

HINDUISM

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THE main object of this paper is to describe Hinduism as a concrete working reality among the Hindu people to-day. The variety of its forms and its general promiscuousness make the presentation an extremely difficult task, especially as Hinduism is entirely unformulated in any official creed or code or standard handbook of theological or moral instruction. Whatever Hinduism may be, one thing however is clear. It is essentially a traditional inheritance from ancient times,—not indeed a primeval deposit handed down unchanged in crystalline form, but a residual deposit resulting from a long process both of accretions and decretions, developments and modifications—, so that it has never been one and the same thing in successive periods of the past, and is never altogether the same thing among different sections of the people themselves. In order, therefore, to understand the meaning of Hinduism, it is not enough to enumerate the various existing elements which make up the whole. It is necessary also to see how these elements have come together, and the idea and motive which has lain at the back of them. And this is possible only through a comprehensive view of the history of the entire development from earliest times.

THE ARYAN IMMIGRATION

By "earliest times," for present purposes, I mean the unascertainable date at which the original Aryan stock, then dwelling somewhere in Central Asia, divided into two streams, the one migrating westwards through Persia, and then on to Greece, Italy,

and Germany, while the other diverted southwards through the passes of the Himalayas, and worked its way first down to the Indus, then eastwards along the Ganges, and finally southwards over the peninsula. The peoples whom they found already occupying the country were of two sorts, probably representing two earlier migrations — first, the “Kolarians,” still surviving in remnants among the hill tribes of Central India; and secondly, the “Dravidians,” who even now predominate in the southern half of the country. These peoples were partly subjugated by the Aryan immigrants and partly left untouched in the more inaccessible districts. Of those subjugated races some remained more or less unmixed, while others gradually intermingled and formed semi-Aryan tribes. Both these previous populations had their own distinct forms of religion; and (though it would require much detailed study to be definite) it is certain that they contributed many of the grosser elements which afterwards went to make up the congeries of later Hinduism—animistic beliefs, fetish, stone, image, and demon worship, and a multiplicity of local deities of low type.

FIRST PERIOD: 1500-1000 B.C.

Our sole knowledge of the early Aryan worship is derived from the sacred books called the Vedas, of which a very brief account must now be given. First and oldest comes the *Rig Veda*, a collection of religious hymns, which on the one hand embody the conception of one sublime deity, and on the other hand so personificate the powers of nature as to make them seem separate gods—Dyospita, the shining one, or father and superior of the sky (the Zeus of the Greeks, and Jupiter, supreme God of Rome¹); Varuna, the god of the dark sky; Mitra, god of the bright sky;² Indra, god of the cloudy sky (or of rain); Agni, the god of

¹ Cf. xi. 16; xiii. 15.

² Cf. x. 16; x. *passim*; xvi. 5 and *passim*.

fire; Surya, god of the sun; Savitri, Pushan, and finally *Vishnu*—at that time a sun-god of quite inferior note; Vayu, god of the air; the Maruts, or storm gods; Rudra, father of the Maruts, a third-rate deity, but (like Vishnu) elevated in later times to a position of supreme prominence under the name of *Siva*; Yama, the first of the Blessed (*i.e.* of men elevated to heaven), afterwards the dread king of hell; the Aswins, healers of men; Ushas, goddess of dawn; Saraswati, goddess of a river of that name, and now surviving as the goddess of eloquence, etc.—making in all a total of thirty-three—eleven in heaven, eleven on earth, and eleven in mid-air. Each of these objects was separately worshipped as supreme by prostrations, oblations, sacrifices of the goat, cow, horse, and even man. It is difficult to judge how far they were regarded polytheistically as distinct divinities, or monotheistically as various aspects of one and the same all-pervading power. Enough to say that a noble and elevated tone pervades the hymns throughout, far different from that of most later literature. In fact, in no instance is the downward tendency from primitive to later times more strongly manifested than in the history of Hinduism viewed from the starting-point of the Rig Veda, thus rendering difficult any theory of the consistent upward evolution of religions generally. Even Rig-vedism itself seems already to mark a downward departure from a more primitive belief in one God. In certain social points, too, now identified religiously with Hinduism, the same evidence appears. In the Rig-vedic times caste was unknown. Even the priest-class were men of the world, and in no way an exclusive racial clique.¹ Women were in full enjoyment of a healthy social liberty and equality with men, sharers in sacrifice and praise; and some of them were counted even as priestesses. They married at a reasonable age, had some voice in the choice of their

¹ Cf. xiii. 18.

husbands, were free to re-marry, and the ritual suicide of *Sati* was unknown. The people had no religious restrictions in the use of meat and drink. The dead were sometimes cremated, but also sometimes buried. The chief aim of worship was indeed to secure prosperity in this world, but conceptions of sin and forgiveness were not wanting.¹ The people believed in the happiness of a future state, and the doctrine of transmigration was unknown. Neither (except in a few hymns of undoubtedly late origin) is there any suggestion of the pantheism of a later age, nor of any official intermingling of magic with religion.

SECOND PERIOD: 1000-800 B.C.

By a convenient speculation, the compilation of the Rig Veda may be placed somewhere between 1500 and 1000 B.C., and its place of composition was the Punjab. With similarly convenient definiteness we can assign the composition of the other three Vedas to somewhere between 1000 and 800 B.C., during which time the Aryans pressed on from the country of the Indus and settled in the Jumna and Ganges plains as far eastwards as Behar. The literature which came into existence during this second period is as follows:—(1) *The Sama Veda*, a collection of sacrificial chants taken from the Rig Veda and arranged for solemn recitation or singing to music; (2) *The Yajur Veda*, a collection of sacrificial formulas; (3) *The Atharva Veda*, including a few late hymns from the Rig Veda, but consisting chiefly of “mantras”—spells against evil, incantations against diseases, imprecations against demons, sorcerers, and enemies, and charms for securing prosperity and success. This document may not indicate the *origin* of magic, but certainly reveals its gradual incorporation with religion, thus marking a clear stage of degradation.² For centuries it was not regarded as a

¹ Cf. xiii. 29.

² Cf. i. 9; xiii. 2.

sacred book, and only became incorporated into the canon after religious degeneracy had prepared the way.

Subsequently to the foregoing Vedas, and now at least regarded also as Vedas, came a series of commentaries called *Brahmanas*. They deal with the procedure of sacrifice, but are chiefly full of theological and mystical speculations, with citations from earlier authors now otherwise lost. They mark a time when the simple and natural worship of the Rig Veda had expanded into a totally artificial system, and presuppose as already accomplished the transformation which they represent.

Following on the *Brahmanas* came the *Aranyakas* or "forest lectures," to be read by Brahmins during their ascetical probation; and secondly the *Upanishads*, which show the beginnings of intellectual speculation in theology—not claiming at the time to be divine revelations, but "guesses at truth," and attempts to penetrate into the problems of the soul, the universe, and the Supreme Being. In some of these works there appears a strong tinge of pantheistic speculation, which was afterwards developed into a system.

Side by side with the religious transformations revealed by this literature, social changes of no less importance were taking place. The original divisions into four classes—if not indeed a pure myth from beginning to end—had been established, viz. the priests, warriors, and agriculturalists, with the Sudras or incorporated aborigines added as a fourth. It was only afterwards that caste developed into an iron-bound system of social division, and came to be identified with religion as it now is. The position of women and their privileges still remained almost unaffected, while flesh-eating was still in full vogue.

THIRD PERIOD: 800-500 B.C.

Following on this comes the *Sutra* or so-called rationalistic period, which may be placed between 800

and 500 B.C.¹ It is named from the appearance of the *Sutras*—treatises of theology, philosophy, law, and domestic rites. Among these *Sutras* must be included the six *Darsanas*, *Shastras*, or systems of philosophy as follows:—(1) *Nyaya*, mainly a system of logic, and atheistic in character; (2) *Vaiseshika*, a system of atoms and eternal matter, which under criticism adopted the idea of God, but made souls eternal before and after, and independent of Him; (3) *Sankhya* (the classical system), originally atheistic, but modified so as to include God; (4) *Yoga*, atheistic adaptation of the *Sankhya*; (5) *Purva Mimansa*, an exegesis on the *Vedas*; (6) *Uttara Mimansa* (also called the *Vedanta*), divided into two systems—(a) the unqualified or extreme, which teaches pure idealism: “There is One, and no second”; the world is an unreal delusion of *Maya*; (b) the qualified *Vedanta*, which makes the world and souls realities, but still only forms of the One. Among these treatises the most celebrated is the *Vedanta* group, the contents of which is undoubtedly pantheistic. For though efforts have been made to use the more theistic portions as a key for the interpretation of the whole, the *Vedantic* philosophy is generally understood in such a way as to make the name “*Vedantist*” identical with “*Emanative Pantheist*.” This group marks the climax of theological development in ancient literature—later writers having done nothing but evolve the teaching here contained into a more explicit and methodic form.

At the same time the old religion had in practice reached its most formalized condition; though, even so, there were as yet no temples, no images, and no fantastic mythology of gods and goddesses such as constitutes the entire make-up of later Hinduism.² No doubt the growth of the six *Shastras* or philosophies had already given rise to the distinction

¹ Cf. xi. 24–26.

² Cf. xiii. 4; xiii. 4, 7.

between "esoteric" and "exoteric" Hinduism ; philosophical pantheism prevailed among the select circle of the priestly caste, while the multifarious ceremonial cult of the people was connived at, fostered, and encouraged by them as the only form of religion suited to their lower capacities.

BUDDHISTIC PERIOD: 500 B.C. TO 500 A.D.

Gautama Buddha,¹ founder of Buddhism in the sixth century B.C., who came with an answer to a growing aspiration after a purer and nobler form of faith, found all the materials out of which to select his theology in the literature already existing around him. The conception of Brahma as the unconscious All, producing souls and matter identical with himself by means of *Maya* or the principle of delusion; the eternity of the universe, souls, and matter before and after; the union of souls and matter, affording the condition for consciousness, desire, and action; karma, or the good and evil consequences of action; the transmigrations of souls through an indefinite series of lives; release from the series by uprightness of life; the attainment of the goal of human destiny by absorption into the All—these ideas are found already, some of them first hinted at in the Upanishads, and all of them expanded and systemized by the six systems of the Shastras, the latest dating a century or two before Buddha's time. What Buddha really did was this. First, he preached the unreality of the ritual worship prevalent among the people and the impotence of priestly ministrations; secondly, he set about popularizing selected portions of the esoteric Vedanta—in the light of which he substituted contemplation and self-restraint for ceremonial observances as the means of sanctification and salvation. In short, the original Buddhism seems to have been little more than the logical and practical (though

¹ Cf. iv. *passim*.

eclectic) use of intellectual Hinduism as a solvent to popular Hinduism. That Buddhism was merely a practical outcome of a pre-existing theology is perhaps shown from the fact that just before Buddha's time there had started quite independently a parallel movement on very similar lines, now known and still surviving under the name of Jainism.¹

Buddhism spread gradually throughout the peninsula, but received its chief push forward from the powerful patronage of Asoka (*circa* 250 B.C.).² The country was soon covered over with Buddhistic temples and monasteries, whose material remains are still the delight of the archæologist and traveller. A monkish system was developed on lines so strangely parallel to those of Christian monasticism as to suggest imitation on one side or the other; but the likeness is fully explained by the co-ordinate working out of the same root-idea of discipline and self-restraint.³

PURANIC PERIOD: 500-1000 A.D.

Meantime Brahminism, though much weakened for a time, was by no means universally superseded, and gradually reasserted itself among the masses of the people—not indeed in the *Vedic* form existing prior to Buddhism, but in the *Puranic*, which was itself even a greater transformation from Vedic Brahminism than Vedic Brahminism had been from pure Rig-Vedism. The later or Puranic religion, the staple of modern Hinduism, embodied the full apparatus of a fanciful mythology, a large pantheon of gods and goddesses, very human and superhuman and preterhuman and infrahuman, with spirits good and evil, represented by fantastic image-forms and worshipped with manifold rites. Every action in life and after life, great and small, was brought under the good and evil influences of these deities, and prosperity and

¹ Cf. iv. 7. ² Cf. *ib.*, 24.

³ Cf. *ib.*, 9, 10, 28.

adversity in life were made to depend upon ceremonial observances of a more or less magical character connected with their worship.

But what we want to say at this point is that Buddhism, with its exacting moral code resting on transcendental ideas, could not possibly hold its own among the masses of the people, especially when placed in rivalry with the attractive concreteness of the growing Puranic Brahminism. And so Buddhism was gradually drawn down to the level of its environment. Reverence for Buddha as a saint soon became worship of Buddha as a god. Other Buddhist saints were similarly deified, and there grew up a system of semi-polytheism, semi-saint-worship, in which the veneration of sacred places and relics formed the most prominent feature. This change had established itself by the early centuries of the Christian era; but any effective hold upon the mind of the people was not of long duration. For even with its new popular attractions Buddhism could hardly compete with the increasing popularity of Puranism, and the ever growing domination of the Brahminical caste. The result was that by the twelfth century A.D., Buddhism was practically obsolete in India, though it survived and still flourishes in Ceylon, Burma, Thibet, and elsewhere. Jainism, which went through a similar popularizing process, managed to survive in certain parts such as Gujerat, Rajputana, etc.; but for the rest, from this time forward the new or Puranic Brahminism prevailed throughout the length and breadth of India, and prevails still—being adopted not only by the Aryans, but also by the Dravidians of the south, and by such portions of the Kolarian tribes as had been drawn into connection with the Aryan race.

PURANIC HINDUISM

We have now reached that traditional deposit of religion which is meant by Hinduism in the ordinary

acceptance of the term. In point of contents it is extremely heterogeneous and complex, and in various degrees participated in piecemeal by different sections of the people; it permeates however the community as a whole, so that there is a remarkable uniformity of spirit and practice prevailing throughout the country. This unity is forced upon the traveller by the practical fact that the same features recur again and again in every part, so that after a short time he finds little or nothing new to be seen—a festival scene in the great Temple at Madura and another in the Golden Temple at Benares being undistinguishable except by locality. To put it philosophically, Hinduism, if taken analytically, divides up into an amazing complexity of diverse parts which it would take a volume to enumerate; but when looked at synthetically, it is the same one thing in its essential ideas wherever found. There are thousands of castes, each with its own distinctive religious practices, and there are scores of “sects” or different religious allegiances; and yet all share promiscuously in each other’s practices, the Vishnavite mingling with the Sivaite, and the worshipper of Ganesh making no distinction when he comes in front of a shrine of Vittoba. The primary instinct to worship *something* is so strong that it issues readily in the worship of *anything*. Hence the Hindus even flock with Christians to the more famous Catholic shrines, and make their votive offerings to Our Lady just as they will make them the next day to Durga or Parvati. It is quite an ordinary thing to find a Christian grave of unknown origin turned into a Hindu shrine, and loaded with bits of rags and faded garlands and coco-nut shells smeared with butter by way of sacrifice.

METHOD OF SYNTHESIS

“Hinduism—that is, latter-day Hinduism,” writes Hunter—“the Hinduism of the Puranas and after-

wards—is a social league and a religious alliance. As the various race-elements of the Indian peoples have been welded together, the simple old beliefs of the Veda, the mild doctrines of Buddha, and the fierce rites of the non-Aryan tribes have been thrown into the melting-pot, and poured out thence as a mixture of precious metal and dross to be worked up into the complex worship of the Hindu gods." Unfortunately our literary resources are too scanty to allow anything like a tracing of the whole process in detail. A few of the factors can, however, be indicated, even though their exact share in the results cannot be other than conjecturally assigned.

Starting from the fact that the systematization of later Hinduism was the work of the Brahmins and the stepping-stone to their ascendancy, it is easy to understand that they would use every form of belief and practice already prevailing among the people as a means of securing their desired object. And in justification of this "accommodation" they had a magnificent instrument at their back. This was none other than the pantheistic philosophy of the Vedanta. According to this speculation, the whole universe is nothing but a kind of shadowy reflection of the One Infinite Supreme, being really identical with Him, and only by a delusive limitation of mind conceived as distinct. It thus becomes not only possible but inevitable to regard the whole world, and whatever is in it, not only as a manifestation of God, but as actually divine, and so capable of receiving divine worship. If, therefore, the people were found worshipping forces of nature, spirits, demons, animals, and even curiously shaped stones, there was no necessity to convert them from their errors. Once recognize the all-pervading divinity, and the worship can be sanctioned as legitimate and embodied into orthodox Hinduism without essential alteration.

Such is the explanation which you will get nowadays if you catechize a Brahmin priest about the

many bizarre worships which he encourages and perhaps takes part in ; and it seems likely that such was the means by which a large part of the Hindu pantheon was created. Of the deities of Vedic times several have thus survived, *e.g.* Saraswati, Savitri, Vishnu, and Siva, the two latter of whom had by the decline of the Buddhist period assumed such importance as almost to eclipse all the rest, and to divide the country into two enormous sects, of which we shall have more to say later on. Besides these Vedic gods there were many others of local origin to be synthesized. Among them, in the first place, were the five brothers Pandavas, possibly historical persons, celebrated by the old epic called the Mahabharata (500 to 200 B.C.), and afterwards deified and worshipped collectively under the material form of five round stones grouped together. Shrines of this kind can be found along the roadsides in many parts of the country. Another was Rama, also a deified hero, celebrated in the epic called the Ramayana (similar date). In connection with him comes Hanuman, a warlike general having the form of a monkey, who was instrumental in the recovery of Rama's wife Sita, and who is still worshipped in many temples as the "Monkey-God." Then comes Krishna, the most popular of all, celebrated in several of the Puranas ; probably also a historical personage of great prowess, afterwards deified and made the subject of a vast amount of mythology, and then the revealer of a religious philosophy. Among the rest may be mentioned Ganesh or Ganpati, a mythological youth whose head was cut off by his own father Siva, and replaced by that of an elephant, since when he has become the god of the domestic hearth and the patron of successful enterprise. These and a multitude of decidedly local gods, to say nothing of goddesses (Kali or Durga, Parvati, Mahaluxmi, etc. etc.), all found a place in the pantheon under the general category of manifestations or avatars. Even Buddha

himself was adopted as one among the avatars of Vishnu.

SIVA AND VISHNU

As the worship of Vishnu and Siva are almost the two substantial halves of popular Hinduism, it will be useful here to enter into summary particulars of the leading differences between them.

SIVA

(1) Originally the vedic god Rudra, father of the storm gods, who gradually gained popularity. The cult was especially propagated by Sankaracharya in the eighth century A.D.

(2) A stern and exacting deity, standing aloof from men, who must raise themselves towards him by painful efforts.

(3) He is worshipped by ascetical practices—"the way of works"—and propitiated by sacrifices of blood.

(4) His clients are distinguished by horizontal paint-marks on the brow.

(5) The theology is pantheistic, and maintains the law of salvation by works as a means of final absorption into the divine.

(6) The worship gives rise to numerous Jogis, and tends to acts of excessive penance, fanaticism, secret sects, and pious fraud.

(7) The worship of the linga or generative power is characteristic, as well as animal sacrifice. The objects worshipped are not regarded as avatars of the divinity, but as symbols of his attributes and powers.

VISHNU

(1) Originally a minor sun-god of Vedic times, who gradually gained popularity. The cult was especially propagated by Ramanuja in the eleventh and Chaitanya in the fourteenth century A.D.

(2) A bright and comfortable deity, who condescendingly comes down to the level of men by avatars or manifestations.

(3) He is worshipped with festal praise as a king by his courtiers in "the way of devotion," and not of works.

(4) His clients are distinguished by the use of vertical paint-marks on the brow.

(5) The theology tends to theism by emphasizing personal manifestations of the divinity. Salvation is a free gift of grace.

(6) The worship tends to degenerate into licentiousness sanctified by religion (prostitution in temples, etc.).

(7) The principle of avatars favours polytheism and fetish by incorporating the worship of the fish, tortoise, boar, etc., and also of deified heroes as avatars of Vishnu.

THE AVATARS

The ten chief avatars or incarnations of Vishnu are as follows:—

(1) *Matsya, the fish.* Vishnu becomes a fish to save Manu, the first progenitor of the human race, from the deluge.

(2) *Kurma, the tortoise.* Vishnu appears as a tortoise in order to rescue certain valuable articles lost in the deluge.

(3) *Varaha, the boar.* Vishnu descended to rescue the world from a demon called Hiranyaksa who had plunged it beneath the sea.

(4) *Nara Sinha, the man-lion.* Vishnu, in the form of a half-man half-lion, delivers the world from a demon called Hiranya Kasipu, who had appropriated the sacrifices made to the gods.

These four avatars are said to have taken place in the Satya, the first or golden age of the world.

(5) *Vamana, the dwarf.* Vishnu descends as a dwarf to rescue the world from the power of the demon Bali. In two strides the dwarf passed over heaven and earth, but left the third or under world unreclaimed.

(6) *Parashu rama = Rama with the Axe.* Born to suppress the domineering of the Kshatrya or warrior caste over the Brahmin or priestly caste.

(7) *Rama Chandra, the mild or moon-like.* A Kshatrya prince and the hero of the Ramayana epic, who destroyed the demon Ravana.

These three occurred in the Treta, the second or silver age.

(8) *Krishna, the dark god,* the most popular of all. He appeared at the close of the Dvapara, the third or copper age, for the destruction of the tyrant Kansa, who represented the principle of evil. Details of his later life are woven into the Mahabharata epic, but his principal place is in the Puranas. Some say, however,

that he was not an avatar of Vishnu, but Vishnu himself.

(9) *Buddha*, adopted as the ninth incarnation in order to incorporate the Buddhists under the Brahmin domination.

(10) *Kalki*, who is yet to appear at the close of the fourth—the present—“kali” or iron age, riding on a white horse, and restoring the first or golden age once more. Hence the many votive images of horses ranged round the temples of southern India, in the hope of hastening his looked-for advent.

Some of the present-day Hindus are said to have adopted Queen Victoria (embodiment of the British power), and others, it is reported, have tried to adopt Christ, as additional avatars of Vishnu.

The word Avatar means “descent.” Its metaphysics do not seem to have been explicitly analyzed. On the one hand, it is said that avatars are not incarnations in the sense of adopting or assuming a finite object into union with the godhead—that Krishna, for instance, is not God-made-man but God-made-manifest—God pure and simple, manifested under the appearance of a human form—theophany, not incarnation. On the other hand, different degrees of avatar are specified according to the proportion of divinity contained in the object, thus: (1) the full divinity, as Krishna; (2) half the divinity, as Rama; (3) quarter divinity, as Bharata; (4) one-eighth divinity, as Lakshmana and Satrughna; and (5) a mere infusion of divine powers and qualities into men, animals, plants, or even stones.

THE HINDU TRINITY

The cults of Vishnu and Siva were at first developed separately among different sections of the people. When the two forms of worship came face to face with each other their votaries maintained a sharp opposition between them as between two rival gods. But efforts

were made by the Brahmins to bring the two into harmony. This they did by putting forward Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva together as three different aspects of the one Supreme Being, viz. as Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer respectively. More philosophically speaking, Brahma represents the principle of origination, Vishnu the principle of continuation, and Siva the principle of mutation—the destruction of one thing with the emergence of another. By this means was constructed the Hindu Trimurthi or Trinity, which came to be represented in concrete form by a three-headed and six-armed human figure. The two ways of devotion and of works were also synthesized into one called “the way of knowledge,” and the Bhagavat Purana was written to express this combination. The scheme was successful. The two sects continued to exist distinct, but in peace and mutual tolerance, and the two worships soon came to be practised promiscuously by both parties alike.

How far the Hindu Trinity is in analogy with the Christian depends on the point of view. The Trimurthi was formed late enough to be an imitation of Christian doctrine, but is probably nothing of the kind, as its origin can be explained by the exigencies of Hinduism at the time. The problem was how to reconcile the claims of two rival divinities without sacrificing either, and at the same time to uphold the reality of Brahma himself as the one true God. And the solution by aspects, modes, or rôles (like the theory of Sabellianism) was the obvious way out of the difficulty. A pantheistic god can contain a million distinct hypostases just as easily as he can contain one. The Christian difficulty, “How can there be *processiones reales ad intra*, or a triplicity of really distinct hypostases in an infinitely simple substance?” is in pantheistic Hinduism extended to the whole universe, and takes the form “How can the One be also the manifold, or the unconditioned be also the conditioned?” The Christian meets the crux by reasserting the facts of

revelation, and leaving the *how* a strict mystery. The Hindu cuts the knot by saying that the manifold and the conditioned are not realities, but delusions of Maya, and that in truth there is "only the One, and no other."

Considering the prominence of Siva and Vishnu in the scheme of Hindu worship, it is strange to find that so little attention has been given to Brahma. Although Brahma was in Hindu philosophy no other than the One Supreme himself, and the one all-comprehensive object of adoration among the esoteric élite, his worship never formed any part of the popular programme. No temple or shrine of his exists to-day in India, nor has any existed for a thousand years past—a few very ancient and insignificant instances in remote parts being occasionally unearthed by archæologists. The fact that the One Supreme God himself is about the only object *not* provided for in Hindu worship would seem to lend itself to scathing satire. This, however, is disarmed by the reply that since Brahma as such is the infinite unconscious principle, devoid of attributes or qualities, he is therefore incapable of providing a tangible object of worship—not because he is below our esteem, but because he is above our comprehension. It is only as the conditioned that the Supreme can become manifest to our minds; and since Vishnu and Siva, the principles of continuity and change, are the most radical of these manifestations, they therefore form the first and most ultimate objects of feasible worship. Starting from Vedantic premises the answer is valid.

MEDIÆVAL GODDESS-WORSHIP

A word about the goddesses of Hinduism, who are almost invariably represented as wives of the gods. The idea of a female principle in the divinity, though to our minds bizarre on account of its human associations, philosophically seems to express no more than

the principle of fecundity, or the *terminus a quo* of production. In fact "matter" in the Vedantic philosophy is nothing other than a sort of womb out of which the divine power produces the manifold of creation. It may be described as the divine substance regarded as impregnated by the divine activity, and affording a substratum for the multiplication of finite form (*cf. principium individuationis*). That the female principle is really identified with the male is shown from the fact that, nowadays at least, the wives of the gods are not supposed to be worshipped apart from, but rather in conjunction with their husbands, though the unreflecting masses may not always discriminate.

So far in the abstract. Practically, however, the idea of the female principle did at one time develop into a distinct cult—and one both professedly licentious and deeply superstitious—under the name of Saktism, or, from the writings which embody it, Tantrism. Curiously enough, the female was not regarded as the passive but as the active principle, so that Saktism (as implied by the name) was a worship of active force. It included at once the most debased use of magic, and the practice of promiscuous intercourse in the temple precincts. It is said that in the twelfth century A.D., Saktism was prevalent throughout India, though at the present time it seems to survive only in a few parts, of which Bengal is one. During that period Hindus were divided into "right-hand worshippers," who made the Puranas their real Veda, and were devoted in the ordinary way to Siva, Vishnu, Krishna, and their wives taken in practical identity with them, and "left-hand worshippers," who made the Tantras their real Veda, and worshipped the female counterpart of the deities (Durga, Radha, Sita, etc.) as separate goddesses presiding over the two operations of sexual intercourse and magic.

This corrupt state of things soon gave rise to several reforming sects, called after their founders the Nimbarkas, Madhvacharyas, Vallabhacharyas, Ramanujas,

Ramandas, and Chaitanyas, dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, and many others later—all of which worked for the betterment of religion in various parts of India, and, though now merged and forgotten as sects, seem to have succeeded in bringing Hinduism back from the lower abyss of degradation into which it had sunk, and leaving the less objectionable Puranism of the “right-hand worshippers” for the most part in possession down to this day.

It is to be remarked that Sivaism, which is characterized by its *linga* or phallus worship, was the source whence Saktism or Tantrism was developed. Yet this development was not an outcome of phallus-worship, but of the worship of female fecundity. Secondly, that *linga*-worship is not, as one might expect, licentious, but, on the contrary, rather austere. It is significant to note in this connection that in modern times, since Tantrism has practically disappeared, sanctified licentiousness is not attached to the worship of Siva and the *linga*, but to that of Vishnu, the god of divine grace and condescension, especially in connection with the worship of Krishna, who is supposed to derive sensuous pleasure from seeing the immodest caresses of his maharajas or priestly representatives on earth. These favours are regarded by the people of that sect, even married women, as the greatest honour and privilege they can receive. To what extent this immoral view prevails is unascertainable. It certainly cannot be imputed to Hindus in general, especially educated ones, and at most it exists only among the professedly Vishnuite section.

THE PURANAS

Modern Hinduism is undoubtedly much more comprehensive than the Puranas; but as it is so often called by that name, we ought to add just a word on those documents. The existing works are eighteen in number, of which the Vayu Matsya and Vishnu puranas are the oldest, dating possibly from the fourth

to the sixth century A.D. They are very miscellaneous in contents, and most of them probably composite, embodying much historical tradition, inextricably intermingled with legend and moral or theological teaching, as well as rules for ceremonies. Six (Rajasa) relate mainly to Brahma, six (Sattvika) to Vishnu, and six (Tamasa) to Siva. They seem all to have been compiled with a view of promoting some phase of Brahminical teaching, especially the trimurthi and the idea of incarnations or avatars. They came to be called "the Veda of the common people and of women," and form the staple religious reading of the ordinary Hindu who cares to read at all. Extracts from them are habitually recited or embodied in songs.

The almost total severance between the later Puranic and the earlier Vedic Hinduism has been sufficiently remarked as regards the objects of worship. Another difference is the introduction of images or idol worship in the later religion; the building of numberless temples, pilgrimages to famous shrines, the upgrowth of many fantastic rites, including bathing in sacred rivers for the instantaneous washing away of sins, etc. In addition should be mentioned the observance of signs and omens, and the magical use of incantations in connection with every important incident of daily life, and an elaborate code of caste and social ceremonies regarded as of vital importance and as integral to religion—so much so that it has been said that in India "caste is religion, and religion is caste." Among peculiarities which would specially strike a Christian, it should be mentioned that the essentials of worship are all strictly domestic. When (as on feast days) temples are visited, this is always individually, there being nothing in Hinduism analogous to collective public worship, or our system of preaching sermons or giving public instructions. The management of the domestic observances is in the hands of the family priest (always a Brahmin). The

children pick up the practices of their mothers without anything like a course of instruction on their meaning or on the fundamental truths of theological belief—although in the better educated families such instruction is said to form part of the domestic programme. But it is extremely difficult for the outsider to penetrate into the domestic workings of the Hindu religion.

MEANING OF IDOL-WORSHIP

As regards the use of idols or images, it is well to be on our guard against the somewhat naïve idea of "stock-and-stone worship" prevalent among many, viz. the notion that image worshippers really worship material objects, viewing them at the same time simply as such. Among students of comparative religion no such idea prevails. All writers I have seen are unanimous in understanding that image-worship (and even the grossest fetish) is *animistic* in its lower forms and *symbolic* or representative in its higher.¹ Where the concrete object is directly made an object of adoration, this is always because it is viewed not merely as the material thing which it appears, but because it is invisibly permeated or animated by the presence of spirit, of which it is merely the dwelling-place and vehicle; *cf.* the doctrines of consubstantiation and transubstantiation in the Blessed Eucharist. Hindus have their recognized ritual for inducing the presence of the god, and even of causing its cessation. At the beginning of the Ganpati feast the images, hitherto nothing but clay, are consecrated, and then worshipped as divine. At the close, the god is literally cast out by another ceremony, after which the images are thrown away, *e.g.*, into the sea. Apart from this, the presence of a god can be induced by the simple expedient of covering any suitable object with vermilion paint, a

¹ *Cf.* i. 4; xiii. 3, 16 note.

modern substitute for the original use of blood. In country parts the villagers will smear any fantastically-shaped boulder they find in the neighbourhood, and thereby set up what may in time become a permanent shrine. Most of the ancient monuments have been spoiled in this way by smudges of red paint placed on the sculptures, *e.g.* Elephanta, Ellora, Pandu Lena, etc.

The more educated, especially those under Western influences, adopt the higher or *symbolic* explanation, viz. that the image is merely a symbol of some attribute of the deity, or a representation of some legendary fact—to be venerated by association as Catholics venerate images, but not to be directly worshipped. Thus one Brahmin priest said, "The common people believe that the God is here, but *we* believe that God is *up there*." Another said, "We call this God and that God, for this is Siva and that is Vishnu. They are all Gods, and yet there is only one God." A third explained, "We adore not the image but the God in the image, because he dwells there." On asking them whether God was not everywhere present; and if so, why say that He dwells in this image? I managed, with a little help, to elicit the answer, "God is present everywhere, for He is everything and in everything. What we mean is only that He is *more operative* towards us in the image than apart from it." An educated layman told me that three-quarters of his fellow-countrymen believed in the real presence of the god in the image, and that the other quarter, who reduced it to a symbol merely, were not true Hindus. The educated Brahmin, however, with his esoteric philosophy, would probably not admit this latter aspersion.

THE MIND OF THE PEOPLE

Among the great mass of the people there is nothing like a reasoned belief. Even among the

educated, who will talk of the Sacred Books as the great charter of their religion, the Vedas are little read, if only because the knowledge of Sanskrit is so rare as to attract attention where found. Those interested in scientific theology are, it would seem, generally Vedanists; but opportunities of meeting men who show knowledge in this subject are few and far between. The general attitude is one of implicit and unreasoned practice of whatever the Brahmins tell them to do, and a blind following of ceremonial hereditary in the family. The least touch of Western education seems to act as a solvent even of this amount of orthodoxy; with the result that the men become totally indifferent, and leave the religious usages of the family to the women-sort. Intercourse with educated Hindus shows that they possess a great capacity for religious discussion, and generally a keen interest in listening to religious teaching; but the tolerance and sympathy thus shown rarely issues in any practical result. The Hindu mind is so imbued with the spirit of heredity that when he gives up the practice of his own religion he feels no disposition to embrace any other; he thinks that being born a Hindu, he must inevitably remain a Hindu, and a Hindu means in religion Hinduism or nothing. The result is that many at the present time absorb a large amount of Christian thought and feeling and appreciate its moral and mental value, but are no nearer the prospect of embracing Christianity as such than they were before hearing a word of it.

CHIEF BLOTS ON HINDUISM

The chief blots on the social-religious system of the Hindu—for “social” and “religious” among them are inseparable—are as follows:—

(1) The iron-bound system of caste, though useful in certain respects, stands in the way of all social expansion and development, and especially of any-

thing like racial or national unification. It places artificially a far wider gulf between pure Hindu and pure Hindu (otherwise equal in mental and social qualities) than nature itself seems to have placed between European and Asiatic, or between the white and the coloured man. On the other hand, the formal means by which one who has broken caste can secure recovery tend to expose the system itself to ridicule and contempt.

(2) The inability of the higher castes to touch food unless prepared by one of a caste equal to or superior to their own. An orthodox Hindu servant of high caste recently starved himself almost to death for five days on board ship from Calcutta to Madras, and had to be put on land and sent back by his master simply for this reason: a more incapacitating piece of ceremonialism could hardly be imagined, or a more dismal slavery to superstition. Apart from such emergencies, the system is an insuperable barrier to the intercourse required in modern times if social progress is to have place. Nothing brings home more clearly the unhuman effects of this system than the fact which I have personally experienced more than once, that a European pedestrian in the country, half-dying with thirst, may ask dozens of times for a "cup of cold water" in vain—even from those actually drawing water from a well. This comes not from any ill-nature or want of friendliness, but from a mortal dread of having their drinking-vessels defiled by the touch of a stranger.

(3) The practice of infant marriage, and, above all, the prohibition of those thus married in infancy to marry anyone else in case their tiny husband dies. These enforced widows are looked upon with the greatest contempt, and the usage is rife with evil consequences in the form of illicit intercourse and prostitution.

(4) The supreme emphasis laid on formal observances, not only for the securing of good-luck, but

also for the attainment of sanctity, forgiveness, and salvation—thus putting the importance of a virtuous life in the background, and robbing sin of its penalties by means of an extravagant and debased sacramentalism. One who bathes in the Ganges or the Godavery is made wholly clean, and he who dies at Benares goes straight to heaven, and so on.

(5) The mortal dread of misfortune if the ceremonial observances of religion are even for any excusable motive omitted. This dread of the penalties of omission is the great mainstay of Hindu practice, and the result is to rob it of all real religious value and reduce it to a mere policy of "saving one's skin."

(6) The total stoppage of the most important business enterprises at a critical moment simply because an unlucky omen has been observed. Only the other day a bargain in land was just on the point of being signed when the purchaser, looking at the plan, perceived that the plot was "tiger-shaped"—what we should call leg-of-mutton-shaped, more or less—and therefore bound to bring ill-luck. At no price whatever would the man entertain the purchase after that.¹

(7) The supremacy of the Brahmin and the Jogi, involving as it does a cruel incubus on the people, and the encouragement of professional vagabondage and roguery. Mortal dread of the power of a Brahmin's curse drives people to do whatever is demanded of them, thus turning what might be charity into brutal compulsion. Moreover, this no doubt stands as a strong obstacle to the people entertaining the idea of any change of religion.

Other blots are of a more local character, and would be repudiated by the better kind of Hindus as outside the range of true orthodoxy. For instance, Thuggee, of course, or the religious sanctification of murder, now extinct; dacoity or highway-robbery similarly sanctified (both peculiar only to a few remote tribes);

¹ Cf. xiii. 23, 24.

Sati, or the burning of the widow beside the pyre of the husband (now made penal by English law, but occurring occasionally on the sly); the use of obscene language on certain festival occasions; prostitution in temples under the cloak of "espousal to the gods," etc.

MORE ATTRACTIVE FEATURES

Of the more attractive points in Hinduism are the following :—

(1) The way in which religion permeates the whole life—in diametrical opposition to the idea that religion is a Sunday affair, or a separate department in which a small fraction of life must be given to God and the rest taken for ourselves.

(2) Beautiful traits of religious symbolism, sometimes underlying what to the outsider seem to be grotesque and monstrous forms. Thus a hideous idol often embodies a sublime thought, or at least is made the vehicle for it—according to Hunter, "the precious metal mingled with the dross."

(3) A deep and far-reaching family-spirit, which binds the members together throughout their lives, generation after generation—proving no doubt an intolerable nuisance at times, but certainly a powerful object-lesson to the West, where the spirit of family-life is so badly on the wane.¹

(4) A tender regard for life and for the sufferings of the lower creation—which, regarded as a system, is not perhaps theologically sound. It probably rests on the belief in transmigration, according to which any particular plague-rat may be a man's ancestress. But it is nevertheless a beautiful feature in itself, and an eloquent set-off against all tendencies to recklessness and cruelty. It is curious, however, that this tenderness for life, and even the belief in the divinity of the cow, does not for a moment prevent a driver

¹ Cf. ii. 13; xiii. 9.

from habitually twisting his animal's tail till it becomes one long string of knotty disfigurements. This may sometimes be his only way of getting the beast to move, and so facts become too strong for faith; which perhaps may excuse the inconsistency. When it comes to pass that a Hindu will rather let himself be bitten into a piebald condition than lift his hand to kill a flea, it seems going a little too far.

(5) Almsgiving as a regular habit of life, not only to strolling Jogis but also to all and sundry beggars. A well-to-do Hindu carries a pocketful of small copper coins ready for all applicants. He never rebuffs a beggar rudely, or refuses him an alms until his pocket is empty, and then politely indicates the fact by a sign, which is always respectfully accepted as final. The literal teaching of the Gospel on the one hand, and the economic, social, and moral objections to indiscriminate almsgiving on the other, here begin to loom strong on the horizon. So we must confine ourselves to remarking on the beauty of the trait, whatever criticism may be involved.

(6) A certain stability in the social order, and a certain habitual discipline borne in upon the individual, through the rules of caste. The existence of caste has hitherto made the Hindu an easy people to govern, and its breaking down is opening the way to a perilous unsettlement and unrest.

RELATIONS TO CHRISTIANITY

(1) Down to quite recent times the influence of Christianity on Hindu thought and worship may be safely regarded as *nil*, with the exception of the later aspects of Krishna-worship. An attempt has been made to show that the portrayal of Krishna as a baby-god, which occurs as a late development, is a conscious imitation of the child Jesus; and the spiritual doctrine of personal devotion and renuncia-

tion, or of giving oneself over to the divinity by faith and self-abandonment (embodied in the Bagavad Gita), is also probably the outcome of Christian influence. The Brahmo and Arya Samajs, instituted for the purification of popular Hinduism, though professedly returning to the purity of the Vedic religion, show themselves imbued with an ethos borrowed from non-Catholic Christianity. At the present day educated Hindus, including Brahmins, show a marked tendency to explain matters in Christian terminology and in analogy with Christian belief and practice. They do not, as a rule, acknowledge indebtedness, but endeavour rather, by searching their own books or by free allegorizing, to show that Hinduism already contains everything, and needs no help from outside sources.

(2) The antagonism between Christianity and intellectual Hinduism is most marked.

VEDANTIC HINDUISM

(1) God, as He is in Himself, absolutely unknowable and incapable of definite attributions.

(2) The universe an emanation of the divine substance, unreal and delusive when viewed as distinct from the divine substance.

(3) The universe eternal before and after, and in a state of unending cyclic flux.

(4) Spirit, soul, and body, all three distinct, and yet all in different ways identical in essence with the One and the All.

(5) The spirit in each individual man identically the one same infinite spirit pervading all.

CHRISTIAN THEISM

(1) God, as He is in Himself, knowable correctly though inadequately under definite attributions.

(2) The universe a creation of the divine power, real, and substantially distinct from the divine substance.

(3) The universe finite, with a beginning in time, and not (at least of necessity) to last for ever.

(4) Spirit and soul identical, but neither soul nor body identical in essence with the One or the All, but only "according to his image and likeness."

(5) The spirit in each individual man a self-contained entity, separately created by God.

VEDANTIC HINDUISM

(6) An eternal series of lives (by transmigration) brought to an end only by achieving a conscious identification of self with the Supreme.

(7) Probation continued indefinitely until a man has attained absolute perfection. No finality of the state of punishment.

(8) The inexorable reign of karma, or the causality of actions; the effects of evil actions being cancelled only by equivalent good actions—a system of rigid causality involving the denial of anything like mercy, forgiveness, vicarious atonement or redemption.

(9) The consequent negation of moral and personal relations between God and man. In God no such attribute as holiness, love, freedom of will, providence, retributive judgement, or the prerogatives of Creator, Lord, Master, Redeemer, etc.

(10) No idea of personal service, sanctification and salvation being self-centred and autonomous. Each man at once master and slave of his own karma; no real fear, loyalty, gratitude or love to God, and no proper idea of the meaning of sin.

CHRISTIAN THEISM

(6) One life only, followed after death by perseverance of individual existence—capable of moral union with, but not physical absorption into, the Supreme.

(7) Probation closed absolutely at the end of this one life, and followed by eternal fixity either in heaven or in hell.

(8) Causality of actions of secondary import; moral effect all-important, viz. outrage of the divine law. Effects of evil actions cancelled by repentance and by gratuitous forgiveness through the mercy of God, and this on a basis of vicarious atonement.

(9) The consequent belief in personal and moral relations between God and man. In God there are the attributes of holiness, love, freedom of will, providence, retributive judgement, and the prerogatives of Creator, Lord, Master, Redeemer, etc.

(10) Personal service the very essence of religion; sanctification and salvation the work of God, requiring only the co-operation of man. Hence the spirit of loyalty, gratitude, and love to God, and an intense realization of the proper meaning of sin.

The radical antagonism is therefore strongest in Vedantic Hinduism. The more theistic philosophies obliterate some but substitute other points of difference; *e.g.* the Nyaya system, which, while representing God as eternal and personal, regards souls as also eternal and independent of Him; and

similarly with the Vaiseshika system, which is developed on atomistic lines. But it is the Vedanta which prevails most widely among those who cultivate speculative theology at all.

(3) Strange to say, with all its aberrations in the way of superstition, popular Hinduism is not so radically opposed to Christianity as is the philosophical. The mass of Hindus, even if tinged with pantheistic ideas, do practically regard God as a personal being with attributes, and by them religion is viewed as service. They believe in the divine governance of the world, though in a way sadly degraded to a kind of fatalism. They seem to have a notion of the divine mercy and forgiveness, though again debased into a hideous sacramentalism, more or less independent of repentance and a virtuous life. The use of images and of symbolical ceremonies would be theoretically unobjectionable, at least from the Catholic point of view, were it not centred round objects both mythical and unworthy of the Divine Being, and associated with astrology and magic. The radical antagonism between the popular religion and Christianity lies rather in these main points: (1) The idea of heredity (Hindu by birth = Hindu by religion). (2) Hence no notion of truth as a criterion of religion, or of rational inquiry into the truth of religion on a basis of historical fact. (3) The identification of religion with caste, so that no Hindu can change his religion, even on conviction, without being penalized as an outcaste; and, of course (4) the mythology, superstition, magic and fatalism which run through the system.

HINTS ON INTERPRETATION

Finally, I deem it necessary to warn Europeans approaching Hinduism against certain prejudices which tend to putting the worst instead of the best interpretation on things read or seen—thus making Hinduism in many respects appear far otherwise than

a more intimate knowledge shows it to be. These prejudices arise partly from pure and simple preconceptions, based no doubt on an appreciation of the excellence of Christianity and the inferiority of paganism, etc. But they arise also from the totally different constitution of the Eastern as compared with the Western mind. The Western temperament is primarily matter-of-fact, or, if you like, historical and scientific; while the Eastern temperament is primarily romantic, poetic, and artistic. Whereas in so vital a matter as religion our first query would be, "Is it a fact?", the oriental mind, left to itself, would hardly ever dream of asking such a question. Instead of the fact, he always looks to the idea; and the acceptability of the idea is his criterion of assent. To him it is a matter of supreme indifference whether Vishnu ever made his nine "descents" in history or not. Enough if the idea is there as part of his traditional inheritance and edifies his mind. He would be just as ready to worship Christ as he is to worship Krishna, if only Christ were presented to him in an acceptable light and embodied for him in his code. Moreover, the power of the Hindu to work in symbols is enough to amaze the Western spectator. He will tell you how a certain god—I forget his name, but he is represented in scores of rustic shrines under the form of a shapeless trunk without arms or legs or nose, but with two eyes of porcelain glaring monstrously out of a pudding-face where the breast ought to be—how this god lost his limbs through nameless diseases contracted by a licentious life; and will then go on to explain it to mean the divinity labouring and suffering out of love for mankind! The instance is an extreme one, but illustrates my point—viz. that the various grotesquenesses of the Hindu religious apparatus must not be judged altogether by their surface appearance or literal sense, but by the sometimes far-fetched but sometimes apt and beautiful imagery which may underlie it in the worshipper's mind.

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