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Symbolism in Hindu Worship

Introduction

This article is not a survey of the many kinds of images and symbols that could be found in the entire spectrum of Hindu worship. Certainly the question of 'Symbolism in Hindu Worship' can be approached this way, and then it would call for a different method and a more elaborate discussion. The aim of the present study is rather to establish the rationale behind the development of the main symbolic forms in worship, although some models of these forms will also have to be considered in order to illustrate the main point mentioned. We shall divide this study in three parts: a general discussion of the symbolic nature of man as *homo religiosus* and of the Hindu cultic activity (part I); an enquiry about the basic orientations of the Indian world-vision (part II); and an investigation of the dynamics of the Hindu worship-symbolism arising out of this peculiar world-vision (part III).

I

Man and Worship

Religion is as old as mankind itself and naturally worship has to be a human invariant since there is hardly any religion without some form of cult. Of the three levels at which religion manifests itself—socio-cultural, symbolic and mystical—the most common and natural is the middle one, namely, the symbolic or ritual level. Thus cult is neither something merely external and social nor purely internal and mystical; it embraces both these aspects uniting in itself the external and the internal, the physical and the mystical.

This symbolic level, we have said, is most natural and common because it pertains to the very nature of man as symbolic being. He is symbolic both in his structure and function, in his 'being' and 'doing'. What he appears externally is not the whole of what he, in fact is. In a certain sense he is composite, but his is a unique composition:

although man is not just his body alone, yet anything truly human cannot exist and act except through his body; his body is what his interiority made visible. In other words, man is structurally symbolic something "thrown/put together" (*sym-ballein*) in a unique manner.

Since "doing follows being" in the Schoolmen's language, a lot of man's 'doing' has the same quality as of his 'being'. Man is seen to perform some kind of actions in which the outsider or the external observer fails to detect continuity and connection between the action and the goal intended. For example, when a believer prays for food or when a sacrificer (*yajamana*) undertakes the performance of a Soma-sacrifice (*Agnistoma/Atiratra* . . .) for world peace, a non-believer finds a hiatus or gap between the prayer/sacrifice and the food/peace. The insider assumes, unlike the outsider, that the prayer may bring rain/good crop, that the priestly blessing may forgive sin, obtain reconciliation and grace etc. In such instances the empirical act and the goal intended, together being constitutive of a concrete symbol/rite, belong to different planes. The empirical act does not really cross over to the plane of the goal, but only opens the way to it or the act unveils it while veiling it again. And the believer is somehow aware this "hiding-revealing" nature of the act, but he is also aware that here and now there is no other way of reaching that goal somehow. Such human actions are what we call rituals or symbolic forms in worship. Ritual or worship symbol, therefore, is the means/medium by which man tries to reach, obtain and express what is otherwise inexpressible and inaccessible. In such cases there is always a rupture of planes tending to the beyond and this is often signified by some 'thing' done with, that is destroyed, cut or burned to become 'offering' or 'sacrifice', accompanied by some 'prayer' (*mantra*) uttered (outered/put outside), in order to reach that plane beyond.

Three Symbolic Forms in Worship

The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that there are three constitutive elements of any cultic symbol. These are things, deeds and words, all of them being symbolic again. Any object or offer-material (*dravya*) used in cult belong to the first category of 'things'. These are sensible and symbolic realities in tune with the symbolic nature of man who makes use of them as means of reaching transcendence, of encountering the Divine, on account of their evocative (concealing-revealing) power. By "deeds" in worship are meant all 'doings',

that is the gestures, postures and ritual actions over the "things" and accompanying the "words". These are truly symbolic acts and as such belong to the category of "the performative"¹; they accomplish what they signify and thus open to the sphere of the Transcendent in a veiled manner. Finally, the third element "word" in cult mean and include all verbal expressions, namely, prayer formulae, readings, narratives and chants. These three elements of worship mutually support and interpret to produce a coherent and total meaning and message of the cultic rite/symbol. Thus, cultic actions, unlike ordinary human actions, get a peculiar goal orientation defying the logic of cause-effect relationship, thanks to some cultic object and ritual formula. Similarly, whereas an ordinary meal only feeds the body or nurtures the mind, a ritual meal becomes also sacramental communion, thanks to the accompanying prayer and sacred 'thing' used. In like manner, the words/prayers uttered acquire a distinct meaning on account of the other two elements going with it. For example, making the sign of the cross over the penitent who confesses his sins makes sense only when one hears the words, "I absolve you from your sins...". In short, these three components—things, deeds and words—are necessary elements of worship symbolism, and they together stand for a particular vision of Reality. In fact, worship itself becomes, thus concretization of a unique world-vision, as we shall see later.

Primacy of Cult in Hinduism

If the symbolism of worship noted above holds good with respect to religions in general, it is particularly so in the case of Hinduism and its cult. Unlike other world religions like Buddhism and Christianity, Hinduism regards cult or liturgy as the core of religion. That is to say, religion in the Indian perspective consists primarily not in a set of dogmas and doctrines, but in praxis, cult, sacrifice. Whereas Christianity insists very firmly on 'ortho-doxy' or on the authenticity of faith and doctrine (hence the many doctrinal distinctions and clarifications against heresies and heretics in the history of Catholicism), Hinduism prizes always 'ortho-praxis' or authenticity of cult and wor-

1 The reference is to J.L. Austin's linguistic theory concerning certain class of words and expressions called "the performatives" (cf. Austin, *How to do things with words*, London : 1976, ch. 1). In a certain sense ritual actions too are performatives, but on a different plane and by signification.

ship as a way of life and norm of living.² In fact from the time of the Vedic times till the emergence of modern Hinduism, one can observe the practice of *yajnas*, *yagas*, and *pujas* of bewildering variety and complexity. It is not without reason that J. Gonda has said: "Hinduism rooted in the Vedic religion as it is now known to us is first of all a liturgy which of course has been supported later by a complex speculation."³ R. Panikkar would go one step further and say: "If one had to choose a single word to express the quintessence of the Vedic revelation, the word *yajna*, sacrifice would perhaps be the most adequate."⁴ As Aguilar in his recent book has very well shown, for the Vedic people (and also for Hindus in general) *yajna* is not simply a means to some desired end, be it the highest, but the end itself; it is not only a redemptive act as in other religions but also and more especially the creative of re-integrative act.⁵ If, for most religions, sacrifice "consists in a concrete gift to a higher Being",⁶ for the Vedic man sacrifice (*yajna*) in the ultimate analysis is not ordained to something higher than itself. It is the supreme principle, although in its different cultic forms the lower ones are necessarily ordained to the higher and thus to the highest as well.⁷ It is true that from the time of *Rgveda* the conception of sacrifice as the central cultic act has varied through the ages assuming shades and nuances of meaning; yet the fact remains that the underlying primary intuition and central symbolism has not disappeared even today.⁸ This is mainly because cult in Hinduism is symbolic realization of a particular vision of Reality running through the whole gamut of its tradition as we shall see presently.

II

Elements of the Indian World Vision

Two important aspects of the Indian world-vision that pertain to the question of symbolism in Hindu worship may be listed as, 1) the

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2. R. Panikkar, *Le mystere du culte l'hinduisme et le chretienisme*, (Paris :1970) p. 62.
 3. L. Renou, *Religions of Ancient India*, (London : 1953), p. 29; cf. J. Gonda, *religions de l'Inde*, vol. I (Paris : 1979), p. 122.
 4. R. Panikkar, *The Vedic Experience*, (London : 1977), p. 347.
 5. H. Aguilar, *The Sacrifice in the Rgveda*, (Varanasi, 1976), ch. I
 6. V. Warnach, "Vom Wesen des kultischen Opfers", in *Opfer Christi und Opfer der Kirche*, ed. by Neunheuser, (Düsseldorf: 1960), p. 58.
 7. Cf. Aguilar, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*
 8. This point will be made clear in the course the discussion.

vision of totality (*sarvam*) or catholicity and, 2) inter-relatedness of the entire realm of reality. The first one is an intuitive experience of the togetherness of the three poles of reality: God-Man-World. It means neither that the Ultimate is standing apart as the totally Other overarching the finite sphere of creation, nor that the Ultimate is the sum total of the contingent existences. The vision holds neither a thesis of alterity nor that of identity with respect to the perennial problem of "the One and the many". On the contrary, the Indian perspective here is that of "the One insofar as the many" without either denying or emphasizing the copula or connecting link "and" between One *and* many. The Valakhilya hymn (*RV VIII, 58*) presents a glimpse of this vision when it says: "One is also this and differently all" (*ekam va idam vi bahudha sarvam*).

Now, the totality vision as noted above naturally implies the second namely, inter-relatedness. In this vision elements or parts are not something in themselves and for themselves; each part is what it is, not independently of being part of the Whole; for each part, its fullness is to be part, indeed a unique part of the Whole. Such perfect inter-dependance and mutuality is the very basis of the cardinal concept of *Rta* in the Indian thought. But it is also evident that these two aspects—totality and inter-relatedness—of the world-vision go together, because only a total approach or an approach that perceives at a glance the simultaneous operations of the diverse parts can explain how these are mutually related and co-ordinated. It can be seen that this relationship between parts and the Whole, or many and the One is what the *Isa Upaniṣad* points to, when it says:

That is full; this is full

The full comes out of the full

Taking the full from the full

The full itself remains. (*Isa Up. Invocation*; cf. BU. V, 1)

What this verse tries to tell us seems to be this: In all manifestations of the real there is a basic oneness and a relative fullness implying a complementary totality in all its diverse parts. And we have here what may be called, a symbolic vision of the universe, if only we care to understand the relationship between "basis/reality" (*prama*) and its "image/symbol" (*pratima*) in the Indian thought.⁹

9. On *pramā*, *pratimā*, *rūpa* and *nāman*, see Oldenberg, *Die Weltanschauung der Brahmana-text*, (Göttingen, 1919), pp. 103-109; 113-116

Symbol and Reality in the Indian World-Vision

The foregoing discussion of the two important aspects of the Indian vision of reality leads us further to the consideration of the meaning of symbol as related to this world-vision. If it is true to say: "Each being is by itself necessarily symbloic for the reason that it ought to express itself in order to find its nature,"¹⁰ then we may be permitted to say that symbol is reality itself in some concrete mode of existence or that symbol is a moment distinct and at once interior to the manifesting reality. Both reality and symbol imply mutuality so much so that reality does not exist independently of its symbol and that no symbol is fully itself except as manifestation of reality. In this sense the Indian world-vision is symbolic in that it safeguards the existential character of the "many" without prejudice to the ontic fullness of the "One". Moreover it transcends the notion of plurality but admits that of inherent polarity. In other words, the Indian vision perceives the world and everything in it as symbols of the Absolute, or it conceives beings as symbols of the Being. That is to say, beings are not seen as numerical multiplicity with respect to the Being, but as Being itself insofar as "the become" (*bhūtani*).¹¹

Consequently, it can be seen that the basis of symbolism in the Indian thought is not mere analogy or some kind of external similarity but the above-mentioned particular vision of the universe which permits interchange and substitution in the sphere of manifestation. And so even among the gods there is a henotesitic law of substitution, now one god and now another appearing as the supreme:

They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni or
the heavenly sunbird Garutmat. The seers
call in many ways that which is One; they
speak of Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.

(RV III, 54, 9; cf. VIII, 58, 2)

As A.K. Coomaraswamy has long ago noted, in the mystico-metaphysical experience related to the concepts of "centre" (*kha/nābhi*) and the "kernal space" (*śūnya/ākāśa*) of the cosmic wheel or circle, the experience of "void" (*śūnya*) implies also that of "fulness" (*pūrṇa*), just as the concept of circle not only includes that of its centre but the latter

10. K. Rahner, "Zur Theologie der Symbols" in *Schriften Zur Theologie*, vol.IV (Einsiedeln, 1960), p. 278.

11. Cf. R. Pannikar, *Le mystère du culte . . .*, p. 125

can also be considered the limit-point of the former.¹² In other words, in the Indian vision of reality, just as the concept of circle necessarily implies its centre so too everything internally reveals by concealing (not simply simulate externally), that is, symbolizes the Absolute.

III

Symbolism in Hindu Worship

When this rather subtle conception of symbol-reality relationship reaches the level of cult, the law of symbolic substitution becomes fully operative leading to a whole theology of cosmic separation and re-integration. Already with respect to the Vedic sacrifices the Brahmanas abound with evidence that the victim is the symbol of the sacrificer or even that it is substantially (*nidānena*) the sacrificer himself (*yajamāno vā eśa nidānena yat paśuh:* AB II, 11; cf. SB III, 7, 1, 11). This is otherwise evident from the significant appellation *yajamana* (literally "he who sacrifices himself") given to all Vedic sacrificers. This law of substitution works at various levels as well as kinds of ritual sacrifices. Consequently, although man is the first of all victims (*puruṣo hi prathamah paśūnām:* ŚB VI, 2, 1, 18) in animal-sacrifices, by a successive identification of man's essence with lower forms of victims, ending with "sacrificial cake made of rice" (*purodāśa* or *piṣṭapaśu*), he is substituted with this latter offer-material which is then thrown into the sacrificial fire.¹³ What is to be noted here is that in the thinking of the Brahmanas there is no belittling here of the wholeness or completeness of the sacrifice so made; it is essentially the originally intended sacrifices of man as the first of the five victims and this is due to the power of symbolism as we noted above. In terms of the Brahmana texts this is possible owing to the doctrine of *nidana* (symbolic identity) or *pratima-prama* (image/symbol-basis/reality) so much emphasized in them.¹⁴ Aitareya Brahmana while narrating a story concerning the evolution of symbolic substitution of victims specially notes that the sacrifice made with the sacrificial cake is the whole sacrifice: "They offer a cake in the animal sacrifice thinking 'let our sac-

12. The double idea of void and fulness with respect to "centre (kha/nabhi) of the cosmic wheel (cf. RV II, 28, 5), according to Coomaraswamy, has given rise to the zero concept in mathematics, expressible as $0=X-X$, for all $X=1, 2, 3, \dots$. Cf. *Le temps et l'éternité*, (Paris: 1976), pp. 116. 131.

13. G.U. Thite, *Sacrifice in the Brahmana texts*, (Poona: 1975), p. 145.

14. Cf. D.M. Knippe, *In the Image of Fire*, (Delhi: 1975), pp. 143-145.

rifice be with the sacrificial essence; let our sacrifice be with a victim whole'. ” Elsewhere the victim is identified with the sacrificial cake by saying: “It is an animal-sacrifice that this sacrificial cake is offered’ (SB I, 2, 3, 5). For the same reason this Brahmana tries to establish correspondence between the parts of the animal victim and the various stages of the sacrificial cake in its preparation (cf. SB I, 2, 3, 8).

Symbolism of Vēdi (Altar)

We shall consider now a few items pertaining to the sacrificial cult to illustrate our main thesis that worship in Hinduism is a symbolic realization of its world-vision. We shall take up the symbolism of *Vēdi* first. Already in the *Rgveda* it is said: “The altar (*Vēdi*) is the furthest limit of earth; this sacrifice of ours is the centre (*nabhi*) of the world” (RV I, 164, 35). Moreover, all cultic action is normally performed on the altar. Hence there is a ritual identification of *vēdi* with the centre of the universe.¹⁵ We have seen that in the Indian vision of reality there is a symbolic correspondence between the concepts of “centre” (*nabhi*) and “kernal space” (*akasa*) of the cosmic wheel or circle. From the cultic point of view the Brahmana text also make such a correspondence between *vēdi* (microcosm) and universe (macrocosm). Thus the world itself is sacrifice. Whatever happens in the universe is in accordance with what takes place on the *Vēdi* and this is again echoed in the Vedic statement that “unless the priest offers the morning *Agnihotra* that day the sun would not rise.” The fire offers itself in the rising sun; yonder sun, when setting, offers itself in the fire at evening. The night also offers itself in day; the day in night; the expiration offers itself in the inspiration; the inspiration in the expiration. These six sacrifice themselves into one another (cf. KB II, 8). Thus there is a cosmic sacrifice continuously going on at the *vēdi* and in the world at large. The happenings in the microcosm and the macrocosm are mutually related and interdependent. In order to achieve and bring about some good in the macrocosm, some form of worship, cult or sacrifice is performed in

15. For the development of the notion of “centre” connected with the symbolism of stone-tree-altar in the primitive religions, as meeting points of the different zones of the universe, as embodiments of nature’s renewal etc., see M. Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, (London: 1976), chs. VI-VIII.

the microcosm.¹⁶ Moreover, the Brahmanas declare that as great as the altar is, so great is the earth (cf. SB I, 3, 3, 9; III, 7, 2, 1; TB III, 2, 9, 12; JUB I, 1, 5, 5); and elsewhere *vedi* is actually identified with the earth (cf. SB IX, 4, 2, 3; TB III, 3, 6, 2).

Symbolism of *Dikṣa* (Consecration)

The *dikṣa* is a group of various rites to be performed in connection with the Soma-sacrifice, and the ceremony varies with the kind of sacrifice, at hand.¹⁷ Without going into details, we shall consider here only some aspects of it which have a bearing on the main point at issue in this article. With respect to the sacrificer the *dikṣa* ceremony is intended to signify his divinization by a process of ritual death and re-birth. Further, it also symbolizes the endless cycle of birth and death in the macrocosm which is reflected in the microcosm of the sacrificial cult.

Among the three births and three deaths, a man should undergo, *dikṣa* is understood in the Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brahmaṇa as death (cf. III, 3, 1, 1-4). As *yajamana* the sacrificer has to die, and destroy himself literally so that his divine birth in the company of the gods is assured. However, this will be the end of his earthly life. Hence instead of this literal self-sacrifice he attempts to make a symbolic self-sacrifice with a "borrowed body". The *dikṣa* ritual is to prepare for him this sacrificial body by undergoing several acts of penance and asceticism (*tapas*). Unless he thus expressly makes this renunciation of himself (*atmanah paridam na vadeta*) the sacrificial fire (*agni*) would deprive him of it (cf. SB IX, 5, 1, 53). In fact he ritually assumes the form of seed to be thrown into the *agni* that ensures his re-birth in heaven.¹⁸ Hence it is stated that one enters into the fire while

16. In our times the occasional sacrifices of the Vedic type conducted on a big scale here and there in India for getting rains, for world peace, etc. indicate this.

17. For some detailed discussion, see Thite, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-122.

18. Seed and fire have a twofold meaning in this context. In the *dikṣa* man pours himself as seed (grains of rice) into the sacrificial fire with a view to his re-birth in heaven; he also pours himself as seed (human sperm) into the housefire (*gārhapatyaagni*) identified with wife, to ensure his re-birth here on earth through children. For that matter in the *dikṣa* ceremony he is made to pass through all the stages of insemination, embryonic development in the womb and birth (cf. Coomaraswamy, "Atma yajna: Self-sacrifice," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 6(1942), p.360.

one enters into the intermediate *dīksa* and that the *dīksa* thus protects himself and his offsprings (cf. TS VI, 2, 2, 7). It is in this symbolical sense that "the initiate is the oblation" (*havir vai dīksitah*: TA V, 2, 2; AB II, 3 etc). Assuming the embryonic state, he is sprinkled with water to indicate the process of germination, and he is anointed with butter for a similar reason and is placed in a small hut to symbolize the womb (*yoni*) from which he is to be born again by the heat of ritual *tapas* (cf. AB I, 3). Rightly, therefore, has S. Lévi remarked that the whole procedure consists in fabricating a new body for the use of the sacrificer; the whole ceremony almost symbolizes conception and birth.¹⁹ Moreover, we have here the idea of redeeming oneself by substitution, because the *dīksita* redeems his true self by offering instead his image (*pratimā*) in the "borrowed body". In this sense even Prajapati is said to have projected an image of himself which is the sacrifice (*atmanah pratimam asrjata yad yajnam*) and by this self-image he is said to have redeemed himself from the gods (cf. SB XI, 1, 8, 2-4). Further, the cosmic reference of *dīksa* can be seen from the fact that at the time of consecrating the sacrificer the priest (*adhvaryu*) prays that following him the whole cosmos—earth, atmosphere, heaven, directions, waters, sun, moon etc.—may also be consecrated with regard to their respective functions.²⁰

Symbolism of *Yūpa* (Sacrificial Post)

The sacrificial post (*yūpa*) has an essential function in the Soma-Sacrifice and the Brahmanas deal with it giving numerous details. We shall consider here only some of them which are relevant to the theme of our article. In the animal-sacrifice there is a ceremony of binding the victim (*paśu*) to the sacrificial post. In fact there is a symbolic identification of the sacrifice with *yūpa* (*yajamano va eṣa nidanena yad yupah*: SB III, 7, 1, 11). In the Purusa-Sukta (RV X, 90) which describes the origin of the universe as a resulting from the mythical self-dismemberment of Purusa/Prajapati, the latter as victim is said to be "bound as sacrificial victim" (*abadhnam purusam paśum*) to the post. The Vedic tradition identifies this post with the Cosmic Pillar (*skamba*: cf. AV X, 7) and with the Cosmic tree or The Lord

19. S. Lévi *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brahmanas*, (Paris: 1966), p. 103; cf. A.B. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, (Cambridge, 1925), p. 461.

20. Cf. Thite, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

of Trees (*vanaspati*, otherwise referred to as *asvatha* tree (cf. Ka. Up. VI, 1),²¹ which evokes similar images in other religious traditions.²²

In accordance with the Vedic statement: "In truth the sacrificer makes himself a ladder and a bridge to reach the celestial world" (TS VI, 6, 4, 2), the *yūpa* is a great symbol of the sacrificer himself, which is also evident from the SB passage cited above. And as such it becomes a symbol of cosmic separation and re-unification/redemption. It is indeed a multi-faceted point of reference not only for the mythical support of the universe (*axis mundi*), but also for the concepts of unity-multiplicity (One-many), *Atmau-Brahman*, in a word, for the Vedic conception of 'creation' and 'redemption'. This intuitive perception of the cosmic process is ritually expressed in and through the cultic symbol of the stake (*yūpa*). On the one hand, it is the symbol of the sacrificial descent of the Absolute into the realm of manifestation (the creative dimension of sacrifice), but on the other, it is the symbol of man (and of the world) sacrificial ascent to divine union, to at-one-ment with the Absolute. It can be seen that the symbolism of the sacrificially post approximates in a certain sense the symbolism of the Christian Cross.²³

Symbolism of Agnicayana (Building Fire-altar)

As a final example we shall discuss one of the Vedic sacrifices, namely, the so-called rite of building a fire-altar. Although this is an optional ancillary rite of the Soma-sacrifice,²⁴ the fact that its description and interpretation occupy a major portion of the SB (chapters VI-X) shows its importance from a different point of view, as we shall see below. Without attempting a description of the rite which is indeed very elaborate, we may be able to get at least a glimpse of the whole process from the succinct presentation of it by C. B. Sen who tells us that it is:

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21. The earliest reference to this tree standing in inverted position *ardhvamālu* is perhaps RV I, 24; 7.
 22. For a survey of such images and their significance in other religions, cf. E.O. James, *The Tree of Life*, (Leiden: 1966), ch.V; also M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, (London: 1961).
 23. M.Eliade, while speaking about the symbolism of the cosmic tree, shows further how Christianity has absorbed this symbolism in the Cross (cf. *Images and Symbols*, pp. 161f).
 24. Thite, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

piling the fire altar, included in the Soma-sacrifices, in five layers with bricks, on the *Uttaravedi*, for setting up the *Ahavaniya*, it is represented in Śatapata Brahmana as a human imitation of the construction of the cosmic world of the Prajapati.²⁵

It is the second part of the above definition that should concern us here, namely, the symbolism attached to it by the Vedic tradition; we shall attempt to analyse the different aspects of it. First of all, the altar so built is said to represent the manifested reality in a symbolic form. "This fire altar is these worlds" (*ime vai loka eso'gnih:* SB VII, 3, 1, 13). This is mainly because the elements used for the construction (bricks etc.) are said to represent the cosmic elements like sun, star, water etc.²⁶ The five layers of the bricks symbolise the five mortal and five immortal bodies of Prajapati; they also stand for the three worlds and spaces between them.²⁷ In short, the entire altar with the living flame (fire) installed at its centre is a concrete image of the universe in its non-dispersed and unmanifest state.

Secondly, the whole process of construction stands for the trans-temporal restoration and re-integration of the dismembered mortal body of Prajapati. Many texts speak about the exhaustion and "emptying out" of Prajapati in his creative activity,²⁸ and about Agni's role in revitalizing and restoring the 'dying god' through Agnihotra.²⁹ Besides, the altar in its very structure is the image of the year (*samvatsara*) as a full unit of time (cf. SB VI, 3, 1, 25). The construction, theoretically speaking, extending over a year at the rate of one brick per hour, each brick corresponding to a day of the year, seeks to symbolize the integration of time and temporalities, which is possible by this ritual gesture, because of the Vedic conception that "year is Prajapati" (AB VII, 7, 2; cf. KB VI, 15).³⁰

25. C.B. Sen, *Dictionary of the Vedic Rituals*, (Delhi, 1978), under *aghicayana*.

26. Thite, *ibid.*, p. 188.

27. Cf. J. Gonda, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

28. "emptied out, as it were" (*riricāna iva:* SB. X,4,2,2,) is comparable to the sacrifice "completely offered" (*sarvāhut:* RV X, 90, 8).

29. For a number of texts from the SB, which illustrate this role of Agni, see S. Lévi, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

30. Or alternatively, "The year is Prajapati-Sacrifice" (SB 1, 2, 5, 13); and also "Prajapati, entering into union with the year, produced the creatures" (SB VIII, 2, 2, 8).

Whatever be the real value and significance of this elaborate rite when we look at it from our own standpoint, one thing is certain: In the Vedic thought it is a true sacrifice, a sacrifice of re-integration of reality, brought forth by Purusa's self-sacrifice, into its source. Simultaneously it is a symbol of man's response to the call addressed to him in the great sacrifice of Purusa to do his part by performing sacrifice as his contribution, however small it be, towards the universal process of re-integration and 'redemption'.

Concluding Remarks

In the foregoing pages we were trying to discover and illustrate with examples the rationale underlying the cultic symbolism of Vedic Hinduism. We saw that it is founded on a particular vision (not so much intellectual grasp) of the world process whose two important aspects were found to be totality and inter-relatedness. Lying deeper in this vision is found the power of substitution in a *prama-pratima*, reality-symbol or macro-microcosmic relationship which entails the idea of cosmic redemption or re-integration. Further analysis of the Vedic cult showed how this law of symbolic substitution and of cosmic separation-integration is fully operative in Vedic sacrifice in general and then in terms of particular examples related to such sacrifices.

Finally it may be noted that in this discussion we have considered only classical examples of *yajnas* and *yagas* not *pujas* and *utsavas* of modern Hinduism. This preference was due to practical reasons like lucidity and concreteness in terms of textual evidences. In the case of *pujas*/festivals not only are these ideas very much dormant and vague but also their forms of performance very widely from place to place.³¹ Moreover, the type of *yagas* of Vedic Hinduism we have considered is not altogether absent from their practice in modern times; in fact over the last few years they seem to have staged a come back in several places.

31. Still it is possible to take examples from the popular Hindu cults and examine the various elements making up a particular festival or *puja* and see in what way it expresses at least in a veiled manner these same ideas. M. Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*, especially pp. 357ff, where he discusses the Holi festival in India, throws some light on this.