

Brāhmanism in South-East Asia

(From the earliest time to 1445 A.D.)

DAWEE DAWEEWARN



BRAHMANISM IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

(FROM THE EARLIEST TIME TO 1445 A.D.)

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Foreword

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FOREWORD

I have a great pleasure to contribute this Foreword to Dr Dawee Daweewarn's book, *Brāhmaṇism in South-East Asia*, which portrays a complete picture of Brāhmaṇical religion in South-East Asia from the earliest times to 1445 A.D., i.e., till the fall of Majapahit, the last great Hindu kingdom which flourished in Java. Though some aspects of this study have been treated by scholars in their monographs and books this is for the first time that a comprehensive work has been done on Brāhmaṇism in South-East Asia which dominated the scene for about 1300 years.

It is well-known that the two Indian religions—Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism—with its many sects and sub-sects flourished in South-East Asia during this period. The numerous inscriptions and art-objects that have been discovered in different parts of this region throw considerable light on the various aspects of these religions. Unfortunately, these inscriptions have not been studied from religious point of view : they have been chiefly utilised as sources of political history. However, on close scrutiny, one finds that most of these inscriptions, particularly those in Cambodia, are religious in character and their chief object is to describe some religious foundations. In this respect, the invocatory stanzas of the Sanskrit inscriptions are particularly interesting from religious point of view as they often express theological and philosophical ideas drawn from various Indian texts. For instance, of all the countries of South-East Asia, the philosophical activities were most pronounced in Java where religious texts of great importance have come down to us which form an invaluable treasure of Indo-Javanese literature. Though in the case of Cambodia, which constituted one of the strongholds of Hindu culture in South-East Asia, it is difficult to say on the basis of the fragmentary documents if philosophical activities were so important as in Java, nevertheless, the average of these stanzas, contained in epigraphic records, would appear more philosophical than average of the invocatory stanzas of the Indian, Cham and Javanese inscriptions. These records as a whole present a clear picture of the general tendencies of these religions in those countries, some of which patronised Śaivism, some Vaiṣṇavism, some both and yet others Buddhism. For instance, Śaivism was the most popular religion in ancient Cambodia and the documents on it are more numerous than those on Vaiṣṇavism and Buddhism, and the ideas we gather from them are for that reason more comprehensive. Thus, almost all the currents of Indian thought are fully reflected in the Sanskrit inscriptions, and the authors

have extensively drawn from the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas and the Āgamas. The influence of Vedānta philosophy which we notice in various countries, specially in Cambodia, towards the second half of the 10th century, seems to have some association with a particular movement in the Śaiva circles in India during this period. Besides, the Yogic theories also seem to have exerted a strong influence, and the proficiency with which the authors of the inscriptions express the religious and philosophical ideas points to the deep cultural influence of India in that part of the world.

As we know, the Philippine islands, Malay and Indonesia were greatly influenced by Hindu religions and philosophy since the early years of the Christian era. While Java has conserved its monuments and inscriptions, Bali with its Hindu-Balinese religion is a store-house of Hindu-Javanese or Old-Javanese culture, deeply imbibing all the best in Indo-Javanese sources. Voluminous treatises on pre-Islamic, Indo-Javanese religious organisations, institutions, etc., in Java known as the *Tantu Panggelaram* and the *Koravāśrama* betray tremendous Hindu influence in all walks of life. This impact was so absorbing and encompassing that even the change of religion, i.e., culture, in Java took centuries to take roots, and it has been rightly suggested that "this process is still far from completed in the eyes of orthodox Muslims". It is therefore not at all surprising to find the Muslims of Java maintaining still its Hindu mythology partly in its literature, and fully in its shadow-play. In spite of the continuous efforts by the powerful Muslim organization *Muhammadiyah* for well over half a century to purify Islam, it has received not much success: On the other hand, it has to face stiff resistance in the form of voices "in favour of maintaining the *Kajavéu* the inherited Javanese way of life. Javanese syncretism make themselves heard louder and louder".

Legends current in Bali tell us how fugitives from Java fled to the East to escape the sword of the advancing Muslim conquerors, {and crossed to Bali where they planted their religion and literature. Whatever the credence of these stories the fact remains that as early as 1000 A.D. the Javanese and Balinese royal families intermarried and that Java had conquered Bali more than once, and the Balinese during this period had avidly absorbed Indo-Javanese culture. Thus, Indo-Javanese literature could best be studied in Bali, a graphic description of which has been presented by C. Hooykaas in his informative article entitled "The Treasures of Bali". This influence is again to be seen in the shadow-theatre (*Vayang Kulit*) in Java and Bali, the themes of which can easily be traced to Indo-Javanese sources. Though awkward for a Muslim society, a performance in both the islands is a religious requisite. While in Bali it is requirement during a temple-festival, in Java it is not admitted to the mosque, but in both the islands it enjoys court-favour. This all round influence is further suggested by the Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin* (Balinese script); Kāvya

Bharata-Yuddha (Balinese script) and the Śaiva-Buddhistic *Kāvya Sutasoma* dealing with *Kalmaśapāda* (same production) as well as the Balinese poems like the *Dukuh Silandri*, *Basur* and *Jayaprāna* which bear the important literary manifestations of an unmistakably Hinduised and still Indonesian people. In fact, we have numerous treatises on religion, philosophy, metaphysics, manuals for priests and so on that are usually mere transliterations into Latin script from the existing palm-leaf manuscripts, but also not unfrequently freshly-composed expositions.

The present work, as rightly suggested by the author, is “not a startling discovery of hitherto unknown sources, but a patient compilation and scientific interpretation of information contained in known sources”, suggesting fresh approaches to the topics discussed here. I have no doubt that the work will attract notice of both indigenous and foreign scholars and would go a long way in cementing the age-old cultural tie between India and South-East Asia. Moreover, it will serve for long as a guide-book to the inquisitive researchers in the field.

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Dawee Daweewarn

INTRODUCTION

The present work entitled *Brāhmaṇism in South-East Asia* is a survey of the conditions of the Brāhmaṇical religion from the earliest time upto 1445 A.D. An attempt has been made to give a comprehensive account of this important facet of the Indian religious set-up in the countries of South-East Asia on the basis of a variety of original and secondary sources. Some aspects of the subjects were undoubtedly treated by competent scholars in many books and monographs but a complete integrated study of all of them was not available in such a comprehensive way as to deal fully with this theme in all its essential formative trends and evolutionary courses. It is surprising that upto this time no work dealing exclusively with Brāhmaṇism in South-East Asia has been written in any language. This led us to embark upon this study. The main feature of this work is not a startling discovery of hitherto unknown sources, but a patient compilation and scientific interpretation of the information contained in known sources. Therefore, without laying claim to any original discovery, we are content with advancing some new interpretations and suggesting some fresh approaches to the topics treated here.

The term 'South-East Asia' was coined during the last world war as a term of military usage but now it has become geographical. The area of South-East Asia, may be broadly defined as nearly the whole of Indo-Chinese peninsula and East Indias, called by the Indians respectively as *Suvarṇa-bhūmi* and *Suvarṇa-dvīpa*. To be more precise it comprised the territories now known as Burma, Thailand (Siam), Malaya peninsula, Cambodia (now Khmer Republic), Laos and Vietnam on the mainland, and the islands of Sumatra, Java, Madura, Bali, Borneo, etc.

The countries of South-East Asia have a glorious past of which any civilised region may justly be proud. The relics of their glorious past can yet be seen in its ancient cities and the achievements of the prominent kings—Mengrai, Ram Khamheng, Chulalongkorn (Thailand); Aniruddha and Kyanzittha (Burma); Jayavarman II and Jayavarman VII (Cambodia); Śrī Mara and Harivarman (Champā); Fa Ngum (Laos); Kritinagar, Airlangga and Vijaya of Java; Malavarman of Borneo, etc., were the main builders and organisers of Buddhism and Brāhmaṇism in their respective areas. There are remains of splendid cities, temples and monasteries and places hallowed by the memory of the great thinkers and preachers. Their fertile plains, rippling with bouncing harvests, and teeming with multitudinous population, have witnessed the majestic and

interminable drama of the movement and migration of peoples.

Though, the materials for the study of the present work are scanty, nevertheless an attempt has been made to utilise all possible sources such as literature both indigenous and foreign, religious, legal, and secular, the Buddhist and Pali works and the accounts of foreign travellers. Besides these many non-South East-Asian sources have proved very helpful to us. Coming to the archaeological sources we have a large number of art objects and stone sculptures, epigraphic records etc., discovered in the excavations conducted at various places in South-East Asian countries.

Although the sources are numerous and varied, none of these, however, gives us a complete and comprehensive account regarding the Brāhmaṇism in South-East Asia. Nevertheless basing on these sources we have attempted to portray as complete a picture as possible of the topic under discussion.

To have a clear idea of the subject we have divided our work into five convenient chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the origin and evolution of Brāhmaṇism in India. Chapter 2 offers a historical sketch of Brāhmaṇical cults in South-East Asia. Chapter 3 tells us about the Brāhmaṇism and art. Chapter 4 enlightens us on a minor deity of Brāhmaṇical pantheon—Gaṇeśa and Chapter 5 portrays the Brāhmaṇical culture in South-East Asia.

ABBREVIATIONS

An. Rep. A.S. Burma	: <i>Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of Burma.</i>
An. Rep. A.S. India	: <i>Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India.</i>
A.S. Memoir	: <i>Archaeological Survey Memoir.</i>
ASR	: <i>Archaeological Survey Report.</i>
BCAIC	: <i>Bulletin de la Commission archæologie de l'Indo-China.</i>
BEFEO	: <i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient.</i>
EFEQ	: <i>Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient.</i>
Ep. Birm.	: <i>Epigraphia Birmanica.</i>
HCFE	: <i>Hindu Colonies in the Far East.</i>
HCGI	: <i>Hindu Culture in Greater India.</i>
IA	: <i>Indian Antiquary.</i>
IAC	: <i>Indo-Asian Culture.</i>
IC	: <i>Inscription du Cambodge.</i>
ICC	: <i>Indian Colony in Champa.</i>
ISCC	: <i>Inscription de Champa et du Cambodge.</i>
JAOS	: <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society.</i>
JASB	: <i>Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.</i>
JMBRAS } JRASMB }	: <i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Malay Branch.</i>
JOI	: <i>Journal of Oriental Institute, Baroda.</i>
JOR	: <i>Journal of Oriental Research.</i>
JRBS	: <i>Journal of the Royal Burma Research Society.</i>
JSEAH	: <i>Journal of the South-East Asian History.</i>
JSS	: <i>Journal of the Siam Society.</i>
Mon. Ins.	: <i>Mon Inscriptions.</i>
Skt.	: <i>Sanskrit.</i>
VIJ	: <i>Visheshvaranand Indological Journal.</i>

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1

Brahmanism in India—Origin and Evolution

This chapter is intended to present a brief account of Brāhmaṇism in India, from its rude beginnings down to the sixteenth century A.D. But this task is beset with many difficulties. Sufficient data are lacking to enable us to follow, even with a tolerable degree of certainty, the rise and development of the various religious movements in India. Opinions differ widely and the differences are accentuated, and not unoften embittered, by sectarian jealousy and fanaticism. The Indians are particularly sensitive to any matter concerning their religion. Amid the passions and prejudices that have slowly gathered force, it is not easy to get a detached view of things, which is essential to the writing of a historical survey of religious growth.

Indian tradition acknowledges two main strands in Indian religion—the Vedic or the *Nigama* and the Tāntric—Paurāṇic or the *Āgama*. There has been interaction between these two. The Vedic tradition is mainly the Aryan tradition, and the *Āgama* tradition is basically the pre-Aryan tradition. But there has been a final blend of these two sects of ideologies, which differed in their original forms, in some very deep or fundamental points. We are not, however, concerned with that, as it was pre-historic. What is remarkable is the attitude of the Hindu thinkers all through the centuries in trying to fit in these two systems together. And the result has been something which is unique in the world. It fills us with admiration for the comprehensive spirit which was displayed in making a new fabric out of the warp and weft of the diverse sects and ideas. The fabric is the fabric of Brāhmaṇism in all its wonderful variety.

For the sake of convenience of treatment we may divide this review of Brāhmaṇism in India into the following well-defined chronological periods :

The pre-Aryan period (c. 3000-2000 B.C.)

The beginning of religion of Indian society have been pushed back by two thousand years or even more by the discoveries at Mohenjo-daro. Mohenjo-daro, 'mounds of the dead', is the local name of a high mound situated in a narrow strip of land between the main bed of the Indus river and the western Nara canal in the plains of Larkana District in Sind. Here a city was built about five thousand years ago, and was destroyed and rebuilt no less than seven times. The ruins of these successive cities afford us a glimpse of a civilization which was indeed of a very high order, at least from the materialistic point of view. The people who lived in these cities cannot be definitely affiliated to any known race of men in India. It is certain, however, that they had long emerged from primitive barbarism and developed an urban life with all its amenities. Of their religious culture some traces are left in their icons which include the Mother Goddess, the phallus, and a male god, seated in yogic posture, who has been regarded as Śiva.¹ In the absence of any written documents, our knowledge of this religion must necessarily remain vague, but there are enough indications that the worship of Śiva in the form of phallus, which is a prominent feature in later Brāhmanism but is condemned in the *Vedas*, is possibly to be traced to this source. Once this is conceded it is easy to assume that many traits of later Brāhmanism specially those which cannot be directly traced to the *Vedas*, might have been a legacy of these unknown people. Their cult of the Mother Goddess may not be exactly the same as Śakti-worship of later days, but both seem to be inspired by the same fundamental belief in a female energy as the source of all creation. The worship of tree, fire, and water seems to have been in vogue. The seal-amulets, containing figures of a variety of animals, have been taken as evidence for the worship of animals, but they might be symbols or carriers of deities who were the real objects of worship. These are no doubt, matters of dispute, but the cumulative effect of the discoveries at Mohenjo-daro and the neighbouring regions may be summed up in the form (i) that some fundamental ideas of Brāhmanism as well as some primitive beliefs and observances, still current in India, may be traced as far back as the third millennium B.C., (ii) that the worship of Śiva and Śakti may be regarded as the oldest form of Indian theistic religion.²

This old religion and culture was widely spread in Sind, Baluchistan, and parts of the Punjab. How and when it receded to the background is not definitely known to us. It is generally held that the influx of the Aryan race into India was the cause of the downfall of this older culture and civilization of the Indus Valley. This may be regarded as the only

1. Marshall, J., *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization*.
2. Cf. Hopkins, E.W., *Religions of India*.

satisfactory hypothesis in the present state of our knowledge.

The Vedic period (c. 2000-600 B.C.)

The civilization of the Aryans and particularly their philosophical thought and religious practices during the first thousand years are known to us from sacred books collectively known as the Vedas. This term denotes not any particular book, but the whole mass of literature produced by the Aryans during the first thousand years or more of their settlement in India. Although definite dates cannot be assigned to the different texts, it is possible to give a general idea of their chronological sequence. The *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and *Upaniṣads* represent the four successive stages in the development of Vedic literature. The *Rg-Veda Samhitā*, the earliest text, may be referred to a date between 2000 and 1500 B.C., while the principal *Upaniṣads* were composed by 600 B.C. Between these two extreme dates we have to put the other *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyakas*, and the principal *Upaniṣads*.

In the *Rg-Veda Samhitā*, we first come across the ideas of definite gods, as a normal evolution from the striking phenomena of nature. The same *Samhitā* shows that the development of the Aryan religion and philosophy proceeded along two well-marked directions. On the one hand, we find the idea of propitiating the different gods by means of worship, which led to the religious sacraments known as yajña or sacrifice. On the other hand, there was developed more philosophic conception about the nature of these gods, which culminated in the idea that all these gods are but the manifestations of a higher Spirit. The later Vedic literature saw a further development in these directions. The *Brāhmaṇas* developed the ritualistic side by elaborating the mechanical details of the yajña, while the philosophical ideas were developed in the *Upaniṣads*.¹

The *Upaniṣads* are works of various authors living in different ages. They do not present a coherent or consistent people who obtained glimpses of the highest truths by earnest meditation. Their process is intuitive rather than logical, and their object is to satisfy the natural yearnings of the human mind for an ultimate knowledge of the reality about God, man and the world around us. The answers given to these questions are many, and it is not always easy so say definitely what the teachings of the *Upaniṣads* as a whole are. The hints, suggestions, guesses, and implications contained in them are so many and so diverse that in subsequent ages they have been quoted as authority by the founders of almost all the religious and philosophical systems in India, even though they differed on essential points.

But in spite of the mystic character of the *Upaniṣads*, certain

1. Hopkins, E.W., op. cit.

fundamental conceptions clearly emerge out of the mass of spiritual and metaphysical thoughts. The first and foremost is the idea of one all-powerful, all-pervading, self-existent, eternal, and incomprehensible. Absolute (Brahman), in whom all creatures find their origin and dissolution.¹

Secondly, the *Upaniṣads* lay stress on the miseries of life, which are perpetuated by transmigration or rebirth due to our *karma* or actions. But they pin their faith on the ultimate hope of deliverance (*mukti*), which means cessation of miseries and enjoyment of eternal bliss. This can only be obtained by a true knowledge of the universal Spirit or Soul (*Brahman*). Such knowledge can only be derived by purity of life and intense meditation (*nididhyāsana*). By implication, if not by express mention, they deny that the ritualistic sacrifices (*yajña*) can achieve the same result. Lastly, the *Upaniṣads* elaborate the idea of the eternal human soul, as distinct from the body, and, by a bold flight of imagination, regard the individual human soul as identical with the universal Soul or God. When true knowledge comes by meditation, the individual souls merge in the universal Soul, as rivers merge in the ocean. A solution was thus offered of the problems of life and death and of God and man, which are at the root of all philosophy and religion.

In spite of the profundity and brilliance of *Upaniṣadic* ideas, they cannot be regarded as sufficient for the moral or religious needs of the masses. In the first place, they could make their appeal only to the intelligentsia, but failed to impress the average man to whom the attainment of such a profound knowledge appeared as a Utopian ideal. Secondly, while the *Rg-Veda Samhitā* showed an analytic process in discovering one great God behind the visible phenomena of nature, the *Upaniṣads* follow from the beginning an intuitive method. Their conclusions were not based on an intelligible chain of reasoning and arguments, but held out merely as the experience or realization of great minds. They were therefore to be accepted on faith. Thirdly, although by implication they denied the efficacy of ritualistic *yajña* for the purpose of salvation, they prescribed no substitute for it, which an average man could normally pursue for developing his religious life.¹

Thus while the *Upaniṣadic* philosophers soared to a dizzy height and indicated the line on which Indian thoughts were to be developed, in later years, they failed to satisfy all the normal religious cravings of the human heart and the legitimate spiritual needs of the human mind.

1. Vide, Nikhilananda, Swami, *The Upaniṣads*.

2. Hopkins, E.W. op. cit., also see Nikhilananda Swami, op. cit.