

RIDDLE NO. 10

WHY DID THE BRAHMINS MAKE THE HINDU GODS FIGHT AGAINST ONE ANOTHER ?

The Hindu theology regarding the world is based upon the doctrine of Trimurti. According to this doctrine the world undergoes three stages. It is created, preserved and destroyed. It is endless series of cycles which goes on without stoppage. The three functions which comprise the cycle are discharged by three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Brahma creates the world, Vishnu preserves and Mahesh destroys it for the purpose of creation. These gods are spoken of as forming what is called Trimurti. The doctrine of Trimurti postulates that three gods are co-equal in status and are engaged in functions which are contemporary and not competitive. They are friends and not rivals. They are allies of one another and not enemies.

When, however, one studies the literature which depicts the deeds of these three gods one finds a complete difference between the theory and the practice. The Gods far from being friends appear to be worse enemies of one another, competing for supremacy and sovereignty among themselves. A few illustrations from the Puranas will make the matter clear.

At one time Brahma appears to be the most supreme god as compared to Shiva and Vishnu. Brahma is said to be the creator of the universe—the first Prajapati. He is the progenitor of Shiva,¹ and the master of Vishnu because if Vishnu became the preserver of the universe it was because Brahma commanded him to do it. So supreme was Brahma that he was the arbitrator in the conflicts that took place between Rudra and Narayan and between Krishna and Shiva.

Equally certain is the fact that at a subsequent stage Brahma came into conflict with Shiva and Vishnu and strangely enough lost his position and supremacy to his rivals. Two illustrations of his conflict with Vishnu may be given.

¹ Vishnu Purana. Muir. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

The first may well be the story of the Avatars. On the issue of the Avatars there is a rivalry between Brahma and Vishnu. The theory of Avatars or incarnation assumed by God to save humanity from a calamity began with Brahma. He was said to have assumed two Avatars (1) Boar and (2) Fish. But the followers of Vishnu refused to allow this. They asserted that these Avatars were not the Avatars of Brahma but that they were the Avatars of Vishnu. Not only did they appropriate these Avatars of Vishnu they gave to Vishnu many more Avatars.

The Puranas have run riot with the *Avatars* of Vishnu and different Puranas have given different lists of Avatars as will be seen from the following :

AVATARS OF VISHNU

Sr. No.	According to Hari Vamsa	According to Narayani Akhyan	According to Varaha Purana	According to Vayu Purana	According to Bhagwat Purana
1.	Varaha	Hansa	Kurma	Narasinha	Sanatkumar
2.	Narasinha	Kurma	Matsya	Vaman	Boar
3.	Vaman	Matsya	Varaha	Varaha	
4.	Parshuram	Varaha	Narasinha	Kurma	Nara-Narayan
5.	Rama	Narasinha	Vaman	Sangram	Kapila
6.	Krishna	Vaman	Parshuram	Adivaka	Dattatraya
7.		Parshuram	Rama	Tripurari	Jadna
8.		Rama	Krishna	Andhakarh	Rashabha
9.		Krishna	Buddha	Dhvaja	Prithi
10.		Kalkin	Kalkin	Varta	Matsya
11.				Halahal	Kurma
12.				Kolhahal	Dhanwantari
13.					Mohini
14.					Narasinha
15.					Vaman
16.					Parshuram
17.					Ved Vyas
18.					Naradeo
19.					Rama
20.					Krishna
21.					Buddha
22.					Kalkin

The second story may well be the issue of the first born. It is related in the Skanda Purana. The story says that at one time Vishnu lay asleep on the bosom of Devi, a lotus arose from his navel, and its ascending flower soon reached the surface of the flood, Brahma sprang from flower, and looking round without any creature on the boundless

expanse, imagined himself to be first born, and entitled to rank above all future beings ; yet resolved to investigate deep and to ascertain whether any being existed in its universe who could controvert his preeminence, he glided down the stock of the lotus and finding Vishnu asleep, asked loudly who he was 'I am the first born' answered Vishnu ; and when Brahma denied his preprogeniture, they engaged in battle, till Mahadeo pressed between them in great wrath, saying 'It is I who am truly the first born'. But I will resign my place to either of you, who shall be able to reach and behind the summit of my head, or the soles of my foot. Brahma instantly ascended but having fatigued himself to no purpose in the regions of immensity yet loath to abandon his claim, returned to Mahadeo declaring that he had attained and seen the crown of his head, and called as his witness the first born cow. For this union of pride and falsehood, the angry God Shiva ordained that no sacred rites should be performed to Brahma and that the mouth of cow should be defiled. When Vishnu returned, he acknowledged that he had not been able to see the feet of Mahadeo who then told him that he was the first born among the Gods, and should be raised above all. It was after this Mahadeo cut off the fifth head of Brahma who thus suffered the loss of his pride, his power and his influence.

According to this story Brahma's claim to be the first born was false. He was punished by Shiva for making it. Vishnu gets the right to call himself the first born. But that is allowed to him by the grace of Shiva. The followers of Brahma had their revenge on Vishnu for stealing what rightfully belonged to him with the help of Shiva. So they manufactured another legend according to which Vishnu emanated from Brahma's nostrils in the shape of a pig and grew naturally into a boar—a very mean explanation of Vishnu's Avatar as a boar.

After this Brahma tried to create enmity between Shiva and Vishnu evidently to better his own position. This story is told in the Ramayana. It says : "When King Dasaratha was returning to his capital, after taking leave of Janaka, the king of Mithila, whose daughter Sita had just been married to Rama, he was alarmed by the ill-omened sounds uttered by certain birds, which however were counteracted, as the sage Vasishta assured the king, by the auspicious sign of his being perambulated by the wild animals of the forest. The alarming event indicated was the arrival of Parasurama, preceded by a hurricane which shook the earth and prostrated the trees, and by thick darkness which veiled the sun. He was fearful to behold, brilliant as fire, and bore the axe and a bow on his shoulder. Being received with honour, which he accepted, he proceeded to say to Rama, the son of

Dasaratha that he had heard of his prowess in breaking the bow produced by Janaka and had brought another which he asked Rama to bend, and to fit an arrow on the string; and if he succeeded in doing so, he (Parasurama) would offer to engage with him in single combat. Dasaratha is rendered anxious by this speech, and adopts a suppliant tone towards Parasurama, but the latter again addresses Rama, and says that the bow he had broken was Siva's, but the one he himself had now brought was Vishnu's. Two celestial bows, he proceeds, were made by Visvakarma of which one was given by the gods to Mahadeva, the other to Vishnu".

The narrative then proceeds :

"The gods then all made a request to Brahma desiring to find out the strength and weakness of Sitikantha (Mahadeva) and Vishnu. Brahma, most excellent of the three learning the purpose of the gods, created enmity between the two. In this state of enmity a great and terrible fight ensued between Sitikantha and Vishnu each of whom was eager to conquer the other. Siva's bow of dreadful power was then relaxed and the three-eyed Mahadeva was arrested by a muttering. These two eminent deities being entreated by the assembled gods, rishis, and Charanas then became pacified. Seeing that the bow of Siva had been relaxed by the prowess of Vishnu, the gods and rishis esteemed Vishnu to be superior."

Thus Brahma managed to avenge the wrong done to him by Mahadeo.

Even this stratagem did not avail Brahma to maintain his position against Vishnu. Brahma lost his position so completely to Vishnu that Vishnu who at one time was at the command of Brahma became the creator of Brahma.

In his contest with Shiva for supremacy Brahma suffered equal defeat. Here again, the position became completely inverted. Instead of being created by Brahma, Shiva became the creator of Brahma. Brahma lost the power of giving salvation. The god who could give salvation was Shiva and Brahma became no more than a common devotee worshipping Shiva and his Linga in the hope of getting salvation.¹ He was reduced to the position of a servant of Shiva doing the work of charioteer² of Shiva.

Ultimately Brahma was knocked out of the field of worship on a charge of having committed adultery with his own daughter. The charge is set out in the Bhagwat Purana in the following terms :

¹ Mahabharata quoted in Muir IV, p. 192.

² Mahabharata quoted in Muir IV, p. 199.

“We have heard, O Kshatriya, that Swayambhu (Brahma) had a passion for Vach, his slender and enchanting daughter, who had no passion for him. The Munis, his sons, headed by Marichi, seeing their father bent upon wickedness, admonished him with affection ; ‘This is such a thing as has not been done by those before you, nor will those after you do it,— that you, being the lord, should sexually approach your daughter, not restraining your passion. This, O preceptor of the world, is not a laudable deed even in glorious personages, through limitation of whose actions men attain felicity. Glory to that divine being (Vishnu) who by his own lustre revealed this (universe) which abides in himself, he must maintain ‘righteousness’. Seeing his sons, the Prajapatis, thus speaking before him the lord of the Prajapatis (Brahma) was ashamed, and abandoned his body. This dreadful body the regions received and it is known as foggy darkness.”

The result of this degrading and defamatory attacks on Brahma was to damn him completely. No wonder that his cult disappeared from the face of India leaving him a nominal and theoretical member of the Trimurti.

After Brahma was driven out of the field there remained in the field Shiva and Vishnu. The two however were never at peace. The rivalry and antagonism between the two is continuous.

The Puranas are full of propaganda and counter-propaganda carried on by the Brahmins, protagonists of Shiva and Vishnu. How well matched the propaganda and counter-propaganda was, can be seen from the following few illustrations :

Vishnu is connected with the Vedic God Sun. The worshippers of Shiva connect him with Agni. The motive was that if Vishnu has a Vedic origin Shiva must also have Vedic origin as well. One cannot be inferior to the other in the matter of nobility of origin.

Shiva must be greater than Vishnu and Vishnu must not be less than Shiva. Vishnu has thousand¹ names. So Shiva must have thousand names and he has them².

Vishnu has his emblems³. They are four. So Shiva must have them and he has them. They are (1) flowing ganges, (2) Chandra (moon), (3) Shesh (snake) and, (4) *Jata* (walled hair). The only point on which Shiva did not compete with Vishnu was the matter of *Avatars*. The reason is not that there was no desire to compete but that philosophically there was an impediment in the way of Shiva taking

¹ See Vishnu Sahasranama.

² They are mentioned in the Padma Purana.

³ *Ibid.*

Avatars. The Saivas and Vaisnavas differed fundamentally in their conceptions of immortal bliss. As has been pointed out by Mr. Ayer :

“To the Saiva the goal to be reached was final liberation from all fetters, bodily and mental, by their total annihilation. Hence he conceived of Rudra as the inextinguishable, one who could never be destroyed, but who extinguished or destroyed everything else. That was why Rudra came to be called the Destroyer. In the final stage of the spiritual development of an individual, there ought to be no separateness at all from the supreme Shiva. He ought to transcend his body and mind, pleasure and pain, and all opposites or dualities. He should attain union or Sayujya with Shiva in which condition he would not be able to regard himself as separate from Shiva. Till he reached that stage, he was imperfect, however pure he might be, however eligible he might be, for the highest state of Sayujya ; for, those who were eligible had attained only the subordinate stages of Salokya, Samipya and Sarupya. That was also the reason why the doctrine of Avatars did not appeal to the Saiva. God as an Avatar was only a limited being, one who had the capacity, perhaps, of releasing himself from his fetters but not one without fetters. The Vaisnava believed differently. He had also an equally clear conception of the highest state that could be reached, and that ought to be reached. But there was, according to him, nothing appealing in the idea of losing one’s own individuality totally. One should be united with the supreme, and yet be conscious of the union. He should be united with the universe which again should be regarded as the other aspect of the supreme imperishable being. He was not, in other words, for the extinction of the universe as if it were something separate and distinct from the Supreme Purusha. He was rather in favour of the preservation of the universe which was neither more nor less than the manifestation of the Purusha so manifested. That was the reason why Vishnu was given the name of the Preserver. After all it is but a difference in the way in which the truth is perceived or viewed. The Saiva viewed the universe as an object of pain and misery—as *Pasha* or fetters (and one bound by it to be *Pasu*) which had to be broken and destroyed. The Vaisnava regarded it as evidencing the greatness of the Purusa and so to be preserved. The Saiva, with his superior pessimism (if it could be so called) was not likely to respect the Dharma Shastras, the Artha Shastras and other scriptures all of which were framed with the purpose of establishing orderliness in the world, inevitable for its welfare. He was bound to be a non-conformist, disdaining rules and conventions. Ideas of caste rigidity would be repugnant to the highly-evolved Saiva who would at best tolerate such

notions in others who had not reached his own stage of development. He would pay respect to and cultivate the society of only such people, to whatever caste they might belong, as were eligible for Samipya, Salokya, Sarupya and Sayujya, with Siva. The Vaisnava, on the other hand, was more concerned with the preservation of all rules and regulations which would have the effect of promoting peace and happiness in the world. If '*Dharma*' perished, the world would perish too, and since the world ought not to perish, for it was a manifestation of the glory of the cosmic Purusa, his duty consisted in doing everything he could for preserving the Dharma. If things went beyond his control he was sure Vishnu would take the matter up himself; for he would come into the world as an Avatar. But when Vishnu did come upon the earth, it would be to destroy the wicked, that is, all those who were instrumental in upsetting the Dharma, and so it was necessary that one should be careful not to deserve that terrible punishment from Vishnu. Hence, the Agamas or rules laid down for the guidance of Siva bhaktas did not emphasise caste, and were concerned only with the duties of *bhaktas* in general, the proper fulfilment of which would render them fit to gain God vision, and ultimately union with Siva. These were regarded as impure by the others because they were subversive of caste ideas, and as stated before, they were not alluded to in the orthodox scriptures."

In the performance of deeds of glory the propaganda in favour of Shiva is fully matched by counter-propaganda in favour of Vishnu. One illustration of this is the story regarding the origin of the holy river Ganges.¹ The devotees of Shiva attribute its origin to Shiva. They take its origin from Shiva's hair. But the Vaishnavas will not allow it. They have manufactured another legend. According to the Vaishnavite legend the blessed and the blessing river flowed originally out of Vaikunth (the abode of Vishnu) from the foot of Vishnu, and descending upon Kailasa fell on the head of Shiva. There is a two-fold suggestion in the legend. In the first place Shiva is not the source of the Ganges. In the second place Shiva is lower than Vishnu and receives on his head water which flows from the foot of Vishnu.

Another illustration is furnished by the story which relates to the churning of the oceans by the Devas and the Asuras. They used the Mandara mountain as the churning rod and mighty serpent Shesha as a rope to whirl the mountain. The earth began to shake and people became afraid that the world was coming to an end. Vishnu took the Avatar of Kurma (Tortoise) and held the earth on his back and prevented the earth from shaking while the churning was going on.

1. Moore's Hindu Pantheon pp. 40-41.

This story is told in glorification of Vishnu. To this the Shaivites add a supplement. According to this supplement the churning brought out fourteen articles from the depth of the ocean which are called fourteen jewels. Among these fourteen a deadly poison was one. This deadly poison would have destroyed the earth unless somebody was prepared to drink it. Shiva was the only person who came forward to drink it. The suggestion is that Vishnu's act was foolish in allowing the rivals—the Gods and Demons—to bring out this deadly poison. Glory to Shiva for he drank it and saved the world from the evil consequences of the folly of Vishnu.

Third illustration is an attempt to show that Vishnu is a fool and that it is Shiva who with his greater wisdom and greater power saves Vishnu from his folly. It is the story of Akrurasura¹. Akrur was a demon with the face of a bear, who, nevertheless, was continuously reading the Vedas and performing acts of devotion. Vishnu was greatly pleased and promised him any boon that he would care to ask. Akrurasura requested that no creature, then existing in three worlds, might have power to deprive him of life, and Vishnu complied with his request ; but the demon became so insolent that the Devatas, whom he oppressed, were obliged to conceal themselves, and he assumed the dominion of the world; Vishnu was then sitting on a bank of the Kali, greatly disquieted by the malignant ingratitude of the demon ; and his wrath being kindled, a shape, which never before had existed, sprang from his eyes. It was Mahadeva, in his destructive character, who dispelled in a moment the anxiety of the Vishnu.

This is countered by the story of Bhasmasura intended to show that Shiva was a fool and Vishnu saved him from his folly. Bhasmasura having propitiated Shiva asked for a boon. The boon was to be the power to burn any one on whose head Bhasmasura laid his hands. Shiva granted the boon. Bhasmasura tried to use his boon power against Shiva himself. Shiva became terrified and ran to Vishnu for help. Vishnu promised to help him. Vishnu took the form of a beautiful woman and went to Bhasmasura who became completely enamoured of her. Vishnu asked Bhasmasura to agree to obey him in everything as a condition of surrender. Bhasmasura agreed. Vishnu then asked him to place his hands on his own head which Bhasmasura did with the result that Bhasmasura died and Vishnu got the credit of saving Shiva from the consequences of his folly.

“Is Isa (Mahadeva) the Cause of causes for any other reasons ? We have not heard that the linga (male organ) of any other person is worshipped by the gods. Declare, if thou hast heard, what other

¹ This story is told in Vishnu Agama and is quoted in Moore's Hindu Pantheon, pp. 19-20.

being's linga except that of Mahesvara is now worshipped, or has formerly been worshipped, by the gods ? He whose linga Brahma and Vishnu, and thou (Indra), with, the deities, continually worship, is therefore then most eminent. Since children bear neither the mark of the lotus (Brahma's), nor of the discus (Vishnu's), nor of the thunderbolt (Indra's), but are marked with the male and the female organs,—therefore offspring is derived from Mahesvara. All women produced from the nature of Devi as their cause, are marked with the female organ, and all males are manifestly marked with the linga of Hara. He who asserts any other cause than Isvara (Mahadeva) or (affirms) that there is any (female) not marked by Devi in the three worlds, including all things movable or immovable, let that fool be thrust out. Know everything which is male to be Isara, and all that is female to be Uma ; for this whole world, movable and immovable, is pervaded by (these) two bodies."

The Greek Philosopher Zenophanes insists that polytheism or plurality of Gods is inconceivable and contradictory. That the only true doctrine was monotheism. Considered from a philosophical point of view, Zenophanes might be right. But from the historical point of view both are natural. Monotheism is natural where society is a single community. Where society is a federation of many communities polytheism is both natural and inevitable. Because every ancient community consisted not merely of men but of men and its Gods it was impossible for the various communities to merge and coalesce except on one condition that its God is also accepted by the rest. This is how polytheism has grown.

Consequently the existence of many Gods among the Hindus is quite understandable because the Hindu Society has been formed by the conglomeration of many tribes and many communities each of whom had their own separate Gods. What strikes one as a strange phenomenon is the sight of the Hindu Gods, struggling one against the other, their combats and feuds and the ascriptions by one God to the other, all things that are a shame and disgrace to common mortals. This is what requires explanation.

