

Vedic hymns created by the priests for use in the ritual services include one in which Kala or Time is conceived as the abstract source or first principle from which all changing things spring.¹⁴ Time is the first god, the lord of all things, carrying all things forward into the cycle of being. According to the later *Upanishads*, man's chief function as he passes through various cycles of existence or reincarnation is to bring his soul (*atman*) through sacrificial ritual and meditation into an identity with the Reality or Ground of the universe which is timeless. That is, he is to identify with that which is beyond time, the *Brahman* or the *Atman* as the Real Self (pp.52-3). Man is to improve the nature of his actions (*karma*) in order to raise his standing spiritually in a future mode of existence. This requires disciplined action (*karma yoga*) in accordance with the duties (*dharma*) appropriate to one's present social class (pp. 120-1). Still later literature, beginning with the Bhagavad Gita, develops the notion of Krishna and other deities as incarnations of the greater gods Vishny and Shiva. Lesser gods can thus associate with the world of temporal change long enough to help restore some semblance of moral order to it.

Ainslie Embree makes the point that there is no "Hindu view of history" but only an Indian "understanding of the nature of the historical process" (p.220). As already suggested, fundamental to this understanding is the vastness of the process depicted in terms of endless cycles of aeons and of concentric circles included within the eternity and completeness of Being (*Brahma*). When this cosmic conception of time and perfectability is coupled with the practice of renunciation of the world of temporal change referred to earlier, it is not hard to see why Albert Schweitzer, among others, has represented the Hindu attitude as one of "world and life negation."¹⁵ Paul Tillich has described it as a "non-historical type of interpretation of history" because the combination of the desire to escape from time by reincarnation with the cosmic wheel of repetition means that "no event in time can have ultimate significance."¹⁶

Now since the traditional sources and modern influences are so various in nature, it should not be surprising that some Hindu scholars would take exception to the above criticisms as typical of the western failure to understand the presuppositions of eastern thought. When I discussed this matter with T. M. P. Mahadevan at the University of Madras in 1965 I soon found out that this was the case! Let me quote the central contention from his book *Time and the Timeless*:¹⁷

The purpose of history is to become aware of the eternal -- which is the reality of ourselves -- revealing itself in the temporal process. Our progressive realization of the eternal Self is the inner meaning of history. If only we would free ourselves from our time-obsession, and become time-binding instead of time-bound, we shall [would?] see how Time is a snare and a delusion if it is not regarded as the image of Eternity.

While it is not important for my purposes to resolve the difference in interpretation, it is worth noting that we have here essentially two different paradigms of traditional Indian historical consciousness. Mahadevan in effect is rendering the presuppositions of the "classical" interpretation in an "existentialist" fashion: the eternal is operative *in* the individual and is thus bringing "selflessness" into the temporal process and potentially into