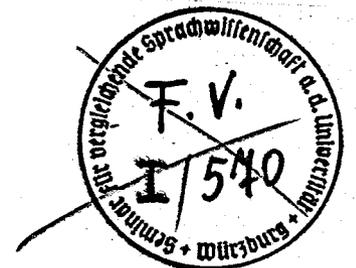


ASPECTS OF EARLY VISNUISM

BY

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des erreurs (1644)⁹⁰⁾: "La troisieme incarnation de Vichnou fut en cochon⁹¹⁾. . . . Ils disent donc que les Dieux, etant en dispute entre eux pour sçavoir lequel (d'eux) etoit le plus grand, Rutren dit a Bruma et a Vichnou qu'il s'alloit cacher, et que celui qui trouveroit ses pieds et sa teste, seroit le plus grand des Dieux. Bruma se transforma en cigne. . . . Vichnou se transforma en porc pour luy trouver les pieds et fut creuzer et fouillir la terre jusqu'aux abimes, et n'ayant pu les trouver, il s'en retourna plus vilain et plus sale qu'il n'etoit auparavant, mais ces pauvres Gentils sont sy brutes, que par rapport à cette fable ils ont beaucoup de veneration pour le cochon"⁹²⁾ ⁹³⁾.

We can make an attempt to solve the problem of the association of the boar with Viṣṣu by referring to the god's penetrating abilities and to his relations with pits: when the sacrificial horse falls into a pit an oblation is due to Viṣṣu (ĀpŚS. 20, 7, 19; a similar injunction:

⁹⁰⁾ Edited by W. Caland, *Twee oude Franse verhandeligen over het Hindoeïsme*, Amsterdam 1923, p. 9 f.; see also Caland, *Drie oude Portugeesche verhandeligen over het Hindoeïsme*, Amsterdam 1915, p. 155 ff.

⁹¹⁾ Mark the departure from the 'classic' tradition with regard to the motive of the boar-avatāra.

⁹²⁾ Baldaeus (Ph. Baldaeus, *Afgoderye der Oost-Indische heydenen*, re-edited by A. J. de Jong, Thesis Utrecht 1917) telling a similar story gives a curious detail: Viṣṣu rooting in the earth met a terrible serpent and, having returned to the surface for fear of this monster, declared Ixora (Īśvara, Ćiva) to be his superior.

⁹³⁾ Some additional remarks in connection with the boar may find their place here. For a general survey of the above and other appearances of the god in the body of a boar the reader may be referred to Ruben, *Eisenschmiede*, p. 243 ff. He may find there also a compilation from modern ethnographical works. In my opinion matters are often more complicated than this author seems to suggest. There is, to my mind, already in the documents of the oldest period such a wealth of superstructural elaboration and implications that it is in many cases not possible to give more than a general delineation of tendencies, influences, and 'primitive origins'. As I have endeavoured to show in the above expositions, such complex conceptions as "Viṣṣu is the sacrifice" and "Viṣṣu assumes the form of a boar" cannot be regarded as being completely explained by pointing out that today so-called primitive inhabitants of India immolate hogs and by recalling the sacramental character of eating.

A conspicuous trait of Viṣṣu's appearance as a boar sometimes is his having, or using, a single tusk. (See also such inscriptional evidence as may be found in the IA. 9, p. 251. — For the 'unicorn' see R. Ettinghausen, *Studies in Muslim iconography*, I, Washington: 1950, p. 94 ff. For various types of varāha: B. C. Bhattacharya, *Indian images*, I, Calcutta 1921, p. 14). Hence his name *Ekāśṛṅga*. (Mbh. 13, 149, 70 he is also called *Mahāśṛṅga*). See also Mbh. 3, 142, 45; Rao, o.c. p. 137 (In other cases the boar is sculptured with two tusks; he is often represented en profile). One cannot help being reminded of the 'symbolical' value of a single horn or tusk — the word *śṛṅga-* can have both meanings and also stand for a variety of other horn-like projections —: the penis erectus (cf. Meyer, o.c., II, p. 301). This significance of the single tusk would be in perfect harmony with the generative function of the boar. — In this connection it may be recalled that the word *śra-* "plough" (cf. above, p. 99 ff.) is given the sense of "the sun"

22, 21, 10; the context leads us to the conclusion that this relation was similar to that existing between drowning and the Lord of the waters, blindness and the Sun etc.⁹⁴⁾, and, especially, due to his associations with the earth.

XX. THE DWARF.

The Dwarf avatāra — the historical development of which was at the time studied by Macdonell¹⁾ — is, as it would seem to my mind, also very illustrative of the god's character. In this manifestation Viṣṣu gives unmistakable evidence of protecting and preserving capabilities. The essential element of the Vāmana myth, the three steps taken by the god for the good of the world, was already known to the authors of the Ṛgveda. In the Vedic Vṛtra combat it was Viṣṣu who, being associated with Indra, helps, by striding, the latter to vanquish the demon. In this avatāra it is Viṣṣu who takes his strides to overcome the demons himself and to regain possession of the earth for the gods after conquering Bali. In both cases Viṣṣu exerts himself to rescue gods and men from a disaster, but in the avatāra he is the central figure and, unlike the other gods, personally active.

In ŚB. 1, 2, 5, 4 ff. we find the germ of the dwarf myth: Viṣṣu was a dwarf (cf. also 6, 5, 2, 8; 6, 2, 12 etc.²⁾). References to it are, for instance, made Mbh. 5, 10, 6; 8, 73, 58; 9, 33, 25. In this manifestation the god was very popular³⁾. Leaving the relations between the dwarf and the soul, the allusions to a thumb-like puruṣa etc.⁴⁾ undiscussed, it seems warranted to suppose the Vāmana to be the most famous Indian instance of the widespread belief in the miraculous abilities of beings who are considerably below the usual size⁵⁾. In ancient Germany they were held to assist man in ploughing, harrowing, and reaping.

(*āditya-*) in the Nirukta, 9, 40: might this note perhaps reflect an 'identification' of Viṣṣu = the sun and the plough?? — See also Onians, *Origins*, p. 245 f.

¹⁾ It may however be asked whether these passages presuppose the identification of the god and the boar. — Is there any use in mentioning here that RV. 1, 22, 17 bearing upon V.'s strides is, side by side with stanzas referring to Varuṇa, recited in a ceremony conducted to consecrate ponds, wells, and tanks (ÇāṅkhGS. 5, 2, 6)? (ibid. 5, 3, 3 with Indra, Agni, Viśvakarman: consecration of a garden). — GobhGS. 2, 9, 13 the razor used in the *cūḍākaraṇa-* ceremony (the 'tonsure', performed on a child) is addressed: *viṣṣor daṁṣṭro 'si* "you are V.'s tusk" (= MB. 1, 6, 4).

²⁾ Macdonell, JRAS. 1895, p. 165 ff.

³⁾ I refer to JRAS. 1895, p. 168 f. Cf. also KaṭhUp. 5, 3.

⁴⁾ Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie*² II, p. 321. — Cf. also Rao, *Elements of Hindu iconography*, I, 1, p. 161 ff.

⁵⁾ See section XII.

⁶⁾ See e.g. O. Schrader-A. Nehring, *Reallexikon der indogerm. Altertums-kunde*, II, Berlin-Leipsic 1929, p. 707 ff.; Gonda, *Drama*, p. 412 ff.

This aid might also mean good luck for the cattle⁶⁾. The very idea of the divine, but dwarfish or misshapen, helper is from of old familiar to Indians: the yakṣas who are described as helpful beings in possession of supranormal powers are often thought of as dwarfs⁷⁾. Johansson⁸⁾ seems therefore to be right in considering Viṣṇu's appearance as dwarf in the Veda to be more than an occasional stratagem — as was supposed by Macdonell⁹⁾ —; it probably has something to do with a feature in his character. An animal below the usual size of its species has Viṣṇu for its deity, and it serves for prosperity, the TS., 2, 1, 8, 3, states, and also that by offering such an animal to this god, who is the sacrifice, one has recourse to him with his own share. A dwarf animal affords support to cattle when born (2, 1, 5, 2). The *lūnāṅga*- "crippled" is *maṅgalāvaha*- "auspicious": Rājatarāṅgīnī 7, 289. TS. 2, 1, 3, 1 relates that Viṣṇu seeing a dwarf offered it to its own deity; thereupon he conquered these worlds. By offering such an animal to this god a man who is engaged in a struggle becomes this god and conquers these worlds¹⁰⁾. It may be remembered that the deities of vegetation are not seldom said "to be sacrificed to themselves". — I would not be able to provide evidence in favour of the supposition, which in itself would not be unreasonable, that the dwarf represents the light or energy of the sun which after small beginnings soon grows considerably¹¹⁾.

One observation remains to be made: Viṣṇu, the dwarf, is able to enlarge himself, in a miraculous way (cf. ŚB. 1, 2, 5, 1 f.; TB. 3, 2, 9, 7, and the puranic stories), to such an extent as to encompass the whole universe. He is, or can make himself, or show himself to be, co-extensive with all existence¹²⁾.

⁶⁾ W. Müller-Bergström, in the Handwbt. d. de. Aberggl. 9, 1086 f.; De Vries, Altgerm. Religionsgesch. I, p. 284 ff.

⁷⁾ See e.g. A. Foucher, in A. Getty, Gaṇeśa, Oxford 1936, p. XV; cf. also Ruben, Eisenschmiede, p. 60; 250. — For the associations of the yakṣas with fertility see e.g. Meyer, Trilogie, I, p. 98 ff.

⁸⁾ Johansson, o.c., p. 7.

⁹⁾ Macdonell, Ved. Myth., p. 41.

¹⁰⁾ See also 2, 1, 5, 2; ÇB. 13, 2, 2, 9.

¹¹⁾ In the ceremonies observed at the Jayā and Vijayā festivals Viṣṇu the dwarf is revered: Saurapur. a. 15; see esp. st. 36 f. — S. K. Saraswati, A rare type of Viṣṇu image, Proc. Ind. Hist. Congr. 9 (1946), p. 72 makes mention of an image representing the god riding on the shoulders of a fat dwarf which may be recognized as Garuḍa. — For the offering of a dwarf-bull to Viṣṇu: ApÇS. 21, 23, 4. — See also Filchner-Maräthe, o.c., p. 112 ff.

¹²⁾ I am not convinced that the epithet *bṛhaccharitra*- (RV. 1, 155, 6) refers to this power of the god (according to Sāyana it means: *virāḍ ātmanā sarvadevama-muṣyādīśarīrāṇāṃ svaśarīratvāt*). — In this connection such passages as Matsyapur. 245, 80 may be of some interest: *prabhavasva prabhāvana | prabhavāyāsya viśvasya viśvātman ...*

XXI. ANIMALS.

Having already discussed the great bird, Garuḍa, the god's vehicle or *vāhana*- and his intimate relations with the boar, we must now review a number of other animals with which he, in various ways, associated, because they, too, may be expected to shed light on important traits of his character. Animals, widely believed to have superior power, to sustain, for instance, the potency of vegetation, to have mysterious relations, to be a sort of reservoir of power for the socio-religious community, could even be representatives of the god whom they accompanied. Some animals are especially 'divine' or apt to be worshipped and deemed to be bearers of special potentialities; others are of secondary importance¹⁾.

There are striking relations between Viṣṇu and the horse, an animal of great interest from the point of view of the comparative study of religions²⁾. The horse is on the one hand connected with vegetation and the nether world, on the other hand related to, or identified with the sun³⁾. Sunlight and fecundity are, for all we know now, also two of those 'concepts' which are especially associated with the name of Viṣṇu. In the cults and beliefs of Indians and other peoples the sun-god often assumes the form of a horse. In other cases the animal is conceived as sky-going⁴⁾. It may be of some interest to dwell for a moment on the most famous of Ṛgvedic horses, Dadhikrā or Dadhikrāvan because he gives evidence of qualities often mentioned in the preceding sections. He is extolled as a hero, as swift, victorious, booty-winning, bird-like; he is a *vājīn*- expected to be able to give longevity, strength, refreshing food; he "extends himself" over the nations of mankind, and in this he resembles Sūrya pervading the water with his light. He is praised at dawn, when the ritual fire is kindled. He is invoked together with the Dawns, Agni, the Sun (RV. 4, 38-40). Like the other horses of similar character in the Ṛgveda Dadhikrā 'symbolizes' the celestial

¹⁾ For the rôle of animals in religion see Van der Leeuw, Religion, ch. 8.

²⁾ See e.g. H. Hindringer, Weiheroß und Roßweihe, München 1932, p. 36 ff.; A. Nehring, in Koppers, Indogermanen- und Germanenfrage; Koppers, ibidem, p. 279 f.; L. Malten, Jahrb. d. kais. deutschen Archaeol. Inst. 29 (1914), p. 181 f.; E. Abegg, Der Messiasglaube in Indien u. Iran, Berlin 1928, p. 39 ff.; Meyer, o.c., III, p. 314 (cf. esp. II, p. 250, n.). Compare also P. E. Dumont, L'Āśvamedha, Paris 1927, p. I ff.; W. Kirfel, in Beiträge zur indischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, Hamburg 1951, p. 39 ff. — In the cults and beliefs of various Indian tribes and communities the horse plays an important part. See e.g. also Ruben, Literatur der vorarischen Stämme Indiens, Berlin 1952, p. 75.

³⁾ In the latter case the animal is often white in colour, cf. e.g. ÇB. 7, 3, 2, 16. For the horse = the sun, see Abegg, o.c., p. 54, n. 10.

⁴⁾ See, in general, Keith, Rel. and Phil., p. 189 ff.; Macdonell, o.c., p. 148 ff.