

## REVIEWS :

J. Feys, *A = B, an Enquiry into the Upaniṣads' Basic insight*; Calcutta : Firma KLM, 1976, 64 pages, Rs. 16.

As early as 1906, Paul Deussen wrote : "If...we hold fast to this distinction of the Brahman as the cosmic principle of the universe, [and] the Ātman as the psychical, the fundamental thought of the entire Upaniṣadic philosophy may be expressed by the simple equation: Brahman = Ātman." Following in his footsteps, Radhakrishnan explained : "The two, the objective and the subjective, the Brahman and the Ātman, are looked upon as identical. Brahman is Atman." Dasgupta only reversed the equation : "The sum and substance of the Upaniṣadic teaching is involved in the equation, Ātman = Brahman." And Dr. Chandradhar Sharma speaks similarly of "This blending of the subject and the object in a transcendental principle, this synthesis of the self and the non-self in the Absolute...arrived at by the Upaniṣadic sages."

However, this now traditional interpretation initiated by Deussen, was already looked upon with cautious scepticism by Belvalkar, in 1927, at least as regards the beginning of Upaniṣadic reflection : "Upaniṣadic 'idealism' may thus have come towards the end of the process, and not initiated it." Thus, to this thorough historian, the equation  $A = B$  (Ātman is Brahman), understood as subject = Object, appeared historically doubtful. Dr. J. Feys, in the three studies that make up this book, institutes an historico-exegetical enquiry the results of which justify Belvalkar against the idealistic interpretation.

The first study concerns 'ātman'. It situates the ātman-texts which it analyses and relates to each other within the change of perspective we find adopted in the Upaniṣads where introspective reflection on the self supplants ritualistic concern with the sacrifice. The second study concerns 'brahman' and through the same method shows how it becomes identified with ātman through the intermediary of a third term, 'immortal' or 'immortality', and thus leaves the realm of the sacred to become assimilated to the sphere of interiority and reflection. What the Upaniṣads arrive at is not an 'identity' of two spheres, the objective and the subjective, but an assimilative identification : the brahman, long

unidentified but conceived as the absolute and centre of the realm of the sacrifice and of the realm of the macrocosm, is now sought for within a third realm, that of the microcosm, where various attempts are made to identify it as one or the other of the realities of this realm, and where it is finally identified as the deepest ātman, the immortal.

The third study applies the results of these enquiries to testing and finally superseding the Deussen interpretation of the Upaniṣads as idealism. To quote the author : " So then, ' ātman = brahman '. But in which sense ? Because of the very nature of the ' sacred ' it once designated, brahman was the ' mysterious '. The ritualistic Brāhmaṇas located that impenetrable, unattainable mystery in the magic power of the sacrifice. The Upaniṣads situated it in man's very self. For the self transcends all, it is immortal, it is supreme. And which word could give expression to this unutterable assurance, which word better than ' brahman ' ? The mystery is hereby unveiled : brahman has been *identified* as ātman. Ātman is not thereby raised on to the dais of the sacred, nor is the halo of brahman lowered over the soul. It is not the blending of two distinct realm, it is interiority succeeding to ritualism. For subject and object there is but little place here : the equation ātman = brahman simply does not come as the synthesis of an opposition between the subjective and the objective. Both terms do meet : in immortality." ( pp. 58-59 )

Dr. Feys's conclusions meet those of some other recent interpreters (including this reviewer.) He might have strengthened their historical setting with a recourse to what Belvalkar already and then Renou have revealed of the search for *bandhus* and *bandhutās* (affinities between elements of the sacrifice and features of the cosmos) in the *Brāhmaṇas* and its prolongation to the realm of the self in the *Āraṇyakas* and in the *Upaniṣads* (whose very name *upaniṣad*, Renou, explained, means 'connection', mystic reapproachment.) The Upaniṣadic quest is a process of detection. What is to be detected and identified is that in man which corresponds to the brahman-prayer and power of the sacrifice and the Brahman-cosmic source and support of the universe. That is the ātman, the immortal.

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