THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF PSYCHIC PHENOMENA IN HINDUISM AND BUDDHISM

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Let me first define my use of "psychic phenomena" in this contribution. I cannot use the term in the more narrowly technical sense in the manner that specialists on ESP and the entire range of psychic research would, for my theme urges a rather wider use than would be warranted were I to present this paper as a psychic researcher rather than as a cultural anthropologist specializing in South Asian ritual and belief systems. I would like to submit that the realm of psychic phenomena as part of the South Asian religious systems could be extended to include a much larger variety of paradigms than I will adduce. Depending on the proclivities of any particular researcher, certain themes in Hindu and Buddhist doctrine and practice could be widened so as to include the psychic; on the other hand, a complete statement on the Hindu and Buddhist belief system could be made which does not contain any reference to the psychic. Let me exemplify these two extremes by a putative account. A scholarly Hindu pandit may say something like this: "Ghosts, *pretas* (disembodied spirits) are figments of the imagination; they have no separate existence. Only fools believe in their power." On the other end of the scale, an equally learned Tibetan Buddhist monk may say, "Together with a large number of other supernatural beings, spirits of the departed, minor deities such as *yakṣas* (forest dwelling spirits), and *rākṣasas* (demons) hover around us at all times. One must take care not to offend them." *Both* these extreme putative cases at opposite ends of the unbelief-to-total-acceptance continuum will, however, admit, as part of their central doctrines, that souls or other transmigrating existents that would translate a large number of Indian and Tibetan terms, are indeed present in the interstices between their bodies' demise and their next incarnations; and whatever contact there can be between the living and them, must logically (and is doctrinarily) be in contact with those interstitial beings, because there are no others in the Hindu-Buddhist pantheon;[1] even though a large number of divinities are conceived euphe-

mistically, the fact that they are believed to exist as beings within the theological-mythological framework of indigenous South Asian belief systems, precludes them from being thought of, and hence approached as, interstitial. It follows from this that the numerous, complex, and fairly well-studied and reported patterns of approach to these beings, through trance, possession, drug use, meditation, etc., do *not* fall within the purview of this paper. These have to be dealt with under the rubric of religious specialists, shamanism, priesthood, etc., and these, of course, are entirely different topics in the anthropological taxonomy. If, for example, we were to equate or assimilate the frequent phenomenon of possession by some village god, to an occidental seance, we would blur our investigation, and the eclectic results of such enthusiastic comparisons would be deleterious to any genuine research effort. In order to impress this methodological caveat on my fellow symposiasts here, I must adumbrate that what we call the "new ethnography" (now about a dozen years old and, in other contexts than ours, already slightly obsolete) demands that the researcher distinguish rigorously between what people within a culture, subculture, or within any identifiable segment of a society say about themselves and their beliefs, when they talk with one another, in a manner that makes sense to *them,* and what outside researchers (or researchers who happen to belong to their society, as the case may be, for instance, when a Zulu becomes an anthropologist studying Zulus) infer, and report about the deeds and ideas of that society, making sense to *other* researchers in the field, but not necessarily (and indeed, very rarely) to the agents of that culture. A simple example: Americans (males) hand cigars to friends when their wife has given birth to a child. Now when you ask a cigar giver *why* he does that, he will probably say, "It is the custom," or "I like my friends to know I have a son," or some such thing. Or, if unasked, he will simply keep giving cigars to some people whenever there is a new child at home. But to the psychologist of Freudian provenance, the man gives a cigar because he is unconsciously afraid of the envy or jealousy of other people—he cannot let them share the sexual favors of his wife that resulted in the offspring, so he substitutes a cigar for his penis, sharing these favors vicariously, symbolically. Now if the psychologist tells this to the average American farmer, the latter will either laugh it off, get upset, or hit the psychologist over the head; or, in a few rare instances, he may agree. But what is important is the distinction, the keeping apart of these two types of reporting. The term for the participant in a culture communicating his cultural experience to fellow participants, is *emic;* the term for the social analyst's analyzing that social behavior in a manner that makes sense to other scientists, is *etic. Etic* and *emic* strategies

must be used side by side for the analysis of any social situation, but they must be strictly kept apart.

Now when we study parapsychology as anthropologists, we cannot do what the parapsychologist does. Our job is to see what parapsychology does, and also to analyze the parapsychologist's findings, in a manner that makes sense to the social scientist. I think the best parallel is the case of psychiatry: psychiatric jargon makes sense, hopefully, to psychiatrists; yet terms like "paranoid schizophrenic" do not necessarily describe anything in the patient. Rather, such terms describe the psychiatric league's view about social norms, and conformity to these norms. Inter-psychiatric talk about patients is *emic* talk; but talk about psychiatrists, their "patients," and their society is *etic* talk, as when anthropologists today analyze the psychiatric situation.

With this apparatus in mind, we can return to our special theme: psychic phenomena in Hinduism and Buddhism. In an emic strategy, we shall try to state what Hindus and Buddhists think about phenomena which you might call "psychic." Thereafter, we shall try to analyze these notions etically. In both these subsequent strategies, of course, we have to select our audience and our topic. The Hindus and Buddhists I shall choose for the emic part of this analysis are Hindu villagers in South India and Buddhist villagers in the ethnically Tibetan parts of eastern and northern Nepal, both groups with which I have had intensive contacts. As I said at the outset, Hindu and Buddhist religious specialists have a wide range of assumptions with regard to these phenomena, while the illiterate, or semi-literate villagers' attitudes are modal, and can be predicted pretty accurately. There is one very important difference between the analysis of South Asian modal ideas with regard to the extranatural, and modal ideas of other cultures: in South Asia and Tibet, the "great tradition" of the cities, the shrines, and of the centers of religious learning constantly invades the "little" local, parochial traditions of the village. This pattern is powerfully pervasive on the subcontinent: the village god X, worshipped and manipulated by the villagers or their ritual specialists, is identified with some Vedic all-Indian deity whenever X is represented to the outside world. In the light of this diffuse fact, we find that locally known and regionally handled phenomena which most of you here would call "psychic" are always assimilated with phenomena thought to be *universal* by the villager, i.e., phenomena reported about other regions within this culture, either through folklore, wandering *sadhus,*[2] or through inter-village gossip lines; and there are indeed some well-delineated parapsychological themes in the all-Indian "great tradition" lore, all of which I am going to mention

presently. Still, it must be kept in mind that emic reports from rural South Asia are vastly more numerous than the tentatively parapsychological material in the great "tradition," i.e., in official Hinduism and Buddhism.

Let me present a few typical village-originated situations. At first, the emic statements: disease and other bad luck is due to the evil eye, and to transgressions in previous incarnations. Good luck is due to merit accumulated in previous existences, or to the blessings of a holy man, or to the benevolence of some deity properly propitiated. Almost all diseases are due to witchcraft.

Now the etic analysis of these modal statements is, of course, much more complex, and much longer. In the first place, we shall have to understand what sorts of beings of the extrahuman and human realm are referred to by various village Indian terms; next, we shall have to single out and separate "great tradition" conceptions about rebirth and the interstitial status of souls or other beings between their incarnations; and thirdly, we shall have to explain how the villager manipulates these agencies, how he assuages them, cajoles them, threatens them, or otherwise defends himself against them. The final section of this paper will of necessity adumbrate the normative, "great tradition" view of parapsychological and cognate phenomena; that, however, will be a very short section, since the anthropologist is really more interested in actual occurrences than in projections and possibilities, which he prefers to leave to the philosopher or, in this case, to the philologically oriented Indologist.

At a seance in Boston, the entities contacted are departed spirits, interstitial entities perhaps, but I don't think that the official saints or divinities of the Judaeo-Christian pantheon have a place there. ESP, too, seems to come to a halt at the point where religious or mystical perception in the sense understood by mystics and their votaries begin.

Now this exclusion is, to my understanding, simply a part of the theological-secular dichotomy in the research strategies of the West. It seems to me that the exclusion of the Christian pantheon from parapsychological research is due to certain unspoken canons of mutual nonencroachment rather than to any thematic nonconnectedness. In the Indian situation, there is no such delimitation at all: local spirits, the interstitial souls of the deceased, as well as the Hindu high gods share the human–extrahuman interface in South and Central Asia. A man or a woman may be possessed, and hence act on the behest of some local demon, saint, spirit, or on that of Hanuman or the Mother Goddess, both high up in the official Hindu or Buddhist theological hierarchy. The Buddha, of course, cannot and does not appear in these situations, since he is the only being that does *not* exist, having reached extinction *(nirvāṇa)*. The Hindu gods, thoroughly absorbed

into the Buddhist pantheon—the Buddha himself never denied their existence, though he challenged their importance—do participate in the inter-human–extrahuman transaction on the subcontinent. If the Buddha does appear in a monk's or a lay person's dream, then the latter's rationale for it is of a mnemonic type; the Buddha has no ontological existence to the Buddhist, but he most certainly has an affective existence to the Nepalese, Ceylonese, and Tibetan villager.[3]

During my two last field researches among Indians in East Africa [4] and monks in Śrilanka,[5] I encountered an approximately even distribution of high-god and "little-tradition" local extrahuman ingression. Among Hindus in East Africa, the term used for any possession is *mātā lag gayī,* literally "the Mother has affixed herself" (i.e., to the person in question). By whatever mechanisms such possession has been called forth, the person then speaks as the Divine Mother, and whether his counsel is sought as an oracle or for healing purposes, it is divinity that does the healing; the address by the audience to the curer or shaman, or to the layman occasionally possessed, is an address to the Deity, not to the person. Probably due to the East African Hindus' remoteness from India—we have here third generation expatriates—it is only members of the "great tradition" high pantheon that possess and direct people, so that the generic phrase *mātā lag gayī* may refer to the possession by some other Hindu high god, but not by some local spirit, since local spirits were obviously not shipped along from India with the ancestors who came to East Africa. In villages in India and Nepal, however, I witnessed possession by Hindu or Buddhist deities as well as by local spirits; and this, as I mentioned earlier, in about even distribution.

The ontological status of local spirits and of the high gods seems to be identical in the Hindu and Buddhist villagers' conception: In other words, villagers think that these beings really exist, quite outside from and apart from the actual or alleged perceivers, i.e., the sadhus, the shamans, the curers, and the occasionally possessed. In other words, the frequent Western, Judaeo-Christian argument heard on all levels of sophistication, that these phenomena "exist in the minds of people only," or expressions to that effect, is rare in South Asia; when it does occur, as in urban settings, it is due more often than not to some degree of exposure to Western ideas, through formal education in the official school systems which follow a Western model, or through indirect modernistic gossip lines.

Now this does not conflict with the refined theological notions of several Hindu schools of thought, and of all Buddhist schools, i.e., that no divinity and, for that matter, no other living entity has ontological status. Patāñjali, the founder of systematized *yoga* (roughly second century B.C.), made it quite clear in his yoga aphorismus that "*īśvara* (i.e., the personal *theos)* is a

crutch to meditation"; and the commentators agreed that the implication was the irrelevance of the ontological status of *īśvara.* Some comparative philosophers of this century, both Indian and occidental, have seen this as a parallel to the Kantian idea of the thing-in-itself *(Ding an sich),* whose ontological reality cannot be proved or disproved, but which can be postulated by practical, i.e. moral reason. I do not think this is a felicitous analogy. In the literary religious traditions of India, the ontological status of divinity has been rather precarious, and it was really only very recent schools of devotion, from the eleventh century A.D. onward, that emphasized the ontological reality of a supreme divinity. But as Professor Smart here in London has shown quite cogently,[6] insistence or emphasis on the ontological existence of a personal god always weakened the philosophical thrust of Indian religious argument, inside the doctrinal systems in which they arose. For this reason, the Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine as taught by the second century B.C. Buddhist teacher Nāgārjuna is, often somewhat grudgingly, acknowledged as the most sophisticated by the religious doctors of ancient and modern India.[7] Nāgārjuna taught that the only commitment of the religious thinker is the destruction of any dogma, without replacing it by his own. To him, the question of ontological reality or non-reality of any being, including divine beings, is childish prattle. But, so he taught, the power accruing from the proper manipulation of forces which are talked about as though they had ontological reality, is real so far as it goes: the person who knows that the void *(śūnya)* can generate phantom entities just like the magician conjures animals and other visible things out of nothing, is indeed powerful when he learns to harness his mind to the techniques of control which enable him to recreate this magical spectacle.

Now, although none but the learned monks and lamas in Tibet and the ethnically Tibetan parts of Nepal know Nāgārjuna's teachings, the "little traditions" in the villages and the nomadic camps echo the cognitive base of his teachings. Miraculous powers are ascribed to the priest who *knows* what the layman does not know: the lama or the powerful shaman can control and conjure forces which actively pervade the universe of people. More importantly, or more immediately important to the village scene, the mendicant or the yogi can counter the evil powers of witches, evil spirits, enemies of the *dharma,* etc., by virtue of his knowledge and of the *sādhana* (psychoexperimental practice) which he has done, and which, in theory at least, could be emulated by anybody who wants to and who seeks the proper guidance. This means that the popular occidental notion of a person's "being psychic" is not shared by the village Indian or Tibetan: it is not merely that some persons happen to have these powers; but rather, these powers must be acquired. And if a person displays such skills without

having undergone the proper training, then the inference is that he did learn them in some previous existence, which bears fruition at this time only. The Indian tradition rejects the possibility of "talent," or *tabula rasa* skills. Everything that is worthwhile has to be learned from a qualified teacher, and that includes all the skills popular Western terminology would refer to as "psychic."

At this point, we must go back to the Indian (and Tibetan) villagers' modal explanation of ill luck including disease, death, poverty, etc. Some agents of mischief are recognized as more dangerous than others, and the local taxonomies vary in these ascriptions: a woman who has died in childbirth, so the villagers in South India hold, cannot readily find the proper womb for her own next birth, and her spirit visits and harms the survivors, especially, or perhaps exclusively, in her in-laws' house: she can and does cause further stillbirths, and a large number of other afflictions identified by the local curers. Etically, of course, this has to do with the enormous tension systematically present in the Indian family system, where the wife is felt to be a lifelong intruder in her in-laws' house, in spite of the fact of course that she didn't go there of her own choice, since all marriages are arranged. Female suicides are very largely due to these specific affinal tensions, and the spirits of women who have committed suicide are particularly ferocious and hard to assuage or exorcise: they tend to cause, in their affinal kinswomen, the same troubles and mental afflictions from which they themselves suffered when they were alive.

I have counted some half-dozen varieties of such unpleasant ghosts; their functions overlap at times, but are usually quite well defined. In Northern India, the terms *bhūta* and *preta,* usually translated by "ghost" in older non-sophisticated dictionaries, both mean "departed spirit," which is only part of the English sememe, since to my scant knowledge of occidental lore, there are ghosts who are not departed spirits but are some heathen left-overs. The *bhūt* and *pret* in Northern Indian appear in various forms, but some kind of shape, albeit somewhat transparent, is assigned to them: there are some with enormous abdomens and long thin necks, which appear on roadsides in the hours of dusk and dawn—these are spirits of people who suffered a violent death. The *cūṛeil* is a female witch, not an actual person who practices witchcraft (for such a person there are other terms), but some malevolent departed spirit whose original cause for anger has long been forgotten, and who has not found a new body (once a soul has found a body, of course, it cannot appear to anyone, nor be a *bhūt, pret, cūṛeil,* etc.). The *cūṛeil* often appears as a beautiful woman, who seduces men crossing her path and kills them by emptying the victim of blood and semen during copulation—a sort of vaginal vampire, if you permit the facetious

alliteration. Now though the number of local spirit types is legion, one might easily establish some sort of a typology for them (which I am not going to attempt here). The defense against, and the previous diagnosis of the presence and the effects of spirit interference is part of the training and the function of several categories of curers, shamans, diviners, etc., and it is to these that I now briefly turn.

Again, following the rules of ethnoscience, we find the native terms and see what kinds of persons fit into these terms. The *kapurāla* in Śrilanka is partly an officiant of some deity, and partly a curer who uses the power conferred by that deity upon him, either by training or by some sort of contract. The *baṛwā* in Northern Central India is a village practitioner; he deflects spirits possessing people and causing various disorders in them, from those victims, absorbing them into his system, and "dancing them dead"—as one of the many forms of exorcism practices on the subcontinent. Let me add that the recent cross-cultural literature on modes of spirit divination and exorcism is vast; I have made a critical survey of it in the *Biennial Review of Anthropology*, 1971.[8] As a young monk, I walked through India, visiting some 250 villages;[9] virtually without exception, villagers told me, unsolicitedly, about the harm caused to them by evil spirits, witches, and discontented local divinities. Hardly anyone ever spoke about the effects of bad *karma,* except as an afterthought in more highly structured religious conversations. Parapsychologists would have a field day in village India; the only trouble is that as of now and for many years to come, they won't be likely to obtain visas, since the Indian government looks with suspicion and disdain upon anything that seems to underline local ways which conflict with industrialization. The modern, English-speaking Hindu, and all Indian government officers, will simply deny that these things happen or exist in India. Some of them are city boys, some are ignorant and may really not know about the spirit lore permeating India at all times; but for the most part, they simply deny knowledge due to political exigency.

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In the official "great tradition," both Hindu and Buddhist, there is consensus about the possibility of acquiring supernatural powers, powers of control over spiritual forces seen as within or outside the agent, depending on the theological base of the teachers and the chain of disciples. The texts single out seven "great occult powers" *(saptamahāsiddhih)*, and although there is some variation in the enumeration, the most commonly quoted are "the power to be as heavy as the earth" *(garimā)*, "to be as light as a fly" *(laghimā),* "the power of having all one's wishes fulfilled instantaneously"

(kāmatvam), "the power of having sexual relations with anyone one chooses" *(vasīkaraṇa),* "the power to appear simultaneously at several places anywhere in the same or different bodies" *(karmalokaśāriratvam),* and finally the two most gruesome ones, "the blowing up of a dwelling" *(uccāṭana)* and killing *(mārana).* The difference between the knowledge about these powers, as between the villagers and the "great tradition" pandits, is simply that the latter know the Sanskrit technical terms, and most of them can enumerate these. The villager knows about these occult powers in the sense that he has heard about each of them, but he does not usually know all the seven, nor of course does he know the technical terms for them. But other than that, belief in the possibility of acquiring these powers seems to be quite universal in South Asia. Were a scholarly Hindu or Buddhist asked, for example, how a witch works when he or she kills a person by witchcraft, he would ascribe this to the seventh power, *mārana.* Were a simple villager told about the power of *laghimā* by some itinerant monk, the former might remember that he heard of a person who could levitate.

You will notice that none of these classical powers stipulates any intermediate agency between the practitioner and his object. There is, however, on the village level, a wide range of beliefs in phenomena where a practitioner does use some sort of spirit to effect his works. The general North Indian term for this is *jādu* (a word that has no lexical equivalent in any Western language). The term means *both* a practitioner as well as the spirit he or she uses toward effecting some supernatural feat. In Hindi and Urdu, a *jādu* may be a person who does witchcraft, or it may be the spirit agent of a witch; hence the phrases "he (i.e., the practitioner in question) *has* a *jādu*" or "he *is* a *jādu.*"

I recall an incident in 1955, when I stayed at the Birla Temple right in midtown New Delhi. A somewhat forbidding-looking man, who was my neighbor, called me over into his cell; he took a hair from his substantial whiskers, and moved it along the stone wall—there was a formidably loud sound as though someone was starting a scooter right in the cell. There could have been no apparatus to aid in this performance; the man told me that he owned a "noise-making *jādu*" whom he summoned by using a hair of his whisker plus some secret incantation. In the Indian National Army in which I served in 1943, there was a Marathi sergeant who could blunt a knife or a sword, or any sharp edge including that of a switchblade, by moving it through his spread-apart legs, and by muttering some *mantra* (magical formula). By reversing the sequence in the opposite direction and by reciting the *mantra* backward, he would restore the edge to its original sharpness. The soldiers referred to this man as "a *jādu.*" It is important to

know that there is no canonical mention of these highly diffuse, typically "little tradition" phenomena in the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, though casual mention in some very old texts suggests that their existence was taken for granted even during the time of the Buddha (fifth century B.C.).

How are people believed to come by these powers? Here, in simple and in complex formulations as the case may be, there is consensus all over South Asia and in Tibet, that *sādhana* alone does it: intensive, guided contemplation of highly specific kinds, usually involving the repetition of one or more mantras, accompanied by special types of psychophysical asceticism and other (dietary, sexual) austerities. Lexically, *sādhana* means "practice, exercise" in general, and the term is used for music, the fine arts, sports, etc. In our context, however, all people in South Asia understand the term to mean the process of training whereby a person acquires *siddhis* (occult powers).

There is, however, a snag to all this. Unlike in the West (or maybe a bit like in the early and medieval Christian West up until Salem, Mass., where the quest for occult powers tended to be persecuted as witchcraft), the Hindu and Buddhist theologian declare these powers, lock, stock and barrel, as *undesirable,* as obstacles in the path of religious realization and consummatory spiritual fulfillment. All agree that the practice of yoga, the quest for *nirvāṇa* (Buddhist) or for *mukti* (the Hindu and Jaina term for redemption from rebirth, for acquiring the supreme intuitive knowledge that liberates the individual from bondage once and for all), generates *siddhis* as inevitable epiphenomena, as it were. But a person who uses these *siddhis* instead of renouncing them and utilizing their force toward accelerating his path to liberation, falls from that noble path and is bound to fall lower than the ordinary human being who has not attempted any yoga at all. The technical term for a person who has failed to resist the temptation of using his *siddhis* is *yogabhraṣṭa:* "one fallen from (the path) of yoga." It is important to know that *any* use of *siddhis* is malfunctional in this sense, regardless of whether it is "good" or "bad" use—the facile Christian distinction between black and white magic would be regarded as somewhat irritating and fatuous by the Hindu and Buddhist yogic practitioner. There is a somewhat depressing tendency among Western admirers of the occult, to *like* the occult and its practice, whereas actual practicants reject the basis of occult power as dysfunctional; this is in line with Western admirers of the mysterious East enthusiastically endorsing rebirth, as though rebirth were something desirable and wonderful, when in theological and experiential reality it is entirely painful and miserable. A lunatic fringe in the West talks about previous lives, with lamas, Cleopatra and priests of Osiris heavily

spoken for by those who claim such memory. All these people fail to see that the genuine proponents of the doctrine of rebirth in the South Asian indigenous religions regard *any* birth as painful, including that of an Osiris priest and of Cleopatra. Some more crucial caveats about rebirth will be brought out in the final section of this paper.

Now at last the question about the ontological status of the media used by *siddhas* (i.e., by persons who have developed *siddhis)* can be asked: "What are the *jādus* 'owned' or manipulated by the 'little tradition' practitioner, and what are the spirits or spirit forces mentioned in the Sanskritic 'great tradition' of the 'seven great *siddhis'?"* A general answer is not very hard to formulate, and specific answers cannot be given covering the total context. The general answer about the ontological status of these agents or agencies is that *their ontological* status is thought to be similar to that of the practitioners themselves, "as real as the yogi himself." This sounds hopeful, offhand, but for the enthusiast there is little comfort and little reason to rejoice: in virtually all Indian systems of thought, the ontological status of man in general is very weak indeed. Since the lack of agreement about man's status anywhere along a continuum from illusory, dreamlike existence as in the monistic schools of Hinduism and in some of the northern Buddhist schools, and a naive realistic position of straight ontological existence comparable to the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic ontologies, as in the medieval Vaiṣṇava schools,[10] it could of course not be expected that extra- or infra-human agencies could have a more highly defined ontological status; and comparative theological study shows that liminal beings of any kind (i.e., the whole array of spirits, ghosts, departed souls, etc., culturally postulated in any society) are never assigned ontological status *stronger* than that of human beings. To put this more simply ghosts, spirits, and other supernaturals believed in by any society are never thought to be more real than the human beings themselves, although they may be more powerful, sometimes wiser, etc. In systems where human beings themselves are illusory, as in the monistic Vedānta, these beings are illusory, too, and the question whether they are more or less illusory than man himself is left entirely to the individual interpreter; though it is sure that none belonging to that school ever seemed to have gotten any results from contemplating degrees of illusoriness between spirits and men. As the most general possible statement, it might be said that "great tradition" Hindus and Buddhists have a built-in systematic shrug, as it were, with regard to the realm of the extrasensory, and to extrahuman beings other than the theologically postulated absolute (the *brahman* in the Vedānta tradition): Since the kinds of knowledge of any one being (human, spirit, ghost, god, demon, etc.) can never be *decisively* superior to that of the wiser

men, since true wisdom has been found only by those who no longer exist in *any* form, because release from bondage and ignorance means release from rebirth in any form.

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With some trepidation, and as an appendix rather than as part of the main text of this paper, I will now conclude with a note on the indigenous Indian notion of rebirth or reincarnation. I am afraid that some of you, on reading the title of this paper, might have thought that this was going to be the nucleus of my presentation. However, in an emic strategy there is really much less to be reported for the subcontinent and for Tibet; consequently, there is not too much to report etically. I do hope that none of you ever took seriously that ghastly welter of sheer nonsense and the phoney output of the pseudo-Tibetan and pseudo-Indian exotericists, from Mme. Blavatsky to Lobsang Rampa alias Hoskiss. Their tales about rebirth and metempsychosis-related experiences is pure fancy, in the eyes of the informed, good-humored critic; in the eyes of the informed, not-so-good-humored critic, however, this type of writing appears nefarious, subversive, and harmful, apart from being intellectually dishonest. Works like Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine,* with her constant reference to Himalayan initiates, to a White Brotherhood, to "K" were creations of her fertile, crafty mind. They have nothing to do with the Indian and Tibetan lore; the many learned Tibetan ecclesiastics with whom I talked over the past two decades, including His Highness the Dalai Lama, laughed at these things when they first heard about them; but by now, unfortunately, the Tibetan scholars in the diaspora in India and the West so disdain this genre that they regard it beneath their dignity to talk about it.

The sober and, to the wide-eyed admirers of phoney esoterica, fearful fact is that the Hindu-Buddhist-Jaina, i.e., the autochthonous Indian notions of rebirth have been, and are, far less important to the Hindu and Buddhist—both villager and religious scholar, layman and mystic alike, than they are to the Western convert to pseudo-Indica and pseudo-Tibetica. In the first place, we find almost nothing about rebirth in the canonical Hindu scriptures, the Veda; the casual mention in the somewhat later Upanisads, and the recurrent mention in later noncanonical literature, are like marginalia to the text and the teaching. In no sense is the doctrine of rebirth a dogma to the Hindu. To the "great tradition," i.e., scripture-oriented Buddhist, the doctrine of *karma* is quite crucial indeed, as he explains the total experiential matrix in any living being's life on the etiological base

of his or her former actions and attitudes. The classical Buddhist statement would be something like, "What you are now is exactly the result of what you did, thought, and felt from eternity." We are here in the "great tradition" diction of the scholars; and in this tradition, strange to behold, there is no desire for any sort of empirical verification of the postulated chain of rebirths. On the "little tradition" village level, we encounter thousands of local reports of how a boy or a girl was taken to a place he or she had never seen before, and how he or she pointed out everything and told of everything that had happened there a long time ago. These stories are highly stereotyped and once the narrator embarks on them, the astute listener can pretty much predict the end of it. Yet the Bridey Murphy-type sequence has never been given any sort of serious consideration by "great tradition" Hinduism and Buddhism. For here, the notion of rebirth is *not an empirical but a moral postulate,* a postulate of moral rather than empirical causation. The Hindu and Buddhist theologian's argument, often used to counter Christian and Muslim notions of a one-shot chance for a human being, runs like this: Two twins with the same astrological background, the same family, same education, etc., turn out to be quite different—the one a thief, the other a famous saint. The reason, so the Hindu and Buddhist doctors aver, is that none is a *tabula rasa,* everyone brings billions of former impressions *(samskāras)* along from previous lives—and this accounts for differences where similarities would be expected. This *ex post facto* moral argument appeals to the learned Hindu or Buddhist; empirical, Bridey Murphy style attempts usually bore or annoy him—and such narratives are pointed out as "typical village tales." On the village level however, as shown earlier, no one thinks of *karma* as a single cause of one's life's career: There is karma, and there is the annoyance of gods and demons, there are witches, there is *"taqdīr,"* a Muslim word synonymous with *kismet,* introduced during the Muslim conquest a long time ago and amalgamated into the Hindu belief system much as Western medicine now has become a part of the villager's *materia medica,* alongside of spells, curing magic, and charms.

NOTES

1. I use "Hindu-Buddhist" loosely throughout this paper; it covers the shared lore of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Though the latter two religions are atheistic in the theological sense, they share the enormous pantheon of divine, semi-divine, and other extrahuman beings whose existence neither the Buddha, nor Mahavīra, the founder of Jainism, ever denied, though they attached no importance to them.

2. *Sadhu* is the most general, generic term for "holy man," mystic, saint, mendicant religious teacher, etc.
3. The best study of this fascinating, highly complex problem is by a British scholar, Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
4. See my *The Asians in East Africa: Jayhind and Uhuru* (Chicago: Nelson Hall Company, 1972).
5. See my essay, "Serendipity Suddenly Armed," in *Quest*, No. 80, Jan-Feb. 1973, Bombay.
6. N. Smart, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965).
7. Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamikakārikā* is the seminal text of the Mādhyamika or Śūnyavāda school of northern Buddhism, basic to scholastic Tibetan Buddhist teachings. The work has been translated into French and English; the best treatise on Nāgārjuna's work is to be found in E. Lamotte's *Histoire de Boudhisme Indien* (Louvain (Belgium) 1955).
8. Bharati, "Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ritual and Belief Systems," in *Biennial Review of Anthropology*, ed. B.J. Siegel (Stanford: University Press, 1971).
9. See my autobiography *The Ochre Robe* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1963; U.S. paperback edition Anchor-Doubleday, New York, 1970).
10. The worshippers of Vishnu and his incarnations. The ubiquitous, mildly spurious ISKCON, "Hare Krishna" kids, visible in all major occidental cities, belong to the Vaiṣṇava category, if viewed taxonomically.

DISCUSSION

VAN DE CASTLE: We're now open for discussion on this paper.

WEINER: I was going to ask a question, but just to reply to the last statement of the paper, I believe that the most basic thought of the whole biblical tradition is that there is only one God, not that there is one god who is big and other gods who are smaller.

BHARATI: Do you mean to say that if the people thought the other power didn't exist. . . .

WEINER: There are many opinions among the people. Obviously, we don't know what they were, but the official doctrines expressed in all the literature we have is that there is only one God. That's the basic statement, just as there is a basic statement in the Moslem faith and that is the basis of the whole religion—that there were those who were more folksy in their feelings and cognitions obviously is so.

BHARATI: I disagree, because after all Moses said, "Don't rush it." But don't say it because it doesn't exist.

WEINER: Oh yes.

BHARATI: Does it?

WEINER: Yes.

BHARATI: Show me the passage.

WEINER: It can be shown, but the question I really wanted to ask was in this interesting paper, inasmuch as etic and emic strategies must be kept apart, is this an etic or an emic. . . .

BHARATI: The emic portion of it was very short. I quoted what the Hindu or the Buddhist teacher or layman would say, and then, of course, the rest of the analysis was an attempt at an etic analysis.

DEVEREUX: I have worked out the distinction between etic and emic (without using these words) in 1937, in the book which had to wait thirty years for a publisher. The idea was very clearly alluded to by me also in 1945 at the New York Academy of Sciences, and in 1952, in the *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic.* As regards the complementarity of so-called contradictions, in 1942 I published a paper on two totally contradictory sets of Mohave beliefs concerning twins. In terms of psychoanalysis it made excellent sense that there should be such contradictory beliefs. As to "studying psychiatrists from the outside as an anthropologist," that was my job for quite a while, as far back as 1939, so I don't see anything surprising about it. The particular example given here, regarding explanations, singularly reminds me of my four-level explanation of the same phenomenon in my 1952 *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* paper.

BRIER: Dr. Bharati, I understand the thrust of your paper is to show the ontological status isn't important, but let me ask you this for the sake of the parapsychologists for whom these kinds of considerations are very important. I remember this morning when you said, "It doesn't matter whether he can levitate or not; the fact that he believes he can levitate . . ." I can understand that framework, but for the parapsychologists, of course, what's crucial is in an objective sense, can the man really levitate or anything like that? And let me ask from your experience, have you ever seen anything within these frameworks that seems to be of parapsychological interest?

BHARATI: Yes, of course, but I was sick.

BRIER: You mean you don't trust . . .

BHARATI: I don't trust my own agency in witnessing things which I can't

explain. I wasn't sick really, but I was starved, underweight, hot and so forth.

BRIER: Well, then let me ask you something. I was very interested in your comment when you said the traditional scholar will not acknowledge these things sometimes.

BHARATI: He may; he may not.

BRIER: Because for years I've been trying to track down various Tibetan phenomena, like Tumo or the running lamas and I went to Geshe Wangyal and I described these phenomena that I was interested in and explained to him, and he said to me, "I don't know anybody that can do these things."

KREITLER: You brought up in your paper, in my opinion, a point of genuine importance: the existence of contradictory beliefs. But before commenting on that, just a short semantic remark. I think it to be a dangerous semantic mistake to identify Aristotelian logic—that is, the logic which doesn't permit contradiction—with cognition. Cognition is something else. It adheres to different kinds of logic including a logic that allows for contradictions. Now, we should keep in mind that avoidance of logical contradiction and the striving for cognitive consonance is a Western fashion and even a doubtful one. Why is it doubtful? Because we can't, in fact, define what it means to be the exact contrary of something. Now in order to understand, as you pointed out, Indian beliefs, we have to accept the existence of so-called contradictory beliefs. I would add that this is true for all cultures. In order to understand a culture, including the Western culture, we have to recognize that human beings generally, not only those under investigation, hold contradictory beliefs all the time. Moreover, a person not frequently quoted here, Jung, once made an important statement which may be the most important one he ever made. The quotation is not exact, but runs somewhat like this: "Don't think and don't say that things have to be either-or because they can be either *and* or."

WALTER: I have two comments and this is an extremely provocative contribution, evidence of very hard work indeed, thinking and doing. Now I want to go back about 2,000 years to Plato. Platonic idealism seems to me to resemble very much what you are saying about people's ideas in India and the Hindu and Buddhist ideas, of reality. What Plato ascribed is that what really exists is what we think, what we feel, but you exist in me because I can see you and feel you and hear you, and I appreciate you in all sorts of ways. There are various ways but I won't go into that because of lack of time. Now this goes back a long time to Athens and produced, in

effect, the foundation of our whole Western culture or Western philosophy a long time ago. Now the other thing I wanted to suggest was your suggestion of the way people look at one another in India, their feelings about spirits and one another, reminds me very much of the interpretation of the drama of Luigi Pirandello "Sei Personaggi in cerca d'autore" (Six Characters in Search of an Author), in which the interpretation given by English scholars is that Pirandello's notion of personality is that one's personality is a mosaic of reflections of what you think other people think of you.

BHARATI: Dr. R. D. Laing says that all the time.

WALTER: Well, this is a drama, and Pirandello was one of the great writers, very prolific, and wrote many plays and essays, and I feel this is a very important point: that what you think of me is what I think all of you think of me. What I think of myself is what I think all of you think of me and other people too. I think the mosaic of reflections is a very important factor and I think that what you were saying about the Indian culture relates to our culture in a sense, as he said, that this is a reflection of one's ideas about or of other people, and they include the disembodied realities. That's complicated and it adds another factor. I think it's true of us, that what I think of you is not only what I think of your bodies but of what I think of what you have said and what you have all said and what you feel and what other people said 10,000 years ago.

VAN DE CASTLE: Dr. Skinner.

SKINNER: I just want to call attention to the problem between the emic and the etic. You said in terms of your own experience that you didn't believe it and you attributed this non-belief to your physiological state. Don't you think there's a problem here in terms of this relationship, really the dialectic between the emic and the etic?

BHARATI: At that time I believed it completely.

SKINNER: Oh you did believe it? Because of a kind of emic?

BHARATI: I believed it as part of the emic situation, but many years later it does seem to me that it could be explained in other ways, probably as a pathological occurrence.

SKINNER: What was it?

BHARATI: Well, I walked through India barefooted without eating much food and it was 120 degrees. Therefore all kinds of things that are generated

in this training might have set my mind in a particular framework receptive to things suggested in the literature.

SKINNER: Such as?

BHARATI: Such as seeing gods when other people didn't see gods around. As Dr. Thomas Szasz recently said: "If a man speaks to God, he prays. If God speaks to man, he's insane."

SKINNER: In terms of your suggestion about the Mosaic situation, Talmudic scholars and scholars of ancient Hebrew, I learned in my catechism, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me," which implies, it seems to me, that there were other gods implied.

HALIFAX-GROF: This is just a very brief comment. An Afro-Cuban informant once said to me, "You know, I don't believe in ghosts; but a world without ghosts is quite boring."

BHARATI: That's the trouble with a well-informed informant. The man knows too much of what people say here.

HALIFAX-GROF: From my point of view, I find it a very interesting stand, in terms of the "emic/etic" distinction.