# Reassembling the Giant: Caitanya Vaisnava Theology in Context

Neal Delmonico

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## 1 Introduction

It is always a bit risky to apply terms developed and used in one set of religious traditions to another set of religious traditions with its own insights, history and way of thinking and talking about religious matters. Such risk attaches especially to the use of the word monotheism in connection with the religious traditions of India. There is no comparable word or conception in any of the Indic languages. The idea of there being one and only one god would seem strange and even perverse to religious people nurtured in the rich, diverse, and densely populated religious world that has flourished in India for thousands of years. Even the terms that are used for the supreme god indicate a sense of the plurality of cosmic powers: god of gods (*deva-deva*), lord of gods (*devesa*), master of the moving (*jagannatha*), the fortunate one (*bhagavan*) etc. Each of these indicate the singling out of one god from among many gods. This on the surface has more of the feel of monolatry than anything like monotheism. Of course, monotheism emerges late in the biblical religion, too, Yahweh at first pitting himself against other tribal gods until the period of Kings (if any credence at all can be given to biblical history) when he is finally recognized as the one and only. Perhaps pure monotheism, in the sense of belief in one and only one god, does not stay around long either, the one becoming a trinity in Christianity and Allah sharing eternity with the Qur'an or his Sekhinah in Islam. Nevertheless, the theism that developed in India is not a form of monolatry nor does it fit the henotheism that Max Muller invented to describe the early Vedic kind of theistic worship. Still, the best term for what happens to theism in India is monotheism as long as we are willing to allow the term enough plasticity to be molded by the Indic tradition into a form unlike

any other form of monotheism in the history of religions. This paper will trace the historical development of Indic theism, relying for evidence on some of the major religious texts of the Indic traditions, as it flowers into the form of monotheism found in the theology of the movement founded by Sri Caitanya in the 16th century C.E.

Since the religious traditions of India grew up in close proximity to each other, sharing many of the same fundamental religious ideas (*karma*, *samsara*, *moksa*, etc)[1] and predispositions (a sense of mundane life as bondage, etc.), it is necessary in surveying the development of theism in Hindusim to take into account many of the other members of the Indic family. That is why in this essay "Indic religion" is referred to rather than just Hinduism. The members of the family of religions that developed in India (Vedic religion, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, etc.) had profound effects on each other. For example, much of the theological reflection that occurred in Hinduism at certain periods was shaped by dialectical confrontations with Buddhism and Jainism, both of which are essentially atheistic and critical of the Vedas as revelation. In addition, some of the forms of scepticism that flourished early on in India had profound effects on the way theism in India developed. To a large degree theistic Hinduism defined itself in terms of its opponents and thus it is necessary to know who those opponents were and what they believed.

As mentioned earlier, there are no native terms in India for monotheism. There is similarly no common term for theism or for theology. The major watershed in Indic religion has been that between the *astika* religious perspectives and the *nastika* ones. This distinction is between those who accept the Vedas as religious authority and those who do not. *Astika* refers to those who say there is (*asti*) authority in the Vedas and *nastika* to those who say there is not (*na asti*) religious authority in the Vedas.[2] Sometimes these categories are interpreted as those who believe in a god and those who do not, but that is not strictly speaking correct. There are several sub-traditions in the *astika* camp who do not believe in the existence of a supreme being or god, as in the Atomistic or Vaisesika school, and among the *nastika* camp

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[1]*Karma* refers to the idea that one is bound to suffer or enjoy the results of actions performed out of desire or attachment. The results that we suffer in our current lives might come from actions in this life or in past births and the actions performed in this life might fructify in this life or in some future birth. The repeated cycle of birth and death that is driven by *karma* is called *samsara*. *Moksa* or liberation from that cycle is achieved by means of one of the religious cultivations recommended in the HIndu religious texts.

[2]This intrepretation is placed on these words in one of the most important of the Hindu law books, the *Laws of Manu* (*Manu-smrti*), 2.11.

sometimes a founding figure like the Buddha or Mahavira (the founder of Jainism) assumes almost god-like abilities and powers. Thus this distinction does not coincide with that between theistic and atheistic beliefs. Similarly, there is no distinction in India between theology and philosophy. The one word that refers to them both is *darsana*, "vision" or "way of seeing" things as they really are. All of the various traditions have their *darsana*, be they *astika* or *nastika*, and they all understand the purpose of seeing things as they really are to be liberation of some sort. Even the materialists, who are referred to as Lokayatika or Carvaka, see their *darsana* as a way to freedom from the crippling effects of superstition and belief in false absolutes.

There is a kind of unified method that is also discernible among the diverse traditions in Indic religion. It is the method of inclusion. Every element, every god, every form of worship, every form of religious experience must be accounted for, must be fit into an inclusive hierarchy envisioned by a tradition. One of the ways to refute a "way of seeing" is to demonstrate that it does not adequately account for some aspect of the Indic religious topography. If, for instance, large parts of the sacred texts and significant portions of the population believe in an impersonal absolute, that must be accounted for somehow in the theology of those who believe in a personal absolute and vice versa. In this way Indic religion is quite unlike the Middle Eastern religions which are the religions of exclusion and scarcity.[3] Indic religions are religions of abundance, abundant in gods, abundant in paths to the truth, and abundant in visions and experiences of the absolute. Yet underlying all of this diversity each Indic tradition finds a unifying structure, usually hierarchical, of course, that ties them all together into a whole within which every speck of dust has a place, perhaps not a place of great value, but nevertheless a place, an evaluation. Thus, out of India come such metaphors for the search for truth as that of diverse paths running up a mountain reaching the same peak irregardless of how different they appear below, or of all rivers finding their final resting place in the same vast ocean. Even one's opponents must somehow be fit into the structure.

Within these unified, hierarchical structures of the Indic traditions, however, there is plenty of room for preferential treatment. Those gods, paths, and experiences that are preferred are placed above those that are not and thus a clear order appears and the preferred ideals of a tradition are estab-

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[3]See the excellent study of the relationship between violence and the Middle Eastern monotheism of scarcity by Regina M. Schwartz called *The Curse of Cain: the Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

lished as superior to those of other traditions. Superiority generally means in the case of Indic religion "more inclusive." Thus, those elements higher in the hierarchy include within themselves in some potential form the elements lower in the hierarchy. They are therefore more complete, less committed to a certain line of action, and therefore less dependent. At the top of a hierarchy stands that which is considered the most complete and most independent. Since all other things are contained in it, there is, to some degree, no need for those lesser things. One need aim only for the fullest, perceiving the rest as only fragmented or partial expressions of the fullest.

In addition to the principle of inclusion is the methodology that is often applied in constructing the inclusive hierarchies and then in testing and justifying them. This is the triumvirate of means of knowledge[4] that is shared by all the *darsana*, namely perception (*pratyaksa*), inference (*anumana*), and testimony (*sabda*).[5] Perception means the acquisition of knowledge through contact of the senses with their proper objects. It presents the world in its vast diversity and constant change. Inference brings knowledge beyond the scope of perception through the recognition of the relatedness of things. Smoke and fire are related by the relationship of pervasion (*vyapti*), for instance. Smoke pervades fire although fire does not necessarily pervade smoke. Smoke represents in this example the *linga* or marker. Markers rest on the fundamental logical methodology of examination by means of knowledge of agreement in presence and knowledge of agreement in absence (*anvaya-vyatireka*). Two things agree in presence if one of them is always followed by the presence of the other. Two things agree in absence if when one is absent the other is also absent.[6]

Finally, there is testimony, which means in its highest sense the testimony of revealed scripture. While the scriptures are diverse and contain

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[4]By knowledge I mean only correct knowledge (*prama*). False knowledge is by definition error. A knowledge arrived at by these three means is considered correct until it is sublated by another later knowledge also arrived at by those means.

[5]Some schools identify more means of knowledge than these three. Comparison (*upamana)* is one that is often cited. It is the recognition of the likeness of one thing to another. Presumption (*arthapatti*) is another. It is the the postulation of a new truth from the contradiction of two other truths. Non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*) is yet another. It is the conclusion that something is not so because of the non-apprehension, by one of the means of knowledge, of what should be apprehended were it so. Some twelve or thirteen means of knowledge have been proposed by various shcools at various times. Since most of these are merely various combinations of the primary three, they need not be considered separately.

[6]The discipline in which the means of knowledge are most thoroughly discussed is the school of Logic. My discussion here is based on that of Annambhatta (17th century CE) in his *Tarka-sangraha* and *dipika*. It is the standard introduction to the combined schools of Logic and Atomism (Nyaya-Vaisesika). See the bibliography.

many different points of view, they always point to an underlying fundamental truth that is unitary and beyond the multiplicity presented by perception and even the relatedness presented by inference. The scriptures are believed in some Indic traditions to present knowledge that is unavailable to either perception or inference and thus constitute the highest authority. Generally speaking, those traditions that accept scripture as the highest authority belong to the *astika* division. Those that do not belong to the *nastika* division. This does not mean that scripture is not important to the *nastika* traditions. Scripture or testimony is simply not given as much weight as perception and inference. The various hierarchies are the result of the creative use of these tools. With these preliminary reflections on some of the general tendencies of Indic religion in place, let us take up a brief overview of Indic religious history.

## 2    Dismembering the Giant[7]

The religious history of India is ancient and continuous, something that can be said of few of the world's ancient civilizations. India can boast of some of the world's most ancient religious and literary texts and some its most profound. India's more than three thousand years of religious history can be roughly divided into roughly seven ages. The earliest age (if we discount the Indus Valley civilization, about which we know so little) is the Vedic age which, it is generally agreed, lasted from about 1200 BCE to 600 BCE. This is the age of the composition and compilation of the four Veda (Rg, Yajus, Saman, and Atharvan) and the ritual texts called the Brahmana. This was the age of sacrifice and the major deities were those associated with the sacrificial rites, Soma, the god of plants, Indra, the warrior-king of the gods, and Agni, the sacred fire bearing the sacrificial offerings (Soma) to the gods (headed by Indra). Numerous other gods are praised in the Vedic age, but none as frequently as those three. It was believed that sacrificial offerings fed and pleased the gods and the gods in turn supplied the needs of all, in the form of rain, good herds, and good progeny. The next age is the Upanisadic age (roughly 600 BCE to 200 BCE), an age in which the sacrifice was radically reinterpreted in favor of the power behind

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[7]This chronology is based primarily on those of two good reference works on Hinduism: Klostermaier's *A Survey of Hinduism* and Flood's *An Introduction to Hinduism*, with more weight given to Flood than to Klostermaier. Klostermaier seems too willing to accept earlier dates based on the work of S.B. Roy who appeals to the Puranic "histories" without further study. See his discussion on pp. 477-489. I have also used Friedhelm Hardy and Glen Richards' essays in *The World's Relgions*. See the bibliography for the details.

the sacrifice, Brahman which came to be recognized as the very fountain-head of all being. The twelve or thirteen principal Upanisads that were composed during this period characterize Brahman variously, sometimes personally (*Isavasya Upanisad*) and sometimes impersonally (*Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad*). They generally advocate knowledge over rites; and a new, more pessimistic, view of reality than was in evidence in the Vedic age, one ruled by *karma* and rebirth, is put forward. Also belonging to this age are the protest religions of Buddhism and Jainism, rejecting the Vedic tradition in favor of meditation and asceticism respectively. The extensive canons of those traditions in Pali and Prakrit developed towards the end of this period as well.

The next major age, the age of the Epics, overlaps with the Upanisadic age somewhat, beginning in roughly 400 BCE and lasting until about 200 CE when the epic literature at first oral begins take its final written shape. The two major Hindu epics are the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, huge works of high literary caliber and rich content, and in them one sees *bhakti* or devotion to a personal deity rise to a position of central importance for the first time. Krsna in the *Mahabharata* and Rama in the *Ramayana* are the two main personal visions of deity, each considered an incarnation of Visnu, toward whom *bhakti* is expressed in the Epic period. One of the great classics of the Hindu religious tradition, the *Bhagavad-gita* or "Song of the Lord," is inserted into the narrative of the *Mahabharata*. In South India the ancient poems were being composed in Tamil in a development that would many centuries later influence the Hindu traditions, both religiously, through the Tamil songs of the Vaisnava and Saivite saints, and aesthetically, through the gradual absorption of the literary practices of the ancient Tamil poetry into classical Sanskrit poetry.

During the same period, or slightly later (200 BCE to about 400 CE), it is generally thought that the classical schools or *darsana* were developing. The six classical or *astika* schools are the Yoga (Meditation) school, the Sankhya (Enumeration) school, the Vaisesika (Atomistic) school, the Nyaya (Logic) school, the Mimamsa (Ritualistic) school, and the Vedanta (Upanisadic) school. Each of these schools encapsulated its teaching in a *sutra* or aphoristic work that was augmented at a later date by a *bhasya* or authoritative commentary. Later Hindu tradition associated these schools into the following pairs: Sankhya-Yoga, Nyaya-Vaisesika, and Mimamsa-Vedanta. Interestingly, one in each of the pairs is atheistic while the other is theistic. Yoga, for instance, makes reference to *isvara* or god as an appropriate object of meditation and worship while its metaphysical mate, Sankhya, has no room for a god. The situation is similar with the other

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pairs. As the centuries advanced, the defence of theism, especially from the Buddhist challenges, fell mostly to the Nyaya tradition and the development of theology fell to the alternate forms of Vedanta, such as that of Ramanuja (11th century) and Madhva (12th century). During this same period of the development of the schools, the Buddhist (Madhyamaka and Yogacara) and Jaina philosophical traditions (as expressed by Umasvati in the *Tattvarthadhigama-sutra*) were also developing.

The Puranic age comes next, running from about 200 CE to 1200 CE (although Purana kept being written and added to for several centuries after this). In this period the massive literature of the Purana or Ancient Histories[8] was compiled and, after nearly a thousand years of the religious dominance of Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism began to reassert itself, in part by reinterpreting its own tradition and in part by absorbing elements of Buddhism and Jainism into itself. The works called the Purana are vast stores of traditional wisdom containing mythological accounts of creation, kingly genealogies, incarnation narratives and various religious teachings and are generally numbered eighteen.[9] Together they make up nearly four hundred thousand verses of Sanskrit teaching in which *bhakti* to the gods, primarily Visnu, Siva, and the Great Goddess, received the greatest emphasis. Among the Purana some stand out as classical works of religious insight: from among the early Purana, the *Visnu Purana*; in the middle period the *Bhagavata Purana*; and among the later Purana, the *Padma* and *Brahma-vaivarta Purana.* In the tradition of Siva worship and the worship of the Goddess, the *SkandaPurana* and the *Markandeya Purana*, respectively, stand out. The Jaina tradition was also at work on their own Purana during this period as exemplified by the great Jaina history of the world called the *Mahapurana* which was completed in 892 CE.

In the same period another great body of religious texts, referred to in general as the Tantra, began to be composed. They too are divided into three divisions depending on which of the three main deities (Visnu, Siva, or the Goddess) they are devoted to. In general the Tantra are highly ritualistic, extremely concerned with the power of sound in the form of mantra, and based on a perception of the nature of reality in terms of sexual division, with male and female forces, the reuniting of which is conducive

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[8]None of these accounts have any real historical value. The names mentioned may have belonged to actual people, but the stories and the time settings are impossible to confirm and are in all likelihood the stuff of myth. Their value resides more in the instructive dimensions of the tales.

[9]There are a greater number of Upapurana or sub-Purana, but they are not as highly regarded as the main Purana

to well-being and liberation. We begin to see, therefore, the gods no longer alone, but joined with their *saktis* or feminine powers. The Buddhist Tantra, once so lively in Eastern India and now still vibrant in Tibet, began its development during this same period (200 CE to 1200 CE) and from the same possibly quite ancient influences.

The next great age in Indic religious history is characterized by the rise and spread throughout India of highly emotionalized *bhakti* movements. This began in about the 8th century CE in the south and spread throughout the north by the 16th century. It continued as a driving force throughout India until about the middle of the 18th century when the British gained control of much of the Indian sub-continent and threw the native traditions somewhat off balance. This period of about a thousand years is when Indic reflection on the nature of god reached its summit, finding expression not only in Sanskrit, the language of the ancient and sacred culture, but also in many of the new flourishing vernaculars of various regions in India. Thus, along side such classics of erotic and mystical poetry as the *Gita-govinda* by Jayadeva (12th century) one finds the songs of Vidyapati in Maithili (15th century) and of Candidas in Bengali (14th century). From the south we have the Tamil songs of the Alvars in the Tamil Veda (the *Divyaprabandham*, 7th-10th centuries) and Sanskrit hymns and poetry from someone like Vedantadesika (13th century). In the southern Saivite tradition the Tamil songs of the saints called the Nayanars were collected in the *Tiru-murai* and they powerfully influenced the later monotheistic Saiva-siddhanta that flourished in both Sanskrit and Tamil during this period. Buddhism, of course, all but disappeared from India during this period, in part the result of the growing strength of a rejuvenated Hinduism and in part because of the destruction of important Buddhist monasteries and universities as a result of the Islamic invasions of the 11th and 12th centuries. Jainism continued to flourish, especially in western and southern India. Islam became a powerful presence in north India and the Sant traditions, which were blends of Hinduism and Islam and which produced powerful mystic poets like Kabir, Dadu, and Guru Nanak, began to develop their unique vernacular literature and their middle-eastern (that is Islamic) influenced form of monotheism. Islamic Sufism also exerted some influence on the *bhakti* movements in north India during this period.

The next period begins from the ascension of the British to power in India and extends up to the present day. This period began with a period of self-doubt in which the Indic traditions fell under mostly unfavorable scrutiny and criticism by representatives of the religious traditions of the conquerors. Many of the conquered responded cordially by converting to

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the religions of the conquerors, some remaining converts while the brightest among them, discovering the faults and hypocrisies of those religions, eventually returned to their own traditions and led reform movements that searched, among the roots of the native traditions, for "sanitized" forms of Hinduism or Buddhism. Thus Swami Dayananda founded the Arya Samaj movement that sought to recover, or rather to invent, an ancient monotheism of the Vedas that had been "lost" and "corrupted" by the polytheism and pantheism of the interceding ages. So too a Rammohan Roy would found the the Brahmo Samaj in an attempt to "recover" the higher religion of the Upanisads in the form of a sanitized monism. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who tried his hardest to clean up Krsna's act, and, though much later, Sri Aurobindo's evolutionary interpretation of Indic religion might also be included in this group. Still others, after flirting with the religions of the conquerors and receiving fine English educations, discovered the poverties of Christianity and returned wholeheartedly to their own native traditions to try to excavate the treasures left for them by their ancestors. Bhaktivinoda Thakura in his reaffirmation of Caitanya Vaisnavism with a modernistic difference, Swami Pratyagatmananda in his scientific reinterpretation of Tantra, and some of the followers of Sri Ramkrishna such as Swami Vivekananda in their adoption/adaptation of Sankara's Vedanta fall into this group. These tendencies continue today in newer and ever more vocerifous incarnations in the religious life of India, both at home and in its wide-ranging diaspora.

## 3    The Backbone of Theistic Reflection in India

How does one sift through over three thousand years of continuous religious and intellectual history, with a huge and rich textual tradition like the one just sketched, in order to trace the development of Indic monotheism? Fortunately for us, the Indic tradition has been, and in many respects still is, extremely conservative. This means that through all of the change and challenge that has faced the Indic world it has conserved and returned to particular insights and visions, creatively reinterpreting them in accordance with new contexts. There are thus certain strands or *sutra* that tie together great spans of Indian history and reveal a kind of familial connection between ancient visionary hymns, medieval religious speculations and system building, and modern theistic orientations and practices. The

ancient "Hymn to the Giant"[10] (*Purusa-sukta*, Rg Veda, 10.90) from the Rg Veda is one such strand that has been profoundly influential in the history of monotheism in India. Like a backbone, or the mythical Mount Meru of Hindu cosmology, it runs through the full length of the history of Indic theism providing a basic structure from which the various forms of theism have grown. With the exception of some theistic borrowings from the Middle Eastern religions, mostly confined to the Sant traditions of Kabir and Guru Nanak, the history of Indic theism is largely the history of the continual reinterpretation and reaffirmation of this great hymn. It provides the peculiar structure that shaped Indic monotheism into the unique forms it has. The prominence of this hymn when many of the other hymns of the Rg Veda have been all but forgotten probably has to do with its early connection with ritual practice. It is still today recited in various ceremonies and in the sixteen-part worship ritual called *puja*, which is part of the worship of Visnu, and forms an important part of the Vedic education of brahmins all over India. We will touch on some of the high points in the long and diverse history of interpretation surrounding this hymn as they bear upon the development of the kind of monotheism in evidence in the Caitanya tradition.

Let us begin with the hymn itself:

1. Thousand-headed is Purusa, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He covered the earth on all sides and stood above it the space of ten fingers.

2. Purusa alone is all this, what has been and what is to be, and he is the lord of immortals, who grow further by means of food.

3. Such is his greatness, and greater than this is Purusa: a quarter of him is all beings, three-quarters of him the immortal in heaven.

4. Three-quarters of Purusa went upward, but a quarter of him was here below. From that he spread out in all directions into what eats and does not eat.

5. From that Viraj was born; from Viraj, Purusa. When he was born, he extended beyond the earth, behind and also in front.

6. When with Purusa as oblation the gods offered a sacrifice, the spring was its clarified butter, the summer the fuel, the

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[10] I am translating *purusa* as giant which is strictly speaking not correct. *Purusa* means male, but in the context of this hymn the translation "giant" seems appropriate.

autumn the oblation.

     7. A sacrifice on the sacred grass they sprinkled him, Purusa, who was born in the beginning. With him the gods sacrificed, the Sadhyas and seers.

     8. From that sacrifice, a total offering, was brought together the clotted butter. It made the beasts: those of the air, of the forest, and of the village.

     9. From that sacrifice, a total offering, the Hymns of Praise and the Chants were born; the metres were born from it; the Sacrificial Formula from it was born.

     10. From it the horses were born and whatsoever have incisor teeth in both jaws. The cows were born from it. From it were born the goats and sheep.

     11. When they portioned out Purusa, in how many ways did they distribute him? What is his mouth called, what his arms, what his thighs, what are his feet called?

     12. His mouth was the Brahmana, his arms were made the Rajanya, what was his thighs was made the Vaisya, from his feet the Sudra was born.

     13. The moon from his mind was born; from his eye the sun was born; from his mouth both Indra and Agni; from his breath the wind was born.

     14. From his navel was the atmosphere; from his head the heaven evolved; from his feet the earth; the directions from his ear. Thus they fashioned the worlds.

     15. Seven were his altar-sticks; thrice seven faggots were made, when the gods, offering the sacrifice, tied Purusa as their victim.

     16. The gods sacrificed with the sacrifice to the sacrifice. These were the first rites. These powers reached the firmament, where the ancient Sadhyas are and also the gods.[11]

Much can be said by way of commentary on this extraordinary hymn. First it should be noted that this hymn comes in the Tenth Mandala of the Rg Veda and is thought generally to be one of the latest hymns to be added to the collection. It is often assigned a date of around 1000 BCE, but may be slightly more recent (900-800 BCE) because of the recent redating of

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[11]This translation is taken from Walter H. Maurer's book *Pinnacles of India's Past: selections from the Rgveda*, pp. 271-272. (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1986)

the Buddha.[12] This hymn is usually noted as the earliest reference to the caste system in Indic literature and as an example of how the caste system is given a cosmic or divine authentication. This provides the foundation for the line of reflection found in the later law texts (*smrti*) in which the roles of and interactions between the various castes were developed and regulated. The hymn is also cited as evidence of the fundamental importance of sacrifice in the Vedic and later Hindu traditions. This very world is created through sacrifice. Sacrifice, too, receives a cosmic justification and is recognized as the source of the powers that create and nourish the world. Such powers may be used to renew the world as well. This line of thought was further developed in the Mimamsa tradition within Hinduism, for which the essential meaning of the Veda is the call to ritual action. From the point of view of the history of Indic theism, however, the most important stanzas of this hymn are the first five, especially the rather striking image of the first verse where Purusa is described as having a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. From one perspective Purusa continues a very ancient mythological theme that was part of a common Indo-European inheritance, the idea of creation of the universe from the destruction/dismemberment of a primordial giant or god.[13] In India, though, this idea was developed, transformed, and articulated into the foundation of its version of monotheism.

The thousand heads, eyes, and feet of Purusa are not to be taken literally, of course. A "thousand" means unlimited[14] and points to the idea that the heads and eyes and feet of Purusa are those of all living beings. Thus, deity is at the very beginning identified with the living beings, not just human beings, but all living beings. The exact kind or degree of identity is worked out differently by each tradition in its own interpretation of deity. Thus, some advocate, on the basis of some of the Upanisadic interpretations, an absolute identity (Advaita Vedanta), some a partial identity as in the case of the theo-monism[15] of Kashmiri Saivism in which all beings are manifestations of Siva; and some advocate an identity like that between a cause and an effect, a thing and its quality, or a power and the possessor of that power (the various theistic Vaisnava Vedantas), all of which indi-

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[12]See Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, pp. 37-39. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996)

[13]The classic example is Ymir, the Norse Frost Giant, who is killed by the gods Odin, Vili, and Ve. He is dismembered and from the parts of his body the world is made.

[14]As the late commentator on the hymn, Sayana, opines.

[15]Theo-monism is the term I have fabricated to refer to the kind of half-theism, half-monism that is found in Kashmiri Saivism.

cate an existential dependence of living being on deity. We also see here in this ancient Purusa the source of the idea of what will later in this essay be called the "divisible deity," a deity who divides himself into numerous parts and portions with various functions.

The mention of Viraj in the fifth verse points to another important dimension of the influence of this hymn. Viraj is a female principle who is born or separates from the primal Purusa and who in turn gives birth to a secondary Purusa, the Purusa who is sacrificed. This anticipates the later pairing of the major deities of the Hindu tradition with female counterparts, often considered a consort or a power (*sakti*). Thus, sexual differentiation and intercourse become important paradigms for the creation of the world and the reverse movements (rejoining of the male and female parts in a de-intercourse) become paradigms for the de-creation of or liberation from the world. This perspective is further reinforced by the sexual imagery of another great creation hymn of the Rg Veda, the *Nasadiya Hymn* (10. 129). A later hymn like the *Purusa-sukta*, the *Nasadiya*'s opening words "there was no non-being, there was no being then" (*nasad asin no sad asid tadanim*) have gone echoing down the ages appearing in slightly altered forms in passage after passage of Upanisad, Purana, and Tantra. In the fourth stanza of the hymn we hear that Desire (*kama*) is the first seed of existence and in the fifth we find the seed bearers above and the powers below. This line of insight was more fully developed and expressed in the Tantric tradition, of course, but after around the 10th century CE, it was commonly shared by nearly all the Hindu traditions.

## 4   Reassembling the Giant

There are many passages reflective of the *Hymn of the Giant* in the later sacred literature of the Hindu tradition. Only a few will be discussed here, one from each of the periods, and again only those that reflect stages in the development of what I consider to be the seven major features of Indic monotheism. The first set of interpretations naturally occur in the Upanisads. Several passages of the Upanisads expand on the features of the Purusa presented in the Vedic hymn. In one of the earliest, at the beginning of the *Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad*, Purusa is reimagined in the form of a sacrificial horse (BA U, 1.1). Like the giant of the hymn the various parts of the horse become different aspects of the world. The shift here from gigantic person to gigantic horse is interesting since it possibly reflects an increase in the power of the kingly class, the horse sacrifice being predom-

inantly a royal ritual. In many passages of the important Upanisads one finds sage-kings in a prominent role, in some cases presented as possessing knowledge not possessed even by the brahmins, in other cases giving generously in support of brahmins who excel in knowledge.

A more important interpretation comes a little later in the same Upanisad (BA U, 1.4), in a passage that begins with "In the beginning this world was just a single body shaped like a man (*purusa*)." The first thing this person does is speak using the word "I" indicating the arising of identity or ego. The next thing he does is become afraid because he is alone. He quickly realizes, though, that because he is alone and there is no other, there is no other to fear. Thus fear is connected to the presence of an "other." He next realizes that he has no pleasure and that without an "other" there is also no pleasure. He desires a companion and being "as large as a man and a woman in close embrace" he splits himself into a man and a woman. He copulates with the woman and human beings are born. The woman feeling uneasy about copulating with her own begetter (i.e. father) tries to hide herself as a cow. The male half becomes a bull and copulates with her and cattle are born. This process continues until all gendered forms of life are created. This is, of course, an interpretation of how Purusa comes to have a thousand heads, eyes, and feet. Later in the passage it is said that the world thus created was without real distinctions. It is distinguished only in name and form. Furthermore, that Purusa which is the source of all these names and forms is identified with the self (*atma*) and of the self it is said: "penetrating this body up to the very nail-tips, he remains there like a razor within a case or a termite within a termite hill."[16] In this interpretation of the *Hymn of the Giant* we have the identification of the heads, eyes, and feet of Purusa with all gendered living beings, the bifurcation of Purusa into male and female (corresponding to the begetting of Viraj in the original hymn), and the association of fear with the presence of the "other." The other is also recognized as the source of pleasure and it is out of a desire for pleasure that the whole creation is set in motion.

The *Brhad-aranyaka*'s interpretation of the Purusa hymn lends itself well to the monistic side of the Indic tradition. Others of the Upanisads, however, especially the later ones, present a more theistic interpretation. The author of the *Isavasya Upanisad*, for instance, appears to recognize a difference between the deity and living beings in its first verse ("all this is inhabited by the lord, whatever is moving in the moving world. You should enjoy only what is abandoned by him. ..."), but ultimately collapses that in

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[16]I am following the translation of Patrick Olivelle here. See the bibliography.

the sixteenth verse where the speaker says "I am that purusa [in the sun]."[17] The *Svetasvatara Upanisad*, a late Upanisad, is clearly monotheistic in its interpretation of the Purusa hymn, some lines of which it quotes verbatim (SU, 3.14-15). There are many examples of monotheistic thought in this Upanisad, but to settle on just one example the following does admirably:

> Those who follow the discipline of meditation have seen God, the self, and the power, all hidden by their own qualities. One alone is he who governs all those causes, from "time" to "self." (SU, 1.3)[18]

Here deity (primal *purusa*) is separated from the self (the living beings, secondary *purusa*) and the power (Viraj which creates the objects of enjoyment and joins with the secondary *purusa*) and is recognized as one. The author of this Upanisad also in several places addresses the deity with the names of Siva and thus bridges the gap between the Purusa hymn (which might have been monopolized by the followers of Visnu) and the Saivite tradition.

Perhaps the most stunning of the interpretations of the Purusa hymn is that found in the Eleventh Chapter of the *Bhagavad-gita*. There Arjuna asks Krsna to reveal his universal form (*visvarupa*) to him. Krsna reveals to him a version of the ancient Purusa form as a kind of validation of his own claims of divinity and of the teachings given previously in the text. Here is what Arjuna saw:

> Having thus spoken, Hari, the great sovereign of Yoga, revealed to the Partha his supreme supernal form, with countless mouths and eyes, displaying multitudes of marvels, wearing numbers of divine ornaments, and raising divine weapons beyond count. And this form wore celestial garlands and robes, it was anointed with the perfumes of the Gods – it was God himself, infinite and universal, containing all miracles.[19]

Later in the chapter Krsna is specifically identified as that primordial Purusa in a statement placed in the mouth of Arjuna:

> The Original God, the Person Eternal [*purusa purana*],
> You are of this world the ultimate support,

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[17] These are my own translations.

[18] Olivelle's translation, p. 253.

[19] This is the translation of J.B.A. van Buitenen from his *The Bhagavad-gita in the Mahabharata*, p. 113. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981)

> The knower, the known, the final abode –
> All is strung upon you, of infinite form: (BG, 11.38)[20]

The Purusa of the *Bhagavad-gita* is a far more majestic, awe-inspiring, over-powering, and frightening form than that encountered in the Vedic hymn. In the hundreds of years that passed between the Upanisads and the *Gita*, the Purusa came to represent the all-encompassing, majesty of the deity before which one can only tremble as Arjuna did. As Purusa became more majestic a tension was created between the all-encompassing, majestic form and the human form, a tension that would take over a thousand years to work out. In the *Bhagavad-gita*, Arjuna apologizes for treating Krsna as a friend (11.41-42) and then begs him to reassume his human-like form (11.46). After seeing Krsna in his human form Arjuna is once again able to regain his composure. Thus, the manifestation of the universal form temporarily interrupts the intimacy they shared as friends. This later becomes an important theme in the theology of the Caitanya tradition.

The next major stage in the interpretation of the Purusa vision and the development of Indic monotheism is found in the Puranic literature. The Purana abound in references to and interpretations of the Purusa hymn. What happens to Purusa in the *Bhagavata Purana*, one of the most important of the Purana, exemplifies this stage. The *Bhagavata* is generally dated to the middle of the Puranic period, some time in the 8th or 9th centuries CE. Purusa is referred to in a number of places, but the main locus of the work's interpretation of Purusa is in the beginning of chapter on the incarnations (*avatara*) of Krsna, the third chapter of the First Canto. Incarnation means, in the context of Indic theism, a "descent" of the deity into the manifest or moving world (*jagat*). Responding to a request made in the first chapter of the First Canto (1.1.18) to describe the various incarnations of Hari, Suta, the reciter of the *Bhagavata*, begins the third chapter with a description of the source of all the incarnations, Purusa, himself an incarnation according to this text:

> The Lord took on the Purusa form, replete with the "great"
> (*mahat*) and the rest and possessed of the sixteen parts, out of a
> desire to create the worlds.[21] (BP, 1.3.1)

Purusa has been demoted from the first and foremost entity to merely a form assumed by a higher deity referred to as the Lord (*bhagavan*). Or

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[20]Again van Buitenen's translation, pp. 117-8.
[21]The translation is my own based on the text edited by Puridasa.

one might say that the phrase "the three-quarters of him the immortal in heaven" has been interpreted as an indication of a higher deity, the Lord. The Purusa form contains within it the "great and the rest," the components that will become the universe, and the sixteen parts or portions, which are, according to some, the ten action and knowledge senses, the five elements, and the mind. Others take the sixteen parts to be the various feminine powers of the deity, headed by Sri, the goddess of fortune.[22] This honors the ancient hymn's idea that all of the elements of creation were contained in the body of Purusa.

The next verse reads:

> From the lotus of the navel-lake of him, lying in the water and sleeping the sleep of yoga, was born Brahma, the lord of the world's beings. (BP, 1.3.2)

Here some new twists have been added. The birth of Brahma, the creator god in the so-called Hindu trinity, has been added. Obviously, this reflects an effort to incorporate and combine different mythological creation accounts. Also, although it is not apparent from the wording of this text, the feminine Viraj from the hymn has been transformed into an ocean. This is possibly an attempt to account for a popular name of Visnu, Narayana, the most common traditional etymology of which is "he whose abode (*ayana*) is the waters (*nara*)." New too is the idea that while the world is manifest Visnu, its ultimate creator, is in a trance-like sleep. The next verse returns to the hymn:

> The expanse of the worlds is arranged by the position of his limbs. That form of the Lord is pure and powerful being. (BP, 13.3)

The worlds are arranged by the position of Purusa's limbs, the lowest planets are his feet, the highest his head (from BP, 2.1.26). This is certainly in harmony with the hymn's idea that the parts of the body of Purusa become the world, except that there appears to be no sacrificial dismemberment. The parts remain connected.

The next verse recognizes the Purusa hymn as revelation and echoes its opening words:

> They whose eyes are not dull see that form wondrous with a thousand feet, thighs, arms and faces, a thousand heads, ears,

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[22]Baladeva Vidyabhusana (18th cent. C.E.), for instance, in his *Vaisnava-nandini*.

eyes, and noses, shining with a thousand crowns, robes, and ear-rings. (BP, 13.4)

Concluding the *Bhagavata*'s invocation of Purusa is the fifth verse of the chapter which reads:

> This is the resting place and inexhaustible source of the many incarnations. By portions of his portions, gods, animals, and men among others are created. (BP, 1.3.5)

Here the focus has shifted somewhat from a Purusa who becomes all beings to one who becomes first and foremost all incarnations, that is, all the manifest forms of the deity, through his portions and portions of portions. This is a god who splits himself into many gods, each with a specific function to perform, but who remains one through it all. He is the resting place when they are not in action and their source or seed when they are called into action. The living beings are created by those portions of portions. Thus, the thousand heads now primarily refer to the thousand heads or faces of the deity. But, who is the deity? Who is the Lord who takes the form of Purusa in the first place? The *Bhagavata* gives an answer to that question later in the same chapter. After listing the major incarnations and stating that apart from those listed, the incarnations are so many that they cannot be counted (BP, 1.3.26), the claim is made that all those incarnations are portions or parts of portions of Purusa, but Krsna is the Lord himself (BP, 1.3.28), that is, Krsna is the Lord (*bhagavan*) behind Purusa. This is a monumental coup, a setting of the divine world on its head. For centuries in other texts Krsna was recognized as an incarnation of Visnu or Purusa; now Krsna is placed above Visnu or Purusa. In terms of the inclusive hierarchies discussed earlier Krsna is now placed above Visnu or Purusa as inclusive of them, but in possession of something they lack. The human-like form to which Arjuna related as a friend and who drove Arjuna's chariot out of affection for him in the *Bhagavad-gita* has superceded the awe-inspiring, majestic, opulent, all-destroying, and quite inhuman form of the universal Purusa. What Krsna offers that the others lack is the possibility of intimacy. As Rupa Goswami (16th century CE), one of the leading theologians of the Caitanya tradition, says in his *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* (Ocean of the Nectar of Devotion) (BRS, 1.2.59):

> Though the natures of the Lord of Sri (Visnu) and Krsna are non-different according to accepted teaching, the form of Krsna

> is exhalted because of the emotional enjoyment (*rasa*) [of love].
> This is the position of emotional enjoyment.

Rupa's theology is based on the *Bhagavata*'s.

A more or less final layer in the development of Indic monotheism is contributed by tantric literature. This vast body of texts is still largely unavailable and unexplored, but those pieces that have been published and studied reveal some interesting expansions on the Purusa vision in the direction of a trans-sectarian inclusiveness and in the matter of the hymn's sexual suggestiveness. One can only indicate the direction in which the tantric literature carried theistic reflection by citing an example or two. A tantric text that the Caitanya tradition looked to in order to justify the kind of monotheism it subscribed to is called the *Brahma-samhita*, one of a group of texts that refer to themselves as *samhita* or collections and that make up much of the Vaisnava branch of the tantric tradition. The portion of the text that has survived consists of only the fifth chapter and was reportedly discovered and collected by Caitanya himself on his pilgrimage through South India. South India has been the center of much of the Vaisnava *samhita* literature also known as the Pancaratra ("Five Nights"). The fifth chapter of the *Brahma-samhita* appears to fit in well with the Pancaratra system as it deals with two of the five forms or manifestations of deity: the higher (*para*) and the expansion (*vyuha*). The lesser expansions (*vibhava*), the indweller (*antaryamin*), and the images (*arca*) are not discussed in the part of the text we have. The higher form of deity in this text is Govinda or Krsna the cowherder. This is the form of deity beyond the created world in the supreme abode called Gokula, that "three-quarters of him the immortal in heaven." When Govinda expands into other forms to begin the work of creation they are called his expansions or *vyuha*.

The *Brahma-samhita* begins its discussion of the expansion, which is where the Purusa form comes in, by describing the higher deity, Govinda, as self-enjoying, that is not dependent on any thing or any one else for enjoyment (*atmarama*) and free from contact with material nature (*prakrti*) (BS 5.10). The next verse, however, gives a new twist to the idea of self-enjoying by saying that he is always enjoying with his power (*maya*) and is never separated from her, that out of a desire to create, he enjoys with Rama who is his own (BS 5.11). The words used for "enjoy" mean primarily sexual enjoyment (*ram*). Thus, deity is now linked to or paired with its own power viewed as a female consort and is constantly engaged in sexual enjoyment with her. This considerably extends the Upanisadic idea of Purusa as one who was "as large as a man and a woman in close embrace."

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What happens next is also quite astounding. The female consort, Rama, is identified as fate or fortune (*niyati*).[23] Govinda's penis becomes Sambhu or Siva, Rama's vagina becomes the higher power or Sakti (*para sakti*), Siva's consort, and Govinda's seed becomes the "great" (*mahat*) (BS 5.12). All these living beings, therefore, that are born of the great goddess, the text tells us next, either have penises or vaginas (BS 5.13). This is equivalent to the gendered condition of the living beings created by the male and female, shape-shifting copulators into which the Purusa split in the Upanisad passage. The next verse is also interesting in that it states that the Mahesvara (Siva) in the form of the penis is the same as that power-possessing Purusa (Mahesvara's source) and Mahavisnu (the source of Mahesvara), the lord of the universe, appears in that penis, or rather is born through that penis (BS 5.14). This means that Mahavisnu is born through his own expansion, Siva, who acts as a conduit for his entrance into the arena of creation, the prologue of the drama of creation. This appears to be an expansion of the Purusa hymn's brief statement (verse 5): "from that [Purusa] Viraj was born; from Viraj, Purusa." In order to highlight the text's relationship with the Purusa hymn the next verse is:

> Thousand headed is Purusa, thousand eyed, and thousand footed. A thousand arms has the soul of the universe, a thousand parts, a thousand offspring. (BS 5.15)

Mahavisnu's next actions: creating the causal ocean, going into yoga-sleep in the causal ocean, creating innumerable universes from the pores of his skin, entering each of those in yet another Visnu expansion, and begetting the creator Prajapati or Brahma from the lotus growing from his navel are the first few scenes in the opening act of the great drama of cosmic creation according to both the tantric and puranic literature (BS 5.17-27).[24] As with the Bhagavata Purana, this interpretation of the Purusa hymn has no reference at all to sacrificial dismemberment.

This has been a very brief survey of the history of textual interpretations of the Purusa mythology. Only the line of interpretation most directly influential on the development of the kind of monotheism found in Caitanya

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[23]This is interpreted by the only commentator on this text, Jiva Gosvami, to mean not that she is "fate," but that she is "restricted" (another meaning of *niyam*) to the internal nature of the higher deity. That is, she is his *internal* power, not be confused with the external power that creates the world.

[24]The technical names for these various forms of Visnu are Karanarnavasayi Visnu for the Visnu who creates the causal ocean and floats on it in the sleep of yoga and Garbhodasayi Visnu who enters into the individual universes fills them half with water and floats on it in the sleep of yoga.

Vaisnavism has been followed and that too only selectively. A great many other lines of thought have contributed to the monotheism of Caitanya's tradition: the Nyaya school's defense of theism from the Buddhist challenges, Kashmiri Saivism's early development of the implications of tantric thought, the theistic explorations of the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, to name just a few. A complete understanding would require a detailed examination not only of the main line of interpretation, but also of those less direct lines of influence. Some of the outlines of Indic monotheism have begun to emerge here, however; and to throw them into greater relief I have dismembered and reorganized them into the seven major features of monotheism in India. Those features, which have developed in Indic monotheism over the last three millennia, are the seven primary ways in which deity is understood. They are: Majesty, Attractiveness, Divisibility, Hedonism, Unfathomability, Redemptive-ness, and Androgyny – MADHURA. Under the Indic theological principle of inclusion within a hierarchy, *madhura* (sweetness or attractiveness) is the fullest, most inclusive, quality of deity.

# 5   Giant Reassembled: Seven Features of Caitanya Vaisnava Monotheism

- **Majesty** is the divine trait that grew out of the representation of Purusa as forming the whole universe out of his body at the time of the primordial sacrifice. It became most pronounced in the Epics and Purana and has remained a part of Indic theism throughout its history. This vision of deity is most clearly seen in the revelation of the universal form of Krsna to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gita.* It is the overpowering and awe-inspiring vision of deity that causes the viewer to tremble and shake in the presence of an entity that is overwhelmingly powerful and superior. It is close to the experience of deity that provokes what Schleiermacher called "creature feelings" or the feeling of being absolutely dependent,[25] or to the aspect of the numinous experience that Otto called *tremendum*, experienced as a supernatural dread.[26] It includes the experience of deity as a universal monarch, surrounded by unimaginable opulence, seated on a blazing throne, blindingly effulgent, being praised by all the greatest of gods and beings. Such a vision of deity has been most often associated with pros-

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[25] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 106. (New York: Harper & Row, 1958)

[26] Otto, Rudolph, *The Idea of the Holy*. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958)

perous Hindu kingdoms in which the deity is a vastly exaggerated image of the king himself, and the cosmic king/deity is worshiped through the elaborate, expensive, and complex rituals of temple worship.

- **Attractiveness** is in many respects the antithesis of majesty. If majesty demonstrates for the worshiper the huge gulf of difference between himself and deity, the vast difference in their respective power, attraction represents deity in a way that is conducive to establishing intimacy between devotee and deity. Deity appears as extremely attractive and kind, as understanding and loving, as concerned for the welfare of all living beings. This is accomplished in Indic monotheism by means of forms of the deity in which human qualities are accented. In the Vaisnava tradition this is achieved by focusing on Krsna as a beautiful, young cowherd boy who steals the hearts of all who know him. In Saivism the image of Siva as an old, intoxicated, and somewhat mad husband achieves much the same effect. The goddess as a beautiful, young, sexually enticing woman (who nevertheless is able to do battle with the greatest and most ferocious of demons) works as well. In this trait the deity exerts a power of fascination that causes the frightening and humbling effect of experience of the majesty to recede into the back ground. This closely corresponds to that aspect of the numinous experience of Otto that he called *fascinans*. This is a trait that develops rather late in the history of Indic monotheism, and its development coincides with periods of loss of power in Hindu society. As Hindu kings were dethroned by Muslim invasions the majestic visions of deity were also dethroned and replaced with forms of god that were hierophanic of the humbler forms of human life: simple cowherders, the elderly, or women called to acts of courage and sacrifice. Purusa can reveal himself through any form of life. This trait is in constant tension with majesty, sometimes overpowering it and at other times being overpowered by it.

- **Divisibility** is one of the unique characteristics of Indic monotheism. The Indic god is highly divisible. This means that the Indic deity divides himself into portions and portions of portions and yet still remains one. This is the core of Indic monotheism, a vast plurality that is yet considered a thorough unity. This is manifested in the Vaisnava theory of incarnations or descents, in the Saivite doctrine of the evolution of the 36 principles, and in the Sakta acceptance of the goddess'

numerous forms in groupings such as the ten Mahavidyas. As the *Bhagavata Purana* says about this portioning (10.87.46): "Obeisance to Lord Krsna of sharp intellect who divides himself into auspicious parts for the liberation of all living beings." One can even point to the three body doctrine in Mahayana Buddhism and the twenty-four Tirthankaras in Jainism as examples of this typically Indic way of perceiving the sacred. It is in the context of this divisibility that the elaborate hierarchies of the theologies are constructed and the deities of other traditions are incorporated into a tradition's world view. We saw how Siva and Sakti, originally belonging to the Saivite or Sakta traditions, were incorporated into the Vaisnava hierarchy in our discussion of the *Brahma-samhita*. In addition, the Buddha appears in lists of the incarnations of Visnu and in the Sakta tradition Krsna is often viewed as a co-form of Kali. This divisibility of godhead is in many respects a reflection in the sacred world of the social organization of Hindu society in which men and women are not regarded as individuals, but as limbs of a larger entity, the extended family or the caste community. What affects the limb at the same time affects the larger entity and vice versa. This is the translation of the Purusa ideal into social organization and interaction. That Vedic hymn was after all the first justification of the caste system.

- **Hedonism** is the idea that the Indic deity is a deity of play, not work. Work is something one does in order to supply a need or replace something that is missing or absent. The deity is seen as full and complete, in need of nothing and therefore does not create this world out of any need, or with any purpose in mind except self-expression. The world is created as a result of the deity's wish to unpack its internal pleasure. As we saw in the *Brhad-aranyaka Upanisad* passage, Purusa had no pleasure because there was no other and as a result it divided itself into male and female and experienced pleasure. The ingredients for that pleasure were inside it all the time. This is expressed in the idea of *lila,* sport or play. The gods sport or play and only humans work. Or, to put it in another way, the deity spends, we humans save. We save because we believe ourselves to be weak, poor, and impotent and in need of struggle to survive. The deity spends because it knows it has an abundance of power, an inexhaustible supply. In some Indic traditions this knowledge is the only difference between the bound living being and the absolute. In other traditions there is real difference between the living beings and their lord.

- **Unfathomability** is the characteristic of deity that places it beyond the comprehension of humans. It is represented by that three-quarters of Purusa that became "the immortal in heaven," beyond this world and beyond the understanding of those in this world. It suggests that most of what deity is is beyond the ken of human beings and will always be so. Whatever is comprehended is of necessity only a partial truth. This is represented in the Indic texts in a number of ways, in the vastness of time and space described there, in the very divisibility of deity into innumerable shapes and forms each capable of unlimited powerful actions. This is suggested in that ancient *Nasadiya Hymn* of the Rg Veda (10.129) and has remained a part of the tradition ever since: "He verily knows or maybe he does not know." The best that a worshiper can hope for is to know and relate well to some small aspect of deity.

- **Redemptive-ness** is the trait perceived in the Indic deity that drives deity again and again to bring about the freedom or enlightenment of the bound living beings. Noticeable in the repeated "descents" of the deity into the world to save the good and destroy the evil.[27] In spite of all this effort, there is no sense of urgency, no sense of loss if all are not saved at once. The descents are at once redemptive because deity pulls back the curtain and reveals itself before the eyes of the bound, and are also sport because deity experiences or relishes some aspect of itself. The redemptive-ness of deity becomes a kind of secondary function as the living beings, in the course of these "redemptions," are swept up into the deity's own experience of pleasure.

- **Androgyny** is the idea that the Indic deity is both male and female mingled together. This is of course a development of the tantric side of the tradition, but the seeds of this trait are noticeably present in the tradition from the very beginning. The male and the female aspects of deity are sometimes indistinguishable, as in the Upanisadic Purusa, and at other times clearly separated, as in the Puranic and Tantric texts. Sometimes the male is predominant and sometimes the female is. Though the male is often regarded as the "possessor" of the feminine *sakti* or power, sometimes the feminine so overpowers the male as to turn him into a corpse, as Kali does with Siva; or she takes the active role (the reversed or "male" role) in love-making, as Radha does

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[27]The classic statement of this is found in the *Bhagavad-gita*, 4.8: "To save the good, to destroy the evil-doers, and to establish the ways of piety (dharma), I appear age after age."

with Krsna. Krsna then becomes her servant.[28] In the Caitanya tradition this trait of androgyny culminates in the predominant view in the tradition that Caitanya is the combined form of Radha and Krsna.

## 6   Concluding Remarks

Monotheism in India is a monotheism unlike that of the Middle Eastern religions. Indic monotheism developed slowly over thousands of years in the rich environment provided by a continuous and multifaceted civilization. The extreme conservatism of the Indic traditions has sent them continually back in times of challenge and change to their roots, which, because of the continuity of the civilization, have always been available to them. Although new influences have exerted themselves often during this long history, those influences were shaped and adapted to fit into the patterns of the ancient visions. Thus it is that an ancient vision of deity like that found in the Purusa hymn could provide the structure on which the later forms of theistic belief and practice were able to build. The image of the primordial giant who was sacrificed to become the world and all beings in it was refracted in a number of ways to form the various types of religious belief one finds in India today. On one end of the spectrum one finds the monistic forms of belief represented by the non-dualistic forms of Vedanta in which all living beings are seen as part of the one supreme, impersonal, being called Brahman. Any sense of distinction between them is the result of ignorance. On the other extreme are the monotheistic forms of Vedanta in which all beings are seen as tiny off-shoots of the supreme being, similar in nature but not in power, like so many tiny sparks shooting out of a fire. As that fire is also capable of unlimited reduplication, so is the deity capable of expanding into unlimited forms each equal to the others. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum rests the theo-monism of Kashmiri Saivism, which attributes an identity or personality to the deity, but which understands all living beings as projections or instances of that deity. Although all of these different adumbrations of the primordial giant have interesting histories, the only line of interpretation followed in this essay has been the monotheistic one. We have seen how some aspects of the Purusa have dropped out of the tradition over time, the sacrificial dismemberment, for instance, while others have survived intact or have been transformed into something new, the three-quarters beyond or the meaning of the thousand

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[28]This is the conclusion of the *Gita-govinda* by Jayadeva (13th century C.E.)

heads, eyes and feet. Nevertheless, the long development of monotheism in India can be seen as having its roots in the old mysterious Purusa.

The seven traits are not meant to be exhaustive. They represent the most salient features of Indic monotheism. The traits of divisibility, hedonism, and androgyny are features that are not found in Western monotheism, at least in its mainstream formulations. The other features are shared with Western monotheism. The three unique features of Indic monotheism give it an entirely different flavor from Western monotheism, one that is sometimes mistaken for polytheism. Adding to that different flavor and providing a wholly different attitude toward other religious traditions is the inclusiveness that informs Indic monotheism. The inclusiveness of Indic religions has played well in the modern market-place of world religions. A Hindu can say with complete sincerity that according to his religion the other world religions are also valid ways to reach the absolute. There is a price to be paid for accepting the hospitality of Indic religions, however, and that is re-absorption into the cosmic body of Purusa and that too not necessarily as one of the thousand heads. As Krsna puts it so well in the *Bhagavad-gita* (BG, 9.23-25):

> Even those who are devotees of other gods,
>
> And worship them permeated with faith,
>
> It is only Me, son of Kunti, that even they
>
> Woship, (tho) not in the enjoined fashion.
>
> For I of all acts of worship
>
> Am both the recipient and the Lord;
>
> But they do not recognize Me
>
> In the true way; therefore they fall (from the 'heaven' they win).
>
> Votaries of the gods go to the gods,
>
> Votaries of the (departed) fathers go to the fathers,
>
> Worshipers of goblins go to the goblins,
>
> Worshipers of Me also go to Me.[29]

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[29]The translation of Franklin Edgerton, p. 48.

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