus some hold that this kind of time is binding because it is socially regulated and adopted by all by convention and being a social contrivance and convenience an illusion or unreal in the real sense of the term. Relatively it is infecting the concept of Time and therefore time itself is relative.

The whole problem of Time must be viewed not indeed in this manner but in terms of the larger standpoint of the 'ingression' of the eternal in the temporal which is characterized by different grades of times or durations or measures (chandamsi). The subjective conception of Time as the process of becoming and not the arbitrary social (spatialised) time, is valuable. The speed of time is calculated by the vigour which attends

upon the upward process. In matter the speed is reduced to a dull uniformity of repetition without any attendant variations, (Tamas). The speed of life is at a new tempo indeed very much different from the speed of matter the most attenuated or wavicle-form. Kala thus is different in the level of the mind - which has become a classical metaphor of the highest speed - manojava. Higher levels of consciousness have higher speeds so that the succession is ultimately reduced so far as the lower level is concerned to simultaneity. Contraction of time or slowness occurs. Equally this entails the contraction of space or distinction between the intervals between two points. Thus the problem of time turns out to be the problem of space also, and the solution of the problem of Time is the solution of the problem of space.

Ultimately this turns out to be the problem of energy, of consciousness or intelligence. The differing paces of movement are available in our own organism and there is multiplicity of motions each with its own unique pace and form which are harmonized by the interrelated laws (rtas) of the Highest Spirit, the Unmanifest Eternal directing and ordering the harmonious concord of the several planes.

Time thus is a mystery of manifestation of the diversity extending from the most slow and spread out to the most speedy and concentrated movements. Their coexistence needs explanation from the mystical standpoint. To say that time is but the activity of Maya or the supreme delusive power of Spirit which simultaneously displays illusions to the individual and confuses him by

interpenetrative confusion between fancies and fantasies, as the Yoga-Vasistha explains, is to miss the truth which does not so much refer to consequences but only to the nature of this confusive possibility. The Mind is said to be the cause of all illusion - mana eva manusyanam karanam bandha-moksayoh. The meaning is that some times we pass into higher or lower speeds of time and therefore of space and levels of experience which are real but because of the non-adaptation they are delusively pleasurable and yet of temporary (not momentary) nature. Mind brings in speeds of instability just as desire brings in complications of imagination and wish-fulfilment. There is a great amount of speculation as to what should be the nature of Time prior to creation or even knowledge or, for the matter of that as to

what is the nature of Space prior to matter being created. If we are asked to hold the view that matter is a creation, a new and original creation by God or Spirit, then there can be the notion of a timeless eternity and a spaceless Vastness. The concept of akasa as the plenum within which we have the occurrence of events or things (atoms or wavicles), defines the directions; and this verily is relative to the individual atoms or groups of atoms or events or things or individuals. If time is conceived in terms of motion or changes, then too we are wedded to relativity. But then the philosophical assumption of a timeless and spaceless or dateless existence as a rational need is unprovable. But if we could conceive of the other possibility that this is the state where everything is in quiescence of Peace, and it is

precisely this state that in some parts of its being plunges into movement whilst retaining its own Peace in other parts (as the Samkhyans conceive of the evolution of their categories only a fourth of the whole being involved an each state in modification), it is possible to explain the double experience of Time and Timeless, Space and Spacelessness, Being and Becoming-ness, Transcendence and immanence. The unceasing, continuity of time or event neither refers to the same individual nor to all or the whole, nor the other alternative of unperturbed stillness of everything or each thing - a position that might involve us in assumptions of illusion of process and progress. Time and Space then are integral to our experience and if we mean to transcend Time and Space it means something that is other than

their abolition. It is this meaning that is granted by the mystical consciousness of unceasing devotion to the highest values of Truth and Eternal Being or the Divine Personality - the Ultimate Summum Bonum or the Good which is followed under all conditions and at all stages of individual growth. This devotion is the pursuit of the Divine with an one-pointedness and absorption of devotion born out of the knowledge of absolute selfness of the Divine out of whom flows all values and all reality. Space and time are limitations to the ignorant and the pursuer of the little things of the body and pleasure. The transcendence over space and time means just the setting aside of all limitations as interferences to the worship of the Divine, attainment of the Divine. The transcendent love (para-bhakti) knows no limitation, and recognizes

none, not only of space and time and circumstance but of birth or caste or class, status or livelihood, life or death. The philosophical transcendence is a mirage considered in the context of the transcendence that is attained by the mystic. Time and Space become however significant, and not the abstract abode of events or the evolution coordinates as Professor Alexander held.

Once then we have found that so far as mystical con-sciousness is concerned its set of vales do not reject space or Time or the Akasa which is the plenum (Matter in one of its primal forms - bhutas, which plays a very important role in the yoga psychology as the abode and indeed itself nada - sound in all its fourfold forms of para, pasyanti, madhyama and vaikhari) - but utilizes these

conditions and processes for the manifestation of the Divine Excellences (lila) (or possibilities).

The unreality of these is not the condition for this liberty of spiritual askesis, spiritual discovery of values, spiritual realisation and evolution; on the other hand, we are made aware of the implicit sets of processes that every state of devotion, knowledge, and action implies.

Thus when it is said that the primary secret of spiritual life consists in the will to practice dependence on the Highest alone and none other, and not what many think a will to defy every condition including the deity - one of the greatest truths of eternal life has been uttered.

Time, said Sri Aurobindo, is one of the factors in the ascent of spiritual life: (Synthesis of Yoga).

This is because the pace and the time of fulfilment or ripeness for the opening of the inner life are not governed by the individual's consciousness at all but by the Grace of the Divine. This is the view of all those who have been treading the path and though the elapse of time may be slow according to the individual's reckoning.

Recently I reviewed a journal entitled "The Wind and the Rain" in which there was an article entitled "The Indian Time-Table", by Mr. Willy Haas.* I shall mention the general thesis of that author. The Indian Timetable is not like the European Timetable which is again different from the American Timetable. He holds that the European Timetable or the conception of History is the continuous stream of life, which has gathered all the rich heredity and culture of the past and is

proceeding towards the future. Thus the present is a consequence of the past, a child of the past, conserving the traditions and heredity of the same, The American New World Time is a free movement unconditioned by the ancient history of Europe and its cultural and racial movements, starting a new epoch, save to the extent that the early settlers had carried with them and what the new settlers are carrying with them into that country. But the general movement is to preserve the moral righteousness of the past of their late country, from which they had fled as refugees so to speak rather than the traditions of the other kind, which repelled them. A new pace for civilization was rendered possible by denying the outer heredity and conditions for the sake of an eternal principle of individual freedom and free

society. A new conception of progress - a revolutionary speed was rendered possible by this abandonment of the past scenes and figures. Perhaps the American Time is the actualisation of the Bergson's conception of Time as duration impelled from behind by the triple aspirations of liberty, individuality and religion. This is mystical and ahistorical as compared with the European Time which is purely historical. The severance with the historical time of Europe, from its tradition and heredity was the higher purpose of mystical time. The withdrawal however was never complete and there is a return of the American to Europe for whatever reason it is not necessary to enquire just now.

The Indian Timetable is different from the historical European Time, though it has an

historical Time of its own - the metabiological theory of Avatars. It has also presumably an ahistorical Time - though this ahistorical Time is more Vedantic, Absolutistic. It has in addition and unhistorical Time revealed in its primitive beliefs in transmigration. After all India is a conglomerate or amalgam of cultures of all strata of evolution from the most primitive to the modern educated savant, in the Western sense of the term. Time accordingly walks at different paces. The different paces of Time however are not widely separated or demarcated but there is an inexorable tendency to mix and mingle with each other making life unpredictable. Time is not relativised but interfused, and confusion is the result. Accordingly the future of India is unpredictable.

I have just stated briefly in my own words his

general Thesis. But it is necessary to enquire further. He says that the Indian Time-Table is equivalent to the unhistorical theory of transmigration, pseudo historical Avatara doctrine, and the mystic ahistorical Time.

Transmigration is the view which holds that life after death has a tendency to take up forms of life which may be of any order, human, animal or even plant. The law of Karma inexorably controls the kind of body that we are to take. If our deeds are human we take up a human body, otherwise we are attracted to and attain to other types of bodies. The movement of the soul from one type of body to another involves, of course, the belief in the existence of souls, life after death, and belief in the principle that disposes our future according to deserts. The belief in transmigration is common

to all primitive races. India also believes in it, perhaps the difference is the primitive beliefs without any reasons whereas the Hindu has a principle or hypothesis which explains the belief. But Prof. Haas considers that this belief is not held but persisted in and that surely is a recessive dynamism. Totemic worship and taboo and superstition have been proved by Sigmund Freud to the phenomena of the subliminal and unconscious and irrational elements which, evolutionarily considered, have occurred earlier. To retain belief in them and to act according to those beliefs is a regressive (if not pathological) phenomenon.

But have the moderners been able to shake off this regressive movement? The superstition in the transmigration has been sacrificed at the cost of

letting loose the whole Pandora's box of furies. Men need not take another body to be brutes; they have become brutes.

It was according to an ancient Sage that Goutama, the Buddha, made a profound remark that men become what they worship or love. Worshipping and eating derive their meaning from the root bhunj in Sanskrit. And on another occasion he made the remark that those who eat meat will become the abodes of the animals whose meat they eat. The ancient superstition of transmigration and the fear of transmigrating into lower forms of life prevented them from descending down the grade of life. This worthy restraint has been given up. There is a supreme wisdom concealed in the doctrine of transmigration when taken along with the doctrine

of karma. Love of life and seeking to lift life to higher levels of being are implicit in this doctrine. The individual soul does not change its individuality as Prof. Haas thinks but only its sheaths or personality in the course of its transmigration. It is undoubtedly a point to insist that the individual has not the memory of his past life and therefore the doctrine of transmigration - both forwards or backwards - is refuted. But then are we certain that there is no biological memory, instinctive memory in the animals and ourselves. The Indian Yogi holds that it is possible to know the past lives fully and know the whole history of the spirit. Perhaps it is incredible to us. But so many things are incredible - have always been.

The second important element of the Indian Time table considered by Prof. Haas is the theory of

reincarnation. The soul incarnates constantly till it is finally released. Incarnation is the corollary to samsara. Freedom from reincarnation or punaravrtti is one of the aims if not the only aim of our life. Jnana alone can lead to the transcendence over samsara or crossing over samsara or death. When this is the case and the Hindus believe in this possibility, it is surprising to hear from Prof. Haas that it is an element that explains the regressive movement of Indian Time. But what he is attacking is not this but the Reincarnation of God or Avatara doctrine. Every Hindu knows that the avatara is a descent of God in popular reckoning, are Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasu Rama, Kodanda Rama, Halayudha Rama, Krishna and Kalki. There has been the inclusion of Buddha latterly.

Some ingenious writers immediately equated this with the biological evaluation or ascent of Man made popular in the 19th century and after. This metabiological view is unacceptable, for, though it can be conceded that the descent of God or the Highest spirit in any form will raise the form to a higher level of Consciousness yet it will not be right to say that it is the evolution of the Deity that we are witnessing. In the Puranas the purpose and meaning of the Avatara is for the restoration of Dharma in and to the plane - an act of Grace.

It is His beneficent willingness to take any kind of Form - which is in that order the perfect expression of His Sovereignty and Puissance, Virility and Transcendence, Beauty and Light - for the protection of His creatures. Nor is the view that some avataras exist at the same time as others

capable of being refuted, for it is this supreme possibility that is seen in the Divine. The Divine Lord may project himself fully or partially, in His form as Avatara - Descending Divine, and for ever in some for certain definite Cosmic Purpose or act in multiple personalities also. This is the secret of the amsa-avataras. This view can only be understood if we understand the general theory of the Pancaratra which teaches the fourfold nature of the Divine - the Para - transcendent - Vasudeva - Narayana: the vyuhas (emanates) of Vasudeva - Samkarsana - Pradyumna - Aniruddha. The Avataras which are not limited to any number are also called the Vibhava (glory-grace forms); the Arca (the idols in the temples spots of Transcendent light to which any sincere seeker can go directly and offer himself or herself or seek

refuge) and last but not least the Antaryamin - the form of the Self within the Guru and Beloved, a descent of the Divine From or Light in the heart of the Mystics, Alvars, Dasars and Nayanmars.

All these forms are important and must be fully known. They are the Forms of the Divine who makes us participate in the Divine Life both inside and outside, who grants, liberation from samsara and ignorance, and service of the eternal Truth and light.

Being unaware of this structure of the mystical, Prof. Haas finds inconsistencies in the Avatara-doctrine. He sees in it every view except the right one. The metabiology of the avataras is a western invention. The mystical is a personal view of reality and not an impersonal view. It is how the

soul seeks and finds its highest truth and Self.

The ahistorical view may be that of the Mysticism of Identity. But identity is not always the poise of Spirit. Unity pervades and manifests multiplicity and gives meaning to them; so also multiplicity and difference reveal the richness of the unity and identity. Both are faces of mysticism. Mysticism reveals that the Divine must be embraced or sought after not from any one part of being or portion of experience but by all parts of one's being, the physical, mental, vital and supramental. All sheathes of organic existence should subserve the Divine, must be suffused with the Divine Light and truth, must ultimately be transformed by the same Ananda. So long as any portion of the organic existence or soul is left untouched by or unopened to the influx of the Divine, there will be

conflict, disease, and mortality. The Divine either has all or has nothing to do with a soul. All or none formula is true here, as elsewhere in Logic.

The ahistorical mystical view is more akin to what the late Nicholas Berdyeav, the renowned Russian Mystic - Christian Apologist, stated. Monism and mysticism are anthithetical, he said. The reason is not far to seek. Being can only be experienced as personal, and the Ultimate is experienced as the Personal 'more' or in Tagore's phrase "surplus". Further he rightly remarked also that the descent of the Divine is a fundamental historical event not in sense in which the world war II is a historical event or the birth of Communism even or the French Revolution or the October Revolution. Its historical nature is suprahistorical really because it sets a pace to the transformation of the

relationship that man bears to the All, the Divine. In this sense the Advent of Christ Jesus and Crucifixion of the Son of Man transcend the ordinary historical. But this aspect is something foreign to Professor Haas's understanding. Every one of the Advents narrated in the Indian Puranas is a significant transcendence over the animal and the human, a new step made in History conceived as the History of Spirit - the Lila* of the Divine, the most wonderful phenomenon of providence descending into the scheme of His creation to give meaning and direction and eternity to the temporal play of events and planes and personalities.

There is a sense in which we can hold that the identity consciousness is fully transcendent to the temporal when it is a swoon into the infinite. Such a swoon is the desideratum according to some

philosopher mystics, as the ecstacy is incomparable and irresistible and there is an actual impossibility of severance or return to the separative consciousness. It is this merging that is acclaimed highest by Advaita Vedanta. Some thinkers hold that without this inner coalescence and loss of individuality and personality there can be no real liberation. It may involve the total negation of the world and all creative process - nisprapancikaranam - so far as that soul is concerned. The abolition of Time is considered accordingly to be the business of the mystical or ahistorical consciousness.

But we are aware of another approach to the problem of Time in the Upanisads. The prasnopanisad begins with an elucidation of this problem in a sense. The great sage of the

Atharvana Veda, Pippalada speaks of the creation form Prajapati in the following way. Prajapati was at the beginning. He brought into being out of Himself Prana and Rayi (souls and matter); Prana is Surya and Rayi is Candramas. Then Rsi Pippalada states that Prajapati is Samvatsara or Year. This Samvatsara has two ayanas the Uttarayana and Daksinayana. The former is Prana, the latter is Rayi. Then Prajapati is said to be the Day which contains the day and the night, the former is praja and the latter is rayi. He who would like to live the Mystic Life, Brahmacharya, must not waste his prana during the daytimes*.

The above shows that Time is conceived of the triple form, the first is daivika, the second is of the pitrs, and the last manava. The person who understands the mystic unity of the transcendence

of the Prajapati and how He works in and through the twofold energies or souls and Matter will find that immortality is open to him. The five nights (ratris) above stated, namely Rayi, Candramas, Daksinayana, Krishnapaksa, and Ratri are of the downward path, the path that leads to disintegration and darkness and Ignorance. The contrary movement is that of the Ascent (or the Souls) in a sense. He who would know the mystic unity of these two in and through the Supreme is the Seer and Knower.

Sometimes it is difficult to gather the intention of these description at all. But the illustration granted by the Ramayana and Harivamsa is extremely valuable. If we look at the birth of Rama as described by Valmiki we find that he is born of the (in the) Five Pranas or Daytimes - Agni-Prana,

(Aditya), Surya-Vamsa, Uttarayana, Suklapaksa, and Midday (karkataka lagna in Chaitra); and so also we find that Sri Krishna was born of (in) five Nights: Devaki (Rayi) Chandra-vamsa, Daksinayana, Krishnapaksa midnight. The supreme purpose of these two descents is to establish the kingdom of Truth and Dharma and abolition of unrighteousness and evil. The significance of these two avataras must be found in two different phases of the mystical Consciousness. The Divine is always the Prana. The descent into a lighted world is where the dharmas are very clear and determined and the people know them with clarity and Rama Rajya prevailed. The interference with this dharma and rajya was punished and the ancient order was restored. Certainly it was the exploit of the

Mahavira Rama that we witness in his super human ability in slaying the ten headed Ravana of great prowess. Sri Rama revealed that he could and would protect everyone and no power on earth could prevent that.

In the case of Sri Krishna it was a period of great indeterminateness. Mankind was itself afflicted with unrighte-ousness. The Dvapara was at its end. It was the beginning of the Kali Night - the night among the yugas. The descent of Krishna was the descent of the supremest power which alone could plunge into inconcience and perennial darkness and in plunging illumine it at every level of its septi-planal darkness and above.

This Time-element in the Upanisad of the five Ratris or Five days is important in respect of man's

own ascent and secret of holding on to the Divine Prana in the darkness or nights. This is expressed in the Visistadvaita exposition as Panchakala Vidhi - comprising abhigamana, upadana, ijya, svadhyaya and yoga. The five times of the day are to be devoted to the worship of the Divine in all his five fold aspect as the Transcendent, Vyuha, Vibhava, Arca and Antaryamin. The way of worship through doing kainkarya for God alone with one-pointed mind (ekayana) is the way to preserve the Prana in the rayi, the Soul within the body.

Thus the mystical division of Time into the two transcendent forms of Prana and Surya (Aditya), and Rayi and Candramas; and the three temporal forms of Uttarayana, Suklapaksa, and Ahas, and Daksinayana, Krishnapaksa and Ratri reveals the

significance which the Mystic Consciousness had always attached to the pravritti and nivrtti paths as including and involving each other.

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It can in this context also refer to the sat-sthala doctrine of the Viarasaiva theology. But it is not as clear. But the Pancasamskaras and the five - symbols may have some reference to the five Nights. Manu indeed equate the Uttarayana with the day of devas, the Krsnapaksa with the day of the Pitrs though this is not the Upanisadic view. Obviously for Manu it was rather surprising that Suklapaksa should be granted to Aditya though the Moon it is who waxes.