

RIDDLE NO. 11

WHY DID THE BRAHMINS MAKE THE HINDU GODS SUFFER TO RISE AND FALL ?

The Hindus are accused of idolatry. But there is nothing wrong in idolatry. Making an idol is nothing more than having a photograph of the deity and if there can be no objection to keeping a photograph what objection can there be to having an image. Real objection to Hindu idolatry is that it is not mere photography, not mere production of an image. It is more than that. The Hindu idol is a living being and is endowed with all the functions of a human being. A Hindu idol is given life by means of a ceremony called *Pranapratishta*. The Buddhists also are idolatrous in as much as they too worship Buddha's idol. But the idol they worship is only a photograph, a mere image. There is no soul in it. Why the Brahmins endowed the Hindu Gods with souls and made them living beings opens out an inquiry which is bound to be revealing. But this inquiry is outside the scope of this Chapter.

The second charge generally levelled against the Hindus is that they are polytheists i.e., they worship many Gods. Here again the Hindus are not the only people who are guilty of the practice of Polytheism. Other communities have also been known to have practised polytheism. To mention only two. The Romans and the Greeks were essentially polytheists. They too worshipped many Gods. There is therefore no force in this charge.

The real charge which can be levelled against the Hindus most people seem to have missed. That charge is that the Hindus are never steadfast in their devotion to their Gods. There is no such thing as

This is a 43-page typed MS having corrections and modifications in the handwriting of the author. The concluding para, however, is written in pen by the author himself. The original title on the Chapter was 'The Rise and Fall of the Gods'. This title was scored out in blue pencil, which was normally used by the author for scoring out the matter.—Ed.

loyalty or attachment or faith in one God. In the history of Hindu Gods one finds it a very common experience that some Gods have been worshipped for a time and subsequently their worship has been abandoned and the Gods themselves have been thrown on the scrap-heap. Quite new Gods are adopted and their worship goes with an intensity of devotion which is full and overflowing. Again the new Gods are abandoned and are replaced by a fresh crop of new Gods. So the cycle goes on. In this way the Hindu Gods are always undergoing rise and fall—a phenomenon which is unknown in the history of any other community in the world.

The statement that the Hindus treat their Gods with such levity may not be accepted without demur. Some evidence on this point is therefore necessary. Fortunately there is abundance of it. At present the Hindus worship four Gods (1) Shiva, (2) Vishnu, (3) Rama and (4) Krishna. The question that one has to consider is : are these the only Gods the Hindus have worshipped from the beginning ?

The Hindu Pantheon has the largest number of inmates. The Pantheon of no religion can rival it in point of population. At the time of the Rig-Veda the number of its inmates was colossal. At two places the Rig-Veda¹ speaks of three thousand three hundred and nine Gods. For some reasons, which it is not possible for us now to know, this number came to be reduced to thirty-three². This is a considerable reduction. Nevertheless with thirty three, the Hindu Pantheon remains the largest.

The composition of this group of thirty-three Gods is explained by the Satapatha Brahmana³ as made up of 8 Vasus, 11 Rudras and 12 Adityas, together with Dyasus and Prithvi (heaven and earth).

Of greater importance than the question of numbers is the question of their relative rank. Was there any distinction between the 33 Gods in point of their rank ? There is a verse in the Rig-Veda which seems to suggest that these thirty-three Gods were divided for purposes of honours and precedence into two classes, one being great and small and the other being young and old. This view seems to be against an earlier view also contained in the Rig-Veda. The old rule says :

“None of you O ! Gods ! is small
or young : You are all great”.

This is also the conclusion of Prof. Max Muller :

“When these individual gods are invoked, they are not conceived as limited by the power of others, as superior or inferior in rank. Each god is to the mind of the supplicants as good as all the gods.

¹ Rig-Veda iii, 99 : X 52 : 6, Vaj, S. 33, 7, Muir V, p. 12.

² Rig-Veda 1, 139, II, iii, 6, 9 ; VIII 28.1, VIII 30.2, VIII 35.3, Muir V. p. 10.

³ S. B. IV 5, 7, 2, Muir V, p. II.

He is felt, at the time, as a real divinity, as supreme and absolute, in spite of the necessary limitations which, to our mind, a plurality of gods must entail on every single god. All the rest disappear for a moment from the vision of the poet, and he only, who is to fulfil their desires stands in full light before the eyes of the worshippers.”

“Nowhere is any of the Gods
represented as the slave of others”.

This is of course true only for a time. A change seems to have come in the old angle of vision towards the Gods. For one finds numerous hymns of the Veda in which some gods are represented as supreme and absolute.

In the first hymn of the second Mandala, Agni is called the ruler of the Universe, the Lord of men, the wise king, the father, the brother, the son, the friend of men ; nay, all the powers and names of the others are distinctly ascribed to Agni.

Then a second god came to be elevated above Agni. He is Indra. Indra is spoken of as the strongest god in the hymns as well as in the Brahmanas, and the burden of one of the songs of the Tenth Book is : *Visvasmad Indra Uttarah* ‘Indra is greater than all’.

Then a third god is raised to the highest level. He is Soma. Of Soma, it is said that he was born great and that he conquers every one. He is called the king of the world, he has the power to prolong the life of men, and in one verse he is called the maker of heaven, and earth, of Agni, of Surya, of Indra and of Vishnu. Then Soma was forgotten and a fourth God was elevated. He is Varuna. Varuna was made the highest of all Gods. For what more could human language do than to express the idea of a divine and supreme power, than what the Vedic poet says of Varuna ; ‘Thou art Lord of all, of heaven, and earth’ or, as is said in another hymn (ii. 27, 10), Thou art the king of all ; of those who are gods, and of those who are men.”

From this evidence it is clear that out of the 33 Vedic Gods four Gods, Agni, Indra, Soma and Varuna had emerged as the principal Gods. Not that other gods had ceased to be gods. But these four had become elevated above the rest. At a later stage a change seems to have taken place at the time of the Satapatha Brahmana in the relative position of the different gods. Soma and Varuna had lost their places as the principal gods while Agni and Indra had retained their positions. A new god has emerged. He is Surya. The result is that instead of Agni, Indra, Soma and Varuna ; Agni, Indra and Surya became the principal gods. This is evident from the Satapatha Brahmana which says :

“Originally the gods were all alike, all pure. Of them being all alike, all pure, three desired, ‘May we become superior’ viz., Agni, Indra and Surya (the sun).

“2.

“3. Originally there was not in Agni the same flame, as this flame which is (now) in him. He desired: ‘May this flame be in me’. He saw this grahs, he took it; and hence there became this flame in him.

4. Originally there was not in Indra the same vigour, etc. (as in para 3).

5. Originally there was not in Surya the same lustre etc.”

For how long these three Gods continued to hold their places of superiority over the rest it is difficult to say. But that at a later stage a change in the scene has taken place is beyond doubt. This is evident by a reference to the Chula-Niddessa. The Chula Niddessa is a treatise which belongs to the Buddhist literature. Its approximate date is.... (*left incomplete*).

The Chula-Niddessa gives a list of sects which were then prevalent in India. Classified on the basis of creeds and cults. They may be listed as follows :

I. CREEDS

Sr. No.	Name of the Sect	
1.	Ajivika Shravaka ¹	Ajivika ²
2.	Nigatta Shravakas	Nigantha ³
3.	Jatil Shravakas	Jatila ⁴
4.	Parivrajaka Shravakas	Parivrajaka ⁵
5.	Avarudha Shravakas	Avarudhaka

II. CULTS

Sr. No.	Name of the Sect	The deity which is worshipped
1.	Hasti Vratikas ⁶	Hasti ⁷
2.	Ashva Vratikas	Ashva ⁸
3.	Go Vratikas	Go ⁹

¹ Shravaka means a disciple.

² Mendicants following special rules with regard to livelihood.

³ Mendicants who are free from all ties and hindrances.

⁴ Mendicants who twist their hair on the head.

⁵ Mendicants who escape from society.

⁶ Vratikas means a devotee.

⁷ Elephant.

⁸ Horse.

⁹ Cow.

II. CULTS *contd.*

Sr. No.	Name of the Sect	The deity which is worshipped
4.	Kukur Vratikas	Kukku ¹
5.	Kaka Vratikas	Kaka ²
6.	Vasudeo Vratikas	Vasudeo
7.	Baldeo Vratikas	Baldeo
8.	Puma Bhadra Vratikas	Puma Bhadra
9.	Mani Bhadra Vratikas	Mani Bhadra
10.	Agni Vratikas	Agni
11.	Naga Vratikas	Naga
12.	Suparna Vratikas	Suparna
13.	Yaksha Vratikas	Yaksha
14.	Asura Vratikas	Asura
15.	Gandharva Vratikas	Gandharva
16.	Maharaja Vratikas	Maharaja
17.	Chandra Vratikas	Chandra
18.	Surya Vratikas	Surya
19.	Indra Vratikas	Indra
20.	Brahma Vratikas	Brahma
21.	Deva Vratikas	Deva
22.	Deesha Vratikas	Deesha

Comparing the position as it stood at the time of the Satapatha Brahmana with that arising from the Chula-Niddessa the following propositions may be said to be well-established: (1) Firstly, that the worship of Agni, Surya and Indra continued up to the time of the Chula Niddessa. (2) Secondly, the Cults of Agni, Surya and Indra although they had not ceased, had lost their places of supremacy. Others and quite a number of cults had come into being as rivals and had won the affection of the people. (3) Thirdly, of the new cults there are two which later on became very prominent. They are the cults of Vasudeo (i.e. Krishna) and Brahma and (4) Fourthly the cults of Vishnu, Shiva and Rama had not come into being.

What is the present position as compared with that found in the Chula-Niddessa? Here again, three propositions are well-established. *First*: the cults of Agni, Indra, Brahma and Surya have disappeared. *Second*: Krishna has retained his position. *Three*: The cults of Vishnu, Shiva and

¹ Dog.

² Crow.

Rama are new cults which have come into existence since the time of the Chula-Niddessa. Given this situation it raises three questions for considerations : *One* is why have the old cults of Agni, Indra, Brahma and Surya disappeared ? Why was the worship of these Gods abandoned ? *Second* is what are the circumstances that gave rise to the new cults of Krishna, Rama, Shiva and Vishnu. *Third* what is the relative position of these new Gods, Krishna, Rama, Shiva and Vishnu ?

For the first question we can find no answer. The Brahmanic literature gives us no clue whatsoever as to why the Brahmins abandoned the worship of Agni, Indra, Surya and Brahma. There is some explanation as to why the cult of Brahma disappeared. It rests in a charge which is found to be levelled in the Brahmanic literature against Brahma. The charge is that he committed rape on his own daughter and hereby made himself unworthy of worship and devotion. Whatever be the truth in the charge it could not be regarded as sufficient to account for the abandonment of Brahma and for two reasons. In the first place, in that age such conduct was not unusual. In the second place, Krishna was guilty of greater immoralities than were charged to Brahma and yet they continued to worship him.

While there is something to speculate about the abandonment of Brahma there is nothing to account for the abandonment of the others. The disappearance of Agni, Indra, Surya and Brahma is thus a mystery. This is no place to solve this mystery. It is enough to say that the *Gods* of the Hindus had ceased to be Gods—a terrible thing.

The second question is also enveloped in mystery. Brahmanic literature, to account for the importance of the cults of these new Gods, Krishna, Vishnu, Shiva and Rama, is full and overflowing. But there is nothing in the Brahmanic literature to account for the rise of these new Gods. Why these new Gods were brought into action is thus a mystery. The mystery however deepens when one finds that some of the new Gods were definitely anti-Vedic.

Let us take the case of Shiva.

That Shiva was originally an Anti-Vedic God is abundantly clear. The following two incidents recorded in the Bhagvata Purana (and also in the Mahabharata) throw a flood of light on the subject. The first incident shows how enmity arose between Shiva and his father-in-law Daksha. It appears that the Gods and Rishis were assembled at a sacrifice celebrated by the Prajapatis. On the entrance of Daksha, all the personages who were present, rose to salute him, except Brahma and Shiva. Daksha, after making his obeisance to Brahma, sat down by his command ; but was offended at the treatment he received from Shiva. This is how he addressed Shiva¹:

¹ Bhagwat Purana quoted in Chapter IV pp. 379-80.

“Beholding Mrida (Shiva) previously seated, Daksha did not brook his want of respect ; and looking at him obliquely with his eyes, as if consuming him, thus spake : ‘Hear me, ye Brahman rishis, with the Gods and the Agnis, While I, neither from ignorance nor from passion, describe what is the practice of virtuous persons. But this shameless being (Siva) detracts from the reputation of the guardians of the world, he by whom, stubborn as he is, the course pursued by the good is transgressed. He assumed the position of my disciple, inasmuch as, like a virtuous person, in the face of Brahmans and of fire, he took the hand of my daughter, who resembled Savitri. This monkey-eyed (god), after having taken of (my) fawn-eyed (daughter), has not even by word shown suitable respect to me whom he ought to have risen and saluted. Though unwilling, I yet gave my daughter to this impure and proud abolisher of rites and demolisher of barriers, like the word of the Veda to a Sudra. He roams about in dreadful cemeteries, attended by hosts of ghosts and spirits, like a madman, naked, with dishevelled hair, laughing, weeping, bathed in the ashes of funeral piles, wearing a garland of dead men’s (skulls), and ornaments of human bones, pretending to be Siva (auspicious) but in reality Asiva (in-auspicious), insane, beloved by the insane the lord of Pramathas and Bhutas (spirits), beings whose nature is essentially darkness. To this wicked-hearted lord of the infuriate, whose purity has perished. I have, alas ! given my virtuous daughter, at the instigation of Brahma’. Having thus reviled Girisa (Siva), Who did not oppose him, Daksha having then touched water, incensed, began to curse him (thus) : ‘Let this Bhava (Siva), lowest of the gods, never, at the worship of the gods, receive any portion along with the gods Indra, Upendra (Vishnu), and others.’ Having delivered his malediction, Daksha departed.”

The enmity between the father-in-law and son-in-law continues. Daksha being elevated by Brahma to the rank of the Chief of the Prajapatis decided to perform a great Sacrifice called Vrihaspathisava. Seeing the other Gods with their wives going to this Sacrifice, Parvati pressed her husband, Shiva, to accompany her thither. He refers to the insults which he had received from her father, and advises her not to go. She, however (sect. 4), being anxious to see her relatives, disregards his warning and goes ; but being sighted by her father, Daksha, she reproaches him for his hostility to her husband, and threatens to abandon the corporeal frame by which she was connected with her parent. She then voluntarily gives up the ghost. Seeing this, Shiva’s attendants, who had followed her, rush on Daksha to kill him. Bhṛigu, however, throws an oblation into the southern fire, pronouncing a Yajus text suited to destroy the destroyers of sacrifice (*yajna-ghnena yajusha dakshinagnau*

juhavaha). A troop of Ribhus in consequence spring up, who put Shiva's followers to flight. Shiva is filled with wrath when he hears of the death of Sati (sect. 5). From a lock of his hair, which he tore out, a gigantic demon arose, whom he commended to destroy Daksha and his sacrifice. This demon proceeds with a troop of Shiva's followers, and they all execute the mandate. How they executed the mandate is described in the Bhagvat Purana¹ in the following terms :

"Some broke the sacrificial vessels, others destroyed the fires, others made water in the ponds, others cut the boundary-cords of the sacrificial ground ; others assaulted the Munis, others reviled their wives ; others seized the gods who were near, and those who had fled.... 19. The divine Bhava (Siva) plucked out the beard of Bhrigu, who was offering oblations with a ladle in his hand, and who had laughed in the assembly, showing his beard. He also tore out the eyes of Bhaga, whom in his wrath he had felled to the ground, and who, when in the assembly, had made a sign to (Daksha when) cursing (Siva) He moreover knocked out the teeth of Pushan (as Bala did the king of Kalinga's), who (Pushan) had laughed, showing his teeth, when the great god was being cursed. Tryambaka (Siva, or Virabhadra, according to the commentator) then cuts off the head of Daksha, but not without some difficulty. The gods report all that had passed to Svayambhu (Brahma), who, with Vishnu, had not been present (sect. 6). Brahma advises the gods to propitiate Siva, whom they had wrongfully excluded from a share in the sacrifice. The deities, headed by Aja (Brahma), accordingly proceed to Kailasa, when they see Siva "bearing the linga desired by devotees, ashes, a staff, a tuft of hair, an antelope's skin, and a digit of the moon, his body shining like an evening cloud". Brahma addresses Mahadeva "as the eternal Brahma, the lord of Sakti and Siva, who are respectively the womb and the seed of the universe,—who, in sport, like a spider, forms all things from Sakti and Siva, who are consubstantial with himself, and preserves and reabsorbs them" (A similar supremacy is ascribed to Vishnu in sect. 7). Brahma adds that it was this great being who had instituted sacrifice, and all the regulations which Brahmans devoutly observe and entreat him, who is beyond all illusion, to have mercy on those who, overcome by its influence, had wrongly attached importance to ceremonial works, and to restore the sacrifice of Daksha, at which a share had been refused to him by evil priests. Mahadeva partly relents (sect. 7)"

There can be no better evidence to prove that Shiva was an anti-vedic God than his destruction of Daksha's Yajna.

¹ Quoted in Muir IV. p. 383-84.

Now let us take Krishna.

There are four persons who go by the name *Krishna*. One Krishna is the son of Satyavati and father of Dhratarashtra, Pandu and Vidur. Second Krishna is the brother of Subhadra and friend of Arjuna. Third Krishna is the son of Vasudeva and Devaki and was resident of Mathura. Fourth Krishna is the one brought up by Nanda and Yeshoda at Gokul and it was he who killed Shishupal. If the Krishna of the Krishna cult is the same as the Krishna son of Devaki there can be no doubt that Krishna originally also was anti-Vedic. From the Chhandogya Upanishad it appears that he was a pupil of Ghora Angiras. What did Ghora Angiras teach him ? This is what the Chhandogya Upanishad says on the subject :

“Ghora, the descendant of Angiras, having declared this (the preceding mystical lore) to Krishna the son of Devaki, said to him that (which, when he heard) he became free from thirst (i.e. desire), viz., ‘let a man at the time of his death have recourse to these three texts, ‘Thou art the undecaying, thou art the imperishable, thou art the subtle principle of breath.’”

The commentator on this text of the Upanishad explains :

“A person, Ghora by name, and an Angirasa by family, having declared this doctrine of sacrifice to Krishna the son of Devaki, his pupil, then said etc. The connexion of the last word ‘said’, is with the words which occur some way below, ‘these three etc., And having heard this doctrine he became free from desire for any kinds of knowledge. In this manner he praises this knowledge of the Purusha-sacrifice by saying that it was so distinguished that it destroyed all thirst in Krishna, the son of Devaki, for any other knowledge. He now tells us that Ghora Angirasa said after declaring this knowledge to Krishna. It was this : ‘Let him who knows the aforesaid sacrifice, at the time of his death have recourse to, mutter, these three texts, *pranasamsitam* means, ‘thou art the very minute, and subtle principle of breath.’”

Obviously the doctrine taught by Ghora Angiras to Krishna was opposed to the Vedas and the Vedic sacrifices as a means of spiritual salvation. On the contrary Vishnu is a Vedic God. Yet his cult is established much later than that of Shiva. Why there has been so much neglect of Vishnu it is difficult to understand.

Similarly Rama though not anti-vedic is unknown to the Vedas. What was the necessity of starting his cult and that too at so late a stage in the history of the country ?

We may now take up the third question—namely what is the relative position of these new Gods to the old Pauranic Gods.

The rise and fall of Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva has already been told in a previous chapter called *Gods at War*. Whatever happened, the struggle for place and power was confined to these three Gods. They were not dragged below any other. But a time came when they were placed below the Devi by name Shri. How this happened is told in the Devi Bhagwat¹. The Devi Bhagwat says that a Devi by name *Shri* created the whole world and that it is this Goddess who created Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva ! The Devi Bhagwat goes on to state that the Devi desired to rub her palms. The rubbing of palms produced a blister. Out of this blister was born Bramha. When Bramha was born the Devi asked him to marry her. Bramha refused saying she was his mother. The Devi got angry and burned Bramha alive by her wrath and Bramha was reduced to ashes then and there. Devi rubbed her palms a second time and had a second blister. Out of this second blister a second son was born. This was Vishnu. The Devi asked Vishnu to marry her. Vishnu declined saying that she was his mother. Devi got angry and burned down Vishnu to ashes. Devi rubbed her palms a third time and had a third blister. Out of this third blister was born a third son. He was Shiva. The Devi asked Shiva to marry her. Shiva replied : ‘I will, provided you assume another body’. Devi agreed. Just then Shiva’s eyes fell on the two piles of ashes. Devi replied ‘they are the ashes of his two brothers and that she burnt them because they refused to marry her.’ On this Shiva said, ‘How can I alone marry ? You create two other women so that we all three can marry’. The devi did as she was told and the three Gods were married to the Devi and her female creations. There are two points in the story. One is that even in doing evil Shiva did not wish to appear more sinning than Bramha and Vishnu for fear that he may appear more degraded than his other two competitors. The more important point however is that Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva had fallen in rank and had become the creatures of the Devi.

Having dealt with the rise and fall of Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva, there remains the vicissitudes in the cults of the two new Gods, Krishna and Rama.

Obviously there is a certain amount of artificiality in the cult of Krishna as compared with the cult of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Bramha, Vishnu and Mahesh were born gods. Krishna was a man who was raised to godhood. It is probably to confer godhood on him that the theory was invented that he was the incarnation of Vishnu. But even then his godhood remained imperfect because he was regarded to be only a partial² avatar of Vishnu largely because of his debaucheries

¹ Summarised in Satyarth Prakash.

² On this point see references in Muir IV pp. 49.

with the *gopis* which would have been inexcusable if he had been a full and perfect *avatar* of Vishnu.

Notwithstanding this humble beginning Krishna became elevated to the position of a supreme God above all others. How great a God he became can be seen by a reference to Chapter X and XIV of the Bhagvat Geeta. In these chapters Krishna says :

“Well then, O best of the Kauravas I will state to you my own divine emanations ; but (only) the chief (ones) for there is no end to the extent of my (emanations). I am the self. O Gudakesa seated in the hearts of all beings ; I am the beginning and the middle and the end also of all beings. I am Vishnu among the Adityas, the beaming Sun among the shining (bodies); I am Marichi among the Maruts, and the Moon among the lunar mansions. Among the Vedas, I am the Sama-veda. I am Indra among the Gods. And I am mind among the senses. I am consciousness in (living) beings. And I am Shankara among the Rudras, the Lord of Wealth among Yakshas and Rakshasas. And I am *fire* among the Vasus, and Meru among the high-topped (mountains). And know me, O Arjuna to be Brihaspati, the chief among domestic priests. I am Skanda among generals. I am the ocean among reservoirs of water. I am Bhrgu among the great sages. I am the Single syllable (Om) among words. Among sacrifices I am the *Gapa* sacrifice ; the Himalaya among the firmly fixed (mountains) ; the Asvattha among all trees, and Narada among divine sages : Chitraratha among the heavenly *choristers*, the sage Kapila among the Siddhas. Among horses know me to be Uchhaissravas, brought forth by (the labour for) the nectar ; and Airavata among the great elephants, and the ruler of men among men. I am the thunderbolt among weapons, the wish-giving (cow) among cows. And I am love which generates. Among serpents I am Vasuki. Among Naga snakes I am Ananta ; I am Varuna among aquatic beings. And I am Aryaman among the manes, and Yama among rulers. Among demons, too, I am Pralhada. I am the king of death (kala, time) among those that count.

“Among beasts I am the lord of beasts, and the son of Vinata among birds. I am the wind among those that blow. I am Rama among those that wield weapons. Among fishes I am Makara, and among streams the Janhavi. Of created things I am the beginning and the end and the middle also. O Arjuna, among sciences, I am the science of the Adhyatma, and I am the argument of controversialists. Among letters I am the letter A, and among the group of compounds the copulative compound. I myself am time inexhaustible and I the creator whose faces are in all directions. I

am death who seizes all, and the source of what is to be. And among females, fame, fortune, speech, memory, intellect, courage, forgiveness. Likewise among Saman hymns, I am the Brihat-saman, and I the Gayatri among metres. I am Margasirsha among the months, the spring among the seasons, of cheats, I am the game of dice ; I am the glory of the glorious ; I am victory. I am industry, I am the goodness of the good. I am Vasudeva among the descendants of Vrishni and Arjuna among the Pandvas. Among sages also, I am Vyasa ; and among the discerning ones, I am the discerning Usanas. I am the rod of those that restrain, and the policy of those that desire victory. I am silence respecting secrets. I am the knowledge of those that have knowledge. And O Arjuna ! I am also that which is the seed of all things. There is nothing movable or immovable which can exist without me.”

“Know that glory (to be) mine which, dwelling in the Sun, lights up the whole world, or in the moon or fire. Entering the earth, I by my power support all things; and becoming the juicy moon, I nourish all herbs. I becoming the fire, and dwelling in the bodies of (all) creatures, and united with the upward and downward life-breaths cause digestion of the four-fold food. And I am placed in the heart of all.”

“From me (come) memory, knowledge, and their removal ; I alone am to be learnt from all the Vedas ; I am the author of the Vedantas ; and I alone know the Vedas. There are these two beings in the world, the destructible and the indestructible. The destructible (includes) all things. The unconcerned one is (what is) called the indestructible. But the being supreme is yet another, called the highest self, who as the inexhaustible lord, pervading the three worlds, supports (them). And since I transcend the destructible, and since I am higher also than the indestructible therefore am I celebrated in the world and in the Vedas as the best of things.”

It is therefore clear that so far as the Gita is concerned there is no God greater than Krishna. He is, Alla ho Akbar. He is greater than all other Gods.

Let us now turn to the Mahabharata. What do we find ? We find a change in the position of Krishna. There is a rise and fall in his position. In the first place we find Krishna elevated above Shiva. Not only that, Shiva is made to admit and acknowledge the greatness of Krishna. Along with this we also find Krishna degraded to a rank below that of Shiva and is made to acknowledge the greatness of Shiva.

As a piece of evidence in support of the elevation of Krishna above Shiva the following passage from the *Amisasana-Parvan*¹ is very illuminating :

“Superior even to Pitamaha (Bramha) is Hari, the eternal Purusha, Krishna, brilliant as gold, like the sun risen in a cloudless sky, ten-armed, of mighty force, slayer of the foes of the gods, marked with the *srivatsa*, Hrishikesa, adored by all the gods. Bramha is sprung from his belly and I (Mahadeva) from his head, the luminaries from the hair of his head, the gods, and Asuras from the hairs of his body, and the rishis as well as everlasting worlds, have been produced from his body. He is the manifest abode of Pitamaha, and of all the deities. He is the creator of this entire earth, the lord of the three worlds, and the destroyer of creatures, of the stationary and the moveable. He is manifestly the most eminent of the gods, the lord of the deities, the vexer of his foes. He is omniscient, intimately united (with all things), omnipresent facing in every direction, the supreme spirit, Hrishikesa all-pervading, the mighty Lord. There is none superior to him in the three worlds. The slayer of Madhu is eternal, renowned as Govinda. He, the conferer of honour, born to fulfil the purposes of the gods, and assuming a human body, will slay all the kings in battle. For all the hosts of the gods, destitute of Trivikrama (the god who strode thrice), are unable to effect the purposes of the gods, devoid of a leader. He is the leader of all creatures, and worshipped by all creatures.

“Of this lord of the gods, devoted to the purposes of the gods, who is Brahma, and is the constant refuge of gods and rishis, Brahma dwells within the body, abiding in his face, and all the gods are easily sheltered in his body. This god is lotus-eyed, the producer of Sri, dwelling together with Sri ... For the welfare of the gods, Govinda shall arise in the family of the great Manu, possessed of eminent intelligence and (walking) in the excellent path of the Prajapati Manu, characterized by righteousness (Govinda’s ancestors are then detailed). In this family, esteemed by Brahmans, of men renowned for valour, distinguished by good conduct and excellent qualities, priests, most pure, this sura, the most eminent of Kshatriya heroic, renowned, conferring honour, shall beget a son Anakadundubhi, the prolonger of his race, known as Vasudev to him shall be born a four-armed son, Vasudeva, liberal, a benefactor of Brahmans, one with Brahma, a lover of Brahmans.”

“You the gods, should, as is fit, worship this deity, like the eternal Brahma, approaching him with reverential and excellent garlands of

¹ Muir IV pp. 273-74.

praise. For the divine and glorious Vasudev should be beheld by him who desires to see me and Brahma and Parent. In regard to this, I have no hesitation, that when he is seen I am seen, or the Parent (Brahma), the lord of the gods : know this ye whose wealth is austerity.”

We shall now see how Krishna after having been elevated to the position being highest among the Gods is being degraded.

The Mahabharata is so full of incidents and occasions which demonstrate Krishna’s inferiority to Shiva that it is difficult to recite the whole of them. One must be content with a few.

The first incident relates to the view taken by Arjuna to slay Jayadratha on the following day. After the vow, Arjuna became very dejected thinking that Jayadratha’s friends would do their utmost to save him and that unless he had sure weapons he would not be able to fulfil his vow. Arjuna goes to Krishna for advice. Krishna suggests to Arjuna that he should supplicate to Mahadeva for the Pasupata weapon with which Mahadev himself had formerly destroyed all the Daityas and which, if he obtained it, he would be sure to kill Jayadrath.

The Drone-Parvan which relates the story proceeds to say :

“The righteous Vasudeva (Krishna) then, together with the son of Pritha (Arjuna), reciting the eternal Veda, bowed his head to the ground, beholding him the source of the worlds, the maker of the universe, the unborn, the imperishable lord, the supreme source of mind, the sky, the wind, the abode of the luminaries, the creator of the oceans, the supreme substance of the earth, the framer of gods, Danavas, Yakshas and men, the supreme Brahma of meditative systems, the satisfied, the treasure of those who know Brahma, the creator of the world and also its destroyer, the great impersonated destructive Wrath, the original of the attributes of Indra and Surya. Krishna then revered him with voice, mind, understanding and act. Those two (heroes) had recourse to Bhava (Mahadeva) as their refuge,—to him whom the wise, desiring the subtle spiritual abode, attain,—to him the unborn cause. Arjuna, too, again and again revered that deity, knowing him to be the beginning of all beings, the source of the past, the future, and the present. Beholding those two, Nara and Narayana, arrived Sarva (Mahadeva), then greatly gratified, said, as if smiling : ‘Welcome, most eminent of men, rise up freed from fatigue, and tell me quickly, heroes, what your mind desires. Shall I accomplish for you the object for which you have come ? Choose what is most for your welfare. I will give you all.’”

Krishna and Arjuna then recite a hymn in honour of Mahadeva,

in the course of which he is designated as the soul of all things, the creator of all things, and the pervader of all things. Arjuna now, after reverencing both Krishna and Mahadeva, asks the latter for the celestial weapon. They are thereupon sent by Mahadeva to a lake where he says he had formerly deposited his bow and arrows. They there saw two serpents, one of which was vomiting flames, and approached them, bowing to Mahadeva and uttering Satarudriya. Through the power of Mahadeva, the serpents change their shape and become a bow and arrow, which Krishna and Arjuna bring to Mahadeva. Eventually Arjuna receives as a boon from Mahadeva the Pasupata weapon, with the power of fulfilling his engagement to slay Jayadratha after which they both return to their camp.”

The Anusasana-Parvan of the Mahabharata contains a dialogue between Yudhishtira and Bhishma. Yudhishtira asks Bhishma to tell him the attributes of Mahadeva. This is what Bhishma says in reply :

“I am unable to declare the attributes of the wise Mahadeva, who is an all-pervading god, yet is nowhere seen, who is the creator and the lord of Brahma, Vishnu and Indra, whom the gods, from Brahma to the Pisachas, worship, who transcends material natures as well as spirit (Purusha), who is meditated upon by rishis versed in contemplation (yoga), and possessing an insight into truth, who is the supreme, imperishable Brahma, that which is both non-existent, and at once existent and non-existent. Having agitated matter and spirit by his power, this god of gods and lord of creatures (Prajapati) thence created Brahma. What human being like me, who has been subject to gestation in the womb, and to birth, and is liable to decay and death, can declare the attributes of Bhava, the supreme lord—(who can do this) except Narayana, the bearer of the shell, the discus, and the cub ? This Vishnu, wise, eminent, in qualities, very hard to overcome, with divine insight, of mighty power, beholds (him) with the eye of contemplation. Through his devotion to Rudra, the world is pervaded by the mighty Krishna. Having then propitiated that deity (Mahadeva) at Badari, he (Krishna) obtained from the golden-eyed Mahesvara the quality of being in all worlds more dear than wealth. This Madhava (Krishna) performed austerity for a full thousand years, propitiating Siva, the god who bestows boons, and the preceptor of the world. But in every mundane period (yuga) Mahesvara has been propitiated by Krishna and has been gratified by the eminent devotion of that great personage. This unshaken Hari (Krishna) when seeking, for offspring, has beheld distinctly of what character is the glory of that great parent of the world. Than him I behold none higher. This

large-armed (Krishna) is able to recount fully the names of the god of gods, to describe the qualities of the divine (being) and the real might of Mahesvara in all its extent”.

This dialogue between Yudhishtira and Bhishma took place in the presence of Krishna. For immediately after his reply Bhishma calls upon Krishna to celebrate the greatness of Mahadeva. And this supreme God Krishna proceeds to do so without feeling any offence and says :

“The course of the deeds of Isa (Mahadeva) cannot be really known. He whose essence neither the gods headed by Hiranyagarbha, nor the great rishis with Indra, nor the Adityas, the perceivers of the minutest objects, understand,—how can he, the refuge of saints, be known by any mere man ? I shall declare to you exactly some of the attributes of that divine slayer of the Asuras. of the lord of religious ceremonies.”

Here not only do we find that Krishna acknowledges his inferiority to Shiva but we also find Shiva conscious of the fact that Krishna has been beaten down and is no longer his superior, indeed is not even his equal. This is evident from Sauptika-parvan where Mahadeva says to Asvathaman¹:

“I have been duly worshipped by Krishna, the energetic in action, with truth, purity, honesty, liberality, austerity, ceremonies, patience, wisdom, self-control, understanding and words : Wherefore no one is dearer to me than Krishna”.

Krishna from being above Shiva, above every God, indeed a Parmeshwar is reduced to the position of being a mere follower of Shiva, begging for petty boons.

This does not complete the story of the degradation of Krishna. He is made to undergo further humiliation. Krishna not only accepted a position of inferiority *vis-a-vis* Shiva but he is sunk so low that he became a disciple of Upamanyu who was a great devotee of Shiva and took Diksha from him in Shaivism. Krishna himself says :

“On the 8th day I was initiated by that Brahamana (Upamanyu) according to the Shastras. Having shaved my entire head, anointing myself with ghee, and taking the staff and kusa grass in my arms I dressed myself in bark fastened with the *mekhala* (the waist string).”

Krishna then performs penance and has a sight of Mahadeo.

Can there be a more glaring instance of so great a rise and so much of a fall in the status of a God ? Krishna who was a Parmeshwar as compared to Shiva who was only an Ishwar does not even remain an Ishwar. He actually becomes a devotee of Shiva and seeks initiation in Shaiva Shastras from a common Brahmin like Upamanyu.

¹ Quoted in Muir p.

The case of Rama as a God is much more artificial than that of Krishna. Rama himself was unaware of the fact that he was a God. After recovering Sita on the defeat and death of Ravana, Sita was suspected of unchastity, Rama felt very dejected on hearing the words of those who thus spoke about Sita. The Ramayana says :

“Then King Kuvera, and Yama with the Pitris and Indra, Lord of the gods, and Varuna, lord of the waters, and the glorious three-eyed Mahadeva, whose ensign is a bull, and Bramha, the creator of the whole world, the most eminent of the knowers of the Veda : (and that King Dasaratha, moving in the air on a celestial car, arrived in that region, equal in lustre to the king of the gods); these all having come on cars brilliant as the Sun, and arrived in the city of Lanka, came near to Raghava (Rama). Then these most eminent gods, holding the large arms of Rama, adorned with armlets, addressed him as he stood with joined hands : How dost thou, the maker of the whole universe, the most eminent of the wise, the pervading, disregard Sita’s throwing herself into the fire ? How dost thou not perceive thyself to be the chief of the host of the gods ? (Thou wast) formerly the Vasu Ritadhaman, and the Prajapati of the Vasus. Thou art the primal maker of the three worlds, the self dependent lord, the eighth Rudra of the Rudras, and the fifth of the Sadhyas. The Asvins are thine ears, the Moon and Sun thine eyes.”

“Thou, vexer of thy foes, art seen in the end and at the beginning of created beings. And yet thou disregardest Sita like a common man”.

On being thus addressed by these Gods, Rama became surprized and replied :

“I regard myself as a man, Rama, son of Dasharath : do you, divine being tell me who and whence I am”.

On this, Brahma replying to Rama said :

“Hear my true word, O being of genuine power. Thou art the god, the glorious lord, Narayana, armed with the discus. Thou art the one-horned boar, the conqueror of thy foes, past and future, the true, imperishable Brahma, both in the middle and end. Thou art the supreme righteousness of the worlds, Vishvakshena, the four-armed ; the bearer of the bow, Saranga, Hrishikesa (lord of the senses). Purusha (the male), the highest of Purushas, the unconquered, sword-wielding, Vishnu, and Krishna of mighty force, the general, the leader the true. Thou art intelligence, thou art patience, and self-restraint. Thou art the source of being and cause of destruction, Upendra (the younger Indra), the Madhusudana. Thou art Mahendra (the elder Indra) fulfilling the function of Indra,

he from whose navel springs a lotus, the ender of battles. The great divine rishis call thee the refuge, the resort of suppliants. Thou art the hundred-horned, composed of the Veda, the thousand-headed the mighty. Thou art the primal maker of the three worlds, the self-dependent lord, and the refuge of the Siddhas and Sahyas, O thou primevally born. Thou art sacrifice, thou art the vashatkara, and the omkara, higher than the highest. Men know not who thou art, the source of being, or the destroyer. Thou art seen in all creatures, in Brahmans and in cows, in all the regions, in the mountains and rivers, thousand-footed, glorious, hundred-headed, thousand-eyed. Thou sustainest creatures, and the earth with its mountains ; thou art seen Rama, at the extremity of the earth, in the waters, a mighty serpent supporting the three worlds, gods, Gandharvas, and Danavas. I am thy heart, Rama, the goddess Sarasvati is thy tongue. The gods have been made by Brahma the hairs on thy limbs. The night is called the closing, and the day the opening, of thine eyes. The Vedas are thy thoughts. This (universe) exists not without thee. The whole world is thy body ; the earth is thy stability. Agni is thine anger, Soma is thy pleasure, O thou whose mark is the Srivatsa. By thee the three worlds were traversed of yore with thy three paces, and Mahendra was made king after thou hadst bound the terrible Bali. That which is known as the chiefest light, that which is known as the chiefest darkness, that which is the higher than the highest— thou art called the highest Soul. It is thou who art hymned as that which is called the highest, and is the highest. Men call thee the highest source of continuance, production and destruction.”

Obviously, there is the same degree of artificiality in the cult of Rama. Like Krishna he was a man who was made God. Unlike Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, he was not one who was born God. It is probably to make his Godhood perfect that the theory was invented that he was the incarnation of Vishnu and that Sita his wife was the incarnation of Lakshmi the wife of Vishnu.

In another respect, Rama was fortunate. He did not have to suffer degradation to other Gods as did Brahma, Vishnu and Krishna. There was however an attempt to degrade him below Parasurama the hero of the Brahmins. The story is told in the Ramayana which 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 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 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 his 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 has heard of his prowess in breaking the bow produced by Janak 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."

"Rama replied that though his warlike qualities are condemned by his rival, he will give him a proof of his powers. He then snatches, in anger, the bow from the hand of Parasurama, bends it, fits an arrow on the string ; and tells his challenger that he will not shoot at him because he is a Brahman, and for the sake of his kinsman Visvamitra ; but will either destroy his superhuman capacity of movement, or deprive him of the blessed abodes he has acquired by austerity. The gods now arrive to be witnesses of the scene. Parasurama becomes disheartened and powerless and humbly entreats that he may not be deprived of his faculty of movement lest he should be incapacitated from fulfilling his promise to Kasyappa to leave the earth every night but consents that his blissful abodes may be destroyed."

With this exception Rama had no rivalry with any of the other Gods. He managed to be where he was. With regards to other Gods there is a different story to tell. Poor creatures they became nothing more than mere toys in the hands of the Brahmins. Why did the Brahmins treat the Gods with so scant a respect ?

