

RELIGION AND AGING IN INDIAN TRADITION: A TEXTUAL STUDY

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to recover from selected Hindu and Buddhist texts ideas and images of aging and illumine their historical, semantic and metaphysical dimensions. The results of this endeavor indicate that as cultural adaptive systems, both religion and gerontology share a common concern in seeking to provide aging with purpose and meaning. Further, the internal logic and semantics expressing this relationship in the texts examined are governed by the formal and literary modes of simile, metaphor and myth. The analysis of such age-sensitive concepts as jarā (aging), āśrama (stages of life), kāla (time), parināma (change), karma (determinate actions), kāma (desire), and vāja (rejuvenatory and revitalizing force) suggest that the bond between the traditional Indian values of life and gerontology is particularly close and mutual.

RESUME

Le but de cette étude est de découvrir dans les textes hindous et bouddhistes choisis les notions et les attitudes relatives au vieillissement et de les éclairer dans une perspective historique, sémantique et métaphysique. Nos études suggèrent qu'en tant que systèmes d'adaptation culturels, la religion et la gérontologie veulent toutes les deux fournir à la vie humaine un but et une signification précise. De plus, la logique interne et la sémantique qui servent à exprimer cette relation dans les textes étudiés ici sont gouvernées par des modes formels et littéraires tels que la comparaison, la métaphore et le mythe. L'analyse de concepts reliés au vieillissement tels que jarā (la vieillesse), āśrama (les étapes de la vie), kāla (le temps), pariṇāma (le changement), karma (les actions déterminées), kāma (le désir) et vāja (la force régénératrice et révéralisante) suggèrent que l'affinité entre les valeurs culturelles et religieuses d'une part, et la gérontologie, d'autre part, est particulièrement étroite et réciproque dans la tradition indienne.

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PREFACE

When Professor Katherine Young suggested "Classical Indian Views of Aging" as a possible topic for my doctoral dissertation, I made a survey of the field and found that almost no previous relevant work existed on the subject. Therefore, I gladly accepted this opportunity to contribute substantially to the field of religion and gerontology in the Indian tradition. My father, an amateur astrologer, predicted that the enterprise would be congenial to my temperament since I was born under the sign of Capricorn, which is ruled by the planet Saturn, the patron of all that is old and aging. However, the more appealing reason for me to accept this proposal was the prospect of spending two years in India on research.

As I began reading relevant passages from selected Hindu and Buddhist texts, I soon realized that the study of aging would not be limited to old age alone. It would also have to include the context of earlier life experiences, on the one hand, and death, on the other. However, by the time I returned to Canada, my notes on the topic had accumulated to more than five hundred pages! It was consequently decided to concentrate more fully on the theoretical aspects on the process of aging rather than the phenomenon of old age. This latter topic will be dealt with in the sequel to the present study.

There is no single discipline answering to the label "Gerontology". Any study of old age, accordingly, must

necessarily include a variety of distinct approaches. My reading of the source material convinced me that any meaningful inquiry into the life cycle and aging in Indian tradition would have to be carried out from the historical, semantic and metaphysical perspectives.

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My special thanks go to Professor Katherine Young, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, who was supervisor of the thesis. Her own work in the field of Indology inspired me to undertake this study in the first place. She encouraged and guided me through various phases of this research and read patiently all the versions. Dr. G. K. Gurjar, formerly Head of the Sanskrit and Samhitā Department, R. A. Poddar College of Āyurveda, Bombay, India, guided my work in India. Numerous discussions with him helped me formulate my ideas and expand the scope of my research. Professor André Couture, Laval University, Quebec, read the final draft and made many useful suggestions, which I have duly incorporated. Professor Arvind Sharma, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, also made helpful comments. Needless to say, I alone, am responsible for the final version of this study.

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thanks for her help in clarifying practical problems of word processing.

ABBREVIATIONS

AHS	<u>Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasaṃhitā</u> of Vāgbhata
AHS/ut.	<u>Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasaṃhitā</u> "Uttara Tantra"
AthV	<u>Atharva Veda</u>
BAU	<u>Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad</u>
BC	<u>Buddhacarita</u>
BCE	Before Common Era
BDS	<u>Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra</u>
BSB	<u>Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya</u>
CE	Common Era
CS	<u>Caraka Saṃhitā</u>
CS.ci.	<u>Caraka Saṃhitā</u> "Cikitsā Sthāna"
CS.ni.	<u>Caraka Saṃhitā</u> "Nidāna Sthāna"
CS.sā.	<u>Caraka Saṃhitā</u> "Śārīra Sthāna"
CS.sū.	<u>Caraka Saṃhitā</u> "Sūtra Sthāna"
CS.vi.	<u>Caraka Saṃhitā</u> "Vimāna Sthāna"
CU	<u>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</u>
DN	<u>Dīgha Nikāya</u>
GDS	<u>Gautama Dharma Sūtra</u>
JB	<u>Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa</u>
KS	<u>Kāma Sūtra</u>
KU	<u>Kausītaki Upaniṣad</u>
MB	<u>Mahābhārata</u>
MN	<u>Majjhima Nikāya</u>
MS	<u>Manusmṛti</u>
MU	<u>Maitrī Upaniṣad</u>

Rg	<u>R̥gveda</u>
Rām	<u>Rāmavāṇa</u>
RV	<u>Raghuvamśa</u>
SB	<u>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</u>
SD	<u>Saundarananda</u>
SN	<u>Samyutta Nikāya</u>
SS	<u>Suśruta Samhitā</u>
SS.ci.	<u>Suśruta Samhitā</u> "Cikitsā Sthāna"
SS.śā.	<u>Suśruta Samhitā</u> "Śārīra Sthāna"
SS.sū.	<u>Suśruta Samhitā</u> "Sūtra Sthāna"
SU	<u>Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad</u>
VDS	<u>Vasiṣṭha Dharma Sūtra</u>
VP	<u>Vākyapadiyam</u>
YS	<u>Yoga Sūtra</u>
YB	<u>Yoga Sūtra Bhāṣya</u>
Ysm	<u>Yājñavalkyasmṛti</u>
YV	<u>Yogavāsiṣṭha</u>

Chapter One: Introduction

Process of Aging

Although in the popular sense aging has to do with the elderly only, aging is actually a life-long process and an integral part of living. Circumscribed by birth at one end, aging is terminated at some point by death. Death, therefore, has a rightful place in any study of human aging. In fact, both aging and death are inherent in conception and begin at the same time as birth. Changes engendered on and within the body by the aging process are quite rapid in infancy and childhood and even more so in the foetus. Conception initiates a truly marvelous set of life events. Never does one age so rapidly again as in one's embryonic development whereby one literally ages, it is said, the equivalent of two billion years in less than a period of nine months.

Biologically, aging is a progressive and irreversible changing of the structures and functions of the living organism. Though deadly and stressful from the individual perspective, aging and death are nonetheless inevitable for the continuation of the species and life in general. The aetiology of aging has not yet been scientifically explained nor is there a definite answer to the question of what is essential and primary in the decaying process of involution.

In the past, however, the causes of aging, the stress it generates, and death were understood in three basic ways. One view traces them to the gradual loss of an élan vital that is important for the maintenance of life. Senescence and death are natural processes inherent in the body cells; they are to be explained as due to the gradual loss of the energy stimulus which is supplied to the developing [and aging] organism at the moment of fertilization. Bodily growth and differentiation over time continue to take place in the organism until finally no energy is left and the organism dies of old age. The second view attributes aging and death to the gradual accumulation of a toxic substance in the body. Constant readjustment among the bodily humours necessary for human survival, according to the third view, renders the body susceptible to aging. Aging, therefore, is a stressful process. Like a mechanical device gradually worn out with use and the passage of time, the individual grows more and more inadequate to carry out the vital functions and eventually succumbs to death.

Notwithstanding the historical controversy regarding the aetiology of aging, it is generally recognized that the process of aging incorporates within itself two simultaneously existing components: while on the one hand, there is growth and development of the body, there is also continued decline and atrophy of the body, on the other. In early life the growth aspect of aging masks and overwhelms the potentially degenerative process. The rate of aging, whether as development or decline,

varies greatly from one individual to the next depending upon the bodily constitution. Again, in any single individual the aging process may appear to occur more rapidly during one period of life than another and at a greater rate in one organ than another (Hall 1984, 5). Not surprisingly, various meaningful ways of learning to live with, manage and cope with the stress of aging have been devised in different traditions.

Gerontology, Religion and Culture

The above observations on aging lead us to the discipline of gerontology which may be seen as a set of systematically argued beliefs and values concerning aging and the human response to it. The activity theory, for instance, suggests that the aging individual actively aspires to extend the norms of middle age as long as it is physically and mentally possible to do so. The rival disengagement theory posits that with age, every individual comes under increasing pressure to cede control and power to the younger members of the family/community. As a cultural system, therefore, gerontology is the organization of concepts, theories and normative practices concerning aging as a process and the aged. As an adaptive cultural response to the stress of aging and its consequences, it overlaps with religion, which, too, is concerned with providing meaning to life, aging and death.

Accordingly, though aging is a biological process, attitudes toward aging, the treatment the aged receive, the evaluation of

the status of the aged, and the roles considered appropriate for them are as much a matter of religious and cultural tradition as of physics or biology. This fact helps explain why aging has been infused with differing meaning and significance in terms of symbols and imageries in various traditions.

The process of aging, though occurring independently within a single body and mind is, therefore, to be appreciated as also taking place between individuals, and in culturally and religiously defined patterns. Together they provide clues to the meanings of aging since the self, body and the world [or even cosmos] are bound to each other not only in their implications for each other but in their fundamental structure by a symbolic reality formed by the acquisition of language and systems of meaning.¹ Not surprisingly, the manifestation of stress precipitated by the aging process and responses to it are culturally determined and mandated. Each distinct culture tends to introduce a unique set of stresses in the aging individual and his/her family and community with respect to age-specific roles, norms, statuses and social worth. But at the same time the aging

¹ A hymn to Soma (a sacred plant with certain hallucinogenic properties) in the Rgveda (9:97.35), for instance, declares Soma to be the conveyor of the cosmic vision, the intuitive perception of the manifesting brahman (the transcendental absolute) thereby juxtaposing the invocatory power of the word to the vision of the cosmic order (ṛta). Another hymn (Rg 10:125) makes Vāc (the faculty of speech) the fountainhead of all manifest life (Lebensprinzip according to Geldner). She is seen as the queen (rāstrī) holding all worlds together. Implicitly, then, this hymn identifies word with world (vāgvai brahma) (see Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 2:1.4.10 and Miller 1985, 240).

individual is also taught culturally sanctioned and defined defense mechanisms to cope with the stress of aging.

Relevant socialization and acculturation take place through the internalization of symbolic reality by suitably orienting one's inner world. That is, symbolic reality enables individuals to make sense out of their inner experience. It helps shape personal identity in accordance with existing cultural, religious and social norms. Symbolic meanings influence basic psychological processes such as the state of consciousness, cognition, memory and through them various bodily functions. If it is accepted that language is a cultural system linking thought and action, then gerontology, too, may be considered a cultural system linking aging and the human response to it. Both are forms of symbolic reality in that both are anchored in cultural beliefs and social roles as well as in individual behaviour and experience.

The age-related characteristics of any social organization tend to be universal in scope. After Cowgill and Holmes 1972, they may be identified as follows:

- 1) Aging tends to precipitate the formation of a class of "old people" in the society who are so identified by appropriate label and nomenclature.
- 2) Most societies develop some system of age-grading which classifies individuals by age and sex ascribing differential statuses and roles in terms of this classification.
- 3) At a certain phase in life, the aging individual is shifted to more sedentary and advisory or supervisory activities often involving psychological or spiritual pursuits rather than physical exertion.

4) Cultures and communities value life and seek to prolong it even in the face of aging. Accordingly, they have sanctioned a widespread search for elixirs, talismans, and charms to protect health and prolong life until the advance of death seems to outweigh the burdens of life.

5) Most societies have designed set patterns of behaviour to meet death with honour and dignity.

These universal features of the aging process suggest that any meaningful quest of the "why" of aging would involve the investigation of the semantic, physical and metaphysical dimensions of the "what" of aging. The body is the means through which individuals act and react with the surrounding world. The self is not just in the body or attached to it. The body may be regarded as an object, but if it is treated merely as an object, part of the selfhood is lost. The process of aging is potentially disruptive of this coherent triune of the self, the body and the world. Aging invariably precipitates a series of losses on all these three levels. As such aging is too vast and complex a subject to be left solely to biological or social scientists.

Because aging is at once a uniquely personal as well as universal experience and because one measure of the humanness of a cultural and religious tradition is its understanding of the aging process and its treatment of the aged, the humanities have a vital contribution to make in the interpretation of this phenomenon. Aging has only recently engaged the attention of humanists (that is, those interested in the philosophy, religion, literature, art and history of a given people). In the

exploration of attitudes, aspirations and cultural practices underlying the ineluctable facts of aging and old age in the past, therefore, humanists can play a vital role. Indeed, it may be our perception of past reservoirs of knowledge that may provide the possibility of imagining a meaningful and human future for the aged. Until we know what we have been, we cannot know what we can or should become.

Setting of the Problem

It was not until the demographic realities of the growing numbers of elderly men and women in modern India confronted Indian social scientists that they "discovered" the elderly. Academic humanists in India have yet to realize that aging is going to be an all-important phenomenon in modern India in the coming decades. Demographers arbitrarily define the population of a country as "young" if the percentage of persons above the age of sixty-four in the population is less than four, as "mature" when this percentage is between four and seven, and as "aged" when it exceeds seven percent. By that reckoning, the population of modern India was still "young" according to the census of 1981. However, in absolute numbers the population of persons aged sixty and above reached thirty-three million. By 2,000 CE, it is expected to top the sixty million mark (Sahni 1981).

There is, therefore, growing interest and concern with the problems of the elderly. The welfare-oriented liberal policies of

the successive governments in India since 1947 have improved public health programs, hygiene and education. These policies also promoted industrialization, modernization and urbanization all over India which has contributed to this burgeoning elderly population. There is, thus, an urgent need to evolve the science of gerontology in order to initiate elderly health-care and welfare programs directed at this growing age-homogeneous group. The question, then, is no longer whether Indian religions, philosophy, literature and arts can provide source material for a variety of humanistic perceptions in the investigation of aging, but more to the point, in what ways can humanists, conversant with Indian traditions produce a fund of knowledge upon which the science and art of gerontology may be initiated by those qualified to do so?

One of the obstacles in the proper, indigenous development of gerontology in modern India is that the collection and the treatment of gerontologically significant data is informed and guided by Western notions and hypotheses on aging. Whenever these are reformulated to suit the Indian context and purpose, they tend to be discontinuous with Indian tradition at large. Rarely has reference been made to traditional, indigenous material on aging.

In fairness to social scientists trained in modern gerontology, however, it must be pointed out that to date no full-length monograph on the subject of aging in relation to culture and religion in Indian tradition has been published. It was only

ten years ago that the Indian Journal of History of Medicine published a four page translation of verses on old age from the Sanskrit wisdom literature by an Āyurvedic scholar P. M. Mehta (1978). Desai (n.d.), Soodan (1975), and de Souza (1982) published surveys undertaken by them on the problems of the urban elderly in India. Sylvia Vatuk contributed a chapter on elderly women in contemporary India (in de Souza 1980), and Maduro dealt with old age and creativity in Indian tradition (in Kastenbaum 1981). Finally, Kurian* (1972) in a brief article, has examined aging in India and Canada from a comparative perspective. Not surprisingly, in a national seminar on aging held in Bombay in 1981 and attended by the present writer, few, if any, of the papers suggested much familiarity with the relevant data that lie buried in the religious, medical and literary texts dating from the ancient and classical period.

Yet, like many contemporary intellectuals the world over, Indian social scientists, too, tend to engage in the cultural devaluation of the past. They trivialize it by equating it with outmoded social and/or religious practices. Endeavour to draw on the past in looking for solutions to current problems is often resented. Any such reference to the past itself is regarded as an expression of romantic nostalgia or reaction.

Nevertheless, the works of Christopher Hill (1961), for instance, suggest that even radical movements draw strength and sustenance from the myth or memory of a golden age in the distant past. At a more individual level, this observation is reinforced.

by the psycho-analytical insight that loving memories originating in the past constitute a valuable psychological resource in one's mature years. The belief or the hypothesis that in some ways the past may have something meaningful to contribute to the resolution of current problems by no means rests on a sentimental illusion. As Lasch (1977) has observed, a denial of the past superficially couched in "progressive" rhetoric may, on closer analysis, turn out to embody the despair of a generation that cannot face the future (see chapter five for an in-depth discussion on the inter-relationship between past, present and future and its relevance to the present study).

If the test of the hardiness and vitality of any cultural and religious tradition is its capacity to draw on the resources of its own symbol system to meet the challenge of new circumstances, then one way to examine the usefulness of the Indian religious tradition as a basis for the proper evaluation of human aging is to explore how that very tradition drew upon its resources in similar circumstances in the past in order to understand aging.

Focus and Scope of the Study

The focus of the present work is on the recovery and reinterpretation of the relevant material from those texts which may help enhance our understanding of what meaning and significance has been attached to the process of aging in

traditional India. In scope, this inquiry extends to the following issues:

- 1) Is aging projected as a source of suffering and evil and, as such, to be eradicated? Or is it seen as a necessary human condition that can or should be creatively utilized for positive, constructive ends?
- 2) How does aging relate life to death? What are the suggested mechanisms to manage and cope with the stress produced by the anticipation and approach of old age and death?
- 3) What formal and literary devices do our texts utilize to invest aging with meaning? Is the imagery of aging precise or hazy, coherent or contradictory?

Examination of these issues is the subject matter of the next five chapters.

Chapter two, "History of Aging" traces the evolution of the differing views about aging held in Hindu and Buddhist traditions in India. It begins by arguing that early Vedic texts maintain a somewhat simplistic, naive but fond attitude toward life. There is a desire to live a long, healthy life into ripe old age. Buddhist texts provide an important critique of this lust for life arguing that aging is evil and a source of suffering. Hindu texts [such as the Dharma Śāstras] having the advantage of hindsight on the two opposing views provide a balanced account of the aging process and its role in the creative unfolding of the potential for development in persons.

Chapter three, "Expression of Aging" is grounded in the fact that although aging is a biological process, its meaning is created, grasped and communicated to others in terms of shared

linguistic and cultural symbols. This chapter, accordingly, discusses how our texts utilize formal and semantic features of the Sanskrit language to capture and propagate distinct views on aging.

Chapter four, "The Aging Body" discusses the Vedic, Buddhist and Hindu views of the human body as a temporary composition of the five physical elements (bhūtas or skandhas), which constitutes the field of operation of the aging process.

Chapter five, "Dynamics of Aging" analyses the role allotted to time (kāla) in connection to aging and then seeks to explain the process of aging in terms of change and mutation (pariṇāma).

Despite sophisticated attempts at providing a physical and empirical explanation, aging still remains an enigma and predicament. Chapter six, "Metaphysics of Aging", accordingly, examines the metacauses of aging in terms of two important pan-Indian concepts viz. kāma (desire) and karma (action).

Chapter seven, "Coping With the Stress of Aging" discusses the mechanisms suggested to cope with the stress of aging based on the concept of vāīa (rejuvenatory and revitalizing force).

Chapter eight, by way of conclusion, critically reviews the contribution of the Indian tradition to the understanding of the process of aging, its relevance to the development of gerontology in modern India and its significance for cross-cultural studies.

In the debate regarding the nature of aging in Indian tradition, three principle streams may be isolated: 1) The Vedic stream stemming from the revealed (Śruti) texts, which generally

evaluate aging in positive terms; 2) the Śramaṇa stream (principally Buddhism), which evaluates aging negatively as the impediment to spiritual liberation, and 3) the Hindu stream, which emerged as the compromise resulting from the dialectic interaction between the first two.²

This broad categorization, though convenient, is not without hazards. For example, one discerns strong and definite differences of opinion regarding aging in texts belonging to various schools categorized within any of the three traditions. Even within a single school major controversies may be detected on the same question. The purpose of producing a representative overview of the traditional Indian understanding of aging may, therefore, best be pursued by examining selected texts belonging to all three strata.

Texts Consulted

It is essential to remember that gerontology per se does not constitute the subject matter in any of our Indian texts used as source material. Since there are no formal statements on aging or old age, any relevant information occurring therein is incidental and often couched in symbolic or mythical forms thereby eluding

² In addition to the Śruti texts, Hinduism also acknowledges certain "remembered" texts (Smṛti) as sacred. The gloss on Amarakośa 1:6.3 defines Śruti as the [revelation], which expounds on the righteous and unrighteous ways of life. Smṛti is explained as the body of texts such as the Manu Smṛti with the help of which one remembers the righteous and unrighteous ways of organized life (see 1:6.6).

the casual reader. Ideas dealing with human birth, growth, decay and destruction, for instance, are inscribed at the cosmic level in terms of composition (appearance) and decomposition (disappearance). According to one famous Rgvedic hymn (10:90), the origin of the universe in its material, metaphysical and social aspects is the consequence of the death and dismemberment of the primordial cosmic man (puruṣa) in sacrifice.

Another Rgvedic hymn (10:125) elevates the faculty of speech (Vāc) to the level of the goddess who is later identified with the immutable (aksara), on the one hand, and with the ultimate reality (brahman), on the other, thereby linking the linguistic universe (śabdabrahman) to the process of creation and dissolution. Creation, thus, may be said to proceed at three levels: physical, metaphysical and semantic. Following Pandeya (1963, 3-4) semantics, in this context, may be understood as the science of linguistic meaning, which is capable of mediating between the physical and the metaphysical.

Other myths from Vedic literature suggest that the three universes are linked to each other by a set of homologies ³

³ In Chāndogya Upaniṣad (3:12) brahman appears under the symbol of the sacred verbal formula (mantra) of Gāyatrī which is said to be identical with the earth and by extension with the human body itself. The Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad similarly posits that the entire universe is condensed in the composite syllable AUM. The world as brahman is identical with the self (ātman), which, however, is also the primordial sound combination AUM inasmuch as its four components A + U + M + the dot [the bindu] are identical to the four states of the self viz. 1) the waking (vaiśvānara), 2) the dream (taijasa), 3) the deep sleep (susupti) and 4) the "fourth" (turiya).

A fundamental consubstantiality is posited in such myths whereby one entity may be created out of the material substance of the other, which then undergoes dissolution. The two, then, are understood as alloforms, alternative shapes or forms, of one another. Body, earth and the word denoting them are viewed as alternate moments in a continuous process, whereby one is continually transmuted into the other.⁴ To understand specific events in the human life cycle, therefore, one must examine their cosmic counterparts. Our texts, accordingly, deal with such subjects of a truly metaphysical nature, as, for example, the immutability and autonomous self contrasted with the mutable [aging] dependence of human body and the "short-comings" of this-worldly life characterized by disease, old age and death.

Since Indian textual material is enormous, the amount of such incidental and symbolic information on aging is considerable. Selected texts, therefore, were first sifted for passages of gerontological significance and the relevant material was then extrapolated and reinterpreted to suit our specific purpose. Portions of these texts are elegantly composed and are justly prized for their literary beauty and quality. In some instances their stylistic and literary traits were found to be relevant for the purpose of the present study, a fact which will become apparent in the chapter on the semantics of aging.

⁴ This line of interpretation was suggested, in part, by Lincoln (1986, 4-5).

Again, one must also bear in mind that in these texts the problem of human life [and aging] is dealt with from different perspectives and at different levels.⁵ This typical Indian predilection to examine any problem from various angles and levels simultaneously is at once a source of strength and weakness. One has to be constantly aware and on guard for shifting premises and hypotheses as well as the fact that our texts keep oscillating between levels abruptly and often without warning.

A relevant instance is the discussion regarding the nature of the embodied self in an early medical text called Caraka Samhitā. While in the "Sūtra Sthāna" chapter the discussion moves at the physical (bhautika) level, the "Śārīra Sthāna" chapter treats it at the metaphysical (laingika) level. Thus, we are inevitably drawn back to the ontology of the problem; while the question of what aging is is treated at the physical level, its etiological presuppositions hover at the metaphysical level. This is because in the larger Indian scheme of the theory of knowledge, the two problems are, in fact, a single problem: physics is the shadow of metaphysics.

From the Vedic stream, the texts principally consulted are the two Samhitās: the Rgveda (ca.1500 BCE), and the Atharva Veda in Śaunakīya version (ca.1200 BCE). The Rgveda (Rg) comprises

⁵ Krishna Chaitanya (1975, 52) refers to the assertion (though the source is not identified) that every Vedic hymn is the condensed expression of a triple meaning: an overt prayer for material prosperity, a homage to the gods, and a veiled allegorical notation of a profound philosophical intuition.

principally hymns of invocation and prayer to the gods and goddesses--Indra, Agni, Aśvins, Soma, Uṣas, Vāc--who are supplicated to bestow long, healthy and happy life unto ripe old age. The Atharva Veda (AthV) contains speculations on the source of being, creation and the relation of the embodied self to the supernatural and the cosmos. Hymns grouped under the categories of āyusyāni (long life) and bhaiṣajyāni (medicines) are particularly relevant for this study. The Brāhmaṇas (ca.1000-800 BCE) are voluminous tomes dealing with the Vedic rituals (yajñas) in their relationship to the potent, unseen forces at work in the cosmos. From among these, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (SB), in particular, was found to contain much relevant information pertinent to the present inquiry.

In the Upaniṣads (ca 800-600 BCE), the interest in sacerdotalism begins to recede, and the attention of the thinkers and hermits to whom this class of texts is attributed is focused instead on the person in relationship to the ultimate and irreducible principle within (ātman). For our purpose the following Upaniṣads warranted particular attention: the Bṛhadāraṇyaka (BAU), Chāndogya (CU), Śvetāśvatara (SU) and Maitrī (MU).

The principle texts consulted from the early Buddhist stream (ca.500 BCE-200 BCE) include the Nikāyas: the Dīgha Nikāya (DN), Majjhima Nikāya (MN) and the Samyutta Nikāya (SN), the Dhammapāda and the Sutta Nipāta. The Milindapañha is a record of the dialogues between King Menander (ca.140-100 BCE) and Nāgasena the

Elder (Thera). Though post-Canonical, it nonetheless provides useful information, particularly on the topics of time (kāla) and actions (karma) as understood in early Buddhism.

Hindu and Buddhist literature in Sanskrit composed according to the rules of the Pāṇinian grammar begins to appear between 600-300 BCE to reach its golden age in the period between 400-800 CE. The two Sanskrit works from early classical period (400 BCE-200 CE) that are of considerable interest to us are the epics Mahābhārata (MB) and the Rāmāyaṇa (Rām). The genre of literature known as Kāvya arose in the early centuries of the common era as court poetry. Composed at urban centers and patronized by princes and merchants, it is distinguished by a refined style and erudition.

Of this material, special attention is paid to the two Mahākāvyas of Aśvaghōṣa: the Buddhacarita (BC) and Saundarananda (SD) as well as the Mahākāvya of Kālidāsa Raghuvamśa (RV). Both the poets skillfully depict the extremes of lifetimes in their portrayals of the elderly and the young who interact frequently. But whereas in the works of Aśvaghōṣa the two generations are in conflict, in Kālidāsa they co-exist in harmony, as balancing and necessary components of the total human experience of aging (see chapters two and three).

The class of texts known as the Dharma Sūtras (ca. 300 BCE) and Dharma Śāstras (ca. 200 BCE-100 CE) were compiled by the brahmin priests in order to provide a ritual framework for the precepts and practice in accordance with the life style allegedly

laid out in the Vedas (vaidika dharma) to legitimate the moral and legal rules of behaviour under which every individual of a given varṇa (class) and āśrama (age-specific stage of life) is expected to live. While the Dharma Sūtras are in the form of aphorisms (sūtras)--short, pithy sayings which may be easily committed to memory--the Dharma Śāstras are a later and more developed form of literature in verse. The principal works belonging to this class used here include the Manu Smṛti (MS) and the Yājñavalkya Smṛti (Ysm).

Āyurveda, the science of long and healthy life, traditionally revered as one of the subsidiary limbs (upāṅgas) of the Vedas is obviously indispensable for the present study with the works of Caraka (CS) and Suśruta (SS) supplying relevant source material. While the former is placed by the scholars around ca.100 CE, the latter is the product of ca.400 CE.

Almost all the major religious systems of India incorporate some form or the other of the spiritual discipline generically known as yoga. Though there are various forms of yoga, the classical type is that associated with the philosophy called Sāṃkhya and expounded by Patañjali in a compilation known as the Yoga Sūtra (ca.100-200 CE). The Yoga Bhāṣya (ca.400-600 CE) of Vyāsa is the earliest commentary on the Yoga Sūtra and is of considerable aid in providing a clearer understanding of the notions of time and change, which are only tersely outlined in the Yoga Sūtra. The Tattvavaiśārādī (ca.800 CE) of Vācaspati

Misra seeks to elucidate both the Yoga Sūtra (YS) and Yoga Bhāṣya (YB).

Sāṃkhya-Yoga is a great expository metaphysics explaining the origin of the cosmos and of the human personality through the imageries of change. The three texts cited above also deal at length with the constitution of temporality as well as the subjective experience originating in the temporal order. For this reason, they have been utilized here for the purpose of explaining the physical and philosophical basis of the aging process.

The Yogavāsiṣṭha (ca.800) is yet another equally relevant yoga text centered on an incident in the life of Rāma (the hero of the epic Rāmāyana). It is in the form of a long dialogue (with over 27,000 verses) between Rāma and his preceptor, the sage Vasiṣṭha wherein it is asserted that the universe is nothing but a mode of the consciousness of self. As O'Flaherty (1984, 131) suggests, the Yogavāsiṣṭha (YV) may be viewed as a metatext dealing with metaphysical issues not discussed in the epic Rāmāyana.

The Purāṇa (ca.300-800 CE), the ancient lore, is a group of eighteen texts, which like the Dharma Śāstras, seeks to perpetuate the life style allegedly first outlined in the revealed literature of the Hindus (Śruti). Some of the Purāṇas provide a valuable source of information on aging which is couched in the form of myths. The principal Purāṇas that have

been of engaging interest to us are the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, the Padma Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

A Note on Citations and Translations

The logic of the citations of verses, phrases and passages from original Sanskrit texts may be explained as follows: When the verse is itself a principle object of study, both the Sanskrit text and translation appear in the body of this study. Where its relevance is more contextual or informative, the Sanskrit citation is reproduced in the footnotes. The relevant portions of Sanskrit prose passages (particularly from the Purāṇas) are cited in English translation, alone when they are purely expository. Where relevant, quotations, phrases and expressions are cited in a note in the original Sanskrit and translated.

Short French and German quotations appearing exclusively in the footnotes are not translated. Occasional briefly quoted technical terms, phrases or expressions which might lose their pith, vivacity or colour, if rendered into English, are left in their original Sanskrit or Pali. Translations of the citations from the Rgveda and Atharva Veda are based on the works by Geldner and Whitney respectively. When warranted, Sāyaṇa's commentaries (bhāṣyas) on the Saṃhitās are also taken into consideration, since they make available alternative interpretations based on traditional grammar, etymology, myths

and legends. References to Buddhist Canonical works are based on the translations sponsored by the Pali Text Society.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the passages from Sanskrit texts are by the present writer. Needless to say, they are indebted to the earlier endeavors by established scholars. These works are duly identified in the bibliography.

Chapter Two: History of Aging

Introduction

The course of the history of aging in India runs parallel to the development of Hindu ideal views on life and its organization from the time of the Veda (represented by the term ṛta) to the formulation of the Dharma Śāstras (represented by the term dharma), that is, from about 1500 BCE to 200 CE. For the purpose of the present study this period may further be divided into six sub-periods dominated by the emergence of one or the other genre of texts sacred to Hindus or Buddhists, each genre emphasizing unique and often contradictory or competing views on human life and by implication on aging. It should, however, be stressed that this periodization is for heuristic purposes only and that there is considerable overlapping of ideas propounded in different periods.

- 1) The Saṃhitā period (ca. 1500-1000 BCE), during which the collections (saṃhitā) of the four Vedas including the Rgveda and the Atharva Veda took place.
- 2) The Brāhmaṇa period (ca. 1,000-800 BCE), which gave rise to the Brāhmaṇa texts dealing with theoretical and practical details of Vedic sacrifices (yajñas).
- 3) The Upaniṣadic period (ca. 800-200 BCE), which is characterized by the rise of speculative and metaphysical texts on topics such as the self and being.

4) The Emergent Buddhism period (ca. 500-400 BCE), which saw the beginnings of the compilation of Buddhist Canonical texts such as the Nikāyas.

5) The Dharma Sūtra and the Pali Canon period (ca. 400-200 BCE), which is characterized, on the one hand, by the emergence of the Smṛti literature of the Hindus and the formation of the Pali Canon of the Buddhists, on the other.

6) The Dharma Śāstra period (ca. 200 BCE-200 CE), during which the very influential Manu Smṛti and the two Mahākāvyas of Aśvaghōṣa (the Buddhacarita and the Saundarananda) were composed.

Vedic Perspective

Since the Saṃhitā portions of the Vedic texts incorporate the earliest documented views on human life, aging and death in Indian tradition, it may be useful to begin our survey with the discussion of two relevant Saṃhitās (compilations), namely: The Rgveda and the Atharva Veda. The Vedic philosophy of life revolves around Vivasvat, the ancestor of humankind and his son Yama, the god of death. Under the protection of Vivasvat, the Vedic Indians hoped for a life as long as possible and a natural death as late as possible. With Yama's favour they hoped for as happy an after-life as possible in the world beyond (AthV 18:3.13).

That Vedic culture was life-affirming with a distinct this-worldly (aihika) emphasis on material prosperity, longevity and progeny is clearly discernible in numerous other hymns of the

Rgveda and the Atharva Veda. In the early Vedic society as characterized in the Rgveda, demographic, social and cultural factors combined to permit only limited differentiation of the life span, which tended to be relatively short.

Distinction between childhood and adulthood remained blurred in that children were seen as miniature adults who gradually assumed adult roles in their early teens, though they were exempted from immediate adult responsibilities. The two major adult roles--parenthood and gainful work--generally stretched over the adult lifespan, whatever its duration. The integration of economic activities within the family unit also provided continuity in the usefulness of the older Vedic male. Old females on their part also contributed to the family-oriented economic unit by engaging in spinning and weaving. People generally tended to be preoccupied with material pursuits, and even the brahmins were more priestly in their outlook than mystical or philosophical.

The primary desire and hope expressed in the Rgveda is to acquire and enjoy full life within the confines and bounds of a homestead economy in the company of sons and grandsons (Rg 10:85.42). Prayers for a longer life also abound in the Rgveda as in 10:18.5, which features a prayer to Death (mṛtyu):

As the days follow in order, as the seasons faithfully follow the seasons, so order their lives, O Regulator (Dhātah), that he who comes after may not abandon him who went before!

Rgveda 9:113.7 includes a prayer to Pavamāna (god Soma) wherein the poet requests to be placed in that deathless, undecaying world, wherein the light of heaven, and everlasting lustre (Sonne) shines. In another hymn the poet pleads:

Never may we suffer want in the presence of the sun
and, living happy lives, may we attain old age
(īaraṇām aśīmaḥi) (Rg 10:37.6).

The seer (ṛṣi) of the Rgvedic hymn (10:39.4,8) to the Aśvins (the twin physicians to the gods) is the old maiden Ghosā, daughter of King Kakṣivān. Suffering from an incurable disease, she invokes help from the Aśvins by reminding them that:

You made Cyavana, weak and worn with length of days,
young again, like a chariot, that he had power to
move... You gave vigour of youthful life to the sage
Kali when old age was approaching (īaraṇām upeyuṣaḥ).

Ghosā then begs the Aśvins to cure and rejuvenate her also.

The Atharva Veda, on the other hand, abounds with charms, spells (āyusvāni), and prescriptions and preparations for long life (bhaiṣajvāni). Usually these treatments are a matter between the priest and his clients, who included the chaplain (purohita) and the king. Intended to assure this-worldly pleasures and long life, the Atharva Veda constitutes a manual for the laity, the warriors and the kings wherein an important motif is to avoid death before old age as exemplified in AthV 5:30.17 (mā purā īaraso mrthāḥ). A hymn (2:13.1,2) to the Fire god (Agni) is a prayer for the welfare and long life of a young child (mānavaka):

O Agni, having partaken of the sweet, pleasant clarified butter of the cow, do you now protect this boy, as a father his sons, upto old age (jarasām vṛṇāno).

Nourish this one... with your splendour, render him one to die of old age; let there not be a premature death for him (jarāmṛtyum kṛṇuta dīrgham āyuh).¹

Atharva Veda (2:28.1,4,5) is an eulogy for long life for a child.

It is to be invoked by the parents in praise of Jariman (old age personified as deity).

Onto you alone, O Jariman, let this one grow; let not the other deaths, that are a hundred, harm him; as a thoughtful mother in her lap a son, let [the deity] Mitra protect this one from harm that may come from a [treacherous] friend.

Let sky and earth [Dyauh as the father and Pṛthivī as the mother respectively] make you reach old age (jarāmṛtyum kṛṇutām).²

[O gods]...make him one [whose life] stretches upto old age (jaradaṣṭir yathāsat).³

Atharva Veda (3:11.5,6,7,8) is a prayer addressed to various

¹ Sāyaṇa glosses the compound jarāmṛtyu as jarayā eva mṛtyuh mṛtiḥ vasya sah, that is, he whose death occurs in old age. The prayer is repeated in AthV 19:24.4.

² In this instance Sāyaṇa identifies jarāmṛtyu with dīrghāyus (long life). If jarāmṛtyu is taken as an exocentric compound (bahuvrīhi), then, the translation would read, "Let sky and earth make him one to have death in old age."

³ Sāyaṇa glosses the compound jaradaṣṭih to mean "having the span of life stretching upto old age" or "having the capacity for all the desired activities despite advanced age" (jarāparyanta-iivanasya aṣṭirvyāptirasya sa...yadvā jarato jīryato'pi aṣṭih sarvavyāpāraviśāya vyāptirasya tādṛśo bhavet).

deities on behalf of a sick person asking for relief from disease and for a long life.

Enter in O Prāṇa and Apāna (breath and expiration), as two draft-oxen a pen (vrajam); let the other deaths go away, which they call the remaining hundred.

O Prāṇa and Apāna... carry his body, his limbs unto old age again.⁴

Unto old age do I commit you [the sick one]; unto old age do I instigate you; may old age, excellent, conduct you; let the other deaths go away, which they call the remaining hundred.⁵

Let old age bind you as a cow with a rope .let Brhaspati with the two hands of truth release the fetters by which death had bound you at birth

Though it begins with a salutation by the priest to Death (antakāya mrtyave namah) on behalf of a young boy, hymn 8.1 of the Atharva Veda (called "Āyuh Sūkta") is really a salute to life. While pouring consecrated water on the young boy (mānavaka), the priest touches the boy's navel and recites a prayer for the boy's living unto old age (jaradastih). He supplicates various medicinal herbs and their king (Soma) to infuse long life into him. Atharva Veda (8:2.8) is a prayer expressly addressed to Death (mrtyu) wherein he is requested to grant long life upto old

⁴ Sāyana glosses jarase with jarethām or jarāparyantam (upto old age).

⁵ jarāyai tvā pari dadāmi jarāyai ni dhuvāmi tvā jarā tvā bhadra neṣṭa vyanye vantu mrtyavo yānahuritaran chatam.

Sāyana glosses jarāyai as avasānaparyantam (upto death by old age) defining old age (jarā) in this context as jirvanti angāni asyam avasthāyām iti (that state wherein the members of the body age).

age (one hundred years) with eyesight, hearing capacity and other bodily members in good health (sarvāṅgaḥ suśrījarasā śatahāyana ātmanā bhujam aśnutām).

Atharva Veda (7:53.5,6) supplicates Prāṇa and Apāna (the two vital breaths) to enter the body in the manner of the oxen entering their pen (vrajam). It then goes on to say.

Let not this treasure of old age (jarimṇaḥ sevādhiḥ) be reduced, let it increase. I instigate Prāṇa in you and drive maladies away. Let this superior Agni grant us long life of all kinds.

This desire and will to live for one hundred years and the lust of life is variously expressed in the Atharvan hymn (19:67) to Sūrya (the Sun god) in the form of the refrain "May we see a hundred autumns" (paśyema śaradaḥ śatam) and reiterated six times with the original use of the verb "see" successively substituted by the following verbs:

Wake (budhyema)
Grow (pūṣema)
Adorn (bhūṣema)
Live (jīvema)
Prosper (rohema)
Be (bhavema).

Similarly, in the hymn "To the Waters for Long Life" (AthV 19:69), the act of living is mentioned four times with four different prepositions:

Living are you; may I live; may I live my whole life time.

Living on are you, may I live on; may I live my whole life

Living together are you; may I live together
my whole life

Lively are you; may I be lively.

These prayers suggest that in Vedic society death must have been more commonly associated with youth and vitality than with old age and decrepitude. Indirect evidence for this hypothesis is discernible in the frequent use of the compound jarāmṛtyu meaning "death in old age" in these prayers. Life in reality probably ended suddenly due to disease or war rather than fading out by degrees in old age.⁶ There was, therefore, no necessary or compelling reason for the Vedic people to connect death and sickness with old age or to assume its inevitability.

However, by the time of the Brāhmaṇa period the Vedic society had overcome, at least partially, its early irrational fear of the after life so graphically depicted in the Rgveda. Awareness of and contact with death were now integrated into everyday life since death (particularly violent or premature death) no longer held that mythical power over the living (the

⁶ Keith (in Rapson 1922, 90) has argued that so much stress is laid on longevity as a great boon that it must have been rare. As against this, Bhargava (1971, 206) has proposed that the Aryans of the Vedic age were a long-lived people. Pointing out that Dirghatamas (the seer of the famous hymn from the Rgveda 1:164 which is named after him) lived one hundred years and Mahidāsa Aitareya (compiler of the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa) one hundred and sixteen years, he concludes (without, however, marshalling additional documentary evidence) that:

The average expectation of life was high. In the Vedas a desire to live a 100 years is frequently expressed (Rg 7:6,16). This no doubt means that an age of 100 years or near about was not very rare in those days.

Brāhmaṇa texts vouch for that).⁷ There was no reason to fear any potential revenge from old or ~~de~~ people.

The foregoing demonstrates the life-affirming, this worldly hopes and aspirations of the Vedic Aryans. The Vedic literature reveals a certain adulation and fondness for old age and old people bordering on a gerontophilia. But this in no way indicates that the Vedic people lived a long life. The individual life course was still not marked by phases, the metaphor of the cycle or the circle to describe life span was not in vogue. And different age groups were still not completely segregated in accordance with their functions. Unlike modern times when parents generally complete their child-rearing tasks with almost a quarter of their active lives still ahead, in Vedic India parenthood probably stretched to the end of life, given the fact that life expectancy was short.

In addition, marriage and the family unit were frequently broken by sudden and/or premature death attributable to warfare, natural calamities and diseases. Not surprisingly, the question of the "why" of aging is thematically avoided or perhaps does not arise in the Saṃhitā or the Brāhmaṇa periods, since few if any lived long enough to experience old age at first hand. Speculating on old age would not, therefore, be a meaningful enterprise.

⁷ Recently Young (Forthcoming) has suggested that the brahmin's self-interest lay in propagating the fear of death in the minds of the gullible Vedic Indians.

However, toward the end of the Brāhmana period and certainly by 700 BGE a major shift and movement away from the Vedic weltanschauung had begun, which, in fact, was the reflection of very important changes in the political, social and economic conditions of north India.⁸ The lust for life that characterized the early Vedic life style was gradually transformed into weariness of life and gerontophilia was replaced by gerontophobia. The frontier spirit, pioneering economy, robust optimism and premium on a happy, healthy and long life were replaced by a disenchantment with active, this-worldly pursuits (samsāra) and a longing and urge for a quiet, contemplative life in the forest away from the dust and din of the city.

There was, thus, a growing cleavage of ideas concerning the old Veda-inspired and controlled ideal life and its organization. This break has been traced to different factors--establishment of autocratic, centralized political units and the ensuing institutionalization of injustice and violence; increasing industrialization, modernization, urbanization and mobility; and over-population, famines and foreign invasions. The growth of towns and commerce and the organization of trade and craft into guilds made the north Indian social landscape quite distinct from the earlier Vedic one.

⁸ Sarosa (1987) has argued that urbanization made its feeble beginnings around the seventh century BCE. The whole of early Buddhist literature presupposes the existence of urbanization, though urbanization saw its real glory under Buddhism itself.

The older Vedic gods and sacrifices as conceived in the Samhitās and the Brāhmaṇas had reflected a rural and pastoral economy. In the face of the new urbanizing and changing world of 600 BCE, much of the symbolism and rituals originating in natural and pastoral functions and phenomena began to appear irrelevant (Pande 1974, 262-265). With doubt and skepticism in the air, sensitive and reflective individuals began to look beyond the old ways of life, seeking to replace or infuse them with new meanings and attitudes. In this enterprise they were supported 1) by the newly urbanized populations increasingly alienated from nature and 2) by social discipline, which called for new productive techniques and implements.

It is to this class of reformers and thinkers who came from both the brahmin and Śramaṇa⁹ circles that the unique ideas concerning spiritual liberation, whether understood as mokṣa or nirvāṇa, enshrined in the Upaniṣads and Buddhism may be traced. In the context of the history of aging it would seem that these post-Vedic thinkers asking ultimate metaphysical questions about the "why" of aging entertained three fundamental assumptions:

- 1) There is something or somebody responsible for aging
- 2) Human aging belongs to the realm of intelligibility

⁹ The Śramaṇas were strivers who put primary emphasis on personal training in a method or program of salvation available to anyone (men or women, high or low) willing to learn it. They stressed personal effort (śrama) and practice, not sacrifices (as propounded by the orthodox Brāhmaṇas) or metaphysical speculation (as engaged in by the Upaniṣadic thinkers). Their doctrines or explanations centered on the personal experience of teachers like the Buddha or Mahāvīra who served as exemplars to others (see Hopkins 1971, 53).

and as such there is no need to remain helpless in the face of aging

3) Suffering and anxiety resulting from aging can be rectified.

The stimulus for redefining the inherited Vedic world view and the meaning of life may be traced to the developing polarity in the Upaniṣadic period between this-worldly suffering on account of repeated births (samsāra) and the aspiration for liberation (mokṣa), which would transcend the condition of human aging altogether. Although few Samhitā verses specifically denigrated the process of decay in old age, the fear of it lurks beneath some of the passages therein as evidenced in the Rgveda¹⁰ and the Atharva Veda (12:2.24) where death is feared as evil.

But it is in the Upaniṣads (Bṛhadāraṇyaka 3.1.51, for instance, where Yājñavalkya is instructing Kahola) that old age begins to be recognized as diminishing human strength and powers. Old age is now projected as unavoidable and incurable. The desire to be free from death, therefore, begins to be accompanied also by the desire to be free from old age. The terms denoting deathlessness (amara) almost become synonymous with the terms for agelessness (ajara) or freedom from old age (nirjara). Alternatively, a new co-ordinative compound (dvandva samāsa) ajarāmara (ageless and deathless) is formed, elevating old age to

¹⁰ In a hymn to the gods (Rg 1:89.9), the poet pleads with them not to cut short his life [which was ordained by the gods themselves, Sāyaṇa], before its due term (mā no madhyā rīrisat ayurgantoh). In yet another hymn (Rg 5:41.15,17), the wish is expressed that Nirṛti, the goddess of death and dissolution, would take away [literally swallow] old age (jarām ca grasatu).

the rank of death in importance (Chāndogya, 8:1.5; Śvetāśvatara, 2:12; Kaṭha 1:3). Though it claims to be a continuation of the old exegesis of the Veda, in effect, the Upaniṣadic thought constitutes a break with that tradition as far as the understanding and meaning of human life is concerned.

This is clear from the number of disturbing insights that the Upaniṣads begin to provide into the process of aging, paving the way for a vision of the essentially painful or pessimistic nature and processes of human life here on earth. The Upaniṣads thus radicalize the nature of sorrow attributable to old age to such a degree that the only resort is escape into another form of life style or organization in the forest leading to liberation (mokṣa). Certain common traits nonetheless seem to run through both the early Vedic and the Upaniṣadic views. First no fundamental ontic distinction is posited between spirit and matter. Though the Upaniṣadic quest seeks to go beyond the life of worldliness and ritualism centered in ritual action (yajña-karma), it does not advocate the radical renunciation of all life of action as will be later counselled by the Buddha. Nor does it condemn the world as a vale of tears.

The Upaniṣads inculcate a life of meditation and contemplation of the great truths in the later years of one's life, but they do not emphasize withdrawal from the mundane pursuits of a householder's life. (This is evident from the fact that Yājñavalkya renounces the world in his old age and King Janaka was a householder). There is occasional disgust expressed

at the contemptible nature of worldly existence, but it stops short of advocating total withdrawal from the alleged sorrowful and evanescent nature of mundane life. On the question of aging and its sorrow, the Upaniṣads consider sorrow as originating in the aging condition of humans and yet capable of awakening them to their transcendent nature. Anxiety caused by the recognition that suffering is inherent in old age is believed to drive the sensitive thinker to break out of his/her condition of being human and transcend it.

On the question of the dreadful consequences of aging, Upaniṣadic reflection opens up a new perspective, pointing out that the evil of old age does not in reality consist so much in this or that sickness, handicap or loss sustained as a consequence of old age, but rather the very fact that the human being is destined to grow old and decrepit and ultimately to die. The optimism of the Saṃhitā is replaced by an acute awareness of the decaying body as the unavoidable factor in human life, which cannot be miraculously cured or prayed away (Panikkar 1977, 465).

This is evident from a passage in Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4:3.35-38), which features a dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Janaka regarding the status and nature of the self (ātman) in its various states such as sleep, dream and death. Yājñavalkya explains that with age the person is burdened as if by a heavy load and is gradually reduced to bone and skin. All organs, which were so prompt to serve in youth, quit service. That decay of the body is one of the main reasons for disenchantment and anxiety

within oneself is also discernible from the beautiful legend involving Indra (king of all Vedic gods), Virocana (the demon) and Prajāpati (the father of all beings).

After thirty-two years of apprenticeship by Indra and Virocana as students, Prajāpati declares to them that the self (ātman) is nothing but the person and its body image in the mirror. But Indra is not satisfied. He doubts that the body--subject to injury, decay and old age--is the self (ātman). Unlike Virocana, he is not satisfied with the explanation that the body is identical with the self (dehātmanvāda). Prajāpati then provides alternative explanations of the self. But Indra is not satisfied by them. It is only then that Prajāpati reveals to him the truth that the body is not the self (ātman), because it is mortal and that the desire for the ageless state free from decay is nothing other than the search for the self (ātman) (Chāndogya 8:7-12).

It was pointed out above that in the Saṃhitā period, the course of human life was characterized by a relatively short and homogeneous life span. There was, accordingly, no need to structure major life events such as marriage, parenthood and retirement into distinct stages. The Upaniṣadic period, in contrast, recognizes two distinct phases in life (as against one in the Saṃhitā) identified as the sacrificing householder and the hermit practicing austerities in the forest. But the relation between the two phases is still ambiguous. They are perceived as being neither consecutive nor inter-related. The stage of studentship is presumed to be preparatory to either one or both

of them. The stages are not known by the distinct names they acquire in the later Smṛti works such as the Manu Smṛti and the Yājñavalkya Smṛti.

This is evident from a passage in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (3:5.1ff) attributed to Yājñavalkya where he hesitantly identifies the important events in the ideal life as being sage, child, silent ascetic and married priest, rating the brahmin over the rest as the highest stage.¹¹ In summing up, it may be argued that in the Upaniṣadic period, for the Vedic Aryan, life in community and life in the forest constituted two alternating poles in terms of rituals based on the concepts of sacrifice (yajña) and the sacred fire (agni) respectively wherein the fundamental ontic unity between spirit and matter still remained in tact.

Buddhist Perspective

Buddhism, which was one of the major protest movements of ca. 600 BCE along with that of the Ājīvikas and Jainas, eventually broke apart the two poles of spirit and matter, precipitating a structural hiatus in the old Veda-inspired and controlled world-view and life-style. The ideal of nirvāṇa, originating in the

¹¹ In later Upaniṣads these events are sacralized by identifying them with the symbolic sequence of sacrifices (yajñas) based on the fire god (Agni). The performance of brahmayajña is prescribed in the first quarter, karmayajña in the second, tapoyajña in the third and the inānayajña in the final phase of life. See Brahma Sūtra (3:4.47-50) and Śaṅkara's gloss.

world-negating mode of life (nivṛtti), emerged as the competing ideal to the this-worldly and life-affirming (pravṛtti) ideal here on earth and subsequently in the other world. Various suttas in the Majjhima Nikāya bear testimony to these trying times of social ferment and change. In fact, in the words of a disgruntled brahmin recorded in the Pali Canon, the Buddha instituted the dispensation of renunciation (pravarjyādhikaraṇa) in place of the dispensation of sacrifice (vajñādhikaraṇa). This succinctly summarizes the shifting world view (Pande 1974, 325).¹²

Further, under the impact of continued industrialization and demographic changes in the period identified above as that of Emergent Buddhism, a gradual differentiation in age groups and age-related specialization in function began to emerge, although it was by no means complete towards the Dharma Sūtra period (300 BCE). A significant consequence of this development was the apprehension of aging, which was dramatized in the newly evolving attitudes toward the treatment of the young and the elderly.

The newly emerging ascetic world view as inscribed in the Pali Canon held that youth had no ethical and familial responsibility toward society, and that they must, in fact,

¹² The Buddhist elder Nāgasena describes the method (whereby the Buddhists brought this about) by narrating a simile to King Milinda:

Just as the carpenter, discarding the soft parts of the wood, takes (only) the hard parts, just so the Bhikṣu ...forsaking the path of the discussion of useless theses to wit: the everlasting life theory, the let-us-eat-and-drink-for tomorrow-we-die theory, the theory that the soul and the body are one and the same, that the soul is one thing, the body another...(Rhys Davids 1969, 2:361-362).

renounce the world while still in youthful vigour in quest of spiritual liberation. It believed that elderly people had neither the energy nor the right aptitude for undertaking the arduous task of the spiritual quest. To those belonging to the orthodox social order, however, the physical infirmities and the inevitable end associated with old age did not present an imminent danger to society and did not, therefore, provoke the degree of anxiety produced by problems vis-a-vis the young in whose social control much lay at stake.

Traditional Vedic society, on its part, continued to regard undisciplined and unsocialized youths as potentially disruptive of social organization. The control and orthodox socialization of the young was deemed essential to prevent their growing into socially unacceptable and potentially destructive non-Vedic adults who may be lured by powerful and influential Śramaṇa or heterodox teachers, such as the Buddha or Mahāvīra. This concern for social order is evident in the arguments of the brahmin mathematician (ganaka) named Moggallāna (see "Gaṇaka Moggallāna Sutta", Majjhima Nikāya 3:1-7). But it was Gośāla, another brahmin thinker and contemporary of the Buddha, whose principles of evolution in relation to education, desire, knowledge and spirituality seem to have provided an antecedent to the formulation of the age-specific life stages model (āśrama) of later times (see Barua 1970, 313).¹³ It is conceivable that the

¹³ Gośāla is said to have conceptualized the ideal human life span in terms of eight developmental stages (atthapurisa bhūmiyo) in order to reach perfection (jina) (Barua 1970, 314).

Buddha's alternative doctrine of eight higher spiritual ranks (atthapurisa puggalā) was designed in light of Gośāla's ideas.

The contrast between the two competing views of Gośāla and the Buddha is nonetheless important, for it suggests the historical shift from a biologically and socially determined view of life events to the morally and spiritually determined one at the hands of the Buddha. That these developments precipitated a growing conflict and chasm between the orthodox brahmins and the Śramaṇas is indicated by a reference to it in Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī (2:4.9) where it is stated that the brahmins and Śramaṇas had separate orders that were in permanent opposition to each other (veśāṃ ca virodhaḥ śāśvatikah). The division is also referred to in Aśokan inscriptions.

People of the Magadhan-Mauryan era witnessed an increasing life span beyond that of the early Vedic period.¹⁴ In part, this may be attributed to the continued advances being made in the field of medicine (Āyurveda). Consequently, the number of persons succumbing to degenerative diseases attributable to old age must have become considerably more than those dying of infection, trauma, snake bite and child birth. As the result of increased life expectancy, death was now also perceived as the inevitable consequence of growing old. The theme of aging accordingly began

¹⁴ Grmek (1958, 29) has observed that by studying the inscriptions of ancient Roman tombstones, scholars have determined that the average duration of life at that time was between twenty to thirty years. Though corresponding figures are not available for the Vedic period, they must not have been far removed from those for the ancient Greek or Roman periods.

to be treated with dread and avoidance as revealed in the Buddhist texts. This was a radical departure, indeed, from the Vedic period when aging was prized because lived experience of aging was so rare!

Canonical Buddhism, by contrast, would make aging (and its inevitable consequences--disease and death) the cornerstone of its doctrinal and soteriological edifice. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to argue that, at least in part, the rise of Buddhism may be understood as one attempt to deal with the problems created by more people living long enough to fear old age and its unhappy consequences. Advances in medical technology assured more numerous first-hand experiences of old age and consequently of sickness and dying as well.

Indirect linguistic evidence backing the hypothesis of the increased life span is available in the Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini, whose date is by no means certain though it is generally accepted that he must have flourished between 600-300 BCE. Agrawala (1963, 94) has observed that the term sapinda is peculiar to the post-Vedic literature and is not found in the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas or the Upaniṣads. Such posterior texts as the Māṇḍ Smṛti (5:60) explain sapinda as blood relations up to the seventh degree on the father's side and fifth on the mother's side.

Pāṇini (4:1.165) also refers to the sapinda institution pointing out that a great-grandson is called yuvan if a more elderly sapinda, that is, either his uncle or grand-uncle is alive. In addition, he suggests the terms vaṁśya (4.1.163) or

vrddha (1:2.65) to designate the male head of the family and yuvan for junior members. The head of the family, for instance, is to be distinguished from the junior members by affixing specific suffixes such as 1) garga, 2) gārgi, 3) gārgya and 4) gārgyāyana. Here garga denotes an ancestor who started a line of descendents. As such he is a samīnakārin (who gave his name to the family or started a lineage). His son would be known as gargi (antarāpatya in grammar) The grandson of garga and the son of gārgi would be gārgya.

According to sūtra 4.1 162, all other descendents numbering a hundred or even thousand would be called gārgya. Thus, while garga would denote the patriarch, gārgyāyana would denote his juniors. These distinctive titles were of relative value. A gārgya as patriarch, for instance, represented his family in the social assemblies. A junior member such as gārgyāyana would be given the nomenclature gārgya only when the former was admitted to the headship of the family in the absence of gārgya, the elder (Agrawala 1963, 86).

The coining or at least the legitimation of these terms by Pāṇini suggests that by his time many were living long enough to be called grandfathers and founded lineages that were named after them ¹⁵. It appears that a number of such lineages were established in the Dharma Sūtra period with significant political

¹⁵ Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya (5:1.59, see Limaye 1974, 343) suggests that he considered the average life span in his time (ca. 300 BCE) to be between sixty and seventy (ṣaṣṭir jīvitaparimāṇamasya ṣaṣṭikah. sapṭatikah).

implications (see Thapar 1984). The patriarch probably died only after experiencing a relatively long ambulatory period imposed by old age in contradistinction to the early Vedic era when sudden death in early life was more frequent. These changes are mythically and symbolically documented in the Pali Canon as well, for example, in the creation myth of the world, humans, and society in the "Aggañña Suttānta" of the Dīgha Nikāya or in the legends describing young Siddhārtha's confrontation with the phenomena of disease, decrepitude and death (see below).¹⁶

It is in this context that one must understand Kane's observation that the earliest mention of the four āśramas (life stages) occurs in the Dharma Sūtras (1974, 2:1 & 2). The Gautama Dharma Sūtra (3:2), one of the earliest, lists them as student, householder, wandering beggar and hermit respectively (brahmacārin, grhastha, bhikṣu and vaikhāṇasa). But the Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra (2:9.21.1) provides different names and a different order for the same four stages--gārhaṣṭham, ācārya-kulam, maunam and vānaprastham. The Vasīṣṭha Dharma Sūtra (7:1.2) has brahmacāri, grhastha, vānaprastha and parivrājaka (see Young 1981). The much later (ca. 500 CE) Kūrma Purāṇa (1:2.39) curiously changes the order, and the terms once again are grhastha, vanastha, bhiksuka and brahmacārin.

¹⁶ In the legend of Yayāti told in the Padma Purāṇa (1:2.76.23), the aged patriarch and the founder of the lineage is compared to the giant Banyan tree spreading its roots and branches in all directions. In like manner, the sons, grandsons, and great grandsons are described as spreading and sinking their roots.

The foregoing suggests that the plan of age-specific life stages was in the air by the time of the Dharma Sūtras, but the structure, sequence and details were still in flux. Gautama (GDS 3:1) and Vasiṣṭha (VDS 7:1.3) concede that the choice of the mendicant (bhikṣu) stage is optional. This reflects the inroads made by the ascetic and renunciatory tendencies in the realm of the Vedic ideal life and its organization (dharma). As Olivelle (1978) argues, it caused a radical change in the notion of Vedic dharma. It introduced an element of choice and alternatives to the socially fixed and immutable dharma.

But one must also remember that an equally fundamental change was also taking place in the Buddhist ideal of ascetic life. The early ideal of the solitary life of a wandering bhikṣu in the forest was replaced by a sedentary life in the monastery (sangha). The Sutta Nipāta is all praise for solitary living like a rhinoceros in the forest. Now this gives way to the organized and relatively comfortable life in the monasteries where the motto was "blessed is the unity of sangha, blessed is the exertion of the united (sukhā saṅghassa sāmaggī samaggānam tapo sukho), quoted in Misra 1972, 117). The lure of the secure life in monasteries, away from the travails of the family duties and obligations in society, began to attract a number of young men and women to Buddhism. Many took to ascetic garb in order to escape physical labour, hardships or poverty.

The Mahāvagga refers to Magadhan soldiers (who were ordered to quell rebellions on the frontier) and debtors taking refuge in

the monastery (Misra 1972, 35). Many Kṣatriyās (members of the warrior class), feeling the pull of class (varṇa) loyalty, were drawn to monasteries founded by a member proud of his warrior class. Following Young (1981), one may therefore, conclude that the āśrama ideal as elaborated in the Dharma Sūtras represents the brahmanical resolution of the conflict between the competing ideals of renunciation in young age and the moral responsibility of discharging the three debts incumbent on each Ārya.

It was during the reign of King Aśoka (ca.300 BCE) that the emergent Buddhism--originally limited to meditating monks in the forest or the monasteries--was transformed into a popular religion of the masses. Under the sponsorship of King Aśoka, the long process of reformulation and codification of the principle tenets of Buddhism was begun, resulting in the establishment of the Pali Canon. The loss of political patronage under the Śunga dynasty--which succeeded the Mauryas in the Magadha--was compensated to an extent in Northwest India in the Buddhist kingdoms of Kanīṣka and Milinda (ca.100 BCE-100 CE).

Doctrinally, Canonical Buddhism as then formulated was distinguished by the twin concepts of the wheel of ethical life (dhammacakka) and the wheel of biological life (bhavaṇacakka) based on the doctrine of dependent origination (pratītya-samutpāda, see chapter four). The explanatory model of the aging body, which is implicit in the Pali Canon, seems to be patterned after the analogy of a machine. The world is understood as a sui generis

circular machine composed of discrete parts (cogs) moving through time and space pivoted by the fundamental law of karma.

Although aging in the organism appears to be qualitative (since it is said to revolve around the different phases of childhood, youth and old age), it is really quantitative, that is, an impersonal flow of discrete moments (ksana). Put differently, in contrast to the traditional Vedic atemporal account of human existence, early Buddhism now proposed that any authentic understanding of human existence must fully recognize life's temporal contingency and its resolute encounter with old age, disease and death.

It is in the first part of the Dīgha Nikāya and the whole of the Majjhima Nikāya in the Pali Canon that one comes across the earliest cogent and organized exposition of the full fledged Buddhist meaning and interpretation of old age. It is not clear whether or not the Buddha himself meditated and reflected on the facts and evils of old age. What is more certain is the likelihood that it is in the Pali Canon that one begins to come across the picturesque legends of the young Siddhārtha being introduced to the triune evil of old age etc. (see below). The Nikāyas (MN 2:75; 3:179) refer to old age (perhaps sarcastically) as one of the three divine messengers (devadūta).

In the "Mahānidāna Suttānta" of the Dīgha Nikāya (2:55-71) is to be found the full explanation of the doctrine of dependent co-origination and its role in the phenomenalization of birth (jāti), old age (jarā) and death (maraṇa). The thread of this

argument is taken up again in the "Nidāna Samyutta" of the Samyutta Nikāya (2:1-133) where we find the Buddha teaching to the monks that the chain of causation begins with ignorance and ends only in old age and death. The "Mahāparinibbāna Suttānta" of the Dīgha Nikāya (2:72-168) records the last message of the Buddha in these words:

vayadhammā saṅkhārā, appamādena sampādetthāti

Decay (age or aging) is inherent in all component things. Work out your own salvation with diligence.

This teaching, it may be argued, is the key-note of early Buddhism and neatly summarizes the early Buddhist understanding and evaluation of the aging process.

The Pali Dhammapāda, which contains the most sublime statements of early Buddhism, is placed by Barua (1970, 41) in 300 BCE. Chapter eleven of this text entitled Jarāvagga (section on old age) records the early Buddhist understanding of aging as primarily a biological process that wastes the human body which itself is conceived as a heap of corruption and an abode of old age, death, pride and deceit. Similar ideas are also put forth in the "Vijaya Sutta" of the Uraga Vagga and the "Jara Sutta" of the Atthaka Vagga of the Sutta Nipāta which Barua (1970, 238) describes as one of the oldest books of the Pali Canon.

In several accounts in the Pali Canon, the future Buddha/Bodhisattva expounds on the three evils of suffering (old age, disease and death). Indeed, as recorded in the Anguttara Nikāya (1:3.4.1-6), he recounts to the monks the dialogues wherein Yama, the god of death, chastises three mortals for 1)

failing to live the pious life and 2) not recognizing old age, disease and death as the three evils.

This episode involving young Siddhārtha's encounter with disease, old age and death is retold in elegant Sanskrit in Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita. The variations from the original account in the Nikāyas tell us much about the shifting spectrum of the Buddhist understanding of old age and aging in this period (ca. 100 CE) when the model of the life-stages (āśrama) in its final mould had already appeared in the Dharma Śāstra texts such as the Manu Smṛti and which as such appears as the premise to be refuted (pūrvapakṣa) in the Buddhacarita.

The reflections on aging as put in the mouth of the Buddha and other monks suggest a new point of reference in uncovering a significance and meaning to the losses engendered by old age etc.

that seem to go beyond an exclusively negative appraisal of their impact. The questions and doubts that arise in the agitated mind of Siddhārtha (BC 3.28) are pregnant with new answers and meanings. Is aging a pre-determined process? Is it caused by an external agency? Are aging and old age accidents in that they happen to some unfortunate individuals? Are others spared from this evil? If old age is an accident, can it be avoided? Or is it an intrinsic, natural condition in human beings unfolding itself with the passage of time? Is there a permanent, immutable self (substance) that ages not but appropriates the experience of aging suffered by the body?

The initial brahmin-endorsed explanations of old age and aging as furnished by the charioteer fail to satisfy Siddhārtha thereby setting him on a spiritual quest (BC 3:33). After he attains nirvāṇa and becomes the Buddha (the awakened one), Siddhārtha begins to insist upon the need for living fully now with an attention on the immediacy of lived experience. In order to realize this fullness in the present, he institutes a spiritual discipline composed of eight stages. For that purpose, one is asked to remove oneself from the centres of power divesting oneself of external social roles and relations; one is to turn away from the world's claims while still young rather than waiting for old age and infirmities to force one to do the same. The constant refrain of the evils of old age is essential to remind us to live fully now so that the losses suffered due to old age can be viewed as vivid reminders of human finitude.

This line of thought and reflection is conspicuously absent from Vedic revelation and Upaniṣadic reflection.¹⁷ Buddhism is not content with a life style where the "facts" of birth, growth, old age and death are nonchalantly accepted as given. Their presence in human life cannot be simply passed over in silence. Canonical Buddhism accordingly directed its indignation against

¹⁷ Occasionally classical Hindu texts such as the epic Mahābhārata (12:137.58) do identify old age with suffering. In the above cited verse, for instance, a mysterious bird named Pūjanī discourses to a brahmin named Brahmadaṭṭa that suffering is old age, suffering is contact with the undesired and suffering is deprivation of a desired thing:

duḥkham jarā Brahmadaṭṭa duḥkham arthaviparyayo
duḥkhaścānistair samvāso duḥkham istavivogajam

the Vedic familism, expression of sexuality in the guise of a conjugal relationship and the brahmanical karma-oriented social ethics and philosophy (see BC 6:44-47).

The most characteristic and surprising expression of Buddhism in this period is the campaign against aging and old age which held a special terror to early Buddhism. It is likely that with the increasing proportion of old people in the population, the problem of old age attracted attention of the anxious monks.¹⁸ The mythical versions of the episode of the young Siddhārtha's awakening to the human condition, then, suggest some idea about the psychological temperament and anxious personality of the Buddha himself and others like him. It is a sensitive mind that detects the all-pervasiveness of sorrow in the old man, sick man and the dead man where others before him failed to see it. He was able to extract and extrapolate the subtle meaning underlying these common, everyday phenomena. His preoccupation with suffering originates in a metaphysical vision and existential condition of humankind.

¹⁸ Consider in this context the observations of Christopher Lasch (1978, 210), who identifies the irrational terror of old age and death with the emergence of the narcissistic personality which takes no interest in the future. Such individuals are dissatisfied with the traditional consolations of old age, the most important among which is the belief that future generations will in some sense carry on his/her work or life [compare with the Brāhmaṇa-inspired notion of horizontal immortality discussed in chapter five]. They reject as naive the faith or conviction that one lives on vicariously in one's children (or more broadly, in future generations) which thought reconciles one to the inevitable superseding--the central sorrow of old age, more harrowing even than loneliness.

That awareness may have been brought into a sharper focus to him in ca. 800 BCE by the changing political and economic conditions of his time. The Buddha's doctrine of suffering (duḥkhavāda) is a philosophical world-view symbolizing demographic, political and economic vicissitudes. As Eliade (1969, xvi) has pointed out, it is the human condition, and above all the temporality (and aging, shall we add?) of the human being that constitutes the central problem of Indian thought. India, therefore, has not been unaware of the relation between illusion, temporality, and human suffering as a "becoming" conditioned by the structures of temporality (ibid, xviii).

Anxiety, then, is the impelling basis of human existence. The Buddha sought a way out of this predicament by positing a theory and practice of spirituality that was erected on the denial and neutralization of the idea of self. The ego is the root of all human anxieties and fears (duḥkha). The Buddha was led to these conclusions, because he was dissatisfied with the Vedic ontology that he had inherited which took for granted the view that time was a kind of vessel in which events took place. Persons exist in this vessel as a substratum that subsists through time.

The Buddha found this analysis unconvincing, because it ignored the temporal, contingent aspect of human beings, resulting in the supposition that beings and time were inseparable. He argued that the belief in human existence as an immutable substance, separated from the progression of time (see

chapter five), was only a protective shield against anxiety resulting from the awareness of the inevitable human destiny.

There is no apparent causal relation nor perhaps any relation between the eight-fold spiritual discipline he proclaimed and the facts of aging, disease and death (jarā-vyādhī-marana). The only possible rational connection between these two may be the possible emergence of the psychological feeling of security and assurance resulting from the rejection of the duties and responsibilities as well as pleasures and comforts of the life of the householder. The Buddha argued that the uncertain and accidental character of death provides the justification of the passionate urgency with which spiritual liberation has to be worked out in young age before old age takes its inevitable toll.

This characteristically Buddhist stance is also clear from the response of the monk Nāgasena to King Milinda's query "how does he who orders his life aright realize nirvāṇa?"

He who orders his life aright grasps the truth as to the development of all things (samkhārāṇāṃ parattam sammāsaṭi) and when he is doing so he perceives therein birth, he perceives old age, he perceives disease, he perceives death. But he perceives not therein either happiness or bliss (dilemma #80, Rhys Davids 1969).

Within this mechanistic-sounding interpretation, human development and aging are seen as consisting of discrete elements. It features prominently in the Buddha's sermon on dependent co-arising which hypothesizes the relation of antecedent to consequent as the fundamental explanation of human

life and its development from birth through death. Human growth and aging is a continuous series in that it is reducible to or predictable from previous antecedents. From the moment of inception, aging is continuous with suffering and remains so till death.

With its emphasis on unique particulars (svalaksanas) rather than on universal sequences, life events including aging are understood as specific causes of specific events of specific outcomes. The task, accordingly, is to identify the cause-effect relations and the variables which mediate or interact with them

Early Buddhism, therefore, is relatively unconcerned with the collective or cultural factors surrounding the process of aging per se; although identified with suffering, aging does become the very *raison d'être* of the Buddha's life and mission. The age of the Buddha was replete with conflict between young and old. Those who endorsed the path proposed by the Buddha sought to transcend the preoccupation with retaining or regaining their youthful vitality and vigour in the manner of their Vedic predecessors. Rather, they longed to escape what they believed was transient and impermanent and of which they had internalized dread.

The Buddha was certainly interested in enjoying long life and satisfying desires if only in good health and in the absence of old age (see BC 4:86). This explains, in part, why he

refused to die though urged by Māra (the personification of death). As a mere process, aging is reducible to time which itself is a chimera and causes nothing. The same /general processes or mechanisms underlie apparent growth and decay of the body in its various phases. Thus, as a focus of attention, aging deserves to be relegated to minor status. There is really no need to explain aging and differences caused by aging. The task at hand is to eliminate aging.

Consequently, any doctrinal discussion of age-specific social duties (āśramadharma and svadharma) is almost non-existent in the Pali Canon. Because, prima facie, these texts are intended for the benefit of the members of the religion of renouncers who have left society and its norms behind them. To be sure, a Buddhist layman (upāsika) or a laywoman (upāsikā), who has not yet left society behind him/her, does have duties deriving from his/her station in life--whether he/she be king, queen or outcast--but these are not duties qua being a Buddhist, that is, these duties are not a function of the Buddhist dogma.

Hindu Perspective

After the demise of King Aśoka, the Maurya dynasty weakened and the royal support for Buddhism also declined. When the Śuṅga dynasty replaced the Mauryas, the stage was set for the revival of brahmanical orthodoxy (ca. 200 BCE). The horse-sacrifices (aśvamedha yajñas) of the Śuṅga king Puṣyamitra and related gifts

to the brahmins replaced the charities which Aśoka had lavished on monks and their monasteries. This return to orthodoxy also affected linguistic, social and cultural fields. The rivalry between the newly invigorated brahmin orthodoxy and the still influential Buddhism must have forced rival thinkers to modify and innovate their religious and social ideas in order to win and maintain popular support. In the process principal tenets of the two contestants acted and reacted dialectically upon each other till some sort of a middle ground tacitly accepted by both emerged ¹⁹

Consequently, as far as the brahmanical side was concerned, after much ferment and speculation, the reification of ideas regarding the āśramas came about so that by the time the influential and authoritative Manu Smṛti (100 BCE-100 CE) was compiled, the ideal framework of organized life in terms of age and class specific duties (varṇāśramadharmā) was formalized with the four life stages identified as celibate studenthood (brahmācārīn), householder (gṛhastha), hermit (vānaprastha) and wandering ascetic (yati) (MS 6:87,137).²⁰

¹⁹ In the opinion of Olivelle (1978, 27-36), the brahmins had never felt comfortable with the element of choice introduced by Sūtrakaras such as Gāyama which prompted the Smṛtikaras to revise the Dharma Sūtra model of the stages of life (āśrama). In the redefined, classical āśrama model, the choice is eliminated and the āśramas are related to definite periods of a man's life. In this scheme one has as much freedom in choosing an āśrama as one has in growing old.

²⁰ In an interesting note to Dilemma #71 (1969, 127-128) Rhys Davids points out that it is always taken for granted that the Buddhists were reformers, as opposed to the brahmins who wanted to run still in the ancient groves. But there is another

The awareness and the need for structuring the steadily extending life span in terms of institutions, norms, roles and values to deal with them had already begun (as pointed out above) in the Dharma Sūtra period. However, no age-specific stages with clear boundaries for them had been demarcated. It was only when the Dharma Śāstra texts began to be written that interest in the "middle years" as a distinct segment of adult life arose out of the need to differentiate social, psychological and spiritual concerns of "middle" age from "old" age.

The social and cultural conditions of the beginning of the Common Era contributed to sharpening and demarcating the boundaries between various age-specific stages. In gerontological terms, two of the most important changes were the increasing association of function with age and the formation of segregated, age-based peer groups (for instance, education with childhood). This segregation by age occurred first in the brahmin class and was only later (perhaps grudgingly) extended to other classes.²¹

In later centuries (ca. 300 CE on), the Purāṇas tried to side of the question that has been entirely overlooked. Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads may be seen as reform following reform. Buddhists are to brahmins much more like socialists (New Democrats in the Canadian context) to liberals, than like Liberals to Conservatives. But rather than working out a totally new system the brahmins grafted new reforms on the old roots surviving underground.

²¹ This is evident from the controversy raised by different commentators around the relevant passage from the Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa regarding whether or not the Kṣatriyas, as members of the broader twice-born (dvija) class, had a right to go through the third stage of life, that is, the forest hermit (vānaprasth-āśrama).

distinguish additional phases in adult life, but it is doubtful if they were ever developed into heuristically useful concepts. The Nārada Purāṇa (2:61.55b-56a), for instance, observes that it is not the soul but the gross elements (constituting the physical body) that attain the seventh stage (old age) before ceasing to exist. Similarly, Nīlakaṇṭha, a medieval commentator on the Mahābhārata has identified the following ten stages of human life

- 1) The stay in the womb
- 2) Birth
- 3) Infancy up to the age of five
- 4) Childhood up to twelve years
- 5) Stage of pre-puberty (pauganda)
- 6) Youth
- 7) Old age
- 8) Decrepitude
- 9) Suspension of breath
- 10) Death (see Tagare, 1981 2:903).

From the text of the Manu Smṛti it is clear that old age by then had come to be recognized as a specific period of adulthood with a formal ritualized beginning at the age of seventy-five. This stage was also institutionalized by the prescription of appropriate norms, duties and rites of passage. A sizeable portion in each Dharma Śāstra manual, accordingly, is devoted to a structural-functional explanation of this human relationship between long life and old age in terms of the stages of the life model whereby the entire system of life comes to be structured on the triad of class (varṇa), duties (dharma) and stages (āśrama).

The Upaniṣadic and the Buddhist insights were accommodated in these Smṛti texts as developmental devices whereby the other-

worldly ethics and ambitions (mokṣa and nirvāṇa) preached therein were harnessed and harmonized as age-specific norms and duties to be taken up in the later part of life with this worldly ethics encapsulated in the concept of dharma. This synthesis was worked out on the basis of the hermeneutic principle of the three debts already in vogue in Vedic circles:

- 1) Knowledge given by the seers (ṛṣi)
- 2) Gift of life received from the ancestors (pitṛ)
- 3) Gifts received from the deities (devatās).

These debts are to be repaid by 1) learning as a student (brahmacārin), 2) procreating a son (gṛhastha) and 3) offering prescribed sacrifices (yajña) in each of the first three āśramas. In this manner, the authors of the Smṛti texts (Smṛtikāras) tempered the excessive zeal of the Vedic this-worldliness and the ascetic other-worldliness by predicating aspirations of both as age-related tasks spread evenly over the entire life span. In other words, the Vedic world-lust and the ascetic world-disgust are replaced with world-concern for planned and ordered growth and development.

The Kāmasūtra, a text attributed to Vātsyāyana and extolling the satiation of desires, was compiled at the height of the Indian Golden Age (400 CE). It begins by providing a tightly knit, clear and explicit age-specific distribution of the first three goals of life (puruṣārthas) interlocked and nested in their respective āśramas based on the Dharma Śāstras.²² The commentator

²² śatāyurvai puruṣo vibhajya kālam anyonya anubandhyam parasparasya anupadyatakam trivargam seveta (KS. 1:2.1-4).

in his gloss on these verses succinctly summarizes the this-worldly attitude of the Kāmasūtra in these terms:

Let one enjoy or give unto whatever is produced--in its proper time and age--discharging duties and acquiring wealth (dharma and artha) in childhood, satiating desires (kāma), dharma and artha in youth and dharma, artha and kāma in one's old age until one becomes exhausted (asāmarthyam cet tāvat).²³

Allusion to the direct, functional link as posited between age and a particular sphere of activity is also provided (from a perspective different from that of the Kāmasutra) by Śaṅkara while commenting on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (6:2 15). Śaṅkara observes that while the householder is bound to karma (karmasambaddha), the hermit and the ascetic are bound to the forest (āraṇyasambaddha). Similarly, Yājñavalkya's announcement to Maitreyī of his projected departure to the forest as recorded in (BAU 2:4.1) is paraphrased by Śaṅkara as:

Desirous of going beyond the order of the householder...I will break off the bond [with the

²³ These very ideas appear as pūrvapakṣa, (premise to be refuted) in the Buddhacarita of Aśvaghōṣa. King Sreṇya of Magadha is disturbed by young Siddhārtha's resolve to abandon the world. He, therefore, tries to persuade Siddhārtha by reiterating the traditional Vedic teaching:

One is able to realize dharma in one's old age after it has rendered one incapable of indulging in the passions of desire. It is for this reason that youth is said to be conducive to satisfying desire, middle age to acquiring wealth and old age to realizing dharma.

household] (gṛhasthyāt sthānāt āśramāt ūrdhvam gantum
icchan sambandhasya vicchedam karavāni).²⁴

In the Upadeśa Sāhasrī, a didactic tract again attributed to Śaṅkara (ca. 700 CE), the teacher--when instructing the disciple on the relationship between the various age-specific sacraments (samskāras) and the four stages of life--points out that by the sacrament/initiation of the tying of the sacred thread (upanayana samskārayogena), one acquires the title of the chaste student (brahmacārisamjñā). By the sacrament of the tying of the (husband's) body to the wife (patnīsam-yoga samskārayogena), one acquires the title of the householder (gṛhasthasamjñā). The same body acquires the title of the hermit (tāpasasamjñā) by the sacrament of the forest (vanasya samskāreṇa). Finally the self-same body acquires the title of the wandering ascetic (parivrāṭ samjñā) by the sacrament of the disengagement from acts (kriyānivṛtti nimittasamskāreṇa).

Towards the middle of the first millennium, classical Hinduism (Purāṇic, Epic and Tāntric) came to recognize old age as horrible and wicked and accepted it as an inevitable and integral

²⁴ The precedent for this line of thinking is already established in the Yajurveda. Following Desai (1967, 66-67), it may be argued that the connotation and significance of Agni with reference to the sacrifice to be performed changes with the age of the performer. In the householder stage, Agni is a personal deity who is a divine friend and the guest of the householder (yajamāna). Agni is present at these sacrifices performed to acquire material prosperity. But in the stage of the hermit the sacrifice performed is called viśvatodhāra (upholder of the universe). This elderly sacrificer has no yearnings for material pleasures. He yearns for the divine wealth of enduring knowledge. The conception of Agni has changed, accordingly, for him from being a personal deity to the universal mind as all pervading consciousness (brahman).

part of the human condition. In this manner it tried partially to reconcile the lived experience of old age with the fundamental Vedic desire for a healthy, happy and long life. The Dharma Śāstras such as the Manu Smṛti or the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, written in verse, are much more extensive than the older Dharma Sūtras and consecrate a larger number of pages to the elucidation of rules and norms of a juridical, this-worldly character (vyavahāra) in addition to the brief discussion of the duties of the classes and stages.²⁵

Thus, chapter six of the Manu Smṛti, dealing with the last two stages (vānaprastha and yati), is the shortest of them all with just ninety-seven verses with the final two verses reiterating the eulogy of the superiority of the stage of the householder. Anyone who would seek to become a hermit or an ascetic without paying the triple debt, that is without living out the order of the householder, is threatened with hell (MS 6:35,27).²⁶ But according to Manu as soon as he observes the birth of his grandson or when his hair turns grey, the householder should distribute his property among his children and

²⁵ Gautama Dharma Sūtra, perhaps the oldest law-book, has barely a page on the rules of the ideal-type it calls bhikṣu. As against this, the rules of behaviour for the Buddhist monk as compiled in the Pali Canon and dating from roughly the same period, fills three volumes in translation.

²⁶ The description and duties of the four stages are succinctly presented in the Mahābhārata in a discourse by the sage Parāśara to King Janaka:

adhītya vedānstapasā brahmacārī vaiñāṇśaktyā
sanisriyeha pañcavanam gacchet puruṣo dharma-
kāmahśreyaścitvā sthāpayitvā svavamsam (MB 12:286.30).

with or without his wife renounce the world and enter the forest in order to undertake the prescribed tasks of the third order (vānaprastha) (MS 6:2). The vānaprastha is explained as one who is established in the forest (vane pratisthita iti vānaprastha). His other epithet is vaikhāṇasa (Govinda's gloss on BDS 2:6.16).

Furthermore, the householder's key duty (dharma) is the practice of austerity (tapas) (these are said to be of five kinds) so as to divest his body and mind of all attachments and passions so that there does not remain in him even the remote possibility of the appearance of pride (see Vijñāneśvara's gloss Mitākṣarā on the Yājñavalkya Smṛti (4:56,57)

Then, with his body rendered parched by the practice of harsh austerities, he should contemplate on retiring from the stage of the hermit and enter the final stage of the wandering ascetic (yati). Baudhāyana (BDS 2.10 6) states that renunciation (saṁnyāsa) is advised when one has passed beyond the age of seventy (saptatyordhvaṁ saṁnyāsaṁ upadiśanti). It then describes the formal ritual ceremony to enter the stage of the wandering ascetic (BDS 10:17,27). The Yājñavalkya Smṛti (3:4.57) advises such an individual to stop the performance of the fire sacrifices and internalize them in the self to mark his entry into the order of the ascetic from that of the hermit.

Verses 6:76,77 in the Manu Smṛti are intended to cultivate disgust and revulsion about the body in the mind of the yati.²⁷

²⁷ In like manner, the Viṣṇu Smṛti (96:27) admonishes the wandering ascetic (saṁnyāsi/yati) to reflect upon the destruction of beauty by old age.

He is to regard the [aging] body as 'a latrine-hut...[realizing which]...he shall discard the body which is the abode of material substances, that is, a product of earth, in the form of fat, urine, semen and blood. Such an entity cannot be the abode of the self. Verse 6:78 further develops the figure of the body spoken of as a hut in the form of a simile of the bird leaving the tree. But this does not mean that the body should be deliberately killed off, for instance, by entering into the fire. The idea, rather, is that one should not persist in one's attachment to the body. One should let the body fall off by itself by the exhaustion of the karmic residuum, just as the tree on the bank of a river falls off. However, if one has realized that inner light and withdrawn from all manifestations of illusion, then one may voluntarily drop off the material body in the manner of the bird taking off from a tree.

Ideally, then, such an individual has attuned his mind and body to be receptive to spiritual enlightenment. He must not engage in any kind of productive activity. As the Manu Smṛti (6:26,29,31) states, such a person is to wander alone, without any companion, fully realizing that the solitary individual who neither forsakes nor is forsaken, attains the desired end. He shall neither tend the ritual fire nor maintain a permanent dwelling. Indifferent to everything, firm of purpose, he shall concentrate and meditate on brahman.

By not injuring any creatures, by detaching the senses (from their objects of enjoyment), by the performance of rites

prescribed in the Vedas, and by rigorously practicing austerities, the state of brahman is reached even in this world. This reformulation of the model of the wandering ascetic (yati) is noteworthy in that wandering and begging is the final duty in life and as such equivalent to the highest aspiration in life mokṣa.²⁸ But at the same time, exclusive emphasis on any single goal in life (puruṣārtha) is studiously avoided. The Manu Smṛti, in fact, ends its discussion of the section on the wandering ascetic (yati) by once again reiterating that the stage of the householder is the best. Though they institutionalize it, the Smṛtikāras never tire of reminding us that the householder is the source (yoni) of all other orders feeding and sustaining them all.

Winternitz traces the etymological meaning of the term āśrama to signify "religious exertion" on the part of the Śramaṇas and observes that the brahmins named even a life of householder as āśrama so that, through this designation, they

²⁸ Coomaraswamy has traced the stereotype of the wandering ascetic to the enigma of the sun as presented in the legend of King Hariścandra and his son Rohita in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (7:13-18) where it is stated:

Kali [Age] his lot who lieth down, Dvāpara [Age] his who would feign cast off, Tretā [Age] his who standeth up, Kṛta [Age] he reacheth who marcheth--keep on going, keep on going (caraiva, caraiva) (quoted in Johnson 1980, 98-99).

Johnson also adds that in the age of the Brāhmaṇas wandering was an innovative spiritual path. Wandering strivers (Śramaṇas), first mentioned in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, produced the Upaniṣads, early Buddhism and Jainism (ibid).

placed the householder's life style in line, and on par with the other three orders (Upadhyaya 1979, 190).²⁹

The focus of the āśrama model, nevertheless, is the twice-born (dvija) male. Members of the Śūdrā class and women of all the classes do not come under its purview. The Manu Smṛti deals with the duties of women at the end of chapter five after discussing various precepts regarding food. This would drastically reduce the scope of the model of the life stages. The apparent absence of women from the age-homogeneous organization may be attributed to the practice of integrating women into domestic and familial roles. The kinship ties affecting women are designed to stress vertical family bonds rather than the horizontal bonds of age.

The āśrama model, it may be argued, posits the ties of age as a balance to kin bonds. The bond developed with a fellow male hermit in the forest is designed to substitute or replace the bond of kinship developed in the context of the family. While kinship ipso facto is perceived to be a source of conflict, the organization by age is viewed as a harmonious counterweight.

The formal organization by age is presented as a channel for avoidance or management of conflicts stemming from the parent-

²⁹ Etymologically āśrama is derived from a + the verb śram (toil or strive). Its cognate substantives include śrama (toiling or striving) and śramana (striver and by extension ascetic). Āśrama would, therefore, mean place where one strives, exerts. With this etymology in mind, Young (1981) surmises that in the compound grhasthāśrama the original etymological meaning of āśrama is dispensed with to protect the fundamental human and Vedic institution of marriage as inscribed in the substantive grhastha.

child knots in the rope of generational succession. From that perspective, the age-homogeneous residence of the aging adult as a hermit in the forest is likely to serve as a tension deflector. Spatial separation from home is likely to have provided insulation from the worries of succession. It is for these reasons that women who were expected to stay within the domestic sphere, therefore, were also less likely to participate in formal age groups such as that of the student, hermit or the ascetic wherein men's lives and duties would be played out in public arena and where principles other than kinship would operate. Aging, therefore, does not seem to have had the same meaning or involved the same circumstances for men as for women.

The great difference in the reproductive potential of the two sexes also seems to play an important role. While men are deemed to be capable of siring offspring when they are well into their seventies or eighties (see chapter seven dealing with the rejuvenation and revitalization therapies), after menopause a woman is no longer considered to be a person with sexuality. In many ways the status of an aged woman is not unlike that of a pre-pubescent girl. Both are relatively free of many repressive sex-taboos and regulations imposed on the young and middle aged women. As she begins to take on the signs and qualities of senescence--wrinkled skin, greying hair, etc. there is a noticeable change in her manner of approach to others. Essentially aging brings out (and permits) relaxation and warmth

in her social interaction with old and young alike of both sexes according to our texts.

Symbolically, this is reflected in the fact that she no longer has to lower her gaze when in the presence of males. But though more highly esteemed with advancing age, a woman is always subordinate to the male, except perhaps during the early socialization stages of her sons. Again, directly or indirectly, her role is invariably associated with sexual reproduction and food production and preparation. To that extent certain age-specific norms for women (strīdharmā, patnīdharmā) are closely tied to equivalent male norms.

Occasionally, woman is eulogised as the root and support of the order of the householder (grhasthadharma), which in itself is praised as the source of all the āśramas. Like a root, the wife sustains and nourishes the householder and his obligations, which entail sustaining and nourishing all the members belonging to the remaining three orders. The order of the householder, thus, is the very pulse of the orthodoxy which can be so only with the co-participation of the housewife (MS 3:78).³⁰

³⁰ One cannot say that elderly women fared any better in the Buddhist lay society or the religious order (sangha). As can be inferred from the Monastic Code for the monks and nuns (Vinaya), the nuns had only limited scope as preachers. They occupied, according to the letter of the Vinaya, the position of novices with respect to the monks, however senior they were in age to him. This endorses the generally held view that Buddhism acquiesced to the androcentric orientation of the larger Indian society and did not seriously challenge the prevailing social norms regarding women.

The Āśrama roles as envisaged in the Smṛti works appear to be normative, ideal constructs created by intentional intensification or exaggeration of a cluster of traits and by the synthesis of a number of discrete phenomena based on individual characteristics. In their conceptual purity, therefore, the ideal role models of the student, householder, hermit or ascetic would not be approximated in reality. This is evident from Śaṅkara's gloss on the Brahma Sūtra (3:4.40) that the dharma (norms) of an individual are determined on the basis of the relevant revealed injunctions (Śruti), not on the basis of the capacity, ability, predilection or the expertise of an individual for successfully carrying out a particular duty. It would, therefore, be hazardous to imagine social reality through the precepts laid down for various orders.

It is not, therefore, surprising that there is no evidence that the theory of Āśrama ever became a total and practical reality--that is, that any considerable number of the twice-born (dvija) or even the brahmins among them, for that matter, actually carried out the tasks of the stages in the course of the ideally prescribed duration and in the prescribed order. The number of such persons must have been small. Many were content to spend their last years in semi-retirement in a small hut erected not far from the habitation of their family members. This practice is legitimated in the Manu Smṛti under the category of

vedasamnyāsa, an ideal which, strictly speaking, lies outside the āśrama scheme.³¹

It is likely that the optional model of a semi-retired elderly male was more popular among the Kṣatriyas. As rulers, ministers and generals who had disengaged from active duties in old age, they settled into a more quiet life style in a modest retreat usually situated within the confines of a palace or a mansion they previously possessed.³² As such they would be readily available as consultants when called upon by the younger, inexperienced members of the family in charge of worldly affairs

Reappraisal of the Āśrama Model

Our survey of the relevant texts suggests that from around 500 BCE Buddhism sought to replace the then prevailing Vedic ideal of life and culture (to that extent it differed from the similar Upaniṣadic critique from within the Vedic tradition) and almost succeeded in that endeavour during the reign of Aśoka (ca.200 BCE). But the brahmins mounted a spirited counter

³¹ Bāṇa in his Kādambarī, identifies such persons as grhamuṇi or bhavanatāpasa. These were householders pursuing the norms of the hermits or the wandering mendicants. According to Agrawala (1969, 30), this was a new ideal that first appeared in the Gupta age. Such persons were also known as Vaikhānasa and belonged to the Bhāgavata sect.

³² In the Raghuvamśa, when prince Aja is reduced to tears at the thought of his aging father, King Raghu, turning a hermit, the latter relents and consents to retire to a modest hut on the outskirts of the city (RV 8:10-14).

offensive of their own and eventually gained the upper hand by reformulating the Vedic principles of ideal life and by accommodating the Buddhist ideas on renunciation. The Smṛti literature and ideals may, therefore, be taken to represent the consummation of the combined brahmin and Śramaṇa views on the philosophy and culture of life.

On the practical side the Dharma Śāstra's consolidation and endorsement of the āśrama model meant the triumph and continuity of the original, positive Vedic ideal of long, healthy and this-worldly life style tempered by a good dose of detachment. It is not clear whether the Buddhists ever developed a similar social philosophy of "stages of life" (varṇāśramadharmā) for the benefit of the lay Buddhists. There is, however, evidence to suggest that the life of the monks and nuns in the monasteries was organized and graded according to age.

Wayman (1984, 48ff), after scrutinizing the available relevant evidence, concludes that the argument that the Buddhist pabbajā (going forth) resembles the Hindu hermit (vānaprastha) stage and the full ordination of the Buddhist monk/nun (upasampadā) is equivalent to attaining the stage of the wandering ascetic (sannyāsa) of the Hindus, is not valid. He points out that the Buddhists did not recognize the requirement to be a householder. He therefore takes the Buddhist novice as equivalent to the Hindu celibate student (brahmachārin) and the fully ordained monk/nun to be roughly equivalent to the forest-hermit.

With the disappearance of Buddhism as a social philosophy in India by about 1,200 CE, the āśrama model emerged as the dominant ideal of life and culture and even today most Indians are familiar with its basic postulates and tacitly endorse them. For this reason, it would be instructive and relevant to provide a reappraisal and an evaluation of the meaning and significance of aging as it is anchored in the Indian psyche from the classical times onwards.

The basic presupposition of the Dharma Śāstras is that the world of human beings is living and active, deriving its meaning from its organic wholeness and cosmic identity. The human organism, reflection in miniature of the cosmic organism, is an active and growing entity, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Organic synthesis rather than cold philosophical reflection on discrete, physical entities (skandhas see chapter four) as in Buddhism is taken as the guiding principle of the theory of aging.

It is held that although efficient causes may have effect on various quantitative and qualitative changes on the body and the mind, the fundamental causation of aging is teleological. That is, though destructive and harmful at the physical level, the change engendered by the aging process works for the better at the metaphysical level of the self set against the backdrop of the law of karma, the doctrine of samsāra and the three-fold theory of guṇa nature (see chapter four). One ripens, matures and grows progressively from the first student (brahmacarya) stage

through the householder (grhastha) stage etc. to the final stage of the ascetic.

The Buddhist mechanistic model of aging as noted above stresses the analysis of the life span as a discontinuous, discrete flow of unique moments and seeks to explain the life span as a result of the relation of antecedent to consequent (krama). Life events are seen as potential stressors, as a source of suffering. In fact, aging as a visible image of the discrete, flowing moments is suffering.

The Hindu Smṛtikāras, therefore, are careful to steer clear of both the negative and the false, positive visualizations of aging. Instead, they struggle to posit what a genuinely positive meaning of aging ought to be. They realized that both the Vedic and the Buddhist views on aging were limiting. While the former hopelessly overvalued it, the latter went to the other extreme. For the negative view, realities and facts of human aging spell the doom of the human being; for the stay ever-young-and-healthy Vedic view of aging such realities and facts are non-existent.

The Smṛtikāras, therefore, sought to map out a middle ground where human growth is to be appreciated as being coeval with aging and as occurring from the moment of conception till death.³³ They recognized, it may be argued, that aging in human

³³ The Yājñavalkya Smṛti (3:3.142) explicitly links, with the help of an appropriate metaphor, advancing old age with an increasing capacity for knowledge of brahman:

Sweet juice already exists in an unripe cucumber. It is

beings reflects diverse changes at the physical and psychological levels which can be catalogued and labeled (as the different names for different stages suggest) and readily distinguished. The wooden chair, too, changes and ages with the person sitting in it, but it happens ever so slowly. Compared to the diversified changes that take place in the life span available to humans, this change is monotonous.

The early Buddhist metaphysics, as documented in the Abhidharma, seems to have failed to take this fact into account, equating the human being to a chair by not distinguishing between the two aging patterns. To the Smṛtikāras, to grow to maturity means to learn to accept the real human predicament. The purpose of self-reflection is, they argue, not, first of all, to deny or confirm the Buddhist claims that there is no being, that to become is to age and that all aging is suffering. One must not deny the fact of aging as characteristic of existence; rather, one must devise ways to cope with this unique dynamic feature of the human condition.

On the other hand, they also recognize that one cannot grow indefinitely either, as the Vedic Samhitās had proclaimed. The blossoming life, like the morning dew drops, cannot last forever. Humans must be consigned to decay and the eventual falling apart of the different constituents of the body in death. The Vedic seers had entreated the gods for a long life without caring to

perceived only when the vegetable ripens. Similarly, the knowledge of brahman, which already exists in the unripe self, may manifest itself with advancing years (see also Ysm 3: 3.141).

reflect upon the travails of aging that inevitably accompany late life. One must now develop a clear appreciation of late life that is inseparable from the phenomenon of old age, of development and aging as inextricably bound in an organized complexity.

As the instigator of development and growth, aging precipitates significant structural changes spread over three or four phases or time periods. This development, in the Smṛti view, is partly continuous and partly discontinuous in that future development is not completely reducible to previous phases as the Buddhists are prone to do; yet future growth potential is predictable from the past phases

In other words, growth in the householder phase is not reducible to that in the student phase; but the potential of growth that would take place in the hermit or wanderer phase is, at least partially, predictable from the growth accomplished in the student phase. Despite their unique identities, the āśramas and the associated values, goals and duties are not mutually inconsistent. Further, the succeeding āśrama is not necessarily superior to the preceding one in terms of associated values or goals. Human aging, therefore, is understood to be goal directed. The emphasis, however, is on the universal typology of growth and development taking place simultaneously with advancing age rather than on individualized and particularized aspects of aging and development.

From this Smārta (adjective of Smṛti) perspective then, life events are to be understood as components of an organized

complexity rather than as specific causes. Events in a particular life are important, but examination of them in isolation will not explain the nature of aging; one must focus on the underlying human structure in which individual life events are reflected.

The āśrama model posits that epistemological, emotional and ethical developments in the human being occur during the entire life span conveniently segmented into four stages. Manu, Yājñavalkya and other Smṛtikāras (perhaps in the manner of Plato and Schopenhauer) consider the highest stage of human development to be of epistemological order and attribute it to old age. It is the aged ascetic (yati, samnyāsī) who is in a position, at least potentially, to attain that true insight into the nature of the ultimate truth (brahman). Advancing years bring with them increases in the understanding of this metaphysical truth spelled out in terms of the knowledge of brahman (brahma-jñāna).

It is only in the second half of life that a follower of the Vedic view (vaiddika) develops cognitions that meaningfully relate tasks accomplished in the early years of life with those to be accomplished in the later half. The cognitive shift that usually takes place toward the midpoint in the life span alone facilitates the true understanding and ability to effectuate the transition from the householder stage bound to works (karma) to the hermit and/or wanderer phase bound to knowledge (jñāna).

The āśrama model thus sees the later years of life as an integrative period continuous with the early years in some ways and yet distinct from them in others. The task of meaningfully

integrating and relating one's life as it has been lived and the final acceptance of one's own death are specific concerns of later existence. To deal with them is the great task in old age. In terms of the goals in life (puruṣārtha) to be strived for, it is essentially different from the tasks of infancy, youth and middle age where the concern is with fulfilling other ends in life, that is, dharma, artha and kāma, which, following Edgerton³⁴ may be described as the ordinary norms compared to the extraordinary norm of spiritual liberation (mokṣa) to be attained in the final years of life.

The norm of mokṣa makes relatively higher demands of a metaphysical and ethical nature on its aging practitioner (hermit) beyond those required of the young student and the middle-aged householder. The philosophy and practice of abandonment implicit in the norm of mokṣa is negative or disengaging compared to the norms of artha and kāma. But as Herman suggests (1976, 270), it is the direct consequence of a metaphysical understanding realized in later years. What the elderly ascetic learns in the course of the final āśrama is to draw the existential consequences ensuing from this deepened understanding.³⁵

³⁴ Quoted in Herman 1976, 267.

³⁵ Schopenhauer seems to have captured the Hindu view of life in a very homely metaphor. He compares life to a fabric or piece of embroidery, of which, during the first half of life, a person gets a sight of the right [correct] side, and during the second half, of the reverse [incorrect, wrong]. The wrong side is not so pretty as the right, but it is the more instructive: it shows the way in which the threads have been worked and sewed

To that extent, the stand taken by the Smṛtikāras in promoting the ideal āśrama model vis-à-vis the early Buddhist view of ideal life style and its principle task of attaining nirvāṇa appears at once more realistic as well as ambitious in that it prescribes with equal care and consideration the tasks to be accomplished in one's early as well as later years. This stand is further supported by an adequate analysis of various functionally age-related aspects of life which are evenly spread over the entire life cycle. In addition, it is also harmonized with the view that the psychodynamic unfolding of the potential of the mind is a function of advancing age.³⁶

Creatively incorporating relevant insights both from the Upaniṣads and Buddhism, the āśrama model focuses on the innate need as well as desire on the part of sensitive and attuned individuals to fulfill human potential through striving for liberation (mokṣa). Human life has, it is consciously recognized, an implicit goal and sense of direction to achieve its full potential. Our bodily sense is a life-long anchor as well as a pointer to the self within and its awareness.

That awareness has to be amplified by reducing our concerns with the gross body. In the second half of life, therefore, one

together ("Ages of Life" in McKee 1982).

³⁶ Schopenhauer points out that the first forty years of life furnish the text, while the remaining thirty supply the commentary. Without it we are unable to understand aright the true sense and coherence of the text, together with the moral it contains, and all the subtle application of which it admits (in McKee 1982).

must reduce pre-occupation with the gross body by cultivating the feeling of disgust (jugupsā) toward it (see chapters four and five). The emphasis, thus, is on both becoming and growth. The continuity of life is predicated on the sequential fulfillment of different ends (puruṣārtha) changing with age. Implicit in this is the intentionality and projection into the future. This, in turn, is based on the realistic acceptance of temporality and the relationship and continuity between its phases conceived as the past, present and future (see chapter five for a more detailed discussion of these modes of time and their relation to the aging process).

The Smṛti texts do not make any reference at all to the series of losses attributed to aging and documented ad nauseam in the early Buddhist texts. The Smṛtikāras readily admit that aging in its wake does unleash such losses in every member of the body and the mind, but they also stress that these "losses" of the later years also have the potential for unfolding new creative developments in the person's selfhood. One must, in fact, rejoice in the realization that with age the bonds of the embodied self (dehin) are coming loose, creating favorable conditions for the eventual liberation in the near future. The focus, therefore, must not be on the vain and futile attempts to deny or avoid aging but rather on the growing awareness of the widening opportunities for self-realization offered by the aging process.

They also discount the Buddhist claim that dispassion (vairāgya) is the general personality disposition that can be

easily cultivated so that the virtues of poverty, continence, homelessness, and solitude can be developed by anybody at any stage in one's life (preferably in youth).³⁷ Instead, they stress that personality formation and behaviour are situational and age-specific, evolving gradually over the entire life span from experiences of socialization and roles beginning with the first āśrama to culminate in the final.

As if anticipating developments in the modern humanistic psychology (Maslow 1970, 38), it is argued that the desire and motivation for attaining liberation will only be felt after basic needs for physiological well-being, love and belonging have been met. The hermeneutic concepts of the three debts and the four ends in life are envisaged for just that purpose. Since the embodied individual self is inextricably bound with other embodied selves, fulfillment of the basic needs for affection and affiliation are, it is believed, an essential ground for future liberation understood as self-realization.

The Smṛtikāras detect a logical inconsistency in the Buddhist teaching, which conceptually appeals to self-realization, while at the same time striking at the foundation of

³⁷ There are occasional statements in the Pali Canon that go against this claim. The "Mahāsāropama Sutta" of the Majjhima Nikāya records the following observation attributed to the Buddha:

There are certain youths who outwardly being allured by the life of monks leave the household life. As monks they receive presents, esteem and repute. They become puffed up and disparage others. Thus they grow remiss and become prey to ills (MN 1:192-197).

self-hood in family, society and culture. With the Buddha, the purpose in this life is clearly stated in terms of the self-legislating individual. Ethical justification of one's quest for spiritual liberation is to be found within one's own self in the application of one's own reason. From the contemporary Vedic socio-ethical point of view, this was not an acceptable ideal, however praiseworthy it may have been from a purely egotistic point of view. And unless it can be represented as an ideal in some way superior to the prevailing Vedic ideal, the Buddhist model of the self-centered "young renunciate" is without relevance. Because it amounted to what Coomaraswamy has called the practice of "premature revulsion" with the body, family and society in that it was to be cultivated in young age.³⁸

It may be argued that this practice must have created serious problems of a psychological and social nature in many of the young disciples of the Buddha. Forcing oneself prematurely to a life of a meditating mendicant in the forest before the youthful desires and needs have been successfully fulfilled must have generated disturbing and distracting psychological and familial problems. Āśvaghosa has forcefully depicted them (albeit as the premise to be refuted) in his portrayals of the young Siddhārtha and Nanda in the Buddhacarita and Saundarananda

³⁸ Quoted in Herman 1976, 218.

respectively.³⁹ Young Nanda, for instance, resents his being ordained, against his will, by the Buddha.

Citing instances from history and legend, he affirms the power of youth and love and justifies his resolve to return to married family life:

Therefore while my guru [The Buddha] is away begging, I will discard the mendicant's robe and return home presently from here [The monastery]; for the person who carries the noble signs with wavering mind and confused understanding and with impaired judgment, has nothing to expect in life and has no part even in this world. (Saundarananda 7:52).

Here one must take into consideration the legacy of the pre-Buddhist notions of renunciation, the Buddha's own reformulation of that ideal and the practice of renunciation as institutionalized in the Smārta āśrama model. Only then may one be able to appreciate and understand the moral dilemma faced by Nanda as it is depicted in the Saundarananda. The Smṛtikāra would not see any moral difficulty in the ideal of renunciation per se, since he responds to a recognized and much lauded practice of the pan-Indian social ethos. But he would locate it securely within the Vedic this-worldly ethos.

By contrast, the self of the young Buddhist monk (bhikṣu) or the nun (bhikṣuṇī) must be projected into his/her behaviour

³⁹ In the Buddhacarita (1:48,51) we come across King Śuddhodana, who has recently become the father of Siddhārtha, day-dreaming that Siddhārtha will retire to forest in his old age, because [the condition of] old age, like austerities, helps develop equanimity and renders one nonchalant.

towards the lay householders, who sustain them. Accordingly, they must be willing to pay a high price for opting for the spiritual quest in youth. The episode of Nanda is selected by Aśvaghoṣa to dramatize the need and reason as perceived by the Buddha, for abandoning the familial, social and ethical responsibilities in young age for greater self-development and realization of nirvāṇa. Membership into the samgha would make him oblivious to the demands made upon him by the older surviving segments of his society--his family, city and republic.

The Smṛtikāras, by contrast, view renunciation in young age as antithetical to world acceptance and not as a life-ideal functioning at the same level as those of 1) teaching, 2) administration, 3) agriculture and commerce, and 4) service prescribed respectively to the four classes viz. brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. This is consistent with their basic position that renunciation is compatible with and sequential to attainment of the goals of dharma, artha and kāma. With the Smṛtikāras, one must rather rehearse the techniques of spiritual liberation such as meditation and its theoretical underpinnings from a qualified teacher in one's first quarter of life, reflect on it, prepare and purify one's body and mind in the second and third quarters of life, and then actively seek liberation in the final quarter after having successfully discharged the three debts (see above).

This ideal proceeds on the hypothesis that the degree of adaptation and adjustment that one must develop in old age

depends on one's earlier life experience, especially the degree of relative isolation and physical deprivation (in terms of comfort and pleasure) that is expected of the seeker of liberation, whether in the Buddhist or the brahmin scheme of things to which he was exposed and trained in the formative period of early life (brahmacaryāśrama).

To recapitulate, the śrama model, which emerges as a compromise between the two competing views (Śramaṇa and brahmin) on the meaning of life, posits a direct relation between age and the organization of social life guided by ethical reasoning. In gerontological terms, there is an attempt to avoid both the gerontophilia and gerontophobia discernible in the Vedic and the Buddhist texts respectively.⁴⁰ The ethic of Dharma Śāstra assumes aging as a process running parallel to the developing self whose intellectual capacities and ethical sensibilities are expected to grow, mould, and change with growing age. It seeks to propose an expanded and fuller humaneness with advancing age. The elderly hermit or the wandering ascetic is deemed to be more fully human (mānava), not solely for what has actually developed within, but also for potential spiritual development.⁴¹

⁴⁰ It need not be assumed that this compromise, worked out in theory, always achieved a practical expression in reality. In fact, the notion of gerontocracy in the social and political organization of India, which survives even today, may be said to be the true legacy of the Dharma Śāstras.

⁴¹ It would be instructive to note what Maves (1965) has to say in this context. He hypothesizes that the nature of religious experience may be different at different stages of adult life. Implicit in what he perceives as the developmental roots of religious experience, expressions and needs is the deeper

As envisaged in the Smṛti texts, the āśrama model embodies a system of vital social values, ethical principles, goals of life and ideals of conduct for structuring the life of society founded on the Vedic tradition. Like the Vedic ṛta, the concept of āśrama, too, has both physical and metaphysical dimensions, which are closely related.⁴²

perception of the developmental roots of aged individuals themselves. As the embodiment of progressive human nature, the aged individual represents to a unique degree, actualized and finalized humaneness.

⁴² According to Swami Nikhilananda (1963, 16), the Vedas were arranged to conform to the four āśramas: the brahmacārī studied the Samhitā portion, the gṛhastha followed the injunctions as laid out in the Brāhmanas, the vānaprastha practiced contemplation as per the Aranyaka texts and the sannyāsī was guided by the wisdom of the Upanisads. Such a practice of harmonising later historical developments with the revealed religious texts (a practice common in most traditions of the world) is consistent with the traditional Hindu view that all the four portions of the Veda were revealed simultaneously and have existed from the very beginning of the cycle. The āśrama model, therefore, may be seen as a continuation of the implicitly conceived Vedic norm of life and as such rooted in Vedic tradition.

Chapter Three: Expression of Aging

Introduction

It was argued in chapter one that it is the symbolic reality shaped as religion and culture which confers specific meaning and significance on various life processes, including aging. One quickly notices the signs of aging on any adult body, but one may have to be convinced by others of the same fact with respect to one's own aging body. These perceptions, even if organized, have no clear meaning unless mediated by religious or cultural symbols. Aging, thus, is one situation in life where the problems of meaning become especially acute.

Relevant religious and cultural ideas on aging are not only shared but also manipulated by persons and groups to resolve particular problems of meaning by mediation through linguistic signs (words). Such an expression and investment of meaning in terms of language is ubiquitous--from our definitions of the physical world and the social reality to our conceptions of other worldly realms and even the existential domain--so that, human pain and suffering are endowed with cultural and religious meaning.

It may be argued that in Indian tradition, the concept of samvrti, first espoused in the Vedic literature and then suitably reinterpreted by the Buddhists (Samyutta Nikāya, 3:70-73) is roughly equivalent to the modern notion of symbolic reality.

Derived from sa + man to think, sammuti (the Pali equivalent of samvrti) literally means agreement and by extension conventions--linguistic, social, political, moral etc. In the pre-Buddhist Vedic texts these conventions were elevated to the level of absolute realities, permanent and eternal (Rg 10:125). But the Buddha, in reinterpreting samvrti, argued that such conventions are not to be clung to as absolute truths nor to be dismissed as mere conventions (Kalupahana 1986, 17). In other words, language is neither Vāc (the faculty of speech or the goddess representing the ultimate reality) nor is it vikalpa (unable to express reality). He argued that language derives its meaning (artha) when it is able to communicate results (artha). Thus, what is true, is that which bears result.¹ That word (śabda) forms the fundamental essence of all things (artha) was strongly asserted also by Bhartrhari (ca. 600 CE), the Hindu grammarian and philosopher.

Since humans cannot rest content with the fact that one inevitably grows old and dies, they must reflect on this phenomenon and verbalize it to express certain meaning (artha) whether in positive or negative terms. But it was soon discovered that it is not very meaningful to posit that aging is merely an accident or a chance event as some early schools of Indian philosophy such as the Ājīvikas did. On the contrary, when it is

¹ As recorded in the "Abhayarājakuṃāra Sutta" of the Majjhima Nikāya (1:387-392), the point was made in a discourse by the Buddha to the prince Abhaya, who was coached and sent by Nātaputta, the Jain, to trip or trick the Buddha in the debate.

suggested that aging is due to bad karma in this or past lives or the movement of planets or the drying up of vital energy (virya), the personal and public experience of aging is immediately invested with meaning.

Semantic Domain of Age

Aging is one domain in life where the problems of meaning become particularly acute when a sharp and uneasy awareness of old age in the form of indelible and clear signs on the body and mind dawns on the individual. Old age precipitates one of the disjunctive experiences in the inner life of individuals, since it confronts them with the psychologically traumatic event of the approaching end, and with the daily diminishing vitality that threatens personal integrity and identity. It would seem strange if these experiences which occur and recur in the life of the human species had not been given religious meaning and objectification through language.

It is only through a self that can communicate with the world through a shared language that our experience of ourselves and of the surrounding world acquires coherence and meaning. The stages of life and the particular definitions of developments within it, including aging, have no meaningful existence apart from what people make of them in and through their words and deeds. The present chapter seeks to undertake a semantic study of

the key verbs and words that our texts use in their struggle to provide meaning to aging and old age.

Since language is the primary code that enables humans 1) to develop and internalize norms which constitute religious tradition and culture and 2) to communicate with each other a variety of inner, personal experiences of reality, the semantic organization of old age as encoded by language (Sanskrit in this case) is an essential prerequisite of this study. Semantics is here understood as the study of meanings and how they are expressed and communicated. Meaning in its various modes has to be articulated in language and the peculiarities, richness, stylistic predilections and limitations of a language both facilitate and set barriers to the ways in which meaning can be inscribed and understood.

The language in which ideas and thoughts are formulated and communicated to others thus has an important and subtle influence on style and structure, through which thought and content are expressed in language. This view of the specific relation between language and meaning is endorsed by Benjamin Whorf's work on comparative languages (1965). Inuits, for instance, have a battery of words to denote different kinds of snow, but only one word for many objects for which other languages have a number of words. Whorf has shown that these differences in language largely reflect the different ways in which people conceive reality. The particular syntactical and grammatical properties of a given

language faithfully reflects the patterns of the symbolization of reality.

In Indian linguistics, inflected words as labels for specific things are understood as lexemes (pada) or lexical units. Whether singular or disconnected, they are generally associated with other similar lexemes into distinctly identified classes or categories (vargas) which, in turn, are organized into still larger groupings (kāṇḍas). As a distinct semantic domain, varga consists of a class of objects, all of which share at least one feature of meaning differentiating it from other semantic domains.

One important Sanskrit lexicon, Amarakośa, attributed to Amarasinha ca. 600 CE, accordingly, is divided into three sections (kāṇḍas). The second section of this work includes the topic entitled the [semantic] domain of "man" (manuṣyavarga). Here we find listed eleven synonyms each for man and woman followed by lists of synonyms for terms designating various age-specific phases in the male and female life cycle: What do these age-related lexemes and expressions have to do with the process of aging, and what do they have to do with each other? It will be argued below that they are not random. There is a coherent conceptual organization underlying these expressions.

The particular organization of words denoting various phases in the human life cycle indicates that in Indian tradition age is an important semantic domain and a universal feature of the human life process based on differential maturity and time. This is

clear from the fact that the Amarakosa (2:6.7ff) dissects the male and the female life cycle into three main phases and labels each with clear and concise terms. Childhood (bālyam), youth (tārūnyam) and old age (vrddhatvam, sthāviram, vārdhakya) constitute the phases in the male life cycle. The female life cycle begins with "first age" (prathame vayasī, kanyā, kumārī, 2:6.7); followed by the "middle age" (madhyame vayasī, tarunī, 2:6.7) and finally "old age" (pāścime vayasī, vrddha, paliknī or prāiṇī, 2:6.12).

Other terms serve as lexical markers delineating various sub-divisions within a particular domain--youth, middle age, old age etc.-- and also serve as a gloss for age-specific norms, roles, statuses and expectations that Indian tradition uses to organize an individual's progression through the life course. Gender, along with age, is another lexical marker in the semantic domain of age. The way in which the attributes of old age are combined is sex-specific. Jarā, the most common term for aging as well as old age, for instance, is feminine in gender. Accordingly, aging, too, receives by association various negative attributes reserved for women. It comes to be personified as evil ogress, tigress, female cat and so on.

Vārdhaka, a substantive in neuter gender and denoting "old-agedness" is usually free of negative innuendos frequently associated with the female sex in the Buddhist and later Hindu tradition. As it is understood in classical Hindu tradition and

its literature, the concept of vārdhaka is composed of two components:

- 1) The process of aging which is biological in nature (jarā) and whose meaning is expressed semantically.
- 2) The phenomenon of old age which is a cultural construct and is understood semiotically (vārdhaka).

In the light of the preceding, the need for collecting from the selected texts relevant compounds and lexical units of gerontological significance becomes clear. It is also essential to take into account the etymologies of various age-related concepts. Gonda (1959, 368) has already noted the peculiar Indian predilection to study the origins of, and relations between, different key technical terms and for tracing their etymologies. Although most of these explanations are unsatisfactory from a scientific point of view, some of them are worthy of consideration, because for the writers and readers of these texts, they constituted an important means of penetrating into the truth and reality lying behind a given phenomenon such as aging. Many of these etymologies are compiled in the Nirukta of Yāska and are often quoted by later writers such as Sāyana in support of a particular claim.

Fancy etymologies of such age-sensitive terms as jarā (old age), śarīra, deha (body), puruṣa ("man"), and parināma (change) reveal differing views and opinions, shedding new light on the connections between the aging process and the body, the mind and

the self.² Where warranted, they will be discussed in the following pages.

For the sake of clarity and convenience the subject matter of this chapter is discussed under two categories 1) formal or stylistic and 2) literary modes of investing meaning.

When the lexemes are structurally and stylistically organized in a particular fashion, as in the Amarakosa, they clearly encode and control the movements of the borne meaning, providing thereby clues to the way the reader's attention has to move in order to recover that meaning. In other words, a given text acquires its meaning and unique identity by virtue of its verbal organization and style. When read with close and sensitive attention, the text does not just communicate an inert image of outward reality but also simultaneously shapes the reader's attitude towards it.

Since the form, content and thought of the text are inseparable, the style is not simply a decorative embellishment upon the subject matter. It becomes the very medium in which the subject matter is turned into text. Style may be understood as the means and measure by which the writer ensures that his/her message is "decoded" in such a way that the targeted reader not

² One instance of a fancy etymology furnished in the Mahābhārata (5:36.1) concerns the name of a certain sage (raśi), Jaratkāru. He is said to have a monstrous body (kāru), which he destroyed by wearing it away (jarat, from the verb ir meaning to age, also has this extended meaning) little by little with severe austerities. Similarly, the term jarāyu (meaning the perishable outer covering of the embryo) occurring in Rgveda 10:106.6 is etymologically explained by Sāyana in his gloss on this verse as mortal (marāyu).

only understands the information conveyed, but also shares and responds to the writer's intention behind it.

The subject of aging, old age and death seems to generate a distinct rhetoric and style as well as a way of summoning stylistic and semantic ingenuity. In Stewart's graphic words:

Death seals lips of ordinary rhetoric leaving room only for clinical report. It arrives not as a mirror of life but as a window on the void (1984, 107).

In his preface to Bend Sinister (1947), Nabokov is equally moved to describe death as:

but a question of style, a mere literary device, a musical resolution (cited in Stewart 1984, 345).

Death, continues Stewart:

is that elusive narrative moment. With all words and no action, it is always lettered than lived. Verbally and iconically textualized, death is driven out of hiding into a visible condition of all textuality (Ibid 3-4).

Death for the self exists only as non-existent. It has no vocabulary native to it. Death as a narrative moment therefore must be approximated by a verbal style charged with elusive evocation in lieu of evidence.

Even in art forms old age and death are not finally a cogent abstraction. They are merely motifs without referents. The intransigent abstraction of aging and death persists across literary history as a semantically unoccupied zone of utterance--at once linguistic horizon and void (Ibid 3-4).

To write of aging, old age and death, then, it is not surprising to find that our writers are impelled to stretch

Sanskrit language's binding temporality--binding in the sense of style's obligations (sāṅketa), its ligatures (sandhi) and its compounds (saṁāsa). An inspired and visionary poet (kavi) with such a clear and transparent verbal texture as Aśvaghoṣa, when required, is willing to haze his poetry (kāvya) with sufficient opacity to inscribe the innate ambiguities of aging and death. And a novelist of the calibre of Bāṇa has to turn around simple words into long and complicated compounds to achieve the same end (in the Harṣacarita, the march of King Harṣa's army is described with the help of seventy-six long compounds).

At the level of rhetoric, such a task demands at various times a full array of all possible formal and literary devices on the part of our writers--from linguistic (nominal compounds, assonance, alliteration etc.) to literary (that is, simile, metaphor and myth).

Thus, phrased in the optative mood, an hortatory proposition/injunction may be designed to elicit on the part of its reader a response in terms of doing or agreeing to do the thing or action endorsed by the writer of the text (see the Dharma Śāstras). Or in another category of texts (such as the Purāṇas), the imperative language of fiat may be deflated to mere prediction. The Rgvedic visionary poet, on his/her part, may engage in prayers in the celebration and veneration of his/her

chosen deity which he/she hopes, will grant long, healthy life that will only end in ripe old age.

On the other hand, in a text such as the Atharva Veda, the coercive motive may be generated in the form of a unique composition of charms and spells. Again, passages in texts such as the Nikāyas or the Yogavāsistha have a style which is deliberately paratactic, that is, the presentation proceeds by way of succession rather than subordination. The basic idea, such as the loss engendered by old age, may be succinctly stated at the beginning of the chapter and then further details are piled up as the text moves along, for emotional content and ornamentation. Occasionally, response to aging may be phrased in the form of pun or wit by word-association (sleśa), which may be understood as simultaneous expression of two or more meanings.

The linguistic form underlying two or more meanings may be the same or different. In some verses every word has at least two meanings and the composition is, accordingly, two different entities, not one. There are several interesting instances of this ingenuity in verses that seek to relate or somehow accommodate the contrasting norms and ideals of the early and late phases in life.

Modes of Expressing Age

The foregoing partly explains why meaningful responses and reactions to the process of aging and the phenomenon of old age

are inscribed in the texts consulted through resort to contrived patterns of style and genre. The internal structure of such texts, then, becomes endowed with some evocative or magic powers and a peculiar semantic weight. Put differently, reactions to the consequences of aging and old age, whether interpreted positively or negatively, are enshrined in a mode of expression chosen from the formal or the literary domain as explained below. For the sake of this analysis, the two modes of expression may be subdivided as follows:

Formal Mode

- a) Nominal composition
- b) Optative Mood
- c) Assonance
- e) Colour vocabulary.

Literary Mode

- a) Simile
- b) Metaphor
- c) Myth.

Overall, the simile seems to be the favorite mode utilized, since, according to Sanskrit poetics, it is the most direct way of introducing another level of discourse into the assertion made formally. Simile is also popular because many other figures, such as metaphor, in fact, may double as similes with the addition of another suitable conceit. Many of our texts are replete with stock similes (similes occurring regularly in the literature of a given linguistic community).

Formal Mode

Nominal Composition

Even a cursory glance at our texts will reveal that the vocabulary of gerontological significance employed therein revolves around three key Sanskrit verbs: jr, vr̥dh, and vī

1) The verb jr is by far the most frequently used verb to indicate a broad range of age-related meanings. The Pāṇinian Dhātupāṭha illustrates the primary meaning (upalakṣaṇa) of jr as loss due to age (jr̥s vayoḥānau see Siddhānta Kaumudī 2 338). Dictionaries list five secondary meanings with parasmaipada endings:

- a) To grow old, wear out, wither away, decay.
- b) To perish, be consumed (also in the figurative sense).
- c) To be dissolved, digested.
- d) To break up or fall to pieces.
- e) As a causative the verb means to make old, wear out, consume or to cause to be digested, to digest.

As ātmanepada the verb jr has two meanings.

- a) To move, approach, come near.
- b) To call out, praise, laud, invoke.

It is not obvious, however, why a verb meaning "to age" should have developed a secondary meaning (assuming that "to age" is its primary meaning) denoting "to praise". In view of the clear difference between the two sets of meanings, it may be that the two meanings essentially belong to two homonymous verbs. It is

also useful to remember that apart from the R̥gveda, the secondary meaning of praise is not retained anywhere in the post-Vedic literature.³

2) The verb vr̥dh is illustrated in the Siddhānta Kaumudī in the sense of to grow or increase (vr̥dhu vr̥ddhau, 2:182). As an ātmanepada verb, it connotes two basic meanings.

a) To increase, augment, strengthen.

b) To grow, grow up, increase.

3) The verb vī is illustrated in the Siddhānta Kaumudī in the sense of to go, pervade, conceive, shine, throw or eat (gativyāptiprajanakāntyasanakhādanēsu, 2:287).

It is interesting to note, however, that the conjugated forms of the above three verbs are relatively less frequently used in our texts with reference to aging. This need not surprise us since the tendency to accord primacy to the substantive over the verb is well known in Sanskrit grammar. Predictably, far more common are the compounds and substantives construed on them: jarā (old age, from jr̥), vr̥ddha (elderly, from vr̥dh) and vayas (age, from vī). But as the dictionary listings indicate, the formations of such substantives invariably leaves them with inherent vagueness of meaning and emotive overtones. Semantic shifts, suggestive of the widening of the original meaning, are evident in many of them.

³ In a hymn addressed to the goddess of dawn (Uṣas), the poet refers to her as the "lovely one who awakens [the people] and causes them to age" (revatstotre sūnṛte jāravanti, Rg 1:124. 10). In this context Geldner observes that jāravanti has the two-fold sense of awakening and aging. According to Bloomfield, on the other hand, jāravanti also has the added meaning of "causing songs to be sung", because it is after Uṣas has dawned that hymns are sung (see Venkatasubbiah n.d., 134-136).

Later classical writers profiting from these fundamental ambiguities seem to have succeeded in creating cognitively and emotively synonymous words by resorting to that popular and creative technique which Coulson (1986, xxiv) has called "componential compounding". The descriptive determinative (karmadhāraya) type of nominal composition based on the juxtaposition of two substantives (one of which being jarā, vrddha or vayas) is also a favorite.⁴ Used in similes and metaphors, these compounds enhance and render colour as well as a particular shade of nuanced significance to the bare meaning of old age.⁵

The Amarakośa explicitly links old age with decrepitude (visrasā jarā 2:6.40). Līngyasūrin's gloss, in explaining visrasā,

⁴ The substantive jarā is formed by adding the suffix an to the verbal base ir according to Pāṇini 3:3.104 (vayohānau with sidbhidātibhyo'ā). It is then augmented on the basis of Pāṇini 7:4.16 (rdro'ni gunah). The feminine suffix tāp is then added following Pāṇini 4:1.4 (aiādyataṣṭāp). Pāṇini (7:2.101) rules that optionally jaras may be substituted for jarā (jarāvā jarasanyatarasyām iti jarasādeśah). The Kāśikā on this rule, as explained in Limaye (1974, 644-645), is that the substitution is warranted by the succeeding aiā vibhakti (jarā ityetasya jaras ityayamādeśo bhavati anyatarasyām aiātau vibhaktau paratah). Thus, one may express the phrase, "teeth fall on account of old age" in Sanskrit either as jarasā dantāḥ śīryante or as jaravā dantāḥ śīryante.

⁵ Palsule (1961, 104) remarks that the present set of meanings attributed to Sanskrit verbs was not originally a part of the Pāṇinian Dhātupāṭha. It is the work of post-Pāṇinian grammarians such as Bhīmaśena and others. Further, the particular meanings were never regarded as exhaustive. They were always open to additions from time to time in accordance with the actual usage of the language. This is reflected in the early acceptance of the doctrine that verbs possess various meanings (dhātunām anekārthatva).

attributes the eventual falling apart (or breaking down) of the body to old age (visramsate adhaḥ patati śarīram anayeti viśrasā). Mallinātha's explanation of this definition is that old age refers to the ripening of the body caused by the final [phase of] age (caramavayah kṛtasaṁśarāparipāka nāmanī). As a feminine substantive, jarā, has come to mean decrepitude, infirmity and general debility consequent on old age. Secondly, it denotes digestion or greeting. In later mythology it is the name of a female demon.

Compounds with jarā/jaras as one of the basic units are comparatively rare in Vedic literature. Jarāmṛtyu as an exocentric compound (bahuvrīhi) occasionally occurs in the Atharva Veda where it is construed to mean one dying in old age or dying due to old age.⁶ This reflects the generally positive appreciation of old age in the Vedic society where people expressed an eager desire to live long enough to enjoy life even in old age.

In the Upaniṣads, however, old age begins to acquire a negative and pejorative connotation where jarāmṛtyu is construed as a co-ordinative compound to mean old age and death. Old age is thereby equated or elevated to the status of death and is equally feared (see chapter four). In the classical Sanskrit literature, which features numerous compounds based on jarā/jaras, the negative appreciation of old age, first initiated in the

⁶ See AthV 12:3.55; 19:24.4,8; 19:26.1; 2:13.2; 2:28.2,4; 8:2.11.

Upaniṣadic period, is retained. This is discernible in the following compounds:

jarāvasthā: state/condition of decrepitude

jarātura: infirm, old, ill on account of age

jarāparinata: bent with age

jarābhīru: afraid of old age (also an epithet of the god of love Madana)

jarāsīla: having old age as the characteristic mark

jarālakṣman: sign of old age

jarādharma: a particular duty to be performed in old age

jaratvīta: old jester

jaratkuttanī: old procuress.

The substantive vrddha and compounds based on it, on the other hand, tend to depict old age or elderly persons in a relatively more favorable light. Though they occur sporadically in Vedic literature, in classical texts they are commonly used in the sense of increased, augmented; full grown, grown up; advanced in years; wise, learned; eminent in, distinguished by. The Amarakośa (2:6.42) furnishes various synonyms of old man (vrddha). Some of them may be listed below with Liṅgyasūrin's gloss:

pravayaḥ: one who has gone beyond the age of youth

sthavirah: one who has "stood" a long time

vrddha: one who has grown with age

jñāḥ: one who acquires knowledge with age

jīrṇah: one who loses due to age

jaran: one who is aging

varṣiṃyān: one who is extremely old

daśamī: one who is above the age of ninety (literally, in the tenth decade).

As a masculine substantive vrddha connotes a worthy, honorable man; a sage, saint; a male descendent. In the following compounds, based on vrddha, the positive or at least value-free evaluation of old age is discernible:

vrddhabhāva: state/condition of being old

vrddhaśrāvaka: aged worshipper of the god Śiva

vrddhavivadha: yoke of the ancients, the bonds of traditional usage.

Similarly, old Vidura, who is a half-brother of the equally old and blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra is described in the Mahābhārata ("Udyoga Parva", chapter 51) in terms of certain prized virtues commonly associated with old age in the Indian ethos as descriptive determinative compounds:

prajñāvrddha: distinguished by discriminating wisdom

dharmavrddha: distinguished by the knowledge of dharma

vidyāvrddha: distinguished by superior knowledge.

As instances of the less frequently occurring compounds one may note:

vrddhayuvati: old procuress

vrddhaśīlin: having the disposition of an old man

vrddhavita: old voluptuary, rogue

vrddhakāla: old age, time of old age

vrddhakrama: rank on account of old age

vrddhasamyoga: association with the aged

vrddhasamgha: council of elders, aged

vrddhasevin: reverencing one's elders

vrddhopasevin: honoring the aged

vrddhāśrama: the old [age] period or the last stage

vrddhayosit: old woman.

In Buddhist texts the Pali term yuddhi (Sanskrit vrddhi) is used in the sense of an opposite of decay caused by the aging process (parihāni). The term is intended to denote spiritual growth, not decay. The inspiring message of the Buddha, then, is to be understood as "people are decaying [aging]; as learners of this dhamma (the Buddha's teachings), they will grow". Woodward, who translated the Anguttara Nikāya, has argued that this usage of the term "will become", "grow" implies not merely "will be". "Become" here is set in opposition to "decaying" or "aging", thus indicating no further "becoming" in the future, but, rather, a causal process, an evolution. There is such a context, both in the Upaniṣads and Piṭakas, where bhaviṣyanti and other conjugations of the verb bhū clearly mean more than just a copula or bare future state (see Anguttara Nikāya vol 1: preface, xii).

The composition of compounds based on the substantive vayas derived from the verb vi appears to be a classical phenomenon wherein the extended meaning of vayas is passing age or the phase in life. Other secondary meanings of vayas include youth, prime of life or any other period or stage in life.⁷ Consider, for instance, the following compounds:

vayahparināti: ripeness of age

vayahpramāṇa: measure or duration of age

vayahsamdhi: life juncture.

With relevant and appropriate words denoting new, old or the

⁷ The formation of such compounds describing a particular age group is based on Pāṇini 3:2.10 (vayasi ca).

passage of time, vayas is further compounded to indicate any phase in the human life cycle:

navavayah: young

agravayah: young [literally, with aging ahead]

īrṇavayah: aged

galitavayah: aged [literally, swallowed by age]

A more colourful and metaphorical way of denoting a particular age-group is to relate vayas idiomatically with a word representing a spatial direction. Thus in the Kāmasūtra (6:1.10) one comes across pūrve vayasi (in young age) and pāścime vayasi (in old age). Less frequently, old age is implied through an expression such as uttare vayasi (Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra 1:5.33), which Govindasvāmī glosses to mean the age of fifty and above. Occasionally an ordinal number may replace the spatial direction in idiomatic expressions designed to encode age-related stages. Accordingly, prathame vayasi means in childhood (BC 5:30); caturthavayah denotes the elderly (in the fourth or final stage of life, see Kuṭṭanīmatam Kāvya # 531).

Age-sensitive compounds construed on a cardinal numeral base may acquire symbolic value in relation to aging. In fact, recent investigations in Structural Anthropology dealing with numbers and their cultural significance in the fields of folklore, religion and syntax suggest that many related things and events are traditionally characterized by a definite number.²⁴ In many traditional societies such as India's identity of numbers is believed to represent the very essence of a given thing or idea. Cultivating insight into unique numerical relations is said to

enable the wise to detect hidden meanings and relations among things, events and phenomena.

A Rgvedic hymn to the twin gods Asvins (1:34) is composed on the numerical motif of three (Dreizahl). In the course of twelve verses, the number three which is invested with esoteric significance, is evoked thirty-six times! This well known predilection of the Indians for classifications, groupings and enumerations invested with specific metaphysical or esoteric meanings, already evident in the Vedic literature, grows to obsession in the later classical period.

Compounds involving low numerals such as trivarga (set or class of three items) and catustaya (group of four values or propositions) are common in our texts. Figures such as twenty-five, fifty, seventy-five, hundred or thousand are also imbued with sacred, mystic meanings and appear in numerous passages of gerontological significance. Rgvedic prayers and Atharvan charms, where the concern is with a long healthy life, employ these numbers for their allegedly esoteric or magical potential.

As Gonda (1976, 94-95) explains, the correspondence between the ritual act or fact, in casu the ritual triad and the tripartite universe, is believed to enable the officiating priest to exert influence on the latter. The human body and its life processes are also believed to have unique numeric correspondences and as such are amenable to divine or priestly/magical intervention. Thus the three seasons in the year are identical with the three vital breaths animating the human

body (SB 12:3.2.1); the medical skill of the Asvins is deposited in equal proportions in three places--in fire (agni); in water (āpas) and in brahmin. In practicing medicine, therefore, the three should be near at hand (Taittiriya Samhitā 6:4.9.2., see also chapter seven dealing with the rejuvenation therapy where this Vedic directive is respected). Occasionally, the sense of old age is also contrived in terms of a mass or numeric substantive, e.g. atijīrṇa (very old) or asītika (in the eighth decade [of life]).

The number one hundred figures in numerous formalized and stylized expressions to denote "many". Such is the case in hymns from the Rgveda (10:162.3) or the Atharva Veda (3:11.3,4,5) where long life stretching to one hundred "autumns" (saradās) is requested. Sāyana, in his comments on these verses, points out that expressions such as śatam (hundred) and sahasram (thousand) are to be understood as meaning aparimitānām (boundless) or bahūnām (numerous) and not literally. In Yajur Veda (3:62), long life stretching to three life spans (tryāyusam) is asked. Similar usage is also reported in the medical texts in the rejuvenation and revitalization prescriptions where a life span of thousands of years is guaranteed to the users (see chapter seven). By contrast, in the Dharma Śāstra literature, the number one hundred is used to represent a specific quantitative measure of time in which human life is lived.

Long, co-ordinative compounds frequently figure in many highly codified, stylized and formalized lists of objects or

persons of varying dispositions and stations in life. Old men and/or women frequently appear in these listings where they share one or more traits in common with the other people on the list. These groupings tend to be optimally homogeneous with certain shared similarities and psychological proximities. Each member of the compound may be handicapped by one or the other weakness or deficiency of a physical, psychological or emotional nature or they all may be deemed to be worthy of respect or honour on account of services rendered in the past. The presence or absence of old persons in such groupings, therefore, constitutes important sources and clues to our understanding of the aging process.

A passage dealing with the duties of a householder in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti (1:5.105) advises the couple to dine on the leftovers after the young people, young married women, elderly folks, pregnant women, sick people, girls, itinerant guests and the servants have been fed. But in a section dealing with the mundane matters (vyavahāra), it warns that elderly persons make unreliable witnesses. So do for that matter, women, children, actors, heretics, handicapped and thieves (2:5.70). The formation of such lists suggest that the elderly, women, children and the sick share the general trait of vulnerability, and for that purpose are grouped together.

Optative Mood

In addition to nominal composition, another effective formal device of controlling or moving meaning in a particular direction or mode that is frequently used in our texts (particularly in the Dharma Śāstras) is to use the optative or imperative mood (vidhirling). By effectively resorting to this device, a text such as the Manu Smṛti has invested Indian society with a well developed and explicit ideal model of living out one's life cycle. It divides the ideal life span of hundred years into a sequence of four distinct phases punctuated or marked by appropriate rituals. Detailed instructions as to how the members of each class (varṇa) are to live are phrased in the form of moral precepts or phrases in the optative mood.

Technically these statements are known as vidhi (injunctions). A vidhi is usually a particular duty that is incumbent upon an individual by virtue of being born in a particular class (varṇa) and age (vayas). A duty is couched in the form of an injunction, because it is not likely to be instinctively or spontaneously fulfilled by the individual in question. Vidhi, therefore, has the same significance as in the Talmudic literature the halakah has for the Jews; it is simply authoritative.

Thus an injunctive statement such as "having been a householder, let one leave for the forest upon noticing grey hair on one's head", which is found in the Manu Smṛti, is unlikely to

be heeded by the individual had it been merely a declaratory statement. A vidhi statement is thus intended to serve as a kāraka hetu (instigation to commit a particular type of action). By contrast, arthavāda is a declaratory or illustrative statement serving as a jñāpaka hetu (justificatory explanation of a particular vidhi statement). It seeks to amplify or facilitate the understanding of a precept laid down in the vidhi.

Occasionally, the rewards arising out of the performance of a particular duty are put in a very tempting form of arthavāda so as to lure the individual into obeying the vidhi. Examples of this type of arthavāda statements are to be found in the classical medical literature in passages dealing with the rejuvenation (rasāyana) therapy where the patient is promised a life of ten thousand years provided he (the therapy is restricted to the male twice-born [dvija] only) also cultivates prescribed ethical virtues.

Passages dealing with old age and aging, therefore, may be analyzed fruitfully on the basis of the science of interpretation developed, for instance, by Jaimini in his Pūrva Mīmāṃsā system. Thus, a promising statement may be examined to determine whether it is phrased in a vidhi or arthavāda form on the hypothesis that semantic meaning is expressed or controlled with resort to a particular mood. Vidhi, for instance, is an injunction declaring a duty that is not likely to be instinctively or spontaneously fulfilled by an individual. A statement such as "having been a householder, let one leave for a forest" is a vidhi statement

commonly found in the Dharma Śāstra texts, which asks the aging individual to renounce home and enter the forest as a hermit, an act he/she is unlikely to undertake on his/her own. Similarly, the Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra (2:9.22.24) resorts to the optative mood in admonishing the aging hermit to throw away the unused food stock stored from the previous year when the new crop becomes available in the month of Āśvin (September-October) (nave sasve prāpte pūrānamanuṣṭhāniyat, see Kane 1974, 2:2.921).

Should the elderly hermit suffer from some incurable disease and cannot properly perform the prescribed duties and tasks, he/she is instructed to begin a long trek (mahāprasthāna) in the north-easterly direction, subsisting on water and air only, till the body collapses to rise no more (MS 6:31). Kane quotes yet another Smṛti passage, also phrased in the optative mood, to the effect that such a hermit ought to undertake a distant journey, enter water, fire or throw himself/herself from a precipice (vānaprastho dūrādhvānam jvalanāmbupravesanam bhrguprapatanam vānutisthet, Kane 1974, 2:2.922).

The Yājñavalkya Smṛti, perhaps because of its deeper this-worldly commitment or orientation, employs a somewhat different and more elaborate scheme to encode its own meaning of the class and stage-bound duties (varṇāśramadharma, see chapter two). In the process it furnishes us with materials of much gerontological relevance. Under the category of varṇadharma, for instance, it is laid out that the stage of renunciation (saṁnyāsa) is to be entered by the elderly male ideally at the age of seventy-five.

A scrutiny of the dharma-related duties as prescribed in the Dharma Śāstras, therefore, is likely to prove a valid source of information regarding the attitude toward old age in traditional Indian society. It also indicates how the Dharma Śāstra writers clothe their thoughts in varied linguistic modalities in order to avail themselves of different types of nominal compositions, phrases and grammatical means to express many delicate distinctions and gradations in their treatment of old age and aging. In their hands Sanskrit develops into a delicately tuned language able to acknowledge the differing statuses both in vocabulary and tone. One is instructed to use different forms of address for the oldest and the older relation. Nor is this kind of distinction limited to one's own generation. An uncle older than one's father is addressed differently than one's father's younger brother.

Another interesting feature of this particular formal mode is that since brahmanical social linguistics and ethics is generally couched in injunctive statements, negation is an exception. Early Buddhism, on the other hand, is fascinated by negative expressions. Love for the negative approach is so great in Buddhism that its highest goal nirvāṇa, wherein the triple evil of old age, disease and death is absent, is given a negative appellation. Ethical virtues that the monks are exhorted to cultivate are also couched in negative terms (nisedhas).

Assonance

This formal mode is principally comprised of rhyme and alliteration deliberately produced to elevate the diction of the verse to reach the lofty heights of ideas such as those expressed in Rgveda 1:124.2)

aminatī daivyāni vratāni. praminatī manuṣyā yugāni
īyusīnām upamā śasvatīnām ayatīnām prathamā vyadyout.
Without violating the divine ordinances, reducing the ages of man, Uṣas has shown forth as the last of many who have passed by, as the first of those who are to come (Gonda's translation 1973, 51).

Alternatively, the essential ideas or their inter-relationships may be expressed by producing short, stylized phrases such as śaradaḥ śatam (one hundred year life span) or puruṣam purātanam (to the old man) which occur frequently in many Vedic texts. Two words or vocables which sound alike but mean different things may also be brought together to produce a double effect upon the ear and mind of the listener. Though etymologically cognate, these words do not generally convey even distantly related meanings. To the casual listener, however, this is not always or immediately clear. A very pertinent example, as pointed out above, is the use of the Vedic verbal root ir meaning to, age and also to praise. While classical Sanskrit has retained only the first meaning, instances are not lacking in the Rgveda where both these meanings are juxtaposed in the same verse.

Words with unique sounds are so arranged in some of the didactic tracts as to generate lexical congruity. Alliterated

pairs of words or expressions may also be made to reverberate with one another. The lexical congruity so created is then made to stretch across the entire verse or the passage producing an integrative structure of interlacing syntax, alliteration and meaning so that when the text or the passage thus arranged is read aloud, it produces a magical or emotive impression on the hearer or reader.

This practice is quite in keeping with Indian poetics which accords an important function to alliterated sound sequences (śrutyānuṣṛāsa). Such a combination of powerful and formulaic utterances is thought to be an effective means of enhancing the didactic quality of the composition's recital.

The following two examples from the Mohamudgara (The Hammer Striking at Delusion), a popular didactic tract in twelve verses attributed to Śaṅkara are selected from that text reproduced in Mahadevan (1980, 33-37) by way of illustration:

āṅgam galitam palitam muṇḍam
daśanavihitam jātam tuṇḍam |
vrddho yāti grhītvā daṇḍam
tadapi na muñcatyāśāpīṇḍam ||

With a sunken body, bent head and a toothless mouth, the aged walks with a staff but does not give up desire (#6).

bālāstāvatkṛīḍāsakts
tarunastāvattarunīraktaḥ |
vrddhastāvaca cintāsaktaḥ
pare brahmaṇi ko'pi na saktaḥ ||

As a boy one is attached to play; in one's youth, the attachment is to a young woman; in old age one is preoccupied with worries; but alas, no one is committed to the transcendent brahman (#7).

In verse number six, the last word in each line contains the harsh sounds of n and d, which occur in a definite pattern and rhythm. Their congruity of sounds hovers and reverberates in the mind of the hearer simultaneously creating a realistic image of an old man before the inner eye. Because of their lexical congruity, they touch the audience to the quick. Moreover, they are delightful to the ears and minds of the hearers and speakers because they meet the psychical needs of uniformity and harmony. Being suggestive and fascinating, they can easily establish associations not only between the parts of utterances but also between the persons speaking through these texts and those listening to or reading them.

In the works of Kālidāsa and Aśvaghōṣa such rhyming phrases and combinations of sounds are of frequent occurrence. The congruity of sounds at the end of a pair of closely associated words in the first instance makes the listener believe that they express one single and related idea. The similarity in sound tends to transform the meanings of the two components of these phrases into a single new semantic unit. In the above examples from the Rgveda and Mohamudgara, one may easily notice the rhythmic sequence of:

- 1) tī-nī tī-nī, nām-nām and,
- 2) mundaṁ-tundaṁ, dandaṁ-pindaṁ respectively.

Deliberate duplication of sounds or phrases may be intended to convey reiteration and distribution in space and time. In Sanskrit the locative case is frequently used for such purpose especially when the "sphere" is a particular point in place or time. For this reason, in the Rgveda, expressions such as yuge-yuge (in every age) or gātre-gātre (in every organ or member of the body) are frequent. Exclamatory repetitions, such as jarā-jarā (old age, old age)--which are put in the mouth of the frightened Siddhārtha who for the first time in his life has come across an old man--in the Buddhacarita of Aśvaghōṣa (3:39) are not merely ornaments. This type of emotional repetition of address or exclamation under the influence of fear, fright or the desire to be heard by others is common in Indian literature.

Many ritual formulae, charms, spells and incantations in the Atharva Veda contain certain stock phrases or syntactic units which appear at the beginning or the end of the verse. These are intended to produce and intensify the magical effect and potency of that particular charm. In one Atharvan prayer to the sun god (Sūrya), the poet enjoins the god to grant him a life of hundred years; the plea is repeated eight times with each phrase ending in the refrain śaradaḥ śatam (one hundred autumns). Sometimes, such repetitive phrases are intended to convey the determination and finality of a particular action contemplated. When a hermit has completed his vānaprastha stage and feels that he is ready to enter the final stage of the wanderer (saṃnyāsī), he performs a designated rite in the course of which he reiterates his firm

resolve to renounce the world by thrice repeating the phrase, samnyastam mayā (I have renounced, see Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra 2:10.27).

Often a structural symmetry between phrases is resorted to in order to present a particular message through highlighted contrasts or parallel actions. The meaning of the poetic message as structured form is construed by positing a symmetry between sound and meaning. An interesting example of this practice is found in the Raghuvamśa 8:22 where Kālidāsa highlights the contrast between the diverging preoccupations of the retiring old King Raghu and his young son Aja, who has assumed the responsibilities of the state:

na navah prabhurā phalodayatsthīrakarmā virarāma
karmanah |
na ca yogavidher navetarah sthīradhīrā
paramātmadarśanat ||

Neither the youthful king (nava=new, young), remaining steadfast in his pursuits till they bore fruit, desisted from acts nor did the old king (navetara=other than new, old), steadfast in discriminating wisdom, cease from the performance of yogic practices before the realization of the supreme self.

To Kālidāsa, then, the systematic poetic form is not merely an unfolding of parallel structures of sound and meaning. It is also a process in which such parallel structural forms serve to create

parallel meanings. To put it differently, one detects here isomorphism between "development" over life spans of humans as bio-social organisms and the "development" of families as they form, and as they change in function and structure over time and life history. Consequently, human life, whether in youth or in old age, is viewed positively.

It is interesting to note how Aśvaghoṣa, too, just as skillfully uses this formal technique to bring out the incompatibility and tension between the this-worldly (pravṛtti) and other-worldly (nivṛtti) life styles (BC 9:48). But Aśvaghoṣa's purpose is to downgrade this worldly life and interests in favour of the ascetic life style which, in the long run, is detrimental to the welfare of the elderly (see chapter two):

1 yā ca śrutirmokṣam āpnavanto nṛpā gṛhasthā naitadasti
śamapradhānāḥ kva ca mokṣadharmo dāṇapradhānāḥ kva ca
rājadharmāḥ

As to the heard [tradition] that kings obtained release as householders, this is not so. [Because] the dharma of release where quietude prevails is [incompatible with] the dharma of kings wherein polity predominates.

Colour Vocabulary

Expressing the consequences of aging on the body in terms of colour symbolism (black and white) is current in all cultures. To describe someone as having white or grey hair on his/her head is an elliptical way of suggesting that the person in question is old. Allusion to dark hair obviously suggests the opposite. The term grey with reference to hair indicates middle age. Vedic

Indians were already sensitive to contrasts of light and dark. They tended to describe as "light" or "dark" things which were contrasted or opposed for other reasons, but which cannot be considered definitely "white" or "black". The dark and light contrast in Vedic poetry also came to reflect a contrast between death and life, night and day, and old and young.

Toward the period when the Brāhmaṇa texts were compiled (ca. 800 BCE), the opposition was extended to include bright, immortality, life, youth and moisture, on the one hand, and dark, mortality, death, old age and dryness, on the other.⁸ Moisture and warmth sustain life; their opposites cause death. The living creature is by nature moist and warm, and to live is to be such. But old age is cold and dry, and so is what is dead. It is inevitable, therefore, that one who grows old should dry up. This line of interpretation is also found in the classical Sanskrit literature where people are described, as if they were plants, in terms of their moisture content or dryness.

In the Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa (3:32), for instance, the growing up of the young Raghu is compared to the shooting forth/sprouting of the bamboo stalk. On the contrary, old people, like dry or rotten leaves, stems and stumps of trees, turn pale, or yellow. The following simile from the Yogavāsistha suggests that meaning:

The more the body approaches ripeness and decline, so much more does death rejoice in it. The body grows lean with grey hair on the head just as a creeper, having flowered, fades away (1:27.4).

Writers of our texts also make use of a number of compounds involving a relevant colour term to designate a particular age-bracket and the physical condition of that person. The number of

⁸ Mahābhārata 12:271.33 echoes this thought claiming that the fate of the soul is related to its colour. The soul may have one of the six colours--white, yellow, red, blue, grey and black. White is the most excellent colour, black is the worst.

such compounds is high, since Sanskrit has a large number of synonyms for each of the seven colours of the solar spectrum. The Amarakośa, for instance, lists fourteen terms to denote the colour white. Some of the more commonly used terms for white are śukla, śubhra, gaura, dhavala and pāṇḍura (1:5.12,13).

The colour black can be expressed in terms of seven different words--kṛṣṇa, nīla, asita, śyāma and kāla being the more frequently used (1:5.14). When Baudhāyana, the alleged compiler of the Dharma Sūtra text named after him, admonishes that the Śruti texts enjoin the dark-haired person to offer sacrifice to the god Agni (BDS 1:2.6), he understands the term dark-haired one (kṛṣṇakesah) to mean a householder, that is, one who is in his/her middle age. The implication is that one who is (not dark-haired-old) should not keep the sacred fire. Such a one must renounce the world.

Palita (grey, see Amarakośa 2:6.40)⁹ is a common term of reference used to describe anyone in his/her middle age.¹⁰ Liṅgyasūri notes that the basic meaning of the verb pal is in the sense of movement. But because of the polyvalent nature of the Sanskrit verbs, it also means adorn. He then points out one

⁹ Derived from the verb pal, (class 1 with the parasmaipada ending), it is irregularly formed with the addition of the itac suffix according to the rule outlined in the Unādi Sūtra (3:92). Patanjali (1964, 192), on the basis of the Unādi Sūtra 5:34 (phaleritaiādesca pah), cites another illustration (phal nispattau) from the Dhātupāṭha and explains the formation of the term palita as that which ripens.

¹⁰ Paliknī is a synonym for old woman, which Liṅgyasūri's gloss on Amarakośa 2:6.12 explains as [on account of [her] grey hair, palitaromayogāt].

meaning of palitam as that whereby the charm of the body is enhanced on account of the white [hair due to old age]. Palitam thus is a term referring to the greying of the hair due to old age. By extending the analogy further the formation of a compound such as pakvakeśyā (one with ripe hair) is explained as a synonym of vrddhapaliknī (woman with ripe, grey hair). The classical Sanskrit literature is replete with such descriptive determinative compounds coined to describe persons approaching old age. By way of example, one may cite the following:

palitadarśanam: appearance of grey [hair]

palitabhaviṣṇu: becoming grey

palitabhāvuka: turning grey

paliknī: greying woman.

Reference to black, grey or white colour with a view to identify/label a person belonging to a distinct age group is quite common in similes (see below). For purely cognitive reasons, similes are stored and recycled for properties or characteristics that are difficult to describe digitally, that is, based on the presence or absence of individual attributes. Certain age-specific colours such as white, grey or black, therefore, are learned and stored in analogic fashion. The concept of blackness, in a gerontological context, is necessarily tied to statements such as, "the colour of hair in young age is black", or "the colour of hair is grey in middle age".

Such use of a distinct colour vocabulary with respect to aging is prevalent in most cultures (as illustrated by a citation from the Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra above), because the meaning of

old age cannot be analyzed into sets of attributes, but must instead be illustrated with literary devices such as similes or metaphors.

The foregoing suggests that the meaning and significance of the changing colour of the hair and the relevant hair-style for that age reposes in two inter-related problems:

- 1) Its personal meaning for the aging individual in question
- 2) The socio-cultural meaning it communicates to the aging person's community and family.

The greying matted hair of a hermit is at once a fusion of symptom and symbol. This transformation of symptom (that is, somatic manifestation of changing coloration signalled by growing age) into symbol (of a hermit or a wanderer) is realized through the cultural patterning of consciousness converting at the same time eros into agape (Obeyesekere 1981, 34-35). The matted grey hair acts as a marker setting aside its bearer as a special and redoubtable being distinguished by old age.¹¹

The matted hair of the hermit or the shaved head of the wanderer (yati or samnyāsin) are public symbols whereby the complex personal experiences of the aging individual are crystallized into a public symbol. They come to mean total detachment from sexual passion because the behaviour implied in a particular hair style and sexual behaviour are consciously associated from the start. Thus, in several Jātaka stories, the king or other noble

¹¹ Consider in this context Geldner's assertion with respect to Rg 10:55.5 that: ...der Greise ist der personifizierte Greisenalter.

men are shown as renouncing family life and contemplating retirement in the forest upon noticing grey hair on the head.

A passage in the authoritative classical Hindu text on poetics (ca. 600 CE) the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (2:3.42ff) deals with conventions to be followed by sculptors and artists in depicting persons of various types. In that context, it is advised that sages, ministers and civic leaders should have matted locks of [grey or black] hair (depending upon their profession). Widows are to be depicted as white haired women wearing a white dress and devoid of any kinds of ornamentation.¹² They should not be shown looking beautiful.

Spatial directions when represented in painting should be depicted as women belonging to different age groups. The south, for instance, is to be portrayed as a young girl with a golden hue and seated in a chariot.¹³ The West is to be shown as a mature woman of dark complexion and riding a horse.¹⁴ The North-West is to be shown as being blue in colour and approaching old age (āsannapalitā nīlā vadavā). The North is to be shown as an old woman astride a man.¹⁵ The North-East is to be shown as very old with pale skin and seated on a bull.¹⁶

¹² vibhartrkāḥ tu kartavyāḥ striyaḥ palitasamyutāḥ
(2:3.73.34).

¹³ rathasthā dakṣiṇā pītā tathā syāt prāptavauvanā
2:3.73.35

¹⁴ yauvanāt vicyutā kṛṣṇā pāścimā turagasthitā (2:3.73.36)

¹⁵ naragatā vrddhā tathā bhavati cottarā... (2:3.73.37)

¹⁶ ativrddhā ca śuklā pūrvottarā bhavet... (2:3.73.38).

Literary Mode

By skillfully employing various literary modes writers of our texts seek to capture the unknown and elusive and shape the awareness of the trans-empirical meaning of human reality. For this purpose they superimpose a particular symbolic meaning (metaphor, simile or myth) upon the ordinary and observable physical signs of aging on the body (metonymy). In searching for the meaning of aging as inscribed in the texts under scrutiny in this study, therefore, one must begin by neither devaluing nor ignoring any of the modes through which our texts struggle to capture the truth of the aging process. They are to be recognized as so many ciphers and keys, as it were, to possible meanings to the queries, "Where does aging and old age fit in the meaning system of the ideal life cycle? What is the value of aging in the ideal scheme of human existence invested with meaning?"

Simile

Simile is the basic alliterative device used in the literature consulted for our purpose. Known as upamā in Indian poetics, it arises when something is compared with something else. The thing compared (upameya) is then tinged with the colour of the standard of similitude (upamāna). This feature distinguishes simile from the metaphor where no words such as

iva, vā or yathā are used, which are expressive of the similitude between the object and the standard of comparison. One comes across a considerable number and variety of similes and comparable forms of imagery in our texts. They reveal a vast field of observations and experiences that are also encapsulated by traditional beliefs. These similes--which often betray a tone of sincerity, sarcasm or familiarity--constitute a valuable source of information on the meanings of aging in human life in ancient and classical India

Family life patterns, the manners and doings of animals and birds, and natural phenomena supply our poets with the basic raw material on which to build their similes. In fact, similes taken from plant and animal life are as frequent as those patterned on spiritual and social life styles, mythology and the daily routine of human life. Accordingly, activities of animals, properties of plants, trees and life in nature which are felt to be analogous to processes, and developmental modalities of the aging human body and mind, accordingly, figure prominently in many similes relating to the aging of the body

Since similes describe in analog as opposed to digital fashion, they present an image rather than a bare list or inventory of predicates. In keeping with the analog mode of explication, similes, whether original or recycled, count as appropriate or inappropriate rather than as true or false. They are pressed into service as valuable instruments for making statements beyond purely logical verification.

It was the Vedic poet who fashioned the first Indian verbal images to describe aging in positive terms using familiar and common phenomena from the domain of nature and the everyday life. Old age, which is thought to carry the mortals to the world of the immortals, is compared, for instance, to the boatman taking a fare to the other shore. Young and radiant, Uṣas, the goddess of dawn, daily appears in the east to unveil her charms. Her daily appearance is compared to the continuation of human life. Yet every dawn also brings humans nearer to death, causing them to grow old (Rgveda 1 92 10). In the Yajurveda (3:60, also Rg 7 59) liberation through death is compared to the ripe cucumber detaching itself from its stalk. Numerous charms and spells recited by the priest to ensure long and healthy life for his client also incorporate picturesque similes. Vital breaths (prāṇas), for instance, are prayed to enter the body with gusto, and animate it in the manner of mighty bulls entering their stocks.

Simile also appears to be a popular literary device used in the Nikāyas. As Gokhale points out (1981, 445-452), Mrs. Rhys Davids has listed some six hundred of them in the Nikāyas. The stock phrase that frequently appears in these works to explain the function of the simile usually goes like this--I shall give you a simile (upamā) for through it some wise men understand, comprehend, or learn the meaning of what is stated.

Gokhale (ibid) points out that the simile in these texts plays a threefold role--first, it vividly expatiates the meaning

of the text (bhāsitaṣṣa atthaṃ). Secondly, as a mnemonic device, it facilitates the memorization of a text. Thirdly, the fixed association between a given simile and the treatment of a given doctrinal point seems to have been conceived as an aid to monastic training. An image created through the device of the simile may present to the targeted reader/listener on the surface some physical reality (such as aging), but it may also appeal to his/her imagination as a metaphysical reflection of the empirical reality. An image thus may be seen as a mirror reflecting some metaphysical truth about a particular phase and face of life. The seventh book of the Milindapañha entitled "Opammā-Kathā Pañho" features a string of sixty-seven similes in order to emphasize the qualities a monk must cultivate to attain liberation (arhant)

Perhaps closer to this discussion is the Sutta entitled "The Lute" of the Dīgha Nikāya (I.70) where a simile of the five-stringed lute (vīṇā) is used to bring out the metaphysical dimension and meaning of the principle of the dependent co-origination of all things (pratītya-samutpāda). A king who has never heard the charming sound of such a lute hears it and inquires about the provenance of the sound. He is told that the sound originates in the harmonious co-functioning between the various parts of the lute. Through the ensuing exchange of questions and answers, the king is made aware of the metaphysical meaning of the doctrine of dependent co-origination, which features old age, disease and death as the principle conditioning

factors (nidāna-pratvayas). In numerous clichéd similes, birth, old age and death are routinely compared to the long ropes of the water-wheel.¹⁷ The stock similes of the Nikayas were later improved by Aśvaghoṣa in his Buddhacarita and Saundarananda. By way of illustration, one may consider the following two elegant similes from the Saundarananda denouncing old age as the villain in typical Buddhist fashion:

yatheksuratyantarasaprapīdīto bhuvi praviddho dahanāya
susyate |
tathā jarāyantranipīditā tanurnipītasārā maranāya
tisthati ||

Just as the sugarcane stalk is strewn on the ground to be dried for burning [as fuel] after extracting all the juice by squeezing it, so does the body, pressed in the mill of old age and with its vitality drained away, await the funeral pyre (SD 9:31).¹⁸

yatha hi nr̥bhyām karapatramīritam samucchritam dāru
bhinattyanekadhā |
tathocchritāmpātayati prajānimām aharnisābhyām
upasamhitā jarā ||

Just as a saw, worked by two persons reduces a tall tree to logs, so does old age, ever closing in by the march of day and night, bring about the fall of vigorous inhabitants of this world (SD 9:32).

¹⁷ janmajarāmaraṇa ghaṭanaghaṭīyantra...rajjavaḥ (see Agrawala 1969, 236). This simile is also used in Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīyam to emphasize the revolution of time:

jalayantra bhramaveśa sadr̥śibhiḥ pravṛtibhiḥ
sa kālah kalayan sarvāḥ kālākhyām labhate vibhuḥ
 (3:9.14).

¹⁸ This simile also appears in the Padma Purāṇa (1:2.66.116) where Mātali (the charioteer of Indra) is describing the viscissitudes of the human body to King Yayāti.

The similes created in the "Jarājugupsā" section of the Yogavāsistha (ca. 800 CE), too, seem to have just such a function with a particular reference to aging. It is possible to classify them in two groups:

- 1) Natural similes based on fire, snow, water-fall, flowing river, winter, withering tree etc.
- 2) Bird and animal similes based on the whooping crane, owl, heron, cat, monkey, hungry tigress, jackal and so on.

The practice of wrapping colourful similes such as these into small and useful syntactic units was already in vogue from the days of the Rgveda and the Nikāyas. Subsequently, the practice became a part of the floating oral tradition. The author of the Yogavāsistha must have gleaned from this mass his working material and refined it according to the norms then current. As an inhabitant of Kashmir where snowfall is abundant in winter, he must have added snow imagery and symbolism to his material from his personal experience. Further, the similes are characterized by a paratactic structure, that is, they are made of short, independent word units or half lines, which can stand on their own in a sentence. They are then strung together in a series (mālopamā) to generate and order some intended new meaning. The language of the similes is paratactic that is, the presentation proceeds by way of succession rather than subordination.

The basic subject matter of chapter #22 of the Yogavāsistha is cultivation of disgust about the body by emphasizing the losses and insults heaped on it by the aging process. The main

premise is succinctly stated at the beginning of the section and then further details are added through resort to simile for emotional content and ornamentation. Paradoxically enough, the discourse on aging is presented by young Rāma to his aging father Daśaratha in the form of finely crafted and charming similes. Some of the poignant observations made by Rāma may be summarized below:

- 1) Old age wears out the body and strips the ego of its conceit. The aging body is compared to a creeper which, after flowering, fades, and turns grey (1:22.28).
- 2) Old age is a harbinger of deadly diseases. This process is compared to the chill blast of winter sweeping away the leaves of a tree (1:22.20).
- 3) Old age lays its icy hand on all mortals in due course. The destruction of the body through aging is compared to the destruction of lotuses by the falling snow, the freezing of the autumnal lilies by the wind or to the [river current] sweeping off a tree on its bank (1:22.2).
- 4) Old age leaves its calling card with ominous warnings. This is compared to the inauspicious cry of the she-jackal in the forest (1:22.26).

Dozens of similes like these descend in a torrent of rapid fire, one on top of another. By this they virtually overwhelm the unsuspecting reader, rather than illuminating him/her. The reader is caught out of breath, as it were, wondering how to relate old age meaningfully with a shrieking owl at one instant and with the laughing hyena at the next. The difficulty is compounded by the author's habit of rather nervously jumping from one simile to the next without developing the previous one. Nevertheless this

barrage of similes on old age does succeed in lending a certain color and vividness to the depressing features of the aging process, emphasizing at the same time the most macabre facts of old age.

In contradistinction to the Vedic poet who was unable to analyze emotions surrounding old age explicitly, authors of a text such as the Yogavāsistha do seem to have in their armor varying ways of recording psychological phenomena as perceived by them in the fact of aging. Through these age-related similes they manage to portray all the intensity of feeling worthy of any sophisticated writer. A relentless realism dominates in these gerontophobic (jarājugupsā) writings with didactic intentions. These texts betray that uncanny ability to detect and express universal attitudes toward aging.

Metaphor

Metaphor involves, as Ricoeur (1977, 247-249) has remarked, a tensive use of language in order to uphold a tensive concept of some human reality. Insistent metaphors are closest to the symbolic depths of our experience and as such are so radical that they seem to haunt all human discourse. Repeated metaphors that follow each other in quick succession, as they do in the Buddhacarita and the Saundarananda of Aśvaghosa, are convincing illustrations of their power. They are designed to invoke in the hearer/reader a particular state of agitation, awe, fear and

alarm. Metaphor, along with simile, is a typical Indian way of viewing the world and human life in it.

From the time of the Rgveda metaphysical truths have been explained in bold and vivid metaphors often based on a complete equation of the microcosm and the macrocosm: the sun is said to be not merely like the eye of the sacrificial horse, rather it is (this sense is usually communicated by the Sanskrit enclitic eva) the eye of the horse. To understand what a thing or a process such as aging is like is to understand what it is. Everything in the cosmos is connected to its counterpart in the microcosmic world (see chapters six and seven).

A typical metaphor created to highlight a particular shade of meaning in a text such as the Yogavāsistha contains four different terms related in such a way that the second term (b) is to the first term (a) as the fourth term (d) is to the third term (c). This analogical relationship makes it possible to use (d) metaphorically as the name of (b), and vice versa. Consider the following metaphor from the Yogavāsistha.

Jarāmārijārikā bhuñkte vauvanākhum tathoddhatā
paramullāsamāyāti śarīrāmisagardhinī (1:22.25)

Old age, which preys on the flesh of the human body,
takes as much delight in devouring its youthful bloom,
as a cat does in feeding upon a mouse.

The gloss on this verse attempts to elucidate the metaphor by explaining that just as the cat devours a mouse in the hole [after forcing it out from its hiding place], so does covetous old age excavate youth [hiding in the body] and devour it with extreme pleasure. The Buddhist tendencies of the Yogavāsistha in its evaluation of aging are too obvious in this metaphor. For

the purpose of further discussion it may be schematized as follows:

old age	youth	cat	mouse
a	b	c	d

Here youth (b) is to old age (a) as mouse (d) is to cat (c). From these four substantives the metaphor is created when the text expresses this relationship by the deletion-substitution method:

jarā/māriārikā (old age/cat): yauvana/ākhu (youth/mouse).

But metaphor is not merely a matter of giving old age the name of "cat", that is, giving a thing a name that belongs to something else. It is also bringing together in a lively, poignant way in a line or two, the thoughts and impressions associated with two things. Thus, in our example, both old age and cat feast on a helpless being. This compares favorably with the use of metaphors with reference to the meaning of old age as constructed, for instance, in two poems composed by Yeats (1983):

What shall I do with this absurdity--
O heart, O troubled heart-- this caricature,
Decrepit age that has been tied to me
As to a dog's tail.

-- "The Tower"

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick...

-- "Sailing to Byzantium".

In these poems, the two metaphoric expressions, "As to a dog's tail" and "A tattered coat upon a stick" bring out succinctly the ideas of forlorn helplessness and utter futility associated with old age--a dog's tail and a tattered coat.

One may cite an equally poignant observation on aging from the Rgveda. Uṣas, the goddess of dawn, is said to wear away and waste (the verb used is ir) the life of human beings in the manner of a hunter woman shooting down the flying birds.¹⁹ The peculiarity of a metaphor, as the above examples point out, is that something is present in the situation it describes, but it is not verbally specified in the metaphor itself. The strength or weakness of a metaphor depends upon this factor x. Following Ricoeur (1976) one may say that the metaphor points out the sense and suggests the reference which is to be found at the deeper semantic level.

The metaphor directs us to the sense in the first reading. The reference is to be searched by a second reading. The meaning of a metaphor, therefore, is open to a potential interpretation; it is not fixed or inscribed. The reader is invited to extract it within the framework of the given linguistic context. In the general body of our texts, attitudes toward aging find expression in two ways--direct observations and statements made in the

¹⁹ śvaghñīva kṛtnurviṣā āminānā martasya devī jarayantvāyuh
(Rg 1:92.10).

formal modes and the use of a simile or a metaphor to modify or intensify specific emotions of response to aging and death.

Consider, for instance, the elaborate metaphor on the "forest of samsāra" in the "Strī Parva" of the Mahābhārata (11:6 ff) whereby Vidura seeks to console the grieving blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. A human life is akin to a woodland infested by an elephant (year/time). The person is in a constant danger of falling in a well covered over by a creeper (hope eternal), which is infested by bees (desires), rats (days and nights), a snake (death), wild animals (diseases), and a fierce woman (old age).

Through the profuse use of similes and metaphors, texts such as the Mahābhārata and the Yogavāsistha struggle to infuse meaning and direction in the human world that is full of contradictions and paradoxes, perhaps the greatest paradox being the predicament of aging and its alter ego death Metaphor, because it can be interpreted differently, permits our texts to evoke various images of old age (jarā): as an old and crooked hag, brigand and robber, hungry tigress, laughing hyena, shrieking owl, heinous she-heron, scheming feline and so on. They feature numerous circular, redundant statements showing by their repetitions that old age is unavoidable, sinister, macabre. This betrays a certain cultural anxiety in Indian tradition about aging and old age that begins to manifest itself with the rise of Buddhism and reaches its crescendo in the Yogavāsistha.

Ordering things and events by categories (numeric or hierarchic) according to their qualitative resemblances is a

quasi-scientific way of perceiving those things or events which is already present in the Vedas. Analogy (upamāna) is, therefore, perceived as one of the basic ways of "knowing". A text such as the Yogavāsistha, therefore, easily becomes a morass of metaphysics. Almost every page, as O'Flaherty (1984) observes, contains a statement on metaphysics. It is as if we could not understand anything unless we compared it to something else. The metaphors and similes create levels of persuasion through verbal images, pulling us up onto the metaphysical level.

Myth

Myths may be construed as stories told to manifest a particular aspect of the cosmic order. They provide a given community in which they are alive with ways of stretching past experience in the present. Created to inform humans about their self-identity and the framework of significance in which they operate, a myth incorporates in itself different religious and cultural symbols in a complex narrative. It thereby seeks to recommend a way of life and endorses a set of moral principles and guidelines to those who believe in it.

Unlike a fairy tale, therefore, a living myth[^] is highly significant in personal and communal life in that it may:

- 1) Offer ways of ordering a world view, a vision of the basic structure about human nature and destiny
- 2) Express transforming power in human life as well as a theoretical explanation of it.

Like science or philosophy myth seeks to provide answers to our perennial quest about the human condition and its constant march from life to death as mediated by the aging process. Like them myth also has its own language and medium of expression. A prominent medium of myth is metaphor which, as noted earlier, seeks to selectively transfer some of the familiar associations of a concept, which then acts as a kind of lens or screen through which the new situation or a subject is viewed.

A very relevant example of how a new meaning of old age is created through the promotion of a myth is to be found in the story (already referred to in chapter two) of young Siddhārtha when he confronts old age for the first time in his short life. The episode which is retold in manifold versions in various Buddhist sacred texts in different languages tells us also much about the shifting spectrum of the Buddhist understanding of old age. Briefly, the story, as told in Cantos three and four of the Buddhacarita, runs as follows:

Young Siddhārtha once drove out of the city and happened to see an old man with a whitehead, bent on a staff...On his next outing he happened to see a sick man...and then a dead man. On his fourth and final visit he happened to see a renouncer.

The myth next lets us understand that no one else but the young Siddhārtha "saw" these very common events in the human life, that is, he alone was able to discover the hidden meaning behind these mundane phenomena--that old age, disease and death are suffering and by renouncing worldly life one can eradicate these

sufferings. Both myth and metaphor, therefore, are crucial to the understanding of the meaning of human life and its various processes including aging as espoused in Indian tradition. This is so because the telos of Hindu and Buddhist metaphysics, as Organ (1970, 146) aptly explains, is to cope with the suffering inherent in the human condition. It accordingly prescribes techniques for the alleviation of suffering.

A physician of the soul who merely identifies the malady is not a true physician. In true Hindu and Buddhist tradition, therefore, myth is made to serve another important function--to put the aspirant on the way to spiritual liberation, which in our present context may be interpreted as the recovery of the true insight into the nature of human life and its processes including aging (as the myth recounted above amply indicates). A myth is either living or dead; not true or false. Unlike science and philosophy it cannot be refuted. When one tries to dispute a myth, it ceases to be a myth and becomes a hypothesis or history that may be conveniently refuted or debunked.

Enigmā is an image, which like myth, seeks to understand the metaphysical or the unknown. Enigma may be viewed as a short composition, visual or verbal, in which some truth or observation is presented in terms of complete metaphors in order to express some deeper truth, which is not immediately expressible. The Rgveda and the Pali Canon reveal a number of such enigmas wherein a certain doctrinal truth claim is presented that concerns our discussion of old age and aging. A relevant instance is the

enigmas based on the sun to impart deeper meaning to life processes discussed in the next chapter.

To recapitulate, by the judicious use of the two modes of inscribing meaning (formal and literary), authors of our texts securely locate the meaning and significance of aging and old age where it belongs--in the human body and the mind as circumscribed by the life span and in the heart of the lived experience, which somehow also transcends the purely physical dimension. The formal and literary expressions of aging in our texts are not a random collection, but rather are structured in terms of an identifiable model that is implicit in the semantics of Sanskrit language. They also suggest that aging is not just an amorphous or porous feeling, but rather that it has an elaborate cognitive structure. The similes, metaphors and myths of aging are not mere flights of fancy. They are contrived to furnish a number of nuances and shades of meaning as to what aging is about.

It is essential to recognize these interlocking semantic structures as evident in various compound formations, use of specific moods, metaphors and myths. Thus the meaning (meanings) of aging cannot be understood merely by locating and analysing all the occurrences of the aging-related words, expressions and modes in our texts. They must be juxtaposed in a structural relationship to the relevant physical and metaphysical concepts in order to squeeze out, as it were, the hidden meanings operating at these two levels. That task is undertaken in the next two chapters.

Chapter Four: The Aging Body

Introduction

Since aging takes place within the confines of the body and is circumscribed by the two structurally opposite life events of birth and death, the present chapter attempts to trace the traditional Indian ideas regarding the aging human body and its life span with respect to:-

- 1) The division of the life span into age-specific phases
- 2) The disadvantages and discomforts suffered by the aging body.

The discussion of these themes is carried out in light of the Vedic, Buddhist and classical Hindu perspectives on them. Following Turner's theory of symbolic reality (see , 1975), the human body may be seen as a system of meanings as well as a biological substance. It may then be argued that the semantic field of symbolic reality as it relates to aging (discussed in the preceding chapter) is polarized according to the following:

- 1) The physical and empirical dimension of aging (discussed in this chapter).
- 2) The trans-empirical or metaphysical dimension of aging (discussed in chapter six).

Embodiment and Life Span

As a physical and social object, the human body--in good health or ill, young or old, male or female--belongs to the world as well as to the self.¹ It is the face and front of the self toward the world and as such the most intimate connecting link between self and world. Repudiation of the body (because of its perishability) as a failed object or as an enemy would jeopardize that connection of persons with their world resulting in serious alienation. Existentially speaking, then, the frailty and the inevitable aging of the human body need not necessarily constitute a cause for despair, but neither are they to be celebrated in a "cult of suffering".² The aging body and the ageless, transcendental self embodied within it, should be seen in dialectical interaction containing within them the possibility for a meaningful life on earth.³

¹ The Padma Purāṇa (2:1 64.58) posits this relation in a charming simile--The self and the body both have a friendly persuasion:

ātma kāyaśca dvau etau mātrārūpau ubhāvapi

² Nietzsche held in utmost contempt the cultivation of suffering and urged that one become "free spirit" through embracing the body in all its finitude. Physical frailty of the body, therefore, should be taken as one of the colours that human existence will have (Gadow in Cole & Gadow, 1986).

³ The idea is poetically expressed in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (4:3):

The woman thou art, and the man,
The maiden and the boy,
And born thou growest everywhere,

Such a view, it may be argued, is implicit in the traditional Indian belief that the human being is a dynamic entity possessing an ever changing potential. The usual Indian exposition of the physics and physiology of the body accordingly begins with the assertion--generally shared by all the schools of philosophy including the Āyurveda--that as an aggregate being evolved out of the cardinal elements, the human body is the foundation of action, knowledge, life and death. But the schools differ widely with reference to whether the individual retains his/her identity over time or is merely a succession of moments in a series.⁴

As the Indian tradition understands it, the process of aging is coeval with the transmigratory process of a circular movement (samsāra) from birth to death and birth again. In a given life cycle aging refers primarily to the perceivable evidence of physical and psychological changes which are construed both as positive and negative characteristics. We tend not to acknowledge

As old man on a staff (Deussen 1972, 153).

⁴ The Irish-French writer and playwright Samuel Beckett frequently expresses the idea that persons are both "same, yet another; that no entity existing in time is ever the same from one moment to the next." Act two of Waiting for Godot, for instance, features the following exchange:

Vladimir: And you are Pozzo?
Pozzo: Certainly I am Pozzo.
Vladimir: The same as yesterday?
Pozzo: Yesterday?
Vladimir: We met yesterday. Do you remember?
Pozzo: I don't remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won't remember having met anyone yesterday (quoted in Rabuzzi 1984).

the fact of aging until certain visible, external manifestations begin to appear on the body, even though subtle physiological processes that lead to these changes have been working their silent subversion long before they become externally visible.

The principle idea and the understanding of aging in Indian tradition is conceptually and implicitly tied to the imagery of the "wheel of life", the idea that human life is encompassed within the cyclical rhythm of expansion and decline. The earliest documented evidence of the wheel symbolism to infuse life with meaning is present in the Rgveda (1:164.11-15). The seer of this hymn, Dīrghatāmas, develops an extended metaphor of the human life span in terms of the wheel imagery, which becomes archetypal for all subsequent speculation on the life course as lived out in Indian tradition.⁵ The hymn is composed as a riddle (brahmodya, Ratselleid) with the answer phrased punningly (śleṣa, Zweifelhaft). It describes the ageless, cosmic wheel of order (ṛta) revolving continuously across the firmament. It is also homologized with time (Geldner renders it as the Rad der Zeit) with three naves (seasons) and twelve spokes (months).

The speculative attribute of this cosmic wheel is that though it turns constantly (varvartī), it is not destined to age or decay or break up (nahī tajarāya).⁶ Thus, it is devoid of destruction and end. The world of people, mounted on the cosmic

⁵ With certain modifications, the wheel metaphor is also presented in the Atharva Veda (9:14[9].13-14).

⁶ See Sāyana's gloss on Rg 1:164.13.

wheel, is also subject to rotations. But it is conditioned by aging and death. The recognition of this fact that human destiny is bound to death and mortality is expressed in the compound mṛtyubandhu (bound to death).

The Brāhmaṇa texts hold that dead persons, upon proper ritual cremation, would be taken by the god of fire (Agni) to the realm of the fathers and to Yama in the highest heaven, where, reunited with a glorious body, they would enjoy bliss (Johnson 1980, 115). But both the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist speculation replaced this naively optimistic view of life span, death and happy life in the hereafter with the notion of recurrent death (punarāmṛtyu). Potentially, endless life now became unremitting monotony and a dire fate. Though the metaphor of wheel was retained, samsāra as the wheel of life became endless purgatory into which humans were repeatedly born to improve themselves in their ability to transcend the phenomena of life and death. Transcendence constituted the only end to endlessness

The Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (1:6), for instance, refers to the great wheel of brahman, which is said to animate and envelop everything. A swan (symbolizing the individual self) rambles within that wheel [erroneously] imagining that it is autonomous and is, in fact, the pouvoir moteur of the rotating wheel. Chapter two of the Maitrī Upaniṣad features a dialogue between the Vālakhilya (bald-headed) sages and Kratu Prajāpati (the sacrificing father of the universe) on the embodiment of the self. Prajāpati explains how, as the immutable self (ātman), he

enters the body to animate it in the manner of a potter activating his wheel.

Buddhism, the most influential non-Vedic soteriology, sought to transcend disease, decrepitude and death, which were identified as the chief features of the wheel of life (known technically as bhavacakra). Equated with becoming, the motif of the wheel of life inspired elaborate textual descriptions and visual images which were utilized by the pious Buddhists for the purpose of meditating on the transient nature of life. In a grandiose manner, the Majjhima Nikāya equates the human life process with the wheel of suffering powered by the causative force of one's maturing deeds (karmavipāka) fostered upon the illusory substantiality of the body understood as the collection of five skandhas (see below). The bhavacakra unfolds itself from birth to death and from death to the subsequent rebirth.⁷ This illusion of life is sustained over twelve distinct co-arising causes (nidānas, note the numeric similarity with the twelve-spoked wheel in the Rgveda). Old age and death (jarāmaraṇa) constitute the last of the twelve causes determining the common destination of each future existence by rebirth, which is to

⁷ A distant echo of this idea is found in Schopenhauer's imagery of the Wheel of the ungrateful King Ixion who was punished by Zeus by fastening him to a burning wheel which rotated continuously. Zeus also made him deathless so as to make his punishment never-ending. Well versed as he was in both the Greek and Indian myths, Schopenhauer longed for a universe where the Wheel of Ixion stands still, the stone of Sisyphus is at rest, the sieve of Danaides is put aside and the agony of Tantalus is in abeyance (see, Knox 1980).

travel again through the stage of "becoming" and through the process of decay (jarā) unto death.

The karma-formed and determined accumulations of passive impressions or residues (samskāras) act as the restarting impulse of the next life cycle. Thus, old age and death, ostensibly the last (twelfth) cause, is paradoxically far from that. The significance of death for life, like the significance of birth, lies in the fact that it has to be mediated again and again through old age, until the hidden self-winding mechanism of the maturing causality (vipāka hetu) fueled by karma and as pivoted on ignorance (avidyā) is destroyed by taking to the eight-fold noble path advocated by the Buddha.⁸

The obsession with samsāra as the unending wheel of life at times becomes pathological in epic passages too. The Mahābhārata ("Strī Parva" 11:6 11,12) develops an extended metaphor of the wheel of life (samsāraçakra) using both the formal and literary modes (see chapter three) to infuse the meaning of life, aging and death.

⁸ This account is based on Verdu 1979, 101. In Bāṇa's Harṣacarita, we come across a similar discourse by the erudite Buddhist monk Divākara to King Harṣa's sister Rājyaśrī, who is grieving over the treacherous murder of her husband. Juxtaposing the image of the body, conceived as machine (gātrayantra), on the water-wheel, Divākara explains how the long ropes [of birth, old age, death and so forth] keep the water-wheel [of samsāra] turning round and round (see Agrawala 1969, 236-237).

Structure of the Body

Vedic Perspective

A human being in the Vedic understanding may be viewed as a complex entity characterized by a structural unity of dynamic forces or elements (identified as devatās in AthV 11:8.32) which are themselves cosmic in nature. But these forces are not blind mechanical forces; rather, they possess an inherent intelligence of different grades which favours the formation of functional units with inner and outer hierarchical structures, on both cosmic and individual levels. Thus, cosmos emerges out of chaos with the individual beings issuing out of the interplay of cosmic forces.

A hymn in the Atharva Veda (11:8) dealing with the cosmic forces identifies them with various physiological and psychological processes which dwell in the individual as cattle in their pens (11:8.32).⁹ A person owes his/her individual existence to the highest principle in the universe and is identical with it. This latter is responsible for preserving the structural unity over a determinate period of time. Rgveda (10:16.4) calls it aja (unborn), which is not directly perceptible or evident in humans. Mind (manas), which directs and

⁹ According to Sāyana's gloss, the devatās are to be understood as the vital breaths (prāṇa, apāṇa etc.), sense organs etc. entering the human body in the manner of the cows entering their pens.

guides the phenomenal person, is linked with aja at a deeper level.¹⁰ The individual's phenomenal being is further divided in two structural entities (bodies):

1) The gross physical body (śarīra, Rg 6:25.4) comprised of material organs formed of the five cardinal elements which are returned to the cosmos upon the death of the individual (Rg 10:16.1).¹¹ The śarīra, however, is not the ultimate personality of the individual but the lowest visible level of existence which is mistakenly taken for the essential character of the human being.¹²

Though it occurs but once in the Rgveda, in the epic, Kāvya and Purāṇa literature the term śarīra is commonly used to refer to the perceivable human body which is subject to old age, decay and death. Deha, a synonym for śarīra and derived from the root dih meaning to plaster, fashion or mould also has the extended meaning of body, form, shape, mass or bulk.

2) Tanu is the luminous likeness of the physical body (śarīra) or shape. It is the more subtle second unit

¹⁰ The hymn is addressed to Agni, the fire god, who is invoked to consume the mortal body of the person who has died. Aja, the unmanifest and unperishable component in the body, is characterized by Sāyaṇa as symbolizing the inner self (antara-puruṣa lakṣaṇa), which is devoid of a material body and senses. Curiously though, Geldner (1951 3:148) discredits this sensible and convincing interpretation of Sāyaṇa and translates aja as goat (Bock).

¹¹ Consider also the Atharvan hymn (18:3.71) to be recited by the brahmin priest to invoke Agni (the fire god) to consume and return to cosmos the components of the dead body (śarīra) of the priests's patron.

¹² Sāyaṇa's gloss on AthV 11:8.4 views the gross body (śarīra) as incorporating within itself the capacity for knowledge (ijñānaśakti) which never leaves the self and the capacity for action (kriyāśakti) which, upon death, transmigrates with the subtle body (see below).

which is comprised of mental faculties. It designates that luminous component in the individual with or without its material body (śarīra). Thus, when Agni is enjoined to burn the dead body (AthV 18:3.71) or not to reduce it to ashes (Rg 10:16.1), the term used in either case is śarīra. But when the departed one is asked to "envelop" itself with a "body", the word used is tanu (Rg 1:188.2).

Sāyana identifies tanu with the body which is the abode of sacrifice (vaiṇāśarīra; 8:159.2). Tanu, accordingly, refers to the subjective form which cannot be burnt away like the physical sheath (śarīra). As such, it is the Vedic expression for what was later to be called līṅgaśarīra (the subtle body)

The three distinct layers of the person aja, tanu and śarīra correspond to the three cosmic levels of existence: bhūr, bhuvaś and svaś. Later developments envisaging multiple bodies, sheaths and layers (śarīras, kośas and kāyas) on the human as well as cosmic level, both in Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, are elaborations of this basic Vedic notion of person and its body (Werner 1978).

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad (8:4.1) stresses that ātmā (akin to the Vedic aja) is not cut down by the march of days and nights as are other transmigrating entities. It does not have the characteristics of samsāra. At death the śarīra component is dissolved into the five cardinal elements and the remaining structure is reconstituted in a finer, transfigured form. Depending upon the personal merit, it went to an appropriate world (loka) or ancestral or divine sphere (pitṛyāna or devayāna). In the context of prescribing the five important

sacrifices to be performed by the orthodox, the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa refers to the phenomenon of repeated death, which is only overcome by those who attain identity or community of nature with the brahman (punarmṛtyum mucyate gacchati brahmanah sātmatām, ŚB 11:5.6.9). These ideas of rebirth, of return and of successive lives whether on earth or elsewhere are expressed in different contexts in the Rgveda and were fully spelled out in the subsequent centuries.

The Vedic poets also made use of the sun as an image to inscribe the meaning of the evolving, unfolding life as they understood it. The notion of cosmic law or order (ṛta/dharma), which in later centuries becomes an important hermeneutic principle underlying the inscription of meaning to different phases of life (see the discussion on the Dharma Śāstras in chapters two and three) is often equated to the solar passage. A Rgvedic hymn (1:152.6) to the gods Mitra/Varuna uses such a solar imagery to penetrate semantically the dispensation of Mitra/Varuna, that is, victory of order (ṛta) over chaos or disorder (anṛta).

Similarly, another solar deity Uṣas (dawn) is described as rising out of the implicit chaos of the night, spreading the light (of order) across the darkened universe. Dawn is followed by the sun whose ordered course across the firmament symbolizes the steady, orderly evolution and unfolding of the human life span across time. While the dawn suggests the inception and the

development of order, the sun is its visible sign (see also Johnson 1980, 89).

The Rgveda (2:2.4) posits a close relation between the origin of life and the complex visible appearances embodied in the fire god (Agni) since both the hiranyagarbha (the principle of life) and Agni are made of gold. Both spring from the womb of the waters (Rg 10:91.6). Rasa, an immanent force, exists in water and tends to be in its purest form in the sap of plants which are "the embryo of the waters" (AthV 8:7.8). The sap of the Soma plant, in its strongest concentration, is the essence. The same substance is found in cow's milk, rain, dew, human seed (vīrya) and wine (surā). All these things impart health, warding off sickness and old age.

A hymn from the Atharva Veda (10:2) describes the wonderful structure of man (manuṣya mātmya). The poet lists various body members and organs and asks which particular divinity (devatā) is responsible for the creation of which particular organ and then provides the answers.¹³ Another Atharvan hymn (11:8.13) declares that having poured together the whole mortal being, the gods entered it. Then sleep, weariness, dissolution, and deities named evil and old age entered the mortal body. Brahman was the last one to enter (11:8.23).

¹³ Sāyana's gloss on AthV (11:10(8).31) observes that at death only the gross body (sthūla śarīram) is consumed by fire, not the seventeen member subtle body including five organs of knowledge, five organs of action, five breaths and mind.

The meaning of life is made explicit by linking it with wind and breath both of whom have movement as a common feature. Motion is the soul and essence of life. Wind is not just air; it is moving air. Breath is this moving air within living beings. Life is intrinsically movement, which fact is brought out in the fancy etymology of puruṣa (the embodied self) as purah kusan (that which constantly moves ahead Pāṇini, Unādi Sūtra 4:74).

In the Upaniṣads, hiranyagarbha (the principle of life) is represented as prāṇa (the breath of life indicating an interiorization of life experience and endowing it with an ontological basis). In sum, life in the Vedas is principally viewed as the biological fact of vital movement, growth and pre-reflective consciousness (dehātma-vāda). In the Upaniṣads the embodied self ceases to be a passive participant in the cosmic process; rather, it becomes the focal point. Life now means the vital consciousness of self.¹⁴ Life (prāṇa) is not that which gives form, but that which underlines existence (prāṇātma-vāda). According to Panikkar (1977, 208-209), this prāṇātma-vāda of the Upaniṣads supplants the dehātma-vāda, the interpretation of the self in terms of the body, which was such a dominant theme in the Brāhmaṇas.¹⁵

¹⁴ The Praśna Upaniṣad (1:4ff) features an exchange between the sage Pippalāda and a certain brahmin wherein the old myth of Prajāpati is invoked to explain how Prajāpati created the universe by bringing forth into existence two principles: moon/matter (rayi) and sun/life (prāṇa). Prāṇa thereby is endowed with an ontological rather than strictly physiological function.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the "Nābhanediṣṭha Hymn" in the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 6:5.27.

The Garbhopanīśad, of unknown date, also provides a fancy etymology of the body (śarīra) in physiological and ritual terms. The sage Pippalāda explains in verse #4¹⁶ that because the three fires are located (śrīyante) in the body, it is known as śarīra.¹⁶ The text then goes on to elaborate a metaphorical description of the body and its functions in terms of the Vedic sacrifice (yajña) and its performance. For the purpose numerous homologies are fabricated. The body, for instance, is said to function like the sacrificial altar (yajñavati).

The ensuing correspondences between the ritual aspects of sacrifice and various body parts may be presented as follows

- a) gārhapatya fire- located in the stomach
- b) āhavanīya fire- located in the face
- c) dāksināgni fire- located in the heart
- d) yajamāna (patron of the sacrifice)- self in the body
- e) wife of the patron- buddhi (intellect)
- f) paśu (sacrificial animals)- psychological dispositions such as greed and jealousy
- h) god Brahmā- mind
- i) dīksā (initiation)- steadfast mind
- j) sacrificial vessels- sense organs
- k) havi (ritual fire)- organs of action (karmendriyas)
- l) kapāla (sacrificial jar)- head
- m) darbha (sacred grass)- hair
- n) antarvedi (internal sacrificial altar)- face (Kapani 1976)

¹⁶ śarīramiti kasmāt. agnayo hyatra śrīyante jñānāgnir darśanāgniḥ koṣṭhāgniriti (see Kapani 1976)

As the substratum par excellence for the performances of sacraments (yāgabdhūmi), it is one's sacred duty to keep the body healthy, happy and holy (ritually pure). This attitude of sacralizing the body is also apparent in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, (16 1-7) which metaphorizes human life as a sacrifice and (puruṣoyajña) homologizing the three life stages (āśramas) with three different types of sacrifices to be performed during life ¹⁷

The same theme is also picked up in the Mahānārāyaṇa (verse #5) and Prāṇāgnihoṭra (verse #6) Upaniṣads. The centrality of person and its body to the concept of sacrifice, which is deemed to be the integral human act, is once again brought out with imaginative metaphors. Each sacred duty of life coinciding with the changing age, is a sacrificial act. Death, the final act of life, is also the supreme purification as well as the ultimate human sacrifice (śarīrayajña). Panikkar (1977, 388-390) has argued that because of this identification of sacrifice with "man" (puruṣayajña), certain Vedic texts speak of human life in terms of a constitutive debt (ṛṇa), a kind of moral obligation or duty that man has to discharge when he sacrifices.

¹⁷ The human life span is equated, in this Upaniṣadic passage, with the three libations (stūtyādavas) the householder is supposed to offer daily. His first twenty-four years constitute the morning libation because the sacred formula of the sun (Gāyatrī Mantra) on which it is based has twenty-four syllables in it. His next twenty-four constitute the mid-day libation because the Tristubh hymn, which accompanies it, has twenty-four syllables. The final forty-eight years are his evening libation, because it is accompanied by the Jagatī hymn having forty-eight syllables.

This sacrifice is an act which entails the fulfillment of man's being. The Manu Smṛti, too, envisages it as the ideal to be strived for, that is, the body is to be so rendered as to resemble brahman (brāhmīyam kṛīyate tanuḥ MS 2:28).

Buddhist Perspective

In order to understand the sense in which the human being grows old and ages in the Buddhist view, consideration must be given to the unique Buddhist ideas about the human body which differs significantly from the earlier Vedic view. Although the Sutta Piṭaka and the Vinaya Piṭaka continued to use for didactic purposes the conventional Vedic terms to express their own views on being, person, mind and body etc., the later Abhidhamma Piṭaka shied away from utilizing them. Instead, they promoted new and typically Buddhist terms consistent with the fundamental Buddhist doctrine that there is no identifiable self within the body existing over a period of time. There are only physical and mental phenomena of existence (nāma and rūpa), which the ignorant construe as distinct units of personality and corporeality. The concept of the body, therefore, is to be admitted only provisionally, and for heuristic purposes alone. The Buddhist view of the body, its functioning, aging and the eventual dissociation, accordingly, is affirmed in terms of dharma (elements), skandhas (mass or aggregate of elements), āyatana (base of cognition) and dhātu (element-potential). Kāya is the

technical and global term representing these various units that make up the human body (see the chapters entitled "Dhammasaṅgaṇi" and "Vibhaṅga" of the Abhidhammapitaka).

The chapters entitled "Dhātunirdeśa" and "Indriyanirdeśa" in Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa (ca. 500 CE) (a manual of the Abhidharma) expound in a systematic manner the early Buddhist understanding of the body and its processes. "Lokanirdeśa" is a chapter devoted to clarifying the Buddhist idea that the universe is composed of innumerable worlds (lokas) and is inhabited by beings alternating between the three spheres of existence. The chapter entitled "Karmanirdeśa" deals with the doctrine of karma (see below) and its relation to the body and its processes.

The "Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta" of the Majjhima Nikāya (3 237-247) recognizes the individual to be made of six aggregates (khandhas): earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness. At any given time the person is but a temporary combination of these aggregates, for the khandas are subject to continual change.

The "Jarāsutta" in the Aṭṭhakavagga of the Sutta Nipāta (#804), too, laments over this state of affair in the following words:

Short indeed is this life. Within a hundred years one dies, and if any one lives longer, then he dies of old age. A person does not remain the same for any two consecutive instants.

In this context Vasubandhu refers to the Samyutta Nikāya (13 21) and calls the preceding instant the "burden", and the following one the "carrier of the burden" (see Chaudhuri 1976, 230).

The "Khanda Samyutta" of the Samyutta Nikāya is more unequivocal and forthright on this premise:

Those who are unskilled in the noble Dhamma wrongly conceive, "the body is mine", "consciousness is mine". He who clings to the Khandas is Māra's bondsman. Sorrow and despair arise in the body made of the Khandas owing to their changeful and unstable nature (SN, 3:1-188, translation by Rhys Davids and Woodward 1951-1956).

Similar ideas are expounded in the "Rādha Samyutta" (3:188-201) and the "Ditthi Samyutta" (3:202-224) of the Samyutta Nikāya, which are then clothed in metaphysical propositions in the "Dharma Skandha" of the Abhidharma. The early Buddhist view of the body and its life span then is based on the dual axiom of sabbam aniccam, sabbam dukkham¹⁷ (all is impermanent, all is suffering).¹⁷ It is further elaborated with reference to the triple nature of pain in the Samyutta Nikāya (4:173 ff):

- 1) dukkha dukkhata: Pain gives rise to further pain, for instance, the direct contact of the senses with the sense objects causes an immediate unpleasant feeling. When the skin is cut, even the crudest mind becomes aware of this form of suffering.
- 2) parināma dukkhata: This category presents a contrasting phenomenon to the ordinary mind where even pleasurable feelings become suffering on account of their inherent transitoriness.
- 3) samsāra dukkhata: This category originates in the concept of karma. Actions are ever in search of opportunity--like a core of flame hidden under ashes

¹⁷ Compare this view with the Yoga Sūtra dictum that all is suffering for the one with discriminating intellect (duḥkham eva sarva vivekinah YS 2:25).

catches fire whenever it comes into contact with inflammable material.

Being subject to this triple pain, the human body can never be the abode of anything but evil. A final deliverance from all bodily life, present and to come, is the greatest of all blessings. The body is the sphere of suffering and the origin of suffering. Subjectively understood, suffering is desire (tāṇhā). Objectively, it lies in embodiment and matter. The Buddha systematized his response to the suffering of old age by a set of presuppositions, which cannot be justified on logical or rational grounds.

By identifying old age with suffering, instead of with the sources of suffering, the Buddha merely revealed his intense anxiety and disgust with respect to the phenomenal existence of the person and his/her life experiences such as aging. The disgust with the perishable nature and the aging of the body (nibbidā) as set forth in the "Vijaya Sutta" (#11) in the Uragavagga of the Sutta Nipāta also is a reflection on the worthlessness of the human body:

The body which is put together with bones and sinews, plastered with membranes and flesh, and covered with skin, is not seen as it really is. In nine streams impurity flows always from it; from the eye the eye-excrement, from the ear the ear-excrement... And when it lies dead, swollen and livid, discarded in the cemetery, relatives do not care [for it].

The bhikkhu (monk) possessed of understanding in this world, having listened to Buddha's words, certainly

knows it [the body] thoroughly, for he sees it as it really is.

As this [living body is] so is that [dead one]; as this is so that [will be]; let one put away desire for the body, as to its interior and as to its exterior.

(Fausboll's translation 1973, 32-33).

Both Hindus and Buddhists believed in the existence of a unique type of life between death and the impending rebirth. The theory of such an intermediate state (antarābhava), however, was a disputed point among the early Buddhist sects (Wayman 1984, 251). In the third chapter of his own commentary on the Abhidharmakośa, Vasubandhu argues that an intermediate state (antarābhava) separates death and rebirth, but he denies that it is the same as the self (ātman) of the brahmanical system. The process leading to rebirth is explained by him in so thoroughly an oedipal manner, that Freud might have envied:

Driven by karma, this antarābhava goes to the place where rebirth is to take place. Possessing a divine eye thanks to its karma, it looks for its future parents in the act of sexual intercourse. If male, it is smitten with desire for its potential mother and vice versa. Stirred up by this passion, it attaches itself where the sex organs of the couple are united. Thus does the body composed of the five khandha arise in the womb. One's appearance, constitution and the length of life are determined by the combined result of the karma done in the past (see McDermott in O'Flaherty 1980, 164-192).

Though post-Canonical, the Milindapañha (ca.100 CE) is still authoritative and throws important light on the Buddhist

understanding of the body and its aging. Dilemma #57 in this text poses a question that is of great gerontological significance: When king Milinda asks, "Why have those who attain nirvāṇa (Arhants) no power over the body?", Nāgasena replies that there is one kind of pain only, (dukkha dukkhata possibly? see above) which the liberated one (Arhant) suffers. He/she has no control over bodily pain and the ten qualities of the body: cold, heat, hunger, thirst, fatigue, sleep, old age, disease, death and voiding excreta. But he/she can train and master his/her mental processes.

This exchange suggests the presence of a realistic undercurrent in Buddhism which recognizes and accepts the inevitability of the aging process and the finitude of the human body.¹⁸ To that extent Nāgasena's ideas closely echo the basic Ayurvedic views on aging when he declares:

¹⁸ Occasionally, such a realistic appraisal of aging is also evident in the Pali Canon. The following exchange between the Buddha and his chief disciple Ananda, as recorded in the "Indriya Saṃyutta" of the Saṃyutta Nikāya (5:193-224) bears this out:

[Once while massaging the old tired body of the Buddha, Ananda happened to remark]:

It is strange, the Blessed One's complexion is no longer pure and clear, and all the Blessed One's limbs are relaxed [become flaccid] and wrinkled, and the body is inclined forward, and there is seen a change in the faculties of sight, of hearing, of smell, of taste, of touch.

This is indeed so, Ananda. In youth one is by nature subject to decay, in health by nature, subject to disease, in life [ivite] by nature subject to death (Rhys Davids & Woodward 1951-1956, see also Jennings 1974, 356-358).

Just as the bull never forsakes its own stall, just so...should a strenuous Bhikkhu (monk), earnest in effort, never abandon his body on the ground that its nature is only the decomposition [aging] of that which is impermanent (dilemma #38, Rhys Davids 1969).

Dilemma #80 describes the nature of nirvāṇa in quaint terms which, nonetheless, are of gerontological relevance:

As medicine puts an end to diseases, so does nirvāṇa put an end to grief. as food is the support of the life of all beings, so is nirvāṇa when it has been realized, the support of life, for it puts an end to old age and death (Ibid).

Being a Buddhist text the Milindapañha duly records its disgust and contempt toward the body. But this is accomplished in a restrained and balanced manner without sacrificing or compromising the underlying doctrinal or soteriological motivation. This is clear from the following exchange between King Milinda and Nāgasena the Elder. The context is the Buddhist dogma that the body is to be regarded as an impure thing and foul (pūṭikāya):

Milinda: Is the body, Nāgasena, dear to you
recluses?

Nāgasena: No they love not the body.

Milinda: Then why do you nourish it and lavish
attention upon it?

Nāgasena: Is the wound [suffered in a battle] dear to
you that you treat it so tenderly and lavish
attention upon it?

Milinda: No, [the wound is dressed so that] the flesh may
grow again.

Nāgasena: Just so, with the recluses and the body. Without clinging to it do they bear about the body for the sake of righteousness of life (translated by Rhys Davids 1969, 115).

From the gerontological perspective, then, the basic credo of early Buddhism may be restated thus:

To be, in fact, is to become and age, and to age is suffering. We are never free of temporality and its bodily analogue, aging, which constantly reminds us of our ultimate condition: death. Joyous moments of life are but beguiling shadows of inevitable old age and its accomplices, disease and death. Old age and the consequent bodily suffering is the destiny of the human beings in this world.

The "Rāṣṭrapāla Suttanta"²⁰ of the Majjhima Nikāya links this suffering with other losses incurred by the human beings:

Misfortunes arising out of old age (jarāhāṇi), fatal disease (vyādhīhāṇi), loss of fortune (bhogahāṇi) and loss of relatives (jñātīhāṇi) impel one to adopt monastic life (MN 2.54-74).

The second noble truth affirms that there is a cause of suffering (identified with aging). By stopping the operation of the causes and conditions that generate suffering, it is possible, as affirmed in the third noble truth, to uproot suffering. The fourth noble truth delineates the method and technique one has to adopt in order to achieve complete freedom from suffering.

The Buddha's replacement of the Vedic notion of being by that of becoming and his assertion that the universe is but an

²⁰ In the Pali Canon the terms "Sutta" and "Suttanta" are used interchangeably.

uninterrupted and unmanifest stream of momentary particulars prompted his followers to elaborate a systematic technique of eliminating suffering understood as disease-decrepitude-death (jarā-vyādhī-marana) based on the doctrine of momentariness (ksanikavāda, see below). Thus, the idea of emancipation from the suffering of old age in early Buddhism is that this suffering is endured both by the body and the mind. The suffering will cease when both cease to be. Both must be blown out (nivṛta); anything short will not lead to nirvāṇa. The suffering of old age--which is real and coterminous with dependently originated existence and lived experience is to be eliminated by means of a meditative self-effort (dhyaṇa) (Pande 1974, 186).

Hindu Perspective

The Āyurvedic exposition of the body, which may be taken as the representative Hindu view on the subject under discussion, unfolds within the parameters of the ideas derived from the Sāṃkhya, Vaiśeṣika and Vedānta presuppositions of the physical universe. These include the following:

- 1) The genetic body born of father and mother is a collection of gross physical constituents, either as atoms (anu), substance (dravya) or gross elements (mahābhūtas).
- 2) The mind or psychic apparatus is made of the same stuff as the body though a subtle manifestation of the gross elements (tanmātrās).

3) This psychic apparatus along with the subtle body made of karmic reservoir (karmāśaya) and residual dispositions (vāsanā) etc., transmigrates from one life to the next. Though it animates the physical body, it is construed to be quite distinct from genetic inheritance. That is, in any given life an organism is determined both by its genetic, physical heritage and by its psychic heritage.

4) Ontologically, both the physical body and the psychic apparatus evolve out of the three-fold subtle matter understood either as guṇa (in the Sāṃkhya scheme of things) or dravya (in the Vaiśeṣika scheme of things, see Larson 1987)

The Caraka Samhitā (CS.sū 1.41) states that Āyurveda as the science of life is concerned with defining the happy and unhappy conditions of life and its span. Life (āyus) is a productive and dynamic aggregate of sense organs, mind, body and self held together and maintained over a definite period of time by the power of karmas performed in the previous lives (CS.sū.1.42; śā.1:53). By nature, human life is unstable and volatile since the body, its principle component, decays with every passing moment. This evanescent characteristic of the body, and therefore of human life, is reflected in the different synonyms given to it.

Life is known as dhāri (support) because it is supported and sustained by the three humours (see below). Jīvita (lively) is another synonym for life because it is animated by the vital principle (prāṇa). Nityaga (ever-moving forward) and anubandha (bound to other [bodies or karmas]) are two unusual synonyms of

life, found only in the medical texts.²⁰ The body, made up of the five cardinal elements, serves as an abode of enjoyments and/or suffering determined by the actions. It is formally defined as śarīra--that which is subject to decay and degeneration (śīryate iti śarīram). Because of the evanescent characteristic of its constituent elements (nityaga dravya) the body undergoes mutations (parinata) at every moment (ksana).²¹ The body is also called samayogavāhi, that is, it can only digest, assimilate and absorb those nourishing articles of food which share the body's physico-chemical composition.

The modifications (vikāra) of the body are attributable to the imbalance among the three humours. When dynamic balance is held between them, it is a state of good health (prakṛti). But modifications, which equally affect the body and the mind, lead to pain (CS.sū.9:4). Because of its mutating nature, the body of childhood is different from that of the middle age. Nothing about

²⁰ Cakrapāṇi explains these two synonyms as:

1) Life is that which is [relatively] stable even though the body is momentary and transient (nityam śarīrasya kṣaṇikatvena gacchatīti).

2) Life is that which binds [attaches itself] to other bodies with form (anubadhnātyāyurapara śarīrādi samyoga rūpatayā). See also CS.vi.8:91; CS.sū.1:42.

²¹ An imaginative simile from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (5:61) brings this out clearly:

Food cooked in the morning turns bad by the evening;
one cannot therefore expect the body nourished by that
food to be eternal.

yat prātar saṃskṛtam cānam sāyam tacca vinaśyati
tadiya rasasampustē kāye kā nāma nityatā

the body ever remains the same; everything, in fact, is in the state of constant flux. The body is produced anew every moment, yet the similarity with the old body gives the apparent impression of the persistence of the body (CS.śā.1:46),²²

The day-to-day normal functioning of the body and its maintenance and welfare as well as pathological changes (e.g. aging) culminating in death are explained in Āyurveda in terms of the concepts of bodily humours (doṣas) and elements (dhātus). The humoral theory of Āyurveda postulates the existence of three humours in the body which are the three supportive as well as pathogenic factors responsible for the sustenance, ill health, decay and death of the person. They are known as kapha (derived from the cardinal element water), pitta (derived from the cardinal element fire) and vāta (derived from the cardinal element wind), and are recruited from the food eaten, digested and assimilated. Thus, they sustain life and its smooth functioning.

The bodily humours have their homologue at the cosmic level. The relation between the macrocosmic and the microcosmic aspects of the three humours is posited by Suśruta in the following manner:

Just as the moon, sun and wind uphold the world by their action of release, absorption and dissemination

²² According to Cakrapāṇi's gloss (CS.śā.1:50,51), these verses are meant to prove the eternal existence of the immutable and ageless self tied to a body which is mutable and aging. Thus, the youthful body of a person named Devadatta is not identical with Devadatta in old age (compare with Beckett's ideas on this topic discussed by Rabuzzi in Brock 1984).

respectively, even so do kapha, pitta and vāta act with regard to the body.²³ The same point is elaborated with reference to the simile of a hut upheld by three pillars. In like manner the three humours shore up the human body (SS.sū.21:3).

The humours are in continuous flux, possessing definite circadian rhythms. Under the influence of the yearly solar cycle (divided in six seasons) and the monthly lunar cycle, the relative proportions of the three humours constantly undergo decrease or increase. They may also remain in a state of dynamic equilibrium (CS.sū.17:112). The vāta doṣa, for instance, prevails at the end of the day, in rainy season and in old age (CS.ci.30:308-311). Normally the variations in the relative strengths of the humours remain within tolerable limits, but under the influence of culpable insight (prajñāparādha), seasonal variations (pariṇāma) and uncongenial interaction between the senses and the sense objects (asātmayendriyārtha), they cross the limits, giving rise to pathogenesis that includes premature as well as timely aging.

The humours (doṣas) are so called because they are liable to be morbidified (the equivalent Sanskrit verb is duṣ from which the substantive doṣa is derived) by the wrong kind of nutrition, behaviour, seasonal variation or by internal factors such as emotions or restraint of natural urges. Once morbidified, they, in turn, vitiate the seven bodily elements (dhātus). In their balanced state the humours are also known as the supporting

²³ visargādāna viksepaiḥ soma suryavānīlā yathā
dhārayanti jagaddehaṁ kaphapittānīlastadā (SS.sū.21:6).

elements of the body (dhātu), but for the sake of convenience of exposition and uniformity of application, they are separately identified as humours (doṣas) even in that benevolent condition. In this normal state they are known as prakṛtibhūta and in the morbid state as vikṛtibhūta.

The relative prevalence of a particular humour in the body provides important clues regarding the typology of the human constitution. Thus, due to the stabilizing property of kapha, the ślesmala (kapha dominated) type of subject is slow in his/her undertakings, in the changes of mood and pathological conditions. He/she ages relatively slowly (mandajarasah, CS vi.8:96[2]). Due to the heat inherent in the pitta, the pittala type of subject is prone to premature aging and wrinkles (CS.vi.8:97[1]). On account of the swiftness of vāta, the vātala type of subject quickly undergoes variations of moods and pathological changes (CS.vi.8:98[2]).²⁴

The Āyurveda also posits the human being as the product of rasa, a nutrient fluid generated by the activities of the three

²⁴ This verse suggests that the medical tradition of India resembles other ancient medical traditions of China, Greece and Rome in formulating its medicine from generic physiological and cosmological concepts and in the organization of its practice. Most ancient medical traditions are based on the rudiments of humoral theories: four humours in the Mediterranean tradition, three in the Asian. Like its Chinese and Western counterparts, Āyurveda, too, seems to consider human anatomy and physiology to be intimately bound to the cosmic system. The arrangement and balance of elements in the human body are microscopic versions of their arrangement in society at large and throughout the cosmos. This conception, then, serves to rationalize the relation of humans to their environment by making preventive and curative medical efforts to maintain or to restore cosmic equilibrium.

humours: One must, therefore, preserve rasa with care and effort.²⁵ The postulation of the concept of rasa thus serves as yet another meaningful link between the individual and the cosmos. Rasa is also seen as the first among the seven manifest elements (dhātus) of the body, namely:

rasa: nutrient fluid

rakta: blood

māṃsa: flesh

medas: fat

asthi: bones

majjan: marrow

sukra: semen.

These constituents evolve progressively one out of the other, starting with rasa. Homologous environmental factors maintain health; any variation disturbs their equilibrium.²⁶ Some of the more important among these factors include:

kāla: time or climatic seasonal environment

buddhi: intelligence

indriyārtha: sense-objects including items of diet and pleasures of senses.

²⁵ rasajam puruṣam vidyāt. rasam rakṣet prayatnataḥ
(SS.sū.14.12).

²⁶ Caraka (CS.sū.6:3,5) makes it clear that the sun, the wind and the moon, governed by time as well as their special nature and orbits, constitute the causative factors of the manifestations of the seasons, humours and bodily strength. Thus, the seasonal and dietary regimen practiced by a person who knows the seasonal homologation with regard to behaviour and diet, promote his/her vigour and complexion. The method of rejuvenation, called Vātātapika, is based on this premise (see chapter seven).

According to another important interpretation of Āyurvedic theory, life (āyus) is also a co-product of the puruṣa (conscious monad)²⁷, and the primordial materiality (prakṛti) made up of three material constituents (guṇas):

sattva: the subtle matter of pure thought

rajas: the kinetic matter of pure energy

tamas: the reified matter of inertia.

This explanation closely follows the creation account in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga tradition, which traces the evolution of the entire universe to the coming into contact with each other of the two ultimate principles: puruṣa and prakṛti. The puruṣa are innumerable (CS.śā.1:80) and conscious monads: (CS.śā.1:76) with each occupying a separate gross body (CS.śā.1:81). But there is only one prakṛti which is conceived of as a primordial, unconscious and material substance. Both the puruṣa and prakṛti are without a beginning and end (CS.śā.1:82). Influenced by the metaphysics of the Vedānta, the Caraka Saṃhitā also states that the individual is an epitome of the macrocosm.

The puruṣa is none other than brahman (universal self), which is reflected in the empirical self (CS.śā.1:155; 4:13).²⁸

²⁷ Puruṣa is an important concept in Indian philosophy and is defined variously in different schools of thought. Pāṇini (Uṇādi Sūtra 4:74) defines it as that which moves forward (purah kusan). The Amarakoṣa defines it as that which has body as the locus (puri dehe śidati tiṣṭhatīti, 1:4.29; 1:6.1) and lists its two synonyms--ātma and kṣetraina (knower of field). He identifies kṣetra with śarīra (body) observing that body is that which perishes (kṣiyata iti kṣetram śarīram).

²⁸ The entire chapter #5 called "Individual as the Epitome of the Universe" (CS.śā.) deals with this homology.

Also known as ātmā, the puruṣa is changeless, transcendental and becomes the cause of consciousness when united with the mind, the senses and the sense objects. But despite this association with the perishable body, the self itself remains untouched by all pathogenicity [including aging] (CS.sū.1:56).

The three gunas dialectically interact with each other generating the manifest world of subjective experience and objective existence. Subjectively, prakṛti emanates into the forms of individualized buddhi and its evolutes. Objectively, the physical body evolves out of the five generic essences (tanmātrās) which are present throughout nature and which are transmitted genetically through the semen (śukra) of the father and the ovum and blood (śonita) of the mother. Running throughout nature on all levels (subjective and objective; macrocosmic and microcosmic) are the ongoing transformations (pariṇāmas; see below).

This understanding of human life, though based on the twin Sāṃkhyan concepts of puruṣa and prakṛti, generates a unique understanding of a person in the universe which serves the purpose of the Vedic self (ātman) as well as a composite biological image of puruṣa. Suśruta (SS.sā.1.16) designates this composite product as the acting self (karmapuruṣa) which is the locus of the medical or geriatric treatment. Āyurveda lays great stress on the embodied nature of the self claiming that the body is the very foundation of the human being (CS.ni.6:6 śarīram hya sya mūlam śarīramūlaśca puruṣo bhavati). The desire for a long

and healthy life (prāṇaisanā) is the first among the three basic desires (esaṇās) entertained by human beings (CS.sū.11:4). Before everything else, therefore, one should take care of the body, for in the absence of the body, there is the total extinction of all that characterizes embodied beings (CS.ni.6:7).

The process of the embodiment of the self begins with the garbha (embryo and foetus) which develops as a result of the successful union of semen (śukra) and menstrual blood (śonita, ārtava and rakta). The "Śārīra Sthāna" section (chapters three and four) of the Caraka Samhitā describes in detail how the fertilization of the egg by the sperm sets in motion the development of the foetus. The foetus is said to be self-born (ātmaiah) and is known as antarātman (the equivalent of Vedic tanu) which subsequently becomes known as jīva.²⁹ The embodied self, as noted above, is eternal, without diseases, non-aging, immortal, non-perishable, non-divisible, universal, unmanifest, undying and without a beginning. Having entered the womb, it unites with the sperm and blood and generates itself through fertilization (garbhatvena). Unborn (ajāta), the self generates the unborn foetus (ajāto hyayam ajātam garbham janayati).

The same foetus, with the force of time "acquires" the various phases such as child, youth and old age (see CS.śā.3:8)

²⁹ Cakrapāṇi's gloss points out that the compound antarātman is used here to distinguish the empirical self as a causative factor of the embryo as distinct from the physical body composed of the six elements (dhātus).

without undergoing real modifications.³⁰ The foetus is constituted by the modifications (vikāras) of the five elements: ether, wind, fire, water, earth. Consciousness (cetanā) serves as the sixth component CS.śā.4:6).³¹

A similar account of the genesis of the human body is also provided in early Buddhism in the "Yakkha Samyutta" of the Samyutta Nikāya wherein a celestial being (yakṣa) named Indaka observes:

Form is not the living principle in the opinion of the Buddhas. How does the soul possess this body? Whence to soul does come the lump of bones and liver? How does this soul hide within the body? (SN 1:206-215).

The Buddha's explanation is that first the kalāla (foetus in the primary stage of development) takes birth and then undergoes successive developmental stages (e.g. abbuda, see Barua 1970, 164). In a similar vein Manu (MS 6:76,77) also puts forth his understanding of the characteristics of the human body (dehasvarūpa). Generally his explanation closely follows the familiar ideas detailed in the Āyurvedic texts. Manu's intention, however, is to direct the aging person's energies to the

³⁰ This assertion is consistent with the basic Sāṃkhya doctrine that it is only the properties of the substance that undergo change. Patañjali's Mahābhāṣya (1:1.5) makes a similar point in stating that gold [as a substance] unites with a particular form [and property] and appears as a lump.

³¹ Cakrapāṇi insists that this description of the embryo as composed of six elements is not in contradiction to the assertion made in CS.śā.1:17 that the human being is composed of twenty-four elements. He, however, does not satisfactorily demonstrate how.

cultivation of dispassion (vaīrāgya) with respect to the mundane world (samsāra) and the realization of liberation (mokṣa).

The body and mind are the abodes of diseases as well as of health. Right contact or interaction between the four factors viz. time, mind, senses and sense objects is responsible for good health and well being (CS.sū.1:55). Whereas vāta, pitta and kapha in their morbid condition constitute the pathological factors at the somatic level, rajas and tamas (passion and delusion) are the complex of pathogenic factors at the psychic level (CS.sū.1:57). When there exists erroneous, inadequate or excessive interaction between the above four factors, it leads to ill health (psychic or somatic) and premature aging (CS.sū.1:54). This imbalance in the elements of the body (dhātuvaīśamya) also results from errors of regimen with reference to personal hygiene, It can therefore be rectified by careful observance of svasthavṛtta and sadvṛtta (norms of proper health and ethical behaviour). If the condition of the imbalance is allowed to progress further, it may lead to the vitiation of the humours.

Perhaps influenced by the Buddhist tendency of regarding the body as the impediment to spiritual progress, the Smṛti works such as the Viṣṇu Smṛti (96:43-55) or the Manu Smṛti (6:76,77) insist that one must recognize that this human frame consisting of seven constituents covered with a skin and having a foul smell is a receptacle of impure substances. Though surrounded by a hundred pleasures and though carefully sustained and nourished, the human body is subject to change (aging) and destruction.

Covered by six skin layers, the body is kept together by three hundred and sixty bones.³²

The description of the genesis, development and death of the body in the Yājñavalkya Smṛti (3:3:85-106) is considerably more vivid and detailed and provides a long account of the bodily functions also influenced by yogic and ayurvedic ideas. Viṇṇāneśvara's gloss, Mitāksarā, on these passages reminds us that the knowledge of the bodily functions and organs is for the purpose of cultivating dispassion. Furthermore, this knowledge is for the sake of discriminating the ephemeral from the eternal and to facilitate spiritual liberation. One particular passage strongly reminiscent of the Caraka Saṃhitā puts it succinctly:

The beginningless self does not get embodied (sambhūti). It is the self within (antarātman) which occupies and pervades the gross body (śarīra) through the relation of inherence (samavāya). This comes about due to delusion, desire, repulsion and one's own karma. The body is ripened (vipākah) by the power of the deeds committed in previous lives. Upon dissolution at death, it is reborn here on earth or elsewhere on account of bhāva, the process of becoming (YSm 3:3.133).

Encased in an envelope or sheath generated by the rajas and tamas gunas, the self wanders through samsāra burdened with all kinds of afflictions which are responsible for its repeated embodiment (YSm 3:3.140 and Viṇṇāneśvara's gloss Mitāksarā on it).

A didactic tract attributed to Śaṅkara, the Śaṅkara-prakarana, ("Ātmānātma Viveka", #22-28) also argues that the body is other

³² See also a chapter on "Kāyajugupsā" in the Śiva Purāṇa ("Umā Saṃhitā", #23).

than the self (anātma nāma), evil (anṛta), prone to suffering (duḥkhātmakan) and made of three layers:

1) sthūla: made of five cardinal elements, originating in [past] actions and subject to the six temporal phases such as birth (see above). It is called śarīra because it is worn out with each changing phase identified as childhood, early youth, youth and old age (śīryate vavobhir bālya-kaumāra-yauvana-vārdhakyādibhiriti). It is also known as deha after the verb dah (to burn down to ashes).

The body, therefore, is characterized by the condition of [being reduced to ashes]. All gross bodies are liable to be burned by the fire of the three types of sufferings:

- ādhyātmika: fever and other maladies due to the imbalance of the three doṣas
- ādhibhautika: caused by cold, heat, wind, rain
- ādhidaivika : suffering resulting from the actions of god etc.

2) sūkṣma: made of seventeen senses, that is, five organs of knowledge, five organs of action, five organs including the vital breath (prāṇa) and intellect (buddhi).³³

3) līṅga: that body which survives after the dissolution of the artha (material elements) by listening to religious discourse and reflection.

³³ Compare with Praśna Upaniṣad (6:1-8), which describes Prajāpati as having sixteen parts, fifteen of which disappear gradually and reappear again following the waning and waxing patterns of the moon. But the sixteenth part, being the essence of Prajāpati, remains constant and immutable (cf. BAU 1:5.14). Taking Prajāpati as the model, a human being, too, is described as made of sixteen parts, of which, fifteen decay [age] but are replenished through food, while the sixteenth part vanishes with life itself (cf. CU 6:7.1 see also Deussen 1980, 2:591).

Here śārīra is to be understood as that which is dissolved through the realization that brahman and ātmā (the individual self) are one.³⁴

The human life span is not determinate because otherwise none would seek longevity by Āyurvedic means such as the rasāyana. There is timely or untimely death, because there exists also timely and untimely dietary habits (āhāra) or leisure activities (vihāra). The epic literature, too, reflects the familiar classical ideas of the embodiment of the self and the different structures and layers of the visible body enveloping it. Thus, in a dialogue in the Mahābhārata (14:17.6-39)--featuring the brahmin named Kaśyapa and a siddha (perfect master)--the former wants to know how the body disintegrates (cyavate), how it is born and how it obtains release from samsāra (verses #2-3). The siddha, in a long-winded reply (MB 14:17.6-39), reproduces the standard explanation of the embodied self as elaborated in the medical texts (CS "Śārīra Sthāna"). Of a similar vein is Bhīṣma's discourse on the relationship between one's deeds and the condition of the body (MB 17:4).

In the Rāmāyana, Rāma consoles his distressed younger brother Bharata--who is trying to persuade Rāma to abandon his exile in the forest and return to the capital city of Ayodhyā--by discoursing on the general nature of human life and body which has death for its substratum. Everything, philosophizes Rāma,

³⁴ Śaṅkara's gloss Brahma Sūtra (4:2.9) argues that it is this subtle body which makes spiritual progress possible for the individual as it transmigrates through samsāra. The subtle body perishes only when the individual self dissolves in brahman.

ends in loss and falls to pieces. Just as a house, supported by strong pillars becomes old and comes down, so people consigned to old age and death fall down. Just as a reservoir of water is quickly dried up in summer, so are the lives of all creatures consumed by the march of days and nights (Rām 2:98.18,19).

However, alongside statements of this kind are also to be found pronounced positive affirmations. The Yogavāsistha insists that to the spiritually blind the body is the source of suffering and pain; but for the sage it is the source of unimaginable bliss (4:23.2,18).

Phases of Aging

In Vedic society, when the life expectancy was relatively short, the average life span was conceptually divided into two phases only: youth and old age (see chapter two), which were regarded as two opposing principles--day and night, light and darkness or warm and cold (see chapter three). This primitive dichotomy is also discernible, in some measure, in Vedic language and literature. As the life span continued to increase with developing technology and improved health-care, it came to be further divided into three, four, seven or even ten phases. Such a restructuring of the life span in multiple phases is pictorially described and recorded through various symbols, metaphors and myths by identifying the phases of life with three sacrifices, four seasons, five cardinal elements etc. The autumn,

for instance, though it still bears fruit already contains within itself a germ of destruction, the diminishing of the vital force. With advancing age, hair falls like autumn leaves, the body becomes cold and the head is covered with the snow of grey hair.

A hymn from the Atharva Veda (5:28.3) posits three phases of life:

bālya: childhood

tārunya: youth

vārdhakya: old age

They are then metaphorized on the three strands of the sacred thread (yajñopavita) worn by all initiated males (dvijas). Just as the three strands of the yajñopavita are made of the same material, says the hymn, so are the three life stages governed by one principle of righteousness (dharma) and animated by one being that is identical. Later Dharma Śāstra and medical texts replace this metaphysical visualization of the phases of life with a temporal and biological understanding. The Caraka Samhitā defines the age of a person as a condition of the body, which, in turn, is a function of the measure of time.³⁵ It envisages the typical male life span in three phases:

1) bālyam the phase stretching between the ages of sixteen and thirty and dominated by the kapha doṣa, not yet fully developed constituents (dhātus) and vigour which keeps the body tender but unable to bear hardships. It is also characterized by the continued growth and maturity of the dhātus and the guṇas. Since

³⁵ vayastaśceti kālapramānaviśeṣāpekṣinī
hi śarīravasthā vayo'bhidhiyate (CS.vi.8:122).

the sattva guna is not yet developed, the mind remains fickle and unstable, which therefore requires re-orientation and re-channeling into constructive activities by the practice of tapas (austerities), brahmacarya (chastity) and sadvṛtta (appropriate moral behaviour).

2) madhya: the phase dominated by the pitta dosa and running up to the age of sixty. It is characterized by the full and balanced development of all the seven dhātus and the three gunas, endowing the adult male with vigour, energy, manliness, heroism and the capacity to absorb, retain, recall and express knowledge.

These qualities enable the person to accomplish the two major ends of life (esāṇā)--artha (material prosperity) and kāma (emotional and sexual satisfaction).³⁶

3) jīrṇa: is the final phase, which in theory lasts until the age of one hundred and is dominated by the vāta dosa. It is characterized by the depletion and/or loss of the developed constituents (dhātus), vigour of the sense organs, power, energy, heroism and knowledge. Caraka acknowledges that there may be persons with a life span stretching beyond the average one hundred years. This life span may also be divided into three phases where the phase of bālyam would stretch to thirty-six years, the madhyam to seventy years with the remaining life span recognized as jīrṇa.

³⁶ Suśruta, on his part, regards middle age (madhyāvasthā) as stretching between the ages of sixteen and seventy. He subdivides it into five phases: vrddhi (growth), up to the age of twenty; yauvana (youth), up to the age of thirty; sampūrṇatā (fullness), up to the age of forty; hāni (loss), between forty-five and seventy; and jīrṇāvasthā (old age), from seventy years and up.

On the other hand, those with a shorter life span will have the bālyam phase until the age of twenty-five, the madhya phase until age of fifty, with the remaining years being spent in the jīrṇa phase.

The life span and its phases, thus, are predicated on the basis of the bodily constitution and other signs of life (āyurlakṣaṇas) as outlined in CS.vi.8:95. The condition of the semen and blood (ovum), foetal development through time, the condition of the person in sickness and his/her diet and daily routine, seasonal modifications in the cardinal elements--all these are deemed to be the functions of the foetal constitution, which, in turn, is determined by the predominance of one or the other of the following:

- 1) The three humours
- 2) Birth in the given clan.
- 3) Habitat
- 4) Time.

This renders people genetically susceptible to a varying rate and pattern of aging with various environmental, nutritive, social and cultural conditions also acting as the predisposing factors. The basic constitutional disposition (dehaptakṛti) of each body in the first instance is determined by the respective constitutional peculiarities of the parents at the time of the fertilization of the egg by the sperm. The relative dominance of one of the three humours is determined from different factors in operation at the time of fertilization.

These factors include:

- 1) The nature of the ovum and sperm

- 2) The time and season
- 3) Age of the parents
- 4) Habitation
- 5) The conduct, habits and diet of the parents.

Individuals whose constitutional disposition is dominated by the vāta humour tend to possess low vitality, bear smaller number of children, age faster and have a shorter life span. They are also prone to quick pathological changes in mood (CS.vi.8:98(2)). When the pitta humour dominates the disposition, that individual tends to possess moderate vitality and medium life span. His/her thermogenic nature contributes to premature grey hair, bald head and the appearance of folds of skin at various places on the body at a relatively early age (CS.vi.8:97(1)).

But individuals with a dominant kapha humoral disposition are gifted with good vitality, enduring capacity and long life span. Pathological changes and variations of mood are slower to develop in these individuals and consequently they also age at a much slower rate (mandajarasa CS.vi.8:96(24)). Caraka next argues that the temporal factor that brings about aging and death is also responsible for generating certain diseases specific to old age (CS.śā.1:115). These diseases are natural (svabhāvaja) and as such irremediable. In his gloss on this sūtra, Cakrapāṇi maintains that natural diseases are kālaaja because they manifest themselves at appointed hours. They are caused by old age or appear as premonitory conditions of death (jarāmṛtyunimittajāh), depending upon the normal span of life in a given age (yuga).

The natural manifestation of old age is irremediable in the sense that it cannot be treated by any therapy except the rejuvenation therapy (CS.ci.1:72), which does not, however, cure old age. It merely serves as a prophylactic measure, delaying the onset of old age. Anyone who is familiar with the role that astrology plays in the life of the Hindus will not be surprised to learn that the phases of life are also controlled and superintended by the planets.³⁷ Varāhamihira (ca.600 CE) in his Brhat Samhitā, a work on astrology, rules that:

The phases of life in persons under the protection of the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, the Sun and Saturn are said to be [respectively] those of:

Breast-fed baby: first year

Child: 2-3 years

Innocence (vratasthita): 4-12 years

Youth: 13-32 years

Middle age: 33-50 years

Old age: 51-70 years

Very old age: 71-120 years. ³⁸

Spreading of Old Age

In one short sūtra (SS.sū.35:29), Suśruta graphically describes the damage caused to the body and mind by the aging process. After the age of seventy, with each passing day, the

³⁷ In the "Āraṇyaka Parva" of the Mahābhārata (3:230), for instance, is to be found a discussion on the influence of the planets on the human body and its aging.

³⁸ Wayman (1963, 360-361). In the same article he has also compared these phases with those proposed by Ptolemy.

seven body elements, sense organs, energy, vitality and enthusiasm become debilitated giving rise to wrinkled skin, grey hair, baldness, chronic cough and hard breathing. The aging individual's capacity to perform all kinds of functions is reduced progressively. Eventually, the person goes under, like an old home giving in after a heavy downpour (see also CS.vi. 8:122).

Suśruta provides a detailed account of how any disease, once it has found a home in the body, spreads through it gradually in six clearly identifiable stages eventually killing the body. Since he also regards aging and old age as a disease, it is possible to provide an analogical account of the aging process as it spreads to different parts of the body. The essential stages involved in this process may be presented as follows:

- 1) samuccaya (accumulation of the vāta humour). As explained earlier, the process of aging originates in the imbalance among the three doṣas and the resultant accumulation of the vāta doṣa. This is the first sign and symptom of aging.
- 2) prakopa (vitiation). With the abnormal increase in its proportion, the vāta humour changes from its benevolent aspect, present in the state of balance into a malevolent one on account of the imbalance. According to Vāgbhāṭa, the deranged vāta stops circulating through its normal channels forcing itself into the wrong ones.
- 3) prasara (diffusion). As the term indicates, the deranged vāta begins to spread out of the areas of the body it had first struck into those immediately adjoining it, picking up speed in the process.

4) sthāna-saṁśraya (localization). With increasing rapidity, old age undermines the entire organ or the physiological system which is liable and prone to aging. As Caraka puts it in a colorful metaphor, the vāta doṣa pours down its vitiating element wherever it finds a congenial site and causes disorder there just as a cloud showers down rain on a favorable spot. Vāta strikes first in the urinary bladder, followed by rectum, waist, thighs and colon in that order (CS.sū.20:8).

According to Caraka (CS ci.15:37) these particular parts of the body are likely to age at a faster rate than others betraying the tell-tale signs of old age earlier than elsewhere in the body.

5) vyakti (manifestation). Soon the calling card left by the process of aging becomes manifest and visible for all to see. The aging individual becomes aware and convinced of old age only when others confirm the signs of old age.

6) bheda (rupture). The aging process effectively mediates between life and death. It begins the moment the body, sense organs, mind and the self are brought together as a life (āyus) and culminates in death whereby the composite being that had been held together by the factors of time (kāla), deed (karma) and desire (kāma), and anna (nutrition) is dissolved. (see SS.sū.35:29).

In the classical literature, the spreading of the visible signs of old age is said to begin with the forehead. In one of the plays of Śūdraka entitled Mṛcchakatika (3:8), the hero Cārudatta, describing the phenomenon of sleep compares its onset with the process of aging:

Here is sleep, approaching me as it were, from my forehead, overwhelming my eyes. Invisible in form and

elusive, it gains strength like old age, overcoming the human vitality of a person.³⁹

This simile is appropriate since it is believed that the first dozing impulse is felt in the region of the forehead. Similarly, old age is metaphorically said to approach a person from the forehead, because the sign of grey hair, its forerunner, is first observed round the forehead. This imagery is also discernible in the following expression from a popular maxim:

Old age, the messenger of death, approaching at the root of the ears says...⁴⁰

In the Raghuvamśa, Kālidāsa describes how old age, as if apprehensive of Kaikeyī's evil designs, approached the aging King Daśaratha from behind his ear in the guise of grey [hair] and whispered, "crown Rāma [as the next king]." (RV 12:2)⁴¹

Signs and Symptoms of Aging

Aging is a slow and continuous process of physical and psychological decline and deterioration in strength, initiative and energy. It has determinate incubation periods as well as specific modes of spread, manifestation and localization in every

³⁹ iyam hi nidrā nayanāvalambinī lalātadeśād
upasarpativa mām.adrśyarūpā capalā jaraiva yā
mānasyasatvam paribhūyam vartate.

⁴⁰ krtāntasya dūtī jarā karnamūle samāgatya
vaktīti lokā śrunudhvam...

⁴¹ ram karnamūlam āgatya rāme śrīrnyasyatāmiti
kaikeyīśaṅkayevāha palitachadmanā jarā.

part of the body (kriyākāla). But aging occurs ever so imperceptibly that humans are convinced of the truth of old age only when they discover its manifest and visible signs and symptoms on the body and in the failing faculties of the mind. Caraka (CS.ci.18:30) documents these changes in accurate and consummate detail:

Bald head, receding hair line, greying hair, wrinkles on the face, emaciated, lean body, slowing down of the reflexes, debilitated vital physiological functions (see also SS.sū.5:41.19).

Caraka judges (CS.ci.1:4) old age to be a natural disorder or disease (svābhāvikā vyādhi) which is responsible for the vitiation of the semen (CS.ci.30:134-139) with the result that the aging man becomes aware of his flaccid sex organ (liṅga-śaithilya) and depleting semen (CS.ci.30:153-157) with the consequence that in advanced old age he becomes impotent (CS.ci.30:162-176).⁴² The Vāyu Purāṇa (31:26.40,45), with reference to the Yayāti-Puru dialogue (see chapter six), also describes old age as the destroyer of libido and enjoyments (kāma-bhogaprasāsinī) and of good complexion and beauty (varnarūpa vināsinī).

Such disorders of geriatric nature invariably accompany aging which the medical texts trace to the impairment of the seven dhātus. It is explained that with advancing age, first the

⁴² In CS.ci.2;4.40-45 Caraka lists, along with old age, worries, diseases and karma, too little or too much sex with women, as the causes that deplete the semen of man thereby causing premature aging.

rasa dhātu becomes afflicted with the result that blood (rakta), the second most important dhātu, turns acidic. Consequently, flesh (māṃsa) becomes flabby and flaccid rendering the bones (asthi), the third dhātu, brittle and dry. Fat (medas) thereby gets distended shrivelling up the fifth dhātu in the order of importance, the marrow (maiṇan). Finally, the production of semen (sukra) is reduced to a trickle so that ojas, the essence of all the seven dhātus, is dangerously depleted.

Parallel pathogenic changes are brought about in the body of the woman. The menstrual discharge, which usually begins at the age of twelve, comes to a halt after the woman has reached the age of fifty. These impairments attributable to the aging process further give rise to the specific somatic and psychic disorders which are outlined in precise details in the relevant sections of the Caraka Saṃhitā and the Suśruta Saṃhitā.

One of the earliest and the most worrisome signs of old age to appear on the body is the shrivelling and drying up of the surface skin resulting in wrinkles (vali). CS.śā.8:51, for example, refers to the condition of the knitted forehead (vali-valibha). Baldness and loss of hair (khalati) are not far behind. According to Caraka (CS.ci.26:39); this condition is caused by the vitiated pitta dosa which burns the scalp. Excess intake of salt (lavana rasa) may also contribute to this condition. (CS. vi.1:17). Grey hair (palati) makes its appearance almost simultaneously. With advancing age, chronic cough (jarākāsa) is a familiar complaint. During winter its bouts become particularly

acute. In addition to being very discomforting, it is incurable and only a proper diet and regime can keep it in check. Jarāsosa (wasting of the body in old age) begins to leave its signs when the body becomes very old. Its symptoms include extreme thinness, depletion of semen, lethargy of sense organs and the intellect, tremors, loss of taste and appetite (SS.sū.41:19).

The voice grows thin and faint like beats on a broken drum. Various discharges ooze out of the person's nose, ears, eyes and mouth. Finally, the reflexes slow down decreasing free movements and mobility (SS.sū.35:29). Such inevitable changes and losses are endemic to the human experience of growing older. One's ability to come to terms with these inevitable losses due to old age is a critical test of human maturity. Both the medical and moral texts which are aware of this dimension make use of a number of stock images from the religious perspective to make these losses bearable.

In the manner of the Corpus Hippocraticum ascribed to Hippocrates, Caraka implies that there are some diseases which are characteristic of old age, others such as the chronic cough, occur more or less frequently and still others run quite a different course in old age. Both diseases and old age result when the balance among the three humours is disturbed. When the humours get excited, they bring about pathogenic changes in the body (CS.sū.20:9). Old age is a product of the morbid interaction between the predisposing causes (nidānas), humours and the body elements, which are deranged by the humours.

Semeiotic Implications of Aging

While semantics principally deals with meaning in process (such as aging, see chapter one), semeiotics, as the study of signs, is more concerned with the interpretation of the enduring results or consequences of the processes. The semeiotics of old age (to be discussed in the projected sequel to this study), therefore, is naturally relevant to gerontology and geriatrics. There is a clear recognition and awareness of this fact in Āyurveda, which recognizes that the physician's stock in trade is hermeneutics (interpretation through signs).

Application of semeiotic principles to medical practice, accordingly, is well established in Indian medicine. All the three important medical texts consulted for this study discuss and establish various signs (arista), first, to identify and recognize the observable signs of impending illness, old age and death, and second, to use them as adaptive strategies appropriate to particular semeiotic environments. Recent investigations in semeiotics--particularly into the question whether there exists any relationship between the human being and the function of signs--tend to support this long established hypothesis of Āyurveda (and of Augustine; see De Magistro) that there exists a close relation between the biological processes such as aging and semeiosis.

More recently, semeiosis has been recognized as a pervasive fact of both nature and culture. Semeiotics not only perdures

through youth and adulthood; it is an essential feature of senescence. Old age, is, in fact, a system of signification, to which Peirce's and Augustine's notions of semiosis are eminently applicable (see Sebeok 1977, 181). Repetitiousness in old people is, for them, an index of old age. It is regularly mistaken by others, not old, for an unwitting symptom of physiological deficit. The slowing down of the bodily processes in aging is one of the most dominant signs associated with aging.

In the classical medical terminology of India, influenced by Buddhism, both the symptom and the sign of disease (including aging) are referred to through one term, lakṣaṇa.⁴³ Slowing down is the principal sign (lakṣaṇa) and frequently figures as a metaphor to illumine in more human terms the experience of aging.

Our texts assert that time has the dimension of depth as well as duration (see Helarāja's commentary on Bhartṛhari's Kālasamuddesa), which are often seen as an either/or situation. It is only the realization that the duration aspect of time is not endless that one begins to recognize and appreciate the equally dominant role of the aspect of depth in the process of aging.

Another key sign (lakṣaṇa) employed to interpret the consequences of the process of aging, which is also most readily and clearly visible on the aging human body, is the unrelenting alteration of smooth surfaces and straight lines and contours of

⁴³ Sebeok (1986, 46) has observed that the term symptom usually appears in conjunction with sign. As a technical term, it occurs both in medicine and semiotics.

the body. The skin on different organs begins to wrinkle and roughen with age, bodily posture becomes curved, the memory is restructured and begins to lapse. The structurally essential parts of the body lose their suppleness and become firm and rigid.

The factors which are responsible for this change in the body as listed by Caraka (CŚ.śā.1:102; 6:12) include:

- 1) kālayoga: force of time
- 2) svabhāva: inherent tendency, which Cakrapāṇi glosses as the unseen force (adrsta)
- 3) avidyatāh: imprudence
- 4) prajñāparādha: volitional transgressions as well as culpable insight, that is, acts committed by one who is deranged of understanding, will or memory.

This list effectively summarizes the principle Indian views regarding the aging of the body and the various signs it leaves on the body and mind in its wake. The subject matter of the next chapter (#5) deals with the causes of aging listed above by Caraka.

Chapter Five? Dynamics of Aging

Time and Aging

Introduction

For a proper understanding of the discussion taken up in this chapter, it is crucial to bear in mind the important conceptual distinction between time as an abstract concept and as temporality. While the former is used in the sense of a reified, absolute category with independent ontological status and influencing the mode of beings, the latter is understood as an expression of change which characterizes entities as their mode. In terms of its role in the aging process, time, thus, brings two important perspectives to bear.

The former perspective posits a mechanistic temporal model where events and sequences are unilinear and progressive. Time is compared to the passage of an arrow through space. It is conceived to be an objective phenomenon existing without reference to human perception or social order. Time is ontologically prior to the consciousness of it. Temporality is really a series of atomic moments, a series of "nows", which exist literally for one moment--for the now--then perish to yield to yet another now (see below). History and all change in individual as well as in social life are powered by time and run in a forward irreversible direction like an arrow.

The other perspective takes a relativist view of time and opines that time is a phenomenon based on subjective perception. Time is that which in passing characterizes consciousness and being. Augustine, for instance, places the reality of time in inner experience. Both past and future must exist in the present if they are to be at all. Further, it is the self which permits past and future to be. Past events do not in themselves exist, only the images of them in the memory. Similarly, when we predict the future, it is not tomorrow we see but the foreshadowing of it in the present of the mind (Augustine 1927, 284-301). One may, then, argue that in the consciousness of the aging individual there is a present memory of past events, a present attention to the present events, and a present anticipation of future events.

Vedic Perspective

In Indian tradition, too, similar perspectives on time are posited and consequently have important bearings on the envisaged role of time with relation to the aging process (see below).¹ The term kāla (time) does not occur in the Rgveda (perhaps with the exception of 10:42.9)² nor is the nature of time elaborated. For the Vedic people, time is a moment in process as well as

¹ Bhartṛhari's Vākyapadīyam provides as many as ten different theories of time as known to him.

² The actual term used is kāle (ut prahāmatidīvyā jayāti kṛtam yacchvghnī vicinoti kāle...). Geldner takes it for time-- (Kāle ist der einziige Belag für Kāla in Rgveda). Sāyaṇa glosses it as "at the time of the battle (yuddhakāle)."

discontinuous instants collectively expressed as "year" (saṃvatsara) and identified with Prajāpati. Prajāpati is that articulation of the seasons effected by rituals.³ Yet the Vedic poets earnestly pray to divinities to allow them to "live a hundred years", to live "forever". The Vedic person is certainly conscious of the temporal nature of existence, that life is ever fleeting and always too short. One is therefore encouraged to live according to the rhythm of nature: day and night, the seasons, the year. Yet one does not detect an attitude of escapism from time into timelessness, which begins to preoccupy the Upaniṣadic thinkers and the Buddhists. For the Vedic individual all the three worlds are temporal.

The Upaniṣads attempt to understand and transcend time, which is seen metaphorically as a brimful vessel (pūrṇakumbha). The Maitrī Upaniṣad (6:14-16) speculates on the form, manifestation and infinity of time. The sage Śākāyanya in response to the question of King Brhadratha argues that time, death and life (prāṇa) are identical. Time ripens and dissolves all beings in the great self, but he who knows into what time itself is dissolved, he is the knower of the Veda.⁴ The next

³ Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (1:2) states that behind the "year" (saṃvatsara), which is the visible form of time, there lies the supreme essence of time (ādhisattva kāla) which is compared to a big river expanding in depth and space (see Deshpande in Devasthali 1985, 169-175).

⁴ ka'atsravanti bhūtāni kālādvṛddhim prayānti ca kāle caṣṭam nigacchanti kālo mūrtir amūrtinām.

verse (6:15) posits two forms of the ultimate reality (brahman) in temporal terms: time and timeless.

That which is prior to the sun is the timeless and without parts. That which begins with the sun is concurrent with time that is divisible in parts such as a year (samvatsara). From the year creatures are produced, through the year they grow, and in the year they disappear. It is time that cooks (pacati) all created beings in [the vast cauldron of] his great self. One may detect in such an interpretation of time first attempts to conceptualize the aging process in biophysical terms. This awareness of aging in relation to [temporal] change--which remains submerged under the more spectacular Upaniṣadic discovery of the non-temporal--is elliptically acknowledged by Patañjali:

For here (in the world) nobody indeed remains firm in his self even for a moment; he either grows as long as he can or he meets destruction (Mahābhāṣya on Pāṇini 4:1.3).⁵

The theme is later picked up by Bhartṛhari:

Nothing remains firm in its own self [without undergoing any change] due to its connection with masculinity or with femininity (Kālasamuddesa #114).⁶

⁵ See Limaye 1974, 253:

na hīha kaścit svasminnātmani muhūrtam apyavatiṣṭhate.
vardhate vā yāvadanena vardhitavyam. apāyena vā yuyate.

⁶ yogātvā strītvā pumsatvābhyām na kiñcidavatiṣṭhate
svasminnātmani tatrānyad bhūtam bhāvi ca kathyate.

Buddhist Perspective

Early Buddhism, on its part, argues that the real does not have a mode of being other than the mode of becoming. That which "becomes" [ages] involves changes in its totality. There is no residuum or constancy of a self-identical substance. The radical intent of this metaphysical perspective caters to the scrutiny of what is empirical and as such is open to reflective verification. This stance of the Buddha is clearly recorded in the "Anatta Lakkhana Sutta" of the Samyutta Nikāya:

That which is embodied is not the self...rūpa (form) is not the self...whatever form there is--past, future or present...all that form is not mine (SN 3:1-188).

But it is in the Ābhidharmika literature (particularly the Mahāvibhāṣā, a kind of thesaurus to early Buddhist dogmas) that one finds the first attempt to understand temporality as a process. As Sinha (1983, 85) points out the Mahāvibhāṣā on Jñānaprasthāna (the basic Canon of the Sarvāstivāda school) declares that everything is real. But in asserting that, it does not posit the reality of past, present or future as three points in time; rather, it is the reality of things (dharmas) as past, present and future that is admitted. This reality is perceived in terms of the four aspects of the moment (ksana):

sthiti (static)
jāti (nascent)
jarā (decaying)
nāśa (cessant).

Accordingly, it is the operation of the samskrta lakṣaṇas as jāti (the production or birth), sthiti (duration), jarā (decay) and nāśa (disappearance) that account for a dharma having (or being) past, present or future.

Śāntaraksita (680-740 CE, according to Nakamura 1984, 265) argued that all existence is momentary and things are instantaneous. The vastu is merely an efficient entity (arthakriyākāri) and its essence (pratītya-samutpāda) is momentary (kṣanika). Causation, the interdependence of kṣaṇas following one another, produces the illusion of stability and uninterrupted continuity. A moment (kṣaṇa) is that form of the thing which ceases as soon as it originates. A thing having this characteristic is known as kṣanika (momentary). The nature of a thing, thus, is not different from the thing itself.

The term kṣanika, therefore, is applied to the thing that does not continue to exist after its coming into existence which is identical with a moment, a point instant (Tattva Samgraha of Śāntaraksita #288, 390, quoted in Joshi 1967, 248-250). A jar [like a body] is described as an efficient and variable product of labour, having an origin and existent. This truth is borne out by the declaration in the Nyāyabindu (3:12,13,15) that whatever is real is changing (Joshi 1967, 249).

Kamalaśīla, disciple of Śāntaraksita (ca.800 CE), further attacked the brahmin theory of intellectual time (buddhimān kāla) which, following the "Kāla Sūkta" of the Atharava Veda (19:5.3), visualized time as the conscious principle sensating the world.

In his opinion, the idea of an all pervasive, eternal, durable matter (vastu), is a figment of imagination. On the other hand, the doctrine of impermanence of things is the high-water mark of Buddhist philosophy, which argues that human existence is two-fold: universal and particular. While the former is cognized through understanding or reason, the latter is perceived through sense perception. This latter variety of existence consists of momentary, discrete entities which are in a perpetual flux or change, which usually is referred to by the technical term viparināma.

Buddhists make a clear distinction between change understood as objective fact and change as subjective evaluation. The source of suffering lies in evaluating change in terms of desirable and undesirable. For instance, change characterizing the transition from infancy to adulthood is positively understood as "growth." But the same process of change which brings about the old age and death is described as "decay". The liberated sage, on the other hand, neither grows nor decays.⁷ He simply changes [or ages]. In the Buddhist scheme of things, one may conclude, that there is no ager who ages, only the condition (pratyaya) of aging. Life is continuous instances involving change, which is arbitrarily divided into phases and stages and labeled as so many substantives. But substantives occur only in the construed (samskrta) world of grammar. In reality, there are only verbs

⁷ Mun(....santo) na jāyati na jiyvati na kuppati nappiheti (MN 3:246, cited in Karunaratna 1979, 119).

(indicating ceaseless activity and change), no substantives (Karunaratna 1979, 117).

Hindu Perspective

In the view of most Hindu philosophers, the temporal process involves only a particular aspect of the reality. The real thereby is not exhausted in its completeness. There is a certain aspect of the real which remains constant and self-identical over all temporal change. In Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophy, this enduring substantiality is called dharmīn (see below). The Amarakośa admits time as a temporal category and accords to it a separate semantic domain spread over sixty verses. It lists various measuring units of elapsed time from ksana (moment) to manvantara (eons).⁸ Hindu philosophical and medical texts utilize a series of determinative compounds (ratpurusa) created with kāla as the base in order to convey the meanings and significance of time in relation to change (kālavipāka, cooked in or by time). Some of these compounds include:

kāladharma: characteristics of time.

kālasvabhāva: the nature of time

kālayoga: by virtue of time

kālasātmya: congenial to time

kālalīlā: play or the deeds of time

kālakrama: sequence, order of time.

⁸ It defines time as that which measures (kalyate saṃkhyāyate kālah, 1:4.1). Compare also with Suśruta's definition--saṅkalāyati kālayati va bhūtāniti kālah (SS.sū.6:3).

Drawing on the philosophy of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Āyurveda recognizes time as one of the nine substances (dravyas), an autonomous and self-subsistent principle, which is the matrix of all temporality (CS.sū.25:25). It is perceived to be the root cause of everything including the health and death of humans.⁹ The entire universe is at the mercy of kāla and owes its existence and welfare to it. It is in the nature of time to cause changes in the matter (parināma) and thereby disrupt the equilibrium and balance established in the matter (CS.śā.1:115).

The human being is born through the agency of time and completes its assigned, predetermined term of life (āyus) in due time. Time has two faces:

- 1) As nityaga (ever-flowing) and parināma (modifying), time (kāla) is objective and the linear flow of moments (kṣaṇas) causing the seasons (ṛtu) to happen (CS.vi.1:21(6)).
- 2) As avasthā (modality), time impels the mutable material nature (prakṛti) to vikāra (development and growth) (CS.vi.8:125).¹⁰

⁹ kālaḥastveva puruṣo kālaḥastasya cāmavāh jagat kālavaśam sarvaṁ kālaḥ sarvatra kāraṇam (CS.sū.25:25).

¹⁰ It is tempting to compare this janus-faced characteristic of time with the ancient Greek understanding of time as reflected in the concepts of chronos and kairos. While chronos stands for the passing time of scientific quantification, kairos suggests that certain times are more significant than others. Paul Tillich's concept of "crisis", for instance, is based on it (see Beer 1979, 30).

Cakrapāṇi's gloss on CS vi.8:76 explains this dual nature of time lucidly:

Subjectively perceived, time is measured in terms of various phases in life* (avasthā); as objective framework, time is measured in terms of seasonal cycles.

Cāraka buttresses this observation in the "Vimāna Sthāna" (8:128) and lays down the crucial therapeutical principle of treatment which must take into account and correspond to these two modes of time (kāla).¹¹

The expert physician (vaidya), therefore, is able to appropriate both these modes of time as part of geriatric therapy. As avasthika (modal), time is utilized to demarcate various phases of the life span, rites of passage and states of evolving life. Along with the principles of three humours (tridoṣa), time as avasthā and as parināma forms the theoretical framework on which Āyurvedic therapy rests. Time as modality (avasthā) deals with a particular phase of life and time that flows has reference to becoming appropriate (sātmya) to the seasons. Time, accordingly, is both the universal flow and the power of change (parināma) as well as the progression of seasons (samvatsara kālakrama CS.vi.1:22 [6]).¹²

11 āturavasthāsvapi tu kāryākāryam prati kālākāla samīhā... na hyatipatita kālam aprāptakālam vā bheṣajam upavuiyamānam vaugikam bhavati. kālo hi bhaisajyaprayoga paryāptim abhinirvartayati.

12 kālo hi nityagaścāvasthikaśca tatrāvasthiko vikāram apeksate nityagastu rtusātmyāpeksaḥ

As parināma, time is the objective flow that influences the proportion of the three humours (CS.sū.11:42 kālah punah parināma ucyaṭe). It is, therefore, the task of the physician to take into account these movements of time in devising his therapy for the benefit of his patients including the aged.

According to Caraka (CS.śā.1:57), every substance having the characteristic of "becoming" (bhāvopapatti dharmi padārtha) undergoes modification (parināta) every moment (kṣaṇa). The primary cause of change, transformation [and aging], thus, lies in the production of beings (bhāvotpatti). The parināma by itself cannot be the motor cause of change, which lies in the self-nature of beings themselves (svabhāva). All visible or discernible change (parināma) is coeval with the disappearance and destruction of the being (bhāva). Parināma, therefore, is an inherent tendency (svabhāvaja) of beings. Imbalance among the body elements (dhātu vaiśamya) facilitates and collaborates in the creation of the future phase (uttarāvasthā).

The concept of reformulation (samskāra) in the Caraka Samhitā, therefore, may be taken as analogous to the avasthā-parināma as expounded in the Yoga Sūtra (see below). Samskāra, explains Caraka, is the positing (ādhāna) of a quality (guṇa) in a thing (vastu) as conditioned and determined by a number of

Here vikāra signifies the given phase in life as determined by the relative balance among the three humours. These, in turn, are affected by the seasons, which are the creation of time as temporality (nityaga). Caraka provides a similar explanation elsewhere (...kālah punah samvatsaraścāturāvasthā ca, CS.vi.8:84).

factors among which are included water (jala), fire (agni), place (deśa) and time (kāla). All changes of the qualitative or the quantitative order (gunāntara) as they occur in the process of aging, for instance, are brought about through the agency of samskāra.

The human body as the composite expression (bhāva) of the material elements (dravya) and possessing certain ontological characteristics undergoes modifications (vikāra) every moment (ksana). Consequently, in a human body, over a period of determinate time, one phase disappears making way for the manifestation of the succeeding one by reason of parināma (CS. śā.1:57). Each future phase resides in the time-frame not yet come (anāgata kāla) in the unmanifest mode (avyakta). It only becomes manifest (vyakta) by the power of time as explained above. After remaining manifest for a certain period of time (kriyākāla), it ceases to be manifest' (CS. śā.1:113,114).

This explanation of the role of time in the creation and destruction of the human body (and accompanied by its aging) is analogous to the physics and philosophy of change (parināma) as expounded in the Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali and commented upon in the Yoga Bhāṣya of Vyāsa and profusely elaborated by Vācasapti.¹³ This literature is relevant to our inquiry because it looks at temporality as a characteristic built into the structure of life

¹³ The term parināma occurs a total of eleven times in the Yoga Sūtra (2:15; 3:9,11,12,13,15,16; 4:2,14,32,33). The cognate negative abstract noun aparīṇamatva (non-changed-ness) occurs once at 4:18.

and things. Reification of time as an abstract category independent of life is alien to the Yoga philosophy.

As Sinha (1983 preface, xi) remarks, 'temporality in Sāṃkhya-Yoga is conceived not in terms of time as a transcendent condition of our being and cognition; rather it is seen in terms of the becomingness (which may be understood as aging) characteristic of phenomena as such and its relationship to the cognizing consciousness. In these texts dealing with yoga, change is often explained metaphorically with reference to the unique features of the process of aging as it occurs in inanimate (for instance, rice grains) and animate (cattle and humans) entities. For our purpose, then, this explanation will have to be reversed in order to highlight the explanatory account of the aging process buttressed by observations on change (parināma).

The explanatory accounts of the change in matter of Sāṃkhya-Yoga (and to some extent the Vedānta) are the two more thoroughly worked out views on change through time in classical Indian philosophies.¹⁴ The universe in their reckoning has a true beginning, and the temporal dimensions of process and change are real (not illusory) and good (not imperfect manifestations of some unchanging ideal supreme absolute). The time component of the symbolic reality, accordingly, provides an important clue to the structural patterns of the meaning of change.

¹⁴ These views are also endorsed by the Dharma Śāstras (Manu Smṛti 6:76-77 and Viṣṇu Smṛti 96:27,31,46-48) in that they provide a realistic interpretation of time, history and change with respect to the individual, thereby allowing a positive evaluation of the life span.

The Yoga Sūtra account of change¹⁵ is particularly more useful because of its fully-fledged and rigorous causal explanation of change (parināma) and sequence (krama) in terms of the three-fold transformation (parināma-vāda, see below) taking place in the domain of the material nature (prakṛti). It also concentrates more fully on the actual moment-to-moment (kṣanika) processes involved in the change in matter, invoking for the purpose perceptive agricultural and pastoral models and metaphors. In fact, the Yoga Sūtra and the Bhāṣya of Vyāsa on it explicitly liken human growth and aging to various stages in rice farming (Bhāṣya on YS 4:3).

Change (Parināma) and Aging

The term parināma (from pari + the verb nam-to bend) first occurs in the Śvetāśvatara (5:5) and the Maitrī Upaniṣad (6:10, 3:3). Patañjali, the author of the Mahābhāṣya (not the redactor of the Yoga Sūtra) also uses it (1:3.1.11) in explaining the different phases occurring in an entity:

Born (jāyate)

Exists (asti)

Changes (viparīnamate)

Grows (vardhate)

Wanes (apaksiyate)

Perishes (vināśyati)¹⁵

¹⁵ The corresponding terms given by Cāraṇa (CS.śā.5:8) are: cause (hetu), birth (utpatti), growth (vrddhi), decay (upaplava) and dissolution (vivoga).

Already Yāska (ca. 800 BCE), in his lexicon called Nirukta, had discussed the doctrine of the six modifications of becoming (ṣaḍbhāva vikārāḥ) ascribed to a certain Vārṣāyaṇī. In this connection he defines parināma as the modification of something not divorced or separated (cyu) from its essence (viparināmata ityapracyavamānasya tat vikāram). From the moment of one's birth up to death, the life span of the person is subjected to a number of modifications (vikāras) often compared to the vikāras undergone by the verb (ākhyāna), which has becoming as its fundamental meaning. As enumerated by the grammarians, these vikāras are:

janma (genesis)
āstitvam (existence)
parināmah (transformation)
vrddhiḥ (growth)
hānam (decline)
vināśam (destruction)

The Nirukta (1:2) reproduces the identical terms, though conjugated as verbal forms. The corresponding nominalized forms (provided in brackets) are given in Macdonell (1967, 65):

asti (sattā)
īyate (utpatti)
vardhate (vrddhi)
parinamate (pakvatā)
apakṣīyate (rhāsa)
vināśyati (vināśa)

Parināma in the sense of ripening occurs in the Pali Canon also, and the later Sautrantikas and Viññānavādin Buddhist thinkers avail themselves of this technical term to analyze change as they

understand it (see. above). The Amarakośa recognizes a clear relationship between time and change in the concept of parināma and lists it under the miscellaneous category (3:2.15).¹⁶ Caraka, as noted above, also relates time to change (kālah punah parināmah) and Cakrapāṇi in his gloss argues that what causes change (parināma) is time perceived as seasons etc. Since the Yoga Sūtra account of parināma is provided in terms of two important concepts of kṣana (moment) and krama (sequence), it will be useful to introduce them at this stage.

Moment (Kṣana) and Sequence (krama)

In the Yoga Sūtra, moment is understood as the minimal limit of time, just as the atom is the minimal limit of matter.¹⁷ It is the time taken by an atom in motion in order to leave one point and reach the next point. A continuous flow of these moments becomes krama (sequence, see Amarakośa 3:3 147). But the moments and sequences cannot be combined into a [perpetually] real thing

¹⁶ It is defined as parināmo vikāro dve same vikṛti-vikriye. See also Pāṇini 3:3.18 and 8:4.14. Mallinātha, commenting on a verse from Kālidāsa's Kirātārjunīyam (2:4), glosses parināma as the time of fructification or the state of maturity (parināmah phalakālah paripākāvasthā). Time as parināma [and, as such, a cause of aging], is also suggested in a verse from the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (39.51):

Men are mostly void of proportion (pramāṇahīnatā) because of the power of time and condition.

¹⁷ The Amarakośa includes "moment" in the miscellaneous semantic category, defining it as nirvyāpārasthitau kālaviśeṣotsavayah (3:3.47).

(vastu). This characteristic of time suggests that time does not correspond to anything (perpetually) real but is rather a structure constructed by a mental process and follows as a result of perceptions of words. Woods (1914, 288), elucidating this stance of the Yoga Sūtra, comments that a moment belongs to the real objects, but there is no time outside the sequence of moments (Vyāsa on YS 3:52).

Two moments cannot occur simultaneously, because two things cannot occur simultaneously. When a later moment succeeds an earlier one without interruption, temporal sequence is established. The present, accordingly, is characterized by the presence of a single moment, there being no earlier or later moments in it. But those moments which are past and future are to be explained as inherent in the mutations (parināmas). Vyāsa, in his gloss on YS 3 15, explains that sequence is recognized as such only at the final limit of the series of changes (parināma). The order of the sequence is thus a positive correlate of the order of parināma.

Vyāsa points out that this explains why rice grains, though carefully preserved in a granary, after a number of years are reduced to powder. Such a condition and consequence would not arise suddenly (akasmāt) in the case of newly stocked rice grain. Therefore, in the sequence of successive moments (kṣaṇākrama), this fact that the grains are reduced to powder is seen to characterize those grains which have entered into the sequence of very large, large, small and minute particles.

The appearance of the signs of old age from their potential state 'in the ever-changing [aging] body' represents this sequential temporal transition from the unmanifest to its present state. The disappearance of the signs of youth, on the other hand, represents a sequential temporal transition from the present state to the past.

The sequence (krama), thus, can only be perceived or established if there are clear qualitative and modal differences between the substance and its characteristics. A new piece of cloth does not become or appear old unless it has passed through sequence of moments. For the same reason even a new garment, although kept with care, after a time grows old (Vācaspati's gloss on YS 4:33). One may further infer, argues Vācaspati, that before the point or stage of [visible] oldness is reached, it is preceded by the successive stages of relative but ever-increasing oldness. In the beginning this [eventual] condition of oldness is only the slightest [in terms of its visibility], then slight, noticeable, more noticeable, most noticeable etc. These shades of oldness pre-exist potentially in all substances. The detection of sequence or the passage of time (krama) in a series of parināmas is then, as it were, post facto. This may also explain the fact that though aging continues to take place from the moment of birth (see chapter one), it is detected only after a certain period of time has elapsed.

Here the question may be raised: How can the self, which does not undergo change, nevertheless appropriate the experience

of a sequence and, therefore, of aging? In other words, how can the self which in reality does not age still be referred to in terms of various age-specific phases such as childhood, youth, old age etc.? The classical Indian tradition answers this question by explaining that persons in bondage (samsāra), not realizing that they are caught in the web of the modifying and manifesting world of nature (prakṛti), attribute the aging of the body also to the self. In the case of those liberated from the trammels of samsāra, aging is wrongly predicated on them (vikalpā) by others.¹⁸

The Three Types of Parināma

According to Patañjali, change or modification (parināma), though unique (YS 4:14), may be subdivided in three types:

- 1) Relating to external and visible characteristics
(dharma parināma, substantial modification)

¹⁸ The Vākyapadīyam of Bhartrhari provides a similar interpretation of the three time frames. These three courses [past, future, present] [are] indeed established as devoid of sequence just like darkness and light. [But] the sequence results in them with regard to beings. Helārāja in his vṛtti elaborates the point further by arguing that the three times are like roads: just as travellers perform a continuous series of comings and going etc. on roads, likewise, beings, experiencing transformations in these [three courses of time] perform a continuous series of coming and going [disappearance and appearance respectively]. Thus, a being which exists in future course, the same one having fallen in the present course, falls again in the past course (VP 3:9.52, see also the translation of the Kālasamuddesa in Sharma 1972, 76).

- 2) Relating to attributive characteristics (lakṣaṇa parināma, phasic modification)
- 3) Relating to the phase or condition (avasthā parināma, modal modification).

Dharma is the inherent capability of the substance (dharmin) particularized by its function. The manifestation (vyakti) of dharma in a substance is dependent on space, time, shape and cause. Old age, for instance, does not manifest itself in a child at once, but gradually. That is how we understand and speak of the difference between objects or between individuals who are young, old etc.

The parināma [e.g. aging] is an external aspect or characteristic (dharma) of the substance (dharmin, body). When a young person ages, manifest signs and symptoms of old age gradually become visible on the body. The predominance of the kapha humour disappears and the predominance of the vāta humour is established in its place. This is the dharma parināma.¹⁹ The signs of old age were not visible when the body was young, since they were in the future [time-frame]. In the process of manifesting themselves on the aging body, they left their future [time-frame] and entered the present [time-frame]. Then, upon death of the presently-aged person, they will relapse into the past [time-frame]. This temporal passage of the signs of old age, in our example, from future through present to the past, is an instance of lakṣaṇa parināma.

¹⁹ Karambelkar (1985, 358) explains dharma parināma in terms of the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

The three [temporal] phases of the lakṣaṇa parināma are characterized by modes (avasthā). With reference to our example these modes may be explained as follows: The young person is able to keep the results of the dharma and lakṣaṇa parināmas from manifesting upon the body for a certain duration. During that period of time the person is perceived to be young. The persistence of this mode of appearing young, at least for two moments in a sequence, is technically known as avasthā parināma. The enduring mode such as youth or old age is really a succession of time instants of similar pulsations somehow maintained in a dynamic equilibrium despite the ongoing dharma and lakṣaṇa parināmas.

The division of parināma into three sub-categories, as pointed out above, is for heuristic purposes only. Ultimately there is only one substantial change (dharma parināma) in which the other two changes--phasic [lakṣaṇa] and modal [avasthā]-are nested. Further, these changes are essentially the same as the substance to which they belong. But whereas the substance is permanent, modifications taking place in it are not permanent.

Sequence in Relation to the Three Parināmas

Whenever one dharma is immediately contiguous to another, the two are said to be in sequence. Sequence (krama) with respect to dharma parināma is established when old age becomes manifest upon the disappearance of youth. There is also a similar sequence

established with respect to the lakṣaṇa parināma. By reason of there being a future [time-frame] of the signs of old age, there is a sequence to it in the present [time-frame]. Similarly, by reason of there being a present [time-frame] of a youthful body, there is a sequence to it in the past time-frame of a body in childhood. While youth is present or actual, old age is in future as potential, in that it will manifest itself when youth has become unmanifest and relapsed into the past.

The sequence with respect to the avasthā parināma is also discernible from the fact that the oldness of a brand new water-jar, for instance, becomes evident first on its rim (prāṇte, because in the making of the pot, the rim is fashioned first), successively manifesting itself in a sequence in conformity to the succession of moments. This sequence is empirically discernible with respect to the oldness of the body also. Caraka, for instance, has carefully documented the sequential order in which various organs of the body come under the sway of the aging process.

The three time frames (past, present and future) do not belong to the substance but to its qualities (dharmas). Thus, the process of aging is limited to the sphere of the body only. It does not touch the self. Further, changes brought about in terms of external qualities (dharmas) belong to the mode (avasthā) of the substance, not to the substance (body) itself. Thus, the same stroke is termed one when in the unit place, but ten in the ten's place and a hundred when in the hundred's place. Similarly,

2
explains Vyāsa, in due course of time the same girl (kanyā) becomes a young woman (taruṇī) and a mother (mātā).

This suggests that with respect to the aging body, time is a positive correlate of the modes (avasthā) and phases (lakṣaṇa) of the body. The same self (which, unlike the body, does not age) is styled child, youth and the elderly being as a consequence of the lakṣaṇa parināma, which is also defined as that by which particular time is demarcated.²⁰ Karambelkar (1985, 358ff) argues that modifications of the secondary signs or symptoms of a substance may be attributed to lakṣaṇa parināma. Thus, in our example, turning the colour of the hair with age is the prime instance of the lakṣaṇa parināma. Marked by lakṣaṇa parināma, a thing is distinguishable from others which have other time-frames (e.g. past or future) connected with them.

Vācaspati explaining Yoga Sūtra 3:13, argues that any qualitative change (dharma parināma) with respect to the lakṣaṇa parināma exists really, in all three time-frames (adhvā). The past, though characterized by a unique time-frame, is not thereby completely severed from the corresponding future or present time-frames. Similarly, the future, though having the specific future time-frame, is not, for that matter, completely severed from the present or the past [time-frames]. Yet, the past or the future does not, like the present, exist as a material thing, in that it has been changed into a particularized phenomenal form. While one frame of time is present, the two other time-frames are inherent

²⁰ lakṣyate aneneti lakṣaṇam kālabhedah.

in the substance (Vyāsa on YS 4:12, compare also with Augustine). Vācaspati further adds that if past and future are to be supposed as non-existent simply because they are not in the present, then the present also would be non-existent, because it is not in the past and the future.

It is not possible, however, for the time-frames to belong simultaneously to one and the same [individual] phenomenized time-frame. What is possible is the presentation (bhāva) in successive times of its phenomenal form (see YS 1:11). On the basis of the foregoing, one may argue that things do not arise or pass out of existence as Buddhists would contend. Rather, our conscious experience temporarily isolates successive phenomenal aspects of permanent [but modifying] substances. All phenomena are latent or implicit in the substance itself and become explicit or manifest under certain determined conditions (see also Vācaspati on YS 1:11).²¹ This inference may be utilized to argue that it is conscious self-awareness that detects and

²¹ Compare with Bhartṛhari's concepts of kālaśakti (power of time), and its two aspects--krama (sequence) and jarā (restriction). As krama, kālaśakti activates the [developmental] sequence. As jarā, it stunts development draining all energy and vitality from life:

tadevaṁ kramabhāvē anekakāryakartṛtvam
tatsahakāriprāptau sthītilakṣaṇam upapadyate (VP
 3:9.43)

jarākhyā kālaśaktir yā śaktyāntaravirodhinī sā śaktiḥ
pratibadhnāti jāyante ca virodhinah (VP 3:9.24)

isolates successive phases of the body as childhood, youth, middle age and old age.²²

The foregoing suggests that by extrapolating insights revealed in the Yoga Sūtra in its discussion of how change occurs in matter, it is possible to explain 1) the physical and empirical nature of the aging process in humans, and 2) why chronological age is not the best or most reliable indicator for evaluating and feeling one's age. If we expect to understand our experienced and retained past as well as the future, then investigation into the structure of memorial consciousness in old age should proceed along the model of change in relation to time as suggested in the Yoga Sūtra.

Following Patañjali, one may understand aging to be a relative process. Individuals of identical chronological age, for the same reason, are variously labeled "aged", "elderly" or "old" suggesting why old age is a culturally constructed phenomenon. This will also show how and why 1) subjective time wears qualitatively distinct faces (or hats) in different social contexts as reflected in the classical Indian literature and 2) hermits, wandering mendicants, ministers, chamberlains or the door-keepers are, by convention, depicted in classical Hindu art as elderly persons.

²² Consider in this context kārikā (#39) of Kālasamuddeśa which states that beings transfer their form (perceived by the intellect) upon time and vanish.

The dynamics of change with time (krama of ksana) as it is explained in the Yoga Sūtra and Yoga Bhāṣya may also help relate the quality of human life and aging: how and why people in different stages of life (āśramas) are advised by the Smṛtikāras to follow age-specific norms in order to create their temporal milieu. Appropriate cultural symbols are designed to act as a means to interlock the diverse and uneven rates of the three time dimensions within the individual who is almost unconsciously trained to adjust the three time scales to his/her temporal world.

This may also help one to understand how people construct their past biographies and anticipate their future selves by considering their present situation. Time has meaning only insofar as it comes into our consciousness through the "now" of our awareness of a stream of experience. People do not have a past, but rather an awareness of past, and not a future, but an awareness of a future. Thus, past and future can never be fixed entities for a person, but represent instead the relationship to them at any given now.

The body, too, is central to the experience of the self. The individual is not in the body or attached to it as an object but rather is the body. The body is the unique instrument through which individuals experience their insertion of self into the world and know the past and expect a future. The message of the Dharma Śāstras (see chapter two) is that the future must also be studied as it is lived and not as the future of the clock. The

future is that which comes to meet the now. The past and future are intertwined into the now. The present constantly influences and alters the past, while the past and future give direction and form to the present. There is, thus, an intermingling of temporal frames and the experiences within each individual, which are continually open to reform and reconstruction (see YB on YS 3:13 and Augustine 1927, chapter 20).

Articulation of the triple parināma, which produces and shapes lived experience as well as the phenomenon of old age, involves both a contact and dialectic between an inner and outer reality correlated as temporal sequence (krama of ksana). It is on the basis of such a sequence only that the individual is able to reconstruct in his/her life the changing modalities of being as envisaged in model of the stages of life and duties. Temporality (kālakrama) is a category of life and is inherent in the change (parināma) itself.

This awareness is also reflected, as noted above, in the Āyurvedic definition of life as anubandha, the continuous uninterrupted flow of lived reality. The entire life cycle (samsāra cakra) of human reality seems to serve as potential material (stoff) for parināma. The idea of parināma thus includes its own concrete lived relation as part of its world.²³ It is not a mere abstract idea of the mind as a res cogitans but the human's total existence in its "lived relations", which ought to

²³ It is tempting to compare this with the condition which is characterized as "being-in-the-world" by Heidegger (In-der-Welt-Sein).

provide the starting point for a genuine analysis of the human life cycle and existence.

Following Patañjali (and as informed by Augustine 1927, chapter 18), one may, then, conclude that a given moment in life can be a genuine human lived experience only if it is understood as comprised of all three modalities of human time (past, present and future). Such a model of human temporality based on the theory of parināma can suggest a positive interpretation of aging. It can avoid over-emphasizing only the present (as is done in early Buddhism) or only the future (as happens in the Vedāntic view of liberation).

With the writers of the Dharma Śāstra texts, then, one must refute the obstinate clinging to the present or future alone. The existential acceptance of the future as the equally true temporal mode of existence is a necessary prerequisite for developing a successful strategy for coping with old age. One's present existence, accordingly, must be seen in terms of its future possibilities. Only such an authentic mode of understanding of human life and being across the three temporal frames will afford that true insight into freedom (mokṣa) as conceived in the Dharma Śāstras. The true mode of existence is "being with time", that is, a mode of being that changes with time.

As a measure of accommodation with the Buddhist understanding of personhood, the writers of the Smṛti works reformulated the orthodox views of personhood as not an innate or immutable self-substance. The passage of time [and, with it,

aging] progressively reveals new and increasingly more authentic modes of being in the person. The primordial mode of human spirit and existence, therefore, is anticipatory [of the future potential] as well as exertive (śrama) of here and now. But the revelation of the new modes of being with age, it is argued, is also conditioned by two more factors--karma (deeds) and kāma (desire). They constitute the subject matter of chapter six.

Death and Aging

Introduction

The way elderly people and others handle the prospect of death varies from culture to culture, depending on the society's world view, religious orientation, metaphysical conceptions regarding this and the after world, and the extent to which the society accepts or denies death as the final reality. The precise nature of the relation between aging and death, therefore, is problematic, moving Robert Kohn (1971) to argue that aging in the sense of a name of a thing or process or entity is a naming-fallacy. Death cannot be attributed to aging, because aging is not a thing, or the sort of thing which can be a cause. One cannot die of old age but only of disease etc. "Aging" in the expression "to die of old age" is merely an elliptical term implying any number of factors. But it is not yet clear what

these factors are. Even today, therefore, the notion of aging in relation to death still remains obscure.

Semantics of Death

In Indian tradition the task of making some sense out of the end product of the aging process that is death has resulted in a rich and varied profusion of religious and cultural responses. They may, however, be reduced to two. one response is content to see death as a termination of life, while the other sees death as some sort of transition from one mode of life to another. In other words, the phenomenon of death may be explained in terms of 1) termination or 2) transition theory. Both these explanations have found ardent supporters.

Old age is usually seen as a period of preparation for death and as such a propitious time for planning, reflecting, reviewing and summing up. Although death may occur at any stage in the life cycle, there is a natural tendency, in the post-Vedic world, to associate old age with death and dying. If old age is the final act of the human drama, then surely death is the final curtain. The Hindu and the Buddhist currents of thought have provided contrasting views on death and its relation to aging. Both nevertheless understand death as a form of erosion whereby life and the body are gradually worn away, and death is the inevitable end product of the aging process.

To a certain extent the threats of erosion posed by time, illness and accidents may be circumvented with proper nutrition and life style. Still, the end to human existence may only be delayed, never absolutely avoided altogether. "And just as the proto-Indo-European verb ger straddles the meanings "to age" as well as "to fall apart", so also the verb mer combines the senses, "to die" (Sanskrit marate and mriyate) and "to reduce to pieces" (Sanskrit mrnāti, crush, grind).

It is interesting to note that in the Amarakośa, the category of death is assigned to the semantic domain called "Kṣatriya Varga" thereby possibly hinting that, at least in the early classical period, when this particular lexicon was compiled, death had acquired a certain halo of heroic and valorous meaning around it. It accordingly provides ten synonyms for death, some of the more regular terms include:

- 1) pañcatā: fiveness (that is, the five cardinal elements to which the gross body is reduced at death)
- 2) kāladharma: the property or the characteristic of 'time'
- 3) distānta: end of fate
- 4) pralaya: dissolution
- 5) nāśa: destruction (2:8.116).

This list of the synonyms for death is preceded by a longer list of some thirty synonyms for killing (vadha), that is, death involving at least some degree of violence (2:8.112-115). Other words that topically and perhaps logically precede the entry on death deal with such typically Kṣatriya-related ideas and events

as battles, armies, strategic formations of fighting troops etc. This suggests that semantically death is linked, in some way, to violence (himsā) as the logical outcome of the rajas guna (see above), which is said to predominate in all those who belong to the Kṣatriya class.

The violent aspect of death also comes out, as noted in chapter three, in the illustrative definition of the Sanskrit root ir [in the Pāṇinian Dhātupāṭha, as irsvayohānau, that is, the verbal root ir means loss due to age. It is significant that the substantive hāni (loss) itself is derived from the root han to kill. Again, Sāyaṇa in his gloss on AthV 11:10.19 defines old age as the end state causing destruction on account of age (jarā vayoḥānikarī caramāvasthā).

Such semantics have strong implications for the understanding of the common notions of death in Indian tradition, which views death as the reduction of the gross body to its constituent elements after the bodily conglomerate has survived over the designated period of time as measured by the aging process.

Vedic Perspective

The Samhitās envision the final dissolution of the body (i.e. death) in terms of the metaphors of separation of the gross body, the subtle body (liṅga śarīra) and the self (purusa or ātma). The three fall apart in the manner of a ripe cucumber

detaching itself from its stalk as the popular Vedic metaphor puts it. Other analyses delve further and speculate on the ways in which the body itself crumbles into pieces after death. The teaching on death by Yājñavalkya to Ārtabhāga (BAU 3:2.13) bears this observation out, wherein it is shown how extensive correspondences between the individual members of the cosmic and the micro-cosmic bodies come apart at death:

The voice of the dead man enters the fire,
 his breath enters the wind
 eye enters the sun
 mind enters the moon
 ear enters the cardinal directions
 flesh enters the earth
 self enters the ether (ākāśa)
 body hair enters the herbs
 head hair enters the trees
 semen enters the water.

To Ārtabhāga's question, "what, then, remains of this man?", Yājñavalkya's response is elusive. He takes Ārtabhāga away from the general assembly and allegedly broaches the doctrine of karma. Yājñavalkya, however, is unequivocal in his claim that at death, the body dissolves into its constituent parts only to rejoin their cosmic counterparts.²⁴ In the next birth these same

²⁴ "I cause you", says the Atharvaṇ priest (AthV 12:3.22), "who are earth, to enter the earth; this body of yours, which was well integrated (samānī) is [now] disintegrated (vikṛtā)" (compare with Lincoln 1986, 127). This notion of decomposition or disintegration is also present in the concept of nirrti in the Rgveda, which Renou (1955, 11) explains as a derivative in ti (thus bearing a priori a dynamic value) from the root ar with r indicating a certain fixed order or cosmos. Because of the prefix nis, nirrti inversely signifies disorder, or entropy.

elements are drawn out of the cosmos and recombined into a human, animal and vegetal organism. Never is there any birth for the first time: every birth is a rebirth. Death conversely is never final but repeated (punarmṛtyu).

Identified with a Vedic sacrifice, death is viewed as a recurring and ritual act (punarmṛtyu). Each death repeats the primordial death of purusa, which was also the first sacrifice (Rg 10:90). Cremation of a dead person is, therefore, seen as a form of sacrifice. It is the final sacrifice that a person can perform offering its own body to ensure the continued existence of the universe. Vedic sacrifice was also designed to allay the fear of death while one was still alive. Through the performance of sacrifice, an individual hoped to remain alive. "Deliver me from death, not from life", enjoins the poet to Maruts in a Rgvedic hymn (7:59.12, see also AthV 18:3).

But death, particularly sudden and unexpected death, still holds all of its sting in the Rgveda. One hopes only to escape premature death, to live out a full life span (usually considered as spreading to seventy or to hundred years). The Brāhmaṇa texts, by contrast, attempt to tame death by gradual degrees: first to enable the sacrificer to live out a full life span, then to allow him to live for a hundred or a thousand years, and finally to attain some sort of vaguely conceived immortality (O'Flaherty 1984, 20).

A passage from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (2:3.3.15) features the imagery of old age as a ferryman carrying individuals to the other shore to death. The ferryman is not so much a person as a personification. He is old age incarnate, and it is old age that carries us to death:

Truly the heaven-bound boat is the [agnihotra] sacrifice. The two sides [oars] of that heaven-bound boat are the āhavanīya and the gārhapatya altars. Truly, the ferryman (nāvajaḥ) is the milk-offering (ksīrahotā) priest (Translation is based on Eggeling 1963).

It is interesting to note, in the above passage, the use of the masculine imagery in the metaphoric personification and the positive appreciation of the role of old age. In later classical texts, the personification and imagery of old age is almost invariably in a pejorative sense (and in terms of a feminine imagery and substantive).²⁵ The two key compounds, jarāmaryam (or jarāmūrīyam) and mṛtyubandhu, feature prominently in the Saṃhitā and the Brāhmaṇa texts in this context. Discerning the precise nature of the relationship posited between old age and death in these compounds, however, is problematic. Because depending upon

²⁵ Lincoln (1980) speculates that in the Centum linguistic grouping of Indo-European languages, the ferryman of the dead is the personification of old age carrying souls off to death. But in the satam grouping, the ferryman is the personification of a religious ideal/saviour carrying souls to death. It may be argued that the Vedic religion, which resembled the Centum grouping, tended to be non-soteriological in nature. It was much more concerned with questions of winning a good life in the here and now than with the questions of salvation in the hereafter.

the way the compound is resolved--as a co-ordinative or as an exocentric--a different meaning is implied.

In the context of dealing with the expiations in the agnihotra ritual, the Jaimini Brāhmaṇa states:

etad vai sattram jarāmuriyam (1:51, this session [is to be kept] till death in old age).

But in the same context the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa has:

etad vai jarāmaryam sattram yad agnihotram (12:4.1.1)

Eggeling (1963, 178) translates this phrase as "a sacrificial session ensuring death in old age". He further observes that "old age deatthed" or "having old age for its extreme limit (marya)" seem to be the literal meaning of jarāmaryam and that the author apparently takes it in the former sense, though interpreting the compound in his own way. The Jaimini Brāhmaṇa concurs with this explanation but substitutes jarāmūriya for jarāmarya, perhaps under the influence of the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (25:17.3) where īrya mūrah occurs in the context of the dīrghasattra (a long lasting sacrificial session extending to a thousand years):

This [thousand year session (sattra)] was undertaken by Prajāpati as he was stupefied by old age; by it he repelled old age. They who undertake it repel old age (see Bodewitz 1973, 156).

In the Atharva Veda, the compound jarāmṛtyu acquires yet another significance where it does not mean 1) death and old age (co-ordinative compound) or 2) death as old age (descriptive determinative compound). Rather it means one whose death is due to old age or in old age (exocentric compound). To be graced by

death in old age (jarāmṛtyu) was considered to be a very auspicious and desirable event or fate in the Vedic society. Repeatedly, the Vedic texts express such a wish to have a jarāmṛtyu rather than a death precipitated prematurely through accident, violence or disease in youth.²⁶

The term mṛtyubandhu, which occurs in the Vedic, particularly the Brāhmaṇa texts, is also relevant for the present discussion. Monier-Williams lists two different meanings of bandhu:

- 1) Connection or relation
- 2) Relative, kindred.

Apte's Dictionary lists friend, cognate or kinsman as the three of the possible meanings. In the Rgveda (8:18.22; 10:95.18), the human being is styled mṛtyubandhu [mṛtyoh bandhakah, mṛtyoh bandhubhūtāh] and in Rg 10:72 5 gods are addressed as amṛtabandhavah [Sāyana: amaranabandhanāh] that is, [being] related to the power of immortality.²⁷ Understood as a determinative compound, it signifies friend of death; but as an exocentric compound it may mean, "one whose relation to the [unseen] is death". In recognizing death as a comrade or the unseen companion of the human race, the sober realism of the Vedic world reveals a heroic, unperturbed attitude towards old age and death untainted by fantasy or the fear that would haunt young Naciketa or Siddhārtha (see below).

²⁶ See Rg 2:13.2; 2:28.1-2; 8:67.20; 10:18.6.

²⁷ Geldner renders it as Todengenosse. He renders amṛtabandhu as Unsterblichkeit genossen.

One Atharvan hymn (8:1) sees death in a novel perspective-- as something that does not come only at the last moment of life. It permeates every human moment in life and act. In this sense this hymn invokes a blessing for the human journey which carries the individual from birth through old age to death. This is why it is recited at the initiation ceremony (upanayana) of the young twice-born (dvija) boy. It begins with a startling salute to death, suggesting the intention of the hymn to lay emphasis in protecting the life of the boy when he has not yet fully lived it and assuring his parents. Thus long life (dīrghāyus) is a term used in the Veda to express the life lived until it has yielded all it had to give.

The Brāhmaṇa texts, which often catch the reader unaware, make surprising observations regarding death. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, for instance, discounts the distinction between death and non-death and brazenly declares:

Death does not die and thus within death itself there is immortality (ŚB 10:5.2.3-4).

Elsewhere, it proclaims:

Death is not at the limit of life, but in the middle of it. In fact, one has to be born thrice (trirha vai puruṣo jāyate), in order to be immortal (...mṛtyurna mṛiyate'mṛte hyantastasmādana drśyate'mṛte hyantah... (ŚB 10:5.1.3).²⁸

²⁸ What Shakespeare has to say in this context is also revealing. Death (like old age one might add) is not something that comes only at the last moment of life; it permeates every human act from birth onwards. It is the act of death which gives uniqueness to our separate, disparate acts in life. Only through

One is first born from one's parents, second, by performing prescribed sacrifices, and third, after death. Here is something more colorful and provocative than the bland affirmation in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (6:11) that life does not die.²⁹ Following Panikkar (1977, 534), then, it may be argued that per the Vedic vision, death is not inevitable; it is only accidental. It is the snatching away of life before maturity is reached or the marriage is contracted and heirs are produced. Such a death is always an unnatural event, and it is always untimely (akālamṛtyu). Not surprisingly, the Vedic prayer to gods was:

Let not the thread of my life be snapped while I am weaving my song, nor the measure of my work be broken up before its time (Radhakrishnan 1958, 111).

On the other hand, "the man of long life (jaradaṣṭiḥ)" as the Samhitās call the one who has fulfilled his life span (āyus), does not die, he does not experience a break, and thus, a trauma. The old person does not die. It is merely that the commerce with life (vyāpāra) is over after the three constitutive debts (ṛṇa, see chapter two) have been paid off. But not everyone, who is old

death immortality is revealed and reached. Death itself thus contains within it the seed of immortality (Shibles 1974, 147-174).

²⁹ This is based on Sāyaṇa's gloss on that passage:

mṛtyurūpaḥ puruṣo mṛtyurupe'antara
vartate'mṛtyoh puruṣasyāmṛtatvam amṛtarūpa.

Compare this idea with Yeats' contention that in Rilke's view a person's death is born with it and if its life is successful and it escapes mere "mass death", its nature is completed by its final union with death. Rilke gives Hamlet's death as an example (See Wade 1954, 917).

in years, reaches long, fruitful life, maturity and immortality. It is not a question of mere length of days but of growth (a theme which is stressed in the Dharma Śāstra texts composed in the subsequent centuries) for which the life span stretching to one hundred autumns is certainly welcome but of which it is not the necessary condition. Time is more than its measurement by the passing of days and seasons; it is the qualitative co-efficient of human growth itself.

By the time of the Upaniṣads, the meaning of the relation between old age and death undergoes radical change. Whereas death in old age (jarāmṛtyu) was seen as a fitting and proper end to a long and healthy life, the inspired sage of the Mundaka Upaniṣad now casts old age and death as twin terrors and seeks to transcend them in the hope of the ultimate salvation:

Truly, unsteady and leaking are those [ships] which take the form of sacrifice [The eighteen older sacred texts (3 X 4 Vedas + 6 Vedāṅgas)] in which the lesser [form of] knowledge is stated. Those fools who praise this doctrine as better [than that which is revealed here] truly go again to old age and death.³⁰

In other Upaniṣads death is occasionally portrayed as, or associated with, a dancer. When Naciketa visits the world of death in order to obtain knowledge about dying, Death tempts him with many boons and finally offers him lovely women with musical instruments (Kaṭha Upaniṣad 1:23-25). But Naciketas ridicules them

³⁰ plavā hyete adṛdhā vaiñarupā astādaśoktam
avaram yeṣu karma'etacchreyo ve'bhinandanti
mūdhā jarāmṛtyum te punarevāpi vanti
 (Mundaka Upaniṣad 1:2.7).

as objects that cause one's vitality to wear out with ~~age~~ (jarayanti tejas, compare with the Rgvedic hymn to the lovely Usas, the goddess of dawn, who, too, robs people of their life). Reminding us of young Siddhārtha as depicted in the Buddhacarita, Naciketa spurns Death's gifts rebuking it in these words, "keep to yourself your chariots, dance and song". The association of the dance not only with aging but also with death persists in many later texts wherein Indra is shown dispatching old age in the guise of dancing girls instead of death to destroy those practicing austerities with a view to become immortals (see Padma Purāṇa, 2:77).

In summary, then, the Vedic world view steers a middle course between the two extremes: it avoids a tragic and almost obsessive attitude vis-à-vis old age and death, which will later become the hallmark of the teaching of the Buddha. It does not trivialize or ignore the place of old age and death in human life. Life is a great value; indeed, if properly understood, it is the highest value. It would appear to be the task of old age and death to help us realize the value of life and to treasure it (Panikkar 1977, 575).³¹

³¹ This estimation of death compares favorably with Wittgenstein's observation that at death the world does not alter, but comes to an end. Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present (see Shibbes 1974, 69).

Buddhist Perspective

The Buddha's pessimistic evaluation of life and death is to be found in his characterization of human life as a duration of unhappy and pointless moments, the final point of which is always an unexplainable and painful death preceded by old age and disease. This is evident from the fact that in Buddhist texts, following the practice already initiated in the Upaniṣads, the words jarāmaraṇa/mṛtyu or jarāntakau are construed as co-ordinative compounds, and they are usually understood to mean old age and death.³² As a matter of fact, the practice of binding the concepts of old age and death into an exocentric compound to mean death in old age does not survive after the Saṃhitā period. Even the classical Hindu texts, deeply influenced as they are by the Buddhist evaluation of life, generally combine old age and death in a co-ordinative compound.

Not surprisingly, the negative evaluation of these two structured events in the human condition is particularly unrelenting in its severity in the Buddhist tradition. To the Buddha, the human being is driven by the fear of death [and disease and decrepitude] rather than by the love of life. To conquer death, is to the Buddha, life's aim.³³ Responding to a

³² Lamotte (1976, 42), for instance, renders jarāmaraṇa as la vieillesse-mort.

³³ Here the Buddha is in the company of many distinguished philosophers for whom human existence is--Thomas Hobbes has said it--nasty, mean, brutish and short. After Darwin these views were reformulated and morally mitigated, by recognizing that existence

question by a disciple named Rāḍha ("Rāḍha Saṃyutta", Saṃyutta Nikāya), the Buddha identified death with Māra, explaining that Mara, the principle of destruction, is found wherever the constituents of individuality are found.³⁴ In yet another discourse ("Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta", DN 2:290-315), he described death (maranam) as the breaking up (bheda) of the [five] aggregations.

The Buddhist position with regard to the existence of humans and their life processes, then, is that it is subject to the law of dependent origination, which should be understood in the light of the vision of suffering (dukkhadṛṣṭi) formulated as two fundamental principles: all is suffering (sarvam dukkham) and everything is impermanent (sarvāṇyanityam). While the first principle is intuitively given, the latter emerges from the Buddha's analysis of the facts of life and its experiences. Since whatever is dependently originated is also sorrowful, existence ipso facto is suffering. Yet the source of suffering is distinct from the experience of suffering.

From the gerontological perspective, the Buddha seems to argue that old age is the source of suffering which is lived and experienced by all old people. Early Buddhist literature such as the Jātakas or the works of Aśvaghoṣa (Buddhacarita and Saundarananda) also blur this distinction, identifying old age is struggle for existence (see Kallen 1972, 1-21).

³⁴ Compare with Goethe's enigmatic comment that death is Nature's expert contrivance to get plenty of life (quoted in Mukherji 1965, 382-383).

itself with suffering and effectively constructing picturesque metaphors to reinforce that identity. The reason for this fusion may be that for early Buddhism old age, being dependently originated, is suffering and the elderly person and his/her lived experience also being so originated are suffering.

Thus, dukkha, originally a word meaning a particular type of unpleasant experience, was extended to mean also an entity and a phenomenon (vastu). To that extent this line of interpretation resembles the Sāṃkhya thinking, which, too, believes that everything in the material domain (prakṛti) is characterized by happiness (sukha) as well as by unhappiness (dukkha) and delusion (moha). The result of this logic was that unless origination and embodiment comes to an end, the pain (dukkha) of disease, old age and death cannot be eradicated. This would also require the arrest of the flow of moments (ksāṇa). Since these moments are real, their arrest would involve a specific kind of disciplined effort, which is known as the eight-fold path.

A human being is the only animal which is aware of the certainty of death, which is perceived as the ever-impending terminus. The fear of death and old age would, therefore, dissipate only if one were to reflect carefully on the nature of self and time. Life and the conscious experience of it occur only in the present. The present alone is that which exists and remains unmovable, like a rock which the unceasing flow of time

flows around, but does not carry away with it (contrast with the relevant Hindu view expounded above).³⁵

To surmount suffering, understood as disease, decrepitude and death, then, one should abandon the struggle for happiness and the elimination of unhappiness. Paradoxical though it may sound, one must, in the Buddhist scheme of life, embrace suffering as the true meaning of existence. Dying and death, thus, become the only real purpose of the birth and life process. In the moment of death all is achieved, for which the whole course of life was only the preparation and introduction. Disease, old age and death are the result and the resume of life.³⁶

Hindu Perspective

The views of early Buddhism on death and old age, as outlined above, are controverted by the Dharma Śāstras (see chapter two). Death as deliverance is that toward which one's inner resources and self-disciplined development should be directed, inasmuch as it is the consummation of life. Death is the telos of life. The Buddha's pessimism, as it comes across in early Buddhist texts, results from selective empirical and

³⁵ These lines are originally pronounced by Schopenhauer in the context of his reflections on death ("Ages of Life", in McKee 1982). They could equally well be put in the mouth of the Buddha.

³⁶ Compare these ideas with Schopenhauer's comments that the world is bankrupt and life is a business that does not cover the costs and that man's noble vocation is to suffer ("The Ages of Life", reproduced in McKee 1982).

clinical evidence-gathering than from unbiased observation and cogent arguments. Though nature victimizes humans by giving them the capacity to foresee and fear old age and death, it is argued, it also provides a compensating antidote to the certainty of death, which the reflective reason can posit out of its own means.

In the Purāṇas, the explanatory accounts of old age and death are clothed in a mythic mode. To a certain extent, they are related to their counterparts in many Buddhist myths. Both share the same recurrent motifs and often propose the same solutions to the problems of old age and death, although they are posed differently. The inspiration for these myths may be traced to Yājñavalkya's explanation to Ārtabhāga's query (BAU 3.2.10) that death is an all-consuming fire of which the water [of knowledge] is the best antidote. When this extinguished, this fire of death renders repeated death impossible (mṛtyurmṛtyum jayati).

Time happens to be the corrupting factor in many of the myths of the origin of old age leading to death. Whenever death is chased away from the earth, as it happens when a righteous king rules the earth (e.g. King Yayāti, see below) or when an extraordinary person undertakes severe austerities, the earth becomes overburdened and consequently people (particularly the elderly) must be killed. Two related verses of the Mahābhārata begin with just such an assumption of an amoral necessity for the *raison d'être* of death.

To the questions of Yudhiṣṭhira as to who is it that dies, whence comes death, and how does it stalk its prey, Bhīṣma responds that old age and death arose on account of the dangerous overcrowding brought about by an excess of people [perhaps old people] whose only flaw was that they did not die [or did not soon enough]. In another passage "Death" declines to perform her prescribed duty (svadharma), which is to kill. Instead, she complains:

How could you Brahmā create a woman such as I? How could I perform such a cruel task?...I will not kill sick children or old people. (MB 12:250.9, 25, 41).

In these passages we find an interplay between an absolute and a relative morality in the attitude toward old age and death. In fact, moral judgments regarding not morality but old age and death are introduced (O'Flaherty 1976, 229).

As if taking its cue from such passages, the Hindu devotional (bhakti) literature progresses one step further by asserting that Śiva (or other major gods such as Viṣṇu, Devī or Kṛṣṇa) prevent old age and death from afflicting their respective devotees, although in one important myth Śiva declares his inability to manipulate the process of aging.³⁷ These ideas, too, may be traced back to the Brāhmaṇa texts, which state that certain enlightened beings are not subject to old age and death.

³⁷ In the Skanda Purāṇa, for instance, Śiva rejects King Indradyumna's request to make him ageless (ajara), explaining that nobody can vanquish old age. See also "Umā Samhitā", Śiva Purāṇa (26:27).

The epithet kālāntaka, which is one of the fourteen forms of death, was originally applied to the god Yama himself to indicate his role as the destroyer of the world. But in the Purāṇas it is transferred to Śiva. A relevant episode from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (12:8-10, see O'Flaherty 1976, 232) may be examined here by way of illustration:

The sage Mārkaṇḍeya was fated to die at the age of sixteen. When his moment arrived, he was meditating and worshipping Śiva's symbol (liṅga). When the messengers of the god of death (Yama) came to take his life away, Śiva burst out of his liṅga and prevented the messengers from accomplishing their duties. Śiva then granted Mārkaṇḍeya the boon that he would remain sixteen forever and old age would never touch him.

But Purāṇic Hinduism also derives its attitude toward aging and death from the Samhitā and the Brāhmaṇa texts, often disregarding the Upaniṣadic world view on life, which is closer to Buddhism. Death is evil, and premature death is the sure sign of the gradual waning of righteousness (dharma) in each of the four ages (yuga), which also results in the steady and corresponding decreases of the human life span. Moralistic overtones in the explanation of old age and death, so frequent and familiar in the Purāṇas, are also to be found in passages of important Āyurvedic texts such as the Caraka Samhitā where it is specified which type of person ages and dies prematurely:

As a result of leading a life style which is not in accord with one's bodily strength; from eating beyond one's digestive capacity or eating the wrong kind of food; from allowing the body to deteriorate; from

excessive intercourse; from relationship with evil persons; from restraining natural biological urges (CS.vi.3:38).

The Buddhist view of life, which is diametrically opposed to the Vedic view on life, curiously comes alive again and receives endorsement from such unlikely quarters as the classical drama and poetry, which generally staunchly supports the Vedic values. In Raghuvamśa, for instance, the sage Vasiṣṭha, who is the chief preceptor of the kings of the Raghu dynasty, in consoling King Aja who is mourning the death of his young and lovely wife Indumatī, admonishes him in these terms:

Wise persons know that death is the substratum of sentient beings and life is a mere deviation from that pristine condition. If a creature manages to be alive even for a moment, it is a gainer.

The dull-witted lament the loss of a dear person as a dart shot through the heart, but the firm-minded regard the same as a dart removed, because such a loss opens the door to bliss.

Since the [facts of the] relation and separation of our own body and soul are so well known, tell me, O king! why separation [on account of death] from other objects [body] should at all distress a wise person? (RV 8:87-89).

Vasiṣṭha seems to argue that death, not life, is the norm of the human condition. Death is the substratum (sthāyibhāva) of which life and its phases, including old age are mere deviations

(vibhāvas).³⁸ This view of life in relation to death is duly echoed also by Bhartṛhari in a charming simile:

How can mortals find joy in life that resembles bubbles on the waves of sea? For a moment man is a boy, for a moment a youth tortured by love, for a moment a pauper, for another moment at the apex of prosperity. Then at the end of life's play with limbs tired in old age and with face marked by wrinkles he retires, like an actor, behind the curtain of death (Vairāgyasataka, #49,50).

To conclude, in the Hindu spiritual sphere often influenced by Vedānta [and perhaps by Buddhism], the disgust and meaninglessness of life as conveyed by the triune evil of disease, old age and death--including anxiety derived thereof--has been recognized as the instigator and the source of human striving for the release from the bondage of embodiment. Freedom and reality understood as nirvāṇa or mokṣa begin where anxiety and fear of embodiment is overcome. Anxiety originating in the fear of disease, decrepitude and death must not be allowed to distort or prevent human vision and perception of that supreme reality, which can mediate and express itself only in the mode of

³⁸ A similar discourse is given by Rāma to his younger brother Bharata who has requested Rāma to abandon his life in exile and return to the capital to rule the kingdom of Ayodhyā:

The human being is not able to do what it wills on this earth. It is fate which moves us around (#15). Whether we saunter or hasten on, life and death pass us by like a flowing river, which never returns to its source. As pieces of drifting wood floating on the ocean come together for a span, so wives, sons, parents, wealth and property remain with us for a while, only to abandon us in the course of time! (Rām 2:98.15,25,26).

tranquility (śānti) (Arapura 1977, 73). Moksa or nirvāṇa concerns this particular state of being and of abiding, which transcends the anxiety-laden world of becoming [and aging] and reposes in the sentiment of quietude (śāntarasa). This line of thinking really begins with the Upaniṣadic seers and is endorsed by Buddhism and Hinduism.

Chapter Six: Metaphysics of Aging

Introduction

It was argued in chapters one and three that traditionally in the formulation of Indian texts, thought and meaning become enmeshed in the web of semantics, physics and metaphysics. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that in their attempts to inscribe the meanings of aging and death in the life process, certain passages in our texts imperceptibly dovetail into metaphysics. To cite just one example, the basic Āyurvedic doctrine that the body and mind are intimately connected invariably draws medicine to the frontiers of philosophy and metaphysics.¹ This tendency is already discernible in the Saṃhitā and Brāhmaṇa texts with respect to such age-sensitive concepts as rejuvenation and immortality. It is argued therein that the subtle body, mind and self are sustained and carried over time by a variety of metaphysical causes. The chief among these causal agents are karma (deeds) and kāma (desire), which are said to underlay physical and biological explanations of human beings who age and die and yet continue to go through the rounds of samsāra.

¹ See Rosu (1978, 80). He also observes that, "Il n'y a pas pour Caraka, de clivage entre la condition humaine et l'horizon métaphysique (Ibid. 81),, and "Investigation médicale (śarīravīcaya), aboutit à une anthropologie qui engage une vision de la nature de l'être (puruṣavīcaya)." (Ibid. 138).

Metacauses of Aging

The Vedic seers were not overly preoccupied with establishing the aetiology of aging and death, since it was believed that by performing the prescribed sacrificial rituals or spells, the gods could be contacted and influenced to assure a long, healthy life here on earth and an immortal and joyous life in the hereafter. This promise and hope of the eternal life tended to reduce the fear and significance of aging and suffering here in this world.

In their attempts to answer the questions about the universe and the nature of human life in it, the Upaniṣadic seers tended to reject the simplistic Vedic ideas and the means of manipulating the universe and the human body through divine intervention. Their solution instead lay in reinterpreting the concept of the self in relation to the universe, on the one hand, and to the body on the other. For this purpose, the Upaniṣads introduced the concept of karma to account for the meaning of life whereby the process of aging ceases to be a threat to the self which is perceived to be ageless and eternal. The self gets embodied, it is now argued, because of desire (kāma), which, in turn, creates willing capacity (kratu) in the individual. As one wills so one will become and accumulate the store of good or evil acts (karma) (see BAU 4:4.2-6).

Buddhism and classical Hinduism posited additional causal elements, all related in one way or the other, to the central

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concept of karma to serve as a metaphysical explanation of the aging process. Śaṅkara, for instance, argued that the empirical reality as well as the embodied existence are nothing but a complex of the organs of action (kārya-kāraṇa-saṃghāta) intended to produce the experience of human suffering (which includes aging, see Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya 3:4). The following are some other causal factors with karma as the common thread running through all of them:

- 1) Determinate human action
- 2) Divine intervention
- 3) Hereditary traits
- 4) Extenuating circumstances
- 5) Potent action of extraordinary personages "such as seers, magicians and sooth-sayers
- 6) Potent action of certain substances such as plant extracts and minerals.²

Illustrative accounts depicting the positive or negative implications of these factors for the aging process in terms of acceleration or deceleration are to be found in the Nikāyas, Jātaka stories, Epics, Purāṇas and the Āyurvedic texts. But the origin of aging--the crux of the problem--is often awkwardly glossed over in such accounts. The "Mānุษyaka Sutta", for instance, merely declares that various stages in the life of the sentient being are nothing but mere names (Chaudhuri 1976, 228). Aging, thus, is denied but without adequately explaining why.

² Caraka (CS.sū.1:52) explains that the karma (active potential) present in the substance is conducive to growth or loss in the composite body. This property of karma is sui generis and needs no other cause for it.

Kāma and Aging

Desire for Immortality

The Rgveda suggests that for the Vedic Indians death was but the crossing from one level of existence to another. That the self of the departed one (ajā), after due rites of purification by fire, retires to a land of joy and sunshine is also asserted in the Atharva Veda. According to Miller (1974, 132), two trends of thought are perceptible in these verses. First, there is the desire for a long life here on earth with its corollary avoidance of [premature] death and secondly, the wish for immortality and the equal avoidance of death. Continued physical life and immortality, however, are not held to be equivalent. For this reason, it is not always clear whether the desire expressed is for immortality in spirit or in the body.³

Rgveda (10:121.2) is probably the earliest instance where the shift from the physical to the metaphysical aspect of immortality is attempted by resorting to a literary mode (see chapter three).⁴ It is stressed in this hymn that the sun

³ In the Atharva Veda (8:7.22), amṛta is understood as an elixir of long life. AthV 18:3.62 expresses the hope that deathlessness may replace death and decay. According to Deussen (1972, 1:287), amṛtatva in such passages means the deliverance of the liberated self from dying. But in Western tradition, immortality connotes indestructibility by death. The equivalent concept in Indian tradition is vyatireka (reaching beyond the body).

⁴ This shift is also suggested by the title of this particular hymn, "To Which Gods?"

(hiranyagarbha, the golden germ)⁵, conceived as the son of Prajāpati, is an image of immortality whose shadow is death itself (vasya chāyāmṛtam vasya mṛtyuh). The phrase is based on a pun (śleṣa) on the substantive chāyā, which means both shadow and likeness or reflection. This is a striking enigmatic statement of the paradox of time which brings death, but which is also an image of immortality.⁶

The deeper meaning inscribed in the pun is that the one and the same god (Prajāpati/Hiranyagarbha), paradoxically, is both the creator and the destroyer of human life and its acts (karma). For this purpose, the outward or surface meaning is carried in the imagery of the physical and the visible sun, on whose passage is predicated the measured and elapsed time (see chapter four, also Johnson 1981, 65). Chāyā even has a third meaning: the shade or refuge from the heat and destruction caused by the sun or elliptically by time, as suggested in two Rgvedic hymns to Agni

⁵ According to Geldner, the concept of hiranyagarbha is the precursor of the subsequent Hindu cosmology.

⁶ Compare this account with that in Plato's Politicus (269c-274e), where the cosmos is viewed as a sphere, the motion of which alternates between two opposing phases. In the first phase, the cosmic sphere is guided by God's hand, which spins it in one rotational direction. The world then partakes of both moral and physical well being. This is the paradisaal age of kronos. But at a certain moment, God releases his hand from the cosmos, and it begins to spin in the opposite direction. This is the age of Zeus when moral and physical conditions deteriorate. The moments of transition from one rotational direction to another is a period of catastrophe where "beginning and end rush in opposite directions" (273a, Lincoln 1986, 134). In the parallel Hindu myth of the churning of the ocean, the birth and the death of the universe is similarly symbolized by the two rotational directions.

and Rudra respectively (6:16.38 and 2:33.6). When mortals die, it is not a literal death but a symbolic death that renounces attachment to mortal reality. In another Rgvedic hymn (7:59.12) to Tryambaka (Śiva), the poet enjoins the god to deliver him from death but not from immortality, by which is implied, again, not a literal immortality but rather a full life span (sarvam āyus), reckoned to be one hundred years.⁷

With the emergence of the Brāhmaṇa texts new rituals are introduced to assure longevity, progeny and heaven after death. But at the same time they also begin to move away from a merely physical understanding of life and death. It is now held that only mortals can aspire to be immortal. Immortality is not sheer deathlessness, the mere continuation of a given earthly and temporal condition. It (amṛtatva) is, rather, the overcoming of death, the penetrating and passing through it (ŚB 2:3.3.7).

"Death is bathed in light", claims the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa; "death covers itself in splendour" (ŚB 10:5.2.4).⁸ Elsewhere it is declared that, "He who performs the rājasūya sacrifice transcends all kinds of death (mṛtyūnatimucyate), and old age alone is his death (jaraiva mṛtyurbhavadī, ŚB 5:4.1.1.). This hope is also expressed in the following prayer offered on behalf of a child by its parents:

⁷ This is based on Sāyaṇa's gloss who quotes Śaunakā and the Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (1:6.10.5) in support of this particular line of interpretation.

⁸ ...mṛtyurvivasvantam vasta' ityasau vā'dityo vivasvāṇesa...sarvato hyenena parivṛto mṛtyorātmā vivasvatī...

Let father heaven and mother earth give you death in old age (jarāmṛtyu).⁹

The Kausītaki Upaniṣad (2:10) also provides a meaning of immortality which is, as Deussen (1980, 1:41) notes, on a strictly horizontal plane. Immortality is something handed over by a dying father to his son. By his birth and by the birth of his son, the father has contracted a debt (ṛṇa) with life. In a moving ritual performed at the moment of death and the transmission of immortality (sampradāna), the dying father repays his debt by passing on to his son all that he has, the prayers, the sacrifice and the portion of the world which he is. Thereby the immortality [as a hereditary trait] of the father is assured and the continuity between generations is maintained.¹⁰

In the Purāṇic mythology, immortality is attained by activating the potency in austerities (tapas). In the Samhitā, the practice of tapas is said to produce fertility, but in the Upaniṣads it is undertaken to attain release. As O'Flaherty (1973, 76-77) points out, release and progeny are forms of immortality, both promising continuation of the self without the body. It may be argued that with the emergence of Buddhism as a competing soteriology the followers of orthodoxy were forced to

⁹ Sāyaṇa's gloss states that the compound jarāmṛtyu has a double meaning: freedom from old age and death or freedom even from natural death in old age (jarāmṛtyuvarjita).

¹⁰ The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (5:17-20) provides a similar death-bed ceremony (sampratti), although it goes further in that it describes how the faculty of speech (vāc), mind (manas) and the vital principle (prāṇa) arise out of the earth, sky and water respectively and enter the dying father after he has bequeathed his power of life to his son.

make an existential choice between the spiritual life underscored by renunciation and the desire for the "immortal" life in the body.

This dilemma is somewhat awkwardly posed in the following episode from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (10:4.3.1-9).¹¹ The setting is a sacrificial session undertaken to gain immortality. Death feels threatened by the prospect of humanity obtaining immortality through such sacrifices and addresses the gods:

Death: If this is so, then, surely all persons will become immortal. What will be my fate?

Gods: From now on no one will become immortal with the body. After you have taken the [physical] body as your share, then only shall whoever deserves immortality [either by wisdom (jñāna) or works (karma)] will attain it (translation is based on Eggeling 1963).

In Search of Rejuvenation

The roots of cultural gerontology as the art and science of aging began as an inquiry into the characteristics or the qualities of long-lived people. By nature, the human being is, as Horace put it, laudator temporis acti, and apt to believe that predecessors lived a happier and longer life (Grmek 1958, 29). Over the centuries, much speculation and many myths have been created to explain why certain individuals were favoured with

¹¹ The same dilemma reappears in the legend of Yayāti in various Purāṇas (see below). But the solutions suggested are different.

long life. Thus, the themes of immortality or, more realistically longevity, and rejuvenation go together. Who would want to be eternally alive as a decrepit, old man/woman? Indeed, most would prefer a short life that is full of youthful vigour. A Greek myth graphically portrays the plight of Tethonos whose lover, Eos (comparable to Rgvedic Uṣas), asked Zeus that Tethonos might be deathless and live forever but forgot to ask for agelessness and its specific corollary, eternal youth (Hymn to Aphrodite #221, see King 1986). He, therefore, continued to age with growing years and eventually lived only to curse his immortality devoid of youthful vitality.

Not surprisingly, humankind has always searched for a panacea for an eternal youthful life. Most societies value life and seek to prolong it, and the main cultural practices are dedicated to survival and the maintenance of human life, provided that it could be lived in relative comfort. The human being's quest for longevity and youthfulness predates both the Rgveda and Genesis. That quest is as universal as people's consciousness of the inevitability of their own death and the roots of that quest stretch back to the dawn of time.

Health and youth are, some have claimed, contagious like disease. Since senescence is loss of vital energy, by remaining in close contact with young maidens, it was believed that lost youth and vigour may be regained. King David, accordingly, took the young virgin Abishag to bed, presumably to inhale her breath and thus restore something of his lost youth. Curiously, though,

one does not come across any legend of a similarly motivated old woman taking young, virgin males into her bed. Rabelais does conjure up such scenes from his imagination, but documented instances of such practice are difficult to find.

Others have staked their faith in shunamitism (opotherapy), perhaps the oldest method of rejuvenation, and certainly widely held, which is based on the belief that human physical and psychological properties are closely related to certain bodily organs in humans and animals/plants. If these organs are eaten, it is believed, aging organs may be re-invigorated. This principle is endorsed in Āyurveda and a number of prescriptions based on it are in circulation as popular rejuvenating remedies even today in India (see below).

In more recent times attempts have been made to stimulate the activities of the gonads of the elderly by irritation in order to produce rejuvenating effects. Similarly, sex hormones have been found to stimulate failing libido, improve potency and revive mental faculties. These effects are nonetheless irregular and of short duration. This is by no means a rejuvenation in the literal sense of the word, but rather a kind of erotisation (Grmek 1958, 46-48). The rejuvenation and revitalization therapies as proposed in the classical Āyurveda (see below) seem to fall in this category, since they seek to re-energize the aged individual [in body, mind and spirit] by prescribing various recipes based on animal organs, plants and minerals.

But so far no reliable and fool-proof method of reversing the course of time and giving youth back to the aged has been found. In contrast, as the Āyurvedic texts put it, the secret of prolonging life lies in the art of knowing how not to shorten life. In a truly realistic vein, passages in the Saṃhitās of Caraka and Suśruta point out that we cannot really produce the miracle of rejuvenation. It is, however, possible to retard aging and its nefarious consequences and to avoid premature aging by undertaking prophylactic rejuvenation and revitalization treatments.

Most traditional discussions concerning longevity and rejuvenation are presented in the mythical mode and structured in terms of three basic themes or ideas. First, the idea that people lived much longer in the ancient past but lost that privilege because of some moral flaw is prevalent in most cultures.¹² Bosch (1960, 63), quoting Ronnow, argues that originally in the Vedic texts amṛta is nothing but the elixir of life of folklore and myth. It was a magical means of sustaining actual life and providing protection against ill-health, old age and death. Since this very triune evil was also defeated by the Buddha (see

¹² Genesis (5:9.29) records the life spans of ten patriarchs who lived before the flood. Their ages ranged from 365 years of Enoch to the 969 years of Methusaleh, whose name has become a byword for longevity in Western culture (Gruman 1966, 25). In Chinese tradition the hsein were men who had won eternal life by their mastery of certain techniques of prolongevity. But they are not painted as young and handsome. They are shown as old men, gnarled but shrewd looking and possessing marvelous powers. By following specific taoist techniques, they underwent "internal transformation making their bodies more subtle bit by bit" (Gruman 1966, 39).

below), he came to be regarded as the bestower of immortality (amṛta) upon humankind.

The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa (8:4.6) identifies immortality with gold, amṛta, Agni and Soma, thereby paving the way for the numerous magical and mythical techniques of immortality in later centuries. Another favorite theme, probably originating with the ancient Greeks, arises from their belief that beyond Boreas (the north wind) there is a culture or society whose people enjoy a remarkably long life (Gruman 1966, 22). In the Indian tradition such people belong to Uttarakuru, a mythical and fortunate race, that once lived in the far northern regions of India and enjoyed a marvelous longevity. In that land of Uttarakuru grew the magic jambu tree, whose fruit had the property of conferring immunity from illness and old age and lengthening life to a thousand years.¹³

¹³ In Western tradition this theme is expressed by the myth of the fountain whose waters are purported to rejuvenate. Ponce de Leon came to North America in 1513 CE in search for the fountain of Bimini, which the native Indians believed renovates the body and the mind of anyone who drank from or bathed himself (herself!) in that fountain (compare with the Rgvedic legend of Cyavana). Others believed in chemically producing a substance with similar properties. In one guise or the other the practice of alchemy, then, is an expression of systematic prolongevityism undertaken in the major civilizations of the world. It has meant a curious melange of primitive magic, medicine, natural philosophy and metaphysics.

The Rejuvenation of Old Cyavana

A desirous and lustful old man seeking rejuvenation is a popular motif in Indian tradition. Usually it revolves around an old sage who through the help of the Ásvins (the twin divine physicians), Agni or Soma obtains a young wife.¹⁴ The favorite simile employed in this context is the refurbishing of an old chariot at the hands of a skilled carpenter. The Buddhists, in keeping with their wont, satirically make use of the same metaphor to come to the opposite conclusion that the body, subject to death, ages and eventually breaks down like an old chariot.

The more popular and better known among these legends concerns the old and decrepit sage and ascetic Cyavana abandoned by [his] sons and others (Sāyaṇa: valīpalitābhirupeto jīrṇaṅgaḥ putrādibhiḥ parityaktaḥ) to whom the Ásvins restore youth and strength with the result that his marriage to a young princess named Sukanyā survived.¹⁵ It also figures in the subsequent Brāhmaṇas, the Mahābhārata and the Devī Bhāgavata. This legend may be viewed as the Indian attempt to resolve the tension between Eros and Thanatos, carnal love and physical finitude. The desire is personified by the fatally beautiful but faithful

¹⁴ Consider also the legends involving other old sages--
Anḡirasa (1:51.3), Kalī (1:112.15; 10:39.8) and Rebha (1:119.6ff;
4:33.3; 36.3).

¹⁵ Rg 1:116.10. See also 117.13; 118.6.

princess named Sukanyā and finitude of the mortal body by old Cyavana.

In the Rgveda (1:106.6) Cyavana is rescued by the Ásvins from a pit where he was restrained and separated from his young wife. In the Brāhmaṇas (JB 3:120.120-129), he is depicted as an old husband with a failing libido scheming with his young wife to trick the Ásvins into rejuvenating him. As amplified in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Cyavana assumes a shrivelled form and lies in a pit as if abandoned. The sons of King Śaryāti find him and pelt him with clods. The incensed Cyavana sows discord between the king and his sons. He is appeased only after he has received in marriage the young daughter of Śaryāti (ŚB 4:1.5.3-7). In the Mahābhārata, the core legend is retouched in that old Cyavana is lustful and capable of satisfying his wife even before his rejuvenation.¹⁶ In the Devī Bhāgavata, the premise regarding the sexual prowess of old Cyavana is reversed and he is depicted (as the Ásvins do in all versions) as an unsatisfactory old man eagerly seizing the opportunity to morally coerce King Śaryāti into offering him in marriage the young princess Sukanyā.¹⁷

¹⁶ MB 3:122.1-27; 123.1-23. The etymology of Cyavana is traced to the verb cyu meaning to fall. Cyavana, therefore, is said to mean "one who is fallen." MB 3:122.22,23 seem to refer to Cyavana's lustful (and therefore "fallen") nature:

...
rūpaudaryasamāyuktām lobhamohabalātkṛtām ||
tāmeva pratigrhyāham rājan duhitaram tava |
ksamiśyāmi mahīpāla satyametaḥ pravīmi te ||

¹⁷ 7:2.27-65; 7:3.12-54; 7:4.1-38; 7:5.7-11.

The legend of Cyavana, as it comes across in Indian art and literature, from the Rgveda onward, is the prototype of the enduring motif of eros and the failing libido through aging: an apparently senile and [as a result?] inadequate husband and his young, faithful wife. It reinforces the assumption that age brings with it changes in physical appearance, a more negative evaluation of the body, and the assumption that with age sexual vigour disappears. The caricature of Cyavana also reveals another implicit assumption that an older person's interest in sex is, at best, inappropriate and, at its worst, unnatural and disgusting. Yet, aging men are not as burdened by cultural norms regarding their sexual functioning as aging women are. The rejuvenation of the old ascetic for sexual purposes, though a popular motif, goes against the prescriptions in the legal digests (see chapter four). The medical texts, however, prescribe specific rejuvenation treatment for genuine hermits so as to enable them to attain liberation (CS.ci.1:78-80).

Sex Drive and Premature Aging

In most traditions, men as well as women are subject to the constraints of cultural and religious assumptions about the expression of their sexuality and their age. Sex is not reproduction, even though some traditions have equated the two by reifying sex as a concept and associating it with both the finer and baser qualities of the body (see Frayser 1985, 237,418). In

Indian tradition, the connection between procreation and aging and the implication that immoderate sexual activity is the principle cause of the acceleration of the aging process recurs in many Hindu and Buddhist myths.

Woman as the symbol and source of fecundity becomes not only the abstract or metaphysical cause of aging and old age, she is also used as the specific instrument of the gods physically and morally to corrupt men and, in particular, sages and seers. This is reflected in the misogynist stream that begins to flow in the Indian intellectual tradition after the Saṃhitā period (see chapter two) when first the Upaniṣadic doctrine of the chain of rebirth, and then the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, promoted the view that reproduction ensnares beings in the painful cycle of existence.

As a corollary of this development, abstract Vedic goddesses or female ogresses, such as Uṣas or Alakṣmī respectively, are branded with increasing frequency as the trans-empirical cause of aging and death. Decrepitude, disease and death--originally visualized as male gods--now begin to appear as malefic goddesses. Already in the Rgveda, Uṣas, the goddess of dawn, is described as a beautiful dancing girl, who puts on bright ornaments and lures men with her beguiling charm. But the same hymn also reveals another side of Uṣas that is less alluring.¹⁸

Uṣas is said to be born daily (punaḥ punarjāyamānā), causing mortals to age with every passing day, wearing away their life

¹⁸ Rg 1:92.4,10-11; 1:113.13,15; 1:123.2; 1:124.2; 7:18.20.

span and shrinking human generations in the manner of the hunter woman cutting short the life of the moving birds by clipping their wings (see also chapter three). Here the central metaphor evidently refers to Uṣas as a measure of time, appearing day by day to mark the steady approach of old age and death. The secondary metaphor is that of a courtesan who wears men out and destroys them by aging them (īaravantī āyus). It is also implied that this siphoning off of the vital forces of men, though disastrous and harmful to succeeding human generations, keeps Uṣas herself forever young, thanks to the vitality she has stolen like a cunning gambler (Rg 1:124.4).

In early Buddhism, too, the mythical mode of discourse is constantly employed to associate the origin of old age with the appearance of sexual drive and hunger. In the "Māra Samyutta" of the Samyutta Nikāya, a collection of twenty-five Suttas (SN 1: 103-127), lust and death combine with old age in the image of Māra, the devil. Pāpmā Mr̥tyu (death), who as evil is already present in the Brāhmaṇa texts, furnishes the proto-type for the later Buddhist imagery of evil Māra (Māra Pāpimā). His three daughters--Tāṇhā, Ratī and Aratī--come to disturb Siddhārtha, when he has become the Buddha and is enjoying the bliss of spiritual awakening. The daughters of Māra first flirt with the Buddha in the guise of young virgins but without effect on him. Then they also appear as middle aged and elderly women. Yet they utterly fail to distract or corrupt the Buddha. When the Buddha eventually vanquishes Māra (that is, lust and desire), he

effectively vanquishes disease, decrepitude and death. This Samyutta, therefore, is just one of the many tracts from the Pali Canon which abound in enigmatic statements designed to invoke the condition of agitation (samvega) by pointing out the evanescent nature of worldly objects, desires and joys.

The impermanent nature of desires is also metaphorically depicted in the Yuvañjana Jātaka, which almost recreates young Siddhārtha's departure from home (see chapter two):

Prince Yuvañjana visiting his pleasure garden sees morning dew drops strung like pearls. His charioteer, when asked to explain what they were, identifies them as dew drops which fall in the cold season. But Yuvañjana fails to find dew drops later in the day. It is explained to him, then, that the heat of the mid-day sun destroyed them all (Fausbøll's translation 1973 5:120, #460).

In this story the dew is cleverly enigmatized to demonstrate how the worldly pleasures, though joyous and beautiful, are as transient as the morning dew. When his query is answered, the prince grows extremely agitated [experiences samvega] and observes:

Like the dew drops on the tips of reeds indeed are the life experiences of living beings. I will no longer be afflicted by sickness, old age and death (Fausbøll 1973, 5:120).

Following Johnson (1980), it may be argued that the dew image clarifies the hidden or deeper meaning of life: the experiences of living beings are created and destroyed by time (kāla), one's own deeds (karma) and desires (kāma) like the dew evaporated by

the sun's heat.¹⁹ This insight into human contingency is central to the age-sensitive philosophy of Buddhism. In facing and accepting the evanescent character of the aging body, Buddhism seeks to lead the aging individual to see his/her body and the world as they really are (svalaksana) by producing anxiety (saṃvega) for heuristic purpose. The quest for spiritual awareness (nirvāṇa) is created, continued and brought to fruition in the face of the truth of the triune evil of decrepitude-disease-death (jarā-vyādhī-marana).

In the Purāṇas, this Buddhist theme of the triune evil is clothed in the metaphor of family. Old age is popularly described as the daughter of time. Diseases are her brothers and the family wanders around the world [looking for victims].²⁰ As conceived in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (1:7), the family is composed of fear (bhaya) and delusion (māyā) and their children--disease (vyādhī), old age (jarā), grief (śoka) and thirst/desire (trṣṇā). In the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (4:27.5) old age as the daughter of time goes around the three worlds in search of a groom.²¹

The theory of the progressive contraction of four Ages (yugarhāsa), endorsed in both Hinduism and Buddhism, implies not

¹⁹ This simile also figures in the Agni Purāṇa (51:15-16) where it is observed that the human body, an easy victim of old age, sorrow and death, is more transient than a dew drop on a blade of grass.

²⁰ mṛtyukanyāsutā ścaite jarā tasyāśca kanyakā jarā ca bhrātrbhiḥ sārḍham śasvadbhramati bhūtale (Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa 1:1.17.36).

²¹ kālasya duhitā kacittriloki varamicchatī parvatantī...

merely a diminishing length for each Age but also a corresponding diminution in longevity, strength and stamina for those who live in them. Usually this sorry state of affairs is traced to lax morals with regard to sex. But a long life span is assured to those who lead a virtuous life. In the "Cakkavatti Sihanāda Suttanta" of the Dīgha Nikāya the Buddha explains how a decadent life style in ancient times eventually reduced the life span of man to a mere ten years:

There will come a time, brethren, when the descendants of those [immoral] humans will have a life span of ten years. Among humans of this life span, maidens of five years will be of a marriageable age. Among such humans of reduced life span, it will occur...let us now abstain from taking life.

They will then increase again both as to their span of life and as to their comeliness...now it will occur to them to do still more good...so they will practice religious piety...thereby eventually their progeny will come to live eighty thousand years. Their maidens will be marriageable at five hundred years of age (DN 3:58-79).

The classical Hindu texts trace a similar moral and physical decline at both the cosmic and individual level to three factors:

- 1) Indiscriminate employment of sense organs to gratify worldly desires (asātmyendriyārtha)
- 2) Incorrect adjustment of daily and seasonal activities (dinacaryā and rtucaryā) in terms of diet (āhāra) and daily routine activities (vihāra)
- 3) Errors in judgment (prajñāparādha) with respect to moral conduct and intellectual thinking (ācāra and vicāra).

It is argued that premature old age, disease and death as well as shortening of the life span are the direct consequences of these moral lapses at the individual level (CS.sū.1:11.43).²² At the collective or social level, general qualitative deterioration of the habitat (deśa), time (kāla), and water (jala) resources of that community is attributed to the higher incidence of immorality (adharmā) and wrong deeds committed in previous lives resulting from the collective defective application of intellect (praiñāparādha).

Several Purāṇic myths describing and explaining the *raison d'être* of the Kali Yuga are relevant to our discussion of sexual desire as a metaphysical causal factor of aging. The composite legend of Yayāti as told in the first book of the Mahābhārata and several Purāṇas is analyzed below by way of illustration.

The Legend of Yayāti

The reversal and exchange of old age for youth for the purpose of satisfying sexual appetite, a variant in the theme of rejuvenation, underscores a series of myths created around the core legend of King Yayāti, who first appears in the Rgveda (1:31.17) as a patriarch and sacrificer. In the later texts he is

²² Such moral lapses are said to lead to parallel developments at the cosmic level. The Satya Yuga is equal to childhood, the Tretā Yuga to youth, the Dvāpara Yuga to old age and the Kali Yuga to disease and death (CS.sū.5:2-4). See also "Āraṇyaka Parva", Mahābhārata (3:188) which features Mārkaṇḍeya's discourse on the relation between moral action and the aging process.

described as blinded by polluting desire (kāmakalmaṣacetasā).²³

The main story, as told in the Padma Purāṇa (1:66.62-83), may be summarized as follows:

There once ruled a virtuous king by the name of Yayāti. He had created heaven on earth by 1) performing austerities, 2) scrupulously following the prescribed duties, and 3) by instituting the cult of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa in his kingdom. As a result, his subjects became free from the claws of decrepitude, disease and death, and lived for a long time. Everybody appeared to be under twenty-five forever.

Then Yama (god of death) approached Indra complaining that earthlings had become immortal and free of old age, etc.. Indra--wishing to get rid of the parallel heaven on earth--summoned the celestial beings (gāndharvas), Kāma (the god of love and desire) and the nymphs (apsaras) and asked them to bring Yayāti to heaven by any ruse.

Disguising themselves as actors they came on earth and entertained Yayāti in his court. Old age, who had taken the form of a beautiful woman, deluded Yayāti by her charm and sweet songs who consequently neglected to adhere to the ritually sanctioned practices and as a result old age was able to seize him and age him.

The now aged Yayāti once went hunting and found a beautiful girl named Aśrubindumatī with a maid-servant named Viśālā, on a lakeshore, who revealed the girl's identity to Yayāti in a story:

²³ The story is told in the Mahābhārata ("Ādi Parva", chapters 70-88), the Rāmāyaṇa (1:56ff), the Matsya Purāṇa (chapters 32-42), the Viṣṇu Purāṇa (4:3.14-15; 10.1-18), the Vāyu Purāṇa (1:67.1-25), and the Līṅga Purāṇa (1:67.1-28).

When Śiva burned Kāma, his wife Ratī wept at this lake. From her tears were born sorrow, old age, separation, misery and grief. From the tears shed from the left eye this beautiful girl was born.

Yayāti is seized by passion (kāma saṃsaktamānasah) for Aśrubindumatī. In order to enjoy her thoroughly and for a long period, he exchanges his old age for the youth of one of his sons. But after he had enjoyed Aśrubindumatī for twenty years, she began coaxing Yayāti to accompany her to heaven. Yayāti first hesitates, but eventually yields, reasoning:

Each person's fate is determined by its own good or evil karma. Those actors who came to me in disguise caused old age to enter my body. I will, therefore, go to heaven, abandoning my people even though they then will be a prey of Yama, the god of death.

He then took back his old age from his son and prepared to go to heaven, but his subjects did not want to live without him and accompanied him to the world of Indra.

The sinister aspect of womanhood as the harbinger of old age also surfaces in another version in the Padma Purāṇa (2:76.18-30; 2:77.1-4). It is related how, instructed by Indra, old age (jarā) took the form of a beautiful girl to dance before King Yayāti, who had attained eternal youth by his just and righteous rule. Assisted by Kāma (the god of lust), as stage manager, and by Ratī (Kāma's wife and the goddess of sexual pleasures in the role of another dancer), old age deludes the king and enters him (sañcacāra jarā nrpaṃ). By succumbing to the demonic charms of dance, song and emotion, King Yayāti loses his powers of self-

control and visions of dharma which made him immortal. Here the dancers are death's minions: old age and desire. When the dance is over, old age is exposed as the hag she really is.²⁴

As it is featured in the Mahābhārata ("Ādi Parva" chapters 70ff), Kāvya Uṣanas (Śukra), the chief preceptor of the demons (Daityas) and the father of Devayānī, who is married to Yayāti, is infuriated by some impudence of Yayāti and, therefore, curses him so that Yayāti is at once stricken with decrepit old age. But he relents when supplicated and mitigates the curse so that Yayāti may be able to exchange his old age for youth, if he were to find a willing person.

Yayāti's four eldest sons refuse to volunteer for the exchange, citing various reasons. Yadu, the eldest son, begs off without hesitation pointing out that old age brings with it many inconveniences as to drinking and eating. Turvasu is no less pre-emptory: old age prohibits pleasures, destroys beauty, memory and life itself. Druhyu's objection is that an old man cannot enjoy women, elephants and horses. Finally, according to Anu, old people eat like children and soil themselves constantly.²⁵

But the youngest son Puru is moved by pity for his father, whereupon the exchange is effected. Yayāti then rules justly and

²⁴ In the Purāṇic literature, old age is usually personified as an old woman with wrinkles covering her entire body. She is described as black faced, red eyed and with tawny, coarse hair. She is the antithesis of the goddess Lakṣmī (see Padma Purāṇa, "Brahma Khaṇḍa", 9:9.20). Dange (1986, 12) argues that Alakṣmī is first mentioned in the Taittirīya Aranyaka (10:1-10). However, there are references to Alakṣmī in the Atharva Veda (eg. 7:120.1,2).

²⁵ See Dumézil 1973, 16.

enjoys the pleasures of life for a thousand years. He then transfers the mantle to Puru and enters the forest as a hermit (vānaprastha). The Linga Purāṇa reproduces a summary of the legend of Yayāti in essential details but adds the following reflection on the insatiable nature of desire despite age. As he takes back old age from his youngest son, Yayāti observes:

With age one's hair, teeth, eyes, ears do age... But greed for life and wealth remains ageless (1:67.22,23).

Myths incorporating the theme of the magical manipulation of age are unusual in Indian tradition. The only other reference to this motif is to be found in the story of the devout old sage Saubhari (Bhāgavata Purāṇa 9:6.39-55). He was once bathing in the river Yamunā when he happened to meet the king of fishes making love to his wife. Smitten with passion, Saubhari approached King Māndhātṛ and demanded one of his fifty daughters in marriage. Afraid to displease the old ascetic and yet unwilling to marry his daughter to a decrepit suitor, the king vacillated. Finally he agreed that if any one of his daughters should consent to marry Saubhari, the king would approve of the marriage. But on his way to meet the girls, Saubhari transformed himself into a handsome youth and eventually married all the fifty girls. Soon, however, he discovered that his passion for them continued unabated. He therefore retired to the forest and spent the rest of his days worshipping Viṣṇu.

The legends of Yayāti and Saubhari are the Indian variant of what Dumézil (1971, 94,95,194) has called the Indo-Iranian myth of the magical manipulation of the aging process. But the Indian

version is further embroidered with moralistic overtones. The characters of Yayāti or Saubhari are probably modeled after a lusty and virile king or a devout old sage struggling to indulge in the joys of sex into ripe old age. Yayāti is seized by remorse in his final days and commits suicide. His example is followed by some of his subjects out of a sense of strong loyalty to him. Yayāti's sex impulse symbolizes how the blind drive of sexual hunger goads and impels the embodied self to irrational actions. Yet, the body as a vehicle for satisfying the sex urge cannot, in the very nature of things, escape the clutches of old age and death.²⁶ It also suggests that the fear of old age rests not so much on the burden of advancing years as on its increasing infirmities, in part attributable to one's deeds and desire (karma and kāma). Aiyangar (1983, 297) finds the clue to the legend of Yayāti in the etymology of the name Yayāti, which he traces to the substantive yātayāta, meaning the vortex of birth and death (samsāra).

Following Defourny (1978, 154) the principle theme of the myths of Yayāti and Saubhari may be schematized as follows:

dharma - absence of carnal desire - youth
adharma - carnal desire (kāma) - old age.

²⁶ When Yayāti requests Mātali (Indra's charioteer) to explain the aetiology of aging, the latter, too, traces it to the sex drive (Padma Purāṇa 1:2.64.64,65-87).

A similar motif is also present in the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, wherein the indomitable but witless hero Enkidu (like Yayāti) falls an easy prey to death, after he has allowed himself to be seduced by a courtesan of Ishtar.

The direct relationship between excessive or immoral and unlawful sex with women and premature aging is also posited in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa (1:1.16.47ff) where Viṣṇu in the guise of a young brahmin boy gives a discourse on pious living to an assembly, which includes a young woman whose husband has died recently as the result of a curse. In his discourse Viṣṇu preaches that sex with a woman in her menses, a prostitute, a childless widow, a procuress, a wife of the sacrificer of the śūdra class or a woman in her menopause or eating food from such women is tantamount to killing a brahmin. Accompanied by this sin, decrepitude visits such an individual.²⁷ There is a constant amity also, the boy narrates, between sin and disease. In fact, sin definitely engenders old age, diseases and other adversities.²⁸ But it flies away at the sight of a religious and pious person who worships Hari (Viṣṇu). Decrepitude and diseases cannot subdue a worshipper (bhakta) of Viṣṇu.

27 rajasvalā ca kulatā cāvīrā jarādūtikā
śūdrayājakapatnī yā rjuhīnā ca yā sati
yo hi tāsām annabhojī brahmahatyām labhettu sah
tena pāpēna sārddham sā jarā tam upagacchati
 (1:1.16.49,50)

Similarly, when Yadu, one of the sons of Yayāti, is asked to exchange his youth for the old age of his father (Padma Purāṇa, see above), he pleads inability to bear the burden of old age and quotes a maxim which traces old age to the following five factors: cold [season], time, inferior diet, [sex] with older women and mental adversities:

śītam adhvā kadannam ca vayotītaśca yositāh
manasaḥ pratikūlyam ca jarāvāh pañca hētavāh
 (Padma Purāṇa 1:2.78.29).

28 pāpānām vyādhibhi sārddham mitratā satatam dhruvam
pāpam vyādhi jarābījam vighnabījam ca niścitam
 (1:1.16.51).

Similarly, in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (4:25) the sage Nārada recounts to King Prācīnabarhiṣat the allegorical story of King Purañjana with a view to point out the evil consequences of immoral sex on aging. Purañjana, one reads, was captivated by the charms of his wife and enjoyed her for a long time without realizing that the passage of days and nights was reducing his life span (na kālaramho bubudhe). The consciousness of Purañjana was polluted by lust, passion and desire, which resulted in his siring of eleven hundred sons but in the process lost half of his life (4:27.5,6). Nārada concludes that attached to both kāma and karma, Purañjana arrived at that disagreeable stage in life (that is, old age), not welcomed by those who are attached to worldly objects and pleasures.²⁹

Karma and Aging

Karma as the determinate causal factor controlling the human life span and death is first tentatively broached in the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Early Buddhism, too, endorses that karma acts like a clockwork which, while running down, always winds itself up. This life is a product of the karma accumulated in the course of preceding lives. But at the same time, acts done in the present life produce new karma which will ripen (vipāka) in the future determining the destiny and state of being of the

²⁹ When Mātali, the charioteer of Indra, is requested by King Yayāti to explain the aetiology of aging (Padma Purāṇa 1:2.64.64), he, too, attributes aging to kāma (1:64.80,81,87).

individual in his/her following existence, which may be in a higher or lower species. To put it in traditional terminology, a person's present life is conditioned by its prārabdha karma, that is, by karma which has started bearing its fruits. Samcita karma is the reservoir of karma that is awaiting fructification and samciyamāna karma is that which is being accumulated as a result of actions carried out in this existence (see Matsya Purāṇa 181:10,17,18; 182:20,21).

The fatalistic (i.e. karma-determined) nature of the aging process is apparent in the preaching of the elder Nārada to King Muṇḍa, who is grieving over the death of his life. It is incorporated in the Anguttara Nikāya in the following maxim:

There are five objects which cannot be changed:
avoidance of old age, disease, death, decay and
transiency (quoted in Gonda 1975 4:311).

But the concept of karma as the fatal cause of life and death rises to pre-eminence in classical Hinduism. Since it is now believed that the self is compelled to encounter the effects of the previous deeds, the question arises as to why the self comes under the sway of corporeality, that is, why it is embodied at all in the first place? The problem of what aging is thus also depends upon what is understood by the notion of human beings and their embodiment. It must also be determined just what it is that ages. Do both the self and the body age or is it just the body that ages and dies? In that event is the self eternal and ageless?

The typical classical Hindu explanation of this initial embodiment of the person is sustained by a cosmology composed of ideas drawn from both the Vedānta and Sāṃkhya systems, a practice commonly followed in many segments of the medical texts such as the Caraka Saṃhitā, the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. According to these sources, Brahmā Prajāpati (grandfather of all creatures) first created a body for himself. He then created pradhāna (the material universe or the womb of the universe, yoni). Following him, every subsequent embodied creature has this dual nature: the invisible, non-material, spiritual essence of the self (puruṣa) and its material vehicle--the visible, corporeal abode or the body. Prajāpati then ordained a temporal boundary to this composite structure as well as transmigration (parivṛtti) and a returning (punarāvṛtti) of the portion of that complex.

A number of Purāṇic passages provide the metaphysical underpinnings of the processes of death and birth in great detail in typical Indian fashion. That is, they begin (following the pattern set in the myth of puruṣa in the Rgveda) with death and then proceed to birth. The sadness of death and the unwillingness to accept it as final are clearly reflected in several discussions on dying.³⁰

³⁰ Chapter thirteen of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa (1:16) features an animated discussion on dying for the benefit of a young queen named Mālāvatī, who is grieving over the dead body of her young husband, King Upavarāhaṇa. The Garuḍa Purāṇa 2:1.23-31; 2:2.1-92, too, features an extended dialogue on dying involving god Kṛṣṇa. See also Pārvatī's lamentations upon Śiva's burning to death Kāma, the god of love as described in the Matsya Purāṇa (154:289ff).

The embodied self (jīva) is the carrier of the karmic deposits (karmāśaya) and is identical with the subtle body, which is swifter than the wind (līṅga śarīra or atī vāhita).³¹ Several Purāṇas posit yet another range of development and another body to experience it (e.g. Matsya Purāṇa 141:67ff). The "Uttara Khaṇḍa" of the Garuda Purāṇa is a voluminous but disorganized collection of ideas dealing with death, the dead and the beyond. Chapter #35 called "Preta Kalpa", of this text deals with the nature of these suspended souls, the very embodiment of karmic ambivalence, literally hanging between life and death. The widely prevalent classical Hindu view of the rebirth mechanism, evident in this chapter, is strongly biological in tone. The aging person comes to the point of death in its aged body, the phenomenal self (aḥamkāra) and the organ of intellect (buddhi).

After severing its connection with the gross body (śarīra), the self dwells for twelve days in a transitory ghostly form (preta). When freed from this limbo through ritual offerings (śrāddha) by the son of the deceased, the preta travels upward to the realm of the father (pitṛloka) to remain there for an indeterminate period. Eventually, it is brought back to earth with the rain, enters the food chain through absorption by a plant, and finally becomes associated with the seed of a male who has eaten the fruit/seed of that plant (Deussen 1972, 357-58).

³¹ See the dialogue between a wise young brahmin named Sumati, who remembered his former existences, and his father. Sumati explains how death occurs and describes the stages in the life after death (Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa 10:48-50). See also Agni Purāṇa 369:1-10 and Garuda Purāṇa ("Uttara Khaṇḍa" 21:23-33).

The act of intercourse "introduces" this soul into the womb where its new body will grow (Yājñavalkya Smṛti 3:3.71-72). The force of karma operates at this stage in determining which potential father will eat which plant, thus generating in the self a set of circumstances appropriate to its prior experiences (Jaini in O'Flaherty 1980, 217-238).

A verse from the Subhāṣita Ratna Bhāṇḍāgāra (#555) also opines that the following five things concerning the embodied self are determined in the foetal stage itself: life span, karma, knowledge, wealth and death.³² Another verse from the Mahābhārata (12:88.10) suggests that while karma binds the dying person's self to the gross body composed of sixteen elements, knowledge releases it [the self] which then remains forever unmanifest and without organs (that is, without body).³³ In the non-medical texts, such as the Yājñavalkya Smṛti, key passages champion the idea that multiple combinations of the factors including karma determine the production and rate of aging. Not infrequently, divine action or intervention and time are seen as conspiring to determine, control and guide aging.³⁴

³² pañcaītanī vilikhyante garbhasthasyaiva dehina
āyurkarma ca vidyā ca vīttam nidhanam ca.

³³ karmanā badhyate janturvidyayā ca pramucyate
karmanā jāyate pretya mūrtimān godaśātmakah...vidyayā
jāyate nityam avyaktam hyavyayātmakam.

³⁴ In different passages of the Mahābhārata, they are variously known as providential and divine acts (divya kriyā, 2:42.45ff; 3:2.6; 3:32.40), divine ordinances (divya vidhi, 3:31.3ff); fate (daiva or disti, 1:84.6-8; 1:89.9), time (kāla, 2:40.5; 71.42; 72.8-11), death (mṛtyu, kṛtānta or antaka, 13:1.50ff), nature (prkṛti, 11:222-224) and deeds (karma,

The chief hermeneutic tool employed for the purpose of positing the concept of karma in relation to aging is the creation of two important determinative compounds: karmāśaya (storehouse of deeds) and karmavipāka (maturation of deeds). Viewed thus, karma is of two kinds:

- 1) puruṣākāra: acts done by an individual on his/her own free will
- 2) adr̥ṣṭaphala: acts done unconsciously or done under the complete control of some dominant organ or agency.

All individuals have a natural tendency to act and their present actions are to some extent modified by latencies of the actions committed in previous lives. The system of Vedānta goes even further, claiming that the whole empirical reality is nothing but the requital of karma by its actor. The purpose of the human life, body and its life span (kārya kāraṇasaṃghāta) is to produce that requital in the form of maturing karma and the incidental suffering (see Deussen 1972, 353). The latent force behind present or future actions originates in the reservoir or the storehouse (karmāśaya) of karma which ripens with time and determines individual existence in three fields:

- 1) Birth (jāti)
- 2) The span of life in the present body (āyus)
- 3) The quality of the experiences of the present life (bhoga).

1:1.188-191; 3:148-154; 12:153.12-13).

The storehouse of karma is unigenital, that is, it is formed in the life immediately preceding this one and affects only this life. The life span determines the period of time during which the other two fruits of antecedent karma are experienced.

Bad Karma and Aging

The ideas on old age and death are further connected to deeds (karma) which are evil (pāpa) by the moral element (dharma) that is integral to the concept of karma. The gods inflict old age and death upon mortals, either because they recognize their necessity or because they are jealous or inadequate (see above, the legend of Yayāti). In many Vedic verses death is evil (nirrti), which is often stated as a simple equation. Like other forms of evil, death has snares.³⁵ The opposite of evil (that is, death), therefore, is long life (AthV 3:31).

In the Upaniṣads, too, death is sometimes called evil (pāpmā mṛtyu, BAU 1:3.1; 1:5.27) and is listed together with other forms of evil such as old age and sorrow (CU 8:4.1). But generally, the more typical view is that life, as the cycle of rebirth, is evil, and the highest goal is release from that evil (mokṣa), which a Rgvedic hero would have shunned as a form of eternal death (O'Flaherty 1976, 213-214).

By introducing the new angle of the divine intervention to the Upanisadic concept of karma, classical Hinduism posits that

³⁵ mṛtyupāśah (AthV 8:8.16); pādabandhanapāśah (AthV 8:1.14)

the human being is not necessarily responsible, for the aging of its body. Nor is karma made to bear the brunt of the blame in this context. In some texts gods are shown as being capable of overcoming aging in themselves (nijarā devāh) or in the human beings they favour. These views lead to several myth cycles in which God/Goddess creates the aging process as a positive action in the universe, acting either as a direct instigator of the aging process or himself/herself determining that there ought to be physical corruption of the human body

This is clearly brought out in chapter #13 of the Brahmavaivarta Purāna, which broaches the story of young Upavarhana, the son of an old king of the Gandharvas. On account of a certain youthful impudence, he was cursed by the god Brahmā and died. His wife Mālāvatī supplicated god Viṣṇu, who appeared before her in the guise of a brahmin boy. He consoles Mālāvatī and at her request produces before her the god of death (Yama), time (Kāla), and death (mṛtyu).

Death is described as a black woman, hideous in appearance with six arms and clad in red apparel. She stood on the left hand side of Kala who has six faces, twenty-four eyes and six legs. He, too, is black (kāla) and wears red garments. When queried by Mālāvatī with regard to the premature death of her husband, death replies that she merely executed an order of providence. When Kāla is asked by Mālāvatī to account for his role, he disclaims any direct responsibility and points the finger at Yama. He then

reminds her that ultimately everything takes place at the wish of Lord Kṛṣṇa (15:21-44).

When Viṣṇu observes that Mālāvatī's questions have not been satisfactorily answered, he volunteers to instruct her on how to prevent diseases, decrepitude and death invading the human body. In the process he identifies diseases as the sons of death and old age as her daughter (16:34-42). The Mārkandeya Purāṇa, too, traces the genesis of aging to unrighteousness (adharmā). Injury was his wife; and from the two, untruth (anṛta) and destruction (nirṛti) were produced. They married each other and produced fear, deceit, hell and suffering. These latter, in turn, death and misery. From death were born disease, old age, grief and anger (50:29-32).

In the "Aśvamedha parva" of the Anugītā (14:16ff), a philosophical text inserted in the Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇa relates the ancient dialogue that took place between Kaśyapa and a brahmin pertaining to the nature of human action and its consequences to human birth and death. When Kaśyapa asked the brahmin, "How does the body perish and how is another body constituted?", the answer given is:

The human mind becomes overwhelmed with fear, doubt, anger and despair when it is haunted by the fear of approaching death. Consequently, this person develops poor eating habits and begins to eat improper food at irregular hours. This leads to psychological infirmities disrupting the balance among the three humors. Finally, death is preceded by severe psychosomatic disabilities (jarayā vā upatāpata;

compare to Yājñavalkya's exchange with Janaka in BAU
4:3.36-4.4).³⁶

As part of a wide ranging discourse to Yudhiṣṭhira on various ethico-religious topics the sage Mārkaṇḍeya elaborates on the twin doctrine of karma and samsāra (MB 3:179-221; see particularly 181:11-21). During the primal era, all selves were ensconced in pure and auspicious (suddha) bodies. Being free from physical weaknesses and moral ambiguity, all persons were observant of holy vows, truthful and godlike. They thereby lived a life of a thousand years. But in due course they were overwhelmed by the twin vices of desire (kāma) and anger (krodha). Consequently, due to moral corruption, they were ordained (literally cooked) to premature aging, death and transmigrations. Ever since, human destiny is controlled by death (mṛtyu).

Similarly, in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Viṣṇu in his manifestation as Nārāyaṇa, prophesies the social conditions that will prevail in the land of India after Gaṅgā (the sacred river in North India) returns to Viṣṇu in his world (Vaikuṇṭha), when

³⁶ In an interesting commentary on this passage, Madhva (ca. 1200 CE) provides a moral causal explanation of the varying lengths of human life spans in a charming metaphor:

The fruit of a mango [usually] falls off the tree long before it gets fully developed; the fruit of Udumbara falls down when fully developed and the fruits of Aśvattha fall down only after they are very ripe. So do people die. Some in infancy, some in their youth, and still others in their old age. In the Kali Yuga, people die in their infancy like the mango fruit; in the Tretā Yuga, they die in their youth like the Udumbara fruit; and in the Satya Yuga do they die in old age like the fruits of the Aśvattha tree (see BAU, 514).

the five thousand year term of the age of Kali comes to an end. Toward that period, men, and women will be diseased and smallish in stature. Through the power of Kali, they will look aged even when only sixteen, appearing decrepit by the time they turn twenty. Women, too, will develop prematurely, with menses beginning at the age of eight (7:31-40).

A great many inquiries and observations regarding old age are often introduced in our texts at moments of extreme duress, when a certain unforeseen misfortune has disrupted normal life patterns. Such crises are attributed to a variety of untoward events--discouragement in the face of an onerous task (e.g. Nanda's monologue in Saundarananda), a humiliating defeat, killing or massacre in battle (e.g. Dhṛtarāṣṭra's observations on old age and death after he has lost one hundred sons in the battle), subjection to a terminal illness or curse (e.g. reflections on old age by the accursed King Yayāti, see above) or death (e.g. widowed Mālāvatī's questions to Death and Old age in Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa).

The juxtaposition of the differing views on old age in the Mahābhārata and the other texts is a poignant commentary on the classical Hindu speculation and experimentation regarding the relation between the doctrines of karma, kāma and aging. Both are subjected to a close scrutiny. But such simple dichotomy of propositions is unusual. Usually the aetiology, in this instance of aging, is further complicated by the introduction of other variables or factors such as nutrition, fate, chance or accident.

Often, through the medium of myths, balance is struck by the introduction of the conflicting Buddhist views amidst the older Vedic views. Thus, it is possible for an Indian myth (e.g. of Yayāti) to imply that the evil of old age in human life on earth is necessary, desirable and intended by god, that age in life is relative and yet to attribute at the same time a potential of growth and development to age. Evil in aging must be accepted, but much good in old age must also be pursued and accomplished. These views together provide a working solution to the problem of old age, a framework in which humankind as a whole, and each individual, may function in the face of an ultimately insoluble and inevitable problem.

The Purāṇas address a number of provocative issues pertaining to the relation of karma and kāma to aging, and propose a variety of coping mechanisms supported by the metaphysical reflections on these ideas. But at the same time, opportunity for probing conceptually challenging propositions is not seized. The legend of Yayāti, for instance, provides an ideal setting for lively or provocative discussions between father and sons in which refusal or acceptance to take on old age would each time be justified by a series of well-balanced arguments. The myth of the genesis of āśrama involving Pralhāda (see chapter two) is yet another instance. The Purāṇas examine the same episode from different angles reflecting a measure of diversity as well as incongruity of ideas. At the same time similar motifs reappear constantly (see the stories of Yayāti or Cyavana). This

suggests that the Purāṇas draw upon a common store of general notions on life (first broached in the Vedic texts) and its processes such as aging. But at the same time they reserve the right and freedom to recombine and modify these ideas with reference to important Buddhist insights on aging. These storytellers and mythographers appeal, therefore, to a multivalent range of ideas on aging at the same time recognizing a number of causal factors at work.

Aetiology of Aging

The medical texts concur with the Dharma Śāstras and the Purāṇas in positing that karma, among other factors, is the womb to which the aetiology of aging may be traced. The conference account from the Caraka Samhitā alerts us that various scholars could not agree on a single principle of causation of diseases. From this one may extrapolate that they would also fail to agree on a single factor or theory of the aetiology of aging. Or to put the matter affirmatively (as Weiss in O'Flaherty 1980, does with respect to the aetiology of disease), like their Vedic forbearers, the medical texts, too, were prepared to embrace (or at least tolerate) a diverse array of doctrines in the conviction that while the result of the aging process is oblivion, it is caused by a variety of factors.³⁷

³⁷ Caraka, for instance, traces conception to five different factors (CS.śā.3:14).

Consequently, in medical and juridical texts, contradictions and inconsistencies appear in the elucidation of the aetiology of aging at the metaphysical level. The tension is built from the beginning, because of the potential of conflict between 1) the desire to prevent, postpone or delay death, but thereby assuring old age and, 2) the desire to live a long life but without aging. Unsuccessful resolution of this conflict leads Caraka and Susruta to propose contradictory hypotheses on aging in the context of the rejuvenation and revitalization therapies (see below).

It is consequently posited that aging is a disease and disorder originating in exogenous (āgantū) factors such as karma and as such not treatable by purely rational application of medical theory (yukti). It must be supplemented or supplanted by other para-medical means such as fasting, repetition of sacred formulae (mantra), gifts to brahmins, observance of vows (vrata), pilgrimage, practice of yoga and so forth (this component of the therapy is known as daiva vyapāśraya, see below). The Caraka Samhitā (sū:20.3 ff), accordingly, divides all diseases into two categories: endogenous (nijā), attributable to the imbalance of the three humours, and exogenous (āgantū), caused by demons, poison, wind, fire and battle injuries. But exogenous conditions may be reduced to culpable intellect (prajñāparādha), which violates good sense.

In that context, the concept of karma is harnessed in two major ways to bind and control the metaphysical dimension of the aetiology of aging and its consequences to the human body and

mind. Not only is it made to answer for the biology of the aging process based on the dynamic equilibrium among the three humours per se, but also the factors responsible for the quickening or the slowing down of the aging process are classified as karma. Similarly, the predictability of life expectancy and experience of an infant on the basis of the examination of various signs on the body--quality of hair on the head, texture of the skin, size of the head, earlobes, eyes, etc.--is also said to be determined by the infant's karma.

Other features indicating subsequent pathology of the body include the quality of the aging process and its rate that would develop. This is attributed to the fate (daiva) of the person and as such to his/her karma. In other words, the embodied being is the product of the fruit of actions performed through delusion, desire and aversion (CS.śā.1:53).³⁸ The Caraka Samhitā (śā.4:36) also elaborates and specifies an additional component-- the three constituent gunas: sattva, rajas and tamas which are also understood as the three humours: kapha, pitta and vāta. The quality and rate of aging are determined by the relative proportion of these constituents in the body.

Āyurvedic texts, thus, wrestle to cope with the typically Indian penchant for accommodation. For that purpose the concept

³⁸ The echo of this classification is also to be heard in the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali (3:1.87, quoted in Puri 1957, 221). Here Patañjali mentions the individual self as made of the physical as well as the internal self (śarīrātman and antarātman). The internal self performs those actions whereby the physical self feels pain and pleasure, (śarīrātma tat karma karoti yenāntarātma sukhaduhkhe'nubhavati).

of karma is redefined in its relation to aging by introducing yet another moral category - culpable insight (prajñāparādha). Ātreya, the teacher of Caraka, for instance, affirms:

In this Age of Kali the life span is one hundred years. It may be fully lived out by harmonizing it with one's own constitution, by performing good deeds and by attending to good health and hygienic practices (CS.śā.6:29,30).

Culpable insight (prajñāparādha) emphasizes the importance of abandoning bad habits and cultivating good ones. Thus, after discoursing on the increasing immorality and the corresponding decreasing life span over the course of four Ages (yugas) leading to the present age of Kali, Ātreya is questioned by one of his disciples Agniveśa, who is troubled by the determinative weight allotted to karma:

Is the life span always fixed or is it not?

Ātreya's answer is that the individual life span is a function of both fate and human effort (daiva and puruṣakāra, CS.vi.3). Fate is created through actions committed in previous lives, but human effort is what is done in this life. When both happen to be noble, life is long and happy; when both are bad, it is otherwise. Evil acts of great enormity would definitely reduce it. But the bad effects of moderately unjust actions can be neutralized by moral behaviour (sadvṛtta), wholesome diet and physical activities (svasthavṛtta, see Dasgupta 1968, 2:403).³⁹

³⁹ The "Cūlakamma Vibhaṅga Sutta" and "Mahākamma Vibhaṅga Sutta" provide the Buddhist version of the attempt to reconcile the inevitable working out of the effects of kamma with

In the light of the foregoing, it may be concluded that in the Āyurveda and Dharma Śāstras, the law of karma acquires a metaphysical dimension though its empirical content and consequences are acknowledged and retained. The idea is to employ it as an escape clause and a safety valve against insufficient or no empirical evidence. The fatalistic and immutable elements of the doctrine of karma are reconciled with a more practical empirical attitude toward human life by harmonizing it 1) with the physical theory of aging based on Patañjali's treatment of change (parināma) in relation to time (see chapter four) and 2) the social theory of the stages of life proposed in the Dharma Śāstras. Thus, by instituting a minor cognitive shift, the doctrine of karma is accommodated for its psychological and emotional utility with reference to the process of aging.

* intentional evil or good acts (sañcetanika kamma). The effect of a comparatively weak deed (dubbala kamma) may be superceded by the effect of a comparatively strong deed (balava kamma) or by the accumulated effects of a series of deeds. Thus, the aging experience of the individual and its quality can be manipulated by his volitional kamma (MN 3:202-206, 206-215). To that extent, this line of thought resembles the arguments of Caraka.

Chapter Seven: Coping with the Stress of Age

Introduction

The traditional Indian precepts and practices developed to cope with the stress and erosion caused by aging revolve around the concept of vāja (rejuvenatory and revitalizing force). Food is believed to be the chief source of vāja (also known as sūkṛa or vīrya). But in addition, the potential of vāja is also said to be affected negatively or positively by a number of factors such as psychological attitude or moral behaviour. As pointed out in chapter four, the classical Hindu tradition restricts the sphere and the scope of the aging process to the body, which is deemed to be the product of five interacting cardinal elements. It also serves as the substratum to the conscious self (ātman).¹ Caraka further states that the body, which serves as the substratum to the conscious self, is the product of the food eaten (deho hyāhārasambhavaḥ, CS.sū.28:41). As such, the rate of aging, too, is thought to be subject to the quality and the quantity of food consumed. This line of interpretation, linking sustaining matter to the life process in a causal relationship, is based on Vedic revelation.

¹ śarīram nāma cetanā adhiṣṭhānabhūtam
pañcamabhūta vikāra samudayaत्मakam.

Caraka also argues that everything about the self is established in the body (śarīramūlaśca puruṣo bhavati, CS.nī.6:6).

Metaphysical Basis of Nutrition

The spiritual significance attributed to Soma in Rgveda (9:18.13) or in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (3:9.4.22,23), is a starting point, in the Indian tradition for all speculation about the mystery and the metaphysics of food, which is seen as imparting both physical and spiritual vigour to the embodied self. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1:4.6), too, is moved to exclaim that this whole world, verily, is just food and the eater of food. In metaphysical terms, then, the nature of the sustaining matter (anna) and its significance to the body is intimately connected to the universal phenomenon of the need and hunger for food to stave off death by the body. This strange interlocking of hunger (aśana) and death (mṛtyu) arises from the inscrutable mystery of the mutual relation posited between nutrient matter (anna) and beings who consume it (annāda).

But whosoever be the immediate or the ultimate "eater" and whatever the nature of the "eaten", the world itself has come into existence, according to Maitrī Upaniṣad (6:12), because of the ceaseless desire for food on the part of the universe. Accordingly, it is now proposed that the ritual feeding of one's own body is to be substituted for the ritual feeding of the gods. Further, there is a manifold relationship between time and the universe (kāla and brahman), with food (anna) as the common denominator (MU 6:9-17). Having glorified food as brahman, it is then argued that time is the cause of food. The idea next passes

over to celebrating time as brahman, and, finally, from this symbolic understanding of brahman as time, the idea reverts back to the timeless brahman as the mother cause of all causes.²

The above passages suggest how the classical Hindu views on the relation between the sustenance of the body and aging originate in the Vedic premises regarding the mythology of creation, healing practices, sacrificial rituals and nutritional theories.³ The metaphysical explanation of food as one of the causal agents of the aging process, one may argue, originates in this generally held conviction that the material cosmos and the human body are at once complementary opposites, intimately interrelated and constantly interchangeable along homological lines. When the outer world is created, it is created out of the human being and its life process: whether in cosmogony, sacrifice or death.

Conversely, when the human being is created (anthropogony); his/her bodily nourishment and health-care is sustained with the

² The Taittiriya Upanisad also correlates brahman with the body, on the one hand, and with food, on the other. Verse #7 posits the relation between the body and food in the following tautology:

Food indeed is life and the eater of food is the body.
The body is founded on life and life is founded on the body. In this way food is founded on food.

³ Consider, for instance, this verse from the Maitri Upanisad (6:13) translated in Deussen 1980, 1:351:

Food is what prevents aging,
Food certainly is what is soothing,
Food is the life-breath of creatures.
It is ordained as the oldest,
It is ordained as medicine.

stuff of the cosmos. The creation of the one implies proportionate decreation/decomposition of the other. The sum total of matter in the universe has existed and always will be the same. It merely alternates between cosmic and human/animal/vegetal forms. The human processes of birth, growth, aging and death are nothing other than moments of transition between the temporally determined macrocosmic and microcosmic transformations of matter. But such an hypothesis admitting the interchange of forms between humans and the cosmos has the effect of saddling each with the miseries of the other. The cosmic body becomes the prey to the same physical and metaphysical ailments of the humans--disease, decrepitude and death.

The Buddhist view of the relationship between nutrition and human existence is equally intriguing. According to the myth of creation as recorded in the "Aggañña Suttanta" of the Pali Canon:

Once on earth, there appeared an essence, which a greedy being tasted. Other beings followed suit and eventually they all came to rely on coarse food matter for their physical survival. They gradually lost the subtle component of the body, which consequently became heavier and substantial. Those who grew less addicted to material food, managed to retain their beautiful and ethereal form.

Consequently, time and temporality were integrated into the human condition. The beings, because they began to subsist on material food, gave rise to excrement and urine. The reliance on food for survival eventually gave rise to distinction between genders, sexual desire (kāma) and the notion of private property (see Wayman 1984, 275-76).

Paul (1979, xx-xxi) has speculated that this myth reveals the Buddhist understanding of the Golden Age in the remote past in which asexual, self-luminous, and noncorporeal beings lived blissfully without the need of gross, substantial food (anna). Although no cause for the loss of the Golden Age is offered, the emergence of sexuality and the gross body is attributed to the intake of gross food. The Milindapañha develops this theme further and identifies the five nourishing/regenerative qualities or principles of food (vāja). It then hastens to add that nirvāṇa, too, possesses the same qualities but at the metaphysical level. Nāgaseṇa summarizes the notion of nirvāṇa as food in the following statement to Milinda

As food, O king, is the support of all beings, so is Nirvāṇa, when it has been realised, the support of life, for it puts an end to old age and death (Milindapañha, dilemma #80).

Coping With Age-related Stress

The concept of vāja, which is already broached in the Atharva Veda, becomes in Āyurveda an important tool through which religion, culture and gerontology interact upon one another. Food as the source of vāja, and as such of rejuvenation and revitalization, is freely eulogised in the Āyurvedic texts. Caraka, for instance, emphasizes that the genesis, development, and dissolution of not only the planet earth and its inhabitants

but also of other worlds including heaven are dependent on food-matter (CS.sū.27:350).

Matter is said to flow between people, animals, plants and the universe in various ways. Food, as a specific complex of a highly important component of the universe, also figures prominently in this process. Matter is always in flux, though a dynamic equilibrium over a determinate period of time may prevail. In this cycle, as Lincoln (1986, 138-139) suggests, there is no fixed starting point and no termination. Propelled by the process of aging and natural death, matter moves back and forth between humans and the cosmos through the intermediary of plants and animals. This hypothesis that the world and the passage of creatures from state to state is 1) a transmission of energy from place to place through time and 2) a transformation of matter from one alloform to another (mutability, parināma), is semantically incorporated in the pan-Indian concept of samsāra (metempsychosis).

Parināma and samsāra, thus, are connected doctrines which help us to define and understand the metaphysical cause of aging (see chapter four). The concept of samsāra combines in itself the continuity of transmigration with the concreteness of physical change. This is evident from the generally accepted meaning of that term as the act of going about, wandering through, coursing along, or passing through a series of conditions through successive states of birth, death and rebirth.

The rejuvenative and revitalizing processes as proposed in the concept of vāja and practiced in the medical texts with reference to aging, therefore, need to be understood in terms of the following metaphysical perspective implicit in the Āyurveda:

- 1) There is a continual re-creation or recuperation of the human organism from the food or drugs ingested.
- 2) The transformation of material substance into the human body involves the corresponding transformation of its alloform.
- 3) The nourishing process is a reversal of the creation account expounded, for instance, in Rgveda (10:90). Food was initially created from the body of the cosmic man (puruṣa) that was cut up (according to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 4:2.1-11, it was created from the body of the sacrificed animal [horse]).

Conversely, eating food or ingesting a specially prepared prescription restores/rejuvenates to wholeness the body that would otherwise fall apart through malnutrition, disease, old age and ultimately death. Eating, thus, is conducive to the re-appropriation of bodily parts from foodstuffs in the external universe where they reside in a different form.

A myth from the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa furnishes a similar cosmic significance of food in relation to the restoration of the body:

After he created the universe and the creatures, Lord Prajāpati relaxed and opened up. Food began to flow out of him. Gods then approached the fire god Agni and proposed that they would like to feed themselves on Prajāpati with Agni as their mouth (#4). When he acquiesced to their request, the gods heated up

Prajāpati in Agni's fire and raised him upright as the world (#6) (that is, they nourished and sustained the universe, tasyāyameva lokah pratisthā, ŚB 7:1.2.1-7) (Translation is based on Eggeling).⁴

The gerontological relevance and the rationale behind the Atharvan spells and charms based on certain varieties of grasses and plants designed to grow hair on a bald plate or to turn grey hair into dark may, then, be understood in the light of the preceding. Hair and certain plants or herbs are seen as resembling each other in form. Individual hair is like a blade of grass since both tend to be long, slender and grow in clumps. Both are endowed with an inner dynamism for incessant growth. Again, hair grows on top of the head like the grass growing on top soil. Thus, in many Purāṇic accounts of cosmic creation, trees are said to be the hair of the cosmic being (puruṣa). Finally, there is also the third level of linguistic/semantic homologies between hair and vegetal matter as indicated in the Sanskrit word valśa, which denotes both hair and sprout or shoot (Lincoln 1986, 88).

⁴ Anaxagoras analyses the processes of nutrition and embryology in a similar vein. If it appears that food eaten turns into bodily flesh and hair, this is only because flesh, hair etc. were already present within the food in invisible particles. Food, thus, is nothing other than a microcosm of the macrocosm, containing all parts of the human--or animal or even plant--body within it. Like substance is augmented by like substance (compare to the Ayurvedic doctrine of the sāmānya and viśeṣa). In the process of nutrition the invisible particles of flesh, hair etc. are detached from their temporary location within bread, sorted out, and joined to the parts of the body to which they properly correspond: particles of flesh going to flesh and so forth (see Lincoln 1986, 77).

It is not difficult to understand, then, the homeopathic nature of the cure for hair loss prescribed in the Atharva Veda along the principles discussed above.⁵

You are a goddess, born upon the divine earth, O plant!
We dig you now, you who stretch downward, in order to
make the hairs firm. Make the old ones firm; cause to
be born those which are [still] unborn; make those
which have been born [grow longer] (6:136,137).

Chapter five entitled "Mātrāsītiyam" [Quantitative Dietetics] of the "Sūtra Sthāna" of the Caraka Samhitā, is given to the quantitative and qualitative discussion of food (see also CS.sū.chapters 6,25,26,27; CS.śā.chapter 6). These chapters mention in detail the nutritive, curative, rejuvenative and revitalizing actions of several hundred different edible and potable substances belonging to different classes. The body is nourished on these substances; the distinction between happiness and sorrow, disease, old age and health results from the choice of a wholesome or an unwholesome diet (CS.sū. 25:49).

Caraka admonishes that appropriate food should be consumed in rhythm with the twenty-four hour lunar cycle and the six season solar cycle (kālabhojī syāt). Food eaten is put to proper use only if the individual has cultivated restraint over the palate and other sense organs (jitendriyah). The act of eating is to be undertaken in the spirit that food is brahman and eating is

⁵ Lincoln (1986,94) sees in this spell a sophisticated application of the anthropogonic aspect of the mythology of creation rather than mere sympathetic magic seen by most scholars.

an act of sacrifice (vaiñākarma, CS.ni.6:10).⁶ Consumption of unwholesome food (visama āhāra) leads to suffering and old age. According to Caraka (CS.ci.2:3), food is deemed to be unwholesome when:

- 1) It is prepared from grains that had been grown in the same soil year after year and without alternating with other crops
- 2) It is eaten without regard to the prevailing lunar or solar cycle
- 3) It is eaten before food consumed earlier had been fully digested.

An important criterion of wholesome food is that it must be of the guru (literally heavy) quality. Further, articles of food, which are bahala (thick), snigdha (unctuous), piścila (slippery), manda (slow) and sthira (stable) in quality tend to generate the humour derived from water (kapha dosa) and augment its proportion in the body thereby providing a good potential source of resisting premature bodily decay and aging.⁷ The properly ingested wholesome food first gives rise to rasa, the basic supporting element of the body. Within five days, the rasa is converted into blood (rakta), the second supporting element (dhātu) in importance and then successively into other dhātus with the śukra (semen) as the end product of the assimilating

⁶ To a certain extent this concern with the appropriateness of food to be ingested for sustaining the body to enable the individual to gain liberation is also evident in Buddhist texts (see, for instance, Saundarananda 14:1-19).

⁷ Mhaskar and Watve (1954, 2:86) argue that all products with the predominance of the guru quality prevent the advent of old age in the persons ingesting them.

process. This transformation and assimilation of rasa into śukra is accomplished over the duration of one lunar cycle. The process is similar in the case of women, with this important difference, that in woman the end dhātu is the ovum (SS.sū.1:4).

Rejuvenation and Revitalization

Though in certain Hindu philosophies and sects, the old ideal of bodily immortality is still retained (e.g. the Hatha Yoga), the majority of them eventually came to accept the Buddhist contention that admittedly the human life span is limited. They, accordingly, modified their philosophies of life to reconcile with that fact. Nonetheless, the awareness of the fact that only a quarter of the life span may be enjoyed with full physical and mental health continued to haunt them. In the face of this unsavory aspect of the human condition, like most other traditions, the classical Hindu tradition also prescribed various ways and means of retaining youth and delaying the onset of old age ranging from a few years to immortality.

The rasāyana (rejuvenation) and vājīkaraṇa (revitalization) therapies of Āyurveda properly fall within the domain of geriatrics in that they are proposed as a defense against the wear and tear of the body associated with the aging process. In the Vedic texts, the term rasa is consistently used in the sense of water and its essence (apām rasah). The two are identified in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (raso vā'pah, 3:3.3.18). The Atharva Veda

frequently praises water (rasa) for its alleged properties of keeping old age away, resisting diseases and confirming immortality.⁸ An Atharvan myth (11:6.23) refers to the legend of how Indra's charioteer Mātali obtained the immortalizing elixir (amṛta) by selling Indra's chariot, which Indra had thrown into water, thereby endowing it with immortalizing properties.

However, in later centuries, the term rasa underwent a gradual change in meaning and came to signify in Āyurveda a specific recipe conferring long, healthy life and warding off premature old age. The principle idea underlying these two therapies is the presupposition that appropriate diet (āhāra), when supported by a prescribed and sane life style in conformity with the prescribed code of moral behaviour (vicāra), will activate the rejuvenative force (vāja). Vāja is said to combat the bodily erosion caused by the aging process by replenishing the bodily matter that would otherwise be lost with the passage of time. This fact that the passage of time poses various threats to the human body is already recognized in the semantics of the proto-Indo-European verb ger (Sanskrit ḡr) which combines the meanings of "to grow old", "to break up" and "to wear down", thereby suggesting that the aging process is one of gradual erosion and perdition of some vital principle or matter.

The intake of food or the ingestion of certain substances with recuperative potency helps ward off the bodily loss⁸ due to

⁸ See AthV 1:4.4; 1:6.2; 1:5.4; 3:7.5, and, in particular, Sāyana's gloss on 1:4.4.

old age. The incorporation of specific substances--such as plant or mineral extracts, for instance, are said to ward off the bodily attrition evident in the loss of hair in old age. Āyurveda has promoted the rejuvenation and the revitalization therapies as two coping mechanisms of aging on the basis of the creation mythology already discernible in certain Vedic texts such as the Atharva Veda (5:5; 4:12), which recounts how a specific healing plant [Arundhatī] came into existence from the dismembered portion of the body of a primordial victim, and how the same plant can now be used to restore the material substance needed to mend injuries to that same bodily member in a human being.⁹

With reference to the existence of such homological building blocks, matter and energy may be said to be shifted back and forth between the macrocosm and the microcosm to counter the threats posed by the aging process. This constant and varied motion of matter from one entity to another easily occurs, because at the most fundamental level people, plants, animals as well as the universe originate in the same cosmic stuff. Their apparent differences are only superficial distinctions of form. Each entity in the universe is merely an alloform, an alternative shape, of all the others. The metaphysical underpinnings of this presupposition are to be found in the categories of sāmānya (generic concomitance) and viśeṣa (variant factor) in the Caraka Saṃhitā (CŚ.sū.1:44,45).

⁹ According to Sāyana's gloss, Arundhatī restores to normalcy the organ/member of the body that had lost blood (srtaraktam aṅgam prarohatha).

The medical texts view aging as kālaja, that is, it is initiated and sustained by time (kāla) from the moment the five basic elements (bhūta) and the self (ātmā) come together to produce a foetus. Old age, as the epiphenomenon of the general life process (aging), is generated in the due course of time. The process of aging is coeval with the flow of moments (ksana) that follow each other in quick and continuous succession (krama) (see chapter four). Aging of the body, therefore, is an unstoppable, irreversible and inevitable process. No therapy can arrest aging or cure the diseases, disabilities and discomforts engendered by it. Potentially, any age-related therapy may only delay the onset of old age and/or help manage and cope with the stresses of aging.

Typical geriatric therapies of rejuvenation and revitalization are, therefore, construed only as coping mechanisms which may 1) delay aging, 2) prevent premature aging or impotence and, 3) provide energy to be able to accomplish the prescribed tasks in old age provided the therapy is undertaken as a prophylactic measure in one's younger years (Cakrapāṇi on CS. śā.1:114,115). Under certain extenuating circumstances man may undergo them while he is a married householder and without a son but in any event they must be completed before he leaves that stage.

Rejuvenation Therapy

As the term rasāyana (rejuvenation) suggests, this treatment is alleged to procure, for the individual undergoing it, various beneficial and positive changes in all the seven bodily elements (dhātus) beginning with the most fundamental of them, rasa. This therapy is said to help prevent premature old age, minimize the negative and adverse consequences of old age that manifest themselves naturally in due course of time and help the individual to diligently strive for the prescribed ends in life (puruṣārthas or śaṇās).

In addition, the rejuvenation therapy is said to produce various miraculous results on the aging body and mind. According to Caraka, it promotes longevity and health, preserves youthful vigour, dispenses stupor, torpor, fatigue, exhaustion, indolence and weakness. It tones up flabby muscles and sagging organs, stimulates digestion and maintains a wrinkle-free, lustrous skin (CS.ci.1.(1)). According to Suśruta (SS.sū.1:10), the rejuvenation therapy, in addition to delaying the onset of old age, also guards the subject against the approaching senility and physical deterioration.

On the basis of the role assigned to such natural phenomena as the sun and wind, the rejuvenation therapy is divided in two major categories or methods: 1) Treatment in the Nursing Cottage, 2) The Nature-cure Treatment.

1) Treatment in the Nursing Cottage

The mode of entering a nursing cottage for the treatment (the term used in the CS is kutiprāvesika) involves the isolation of the subject under treatment from all contact with nature for an extended period of time. It is prescribed in the case of those individuals who are reasonably healthy, strong willed, self-controlled and endowed with sufficient means to bear the expenses involved (Cs.ci.4:27). Suśruta lays down additional conditions by ruling that this treatment is not available to those who are:

- 1) Unable to curb their passions
- 2) Idlers and lazy
- 3) Incompetent sloths
- 4) Addicted to various vices
- 5) Sinners
- 6) Skeptics who would doubt the efficacy of the treatment.

Those who are eligible for the treatment must, in addition, cultivate specific psychological traits and habits valued in Indian tradition. These include a commitment to speak only the truth, abstaining from excessive consumption of wine, alcohol and tobacco, observance of celibacy over the duration of the treatment (which may run for ninety days or more) and restricting food intake to milk and clarified butter (ghee) only. The compliance with these preliminary conditions is supported by a long passage in CS.ci.4:30-37, wherein Caraka states that no one who has not rid himself of the evil habits of the body and the

mind can ever expect to come by the benefits resulting from the rasāyana treatment.

In fact, the passage also contains an optional rejuvenative prescription solely based on the cultivation of certain ethical virtues and practices (ācāra rasāyana). These include:

- 1) Repetition of holy chants and giving of alms
- 2) Revering gods, cows, brahmins, teachers, seniors and the village elders)
- 3) Commitment to non-violence, compassion and moderation through developing balanced habits
- 4) Acquiring knowledge of meteorology and nosology (the science of compounding medical prescriptions).

Such an individual will reap all the benefits of the rejuvenation treatment without submitting to that therapy proper. Should he, in addition, undergo the regular rejuvenation therapy under the supervision of a qualified physician (vaidya), he will profit from all the good effects of the rejuvenation treatment promised in the medical texts.¹⁰

The medical component of the treatment is to be administered by a qualified physician in an isolated cottage situated not far from a town where all the requisite medicaments, raw materials for concocting a special regimen etc. are readily available in plenty. The retreat itself should have a qualified physician, attendants and brahmins ready at hand (CS.ci.1:17- 23). The doors

¹⁰ In the legend of Yayāti (Padma Purāṇa), Yayāti spurns Indra's invitation to go to heaven and become immortal claiming that old age [and death] are caused by sin (1:2.72.11). He then boasts that by giving himself to [ācāra] rasāyana [which is akin to that prescribed by Caraka] he will keep his body youthful and free from diseases while inhabiting the earth (1:2.72.17).

and the windows of this hut should be small and strategically located so as to prevent direct access to sunshine or the wind. Two smaller huts, one inside the other, should be constructed within this outer cottage so that in the innermost hut darkness will prevail even at noon. The idea is to recreate in the subject the ambience and mood that will be similar to that experienced by the foetus in the womb.

The treatment begins on an auspicious day, time and place, that is, during the northern movement of the sun and in the bright half of the month when the day and the constellation are propitious (the daivavyapāśraya component of the therapy, see below). The subject should be both physically and mentally pure and serene. He should be firm in his resolution, purpose and faith, and single-minded in application (CS.ci.1:17-23). The treatment is to be preceded by certain bodily purifications resembling the familiar yogic purificatory practices. Caraka adds that the subject must be in the first phase of life and the one whose body has been purged of old blood (sṛtaraktah).

The purification principally involves the purging of the pathogenic factors, that is, the three deranged humors--kapha, vāta and pitta in the months of Caitra (April-May), Śrāvaṇa (July-August) and Mārgaśīrṣa (November-December) respectively. The subject is then put on a rehabilitatory diet consisting of barley gruel mixed with ghee for a period ranging from three to seven days depending on the bodily constitution of the subject. This will purge his intestines of all faecal matter. Suśruta

emphasizes the importance of this essential preliminary step with reference to a homely simile:

The rejuvenation therapy is ineffective in a body that is not properly purged, just as a dirty cloth even though dyed fails to shine (SS.ci.27:4).

At this stage Caraka (CS.sū 16:18) suddenly announces that after undergoing this purificatory treatment, the subject will hardly age at all and will live a long life free from all diseases. (In all probability this is no more than arthavāda (mere praise, see chapter three,) introduced principally to discourage both the subject or his physician from skipping over this preliminary but essential step).

Only then, the physician (his epithet used in this context is kālavīt, that is, knowledgeable of the role of time in the process of aging), can successfully administer the rejuvenation therapy with a view to restore the ideal proportion of the seven bodily elements, to reduce the subject's susceptibility to diseases and to slow down the pace of the aging process. Further details of the treatment vary depending upon the particular prescription used. The fruits, plants and herbs used for such preparations must be collected (often personally by the subject undergoing the therapy) from the Himālayan or other designated forests in their proper seasons and in perfect and flawless state. Pure honey, milk, clarified butter, rock salt, and minerals also figure as rejuvenating agents in many of these prescriptions.

The treatment in the cottage method of rejuvenation, as outlined in the Samhitās of Caraka and Śuśruta is a very lengthy, cumbersome, time-consuming, labour-intensive and expensive affair. Only the rich and the twice-born (dvija) males, with material means to engage a fleet of attendants and care-takers (e.g. the brahmin, the nurse and the attendants) to wait upon them over a period of six months, could consider this method.

2) The Nature-cure Treatment

In this method the subject is fully exposed to the wind and sun as part of the therapy (the term used in the texts is vātātāpika, meaning the sun and wind treatment). It was designed for the benefit of the average individual with limited means. It is argued that other distinct advantages the nature-cure method has over the Residence in Cottage method are that it can be started without undergoing the preliminary purifications. It is also less susceptible to toxic side effects than the hut residence treatment, which involves a relatively larger number of drugs and doses. Further, this treatment may be interrupted or suspended in mid-course without harm (AHS.u.39:144-145). The treatment does not envisage the constant supervision of the physician; the subject merely follows his instructions and takes the prescribed recipes.

Revitalization Therapy

A virile, youthful look with a stallion-like vigour and athletic body notwithstanding advancing age is a popular, ideal male image that has been cultivated in most cultures and traditions. The interest and preoccupation with the pursuit of youth in old age has prompted numerous systems of medicine the world over to promote aphrodisiac potions claiming to generate an inexhaustible store of semen (the definite sign of virility) and great phallic strength. In Indian tradition, already in the Atharva Veda, several charms are listed promising increase in male virility (4:4, 7:72,101). These charms make a specific reference to vāī (horse) as the standard of virile power (yāvat aśvasya vājinah). Occasionally the bull, elephant, goat or the ass also serve as the measure of comparison (Karambelkar 1961, 49).

In Āyurveda such practices and prescriptions are known as vāīkarana vidhi, which Caraka defines as a process whereby man may acquire vigour and be able to copulate frequently for long periods without fatigue (CS.c1.4:50). For Suśruta revitalization is a recipe that can rectify the depleted or scanty production of semen (śukra), a natural consequence of aging, as well as its deficient or poor quality resulting from the deranged humours (SS.sū.1:11).

Cakrapāṇi explains the essential meaning of the concept of vāīkarana in a neat and clear gerontological context stating .

that vāīvidhi is intended to render the sexually weak and feeble individual (avāīī) vigorous, virile and energetic (vāīī). He equates the substantive vāīī (which also means food as well as horse) with semen, and vāīīkarana as the remedy that increases the store of semen. Vāīī also means, according to him, the improved capacity of ejaculating the semen with force during the intercourse.

Nonetheless, Caraka is quick to admonish that the revitalization therapy is valid only within the framework of the model of life stages (see chapter two). As such, it is recommended to the males belonging to the first three classes (varnas) only. Secondly, only the householder may resort to the revitalization therapy for the expressed purpose of enabling him to procreate a son so that he may discharge one of his three debts (ṛṇa, see chapter two). The rationale behind this restriction is buttressed with two appropriate similes by Caraka:

Fragrance manifests itself in the bud only when it is mature enough to blossom. Such is also the case for semen in man. A man desirous of long life must not therefore copulate with a woman while he is still a teenager [in whom the śukradhātu has not fully developed] or when he has grown old [when the proportion of śukra has depleted].

An adolescent boy copulating with a woman would dry up in no time like a pond containing only a little water. Similarly, an old man copulating with a woman will crumble at once like a dry, sapless, worm-eaten and decayed piece of wood at the mere touch (CS.ci.4:39,40).

Even the householder must cultivate certain ethical and cultural traits and norms in order to be eligible for the revitalization treatment. He must be ātmavān (aware of and respectful to the presence of self within) and jitendriya (with restrained senses). He must practice the prescribed svasthavṛtta (code of positive health) and sadvṛtta (code of moral behaviour) norms (CS.ci.2:3-4). The purpose of the revitalization therapy is to enable such a householder to obtain a son (apatyakara) in his old age because he was unable to procreate a son in his young age.

The best virilific agent for such a man is his own wife (vr̥syatamā) provided she is also good looking, young and cultivated (CS.ni.27:8). Caraka reiterates this observation in a charming simile (which incidently is also used by Aśvaghoṣa to draw just the opposite conclusion, see chapter three).

Just as the juice circulates in the sugarcane...even so semen pervades man's body. Stimulated by the warmth of mutual erotic desires and acts [with his wife], semen will spontaneously rush out to unite with the ovum during copulation (CS.ci.4:46-49).

Sex with such a partner in moderation will make such a man long lived. He will age slowly, his body will retain its glow and vigour (SS.ci.24:112).

As the medical texts envisage it, the revitalization therapy is designed to bolster the failing libido and the urge for sex attributed to impotency caused by abnormal physiological or

psychological factors and old age. This is sought to be achieved by:

- 1) Increasing the production of the semen (śukra)
- 2) Improving the mechanism of its delivery during the sex act
- 3) Improving the fertilizing quality of the sperm.

It is interesting to note that Caraka is also aware of the psycho-social dimension of sexuality. He recognizes the role and value of proper social interaction (entregens) in the sustenance of sexual vigour. He therefore counsels men and women to seek persons of their own age-groups and social circle in order to acquire and maintain virility (CS.ci.3:21-23).

Personal Hygiene to Cope with Aging

Āyurveda enjoins that a constant vigilance and a regular daily and seasonal routine (dinacaryā and rtucaryā), when kept according to the moral and social prescriptions compiled in various medical and moral texts, will check the depletion of vāja, which, in turn, will prevent premature aging and help retain sexual vigour despite advancing age. For that purpose Caraka suggests various measures that range from warm baths, gentle exercises and oil massage to the regular intake of selected wines and diet that includes meat.¹¹

¹¹ vyāvāmanityāḥ strīnityā madyanityāśca ye narāḥ
nityam māṃsarasāhārā nāturāḥ syurna durbalāḥ (Cs.sū.27:314).

According to Caraka (CS.sū.27:288), in ancient times, even

The use of prescribed eye-salve and eye-drops, for instance, ~~is~~ recommended to retain good eyesight even in old age. Smoking of pipes containing specific medicinal herbs ~~is~~ said to preserve mental alertness despite advancing age. Regularly lubricating the nostrils at prescribed times with medicated oils retards the onset of senility and maintains the acuteness of sight, smell and hearing (Cs.sū.5:57-59). Daily massage of the scalp and hair with approved vegetable oils prevents insomnia, baldness, grey hairs and sagging facial muscles (CS.sū.5:81-83). Special measures are recommended for the maintenance of health in old age during seasonal changes. Three times a year at prescribed seasons the body should be cleansed of all accumulated waste matter by sudation, steam-baths, emesis, purgation and enemas (CS.sū.7:47).

The following dicta, from the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa emphasize the moral component of the personal hygiene:

The sprinkling of water upon the eyes, application of oil to the soles of the feet, putting oil drops in the ears and anointing the head with oil--these are the methods to keep back decrepitude. Staying away from walks in the sun in autumn, consuming well cooked grains and rice served hot, also avert decrepitude. Walks in the spring season, warming the body moderately before the fire and sex with a young girl keeps old age away (1:1.17.34-42).

the demons became free of old age, disease and fatigue by regularly undergoing oil massage.

On the other hand, engaging in practices forbidden in the texts such as the Dharma Śāstras or the Purāṇas, is said to be conducive to premature aging:

Consuming parched meat, sex with an old woman, sitting in the morning sun, [consuming] yogurt which is not quite ready (taruṇam dadhi)--all these accelerate the aging process (Brahmaivaivarta Purāṇa 1:1.17.45).

The rejuvenation and revitalization therapies and prescriptions as expounded in the medical texts are based on the idea that certain substances categorized as follows are the source of vāja (rejuvenatory and revitalizing force).

- 1) Herbs and herbal products: Śatāvarī, Āmalaka
- 2) Animal secretions: milk, honey
- 3) Fruits: grapes, mango, dates
- 4) Grains: śālī variety of rice, wheat
barley, sesamum, lentil
- 5) Animal flesh: goat, peacock, sparrow
- 6) Minerals: gold, silver.

The above products are said to increase the quantity of semen and to improve its quality. When ingested regularly in the manner and proportion prescribed by the physician, they are said to prevent premature ejaculation which is recognized as a sign and syndrome of premature aging. Occasionally, specific products such as Śīlājatu (mineral pitch) exuded from certain varieties of rocks heated by the rays of the sun are also prized. Caraka, in fact, claims that there is no curable disease on earth which Śīlājatu cannot cure. For centuries it has also been known as the aphrodisiac par excellence, and even today one comes across

itinerant "doctors" peddling what they claim to be Śīlājatu to young couples honeymooning in the hill resorts of India.)

Garaka, however, does not include preparations solely based on minerals such as mercury or sulphur, which first came into vogue with the establishment of the Rasa (alchemy) and Siddha systems of medicine in South India toward the beginning of the common era. By 700 CE, they had already begun to appear in certain Āyurvedic texts also (Cakrapāṇi, for instance, refers frequently to the mercury-based preparations). Proponents of these schools claimed that their mercury-based preparations were superior to herbal preparations of the classical Āyurveda. Their potency, it was argued, was liable to deteriorate rapidly since it was a function of a number of uncontrollable variables--the season, habitat, age, sex and the bodily constitution of the patient.

Further, Āyurvedic preparations had to be concocted out of a large quantity of raw materials, many of which were not readily available or were very expensive. The process of formulation, compounding and dispensing of these preparations generally was tedious, cumbersome, time consuming and labour intensive. The period of the treatment was also long, often stretching into months. The doses were large and numerous and required expensive food adjuncts such as milk or honey.

In brief, Āyurvedic (rejuvenatory or revitalizing remedies were deemed to be [justly so, one may add] beyond the means of the average individual. As against this, the mercury based

potions were, it was claimed, more potent, longer lasting and provided quicker relief or cure. Whereas the potency of the Āyurvedic preparations disappeared within one year of their compounding, the potency of the mercury based potions increased with age (see Śrāṅgadhara Samhitā 1:1.50-52, quoted in Sharma 1975,). The doses of the mercury or mineral-based rejuvenating prescriptions were, it was claimed, quick acting, better tasting and required only a fraction in quantity as compared to the doses prescribed in the Āyurvedic system. The compounding and dispensing of the doses was rational and standardized so that just one dose applied to all regardless of the age, sex, bodily constitution etc. of the subject (Rasacandānsu, "Pūrva Khaṇḍa" 8:9, quoted in Sharma 1975, 469). It was further claimed that some of these preparations had the capacity to render the subject ageless (ajara) and immortal (amara).¹²

Sharma has argued that the Rasa school of medicine arose in Śaivite circles in South India and was developed and made popular by Buddhist monks and physicians. According to Rasesvara Siddhānta, an important text of the Rasa school, mercury is the seed (bīja) of Śiva and mica that of his consort Śakti. When Śiva and Śakti come together, that is, when mercury and mica are combined, the resultant compound acquires the power of vanquishing death. Mercury, therefore, is the best means of

¹² Rasahrdayatantra (1:6), an important text of the Siddha system of medicine, boasts that [the inhabitants of] the entire earth can be rendered ageless (nirjara) by the power of the rasa [mercury-based] preparations (see Sharma 1975).

spiritual liberation, because it endows the body with the necessary immutability (pindasthairyā) which is an essential prerequisite to spiritual realization.

Geriatrics developed as a separate medical and clinical branch only in the twentieth century CE. But traditionally, the treatment and prevention of diseases and disabilities in the aged has been an integral part of general medicine in major ancient civilizations. The culture-bound character of geriatrics as it has evolved in Āyurveda is discernible from the fact that selection and employment of drugs, diet and the over-all life style to be adopted by the elderly--though rationally determined (yukti vyapāśraya)--is also skillfully blended with appeals to divine and magical interventions (daivavyapāśraya) with a view to assure successful treatment.

These latter include the chanting of the sacred formulae (mantra), fasting (upavāsa), wearing of consecrated beads or magical stones (maṇi), sacrifices (homa), observances of vows (vrata and niyama), the collection, cleaning, compounding and dispensing of medicines accompanied by rituals and so forth. Active participation of the elderly in these treatments is deemed to be a necessary condition particularly at the psychological level (sattvāvalaya), which may include such yogic practices as concentration and meditation. This is intended to promote the therapeutic efficacy of the food or drug administered to the elderly patient (CS.sū.11:54).

The three-fold basis of geriatrics or even general medicine in Āyurveda reveals its close affinity with ancient medicine as propounded in the Atharva Veda (particularly daivavyapāśraya), on the one hand, and classical yoga as expounded by Patañjali (sattvāvajaya), on the other. Caraka's admonition that the success or failure of the treatment is a function of the sum of the deeds committed by the individual in his present and past lives undergirds the eclectic and practical approach of the medical school. The Caraka Samhitā (śā.1:53; 1:116,117), for instance, states that the influence of actions done in past births determines pathogenesis in the present or the future life.

But this fatalistic stance is immediately balanced by a rational declaration that "bearing in mind the past symptoms, prophylactic measures taken today will avert disaster/disorder tomorrow." It is preceded by an appropriate simile:

Just as a dam is raised so that the floods may not destroy the crops as they did in the past, so the treatment given today will prevent a possible disaster tomorrow (CS.śā.1:90,91).¹³

The preceding suggests that some of the typical Hindu precepts and practices promoted in the classical medical texts to cope with the stress of aging are as perceptive as some of the modern findings in gerontology and geriatrics. Rules about the dietetics

¹³ The Galenic medicine advocates similar prophylactic measures. Quoting Athenaeos, a Greek physician of first century CE, Galen remarked that application of the hygiene of old age should already start in youth: just as those who wear coats in summer [are forced to] spend winter in worn out [tattered] clothes, so those who in youth waste their vital force endure old age with difficulty (quoted in Grmek 1958, 55).

pertaining to old age are also of equal importance. Despite certain alterations (necessitated by the introduction of modern medicine), they are largely respected by the majority of Indian men and women even today. More recently, one gerontologist has argued in a similar vein claiming that there is no one single factor that plays such a significant role in contributing to the ultimate health status, general well-being, and quality of life of the elderly woman [or man] than does nutrition (Mitchell in Haug et al 1985, 187). The material of gerontological relevance from Ayurvedic texts, accordingly, is likely to be found helpful to the development of an indigenous policy and program for elderly health care and welfare in modern India.

Chapter Eight: Concluding Remarks

The present study was undertaken with the assumption that in India's religious and literary heritage there is a wide range of attitudes and images of aging which, if recovered and critically evaluated in the light of modern gerontology, could substantially contribute toward the development of a contemporary Indian gerontology that is also culturally nuanced. As a first step toward this future enterprise, the survey of the history of the origin and development of the meaning of aging from the Vedic through the classical period was undertaken in chapter two.

That survey revealed a variety of responses to aging which are historically and empirically conditioned--that is, in large measure, they were related to, and determined by, changing structures of sociopolitical power and the patterns of religious thought and culture of India. In Vedic texts penetrating reflections and analysis based on the empirical experience of the meaning of aging and growing old were found to be absent since the life span of the Vedic Indians was so short.

But from about 500 BCE, prodded by Buddhism, Indian society gradually moved away from a naive acceptance of aging as continued growth to a more sophisticated understanding of old age as a distinct stage of life characterized by decline and decrepitude. Old age, along with illness and death, became the source of the most fundamental conflict between the brahmin and Buddhist thinkers regarding the meaning and purpose of life.

Subsequent intellectual and religious thought in Indian tradition, it may be argued, is coloured by this creative tension arising out of the differing interpretations of the human condition and the meaning of aging in life. Early Buddhism saw the aging life, culminating in death, as an unremitting agony and monotony. A solution to this human predicament was conceived epistemologically in terms of the four noble truths. Ascetic renunciation of worldly life in family and community figured as an integral component of this solution, which was designed to vanquish the triune evil of old age, disease and death.

The Hindu Smṛti works, on the other hand, located the meaning of aging in the process of life itself, rather than in an ascetic spirituality opposed to or transcending it. Human life is the dynamic flux that surrounds and moves through the aging individual. It is to be realized within the context of the broader familial and social model of the stages of life. The crystallization of the idea that old age is a distinct stage of life with its own unique meaning and purpose was a complex, dialectical process which began in the age in which the Buddha lived (ca. 500 BCE) and continued for several centuries.

The contribution of Buddhism to this development lay in sensitizing the unreflective Vedic mind to the fact that aging is an irreversible and inevitable process leading to disease and death. When this awareness spread rapidly into the mainstream of the society, old age came to be associated with a major social problem inviting the brahmins to respond in their role as the

custodians of social organization, welfare and control. The result was the development of the ideal model of the stages of life (āśramas) and institutionalization of old age as the final stage in life in which to strive for spiritual liberation.

This articulation of the āśrama model and its formal and ritual incorporation in the Dharma Śāstra texts was designed to counter possible social disorganization which, it was feared, might otherwise ensue from societal neglect of the elderly as a particular age group in the wake of the Buddhist appeal to young men and women to renounce the world. The propagation of the ideal of a well-integrated family life and social organization based on popular Hindu cosmology combined with the progress in medicine and health-care created a relatively favorable environment for the elderly during the classical period. In brief, the chief contribution of the Dharma Śāstras lay in steering a middle course between the naive gerontophilia of the Vedic Indians and the neurotic gerontophobia of the Buddhists. The tradition of the care and culture of aging and the aged, thus, is a post-Vedic phenomenon initiated and fostered by the writers of the Dharma Śāstras.

The examination of the formal and literary modes of expressing the meaning of old age employed in the texts consulted was carried out in chapter three. It suggests that timeless questions such as the meaning of life in aging do not have exclusively historical or metaphysical answers. Responses to aging are also structured by the particular syntactical and grammatical

properties of the language (Sanskrit and Pali in this instance) through which they are presented, communicated and transmitted to posterity.

Our study also reveals that in their attempts to 1) locate and map out the field of activity with respect to the aging body, and 2) to trace the aetiology of aging in metaphysical terms, these texts consistently resort to similes, metaphors and myths. The notion of aging, consequently, emerges as so many iconic images of the upward, downward as well as forward march of life through time and space.

1) Aging as a marker of life's journey. This sense is suggested in a number of Dharma Śāstra texts by the institution of age-specific rites of passage phrased in the optative mood, which effectively set off one period of life from another by reason of privilege or duty.

2) Aging as growth and maturity The individual's growth and development with age are conceptualized positively in physical, material, psychological or spiritual terms.

3) Aging as decline and loss: The later phases of life and the associated meanings are evaluated negatively as violence, loss and finitude.

4) Aging as an accomplice of death: The meaning of aging as a handmaiden of or a minion to death is proposed in striking similes and metaphors in many of our texts.

The above imageries serve to assert, on the one hand, that 1) aging is pain and suffering, 2) the gross body, which is its locus and field of operation is impermanent and impure, and 3) true liberation can be achieved only when the process of aging is

stopped, sacralized or sublimated. On the other hand, it is just as emphatically insisted that the liberation by the self is possible only in the embodied state which is under the sway of the aging process. Aging, thus, is posited as the necessary vehicle or energy that unfolds the path of liberation before the embodied self. The suffering and losses associated with aging are the key to the liberation experience. This suffering is what alerts us to the insubstantiality of the world (samsāra). The pain of aging is, therefore, a useful shock mechanism to awaken people from the mirage of this-worldly existence (samsāra).

But, in order for this to happen, one must develop a proper awareness of the body, its life span and its meaning. The traditional Indian views on these topics were examined in chapters four and five with reference to change (pariṇāma) in relation to time as past, present and future. Our findings indicate how close the relationship is between religion, culture and gerontology. The analysis of pariṇāma shows the extent to which it underscores the Indian understanding of 1) the process of aging, 2) the āśrama model of the stages of life, 3) the concept of karma, which is pivotal to all Indian religions, and 4) the rejuvenation and revitalization therapies of Āyurveda designed to cope with the stress and other adverse consequences of aging.

This relationship between culture and gerontology as mediated by the concepts of pariṇāma and karma is the crux of the Hindu, and to a certain extent, Buddhist soteriological

endeavour: One must experientially cultivate the awareness of the evanescent and aging character of embodiment and then actualize and guide it toward liberation.¹ Regardless of the particular method or dogma selected for this purpose, all approaches focus on developing the metaphysical understanding of the modes of aging as rooted in time (kāla), action (karma) and desire (kāma).

Our texts hasten to point out that from the mundane perspective, the metaphysical understanding of aging does not prevent or eliminate the suffering of aging but, rather, allows us to find meaning in it and thereby lessen its shock. Knowledge is seen as an essential ingredient of any defense mechanism alleviating the pain of aging. From this standpoint, the wise and liberated individual is the one who has lived in harmony with life's true meaning and purpose. It is significant that in suggesting answers to these questions from the worldly standpoint, the Dharma Śāstras and Āyurveda take a career-oriented stance, notwithstanding the disruptive powers of the aging process. None of them preach retirement (e.g. enforced leisure, absence of a meaningful role or the empty-nest syndrome) in the modern sense of the term, even in the face of extreme old age. To that extent it is an important corrective to the modern evaluation of old age as a time for formal retirement and rest.

¹ Aurobindo Ghose (1954 2:6.2) has provided a cogent and modernist expression to this idea. In his view, the dissatisfaction with the aging body originates in the perception of an actual or potential limitation. However, it acquires spiritual significance only when its cause is perceived "sub specie aeternitatis." Suffering, thus, is at once the sign of limitation and the motive for its transcendence.

4

To be sure, our texts talk of disengagement and retreat. But this disengagement from the active householder's norms is for the sake of re-engagement to the tasks of self-realization in old age. For this reason, these texts do not advocate a "sick role" for the aged, because they do not reduce aging to disease or old age to illness. As such, they seem to provide meaningful ways of 1) coping with the stress of old age, 2) maintaining high morale and life satisfaction in aging, and 3) avoiding boredom. That these enduring ideas have filtered down to the lowest strata of Indian society to this day is evident in George's (1981) study of the elderly in Madras city, which concludes that, "the vast majority of the elderly remain active and carry out their routine tasks without help or assistance."

The large number of myths that the Hindu and Buddhist texts reveal about the subject of aging indicates how deeply troubled as well as interested Indian tradition has been by aging, and how difficult it is to make the aging process meaningful. This hypothesis was critically tested in chapter six. The intricate intertwining as well as discrepancies discernible in these myths (e.g. Cyavana, Yayāti) reveal the complexity of the Hindu and Buddhist mythology on aging. Though both the view-points endorse the belief that aging leads to human suffering, they disagree as to its relation to suffering. This is one of the more fascinating features about Indian tradition. A variety of possible causes of and responses to aging are proposed somewhere, so that our texts furnish a wide range of meanings. The strength of the composite

Indian view of aging, therefore, may lie in the possibility that some of the concepts may be found to be compatible with the theories of modern gerontology.

One such concept which needs to be further investigated is vārdhaka ("old-agedness"), which may be heuristically resolved into two components--aging (parināma) and old age (jarā), for the purpose of analyzing age-determined relationships. While aging seems to refer to the inevitable biological and psychological processes, old age is conceived as the psycho-social and cultural experience and meaning of the perceived aging activity. In the traditional Indian understanding, old age includes secondary personal and social responses to a primary malfunctioning in the individual's physical and/or psychological status. It involves responding cognitively and valuatively to both the benign and malign manifestations of the aging process on the body and mind.

Viewed from this perspective, the traditional Hindu legal and medical works provide typical patterns of shaping the aging experience into the predictable behaviour and experience of old age along class-based social and cultural norms and roles. Such a construction of the phenomenon of old age from the aging process appears to be an important function of these texts. That is, old age is depicted as responses to aging in an attempt to provide it with a meaningful form and explanation as well as control.

Paradoxical as it may sound, old age as a culturally constructed phenomenon is part of the mechanism of learning to cope with aging and all that it entails. Gerontologists today

recognize that the key to a relatively healthy old age without stress lies in 1) Planning for an active late life as a career, and 2) Learning the appropriate mechanisms of coping with old age from early on in life. The present study indicates that the profession of gerontology in modern India should further undertake:

- 1) A critical evaluation of the potential relevance and utility of the model of the stages of life (āśrama) to contemporary needs, since it is based on the hypothesis that the successful adaptation and adjustment to life in old age depends on the experience of relative isolation and deprivation (in terms of physical comforts) in one's formative years as a student
- 2) The re-orientation of geriatric practice in the light of Āyurveda since it advocates the incorporation of appropriate dietary habits and a personal hygiene in one's early life to assure a healthy late life.

It is true that in the past, elderly social welfare and medical treatment were mainly devised for the benefit of the male members of the landed, ruling and priestly classes. It is also true that the efficacy of the Āyurvedic treatment is subject to numerous variables. Such conceptual or practical weaknesses of the Dharma Śāstras or Āyurveda must not, however, deter social scientists; since, with imagination and sympathy, these former may be turned into positive features in the development of a truly indigenous gerontology in India.

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