The Flood in Hindu Tradition

The primary object of the present note is to present the Indian flood legend[1] as a special case of the Patriarchal Voyage (*pitryāna*), and at the same time in coherent and intelligible relation with other fundamental conceptions of Vedic cosmology and eschatology. Some analogies with other traditional aspects of the flood legend are incidentally noted. Whatever grounds may or may not exist for belief in an historical flood, the doctrine of *manvantaras* is, like that of *kalpas*, an essential part of Hindu tradition, and can no more be explained by any historical event than can the Vedic angels be explained by the deification of heroes. Further, the Flood legend clearly belongs to a tradition older than any existing Indian redaction or reference, older than the Vedas in their present form; these Indian redactions must be thought of as having, with the Sumerian, Semitic, and perhaps also Eddaic versions, a common source, the correspondences being ascribable not to "influence" but to transmission by inheritance from the common source.

"Floods" are a normal and recurrent feature of the cosmic cycle, i.e., the period (*paru*) of a Brahmā's life, amounting to 36,000 *kalpas*, or "days" of Angelic time. In particular, the *nāimittikapralaya* at the end of every *kalpa* (close of a "day" of Angelic time, and equivalent to the Christian "Last Judgment"), and *prākṛtikapralaya* at the end of the lifetime of a Brahmā (close of a "day" of Supernal Time) are essentially resolutions of manifested existences into their undetermined potentiality, the Waters; and each renewed cycle of manifestation is a bringing forth on the next "day" of forms latent as potentiality in the floods of reservoir of being. In each case the seeds, ideas, or images of the future manifestation persist during the interval or inter-Time of resolution on a higher plane of existence, unaffected by the destruction of manifested forms.

As to this, it will be understood, of course, that the chronological sym-

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[1] For the principal texts see Adam Hohenberger, *Die indische Flutsage und das Matsyapurāṇa* (Leipzig, 1930).

bolism, inevitable from the empirical point of view, cannot be thought of as really characterizing the timeless actuality of all the possibilties of existence in the indivisible present of the Absolute, for Whom all multiplicity is mirrored in a single image. As, then, there can be no destruction of things as they are in the Self, but only of things as they are in themselves, the eternity, or rather timelessness, of ideas is a metaphysical necessity. Hence, indeed, the conception of another type of transformation, an *atyantika pralaya*, ultimate or absolute resolution, to be accomplished by the individual, when or wherever he may be, as Realization: when, in fact, by self-naughting a man effects for himself the transformation of things as they are in themselves, and knows them only as they are in the Self, he becomes immortal—not relatively, as are the Devas, enduring merely to the end of Time—but absolutely, as independent of time and of every other contingency. It should be noted that the ideas (images, types) in question are not exactly Platonic ideas, but ideas or types of activity, the knowledge and being of the Self consisting in pure act; in the chronological symbolism their creative efficacy is expressed in terms of *adṛśya* or *apūrva karma*, "unseen" or "latent consequence."

While the creation of a cosmos (Brahmāṇḍa) at the commencement of a *para*, and the recreation of resolved elements of the cosmos at the commencement of every *kalpa*, are the work of Brahmā (Prajāpati), the All-Father, the more proximate genesis and guidance of humanity in each *kalpa* and *manvantara* is brought about by a Patriarch (*pitṛ*) of angelic ancestry, and designated Manu or Manus. In each *kalpa* there are fourteen *manvantaras*, each presided over by an individual Manu as progenitor and lawgiver; so also the *ṛṣis*, and Indra and other (*karma-*) *devas*, are individual to each *manvantara*. The first Manu of the present *kalpa* was Svāyambhuva, "child of Svayambhū"; the seventh and present Manu, Vāivasvata, "child of the Sun." Each Manu is a determined and conscious survivor from the previous *manvantara*, and through him the sacred tradition is preserved and transmitted. The particular Manu intended is not always stated in the texts, and in such cases it is generally to be understood that the reference is to the present (Vāivasvata) Manu. It is not expressly stated that a flood arises at the conclusion of each *manvantara*, but this may be assumed on the analogy of "the" flood connected with Vāivasvata Manu (ŚB 1.8.1–10), and the analogy of the greater "flood" that marks the conclusion of a *kalpa*; but whereas in the latter case the principle of continuity is provided by the creative Hypostasis, floating recumbent asleep on the surface of the waters, supported by the Nāga

"Eternity" (Ananta), in the case of the partial resolution or submergence of manifested forms which takes place at the close of a *manvantara*, the connecting link is provided by the voyage of a Manu in an ark or ship. It may be observed that this is essentially a voyage up and down the slope (*pravat*) of heaven rather than a voyage to and fro, and quite other than the voyage of the *devayāna*, which is continuously upwards and towards a shore whence there is no return.

We are not informed of the chronological duration of the flood and Manu's voyage. From the analogy of the greater *pralayas*, a duration equal to that of the preceding *manvantara* might be inferred, but a more plausible analogy is perhaps to be found in the "twilights" of the *yugas*, and this would suggest a relatively much shorter period of submergence. As to the depth of the flood, we have better information. In the first place it is evident that the resolution of manifested forms at the close of a *manvantara* will be less in cosmic extent than that, namely of the "three Worlds," which takes place at the close of a *kalpa*, and this will mean necessarily that of the "three Worlds," *svar* (the "Olympian" heavens) at least, and perhaps also *bhuvar* (the "atmospheric" spheres) are exempt from submergence; we know in any case that Dhruva (the Pole Star) remains unaffected throughout the *kalpa*. The earth (*bhur*) is submerged completely. Now the voyage of a Manu, typically a Patriarch (*pitṛ*), is a special case of the Patriarchal Voyage (*pitṛyāna*), and this as we know is a voyage to and from the "Moon," those regularly traveling by this route being the Patriarchs (usually spoken of collectively as *pitaras*), and the Prophets (*ṛṣayaḥ*) "desirous of descendants" (*prajā-kāmaḥ*, Praśna Up. 1.9). The flood, therefore, on which Manu's ship is borne upwards, must rise at least to the level of the sphere of the Moon, though it is not necessary to suppose that the Moon itself is submerged.

While it is out of the question that the flood waters should extend to the Empyrean heavens, Mahar-loka or therebeyond, there is good reason to suppose that in rising to the level of the Moon they must also touch the shores of the Olympian heavens (Indra-loka, deva-loka). For, notwithstanding that Indra- or deva-loka is regarded as a station, not of the Patriarchal, but of the Angelic Voyage, it is undeniable that Indra-loka is continually thought of as a place of reward of the worthy[2] dead, warriors in particular, who reside there enjoying the society of *apsarasas* and other pleasures until in due course the time comes for their return to

[2] "Worthy," i.e., due to receive the reward of *kāmya* Works, though not qualified by Understanding for either gradual or immediate Enfranchisement (*mukti*).

human conditions. And while it is said that the latent effect of Works remains effective in the last analysis throughout a *kalpa* (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* II.8), it would appear from the fact that the occupancy of Indra's office lasts only during the period of a *manvantara*[3] (hence a *kalpa* may as well be called a period of fourteen Indras as a period of fourteen Manus)[4] that reward in Indra-loka generally must be of the same duration; therefore at the commencement of any *manvantara* a general descent from the Angelic World must be initiated, no less than from the Patriarchal. It is clear that the two Worlds, Indra- or deva-loka and the Moon as pitṛ-loka, are psychologically equivalent, both being stations of the reward of *kāmya* Works; in fact, the Patriarchs are constantly spoken of as enjoying Soma in company with the Angels, and it is specifically stated in *Vālakhilya* IV.1 that Manu drank Soma in company with Indra. One might express the situation by saying that whereas the Moon is naturally pitṛ-loka from the (*Brāhmaṇa*) point of view, as the posthumous abode of "those who in the village reverence a belief in sacrifice, merit, and alms-giving" (CU V.10.3), Indra- or deva-loka is naturally the home of the dead from the (*Kṣatriya*) point of view of the warrior. And if Indra-loka is listed *only* as a station of the *devayāna*, this is because it represents actually a station from which there is not only the necessity of return for those who have performed Works only, but also the possibility of a passing on by way of the Sun to the Empyrean heavens in the course of *Krama mukti* and without return, in the case of those "who understand this and in the forest truly worship" (BU VI.2.15). When it is said in RV

[3] Those who, as individuals, are particular to a given *manvantara* are the presiding Angels (*devāḥ*), Prophets (*ṛsayaḥ*), and Manu and his descendants, i.e., kings and other men. The Angels in question cannot, of course, be thought of as any of those of the *ājānaja* ("by birth," e.g., Kāmadeva) order, but will be of the *karma* class, holding positions to which a qualification by Works has entitled them; and of these *karma-devāḥ* or Work Angels the chief is Indra. Hence it is constantly assumed that an individual duly preparing himself here and now may become the Indra (or for that matter even the Brahmā) of a future age; and jealousy is often attributed to the Angels with respect to those who will thus succeed them in office.

There is some inconsistency of detail, though not of principle, as between *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* I.8, where it is said that the "immortality" of the Angels means a survival without change of state until the end of the *kalpa*, and *ibid.*, III.1, where the lifetime of an Indra and other (*karma*) Angels is restricted to the *manvantara*.

In any case, the Hindu view of the nature of angelic offices is identical with that of orthodox Christian theology, cf. St. Gregory and St. Augustine, *Angelus nomen est officii, non naturae*; for which, and the rendering of *deva* by "Angel," see Coomaraswamy, "On Translation: *Māyā, Deva, Tapas*," 1933.

[4] Cf. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* III.1, and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* C.44.

x.14.17 that the two kings whom the dead meet on reaching "heaven" are not Indra and Yama, but Varuṇa and Yama, that is, Varuṇa in the case of the Angelic Voyage (since he who has reached the level of the heavenly waters is confronted with the possibility of future being only under heavenly conditions), and Yama in the case of the Patriarchal Voyage, it may be supposed that Indra (-loka) is omitted as being only a stage on the way to Varuṇa.

Now with respect to Yama, as he is the brother of Manu (Vāivasvata) at the present time, it must be understood that "Yama" implies always the Yama of a given *manvantara*. Yama and Manu, both designated Patriarchs (*pitṛ*), are contrasted in this respect, that whereas Yama, being the first man to die, was also the first to find out the way to the other world, in other words to map out the outward passage on the *pitryāna*, and thereby, as first settler, became king and ruler of all those who followed him, Manu is at once the last and only survivor of the previous *manvantara* and progenitor and lawgiver in the present. Hillebrandt's view (*Vedische Mythologie*, I, 394; II, 368, etc.) of Yama as original ruler of the sphere of the Moon, perhaps at one time simply the Moon-god, his realm or paradise being specifically that of the dead, is naturally acceptable. In any case, in one way or another, Yama and the Moon are regarded as dividers out of the dead, appointing their course (*yāna*) according as they are qualified by Works or by Understanding. This "judgment" is expressed exceptionally in Kauṣ. Up. 1.2 as a selection effected by the Moon itself, qua door of the heavenly world.[5] More characteristically, the dividing out is accomplished by the two dogs of Yama, Śabala and Śyāma ("Iridescent" and "Dark"), who correspond to the Sun and Moon, as argued by Bloomfield (JAOS, XV, 171) with reference to RV x.14.10; and this is supported by Praśna Up. 1.9 and 10 (and Śaṅkaracārya's Commentary), where the Sun, considered as a station on the *devayāna*, is not merely in a passive sense impassible by those devoid of Understanding, but actually and actively a barrier (*nirodha*) restraining those unqualified from passing on to a paradise (*amṛtam āyatanam*) whence there is no returning. Incidentally, this also enables us to establish the correspondence of the Hebraic Angel with the Flaming Sword with the Vedic Sun qua *nirodha*; the "Flaming Sword" being the Angel's natural weapon, in

[5] Cf. BU III.1.6, where the Moon, reached through the efficacy of the Brāhmaṇa priest, now identified with the Intellect, is in turn identified with Intellect, Brahman, "complete release."

virtue of his solar character. The analogy of the *pitryāna* with Jacob's ladder may also be noted.

While the partial Understanding which constitutes the Wayfarer's ship on the Angelic Voyage absolves him from the necessity of return to human corporeal conditions, the latent effect of Works necessitates a return course of the Patriarchal Voyage. In other words, the *pitryāna* is a symbolic representation of what is now called the doctrine of reincarnation, and is bound up with the notion of latent (*adṛṣṭa* or *apurva*) causality. The purely symbolic character of the whole conception is made all the more apparent when we reflect that from the standpoint of very Truth, and in the absolute Present, there can be no distinctions made of cause and effect; and that what is often spoken of as the "destruction of *karma*," or more correctly as a destruction of the latent effects of Works, effected by Understanding and implied with *mukti*, is not really a destruction of valid causes (as though it were possible to make that which has been not to have been, or to conceive of any potentiality of being unrealized in the Self), but simply a Realization of the identity of "cause" and "effect." It must be similarly understood with reference to the designation of states of being in spatial terms, for example as "the Sun" or "the Moon," that these are no more to be taken literally with respect to visible luminaries than are the analogous designations of states of being as time phases, for example, those of the light or dark fortnight, cf. Praśna Up. 1.12. It does not appear, in fact, that the Vedic tradition really propounds any doctrine of reincarnation in the highly individual and literal Buddhist, Jāina, and modern sense, nor in any case an individual return to identical conditions,[6] such as those of any one *manvantara*, but merely a return to analogous conditions in another age, *manvantara* or *kalpa* as the case may be. Divested thus of a too literal interpretation, the Vedic (Upaniṣadic) doctrine of "reincarnation" bears a certain resemblance to modern conceptions of "heredity": we too speak of the continuity of "germ-plasm," of relatively everlasting "genes," and the possibility that the characteristics of a remote ancestor may recur in any descendant; we know only too well that "Man is born like a garden

[6] An exact repetition of any past experience would be inconceivable metaphysically, since any two identical experiences, regarded from the standpoint of the absolute present, in which all potentialities of being are simultaneously realized, must be one and the same experience. Metaphysics asserts the unique character of every monad, and it is precisely this uniqueness which makes the individual unknowable as he is in himself, though intelligible as he is in and of the Self.

ready planted and sown," and few of us can always discard the conviction that "a man gets what is coming to him."

One further point of importance in this connection: while the Vedic point of view necessarily presumes an immortality, that is to say timelessness, of all potentialities of being typally subsistent in the Self (and this may be thought of from the standpoint of the Self as an eternal existence in the world picture not merely of every individual, but of every act of every individual on whatsoever plane of being), an immortality of this kind is in no way to be thought of as an immortality from the standpoint of any individual consciousness. It is clearly enough brought out that both the relative immortality of the Angels, and the absolute immortality of Realization are conditions which are altogether dependent on individual effort; or, as it is expressed from a more limited point of view in the Christian tradition, every individual must work out his own salvation. There can be no "immortality" for the individual monad who has not, so to speak, either acquired a "soul" by the due performance of Works, or realized the Self either partially as a Wayfarer or wholly as a Comprehensor. As to the infrahuman beings, "the small, continually returning creatures" of whom it is said "Be born, and die," theirs is a "third state"; their course is ephemeral, and neither by the *devayāna* nor the *pitryāna*, though the possibility is not excluded that even an animal, under special circumstances, could develop a consciousness with survival value. And as to those beings human in form but so little *menschlich* in nature that they do not achieve even any virtuosity (*kāuśalya*) in Works, their Psyche is said to be reborn in animal wombs, or alternatively to be lost. Hence (of course only from the human point of view, there being no superiority of one state over another in the eyes of the Self) the primary importance of birth in human form; for here and now it is determined whether or no the individual shall inherit Eternal Life, or at least a renewed possibility of winning Eternal Life. Furthermore, Veda is the body of Truth in which is set forth the way of life; and this Truth, eternal in the consciousness of the Self (without distinction of "knowledge" from "being"), is transmitted as it has been "heard," by a succession of Prophets (*ṛsayaḥ*) from *manvantara* to *manvantara*.[7]

While the *pitryāna* is thus manifested in the succession of *manvantaras*, the *devayāna* is primarily a course whereon the individual is removed ever farther and farther from the "storm of the world-flow" (Meister Eck-

[7] In some other versions of the flood legend, the continuity of tradition is more mechanically explained.

hart, Evans ed., I, 192), those who journey by the ship of Knowledge normally "never returning" (*punar na avartante*). The only exception to this is in the case of an *avatara*, whose return or descent is indeed inevitable, like that of the Patriarchs, but with this difference, that in this case the necessity arises from a purely voluntary self-commitment (as is brought out so clearly in the case of the Bodhisattvas, whose appearance as a Buddha is a consequence of previous *praṇidhāna*), and with this further distinction that in such cases the descent is not so much an actual embodiment or helpless subjection to human conditions, as a manifestation (*nirmāṇa*) not infringing the centering of consciousness in the higher state of being from which the *avataraṇa* takes place.[8] In the case of an *avataraṇa* of the Supreme Lord, this has to be thought of as an immediate act of will or grace;[9] and here *a fortiori* the doctrine of *nirmāṇa* or that of merely partial (*aṃśa*) incarnation must be invoked.[10]

We have seen that every procedure from one state of being to another, though formally "death again" (*punar mṛtyu*), is envisaged from the Vedic point of view as a passing from one station to another of a voyage on the sea of life. This sea can only be thought of as having a horizontal surface for so long as our attention is confined to any one and the same state of being; whenever a change of state is involved, as in the Angelic or Patriarchal Voyages, the surface of the sea of life is necessarily conceived of as a slope[11] or limiting form of a succession of degrees, leading upwards or downwards as the case may be, and as though from a valley to a height and *vice versa*. The slope, steep, or height is designated *pravat*, contrasted with *nivat*, descent or depth. *Pravat* is met with frequently in the *Ṛg Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. Here it will suffice to note AV VI.28.3, where it is said that Yama was the first to achieve the scarp (*pravat*), spying out the way for many; AV X.10.2, where the steeps are said to be seven in number, evidently with reference to the seven planes of being, that is to say the

[8] For an explanation of *avataraṇa* with reference to the Vedic Apāntaratamas and others, reference should be made to Śaṅkarācārya's Commentary on the *Vedānta Sutras* III.3.30–31. The *nirmāṇa* doctrine corresponds to the Docetic Heresy in Christianity, and has its equivalent in Manichaeism.

[9] As in BG, *passim*.

[10] Just as from the Christian point of view it is not supposed that the whole being of the Son was by the fact of Incarnation imprisoned in Mary's womb.

[11] A general consideration of traditional symbolism would lead us to identify this "slope" with the pitch of a spiral having for its center the vertical axis of the universe; or as that of the phyllotaxy of the Tree of Life.

"three Worlds" and four Empyrean heavens, Mahar, Janas, Tapas, and Satyam; and AV XVIII.4.7, where the crossing of the fords (*tīrtha*) of the great steeps is said to be by means of the sacrificial Works of the worthy. All this is consistent with the Angelic Voyage of the enlightened in the ship of Understanding, and the Patriarchal Voyage of those whose ship is Works.

The conception of the sea of life as an ocean and of its "surface" as a slope further explains much of the terminology of the posthumous voyages, and that of a Manu. For example, the attainment of the level of any state of being, a port of call on the voyage, is thought of as a tying up in harbor: hence in AV XIX.39.7, where there is an incidental allusion to the Angelic Voyage, the sky-faring vessel is provided with a golden hawser (*bandhana*), and corresponding notions are found in ŚB 1.8.1.6 in the injunction to Manu, *vṛkṣe nāvam pratibandhīṣvatam*, "tie up the ship to a tree"; in Mbh III.187.48, "tie up the ship to the summit of Himālaya"; and III.187.50 *nāu-bandhana*, "ship-tying," denoting the summit of Himālaya, where Manu's ship made land as the Flood subsided. In the same way the conception of a slope or "up" contrasted with a "down" explains the constant use of the verbal prefix *ava-*, "down," whenever a descent on the sea of life is envisaged, as in AV XIX.39.8, where it is said that for those (wayfarers on the *devayāna*) who "see immortality" there is "no gliding down," *nāvaprabhraṃśana*,[12] and ŚB 1.8.1.6, where the descent of Manu's ark is spoken of as *avasarpaṇa*, with the same sense of "downward gliding."

The general parallel with Biblical tradition is very close; the account of creation in Genesis corresponding to the creation at the commencement of the present *kalpa*, that of the Flood and Noah to that of the Flood and Manu Vāivasvata. Manu, however, is not thought of as taking with him into the ark a wife and pairs of creatures after their kind; in other words, the apparatus of the Hebraic version in this respect is more mechanical. Manu is a progenitor of mankind in the sense that all men are of the seed of Manu; and as the reincarnation of the Patriarchs is not all at once, but day by day in the natural course of events, it must be understood not that they descended in Manu's ark literally, but by the *pitryāna* in its general connotation, their genealogy from Manu being,

[12] This word, divided *nāva-prabhraṃśana*, was at one time interpreted as equivalent to *nāu-bandhana*, but this has been rightly rejected on grammatical and other grounds. The AV passage does not refer to the descent of Manu's ark, but is an incidental reference to a voyage upwards on the *devayāna*.

as it were, implicit and by seminal virtue. Their actual birth from day to day is somewhat obscurely described in various accounts of return on the Patriarchal Voyage as a descent of *rasa* with the rain, and a subsequent evolution.

The Eddaic Götterdämmerung and subsequent restoration of the world may also represent the original tradition of a flood at the close of a world period: in *Völuspa*, such expressions as *vepr oll válynd, ragna rok, verold steypesk, skelfr Yggdrasels, snysk jormungundr, himenn klofnar*, followed by *Sér upp koma opro sinne jorth ór aegre ipjagroena . . . sás á fjalle fiske veiper*, and the assembly of the Aesir calling to mind the *fornar rúnar*, all closely parallel Indian descriptions of the end of a world age and subsequent restoration. The finding of the *gollnar toflor paers í árdaga átta hofpo* recalls the Berosus version of the flood legend (Isaac Preston Cory, *Ancient Fragments*, London, 1832, pp. 26 ff.), where a history of the beginning, procedure, and conclusion of all things (a veritable *Purāṇa*!) is buried at Sippara before the submergence of the earth, and found again after the subsidence of the flood, and then again made known to mankind.