



## POPULAR HINDUISM

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# POPULAR HINDUISM

*The Religion of the Masses*

by

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C.I.E., I.C.S. RETIRED



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## P R E F A C E

**I**NDIA has been described as a land of contrasts, and in nothing are the contrasts more marked than in Hinduism, in which the differences between the beliefs and practices of the cultured classes and those of the masses, mostly unlettered villagers, are so great that they almost seem to be differences of kind rather than of degree. The religion of the latter has few of the higher spiritual conceptions of Hinduism and represents in the main its lower side. A mixture of orthodox Hinduism and of that primitive form of religion which is known as animism, it combines Brahmanical rites and observances with the fetishism of lower cults. Offerings are made both to the great gods of Brahmanism and to minor deities outside the Brahmanical pantheon, whose name is legion, for different villages have special local deities of their own. As might be expected in a country with so large an area and so vast a population, a country, moreover, in which different sections of the people are at widely different stages of intellectual develop-

ment, there are great variations of belief and practice, but there are also certain common characteristics. Of both alike I have endeavoured to give an outline in the following pages.

L. S. S. O'M.

## Chapter I

### BELIEFS

THE complexity of Hinduism is so great, the forms which it assumes are so protean, that it defies precise definition. It is a composite religion made up of many conflicting elements; at the same time it is a social system, of which the basis is caste. It is the product of many centuries of growth and compromise, during which such widely divergent beliefs as pantheism, theism, polytheism, and animism have received recognition. It has neither a common creed nor uniformity of worship. It knows little of dogma; it acknowledges no stereotyped and unchanging canons. It allows of the greatest possible freedom of thought as apart from practice, as is frankly admitted by Hindu scholars. "Hinduism", wrote one, "includes all shades of faiths—monotheism, pantheism, agnosticism, atheism, polytheism, and fetishism. So long as a Hindu conforms to the customs and practices of his society, he may believe what he likes."<sup>1</sup> Similarly Professor Radhakrishnan points out that Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought. "While it gives

<sup>1</sup> P. N. Basu, *Hindu Civilization under British Rule* (1894), vol. 1, p. 87.

absolute liberty in the world of thought, it enjoins a strict code of practice. The theist and the atheist, the sceptic and the agnostic may all be Hindus if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life." "What counts is conduct, not belief."<sup>1</sup>

(Considered purely as a religion, i.e. without reference to its social organization, Hinduism may be described as a conglomerate of cults and creeds.) The non-Aryan tribes who were admitted to the fold of Hinduism and the Hindus of Aryan descent reacted on one another, the former adopting the rites and customs of their conquerors, while the latter assimilated some of their less civilized cults and incorporated in their system the objects of popular devotion. The higher and lower forms of religion still coexist side by side. At one end of the scale, therefore, is the cultured monotheist or the eclectic pantheist for whom no mysticism is too subtle. Pantheists actually form a small minority, and the great majority of Hindus are theists believing in one personal god, though they are at the same time polytheistic in their religious observances. At the bottom of the scale is a great multitude of people in a low state of religious development, some of whom have scarcely risen above mere fetishism.

(The essence of the higher Hinduism is pantheism, the belief in the unity of being. According to this, everything that exists is Brahma, the

<sup>1</sup> *The Hindu View of Life* (1931), pp. 38, 77.

Absolute and Eternal, the Supreme Spirit which pervades the universe, and is the soul of all, of man as well as of the world at large—an idea which is expressed in the famous passage in Pope's *Essay on Man*:

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body nature is and God the soul,  
That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,  
Great in the earth as in the ethereal frame . . .  
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent . . .  
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;  
He fills, he bounds, connects and equals all.

So instinct are these lines with the spirit of pantheism that a learned Brahman, hearing them for the first time, started from his seat and asked for a copy of them, saying that the author must have been a Hindu.<sup>1</sup> Enlightened Hindus themselves summarize their pantheistic belief in a saying that knowledge of eternal truth belongs to those, and only those, who see but One in the manifold changes of the universe.

With this system of religious philosophy has grown up a belief in a triad of gods, the first and highest manifestations of, or emanations from, the universal spirit, viz. Brahmā,<sup>2</sup> Vishnu and

<sup>1</sup> W. Ward, *View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, vol. 1, Introd. p. lvii.

<sup>2</sup> The accented *ā* distinguishes this god from the neuter *Brahma* (with no accent), meaning the Infinite, Absolute and Eternal.

Siva, who together symbolize the creation, preservation, dissolution and renewal of the world. Brahmā is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver, and Siva or Mahadeva (Mahadeo), meaning the great god, is the destroyer; but the last stands for reproduction as well as dissolution, for there is an endless series of births, deaths and rebirths, so that death is the portal to new life and destruction involves renewal.

The more thoughtful believe that the Supreme Spirit is immanent both in the world and in the souls of men, but the great majority do not look beyond a personal god to an impersonal spirit. The personal god is conceived of as Vishnu or Siva; Brahmā, having finished the work of creation, is no longer an active force. His work is done, and there is nothing to hope or fear from him. There are not half a dozen temples dedicated to him in all India, and his name is seldom heard. Actually, therefore, the belief in a triad is not operative. Owing to the elimination of Brahmā, Siva and Vishnu reign alone, and both Saivas and Vaishnavas claim their particular god as the Supreme Being with the attributes both of a creator and a redeemer. It was the part of Vishnu, as maintainer and preserver of the universe, to deliver it from the power of evil, and for this purpose he revealed himself from time to time as an Avatar or incarnation in human form, for example as Rama and Krishna. Originally, perhaps he was re-

garded as the saviour of men from evil spirits and demons, but this conception was sublimated by thought and given a higher meaning. It was held that the god incarnated himself in human form in order to maintain righteousness. Rama is thus said to have been sent so that he might establish a reign of righteousness, and Krishna announces in the *Bhagavata Gita* "As often as virtue declines or vice increases, I create myself anew, and thus I appear from age to age for the preservation of the just, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of virtue".

Although Siva and Vishnu were left supreme, they were not left alone, for the subtle minds of the Brahmans proceeded to give them female consorts, as well as to Brahmā. The consort of Brahmā is Sarasvati; that of Siva is known variously as Uma, Parvati, Bhavani, Durga, and Kali; that of Vishnu is Lakshmi. The union of a god with a goddess is given mystical meanings. Spirit is regarded as a male principle and matter as a female principle, and their union is necessary for creation. The god and his consort are said to typify the sources of reproduction in which male and female are united, and to be symbols of a single divine power with male and female aspects. A more general explanation is that a deity has a dual nature, one quiescent and the other active, and the active power, which is known as *Sakti* and is described as the "female

energy" of the god, is personified and regarded as his wife. An idea of the mystical nature of, and the attributes ascribed to, *Sakti* may be gathered from a description given by a Brahman who abandoned Hinduism and became a Unitarian: "In the beginning there was *Sakti* or Power. It is somewhat parallel with St John's 'In the beginning was the Word'. This Power was like the Word of the Evangelist, a term of broadest import, including power in all its elements, creative, sustaining, redeeming, sanctifying, destroying—in short, denoting the whole substance of God, or it was God."<sup>1</sup>)

(Whatever may be the genesis of the idea, there is no question that the goddesses are regarded not as impersonal abstractions of power, but as personal deities. As such they make a peculiar appeal to the minds of Hindus. The lower classes regard them as powerful to curse as well as to bless; but the more intellectual look on them as divine mothers, whom their worshippers can approach as children do their mothers, and to whom they can give a selfless love.)

The process of deification did not stop here. Lesser gods and goddesses were added in ever growing numbers till there was a crowd of deities, many of them adopted from the more primitive peoples who were admitted to Hinduism with

<sup>1</sup> J. C. Gangooly, *Life and Religion of the Hindoos* (1860), p. 258.

the gods whom they worshipped. The total number of deities is said to be 33 crores, i.e. 330 Millions, which, like the phrase "Their name is legion", merely implies an innumerable host. In many parts of the country the minor gods receive as much or even more reverence than the major gods. Hanuman, the monkey-god, for example, is extremely popular, under the name of Maruti, in the Deccan, and Subrahmanya, a son of Siva (also called Skanda and Karttikeya), in Madras. To the more advanced thinkers a plurality of gods does not necessarily involve polytheism, for they are regarded not as separate deities, but as manifestations of one and the same God. God is one, but his aspects are many. He appears in many forms, and it is a case not of a multiplicity of gods but of the multiformity of one God. The unintellectual, however, are less discriminating and look on each and every god or goddess as a separate being.

Among the few distinguishing central concepts of Hinduism are the beliefs in *Karma* and the transmigration of souls. The soul survives the disintegration of the body and is an enduring essence, which passes through a succession of existences numbering, it is said, 84 lakhs, i.e. 8,400,000, and extending from material substances, like rocks, stones, etc., to vegetable, animal and human life. A man's state in any particular life is determined by actions (*Karma*) in

previous lives. As he sows, so shall he reap, or, to quote a Hindu saying, "the body is the field, the soul is the cultivator; virtue and vice are seeds, and the soul must reap as it sows". This is an inexorable law, the working of cause and effect.<sup>1</sup> If there is a balance of good to a man's credit, he gets the benefit of it by being reborn on a higher plane. If he has given himself up to wickedness, he sinks lower at rebirth. Each man lays up a stock of good and bad deeds and, so to speak, accumulates moral capital. The debit of vice can be wiped out by the credit of virtue, and men may thus rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things.

This belief may be described as a working hypothesis of the riddle of existence. It explains the patent inequalities and enigmas of life, the fact that one man is born to honour, another to dishonour, that the wicked so often flourish and the good have to endure misery and suffering. In one respect it may be regarded as a pessimistic doctrine, for a man's present is fashioned by a past of which he has no memory or knowledge, and no effort of his can improve it. It has, on the other hand, elements of optimism, for a man can rise to a better state in future lives by

<sup>1</sup> "The fixed arithmetic of the Universe. . .  
Watchful, aware, implacable, unmoved,  
Making all futures fruits of all the pasts"

*The Light of Asia.*

virtuous conduct. In this sense he is the architect of his fortunes and master of his fate.

According to the pantheistic doctrine emancipation from the long chain of existences is finally obtained when the human soul loses its individual existence by being united with and merged in the Universal Spirit from which everything came and to which everything will eventually return. "The soul enchained", said a modern teacher of Vedantism, Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1834-86), "is man; free from chains, it is God. . . . As a piece of lead, thrown into a basin of mercury, is soon dissolved therein, so the human soul loses its individual existence when it falls into the ocean of Brahma."<sup>1</sup> Other Hindus, however, hold that while salvation consists in the union of the soul with God, it does not lose its identity. Spiritual beatitude and release from rebirths are obtained not by the soul's reabsorption in the Supreme Spirit, but by its communion with God, whether conceived of as Brahmā or as Siva or as Vishnu.

There are three ways by which this consummation may be reached. The first is the way of knowledge (*Jnana-marga*), which consists mainly of meditation on the divine spirit, through which spiritual knowledge of it is obtained. The second is the way of works (*Karma-marga*), which in-

<sup>1</sup> F. Max Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (1898), p. 145.

cludes not only right action or righteous conduct, but also the performance of religious rites, austerities and other acts conferring religious merit. The third way is *Bhakti-marga*, which means ardent faith in and devotion to a personal god, who is generally conceived of as an incarnation of divinity, such as Rama or Krishna. All three help to bring the soul into communion with God by freeing it from obsession by the senses and from entanglement by the fleeting interests of this life. True knowledge of God, it has been said, is ultimately the same as love of God, and both necessarily result in the surrender of the self to divine influence and bear fruit in virtue and righteous conduct.

Together with the belief in metempsychosis there is a popular belief in heavens and hells to which the souls of the good and wicked pass after death. The soul has first to cross the river of death, a river of blood and filth, which separates the earth from the realm of Yama, the god of the dead. To ensure a safe passage a cow is often brought into the death chamber and its tail placed in the hand of the dying man, though this will be ineffectual unless the cow is given away afterwards to the Brahmans. If a cow cannot be got into the room, or if the commotion would be too much for the dying man, or if he is not strong enough to hold its tail, a rope is put into his hand, the other end

of which is fastened to a cow outside the room.

The wicked are condemned to torment by Yama, who passes judgment after the ineffaceable record of their deeds has been read. Horrible are the punishments devised by oriental imagination. According to the offences of which they have been guilty, they may be despatched to a hell of darkness, of fire, of burning oil, or of molten metal, or plunged head downwards into a sea of mud. They may be torn by dogs, or gored by pigs, or have their eyes plucked out by vultures, or be transfixed by spears and arrows, or be flung down from trees and rocks hundreds of miles high. These hells are not purgatories in the sense that souls are purified by suffering in them and then admitted to heaven. The suffering is retribution for past wickednesses, and after it has been endured the soul returns to earth and starts a new existence. The virtuous, on the other hand, are translated to heaven, as also are the souls of those who die in various sacred places like Benares or in the stream of the Ganges.

There is more than one heaven, for there are **Swarga** the heaven of Indra, **Kailasa** the heaven of Siva, **Vaikuntha** the heaven of Vishnu, and **Go-loka** (a comparatively modern addition) the heaven of Krishna. There the souls of the dead live in splendour of a material kind. The streets are of gold, the houses are built of jewels and

precious stones, the senses are entranced by heavenly music, shady trees, luscious fruit, cooling streams, etc.

A material heaven of this kind does not, however, form part of the creed of deeper thinkers, to whom the final consummation is the union of the soul with God in spiritual bliss and consequent freedom from rebirths.

•Nothing perhaps has done so much to maintain the popularity of orthodox Hinduism as the idea of *punya* or good works which is part of the belief in *Karma*, i.e. the idea of the efficacy of good deeds in improving a man's chances of having a higher or happier life in his future terrestrial existences. This is often described as the acquisition of merit, and its effect is to encourage the performance not only of virtuous acts but also of the observances of orthodox Hinduism, including such things as worship in temples, where the vision of an idol is accounted for righteousness, domestic ceremonies, the repetition of a god's name, gifts to Brahmans, pilgrimages, fasts, etc. All of these add to the stock of a man's good deeds and go to his credit in the record of his lives.

The spiritual value of the belief is however impaired by the teachings of the Brahmans and the superstitions of the people themselves. The former have popularized the idea that certain months, days and places are more sacred than others, and that worship at such times and places

is more efficacious than worship at other times and places. They lay down that pilgrimages have an extraordinary power to wipe out the record of past offences; death at Benares is a short cut to heaven; offerings at Gaya are sufficient in themselves to take the souls of one's father and ancestors to heaven. They recognize bathing and expiatory ceremonies as sufficient atonement for many sins, and they sometimes allow offences to be compounded for by payment to themselves. The people for their part consider that the mechanical performance of rites and ceremonies or the repetition of the name of a god are sufficient for the acquisition of merit. Some even keep birds trained to say Ram, Ram in the belief that the repetition of the sacred name by the birds will be added to the times it passes their own lips and so increase the total of their good deeds.

Before proceeding to discuss in more detail other beliefs of the masses, we may mention briefly three characteristic features of orthodox Hinduism, the institution of caste, veneration of the Brahman, and veneration of the cow. The working of the caste system will be dealt with later, and here it will be sufficient to point out, first, that, though a social system, it is intimately connected with religion, because it is believed to be divinely ordained, and secondly, that it continues to control the lives and thoughts of the Hindu community with a persistence and au-

thority undreamed of in the Western world. For these reasons caste has been well described as the spinal cord of Hinduism, which gives it a vitality that neither doctrine nor ritual is sufficiently coherent to provide.<sup>1</sup> The position of the Brahman is described in Chapter VII, which may be so far anticipated as to say that recognition of his spiritual authority is a cardinal tenet of Hinduism. He is acknowledged to be the intermediary between God and man except by certain sects of dissenters; he prescribes the ceremonies necessary to remove ceremonial impurity or to atone for offences against religion, and the right to officiate as a priest is reserved to him except in certain sects and among the lower castes.

The veneration of the cow, which is common to all Hindus, whether high or low, requires fuller treatment. Belief in the sacredness of the cow is as much a tenet of Hinduism as the doctrine of metempsychosis, and is perhaps more widely recognized as a cardinal principle. The cow, it has been said, may almost be called the presiding genius of the country,<sup>2</sup> and cow-worship is, according to Mr Gandhi, "the central fact of Hinduism, the one concrete belief common to all Hindus".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir A. Baines, *Ethnography* (Strassburg, 1912), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Bampfylde Fuller, *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment* (1910), p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> R. M. Gray and M. C. Parekh, *Mahatma Gandhi* (1924), p. 106.

It is difficult to convey to English readers the intensity of the feeling of Hindus on the subject of the cow and the extraordinary sanctity attributed not only to her, but also to her products. Some conception may, however, be gathered from the fact that a modern writer, L. L. Sundara Rama, M.A., states that the following passage "strikingly summarizes within the compass of a few words the superb attitude of the Hindus towards the cow".<sup>1</sup>

The cow is of all animals the most sacred. Every part of its body is inhabited by some deity or other. Every hair on its body is inviolable. All its excreta are hallowed. Not a particle ought to be thrown away as impure. On the contrary, the water it ejects ought to be preserved as the best of holy waters—a sin-destroying liquid which sanctifies everything it touches, while nothing purifies like cow-dung. Any spot which a cow has condescended to honour with the sacred deposit of her excrement is for ever afterwards consecrated ground, and the filthiest place plastered with it is at once cleansed and freed from pollution, while the ashes produced by burning this hallowed substance are of such a holy nature that they not only make clean all material things, however previously unclean, but have only to be sprinkled over a sinner to convert him into a saint.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cow-Protection in India* (Madras, 1927), pp. 60-1.

<sup>2</sup> M. Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism* (1891), p. 318.

To this it should be added that on certain occasions cows receive divine honours and are treated as if they were real and present deities. They are garlanded, water is poured on their feet, oil and yellow powder are placed on their foreheads. Further, the expiatory rite prescribed for grave social and religious offences consists of tasting a mixture of the cow's five products, i.e. milk, curds, clarified butter, dung and urine—the penitential pill, as it has been ironically called by sceptics.

Veneration of the cow is a characteristic of popular as well as of orthodox Hinduism. According to a verse in the *Mahabharata* all who eat, kill, or permit the slaughter of, a cow are doomed to rot in hell for as many years as there are hairs on her body. The killing of cows formerly rendered a man liable to capital punishment, and it is still a penal offence in some States under Hindu rulers; in Kashmir, for example, the maximum penalty is seven years' imprisonment. It is not a penal offence in British India, but the Hindu community outcasts any man who kills a cow or eats her flesh: an exception must be made of some untouchables who will eat the flesh of a cow which has died a natural death. A man whose cow dies not through any deliberate act of his, but through his neglect or carelessness, is obliged to make atonement by means of a penance; one penance which

is designed to make the punishment fit the crime is for the delinquent to leave his home for a certain time, and beg his daily bread by lowing like a cow, without using human speech. Strong men will be moved to tears by the thought that a cow will be or is being sacrificed by Muslims, even though this is done in strict seclusion so as not to offend Hindu susceptibilities. The sight of a cow being openly led away for sacrifice often rouses Hindus to fanatical frenzy, resulting in bloody riots: in one of the districts of the United Provinces in 1931 eleven Muslims were brutally killed by a crowd of Hindus, simply because a Muslim landholder sent a haunch of venison to one of his tenants and the villagers, quick to imagine evil, thought that it was beef. Practically any moral canon may be broken to save the life of a cow, and those who take part in a murderous riot to prevent the slaughter of one believe that their action is meritorious.

It has been found in countries where there are two distinct classes, the one intellectual and learned, the other illiterate and ignorant, that the common religion which they profess has two sides, the one higher and the other lower, the one more or less esoteric and the other popular; but Monier-Williams has pointed out that in Hinduism the chasm which separates the religion of the higher, cultured and thoughtful classes from that of the lower, uncultured and unthink-

ing masses is wider than in any other religious system in the world.<sup>1</sup> The masses accept the cardinal principles of Hinduism, honour the official gods, and acknowledge the merit of orthodox observances, but at the same time they cherish many beliefs and practices which are alien to Brahmanical thought and doctrine. The majority, it must be remembered, are illiterate peasants; six-sevenths of the people cannot read and write. Nearly 50 millions are members of what are known as depressed classes, who are denied the ministrations of Brahmans and entry into their temples, and who are therefore to that extent at least outside the pale. The *Sastras* or Brahmanical scriptures are a closed book to them; their religion is full of ideas and customs having no Brahmanical sanction; even the Brahman, who, according to the Laws of Manu, is "a mighty divinity", though outwardly revered, is often made the object of derision in popular folklore. As is well explained by Mr C. E. A. W. Oldham, C.S.I., writing with special reference to the people of Bihar, of whom he has an exceptionally intimate knowledge:

A perusal of the Brahmanical texts leaves one with the impression that the Brahmans are sacrosanct, semi-divine in fact, as they would like themselves to be held still. When we get down to basic facts, we find how

<sup>1</sup> *Brahmanism and Hinduism* (1891), p. xi.

fanciful much of this is, and how great masses of the people are ignorant of this sacerdotal literature and of its conventions, though the Brahmans have for so many centuries been absorbing their cults and drawing them gradually into what may be called, for want of a better term, orthodox Hinduism. Proverb-lore points in the same direction. We find scant allusion to the teaching of the *Sastras* or the ceremonial formalities of the sacred texts. What we do find, however, permeating this rural lore is the tradition of another culture and the existence and live influence of those beliefs and practices—still largely unaffected by the “official” doctrines we read so much about in books—which have been so fully and so accurately described by Crooke. The closer the association with the people, and the further one moves away from the towns, the more one gets into contact with evidence of this <sup>1</sup>

With rare exceptions, the masses are incapable of intellectual subtleties, and the speculative philosophy of the pantheist is above their heads, though a certain number of thinking men have an idea that there is a supreme spirit pervading all nature and have a vague belief in divine immanence. It was this belief that led a peasant to say of a *pīpal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) under which he was sitting “Parameshvar is in this tree; he is in the roots; he is everywhere in the

<sup>1</sup> C. E. A. W. Oldham, “The Proverbs of the People in a District (Shahabad) of Northern India”, *Folk-Lore*, vol. xli, No. 4, pp. 332–3.

world".<sup>1</sup> There is a more general belief in one supreme god, called by different names, such as Parameshvar, Ishvar and Bhagavan, who is conceived of as a personal god and not as an impersonal spirit. This belief in an omnipotent divinity is widespread, but among the more ignorant it is so dim, or so obscured by fear of demons and evil spirits, as to be scarcely discernible. Those whose minds are obsessed by such fear, and whose real religion consists of the propitiation of malignant powers, regard him as too good to do any harm to mankind; there is therefore no need to propitiate him and it would be a work of supererogation to worship him. Another common idea is that he has no concern with current human affairs, that he is in fact a quiescent power and not an active force, divine intervention being the prerogative of other gods.

The cultured Hindu is taught that he should worship different gods as manifestations or different aspects of the same god. It is explained that just as a young wife should be devoted to her husband above all and should also love other members of his family, so the pious Hindu, while firm in his devotion to his own special god, should honour all the gods. The unenlightened villager, however, looks at the matter more simply.

<sup>1</sup> Sir T. W. Holderness, *Peoples and Problems of India* (1911), p. 114. This tree is sacred to Brahmā. Parameshvar means the great god.

He feels that it is not for him to be exclusive. Any and every god or goddess may help him in some way, and it is only the act of a prudent man to bespeak the good will of all. He is therefore catholic in his religious tastes; to none is honour denied. The general attitude may be realized by the story of an old Brahman pandit, from whom a higher conception of divinity might have been expected. He said that in his daily worship he first made an offering to Vishnu, his own chosen deity, and then threw a handful of rice broadcast for the other deities. "It was his hope that by thus recognizing the existence and authority of these, though there were no clear notions in his mind concerning any of them, he would keep them in good humour towards himself."<sup>1</sup>

There is, therefore, a general recognition of all the gods and goddesses who are included in the Hindu pantheon. It is common, however, to have one particular god or goddess as a kind of patron or tutelary deity. The ordinary Hindu makes this deity the object of his worship, even though worship may consist only of repeating the god's name in the morning and evening. The god will probably be enshrined in some way in the house, e.g. as an idol, or in the form of the *tulasi* (basil plant) or the *salagram*, a river-worn ammonite stone with spiral markings thought to resemble the discus of Vishnu, both of which are

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Wilkins, *Modern Hinduism* (1887), p. 43.

sacred to Vishnu, or a lingam (a representation of the male organ in conventional form), which is the symbol of Siva; to these the members of the household make simple oblations of flowers and water, and they offer their prayers in front of them.

The other deities are at the same time acknowledged as worthy of worship, and homage will be paid to them as need arises or the heart dictates. Pilgrimages, for example, are made to places or shrines sacred to deities other than the patron deity; the festivals of other gods are observed; any god who has special powers, or who has a special sphere of activities under his control, is invoked when anything happens which affects his department or in which his help is likely to be of use. For example, in the Deccan where the monkey-faced Maruti or Hanuman is regarded as a god of strength, wrestlers have an image of him in their gymnasium and tie a miniature of it on their wrists. The elephant-headed Ganesh or Ganapati has sovereignty over demons; his image is therefore placed in a niche over the door or a house as a guardian against evil spirits, and he is invoked by fond mothers, whoever may be their favourite deity, in order that he may protect their children. He also gives success in new undertakings, and yearly account-books open with an invocation to him. Again, Hindus will pray to one god or goddess for wealth, to another

for learning, and to a third for deliverance from dangers. Vishnu, the deliverer, is invoked even by Saivas when a man is on the point of death, usually in his incarnation as Rama, and also as Narayan and Hari. The dying man calls on Rama, those around him cry out *Haribol*, Rama is on the lips of those who accompany the body to the place of cremation or burial, and executioners repeat the name as they perform their melancholy office.

Those who have risen to a higher plane of thought look upon images of different gods and goddesses merely as symbols of a supreme deity appearing in different forms and do not worship them. They may countenance but do not practise idolatry. While they themselves offer their devotions in silent prayer or meditation, they may retain idols in their houses, or make obeisance to them in the temples, in deference to the feelings of their womenfolk. The latter usually require some symbol or representation of divinity, which they invest with a mystic significance, although many of them do not confuse the visible with the invisible, but through the symbol discern the unseen divine presence.

There is a frank recognition in Hinduism that, as all men are not on the same spiritual plane, idolatry is permissible or even expedient for those who are incapable of transcendental thought and require external aids to worship. The atti-

tude of the more enlightened Hindus is simply and sincerely set forth in an explanation given to the French traveller, Bernier, by six of the most learned pandits of Benares in 1665, an explanation which is so lucid that it is well worth quoting., Bernier told them frankly that he was scandalized by the prevalence of a worship which outraged common sense and was totally unworthy of philosophers such as they were. They replied :

We have indeed a great variety of images. To all we pay great honour, prostrating our bodies and presenting to them, with much ceremony, flowers, rice, scented oil, saffron, and other similar articles. Yet we do not believe that these statues are themselves Brahma or Vishnu, but merely their images and representations. We show them deference only for the sake of the deity whom they represent, and when we pray, it is not to the statue, but to that deity. Images are admitted in our temples because we conceive that prayers are offered up with more devotion when there is something before the eyes that fixes the mind; but, in fact, we acknowledge that God alone is absolute, that He only is the omnipotent Lord.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bernier appears not to have believed this explanation, undoubtedly genuine though it was. Looking only at the popular practices and the outward manifestations of Hinduism, he wrote of it as a trickery of prayers, of ablutions, of dippings, and of alms, either cast into the Ganges or bestowed upon Brahmans.

The masses, however, for the most part believe that the gods are present in their images and make the latter objects of worship. Idols are in fact gods in concrete form. Men who profess a belief in an unseen God are convinced that there are many other gods, each of whom fills his images with his presence, and that the idols are alive, and eat, drink and sleep like human beings. Even an advanced thinker like Ramakrishna Parahamsa, while serving as a priest in a temple of Kali, believed that her image lived, breathed and took food from his hand. It was this common belief to which the founder of the Arya Samaj, Dayanand Sarasvati, referred when he said that the idol of Siva "according to all accounts" ate, slept, drank, held a trident in his hand, beat a drum, and could pronounce curses on men. His father explained to him that the image had been consecrated by Brahmans, and, in consequence, had become the god himself, but this did not satisfy him. He found it impossible to reconcile the idea of an omnipotent living god with an idol which mice ran over and fouled.

The nature and effect of the rite of consecration are explained as follows by Raja Ram Mohan Ray, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj:

The Hindus of the present day firmly believe in the real existence of innumerable gods and goddesses, who possess in their own departments full and independent power, and to propitiate them, and not the true God,

are temples erected and ceremonies performed. Neither do they regard these gods merely in the light of instruments for elevating the mind to the conception of those supposed beings; they are simply in themselves made objects of worship. For whatever Hindu purchases an idol in the market, or constructs one with his own hands, or has one made under his own superintendence, it is his invariable practice to perform certain ceremonies, called *pran pratishtha*, or the endowment of animation, by which he believes that its nature is changed from that of the mere materials of which it is formed, and that it acquires not only life but supernatural powers.

If the idol be of the masculine gender, he marries it to a feminine one with no less pomp and magnificence than he celebrates the nuptials of his own children. The mysterious process is now complete, and the god and goddess are esteemed the arbiters of his destiny and continually receive his most ardent adoration.

Raja Ram Mohan Ray was a Bengali Brahman who spent nearly all his life in Bengal, but his remarks apply equally to South India, where too the nature of the image is believed to be changed by a ceremony which makes it the abode of an indwelling spirit and gives it a divine character.

The worshippers seem to believe that the images of the god consume the food presented to them, and are strengthened and refreshed by it. These images are treated and spoken of as living and sentient beings. They are seen to smile, to lift up hands to bless, to move from place to place, and to issue audible commands. Devout

and enthusiastic worshippers amid the glare of the lamps and the smoke of the incense seem to be carried away so as to entirely identify the invisible object of their thoughts with that which is presented before their eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Besides images, inanimate objects are worshipped on certain occasions. Clerks worship pens and ink, traders their weights and measures, cultivators the plough, handicraftsmen and artisans their tools and implements. No doubt such worship had its origin in a feeling that tools and instruments have an inherent power of doing good and harm to those who use them, but this feeling cannot be said to be entertained by thinking men. The worship continues among the more intelligent simply because it is a matter of custom and is regarded as a traditional ceremony. *It is difficult to imagine that when well-educated clerks offer their devotions to Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, before inkpots, pens and ledgers, there is any confusion in their minds between the goddess and the articles which they use daily in pursuit of their calling.*

On the other hand, the more ignorant, as in the case of idols, do not clearly distinguish the object and the spirit believed to be immanent in it. When crowds of Hindu villagers or townsmen are worked up to a state of fanatical frenzy and attack Muslims who have cut the branches of a *pipal* tree because they obstruct the banners borne

<sup>1</sup> Dr G. U. Pope, *The Tiruvāṣāgam* (1900), p. xxxv.

in religious processions, there can be little doubt that they regard the tree itself as divine. Actual worship is paid to the banyan tree by many Hindus, who adorn it with wreaths of flowers, paint the trunk with red powder, water the roots, and will neither cut it nor use the wood as fuel when it dies of old age. So too with the Ganges, which is personified as a goddess and invoked as Mother Ganges. Its water has divine qualities and a magic power of purification, which are explained by the presence of the goddess in it. Bathing in it at certain festivals will cancel sins committed in previous lives; flowers are thrown on it as an act of worship; the water is carried to distant parts of the country and carefully preserved. To die in its stream ensures immediate translation to heaven; on this account those who live near it are taken to the river, when in a moribund condition, and their feet placed in it, or they are immersed to the waist. When a man bathes, it is impious to put his foot into it before he has taken up a little of the water and sprinkled it on his head saying "Mother, forgive me".

Belief in *Karma* and the transmigration of souls is prevalent in areas where Brahmanism has established itself, and the ideas of the people about the life after death have been shaped by Brahmanical influence. As the result of a three years' study of the life of the people in a Punjab village Miss Young came to the conclusion

that the belief was a practical philosophy which coloured the whole of their outlook on life. Convinced that the present was the result of the past, they hoped that calm acceptance of that fact, avoidance of specific sins, and obedience to caste rules would bear fruit in a future life less full of ills<sup>1</sup>. The result of special enquiries made in the United Provinces during the census of 1901 was to show that "the doctrine of *Karma* is one of the firmest beliefs of all classes of Hindus", and that most of them have a fairly clear idea that wrongdoing is displeasing to Parameshvar and that the wrongdoer must suffer for his misdeeds, possibly in his present existence, but certainly in his future life or lives.<sup>2</sup> Here too the *summum bonum* is not union with the supreme spirit. The view is more material, for it is thought that the soul, when sufficiently pure, will go to a heaven in which it will enjoy everlasting happiness and unending material comfort.

So firm is the belief in rebirths in this part of India that divination is sometimes resorted to,

<sup>1</sup> M. Young, *Seen and heard in a Punjab village* (1931), p. 67

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Mr Crooke, writing on the religion of the people in the same province, expressed the opinion that the idea of transmigration of souls is treated merely as a theory of the future and hardly affects the life of the peasant, who is convinced that if he is a good Hindu "in his sense of the word", he will go to heaven and escape hell (*The North-Western Provinces of India* (1897), p. 243).

when a man dies, in order to ascertain what his next life will be. Ashes are put out overnight; if they are found with marks resembling human foot-prints, it means that he will be reborn as a human being; if there are marks like claws, he will be a bird; if there are wavy lines, he will have a vegetable existence as a tree. In the Himalayan tracts it is believed that if a man dies in debt, he will be reborn as an ox or a pony belonging to his creditor; and in the plains a man and wife will bathe in the Ganges with their clothes tied together in the sure and certain belief that this will ensure their being again husband and wife in a future existence.<sup>1</sup> This charming exhibition of married love and of belief in reunion after death is paralleled by an experience of Sir Bampfylde Fuller in the United Provinces. An elderly husband had been poisoned by his wife at the instigation of her paramour. The guilty couple were condemned to death, and before execution the man asked as a last favour to be allowed to speak to the woman. All that he said to her was "Think of the old *pipal* tree on the road home". They believed that their souls would haunt the place last in their thoughts and so they would be reunited.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh for 1901*, Part I, pp. 76-7. At the wedding ceremony the clothes and hands of the bride and bridegroom are tied together as a symbol of union.

<sup>2</sup> *Some Personal Reminiscences* (1930), p. 33.

To take the case of another province, the people of Bombay generally understand that there is a series of births and rebirths, the quality of each of which is determined by previous conduct. Here it is a matter of common belief that a man who has died in debt to another has to repay his debt by being born again as a servant or menial of his creditor. Except among the Brahmans and the educated classes, however, there seems to be little idea of final absorption in or union with the divine spirit. The outlook is more limited. It is merely predicated that virtue will improve one's lot in a subsequent life.

On the other hand, in some areas where Brahmanical influence is not operative, and among classes which have no Brahmans to minister to them, belief in *Karma* cannot be said to be prevalent. For example, in Madras, in parts of which orthodox Hinduism has not yet displaced animism, the idea that virtue will be rewarded and wickedness punished in some future state is hardly to be found as part of the religion of a large section of the population, while even the hope of heaven and fear of hell have very little vogue except among Brahmans and the higher castes.<sup>1</sup> In other parts of India the beliefs about heaven and hell are indeterminate. Some have merely a hazy idea that there is a future life to be

<sup>1</sup> See *Madras Census Reports for 1891*, Part I, p. 60.

spent in some kind of heaven or hell according to one's deserts, the good being blissfully happy and the wicked suffering torment. Some think that a man remains in one or the other until he has completed the period to which he is entitled by his deeds in the past and is then reborn, others that the soul is reborn immediately after, or some time after, death without going either to heaven or hell. Throughout her three years' residence in a Punjab village Miss Young never heard any one formulate any conception of what his or her state might be after death, and no one had any idea of personal immortality.<sup>1</sup>

Side by side with belief in the gods of the Hindu pantheon a more primitive form of religion is found throughout India. The religion of the common people may be said to combine a theoretical belief in the supremacy of one god with a practical conviction of the existence not only of many gods but also of innumerable supernatural powers. A shadowy conception of powers that can be propitiated and induced not to do any harm to their votaries is the shape given to the invisible by simple minds ignorant of natural laws. This form of religion is based on a blind unreasoning fear of the unknown. It is this which led Petronius Arbiter to say, in the first century A.D., "Primus in orbe deos fecit timor", and the English philosopher, Hobbes, to remark "The

<sup>1</sup> *Seen and heard in a Punjab village* (1931), p. 181.

feare of things invisible is the naturall seede of religion". Everywhere primitive man sees forces in operation which owe nothing to his own volition or action and over which he has no control. When therefore anything happens for which he cannot account, or for which there is no obvious cause, he puts it down to some mysterious outside power. The lightning comes he knows not whence, and strikes at random. So with other things which appear to be abnormal, strange or uncanny. Illness attacks his family, and he does not ascribe it to contagion, infection or neglect of the laws of hygiene, but to some malignant spirit. Primitive man rarely associates power with benignity, but thinks that practically everything is charged with potentiality for evil. Where only knowledge of natural law is required to explain the events of life, the worship of spirits is considered necessary; when a doctor should be called in to attend a patient, an exorcist is requisitioned to expel an evil spirit.

Hence arises what is called animism, i.e. the belief, to put it briefly, that all things are soulful, or, at greater length, that every object which has activity enough to affect man in any way is animated by a spirit and will like his own. The world is consequently believed to be full of spirits which have power to affect mankind. They must be propitiated either in order to secure their good will and consequent benefits, in such a form, for

example, as fertile soil and good crops, or in order to bribe them when they threaten to do harm or are actively mischievous. The net result is an extraordinary variety of deities, of which a good summary has been given by Monier-Williams:

Rocks, stocks, and stones, trees, pools, and rivers, his own implements of trade, the animals he finds most useful, the noxious reptiles he fears, men remarkable for any extraordinary qualities—for great valour, sanctity, virtue or even vice—good and evil demons, ghosts and goblins, the spirits of departed ancestors, an infinite number of semi-human, semi-divine existences. . . each and all of these come in for a share of divine honour or a tribute of more or less adoration<sup>1</sup>

‘The nature of the minor divinities is so kaleidoscopic that it is difficult to classify them, but a broad distinction may perhaps be made between what are called village godlings and other godlings or spirits. The former are called godlings to differentiate them from the gods of orthodox Hinduism, i.e. the major gods. They are distinguished from the gods in the vernacular, for they are called *devata* (or *deota*), whereas the major gods are known as *deva*. They are looked on as tutelary village deities with a strictly local jurisdiction, and nearly every village has one of its own. The villagers worship them in order to

<sup>1</sup> *Hinduism* (1877), p. 168

obtain their protection from the attacks of evil spirits and so ensure the welfare of themselves, their families, their cattle and their crops.

Some may be worshipped daily, others periodically or at set seasons, especially those who preside over the sowing or gathering of the crops and who are, therefore, worshipped at seed-time and harvest. Worship may also be *ad hoc*, i.e. it takes place when some emergency arises, such as an outbreak of epidemic disease. The idea is that they will befriend their votaries in return for the offerings made to them and protect them from the evil spirits who lurk round the village. If, however, they are neglected, if they do not receive their meed of offerings, they retaliate and are as revengeful and malignant as the evil spirits and equally powerful to do mischief. It is, therefore, hard to draw any line between the two classes, for the tutelary deities and the evil spirits or demons are alike capable of malicious injury. The net result is a religion of fear, which is partly responsible for a pessimistic outlook on life and for a belief that man is as surely born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Taken all in all, the minor deities constitute a most extraordinary medley, being deified forces of nature and natural phenomena, deified heroes and also deified blackguards, spirits of ancestors, spirits both of the malevolent dead and of the benevolent dead, spirits of different diseases, etc.

Some have no local habitation, image or symbol. Others may be represented by a stone, a lump of clay or a wooden post, or they may haunt trees, hills, rivers and rocks. Perhaps a clearer idea of their miscellaneous nature will be conveyed by specific instances, and for this purpose a list may be given of those which are the most popular in the Central Provinces. They are the goddess of the earth or the village, the goddess of cholera, the goddess of smallpox, the cobra (*Nagdeo*), the buffalo (*Bhainsasur*), and three deified human beings, viz. a young bridegroom who was killed by a tiger, a young Rajput prince who was poisoned by his brother on suspicion of loving his wife, and a deified cowherd.

In some places there are distinct traces of totemism. Even in an advanced community like that of Bombay, Mr Enthoven has found that traces of totemistic worship survive. A totemistic spirit (called a *devaka*), which appears to have been originally an ancestral spirit, is believed to be contained in various animals, birds, trees, plants and material objects (like implements of industry), of which he has enumerated some scores. They are worshipped when a house is occupied for the first time, when a threshing floor is prepared in the fields before harvesting, and, above all, when a marriage is celebrated. These totems are, moreover, the subject of many taboos, e.g. some will not eat the jack fruit and

others will not use the leaves of the banyan tree for any purpose whatever.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of extraordinary diversity there are two common features in the worship of the minor deities. In nearly all cases animals are sacrificed to them, for both godlings and evil spirits delight in blood, whether of a goat, a pig, a fowl or a buffalo. They also receive bloodless offerings from humble votaries, such as flowers and fruit, but these are reckoned of small account in comparison with a sacrifice. In practically all cases, moreover, the priests who officiate at the worship are members of the lowest castes and not Brahmans. The cult, however, though fundamentally animistic, is part of Hinduism. It is, in fact, difficult, if not impossible, to say where animism ends and Hinduism begins; as one discerning Hindu observed, an animist is a Hindu in the making.

At the same time that they propitiate the godlings, the masses acknowledge the claims of the greater gods. Not only is the worship enjoined by the Brahmans, but it is felt to be only common sense, an act of elementary prudence, to secure

<sup>1</sup> R E Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924), pp 19, 25, 208-12. Another view has been put forward by Mr Abbott in *The Keys of Power* (1932), viz that the *devaka* is a symbol into which the *sakti* of the village or the family god is invoked, and that by this invocation the presence of the deity is ensured for the marriage ceremony or other occasion.

their good will as an insurance against possible misfortune. "The gods are kittle cattle and a wise man worships them all." The villagers consequently go to the temples of Vishnu and Siva and of their consorts, or to the shrines of such favourites as Hanuman, and make offerings there, not perhaps as a regular practice, but at least occasionally and almost certainly at times of festival. The ignorant majority feel, however, that it is the minor deities who affect their lives most closely, and that owing to their power for evil they are, for practical purposes, of more account than the greater and more remote gods. Their attitude finds expression in a well-known proverb of Kathiawar which says "Pay reverence once to a benign god, for he may do you good, but twice to a malign power in order that he may do you no harm".<sup>1</sup> There is consequently a kind of dual religion. Thus, it is said of the masses in Bombay:

The ordinary villager, who in his everyday life takes no thought for the morrow of a subsequent existence, is content to worship the village godlings to whom he looks for rain, bountiful harvests, and escape from plague, cholera, and small-pox. . . . There are, as it were, two religions: a work-a-day religion to meet the requirements of everyday existence and a higher religion, known only to the Brahman, who is called on to officiate on

<sup>1</sup> S. Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-born* (1920), pp. 283-4.

great occasions, which the ordinary man does not attempt to understand.<sup>1</sup>

The animistic form of worship is the main cult in some localities, particularly in the south, where it was in existence before the Brahmanical faith was introduced and where it has persisted in full force till the present day. The village godlings are the old gods of the countryside, and there are many villages without any shrine of an orthodox god. In some districts Brahmanism is even said to be "a neglected cult shouldered out by the worship of aboriginal godlings, demons and devils".<sup>2</sup> Generally, however, this primitive form of worship goes on side by side with orthodox Hinduism. The same village will have shrines of Vishnu or Siva, with Brahman priests and ceremonial ritual, and a tree, stump or stone marking the godling's haunt; and worship goes on peacefully at both. To mention a personal experience, I spent some years at Gaya, a town crowded by pilgrims from all parts of India, and filled with shrines in which the ceremonies prescribed by orthodox Hinduism went on daily. Yet one of my clerks, a well-educated man of high caste, believed that his wife, who suffered from epileptic fits, was possessed by a devil, and called in an exorcist to drive it out—with no success, as he

<sup>1</sup> *Bombay Census Report for 1911*, Part I, pp. 66-7.

<sup>2</sup> F. R. Hemingway, *Tanjore District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1906), p. 67.

sorrowfully admitted to me. In villages outside the town the primitive worship of godlings was prevalent, and in one backward area people firmly believed that spirits could be hawked about in a bamboo tube or even in a corked bottle or iron key.

Again, Brahmanical Hinduism is said to be a living reality in Tanjore, a district with celebrated places of pilgrimage, where almost every village has a temple of one of the orthodox gods and every important town an institution in which ascetics are lodged and discussions take place on points of Brahmanical doctrine and ritual.

Brahmans versed in the sacred law are numerous; Vedic sacrifices are performed on the banks of its streams; Vedic chanting is performed in a manner rarely rivalled; philosophical treatises are published in Sanskrit verse; and religious associations exist, the privilege of initiation into which is eagerly sought for, and the rules of which are earnestly followed even to the extent of relinquishing the world. None the less, strong though the influence of the Brahmans is, a number of minor deities or demons are worshipped by all classes<sup>1</sup>,

It would almost seem that a people so ignorant and credulous as the lower-class Hindus will worship practically anything. Ant-hills in some areas are not infrequent objects of adoration,

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Hemingway, *Tanjore District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1906), pp. 68-9

apparently because they are thought to be mysterious emanations from the earth, subsidiary reasons being that they are the abode of snakes and resemble the lingam of Siva in shape. In one town where I was stationed some old stone lingams, which had been buried beneath the earth excavated from a large water reservoir, were uncovered by heavy rainfall. They were greeted as a mysterious outgrowth, and worship was immediately started. An even more extraordinary case happened in a Madras district, which shows how a cult can spring into existence without apparent rhyme or reason. Some boys made a toy temple with some stones under a tree, on which they put a few rags to mark the spot. This was the nucleus of a shrine, the villagers adding stones till there was a pile of them and rags till the tree was covered by them.

Hindus of the lower classes will even worship the spirits of Muslims. One strange cult is that of the supposed spirit of Muhammad the Prophet, which goes on at Manur, seven miles from Tinnevely. Here may be seen a granite pillar standing seven feet high, which, according to popular belief, was brought from Mecca and contains the spirit of the Prophet. This is adored not by Muslims but by Hindus, who alone perform certain ceremonies before it. The ministrant is a Hindu; he performs daily worship, and the thick greasy coating of clarified butter on the

pillar is the accumulation of centuries. Hindus resort to it for the cure of disease and in order to bring down rain for their crops, making offerings of water, milk, *ganja*, i.e. a narcotic product of the hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa* or *indica*), and cheroots, the last two being thought likely to appeal to the taste of a Muslim spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The tombs or shrines of Muslim saints, heroes or mythical personages are frequented by Hindus of the lower classes in North India in the belief that their spirits will grant their desires or prevent misfortune, and thank-offerings are made at them if their help has been effectual. It makes no difference that the object of adoration may have been a Ghazi or one who fell in battle against their own forefathers; the best known in North India is Ghazi Miyan, who was a historical personage, for he was a nephew of the great Mahmud of Ghazni and was killed in battle in A.D. 1034. New-born babes are brought to these rustic shrines if they have been born in answer to prayer or in fulfilment of vows; newly married couples visit them and make obeisance; when a cow calves, some of her milk is brought as an offering.

Both in Bihar and the United Provinces Hindus have no scruples about taking part in the great Muslim festival held in the month of

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Pate, *Tinnevely District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1917), p. 476.

Muharram, which, instead of being a kind of memorial service or passion play, is often more like a fête. One of its features is a procession in which boys act the part of guards or retainers of the martyred Husain, and it is not infrequent for childless Hindus to make vows that if they have a son, he will be one of the guards. Similar vows are made by those who already have sons if they happen to be ill or in any danger, i.e. they vow to dedicate them to the temporary service of the martyr if they recover or escape from danger. In fulfilment of such vows, Hindu boys may be seen with Muslim boys in the procession, running about gaily bedizened with a girdle of jingling bells round the waist, and with whisks of yaks' tails or bunches of peacocks' feathers in their hands. Miss Emerson, who lived for a year in a village of Oudh in order to study the life of the people, says that it was hard to tell whether this festival was Hindu or Muslim. The ten days of mourning were transformed into a gay little fête during which Hindus as well as Muslims wore their best clothes, stayed up all night, ate as much as they could afford to buy, and amused themselves with the models of tombs (*tazias*), made of bamboos, paper and tinsel, which are carried in procession.<sup>1</sup> In some places, on the last day of the festival, Hindus actually take their sick to touch the *tazias* in the expectation that they will

<sup>1</sup> *Voiceless India* (New York, 1930), p. 408.

be cured, and by way of offering throw fried rice and cowries on to them.

In South India, where Muslims are only a small minority, such practices are less common, but they are not unknown. At Kondur in the Cuddapah district there is a shrine of a Muslim saint called Masthan Sahib, where Hindus bring children born after long years of waiting and name them after the saint. In parts of the Anantapur district the Hindus have actually appropriated the Muharram festival and made it one of their own. Indeed they are said to celebrate it with perhaps more fervour than the Hindu feasts<sup>1</sup>. They provide funds and endowments for its annual celebration, and manage it entirely themselves. Strange, too, as it may appear, Hindus have been known to make vows and present votive offerings in Roman Catholic churches in South India, a proceeding which a Brahman sarcastically explained by quoting a proverb to the effect that if a lot of husks are eaten, one grain may turn up.

<sup>1</sup> W. Francis, *Anantapur District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1905), pp. 29-30.

## Chapter II

### IDEALS

IT is common to find in books on India statements emphasizing the important part which religion plays in the life of its people. "The Asiatic", wrote Meredith Townsend, "is essentially religious, that is, intent on obedience to powers which he cannot see but can imagine"<sup>1</sup>. "The Indians", remarks Sir Harcourt Butler, "are as essentially religious as the Europeans are essentially secular. (Religion is still the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of Indian life."<sup>2</sup>) Intellectual Indians go further and assert that the outlook on, and conduct of, life are not merely religious but spiritual. A common *cliché*, which voices a common belief, is "The East is spiritual, the West is material". This belief finds expression in a bitter satire of the Urdu poet Akbar, of which the gist is: "The East is spiritual, the West is material. Mansur<sup>3</sup> declared 'I am God'. Darwin announced 'I am the son of an ape'. A man's reach

<sup>1</sup> *Asia and Europe* (1905), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *India Insistent* (1931), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> A Sufi mystic and pantheist, also known as Hallaj, who was executed at Baghdad in A.D. 922 for blasphemy.

does not exceed his grasp." Mr Gandhi, again, has written :

The tendency of Indian civilization is to elevate the moral being, that of the western civilization is to propagate immorality. The latter is godless, the former is based on a belief in God.

To anyone brought up in a Christian household and acquainted with Christian ideals and principles these seem hard sayings, and contact with everyday Indian life makes it difficult for him to discern what justification there is for the claim to spirituality, though it is obvious that religion plays a great part in social life owing to the religious obligations attached to many social usages. Religion and social life are closely inter-related, and social rules have religious sanction. In particular, religion is intimately associated with births, deaths and marriages, for which certain ceremonies are necessary. Marriage, except among certain low castes in South India, is a sacrament. According to the sacred texts, a woman should marry only once, and on the death of her husband she should lead a life of celibate austerity till her dying day. It is a religious obligation for a man to marry and beget a son, who can make offerings for the salvation of his father's soul and those of his ancestors. It is also regarded as a religious obligation to get one's daughters married and, unfortunately, also

to have the marriage ceremony performed while they are still of tender years.

The caste system again is held to be established by divine ordinance, so that religion may in a way be said to pervade the whole framework of society. In addition to this, some well-known lines in the *Bhagavata Gita* inculcate the supreme merit of performing one's caste duties. Perfection, it is said, is only attained by the man who does not deviate from the duties of caste. Obedience to caste rules is, accordingly, regarded as a virtue or even as *dharma*,<sup>1</sup> i.e. the highest duty or righteousness. Social habits are thus, as it were, sanctified. *Dharma* as so defined may be looked upon as an ideal of conduct. Actually the sphere in which it operates is chiefly dietetic and social, for caste rules regulate such matters as food, marriage, occupation and social intercourse with the rest of the community. Owing, however, to the accepted conception of *dharma* breach of the regulations affecting social usages and matters of food and drink can be regarded as irreligious, and observance of them is supported by the Brahmans, who are the interpreters of religion to the people. It is they who help to enforce the extreme penalty of excommunication imposed by the caste for such offences as marrying out of caste, eating forbidden food, and

<sup>1</sup> The word has a variety of meanings including religion, righteousness, justice and moral duty.

adopting a prohibited occupation. They add supernatural terrors to the other grievous disabilities involved by the sentence, by denying their ministrations to the outcaste and refusing to perform the ceremonies which he regards as a religious obligation or as essential for the salvation of his soul after death.

It is the application of ideas of this kind to conduct which more than anything else makes religion the basis of the social life of the Hindu. A man's religion, as said by Sir Alfred Lyall, means his customary rule of everyday life; habit and duty are placed on a religious basis. His life is also influenced to an extraordinary extent by superstitions which cannot be regarded as connected with real religion. He has a firm belief in astrology and in omens, which guides his actions to an extent which the modern European can scarcely realize. The cultivator, for example, times the work of ploughing, sowing and reaping, on which his livelihood depends, by the astrologer's pronouncements as to auspicious days and times; his incomings and outgoings are determined by omens portending good or ill luck; horoscopes are made when his children are born and are consulted before they are married; the day and hour of marriage depend on the astrologer's fiat. In addition to all this, the sacred books of the Hindus lay down many rules concerning the daily functions of life, and

it is apt to be assumed that they are strictly and conscientiously followed. It is probably on this account that such sweeping statements are made as that (Hindus eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin religiously.) The rules, however, are largely prescriptions about food, dress and the toilet, and are based on an artificial standard of purity to which many would deny a religious, much less any spiritual, significance. They are, moreover, not obeyed universally or minutely. Those who adhere to them are in a minority and consist mainly of orthodox Brahman purists, who are scrupulous to the point of punctiliousness in their observance, and so may be said to regulate their lives by the dictates of their religion.

Although social life is so largely subject to rules which have a religious sanction, it is a large assumption to go further and say that either the general outlook on life or its actual conduct is determined by spiritual standards. Comparisons between different peoples are always difficult and generally dangerous, but on a dispassionate survey it may be said that on the whole the man in the village—the equivalent in such a country as India to the English “man in the street”—has as keen an appreciation of the good things of life and in his dealings with his fellow-men is as much influenced by material considerations as the European, although there are, as in other

communities, a certain number of spiritual persons who hold the things of this world of little or no account.

There is a saying in North India that money, land and women are the root of all quarrels,<sup>1</sup> and it is obvious to all who study village life that they are mainsprings of action—a materialistic trinity. Money and land are the constant subject of thought and staple of conversation; the love of women, though not the topic of talk, is a force both for good and evil as in other countries; love of his land has a power over the mind of the Indian peasant which has hardly a parallel. To him it takes the place of the love of home or the love of country found among other nations; his land is the object of his devoted care and labour and the centre of his thoughts; he clings to his holding with grim tenacity, and it is his constant ambition to increase it. To these three ruling passions a fourth may be added—what is known as *izzat*, an almost untranslatable word connoting a sense of dignity, position or prestige. Loss of *izzat* means to the Indian much the same as “losing face” does to the Chinese, and there are scarcely any lengths to which he will not go in order to maintain it.

The influence of these four factors is seen in feuds and factions which are a blot on village life, otherwise simple and kindly, *dala-dali*, a word

<sup>1</sup> *Zar, zamin, zan jhagre ki jar hain.*

denoting village factions in Bengal, is a by-word there. They result in long-nursed grudges, enmities pursued with bitter vindictiveness, and long-calculated acts of revenge and retaliation. They also produce an astonishingly prolific crop of litigation. Every year in British India alone there are, in round figures, five million cases in the revenue and civil courts of original jurisdiction, and about two million criminal charges come to trial; and it has been ingeniously calculated that, assuming that, on the average, only five persons are interested in each case—as plaintiff, defendant, accused, advocate or witnesses—altogether some thirty-five million persons (or one in ten of every man, woman and child) are interested in cases before the law-courts.<sup>1</sup> Litigation on this scale is scarcely the occupation of a spiritually-minded people.

Materialistic, however, as the villagers may be in their relations to the outside world and in the conduct of their everyday life, there can be no question that their general trend of thought is strongly devotional and that religion is deeply ingrained in thought and feeling and is a very real thing to them. One impelling force is undoubtedly the desire to accumulate merit in the expectation of a higher or better life in the next existence, and of eventually obtaining release

<sup>1</sup> Sir Harcourt Butler, *India Insistent* (1931), p. 105.

from the burden of individual existence, though it is doubtful how far the attainment of such a distant goal as the latter is actually a motive idea among the masses. Another factor is the absence of the rationalistic spirit and lack of scientific knowledge. Natural phenomena and the vicissitudes of human life are ascribed to the working of supernatural powers, and the possibility of divine intervention in human affairs is an article of faith which is held with a simple sincerity. As was once said by Sir Donald McLeod of the Punjab: "The nations we have come to rule over, in spite of their idolatrous darkness, acknowledge no truth more universally and habitually than that we are in all things at the immediate disposal of the Almighty." There is an intense conviction of the divine governance of the world, a strong sense of subordination to and dependence on unseen powers, which manifests itself in what seems to be a craving for worship so strong as to be almost a ruling passion. Together with a persistent belief in the capricious malignancy of evil spirits and in their amenability to propitiation there is a deep faith in the great gods of Hinduism and in their power and willingness to help their suppliants; and it will be found that there is one god who is regarded as having infinite power, wisdom and grace. The names of Mahadeo (Siva) and of Narayan (Vishnu) are constantly on the lips of the peasant in times of

adversity, when there seems to be no help in man. The multiplicity of shrines as well as of sects, the crowds which stream to the temples and other sacred spots at times of festival, the multitudes who go on pilgrimage, the privations they are ready to suffer, and the austerities they undergo, as well as the popularity of the worship of local deities, all bear witness to the faith that is in them.

♦ It is quite true that there is a certain materialism in much of the worship, because their object is to ensure that their granaries shall be full, their cattle strong to labour, and their houses free from illness; but there also may be witnessed a spirit of self-sacrifice and of a self-forgetfulness which often manifests itself in states of ecstasy and exaltation. It is also true that the religious observances of many among the lower classes are intermittent or perfunctory. The peasant is apt to neglect the gods while things go well with him, beyond repeating the name of one or making obeisance to an idol or other symbol, but on the other hand he is quick to offer his prayers or oblations if in trouble or threatened by trouble. Many indeed, hard pressed by want, seem to have no more idea of religion than the cultivator of Central India who said to Colonel Luard: "All I know about religion is that every day I call on Ram morning and night. All my time is taken up in work. I do not do things which

a spirit of self-sacrifice. He should be filled with a single-minded love of God, who is represented as a fount of gracious love for the sincere and earnest worshipper, to whom he stands in the relation of a redeemer. Miss Young found that in the Punjab village where she lived for three years the vernacular version of the *Ramayana* of Tulasi Das had refined the religious conceptions of the people. Their hearts are moved by the patience, gentleness and faithfulness shown by Rama under hardship and suffering, and, as they are inclined to identify him with God, they tend to regard God as full of loving-kindness, pity and mercy.<sup>1</sup> Kabir is a household name in the Punjab and the people constantly quote his sayings, which have a high spiritual tone, for he denounced idolatry and taught that pure self-sacrificing love of God was the path to salvation. Mention should also be made of the teachings of a part of the *Mahabharata* known as the *Bhagavata Gita*, which is considered to be one of the noblest expressions of Hinduism. The well-known Indian Christian mystic, Sadhu Sundar Singh, thought that the *Bhagavata Gita* was so like St John's Gospel that he conjectured that a Hindu might have taken St John's thoughts and put them into Hindu form<sup>2</sup>. Comparatively few

<sup>1</sup> *Seen and heard in a Punjab village* (1931), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> B. H. Streeter and A. P. Appasamy, *The Sadhu* (1921), p. 232.

however among the lower classes are familiar with it.

In the west of India the Marathi poets Namdev and Tukaram may be said to have spiritualized the worship of Krishna in the form of Vithoba. According to Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, purity of heart, humility, self-surrender, forgiveness, and the love of God form the sum and substance of Namdev's teaching, while Tukaram denounced merely mechanical rites and practices and insisted on the need of humility, the purification of the heart, and single-minded devotion to God.<sup>1</sup>

The ~~same~~ high spiritual conceptions have made their way into Saivism in South India owing to the popularity of the poems called *Tiruvassagam* (meaning the Holy Word) by Manikka-Vasagar, who taught that there is one supreme god (Siva) who assumed humanity and came to earth in the form of a Guru or spiritual teacher, and threw open the way of salvation to men and women of all classes. These poems move the Tamil-speaking people to tears of rapture; it is said by them that a man must have a heart of stone if it is not moved by them. According to Dr Pope they are recited daily in all the great Saiva temples, are on everyone's lips, and are as dear to the hearts of vast multitudes as the

<sup>1</sup> *Vaishnavism, Saivism, and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913), p. 91.

Psalms of David are to Jews and Christians. "There is in them", he wrote, "a combination of lofty feeling and spirituality with what we must pronounce to be the grossest idolatry. No one can read the sage's verses without profound emotion. Scarcely ever has the longing of the human soul for purity and peace and divine fellowship found worthier expression."<sup>1</sup>

Among other indications of the appeal which religion makes to the Hindu is the fact that more than half the vernacular literature (i.e. works written in the languages in daily use as opposed to Sanskrit) is religious, i.e. it deals with some aspect of divinity, especially the incarnations of Vishnu as Rama and Krishna. Devotional literature is popular literature and moves the hidden springs of religious emotion in the unlettered masses as well as cultured scholars. It is true that six-sevenths of the people are illiterate, but they crowd to hear, for example, readings of the great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and memorize passages from them. The *Ramayana* is to the peasants of North India what the Bible is to Englishmen, and the earnest attention with which they listen to readings of it has to be seen in order to be realized. In the west of India the works of Namdev, of Jnanoba or Jnanesvar (the author of a Marathi paraphrase of the *Bhagavata Gita*), and

<sup>1</sup> *The Tiruvayagam* (1900), pp. ix, xii-xxiv.

of Tukaram are extraordinarily popular. All classes, high and low, delight in the songs of Namdev, which are said to have sunk into their hearts and to be familiar on their lips; Jnanoba has had a greater influence than any poet-saint except Tukaram. Dr Macnicol tells us that the latter's songs in praise of Vithoba keep the flame of devotion alight among all classes and that the two names "Jnanoba, Tukaram" are linked together in the chants that the worshippers sing as they march in great companies to the festivals in honour of Vithoba and his saints.<sup>1</sup>

The works just mentioned are classics, but religion still continues to be a favourite theme of literature, though it does not predominate to the same extent as formerly, and also of drama. Dramatic representations commonly deal with the lives of the gods or their devotees. In North India the *Ramlila* thrills multitudes of villagers every year with the moving story of Rama and Sita. In South India one favourite play tells of the life of Harischandra, a Raja of transcendent truthfulness, whose sufferings and patience resemble those of Job; the hero of another is Markanda, a youth of every grace and virtue who was doomed to an early death, but by his devotion to Siva won the boon of perpetual youth. The moral of both is the triumph of virtue.

<sup>1</sup> *The Living Religions of the Indian People* (1934), p. 77.

Other facts of no little significance are the real reverence which the people have for asceticism and the profound respect they yield to devotees who have renounced the world and its pleasures. According to the Brahmanical texts there are four stages in the ideal scheme of life. The first is that of the student (*Brahmacharya*). It is a period of learning, discipline, and training, for the youth is bound by strict rules of obedience to his teacher. The second is that of the householder with the cares and responsibilities of married life. The third is a period of retreat, in which the ties of social life are thrown off, but not necessarily those of the married state, for the recluse may be accompanied by his wife. The fourth and last is that of complete renunciation and solitude. In this stage a man cuts himself completely loose from worldly interests and desires, and is free to give himself up to the worship of God by means of meditation, faith and devotion, so as to attain a state of spiritual freedom and union with the divine. He does not, however, devote himself to the service of man except, it may be, by teaching and preaching. These are quite optional, and the ascetic may merely live a solitary self-centred life. The ideal is, in fact, renunciation for the sake not of one's fellow-men but of one's own personal salvation. This last stage, according to the Laws of Manu, is reached when one is a grandfather and old age, as evi-

denced by wrinkles and grey hair, is creeping on; but it is not always realized that it is a stage which should begin only after the discipline of studentship and the trials imposed by married life. Mothers to whom a son has been born after long years of barrenness will dedicate him to an ascetic life while still a boy, and many adopt it in early manhood because of their passion for the ascetic ideal.

It is recognized that renunciation is an ideal, though it may be impossible of realization by the ordinary man. His attitude is generally "Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor." At the same time he accepts it as part of his duty that he should give away wealth and be content with simple necessities; and he acts on this belief by giving charity according to his means, though he is more inclined to acquire merit by giving to Brahmans than to the poor and needy. "The unostentatious benevolence of all grades of society is one of the most beautiful traits of Indian life."<sup>1</sup>

Asceticism makes an extraordinary appeal to practically all classes of Hindus. They feel that, whatever their own manner of life, self-denial is better than self-indulgence, the suppression of passion and desires than their gratification. To their minds temporal power, wealth, success and

<sup>1</sup> Sir T. W. Holderness, *Peoples and Problems of India* (1911), p. 142.

material well-being are, from the ideal point of view, inferior to the spiritual merit attained by one who has subdued the flesh to the spirit. Other-worldliness is a higher calling than the management of affairs. The man of transcendental vision is superior to the man of action. The national heroes are ascetics and sages rather than great soldiers, conquerors and statesmen.

Many, no doubt, will consider that retirement from the world is not a very high ideal, and that solitary self-suppression is not so valuable to the world at large as the development and full use of one's faculties. It may be argued that the life of an ascetic who is anxious only to work out his own salvation is intensely individualistic and not so admirable as a life spent in working for others; that the virtue of a man who is sequestered from the temptations of the world is, after all, only a negative virtue. But it is an ideal all the same, and the homage which the people pay to ascetics and, even more, their readiness to support them out of their meagre means testify to the spirit within them.

True piety commands general admiration and respect, and if a really pious man leads a simple or austere life, without, however, surrendering the world, he may receive a homage bordering almost on veneration. De Nobili, the great Jesuit missionary, who is regarded, next to Xavier, as the greatest Roman Catholic missionary who ever came to India, was honoured as if he were

a Brahman or a Sannyasi because of his simple, semi-ascetic life, for his diet consisted of herbs cooked in water. Mr Gandhi owes the designation of Mahatma, meaning a great soul and connoting saintliness, to a reputation for high thought and selfless life, and the religious implications of the name contributed not a little to his political success, for it was thought that he had supernatural qualities. An astute politician and a Hindu idealist, he captured the imagination of his co-religionists not merely on account of his appeal to the national spirit, but also because of the religious ideas he introduced into politics. He preached the value of *Ahimsa*, or abstention from injury to any living being, the doctrine that thou shalt do no hurt. This is an ideal of Hindu ascetic life, connoting the endurance and not the infliction of suffering, an ideal which most of his followers, violent in word and deed, failed to live up to. He advocated *Satyagraha*, i.e. truth-force or soul-force, as a means of obtaining redress, though in practice this was often translated into lawless and violent non-co-operation. He preached Swaraj with a double meaning, for it implies not only political self-government but also spiritual self-control. "Real home-rule", he wrote, "is self-rule or self-control", and he announced that Indians must be masters of their selves before they could be masters of their country.

The reputation enjoyed by such persons as

these cannot be compared with the veneration given to the religious teacher who renounces the world, with its ambitions, riches and honours, and devotes himself entirely to a religious life. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the common people are really convinced of the truth and sincerity of a religious teacher who continues to lead the life of a citizen. A man who cuts himself apart from the world, and has at the same time a personality which impresses the imagination and a spiritual message which appeals to the religious sense, is on a different plane. He is regarded as semi-divine or as an Avatar, i.e. an incarnation of the divine. The feeling which Indians have for such a man may be gauged by the remarks of Sir Surendranath Banerjea about the Vaishnava reformer Chaitanya, who at the age of 25 became a Sannyasi and for twenty-four years wandered about the country, teaching and preaching. He is described as

the semi-divine person who claims to communicate his message amid a flood of heavenly effulgence, which overpowers the faithful and inspires them with an enthusiasm that carries everything before it. The people feel the advent of an Avatar. He has in him the inspiration of a revelation, proclaiming the truth that is in him, and he proclaims it in a form that touches the heart and appeals to the imagination. Such an Avatar was Chaitanya.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A Nation in Making* (1925), p. 396.

## Chapter III

### MORAL INFLUENCES

IT is frequently said by European critics that in Hinduism religion is divorced from morality, that the moral code is not based on, but independent of, religion, and that the moral sanctions are not religious but social. The pantheism of higher Hinduism is said to be merely a philosophical explanation of the universe; the Supreme Being is conceived of as a universal spirit, a vast impersonality too abstract to be a source of moral principles.<sup>1</sup> The view has also been put forward that pantheism, by inducing the view that all religions are equally true, may have the result of weakening the sense of morality.

Everywhere throughout India we find this spirit of easy accommodation which the pantheistic attitude creates, blurring distinctions of truth and untruth, of right and wrong. This, which has sapped the moral strength of India through all the ages, is exercising the same enervating influence still.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Brahm is bodiless and actionless,  
Passionless, calm, unqualified, unchanged,  
Pure life, pure thought, pure joy " *The Light of Asia*

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Commission on Christian Higher Education in India* (1931), pp. 47-8. The Commission cites as an extreme example of the pantheistic attitude the statement of a Bengali student that he prayed daily to Buddha, Krishna, Christ, Kali, Muhammad and Socrates.

With regard to polytheism it is pointed out that its creed is devoid of ethical significance, for it predicates a multiplicity of gods and goddesses, each operating in his or her own sphere, who prescribe no moral laws and are not concerned with a common standard of right and wrong. Orthodox worship, moreover, is said to be merely a matter of rites and ceremonies; its essence is formalism, in which there is no place for morality. The miscellany of primitive beliefs, with myriad godlings and evil spirits, which forms such a large part of the religion of the masses, is equally destitute of an ethical basis. Worship is undertaken merely to avert misfortune and win material benefits, and it conveys no lessons as to duty either towards God or towards one's neighbour.

The view of the non-moral nature of Hinduism, considered as a form of belief and worship apart from its social aspects, has been set forth ably and reasonably by Bishop Caldwell, who wrote:

Undoubtedly Indian literature contains a large amount of moral teaching, some of which is of very high order; but it is a remarkable circumstance, and one which European Christians find it difficult to believe or even comprehend, that this teaching is unconnected with religious teaching. Books containing moral disquisitions and maxims may be studied at home, but in the temple they are unknown and unheard of. Morality is supposed to consist merely in the discharge of the duties

of one's caste and station towards one's fellow men. . . . Religion, on the other hand, is supposed to rise far above such petty considerations as the social duties and to consist solely in the worship of the gods by means of the appointed praises, prayers, and observances, in the hope of obtaining thereby union with the Supreme Spirit and final emancipation. The duties of life are never inculcated in any Hindu temple. The discharge of those duties is never represented as enjoined by the gods, nor are any prayers ever offered in any temple for help to enable the worshippers to discharge those duties aright. Hence we often see religion going in one direction and morality in another. We meet with a moral Hindu who has broken altogether away from religion and, what is still more common, still more extraordinary, we meet with a devout Hindu who lives a flagrantly immoral life. In the latter case no person sees any inconsistency between the immorality and the devoutness.<sup>1</sup>

There is undoubted force in these arguments, but an enlightened Hindu would emphatically deny the proposition that Hinduism consists solely in the worship of the gods by means of praises, prayers, and observances. He would contend that the main elements of his religion are knowledge of, faith in, and devotion to a personal deity, which find expression in uprightness and piety; he would maintain that visits to shrines, worship before images and the ob-

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and Hinduism*, pp. 29-31.

servance of ceremonies have no worth unless the soul is pure. Nor is this belief unknown to the people at large, for a proverb of North India, which must to some extent at least reflect popular thought, asserts: "If the mind is pure, the water in the household dish is as good as the water of the Ganges." Even pantheism as expounded in the Vedanta is compatible with morality of a lofty character, which is neither esoteric nor beyond the comprehension of an ordinary man. Some of the utterances of Ramakrishna Paramahansa seem to breathe the very spirit of Christianity. "As the dawn heralds the rising sun, so unselfishness, purity and righteousness precede the advent of the Lord." "The pure in heart see the Lord, as the clear mirror reflects the sun. Be holy then." "Like unto a miser that longeth for gold, let thy heart pant after Him. He who yearns for God finds him." "Thou shouldest sacrifice the body, mind, and riches to find God." "So long as one does not become simple like a child, one does not get divine illumination." "Should we pray aloud unto God? Pray unto him in any way you like. He is sure to hear you, for He can hear even the footfall of an ant." "What you wish others to do, do yourself." "If thou wishest to concentrate thy heart on God, be meek, humble, and poor in spirit." Reading such sayings as these, who can deny the truth of Max Müller's remark that they make it clear

that the Vedanta possesses a morality of its own, which in India has done good, is doing good, and may continue to do good for centuries to come?<sup>1</sup> It cannot, however, be contended that spiritual conceptions of this kind are entertained to any great extent by the masses. The popular creed is but feebly influenced by and only dimly reflects higher ethical teaching.

The idea of religion entertained by the majority is not that of the Western theologian, to whom it connotes a code of morals resting on theology. In the minds of the ordinary villager there is no direct connexion between religion and the moral code. The gods do not come within the moral category. The function of the gods is not the direction of morals but the distribution of blessings and, if not duly propitiated, of curses. In Bombay, for example, as explained by Mr Enthoven,

the mass of Hindus are disposed to worship many gods as distinct beings, with powers that may be used to their detriment if the deities are not duly propitiated. Their religion mainly consists in regulating their conduct in order to so propitiate these deities. For the rest the due observance of certain social usages is enough to secure their moral welfare.<sup>2</sup>

There is (observed Sir Harold Stuart) very little connexion between the religion and the morality of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (1898), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> *Bombay Census Report for 1901*, Part I, p. 60.

people of the Madras Presidency. Even among Brahmans and the higher castes, the moral code of their religion is but vaguely known and of no great influence.<sup>1</sup>

Respect for the law of *Karma* is a direct incentive to morality because it encourages the practice of virtues, such as truth, charity, etc., which add to the stock of a man's good deeds. On the other hand, it also encourages the performance of acts which come within the religious but not the moral category, and, largely owing to the influence of the Brahmans, it is acts of the latter kind to which most value is attached by the unintellectual majority. Religious observances consequently tend to become a substitute for moral action because the latter has less efficacy in helping in the acquisition of merit. Thus, the average Hindu would feel that it is better, because more advantageous, to give a feast to Brahmans already well fed than to help the poor and needy.

In any case the motive power is not so much the desire to do good for its own sake, or to worship God without thought of self, but the desire to rise to a higher level in another life. It is only the spiritually-minded who hold that unless worship is offered in a spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion, without thought of advantage or reward, it is fruitless. This is the teaching of the *Bhagavata Gita*, in which Krishna says that even

<sup>1</sup> *Madras Census Report for 1891*, Part I, p. 60.

a leaf, flower, fruit or water offered in a spirit of devotion is acceptable to him. There are two legends which are picturesquely expressive of the two lines of thought. The first relates that a rich man made an offering of 1000 mangoes to the Ganges, throwing the fruit into its sacred water. One of the mangoes was picked up by a poor man, who ate it in order to appease his hunger. That night the goddess appeared to the rich man in a dream and informed him that she had received only the mango which the poor man had eaten.

This view, however, is not the view of the majority, many of whom seem unable to grasp the idea that good may be done for its own sake without reference to its effect in the working of the law of *Karma*. They think that the performance of a religious or moral act is sufficient, whatever may be the underlying motive. Their view has support in the second legend which states that a man who was on his death-bed happened to call for his son who had the name Narayan, which is a name of Vishnu. Simply because the name of the god passed his lips, without his having any intention of invoking Vishnu, he was allowed to enter the heaven of Vishnu.

On the whole it may be concluded that "the fear that a man shall reap as he has sown is an appreciable element in the average morality",<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh for 1901, Part I, p. 76.*

and that the sanction is not the desire of divine approval or fear of divine displeasure, but hope that virtue will get its reward and fear that wickedness will work out its own punishment in a future life.

Few entertain the idea of a God who, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, is grieved by breaches of a moral law which has been ordained for man's spiritual welfare. Still fewer conceive of the moral law as ordained by scripture or required by divine command. The Laws of Manu, a Sanskrit work which is regarded as an authority on social laws, do in fact inculcate virtuous conduct and the avoidance of vice. It is laid down, for example, that he who perseveres in good actions, in subduing his passions, in bestowing alms, in gentleness of manners, and in patient endurance of hardships, he who does not associate with the wicked, he who gives pain to no sentient being, will attain final beatitude, i.e. union with the Supreme Being. But the Hindu scriptures are a closed book to the illiterate peasant. They are written in a dead language, Sanskrit, and he has to rely on the teachings of the Brahmans, which are concerned not so much with virtue and vice as with the merit attached to religious rites.

The gods, according to them, are offended, not by sin, but by neglect. They are pleased by offerings and ceremonies rather than by repen-

tance and a new life. Stress is laid on the virtue of such things as the continued repetition of the name of a god more than on the practical piety of one who does good to his neighbour. Sin does not carry with it the idea of wrong done to God, whose divine love will be wounded, or whose anger will be provoked, by wrongdoing. It is rather an offence against the traditional dictates of religion, and it includes acts involving ceremonial impurity, which can be atoned for by an expiatory rite called *prayaschitta*, or by a penance, or by some act of austerity. Spiritual merit is obtained by such things as pilgrimages, benefactions to Brahmans and building of temples. According to one Purana, he who builds a temple rescues eight generations of his ancestors from hell, according to another he annuls the sins committed in one hundred previous lives. All good deeds of this kind go into the ledger account of *Karma*, where they are placed to a man's credit and are balanced against the misdeeds on the debit side. In the latter is included neglect of religious ceremonies, which are considered essential by the exponents of a formalist creed, e.g. investiture with the sacred thread for the twice-born.

Any rare rationalist (writes Dr Paranjpye) who refuses to perform his son's thread ceremony on account of his principles is considered more blameworthy than

a man who, while conforming to all formal religious injunctions, leads an immoral or a dissolute life.<sup>1</sup>

A more powerful moral force is the caste system, which is Hinduism in its social form. It is, as already stated, a cardinal tenet of popular Hinduism that *dharma*, i.e. ideal duty, consists of right behaviour in that state of life in which one happens to be placed. This for practical purposes means obeying the caste laws, so that morality is largely a matter of conformity to caste customs. Caste laws are enforced among the higher castes by means of common consent to excommunication for grave offences, but minor offences, including moral laxity, are not punished. The lower castes are stricter and have far greater control over their members owing to the existence of an executive body known as the caste council. The caste councils have a wide jurisdiction. They deal with offences which to the European have no ethical import, such as eating, drinking and smoking with other castes, eating certain kinds of food, and taking up forbidden occupations. These, it will be found, depend very largely on an artificial standard of purity. Certain castes, foods and occupations are regarded as impure, and the man who disobeys the caste laws on the subject brings the stigma of pollution not only upon himself, but also upon his family and any members of his caste who associate with him.

<sup>1</sup> *The Crux of the Indian Problem* (1931), p. 61.

In addition to this, the caste councils take cognizance of breaches of religious obligations, often making the punishment fit the crime by inflicting a penalty of a religious nature such as a penance, a pilgrimage or a rite of expiation or purification, as, for example, in grave cases *panchagavya*, i.e. taking a mixture of the five products of the cow. What is of more importance for our present purpose is that they also take action in cases concerned with the moral law, such as adultery and seduction, besides dealing with conduct calculated to disturb the peace and concord of the community; the latter category covers such things as failure to keep an agreement or contract, the spreading of malicious rumours, personal assaults, family quarrels, insults, abuse and even, in some instances, disrespect to elders. The punishments vary from complete excommunication to petty fines, and frequently consist of temporary excommunication with the prospect of reinstalment in caste as a reward for reformation.

By virtue of its authority in these matters and the punishments it metes out for misconduct, the caste council may be regarded as the custodian of morality. Its value as such is, however, reduced by the fact that different castes, or groups of castes, have different ideas of duty and different standards. What one caste considers right another may consider wrong. Things which are

considered obligatory by one may be regarded either as optional or as unnecessary by another. The moral tone is, moreover, regulated by the public opinion of the caste and not of the community at large. In some matters a caste may have a conception of duty which is opposed to the general will of the community, or even to the general moral law, and, when this is the case, the caste law prevails. ✓

The caste system, moreover, maintains many irrational customs which have no moral basis, although they have a semi-religious sanction. "Immemorial custom", according to the Laws of Manu, "is transcendent law, approved in the sacred scriptures and in the codes of divine legislators; every man of the twice-born classes, who has due reverence for the supreme spirit which dwells in him, should diligently and constantly observe immemorial custom." Society, consequently, is ruled by the law of custom more than by scriptural authority, at least among the lower castes. The unwritten law of custom takes the place of ethical principles. Custom, as interpreted and enforced by caste, also leaves little room for individual freedom. Capacity for independent action and personal responsibility are supplanted by caste law. It is not surprising that the great reformer, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, inveighed against the dead hand of custom.

Custom (he declared) is the supreme ruler in this country, custom is the supreme instructor; the rule of custom is the paramount rule, the precept of custom is the paramount custom. What a mighty influence is thine, O custom! Thou has trampled on the *Sastras*, triumphed over virtue, and crushed the power of discriminating right from wrong.

The Pandit was the leader of a movement to allow the remarriage of widows, which was, and still is, banned by caste rule, the feeling being that if a man is in love with a widow, it is better to have her as a mistress than to marry her.

As the result of the application of different standards, the whole treatment of the question of sexual morality by the castes is full of what appear to be inconsistencies. For a woman to have a liaison with a man belonging to a lower caste is one of the gravest offences, presumably because the purity of the stock will be impaired if she gives birth to an illegitimate son. A man, however, may have a mistress belonging to a lower caste, provided he only shares his bed with her and not his meals. If he eats with her, he loses his ceremonial purity and is liable to be outcasted, which will also be the inevitable consequence of marrying her.

Aberrations from the rules regarding marriage, food and drink are generally viewed more seriously than moral turpitude. Perjury, instead of being an object of reprobation, is cause for

admiration if committed on behalf of a fellow casteman. This, however, may be said to have the support of the Laws of Manu, which enunciate that false evidence may be given for a pious motive. "Such evidence wise men call the speech of the gods." Caste clannishness often defeats the ends of justice. When an action has been committed which the State treats as criminal and the caste as right and proper, there is a conspiracy of silence, and members of the caste who give evidence for the prosecution may be outcasted. I myself had two cases before me, each concerned with the murder of a woman for unchastity. In the first no evidence could be obtained against the accused from any member of the caste. In the other a boy who had seen his mother murdered was put out of caste for giving evidence against her murderers. The judgments of the lower castes also operate capriciously in some cases by making the innocent suffer for the guilty. If a woman commits adultery, for example, her husband may be punished, the nature of the punishment varying according to circumstances. He may be condemned merely to pay a fine or the cost of a feast to his caste-fellows, but if he is thought to have connived at the liaison, or to have failed to have exercised proper supervision over her, or to have shown weakness with her, he may be put out of caste altogether. On the other hand, his action will be approved

if he gives his wife a good thrashing, and he will be held to have acted within his rights if he cuts off her nose on account, or even on suspicion, of misconduct.

The idea of *dharma* or duty, as meaning action in accordance with caste rules, may even, in rare cases, be perverted into a sanction for wickedness. Certainly this is the case with criminal castes, i.e. castes whose hereditary occupation is crime, among whom caste law conflicts with, and prevails over, the general moral law. Crime is regarded as the divinely appointed function of the caste; it is believed that crime is under divine favour and that, if it is not practised, a man will incur divine displeasure and suffer from the divine anger. Criminal castes are known to offer prayers to their special divinity before setting out on expeditions and vow to give it part of the spoil. The Maghaiya Dom of North India draws a circle on the ground to represent his patron goddess and cuts his arm with a knife, uses the blood to daub streaks in the centre of the circle, and prays that he and his gang may have the help of a dark night for their work, may get a rich booty, and may escape detection and capture.

Standing quite apart from the caste is the Guru, who is often a power for good. The Guru is the spiritual preceptor of the family and acts as its religious guide. He may serve only one family

or a number of families; he often is a Brahman, but he may belong to another caste, and he is sometimes a member of one of the ascetic orders. It is his prerogative to initiate boys into religious life, generally while they are of tender years, by informing them what particular deity is to be the special object of their adoration, and by whispering a *mantra* in their ears. This is properly a Vedic text, which is believed to be divinely inspired, but by the great mass of the people it is regarded as merely a spell or charm which will keep off evil influences. The Guru also pays periodical visits to the families in his clientele and gives them moral admonition as well as religious instruction.

A special relationship exists between the Guru and his disciples, for he is the medium between them and God, on which account he is venerated as God's earthly representative. Initiation renders spiritual revelation possible and enables a man to have communion with God; it confers a kind of spiritual franchise. Not all Hindus, however, have a Guru; in the Punjab it is said that the great mass of the peasantry do not even pretend to have one; but owing to the belief that, without initiation, man either cannot or possibly may not obtain salvation, the ceremony is sometimes performed in old age, or even when a man is dying.

Some Gurus are ignorant men whose ministrations are confined to ceremonial acts such as put-

ting sectarian marks on the persons of their disciples and to imparting *mantras* which are generally unintelligible to the latter and possibly also to themselves. Others, however, are really true directors of the consciences of their flock, religious guides, and father confessors. In Madras they exercise a salutary disciplinary control over some castes, for they pass sentence on offenders against social and religious laws, and their sanction has to be obtained to readmission to caste. They have been described as the working clergy of Hinduism, and Mr Crooke is emphatic in praise of them, saying that their influence is exerted in the cause of temperance and morality, that it is almost wholly for good, and that it is a tendency working in the direction of holiness and raising the people above the dead level of indifferentism or actual degradation of thought and action.<sup>1</sup>

Literature also helps to give a sense of moral values and to maintain a healthy ethical standard. The two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, are a means of moral education for millions, teaching moral lessons in concrete terms and illustrating in the lives of heroes and heroines such virtues as truth, love, fidelity, courage and calm resignation. Rama, in particular, is an exemplar of truth, valour, faithfulness and piety, Sita of feminine virtue.

<sup>1</sup> *The North-Western Provinces of India* (1897), p. 254.

Could a group of western women (writes Miss Emerson) name their ideal woman, I wonder. In India the answer would spring instantaneously from a hundred and twenty million Hindu women—Sita. Sita is not merely a legend, but a living force in India. . . . She is the undimmed, unchanged Hindu ideal of womanhood. The epic poetry belongs as much to the illiterate masses as to the scholars of India, and under a village tree or within the mud walls of a humble village home, all the trials and triumphs of life are vividly projected in stories of heroes and heroines, real and imaginary, peopling this ancient land. These furnish a never-ending source of instruction and inspiration.<sup>1</sup>

Besides giving examples of noble lives, the literature of the Hindus is full of lines announcing moral truths and inculcating virtue. According to Max Müller, the whole of their literature, from one end to the other, is pervaded by expressions of love and reverence for truth.<sup>2</sup> In the *Ramayana* Rama, who is himself a pattern of loyal truthfulness, declares "Truth is lord in the world; virtue always rests on truth. All things are founded on truth; nothing is higher than it." The *Mahabharata* has been described as an encyclopaedia of moral teaching, the nature of which may perhaps be judged from a few extracts. "The sum of true righteousness is to treat others as you yourself would be treated. Do

<sup>1</sup> *Voiceless India* (New York, 1930), pp. 374-5 and p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> *India, What can it teach us?* (1892), p. 64.

nothing to your neighbour that you would not have your neighbour do to you hereafter." "It is the constant duty of the good to injure no one by thought, word or deed, to give to others, and to be kind to all." "High-minded men delight in doing good without thought of their own interest. When they confer a benefit on others, they do not count on favours in return." "Fasts, ablutions and austerities are all in vain unless the soul is pure." "Overcome the wicked by goodness."

Other works besides the epics might be mentioned in this connexion, such as lyrical songs in praise of a deity, which lend themselves to devotional emotion and mystical rapture, but at the same time promote the cause of morality by teaching that the deity delights in moral goodness and not merely in ritual. The two great Marathi poets, Namdev and Tukaram, for example, laid special stress on the purification of the heart and on moral elevation as a means to a pure love of God and the attainment of eternal bliss.<sup>1</sup>

There are also some classics which are directly concerned with the enunciation of moral truths. Tamil literature is especially rich in ethical works of this kind, of which the most important are the *Kurral* and the *Naladiyar*. The *Kurral* contains 1330 couplets treating of virtue, wealth and

<sup>1</sup> Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Saivism, and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913), p. 101

pleasure and expressing moral truths in epigrammatic phrases. They are said to be enthroned in the hearts of the people of South India and to be a supreme authority on ethics. They inculcate such virtues as humility, charity and forgiveness of injuries, and contain many passages which are said to be strikingly Christian in spirit. They draw a picture of the ideal householder as courteous in speech, grateful for kindness, just in his dealings, diligent in the discharge of his duties, patient and forbearing in spirit, and charitable to all. "The sum and source of his virtues is love."<sup>1</sup>

The *Naladiyar* consists of 400 quatrains and contains moral epigrams which have become household words among the Tamil-speaking people. It deals mainly with *Karma* but otherwise contains no trace of religion. Pervading it, however, there seem to be, in Dr Pope's words, "a strong sense of moral obligation, an earnest aspiration after righteousness, a fervent and unselfish charity, and generally a loftiness of aim that are very impressive".<sup>2</sup>

Direct moral instruction for the young is conveyed by means of moral and prudential aphorisms. Under the old indigenous system of education in village schools children were taught

<sup>1</sup> Dr G. U. Pope, *The "Sacred" Kurral of Tiruvalluvar-Nayanar* (1886), pp. ii, iv, x.

<sup>2</sup> *The Naladiyar* (1893), p. xi.

moral truths with their alphabet. They had to learn the letters not by such catch-phrases as B stands for bat, C for cat, but by repeating different aphorisms or moral maxims. In the United Provinces alphabetical poems called *barakharis* were used, some of which told the stories of great men and others consisted of moral precepts, e.g. that for D was "Do not blame others; you have only your own action to blame", that for J was "He who prays gets salvation." In the Tamil-speaking districts of Madras simple moral lessons have been taught for many centuries by means of a collection of pithy precepts penned by the poetess Auveiyar (meaning the venerable mother), written alphabetically in the order of the Tamil letters and hence called "the golden alphabet". Examples are: "Serve God"; "Subdue anger"; "Do no wrong thing"; "Speak not enviously"; "Forget not a kindness"; "Do not speak deceitfully"; "Avoid base actions"; "Shrink not from doing good"; "Strive to get to heaven."

A captious critic might say that moral truths learnt by rote in this way have no more effect in moulding conduct than copy-book maxims, but this view seems to overlook the fact that such maxims actually are remembered in after life and help to maintain a certain standard. Few would contest the value of proverbial lore, and in South India, we are told, his treasured ethical stanzas

form the cultivator's rules of life from the day he learnt them in the village school or picked them up from some wandering minstrel.<sup>1</sup>

Hinduism has a highly spiritual side and contains many sublime conceptions, but there are no effectual means for their diffusion. There is practically no systematic religious teaching outside Sanskrit and private schools, which have comparatively few pupils. The instruction given by Gurus is only intermittent, for their visits to the families in their charge are not constant but occasional. For the most part children are dependent on their parents for learning what their religion means. Education used to rest on a religious basis, but for the last fifty years it has been almost exclusively secular in State and aided schools. The change is still deplored by men of an earlier generation, as is evident from a review of educational development in the United Provinces by an Indian officer of the Educational Service, Mr S. N. Chaturvedi. After enumerating the various defects of schools of the old type he declares that they had one great merit, viz. that those who studied in them "felt a living faith in God, which kept them moral and religious". He also shows how his contemporaries, while acknowledging the economic value of a purely secular education, lament its divorce from religion. Vernacular literature, he says, is full of

<sup>1</sup> R. W. Frazer, *Indian Thought Past and Present* (1915),

satirical or open sneers at the new kind of education, which was dubbed the New Light. One proverb was coined which said "With the study of English, humane qualities disappear." Another set forth that fireflies resemble the New Light, for though they flash all around, darkness reigns supreme as ever.<sup>1</sup>

It may reasonably be objected to the view of Indian literature given above that, though it contains much admirable moral teaching and many examples of virtue, it contains numerous examples of vicious conduct, which are found even in the characters of the gods and goddesses. There is much to be said for this argument. The gods are neither the source nor the models of virtue. The general feeling is that they must be powerful, but they need not be moral. Some indeed have little pretension to virtue, and enlightened Hindus have lamented their deficiencies, one, for example, writing "The character of the Hindoo deities is more or less puerile, impure and ungodly, not possessing any of the cardinal virtues."<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly there is an element of lasciviousness and grossness, which is quite unsuitable for youthful minds. This is very noticeable in some dramatic representations, though others, as stated in the preceding chapter, have the triumph of virtue as their moral. To

<sup>1</sup> *History of Rural Education in the United Provinces* (Allahabad, 1930), pp 66, 171-2.

<sup>2</sup> S. C. Bose, *The Hindoos as they are* (1881), p. 302.

quote a significant instance, it is said that the favourite play in one district of Madras is one which relates the amours of a god, and that the story is unfit for publication, but so popular that any child can say what it is.<sup>1</sup>

✓ Many are shocked by what appears to them to be indecent sexualism in popular Hinduism. There is at present a tendency among English writers to stress this aspect of Hinduism, and to mention as a stock instance the representation of the great god Siva by the lingam. There can be no doubt that this was originally a phallic symbol, typifying the generative force, for it represents the male organ and is sometimes combined with an annular representation of the *yoni* or female organ. There is nothing priapic, however, about the worship. The lingam is merely a traditional form of representing the deity, of the original meaning of which few of the worshippers have any conception. It dates back to that early form of religion in which man defies the forces of nature, of which the mystery of generation is one of the most obvious. Its origin is now unknown to all but a comparatively few Hindus, and it is simply a hallowed symbol of the god. There are hundreds of thousands, even among the educated classes, who had no idea that it represented the phallus till they read *Mother*

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Brackenbury, *Cuddapah District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1915), p. 63.

*India*, and who were shocked by the meaning attached to it and inclined to retaliate with *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. The great mass of the worshippers no more connect it with a priapic cult than the Germans connect the swastika<sup>1</sup> with sun-worship.

As regards other indications of sexualism, there is no doubt a certain representation of divine things in a sexual way. This, however, does not necessarily imply either indecency or any glorification of the sexual instinct. The Hindu mind sees nothing shameful or unwholesome in sexual life, which is regarded as a natural function. This view is carried into religion, in which the very gods are married, and there is nothing improper in their personifying male and female energy. Sexualism may even be said to be transformed by its association with religion owing to the mystical meaning given to it. These considerations should be borne in mind before condemning figures and sculptures in temples which *prima facie* are grossly obscene:<sup>2</sup> it would be unjust to ascribe impure motives even to the builders of the temple at Konarak in Orissa, the carvings on which might otherwise be stigma-

<sup>1</sup> The swastika is generally held to symbolize the progress of the sun through the heavens. Hindus use it as a propitious sign and charm against evil.

<sup>2</sup> Obscenity in literature and art is a penal offence, but the Indian Penal Code makes an exception in regard to religious sculptures and paintings.

tized as a riot of pornography in stone. So too with erotic legends and literature, particularly in connexion with the worship of Krishna. Here the tendency to mysticism and emotionalism finds expression in the glorification of the love of Radha and the milkmaids for Krishna, which is taken as an ideal of self-sacrificing devotion. It has been explained by Indian writers that such eroticism is an allegory embodying a spiritual truth. In consequence of social conventions the love of a woman for a stranger involves the surrender of all that the world values and is, therefore, inspired by a spirit of martyrdom such as should animate a religious devotee. Illicit love, consequently, becomes a type of salvation. Allegories of this kind are not intended for translation into human practice, and there are specific warnings against their misapplication.<sup>1</sup> Such a line of thought is not confined to Hinduism. The Sufi mystics also made use of erotic symbolism because they could find no analogy more suggestive of ecstatic devotion, and it will be remembered that early commentators interpreted certain passages in the Song of Solomon as an allegorical representation of the love of the Church or of the individual soul for Christ. In this connexion the explanation given by the greatest English authority on the languages and literature of India may be quoted. Sir George Grierson writes:

<sup>1</sup> See Lord Ronaldshay, *India: A Bird's-eye View* (1924),

We find writers describing the most intimate relations of man and wife with an openness which absolutely prohibits translation; yet no indecent thought entered their minds as they wrote those burning words, and those who would protest, and who often have protested, against employing the images of the lupanar in dealing with the most sacred longings of the soul may be reminded that "Wer den Dichter will verstehen, Muss in Dichters Lande gehen"<sup>1</sup> But these esoteric thoughts were little suited to the common herd and, as the cult has spread among the uneducated, it has too often degenerated into infamous license<sup>2</sup>

And it may be added that, though Krishna in the eyes of the spiritually-minded embodies all that is pure and noble, and there is nothing erotic in their worship of him, coarser natures gloat over the stories of his amours.

As an example of the appalling depth of degradation to which a religion may be dragged by the introduction of sexualism, a brief reference may be made to the practices of a section of the Saktas, a sect in Bengal, whose name is derived from *Sakti*, meaning power or energy, which is descriptive of the consort of a god. They worship the Sakti of Siva as personified in Durga or Kali, and are divided into two sections, the right-hand and the left-hand. The right-hand Saktas offer sacrifices, mostly of goats, to the goddess, to

<sup>1</sup> He who would understand the poet must enter into the poet's land.

<sup>2</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1909), vol. II, p. 422.

whom they attribute qualities of motherly love, and are respectable in life and ritual. The left-hand Saktas, who are a small, possibly a minute, minority, are extremists, whose creed sanctions and even prescribes indulgence, among other things, in wine and women. It is represented that certain things are naturally objects of temptation, and that a man should overcome temptation, not by abstinence from them, but by partaking of them without feelings of desire or self. By a curiously inverted process of thought, enjoyment is to be a means of spiritual discipline. Circles composed of men and women are accordingly formed, of which the members meet in secret, personify Siva and his consort, and indulge in sexual intercourse. A cult of this kind can obviously be both the cause of, and a pretext for, revolting depravity; and few will dispute the truth of Monier-Williams's judgment that in Saktism we are confronted with the worst results of the worst superstitious ideas that have ever disgraced and degraded the human race. Decent-minded Hindus are disgusted by such orgies, and Bengali villagers have been known to attack and break up gatherings suspected of indulging in them.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See M. Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism* (1891), pp. 190-2, and J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1929), pp. 303-5.

## Chapter IV

### WORSHIP AND CEREMONIES<sup>1</sup>

IT is difficult to understand the nature of temple worship unless it is realized in the first instance that a temple is a sanctuary of a god or goddess and not a place of public worship like a church. Divine service consists, not of common prayer, but of ceremonies performed by priests. Worship is not congregational as in Christian churches; the ceremonies are not concerned with the landmarks of a worshipper's life, such as baptisms, marriages and deaths; marriage and funeral rites take place in private houses and not in temples. The temples are in any case not designed for crowds of worshippers, except in South India, where a large temple is not a solitary building but a collection of buildings and courts, some of vast size; one court in the temple of Tiruvallur has an area of 15 acres and another of 5 acres; the outer circuit of the Vishnu temple at Srirangam measures 2 miles. High pylon-shaped towers called *gopurams*, long pillared halls, and great reservoirs for bathing are

<sup>1</sup> This chapter deals with orthodox worship and ceremonies. The worship of godlings and evil spirits will be dealt with in the next chapter.

all included in the grounds of one of these great temples, which are as superior to the great majority of the temples elsewhere as a cathedral is to a country parish church. In North India there are comparatively few temples of any great size. Many are small wayside shrines; in the towns they are often built in between the houses or hidden away in narrow lanes. One temple may contain many shrines, at each of which a worshipper can pay his devotions—the Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar in Orissa, for example, contains over sixty subsidiary shrines and there are even more in some temples in Madras—but in the heart of the temple will be found the adytum or sanctuary of the god to whom it is dedicated.

Vishnu and his incarnations are represented by images and Siva or Mahadeva as a rule by the phallic symbol known as the lingam; there may also be an image of Siva with his consort, the latter appearing with him, because his consort is the *Sakti*, or energy, which is inseparable from him and joins with him to create, sustain, and destroy the phenomenal universe. Both Vishnu and Siva receive simple offerings of fruit, flowers and grain. Animal sacrifices are never made to Vishnu and rarely to Siva, but the goddess Kali is propitiated by sacrifices of goats, which are decapitated. Whatever the Brahmans believe, the mass of the people think that the gods eat, drink, sleep and bathe like human beings; colour

is given to the anthropomorphic idea by offerings of food and drink and by clothing, washing, and anointing images. Ritual is the essence of temple worship, the ceremonies being performed by the priests with set motions, in set words, and at set times. The extent to which anthropomorphism enters into it may be realized from the daily round of ceremonies performed at different hours of the day in the temple of Jagannath at Puri.

It begins with a hymn warning the gods (Jagannath, his brother, and his sister) to leave their couches as the sun is about to rise, and is followed by setting some camphor on fire and waving blazing torches. The gods are then presented with cakes made of rice, flour and water, and a gong is beaten. After this they are supposed to bathe and dress. Bathing is done by proxy, i.e. attendants sit in front of some brass plates, in which the images are reflected, and pretend to clean their teeth and rinse their mouths, and water is poured into brass tubs. The images are dressed and then the gods give audience, i.e. the public are admitted and allowed to see the images and present offerings. Early breakfast follows, i.e. fried rice covered with sugar and clarified butter is put in front of the images. At about 10 a.m. the breakfast proper, which consists of such things as rice, vegetables and cakes, is served, and, when this has been done, betel-nut

is presented for chewing and the clothes on the images are changed (as is also done after other meals). After a midday meal cots are brought and placed before them, so that they may have an imaginary siesta. They enjoy an evening meal at between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m., and an hour or two later are anointed. At midnight they are garlanded from head to foot with wreaths of flowers, and sweet-smelling flowers are put to their noses to smell. Finally they are given a light repast, with music and hymns, and are put to bed, couches being brought and placed before the throne. The whole ritual is based on ideas which are diametrically opposed to the saying of the Psalmist that idols have eyes but see not, ears but hear not, noses but smell not.

The ceremonial rites of Siva at the great temple of Lingaraj at Bhubaneswar are on much the same lines but with certain differences due to the fact that there is no image. The god is represented by a natural block of stone, 8 feet in diameter, rising 8 inches above the ground, and encircled by a stone ring, which represents the *yoni* or female organ. Bells are rung at early dawn to awake the god from sleep and a lamp is waved in front of the stone. The cleaning of his teeth is symbolized by pouring water over the stone and rubbing a stick on it, bathing by pouring water over it, and dressing by putting clothes on it. There is a succession of meals,

which need not be described; there is an afternoon siesta, from which he is woken up by loud strains of music; an afternoon meal is served, after which there are a bath and change of clothes. The stone is draped in costly vestments, and flowers and perfumery are placed on it. Finally, after other offerings of food, a bedstead is brought in and the god has a night's repose.

The worship is much simpler in humbler shrines which have no large staff of priests and may consist mainly of offerings and lavations with the appropriate ritual and prayers at various times of the day. It is common to see a labour-saving device which ensures constant bathing of the lingam. Above it is suspended a pot of water with a small hole or several holes in the bottom, through which the water slowly trickles drop by drop on to the lingam below.

In addition to the daily ceremonies, there are special ceremonies at festivals, when lay worshippers come to the temples in numbers which may be large or small according to the occasion, the locality and the fame of the temple. They take no part in the ceremonies, for the performance of which only the services of the priests as celebrants are required.

Private worship in temples is confined to the offering, by each person separately, of prayers and oblations at the times between the regular ceremonies when the gods give audience to the

public. They may be offered in a spirit of simple devotion or in the hope of getting the help of the god in time of trouble, relief from danger, pain and sickness, or some particular boon like the birth of a son in the case of parents who have hitherto been childless. The worshipper having been admitted to the temple presents to the priest his offering (if he brings one), which may consist of flowers, *ghī* (clarified butter), rice, money or jewels. Its amount or value depends not only on the means of the votary but also on his faith in the power of the god or goddess, as may be judged from a proverb of North India, which declares that the cheapest pulse is a good enough offering for a good-for-nothing goddess. He proceeds to the shrine or sanctuary in which the god is installed, reverently puts his palms together, makes obeisance and murmurs or silently repeats a prayer, which may be one of adoration or a petition for whatever he wants. After this he will probably walk round the shrine, once or scores of times, according to the time at his disposal or the intensity of his faith, circumambulation of a shrine being an act of religious merit; while doing so he is careful to keep the shrine on his right. He again bows down before the idol and receives from the priest some small portion of the offerings made to the idols, such as flowers, rice and sandal-wood powder, and then leaves the temple.

Vows and the presentation of *ex voto* offerings by laymen are an important part of worship both in the temples and at other places of worship. The character of the vows and of the offerings naturally varies according to the needs and means of the suppliants. The objects of the vows are the attainment of cherished desires, like male children, wealth, recovery of health when ill, and escape from epidemic disease. Vows may be made to present offerings to the temple varying from flowers and fruit to rich raiments, money and jewels,<sup>1</sup> to write out the name of the deity hundreds of thousands of times, to undergo a fast, to give a feast to Brahmans, to feed and clothe the poor, to dig wells, and, in the case of the wealthy, to build a temple. Nowhere is there such variety as in South India, where the people seem to combine a blind faith with a singularly fertile imagination.

A vow may be made that, if the desired boon is granted, the votary will make a specified offering, or perform some act of austerity, or take a special part in a forthcoming festival. Childless couples vow that, if they have a son, the ceremony of shaving his head shall take place in a temple; one

<sup>1</sup> The wealth acquired by temples is often very great. Some of it is usually invested in land, the income from which is used for the expenses of the temple staff, ceremonies and festivals. Some of the largest temples have great landed estates and incomes running up to £100,000 a year.

shrine is such a favourite place for the ceremony that the right to the children's hair is sold by auction. If a son has already been born, parents may vow to have his head shaved in the temple if he escapes illness during his infancy. If he is ill, they may promise to present money or jewels to the shrine as soon as he recovers. In return again for the birth of a son, the infant may be weighed against rupees and the latter given to a temple.

The *ex voto* offerings are a very miscellaneous collection, including such things as flags, bells, umbrellas, ornaments, jewellery, and in South India, models and figurines in clay, silver or gold. Those to whom children have been born in answer to prayer give miniature cradles and toy babies, those who have been delivered from pain or sickness models of the parts affected; or there may be complete models of the human figure or lengths of silver wire, five to six feet long, to correspond to the height of the donor; but the commonest are those of parts of the body like ears, noses, eyes, tongues, legs, feet, breasts and private parts. Perhaps the most curious collection of all may be seen at the shrine of a godling named Karuppan in the Madura district, where hundreds of iron chains are suspended on a horizontal bar in fulfilment of vows; the deity is also presented with his favourite weapons, swords, clubs, bill-hooks and spears (some 12 feet

long), mingled with which are miniature cradles presented by women.<sup>1</sup>

Circumambulation of a sacred object, such as a temple, a tree, or even the *tulasi* plant, is not uncommonly undertaken, either as an act of devotion, or in accomplishment of a vow. Women engage, for example, to walk round a temple a certain number of times up to even 100,000, or they may prefer to go round it a fixed number of times, e.g. 108, for a specified number of days. If their physical powers fail them, they may get relatives to complete the required number of rounds. Some men even roll round a temple, as if their bodies were human barrels, thus adding a touch of austerity to their vow. Circumambulation is called *pradakshina*, and when it is performed the votary must keep his right side towards the sacred object. It sometimes takes the form of following the course of a sacred river from its source to the sea (or *vice versa*) and then back again.

Another austerity which may be undergone in fulfilment of a vow, or as an act of religious merit independently of a vow, is to measure one's length all the way to a shrine or place of pilgrimage. The devotee prostrates himself at full length, with arms fully extended, marks the spot reached by his fingers, and then, getting up,

<sup>1</sup> W. Francis, *Madura District Gazetteer* (1905), pp. 85, 284.

toes the mark and prostrates himself again. This goes on time after time till he slowly and gradually arrives at his goal. Cases have been known of men making a long and laborious progress in this way from Benares to Puri, a distance of about 500 miles. It is known as *ashtanga dandvat*, i.e. prostration of the eight members, i.e. the forehead, chest, knees, feet and hands, and colloquially in North India as *bhuinpari*, which means simply falling to the ground.

Vows of other kinds of austerity or self-denial are common and in South India take curious forms. Men may take a vow of silence, or do without salt in their food, or deny themselves the use of their hands while eating, until their prayers are granted. If this is not thought enough, they may go further on the hard path of austerity and brand some part of the body. Some take a vow to dedicate themselves to the deity's service on condition that their prayer is granted; if it is, they brand themselves and live by begging. At Palni in the Madura district some strange exhibitions of self-mortification may be seen, e.g. a small skewer is driven through the middle line of the tongue, which is free from blood-vessels; or devotees have themselves gagged for some days by what is called a "mouth-lock", i.e. a silver band fastened over the mouth.

A form of devotion which has been often described in early books on India is hook-swinging,

the Charak Puja of North India and the "Shirry" (*sidi* and *shedil*) of South India. A man is suspended by hooks like butchers' hooks passed through the muscles of his back and is swung round (like a flying-boat at a fair) at the end of a long pole which revolves on a mast 20 to 40 feet high. If the hooks tear through the muscles, death or serious injury is inevitable, and the practice has therefore long been prohibited by Government on account of the danger to life and limb. In South India the ceremony still goes on in a modified and harmless form, e.g. men have their bodies supported by bands, or a sheep or the effigy of a man is substituted, and the sheep may merely be tied instead of having hooks driven through its flesh. There is, however, a tendency for the people to revert to the forbidden practice. Hook-swinging was indulged in in a remote part of the Bankura district of Bengal at the end of the last century. The account of an eye-witness in the *Indian Methodist Times* of June, 1900, states at least 100 persons (boys, young men and middle-aged men) swung in a day, "many for the mere fun of the thing, others in fulfilment of vows, or because they wished to return thanks for benefits received, and a few out of pure devotion to Siva". The Madras Government is also reported to have found it necessary to issue orders at the end of 1933 to local authorities to prevent both hook-swinging at religious

ceremonies and hook-dragging, i.e. harnessing men by hooks to the heavy temple cars.<sup>1</sup>

Private worship in temples is apt to be expensive and largely on that account is not so common among the poorer classes as it might otherwise be;<sup>2</sup> reports from different parts of the country show that the temples are not regularly frequented, at least by the men, except during festivals. According to Sir Denzil Ibbetson, whose account of the Punjab peasantry still holds good, the villager feeds his Brahman, lets his women worship their gods, and accompanies them to the yearly festival at the local shrine; he will make his offerings to the local godlings, but will not perhaps enter the temple of Vishnu or Siva more than twice a year.<sup>3</sup> Sir Bampfylde Fuller, with wide experience of the Central Provinces and Assam, as well as of the United Provinces, declares that as a general rule men are more concerned with the little rituals of magic that usher in the seasons, and with the

<sup>1</sup> Telegram from Madras published in *The Evening Standard* of 30 December 1933 and in *The Sunday Times* of 31 December 1933. Car processions are a special feature of temple worship in South India. The idols are taken out of the temple grounds in towering cars, which are pulled by men and escorted by musicians and others.

<sup>2</sup> The toiling peasant has to consider ways and means, and there is a proverb of North India that, when rice is cheap, worship is performed in every house.

<sup>3</sup> *Census Report of the Punjab for 1881*, Part I, p. 101.

propitiation of the influences that haunt their village lands, than with the more formal ceremonies of doctrinal religion; but, he adds, all will admit the obligation to undertake a pilgrimage and, where temples exist, women will flock to them with oblations of flowers.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the Andhra or Telugu country in the north of Madras, Bishop Azariah points out that, though the people are nominally Saivas or Vaishnavas, those cults mean little to them, and the cult of village deities means much.

Religious practices are not many, some fast on Sundays and at Ekadasi (the eleventh day after the new moon);<sup>2</sup> often they have an annual village sacrifice, more often only when blessed with a good crop or visited by an epidemic. Sometimes they attend the annual Hindu festival in the neighbourhood. Even when there is a temple in the village itself, they visit it rarely, probably only on the occasion of family events.<sup>3</sup>

In any case the layman does not really require a temple as a place of worship, for worship can be conducted at home, where there is generally a deity enshrined in some way or another. There may be an image in a room set apart for the purpose, or in a niche in one of the walls; a picture

<sup>1</sup> *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment* (1910), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> An orthodox Hindu should fast on this day. The strictest not only fast but abstain from drinking water.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*, N. Macnicol, *The Living Religions of the Indian People* (1934), p. 72.

may be nailed to a wall, or there may be a lingam, or a *salagram* stone, or a *tulasi* (basil) plant in a courtyard. Women very frequently adore a small brass or clay image of Krishna as a baby. Nowadays a doll made in Germany sometimes serves instead of an image. The image is treated as if it was a human baby. It is dressed up in thin clothing for the hot and warm clothing for the cold weather. It is washed, fed, and put to bed in a toy cradle; in some modern well-to-do families a miniature brass bedstead with mosquito curtains takes the place of the old-fashioned cradle.

In Brahman houses members of the family naturally perform the ceremonies necessary for home worship, and, in households which can afford his services, a family priest conducts the daily worship, which is on the same general lines as temple worship. In the morning he wakes the idol (or idols) from sleep, takes it out of its bed, washes it, and dries it with a towel, at the same time repeating prayers and ringing a bell. Having dressed it, he strews flowers over it, puts food before it, and prostrates himself on the ground. In the evening he brings in supper, waves lights before the idol, puts it in its bed, covers it with bedding, and sometimes also hangs mosquito nets round it. If there is no family priest, worship is conducted by members of the family without any particular ritual. If there is no idol,

the *tulasi* plant is watered the first thing in the morning, or water is poured over the lingam, a few flowers are offered and the name of the god is repeated with any prayers or texts the worshipper may happen to know; occasionally also a Brahman may be brought in to read passages from sacred books. Besides these acts of worship there are private devotions, the quantity and quality of which depend on the personal equation. They may consist merely of saying "Ram, Ram" in the morning and evening, or hours may be spent in meditation and prayer. ,

The women are undoubtedly devout, and religion plays a large part in their lives, especially in old age. Those who are no longer capable of active work spend much of the day in prayer and devotions, and, if able to read, in the study of books like the *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata Gita*. Both women and girls go through a number of little ceremonies, which are undertaken voluntarily, and are therefore to be distinguished from regular religious observances. Prayers are offered for such things as a speedy marriage, a good husband, and chastity of heart and conduct, and, after marriage, for the long life and prosperity for the husband. One which is offered in Bengal combines a commination with a prayer. It runs:

May I have a husband like Ram, may I be chaste like Sita, and may my husband be happy. May my co-wife die; may her nose and ears be slit, may I get

a golden bowl. May my husband hate her; may I be his best-beloved. May her path be strewn with thorns; may I have a golden son. May she be my slave while I pass my days in laughter. May I be my husband's darling, may she spend her time in cleaning the dust-bin.

A girl's prayers before marriage are largely directed towards getting a husband. After marriage her husband, according to the tenets of orthodox Hinduism, is to be regarded in the light of a divinity. The Laws of Manu lay down that a husband must constantly be revered as a god by a virtuous wife, that no sacrifice or religious rite is to be permitted to a woman apart from her husband, and that so far only as she honours her lord will she be exalted in heaven.

It is a well-recognized principle that a husband is his wife's Guru, i.e. he is the channel through which she should approach God. She is spiritually dependent on him, and he should be adored as God's earthly representative. This is no mere form of words. The sum and substance of woman's religion, according to Pandita Ramabai, is to look upon her husband as a god, to hope for salvation only through him, to be obedient to him in all things, and also never to covet independence, and never to do anything but that which is approved by law and custom.<sup>1</sup> So, too, Sister Nivedita, describing, and idealizing, the

<sup>1</sup> *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (Philadelphia, 1887), p. 58.

attitude of a wife to her husband, writes in *The Web of Indian Life*:

As a disciple might, she prostrates herself before him, touching his feet with her head. It is not equality. No. But who talks of vulgar equality, asks the Hindu wife, when she may have instead the unspeakable happiness of offering worship.

Mrs Sinclair Stevenson tells us that in Kathiawar a Brahman wife, if she is not pressed for time, may worship the big toe of her husband's right foot when he gets up in the morning by bathing it, marking it with sandal-wood and offering incense, lights, rice, etc., just as if he were a god. A Brahman lady, however, told her that wives nowadays have not time for such acts of reverence. All she herself had time for was to stand at the foot of his bed and tell him to get up. "After that I am far too busy cooking for him to have any time to waste in worshipping him."<sup>1</sup>

The red dot on the forehead of a married woman is supposed to mean that she is dedicated to her lord and master, though among the more progressive it is no more than a conventional ornament. Many women regularly go through the graceful act known as taking the dust of the feet<sup>2</sup> of their husbands the first thing in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Rites of the Twice-born* (1920), pp. 248-9, 251.

<sup>2</sup> This means that the wife touches her husband's feet and then raises her hands to her head in token of homage.

morning as an act of devotion. Even when their husbands have died, some still continue to render them a veneration which is little short of idolatry. Mrs Urquhart mentions two cases of this posthumous reverence. In one a piece of paper or cloth with the imprint of a deceased husband's footprints on it was framed and preserved as an object of devotion amounting to worship. In the second case a widow kept her husband's photograph in a miniature bed and a portion of the wooden clogs he used to wear in another little bed. "These she 'tended' as the household god is tended with flowers, food and water."<sup>1</sup>

A good wife's ideal is to be like Sita, who followed her husband on foot during his fourteen years of exile, or like Savitri, who pleaded with the god of death till he was persuaded to restore her dead husband to life. Her constant prayer and the chief object of her fasts is that her husband may have long life and prosperity, and that she may die before him. "My own Gurudev, I only want your love on earth and your feet to lay on my head when I pass away. That is my one prayer to God",<sup>2</sup> wrote one cultured lady to her husband, and this is a sentiment which finds an echo in countless other hearts. It must not

<sup>1</sup> W. E. S. Holland, *The Goal of India* (1918), p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> G. S. Dutt, *A Woman of India* (1929), p. 56. Gurudev is a compound of Guru, the spiritual teacher or guide, and Deva meaning deity.

be imagined, however, that all wives live up to the ideal standard or that their attitude towards their husbands is invariably one of reverence and meek submission. Practice often lags behind precept, and there are masterful women, shrews, and viragoes in India, as in other countries; indeed, there is a proverb of North India which says that a man does not make public his defeat or the thrashing he received from his wife.

Besides temple and domestic worship, there are some forms of worship which may be described as corporate or congregational. A form of devotion associated with the worship of Krishna is that known as *Kirtan* or *Sankirtan*, meaning united singing. It consists of services of sacred song, either at a meeting or in a procession, often led by professional singers and accompanied by music, the assembled worshippers joining in chorus to glorify the god of their adoration and to chant his praises. In West India this form of worship is practised by worshippers of Vithoba, who is identified with Krishna, hundreds of men and women singing together the lyrical verses in his praise composed by the Marathi poet-saints. In Bengal, where Chaitanya enjoined this method of worship for the expression of devotion, services of sacred song are very popular among his followers, who are moved to a high degree of emotion and rapture by devotional singing; a whole night may be spent in this form of devotion.

In this province there are Vaishnava associations called *Hari Sabhas*, of which the object is spiritual development by means of *bhakti* or fervent love of God. Meetings are held once a week either in a building erected for the purpose or at the house of one of the members. Here the conception of a divine personality is brought home to the assembled people both by the reading of sacred books and the singing of sacred songs. A Pandit is engaged to read and explain sacred books, and parties of singers are hired to sing hymns in honour of Vishnu in one or other of his incarnations. The worship is very different from that of temple services, where the priest is the sole celebrant and the people merely look on. It is also different from domestic worship, which is confined to the members of a family, for the meeting-house is a place where all may join in devotional exercises, and the worship is not that of separate individuals or families but of a united congregation.

(The domestic ceremonies connected with births, deaths and marriages are of more importance in popular estimation than temple or domestic worship, and they are certainly observed more generally. A man may neglect the worship of the gods, but he will not neglect the ceremonies on which his status as a Hindu and a member of his caste depend. For the twice-born castes the most essential is the *upanayan* or

investiture with the sacred thread, which takes place in a boy's eighth, eleventh or twelfth year according to his caste. This marks a boy's assumption of religious responsibilities and is the spiritual birth which makes him twice-born, his first being, of course, the physical birth. Till it takes place he is a mere child, without responsibilities, and is not bound by caste restrictions. After it has been performed he can enter upon the duties enjoined by his religion and participate in worship. For this reason it has been compared with the Christian ceremony of confirmation. At the same time it is held to confer on the boy the responsibilities imposed by his caste and to be an essential preliminary to marriage.

Women undergo no such ceremony or indeed any other ceremony in which Vedic texts are used, except marriage. Marriage is, therefore, said to be their only sacrament. This exception to the general rule is presumably due to their having to participate in it with their husbands; as stated above, it is laid down that a woman may take part in no ceremony without her husband. A woman may be said to attain her religious rights on marriage and to retain them only while she is married, for, among other disabilities, a widow is not permitted to join in religious ceremonies and festivals with married women. The numerous low castes which are grouped together under the general name of Sudras have no right

to the sacred thread, and consequently go through no ceremony of investiture. Like women too they are debarred from all other ceremonies involving the use of Vedic texts, except marriage.

Other ceremonies may be mentioned briefly, beginning with the worship, as practised in Bengal, of the tutelary goddess of young children and of women at the time of child-birth. She is known as Shashthi, which means the goddess of the sixth, as she is worshipped on the sixth day after the birth of a child. She is represented by a compost of cow dung or earth in which some cowries are stuck. This is placed in the lying-in room together with a pot of water and some leaves of the mango tree, and is worshipped by the family. It is believed that during the night the destiny of the child is written on its forehead. A pen and inkpot (or the more ancient iron stylus and palm leaves) are accordingly placed at the door ready for use.

The naming of a boy is the occasion of another ceremony called *namakaran*. In addition to the name by which he is known to the world at large, he is given a secret name which is known only to his father and Guru. The idea is that this is his real name, which could be used to his hurt by means of magic; if therefore it is not known by the outside world, he is safe from the machinations of sorcerers and witches. A fictitious name is also entered in his horoscope, which contains

the initial or another letter of the name of the constellation dominant at the time of his birth; consequently it is sometimes called the astrological name.

About six months after birth the *annaprasan* or rice-feeding ceremony takes place, i.e. the child is given a few grains of consecrated rice, and the men belonging to his caste are entertained at a feast. This is supposed to mark the initiation of a boy into caste, his admission to it being typified by the common meal; but, so far as I have been able to ascertain from enquiries made in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, most Hindus in North India have no idea of this meaning, and take the common-sense view that a boy cannot be said to be initiated into caste until he is old enough to understand what he may and may not do.

Other ceremonies connected with a boy's early years are those of ear-boring (*karnaveda*) and hair-cutting (*churakarna*), which in the case of the twice-born castes are performed at the same time that he is invested with the sacred thread. The erudite explain that the boring of the ears will protect a boy from demons and evil spirits, but the unlearned seem to attach no special meaning to it. They look on it simply as a preliminary to marriage, the ceremony of which usually takes place before adult age is reached; some go so far as to say that a boy cannot be

married until his ears have been bored. This ceremony is falling into disuse in Bengal among some castes, which, instead of having the ears pierced by a needle, merely have them touched with an instrument at the time of the marriage ceremony.

The tonsure or hair-cutting ceremony (*churakaran*) means the shaving of the head, leaving only the tuft of hair, a top-knot, which is called variously the *chura*, *choti*, *tik* and *shikha* in North India, *kudumi* (in Tamil), and *shendi* (in Marathi). It is supposed to remove impurities contracted in the womb, before the child had any conscious existence, but this idea is caviare to the general. Some think that it is a purely hygienic measure, or that it is intended to keep the head cool. Whatever may be thought of the object of the ceremony, there is no doubt as to the meaning of the tuft. This is universally recognized as the distinctive mark of a Hindu; religious devotees, being above all ordinary rules, are alone entitled to shave their heads completely.

In Bengal many educated men cut off the top-knot altogether. A certain number, reluctant to cut it off, and unwilling to let it be conspicuous, compromise by keeping a thin lock or wisp of hair, which they brush down when they do not want it to show. When, however, they are in orthodox company, they do their best to let it be seen, and for this purpose some put an umbrella band round it. This practice sometimes

leads to misunderstanding. A learned Bengali Brahman friend of mine, who had given up wearing a top-knot, but began growing it again, because he had occasion to travel in places where he would be among orthodox Brahmans, told me of two experiences he had which illustrate popular ideas. On one occasion he was visiting a school for young Brahmans in Bihar, and they stopped reciting the sacred texts under the impression that he was a non-Hindu and therefore impure. He could only satisfy them by showing his sacred thread as well as his small top-knot. Afterwards he overheard two boys quarrelling, one of whom said to the other, "You are no better than a Bengali. Your top-knot is so short." On another occasion he took refuge from some rain in the portico of a temple in Madras and bowed down to the image. Some boys exclaimed, "Look! There is a Muslim bowing to the image." On his asking why they took him for a Muslim they replied, "Because you keep your hair on your head", and he had to show his top-knot to prove that he was really a Hindu.

Although esoteric reasons are given by Brahmans for the ceremonies just mentioned, the general public seem to be unaware of them and go through the ceremonies as a matter of course. Some perform them in a religious spirit, but the majority seem to regard them more as social conventions, as customs sanctified by age. There is,

however, no doubt about the meaning of marriage and death ceremonies. Marriage is not merely a social but a religious duty, incumbent on all Hindus. The *sraddhas* or death ceremonies are equally obligatory, for on them depends the salvation, not only of a man's soul, but also of those of his ancestors. Even when a man is dying steps have to be taken to prevent his becoming an evil spirit. It is believed that if he dies in his bed between earth and sky, a region haunted by evil spirits, he may become one of them. He is therefore taken out of his cot or bed and placed on the floor if the room has an earthen floor, and otherwise on a plot of earth brought into his room from outside and plastered with cow-dung. The ceremonies after death are designed to appease the spirit, to give it a tenement, and to prevent it being charged with potentialities for evil, and they seem to combine the primitive idea of a ghost which must be fed with the more advanced idea of metempsychosis.

It is thought that after the burning of the body the spirit becomes a homeless ghost, moving round its old haunts, miserable, desolate and impure. To soothe it and provide it with some corporeal substance, the son makes offerings of *pindas*, i.e. balls made of rice, flour, etc., which are often called funeral cakes. These are offered for ten days, during which it is thought that a body is built up for the spirit with arms, legs,

hands, feet, and finally a head. The offerings should be repeated once a month for a year, at the end of which there is a culminating ceremony together with a feast given to Brahmans and relatives. The spirit is then held to be no longer impure and is regarded in the light of a Deva or deity. Inferentially, as is pointed out by Monier-Williams, a *śraddha* is not merely a funeral ceremony, but a worship of deceased ancestors differing, however, in nature from the worship of the gods.<sup>1</sup> The offerings are repeated on anniversaries of the day of death in the belief that they facilitate the passage of the soul through an intermediate heaven or hell to rebirths, and eventually release from them. If, however, the death of a man occurs when he is away from home and the relatives do not hear of it, and consequently omit the funeral rites, his spirit becomes a wandering ghost seeking revenge for its misery.

Various superstitions are connected with these ceremonies. In North India, a pot filled with water, and with a small hole bored in the bottom to allow the water to drip out, is hung on a *pipal* tree, in order that the departed soul may be able to quench its thirst. Both there and in West India balls of rice are put out for crows to eat on the twelfth day after death, and it is believed that if they are not eaten, the spirit wanders about in misery. In Kathiawar every Hindu from the

<sup>1</sup> *Hinduism* (1877), p. 67.

highest Brahman to the lowest sweeper is said to make offerings to crows in this way; it is only when the crows have eaten them that the women have any assurance that the spirit is happy.<sup>1</sup> To get over the difficulty which arises if no crow appears, a *deux ex machina* is often provided. An imitation crow is made of grass and the ball of rice is touched with it. In Bombay on the anniversary of the father's death none of the animals belonging to the family is worked for fear that his soul may be reincarnated in one of them. On the other hand, in Bengal many believe that a man's soul is reincarnated in a child born in the family within a year of his death; till the expiry of this period his spirit wanders restlessly, seeking for a tenement.

Other important kinds of ceremonies are those connected with agriculture and with new departures such as building a house, planting a tree, and excavating a water reservoir. The latter are only occasional, the former periodical, i.e. they are performed at regular intervals according to the agricultural seasons, e.g. at times of ploughing, sowing and reaping. They differ from place to place, but their object is nearly always the same, viz. to drive away evil spirits and ensure fertility; the ceremonies connected with reaping are different, as they are in the nature of a harvest thanksgiving. Some of the rites practised are

<sup>1</sup> S. Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-born* (1920), p. 188.

merely mimetic magic. A man, for instance, who is anxious to get a good cotton crop pulls out the fibre from his best bolls and tweezes it out to make it as long as possible. He and other members of his family then fill their mouths with grains of rice and blow them out as far as they can. The idea is simply that the cotton will grow as widely as the scattered grains and yield fibre as long as that which the man has picked out.

It has been said that in the tropics the festivals of a people are the religious life of a people;<sup>1</sup> and it is certainly true that nothing serves so much to make Hinduism a living religion to the masses as the series of religious festivals which take place month after month throughout the year, even though they are often ignorant of their precise religious significance. The male portion of the population is readier to observe those festivals which are enlivened by feasts than those which involve fasts. Fasting appeals less to them than communal rejoicing and junketing. Their ordinary life is so humdrum that they welcome any fête that will enliven it. The times of the great festivals may be regarded as times of general worship—so much so that the days on which they are held are recognized by the provincial governments as public holidays, on which the law-courts and public offices are closed. Some are general throughout India, others are only local,

<sup>1</sup> Sir W. W. Hunter, *The India of the Queen* (1903), p. 35.

and there are, consequently, great variations in different parts. The Bengal Government, for example, declares 23 days (including Sundays), and the Punjab Government only 10 days, as public holidays on account of Hindu festivals. In the south of India, in addition to general festivals, there is a long list of special and local festivals. It has been estimated that in Travancore their due and full observance would occupy from 35 to 60 days.

Owing to local variations a list of festivals would be long and tedious without being complete, and only a few will be mentioned in order to illustrate the different forms which worship takes. One common type involves bathing in order to obtain ceremonial purification or remission of sins committed in this life and in previous lives; hundreds of thousands may be seen bathing together when festivals of this kind take place. At other festivals the people are spectators as, for instance, at the well-known Car Festival of Jagannath and at the Snan Jatra, when the image of Jagannath is taken out from the shrine and bathed in the sight of his votaries. The crowds on such occasions vary according to the locality. At Puri the Car Festival attracts vast multitudes running, in some years, into hundreds of thousands; in the towns of Bengal and Orissa there may be thousands or scores of thousands, and in the villages a few hundreds.

A festival may also be celebrated at home, e.g. Sivaratri, of which the main features are fasting, a vigil and worship of the lingam, and the Sarasvati Puja or festival of the goddess of learning, when pens, ink, books and paper are worshipped.

Another festival of North India is Divali, which is perhaps the most picturesque of all. It has been called the Festival of Lamps, as lamps are lit to scare away evil spirits from the houses. The effect is extremely striking in a town in which hundreds of thousands of little lamps are lit on the walls, parapets, doors and windows of houses, and show every line of them—an Indian form of flood-lighting—or when little rafts are launched on a river, each bearing a lamp or cluster of lamps. They float away down stream, and the people on the bank watch them anxiously to see how far they will go, auguring good or bad fortune from the distance they reach before being extinguished. The most popular in North India is the Holi, which is a time of hilarity and horseplay. The roads and streets are filled with men throwing red powder on one another and singing lewd songs: obscenity is supposed to drive away devils or evil spirits. Whatever may have been the original object of the festival, it has no devotional meaning to the masses, who regard it merely as a jolly holiday.

In addition to the fixed periodical festivals there are festivals for special contingencies, such

as eclipses, which are an occasion for bathing and invocations by Brahmans. The knowledge of science has not spread sufficiently to discredit the idea that the sun or moon is being swallowed by a dragon. The masses believe that the old-established ceremonies have to be observed to save the heavenly luminary from being devoured, and resort to the beating of drums and blowing of horns to drive the demon away. Insistence on the maintenance of traditional rites is found even in quarters where it would least be expected. Dr R. P. Paranjpye, who was at one time Principal and Professor of Mathematics at the Fergusson College in Poona, and afterwards Minister of Education in Bombay and a Member of the India Council, writes:

I myself was violently attacked in Indian papers because, as the head of a college, I refused to give the students a holiday to allow them to carry out ceremonial purification during an eclipse, the real cause of which it was my duty to teach them in my classes. The outcry arose not because the editors of the papers did not intellectually accept the scientific explanation, but solely because I refused to conform in practice to current superstitions.<sup>1</sup>

It remains to mention the pilgrimages to many places of special sanctity. Visits are made to them throughout the year, while special festivals may

<sup>1</sup> *The Crux of the Indian Problem* (1931), pp. 58-9.

attract hundreds of thousands, or a million or more, e.g. the Magh and Kumbh<sup>1</sup> Melas, the great bathing festivals held at the junction of the Ganges and Jamuna at Allahabad (Prayag). The numbers of the pilgrims are swollen by the increased facilities for travel afforded by the railways, and there is now little of the hardship and danger of the route overland, including the danger of epidemic disease, particularly cholera. A century before by-pass roads were thought of in England, they were made round towns in Bengal to save them from infection by the cholera-stricken bands of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Jagannath at Puri.

The pilgrims going to Amarnath in Kashmir still, however, know when they start that they may never return. Their objective is a cave in a mountain, which is the dwelling place of Siva. It is 13,000 feet above sea-level and the springs it contains freeze into blocks of ice, which are believed to be lingams of the god. To reach it the pilgrim has eight days' marching, and the later stages are of appalling difficulty to all but the strong and able-bodied. There is a succession of steep ascents and descents, a river and several

<sup>1</sup> This festival is held every three years at Hardwar, Allahabad, Nasik, and Ujain in rotation, so that it is held at the same place once every twelve years. It goes on for a month, and over three millions have been known to attend it at Allahabad.

torrents have to be forded, a precipitous ridge has to be crossed in bitter cold. And yet the procession of pilgrims, which may be some miles long, including men and women, young children, and the sick and ailing, struggles on, often ankle-deep in mud, panting for breath, but upborne by fervent faith and the feeling that the greater the suffering, the greater is the merit. It is not surprising that the death roll is sometimes heavy. A few years ago 500 out of 12,000 pilgrims died, and their bodies had to be carried for five miles before wood could be got for their cremation.

Worship at the pilgrimages may be individual or general. Multitudes may assemble on such occasions as bathing festivals or the great Car Festival at Puri, or single persons, families or parties may set out separately. In some places the offering must be made individually as, for instance, at Gaya, where each pilgrim makes separate offerings for the souls of his ancestors in the sure and certain belief that, wherever they may be, they will be translated immediately to the heaven of Vishnu.<sup>1</sup> It must not be imagined that pilgrimages are always the spontaneous outcome of religious fervour. On the contrary, there is a commercial aspect to them. The local priests live on the fees and offerings of pilgrims, and have a regular business organization. The priests

<sup>1</sup> A man or woman who dies at Benares, on the other hand, is immediately translated to the heaven of Siva.

of Puri have divided among themselves the whole of India, each having his own exclusive sphere of influence, in which he has a monopoly of pilgrims, and there is an organized system of pilgrim guides. Two or three months before the chief festivals take place they depute agents to travel through the circles allotted to each and recruit pilgrims. These men go to the different towns and villages, painting in lively colours the benefits to be derived from pilgrimage, such as the immediate remission of sins committed in the past and the salvation of the soul; and when sufficient numbers have been got together, they escort them to the holy town.

The Gayawals, or pilgrim priests of Gaya, have a similar system. Different parts of India are parcelled out among the different families, and the Gayawals keep up registers in which the names of pilgrims and their villages are carefully entered. Paid servants are sent to each to collect pilgrims, as well as any arrears due to their masters. A certain number are also recruited by professional pilgrim-hunters, who work on a system of commission, receiving a certain proportion of the amount paid to the Gayawal by each pilgrim recruited by them. There is considerable competition for unattached pilgrims, i.e. for pilgrims who have come independently either because they have no hereditary priest or because they come for the first time without being pledged to engage the services, and pay the fees,

of any particular priest. They are met at the railway station by touts and servants of the Gayawals, who clamorously press their masters' claims to their patronage, not without a good deal of quarrelling, which sometimes comes to blows. The same thing happens at other places, where there are large numbers of touts, paid by commission, who swoop down like harpies on casual pilgrims. At Allahabad much touting is said to be done by an inferior class of priests called Prayagwals, "notorious for their turbulence and pugnacity and more distinguished for their skill in getting hold of the cash of the faithful than for their piety".<sup>1</sup>

The railway administrations also help to popularize pilgrimages, for carefully prepared propaganda, printed in the vernacular languages, is broadcast, setting out the great merit earned by pilgrimage and the facilities offered by the railways. In 1932 a special pilgrim train, in which the passengers lived and slept, went all over India, visiting dozens of places of pilgrimages.<sup>2</sup> A recent development of commercial enterprise is the construction of an aerodrome at a height of over 10,000 feet in the Himalayas to enable pilgrims to travel by air to the shrine of Badrinath in Garhwal. ✓

<sup>1</sup> Sir C. Walsh, *Indian Village Crimes* (1929), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Mitchell, *Wheels of Ind* (1934), pp. 268-9, 312-13.

## Chapter V

### GODLINGS AND EVIL SPIRITS<sup>1</sup>

POPULAR Hinduism is a mixture of Brahmanical doctrines and animistic beliefs, and the position which either hold in the religion of the masses in any particular area depends on the extent to which Brahmanical influence has spread and established itself. The cult of godlings and evil spirits, which is closely associated with animistic beliefs, is one which draws most of its votaries from the lower castes, particularly those of Dravidian origin, from which the Brahman has held aloof. The higher we go in the social scale, the more does Brahmanical worship prevail.

The cult is found in the villages throughout India, but nowhere is it so popular as it is in South India, where Brahmanism was introduced far later than in the north and where it never succeeded in obtaining the same hold on the masses.

In the matter of religion, the mass of the people of

<sup>1</sup> This chapter would be incomplete if it did not mention *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926) by W. Crooke, *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India* (1912) by E. Thurston, *The Village Gods of South India* (1916) by Bishop H. Whitehead, and *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924) by R. E. Enthoven, which contain a mass of information about popular beliefs and practices in the north, south, and west of India.

Southern India may be said to have been always Dravidian, Aryan Hinduism being a mere veneer. The great temples are, of course, dedicated to Aryan gods, but the people seldom visit them except on festival days. The religion of their daily life has always been, as it is at the present day, that of their forefathers, namely, worship of local deities and of patron gods and goddesses with propitiation of demons; praying to the former for temporal blessings, and averting the anger of the latter by sacrifices and offerings. Trees are supposed to be inhabited by demons, and serpent worship is prevalent. The worship of Siva is practically confined to the upper classes <sup>1</sup>

The non-Brahmanical nature of the worship is apparent from many of its features. The persons who officiate at it are nearly always members of the low castes and not Brahmans. The general attitude of the Brahmans towards it is one of acquiescence; they do not actually approve of it, but neither do they oppose it. In South India, however, even the Brahmans are not altogether immune from infection by the popular faith. Though they do not join in the worship, they will in some places send someone else with offerings if anything happens, or is likely to happen, to them in which the powers of the godlings or evil spirits are likely to be of help. Their offerings consist of grain or fruit, for they draw the line at providing animals for sacrifice. Individual Brah-

<sup>1</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1909), vol. II, pp. 322-3.

mans are also not above attending festivals, and some have been known to act as priests, though they will not make blood offerings. As a kind of compromise a Brahman sometimes consecrates the sacrificial knife.

Another feature which indicates the non-Brahmanical character of the cult is that the godlings and evil spirits are propitiated by blood offerings. They receive, it is true, offerings of grain, fruit and flowers, but the most potent offering, the one which has special virtue, is the sacrifice of an animal or of many animals—buffaloes, sheep, goats, fowls and pigs, of which the last two are particularly abhorrent to an orthodox Hindu. Further, they are represented in a number of ways unknown to orthodox Hinduism, e.g. by little clay mounds, trees, which are not necessarily sacred trees like the banyan, stones, and wooden stocks. In Berar there is a godling called the god of tatters, as he is represented solely and entirely by rags tied to the branches of trees.

Even though there is no image, the anthropomorphic ideas of the people manage to find expression, for they put out crude clay figurines of horses and elephants for the godling to ride on, a kind of cat's cradle, made of wool or thread wound on a small bamboo frame, to serve as his carriage, and occasionally clogs or sandals for the feet. Sometimes there is a roughly wrought image: thus, in Bengal, the godling who wards

off the attacks of tigers has an image crudely fashioned in the form of a man riding a tiger. In the Punjab Hills, where the godlings are represented by rough stones, they are given the semblance of a human shape at certain times of the year. A metal mask is placed on the top of a pole, over which a dress is draped. The figure thus roughly formed is placed in a chair and taken round to visit the other deities or to private houses where it is feasted in fulfilment of vows.

The shrines, if so they may be called, vary enormously. The godlings may be housed in brick buildings or rude huts, or they may be out in the open without protection from the weather. In Purnea, in North Bihar, the abode of the most popular godling, who rejoices in the high-sounding name of Devata Maharaj, is marked by a bamboo stuck in the ground, from which are suspended an old winnowing basket, an old fishing net and hook, and a bow. In Bengal many rural gods are conceived of as immanent in a water-pot; this is their only habitation. In South India godlings may have shrines equal in size to the village temples dedicated to the orthodox gods, but this is an exceptional honour. Their presence may be indicated merely by an unenclosed clearing in which a spear is stuck in the ground, or a platform under a tree, a block or slab of stone, either plain or roughly carved, or simply a stone or brick with a trident

in front of it. If there is neither an image nor a shrine, a clay image may be made and a booth set up to serve as a temporary shrine at a festival.

The worship of godlings and evil spirits may be considered to have two sides, which have been aptly described as "spirit scaring" and "spirit squaring".<sup>1</sup> In the one case a spirit has to be driven away so that *man may be safe from its attacks*; in the other it has to be propitiated, or, if it is an uneasy wandering spirit looking for a home, it has to be appeased by finding one for it. Traces of both ideas may be seen in orthodox Hinduism. For instance, the lighting of lamps at the Divali festival is intended to scare away evil spirits, and one object of *sraddha* ceremonies, as shown in the last chapter, is to appease the uneasy spirit and provide it with a body.

The general idea, however, of orthodox Hinduism is that the gods will drive away the evil spirits which roam about the world and will protect their votaries against their attacks. Various methods are adopted by orthodox Hindus to enlist the help of the gods. These may be illustrated by practices prevalent in a typical district of North Bengal. There it is said that ghosts and demons may be prevented from haunting persons and places by performing *sraddha* ceremonies at Gaya—a purely orthodox belief. It is believed

<sup>1</sup> See R. E. Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924), p. 14.

that cases of possession by evil spirits have diminished in number since the railway has given greater facilities for travel to Gaya and the consequent performance of rites there.<sup>1</sup> Evil spirits can be driven away by a direct appeal to the gods, e.g. by offerings to Vishnu, Siva and Kali, and by singing hymns in honour of Vishnu and his incarnation as Rama. At child-birth the name of Rama is written on the door of the lying-in room, to prevent evil spirits entering it and harming the mother and child; it is repeated by those who carry a corpse to the funeral pyre to prevent any evil spirit from taking possession of the body; and a man is well advised, for his own safety, to repeat it if he is frightened at night by something which he takes to be an apparition, or if he goes by a place which is known to be haunted.

The use of amulets, talismans and charms to scare away evil spirits is general. The amulet may be a figure of a god or goddess on a little plaque or medallion, or it may be a bit of paper or bark or

<sup>1</sup> Much the same statement was made to Monier-Williams in 1876: "I heard it remarked not long ago by a Pandit that ghosts are much less common in India than formerly, and, on my inquiring the reason, was told that communication was now so rapid that few die without their deaths becoming known and without having funeral rites performed very soon afterwards. Besides, he added, it is now so easy to reach Gaya by rail and by good carriage roads" (*Modern India and the Indians* (1878), p. 72).

a leaf, with a charm written on it, which is consecrated by reciting *mantras* or holy texts over it. It is worn in a little case of copper, silver, or gold, which is generally tied round the arm or suspended from the neck, and renders the wearer immune from attacks by evil spirits. Other articles used as charms are a coil of thread, or a tuft of hair, or a cowry, or the roots and leaves of medicinal plants. Some of the last are gathered by a nude woman, who has her hair hanging loose; plants growing on graves or the places used for cremation are preferred.

The scaring of evil spirits is especially common at the time of child-birth, even among the orthodox. The methods in use are many and depend on individual taste. The skull of a cow smeared with vermilion, with cowries stuck in the hollow sockets of the eyes or with a red rag stretched across the horns, is put up on the wall of the lying-in room. A cow's horn or the skull of a dog may be burnt. Old shoes (a most insulting form of greeting), bits of fishing nets (to catch an unwary spiritual visitant), and thorny twigs (to make a difficult barrier) may be suspended over the door. Iron has great virtue; so a sword, spear or other iron implement is stuck up at the door, or a sword or sickle put under the bed, or an assortment of articles like a hoe or mattock, a harrow, and an axe is hung up over the door. Drums are also beaten in order to make a deafen-

ing and alarming noise and the father may fire off a gun.

A figurative form of driving away evil spirits is practised in a district of North Bihar, when a new water reservoir has been excavated. Milk from animals of different kinds is mixed and drunk by a man, who then takes to his heels, pursued by the villagers, who pelt him with clods of earth until he is outside the village boundary.

Other examples of spirit scaring might be multiplied. One has only to pass through a village and the surrounding fields to see them. Designs and figures are painted on the walls of houses to scare the evil spirits; the fact that the figure of an English soldier, in an antiquated uniform, is often one of them may perhaps be taken as a compliment. In the fields one comes across what seem to be scarecrows, such as old pots on sticks, or stones painted red, and it will be found that they are intended to drive away evil spirits. In some parts scarecrows of this kind are almost universal; in Malabar, for example, it is said that every new house has a grotesque wooden figure, usually indecent, and every crop a bogey.<sup>1</sup>

As typical examples, on the other hand, of spirit squaring, mention may be made of some practices found in Madras, which result in the

<sup>1</sup> *District Gazetteer of Malabar and Anjengo* (Madras, 1908), p. 157.

wandering spirits of deceased members of a family being made family deities. It may be the spirit of one who has met a violent death or has died before marriage with unfulfilled desires. The fact that it is a wandering spirit, whose proclivities are dangerous unless it is given a home, is known either from a series of misfortunes in the house, or from the spirit appearing in a dream to one of the family. After consultation with the local soothsayer, who obtains auguries, e.g. by noticing the way a lizard chirps, the spirit is invited to come to the house and entreated to make its abode there. It enters into one of the family and announces through his lips where it would like to stay. A stone or platform is erected at the place indicated and receives periodical worship from the household.<sup>1</sup> Another example of spirit squaring may be taken from the district of Purnea. There offerings of sugar, spices, bread and flowers are made to trees which are haunted by evil spirits. At the end of each month they are collected and heaped up in an earthen pot, which is placed at the nearest cross-roads outside the village. In this way the evil spirits are induced to leave the village. It is further believed that, if anyone is foolish enough to touch the pot, the spirits will attach themselves to him, and that he will be possessed by them.

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Hemingway, *Trichinopoly District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1907), p. 90.

In addition to spirit scaring and spirit squaring, there is a species of hoodwinking of the spirits, a kind of "devil-dodging". This is commonly practised in order to protect children from their attacks, especially when parents have already lost children, and only one is left. Various expedients are resorted to to throw dust in the eyes of the spirits and to avert the evil eye. The child may be sent round the village in a dust-pan or be dressed in rags or in clothes begged from friends; or, if a boy, he may be put into girl's clothes and called by a girl's name; or the child may be given an opprobrious or depreciatory name, in order to make the spirits believe that he or she is of no value and not worth attacking. Common examples of such vilifying names are Half-cowry, Three Cowries, Five Cowries, Dung-heap, Broomstick, Pot, Rubbish, Dirt and Lord of Refuse.

In Orissa there are symbolical sales of children in order to save them from a premature death. They are handed over to a low-caste woman, who returns them after anointing them; after this they are given the name of the caste to which the woman belongs, however low it may be. The transfer of the children and their new names are obviously another case of make-believe, but the current explanation is that the child's mother must have committed some wickedness in a previous death, which will be punished by the

child's death, and the low-caste woman becomes the scapegoat.

The village godling (*grama-devata* or *grama-devati*), who may be male or female, is regarded as a tutelary deity of the village, and as well-disposed towards the inhabitants if duly propitiated, but ill-disposed if neglected, i.e. if left without worship or offerings. Nearly every village has its own godling, who is known by a separate name, and his or her jurisdiction is purely local, not extending beyond the village boundaries. The worship may be illustrated by the practices prevalent in Orissa, where the people are devout votaries of Vishnu and keep up the observances of orthodox Hinduism, but at the same time regularly pay homage to the village goddesses. Their position, though unorthodox, is so well recognized that their priests, all low-caste men, have rent-free holdings set apart for them, on the produce of which they subsist aided by the contributions of the villagers. The godling is usually represented by an undressed piece of stone, which is smeared with the sacred colour, vermilion, and is surrounded by smaller pieces of stone, also shapeless and daubed with red, which represent her children. Occasionally, too, the godling is represented by a carved image or a tree, of which the trunk is smeared with the customary red.

The worship of the godling is conducted regu-

larly, Thursday being a particularly auspicious day, and it is obviously an imitation of that of Vishnu. The stone is bathed, the explanation being that the bath keeps the godling cool and good-tempered; it is smeared with *ghī* (clarified butter) and turmeric; after this, vermilion is applied and fruit and sweetmeats are offered as the godling's food. Special worship takes place on special occasions such as festivals and invariably when there is any epidemic disease about. Each village goddess is believed to be a guardian of the village, and epidemics are due to outside goddesses or spirits. It is her part, therefore, to keep them away from the village or to expel them by any means, gentle or severe, forcible or persuasive, that she may choose to adopt. It will be noticed that the offerings already mentioned are bloodless, as in Vaishnavism, a factor which is due to the local popularity of that faith, but animals and fowls are sacrificed during the Durga Puja and in fulfilment of vows. Some village godlings, however, never receive sacrifices, even on occasions such as these, and the name of "followers of Vishnu" is given to them in consequence.

To ascertain the wishes of the village goddess resort is had, especially during epidemics, to a medium, who may be either male or female. This person bathes in order to purify himself, puts on new clothes, rubs his forehead with vermilion,

and stands in front of the stone representing the goddess. With his hair dishevelled and with two canes in his hands, he sways to and fro, and after a time trembles convulsively as he becomes inspired. He then predicts the future, foretelling good or bad fortune, and indicates what must be done to propitiate the goddess. During this performance he is sometimes given a fowl, of which he pulls off the head and drinks the blood.<sup>1</sup>

The guardian deity of villages in Madras is not a female but a male, named Aiyandar, who, in many places, has his sanctuary in a sacred grove outside the village. This is a hallowed spot and it is sacrilege to remove a leaf or break off a twig, so that the trees often grow into an impenetrable thicket. As guardian of the village he rides the marches every night, driving away evil spirits, and figures of elephants, horses and tigers are provided for him to ride on. These are not the tiny figurines common in North India but are really imposing figures. They often cost quite a large sum of money, for some are made of wood or stone, or brick and chunam painted over, and rise to a height of 20 feet; even the humbler figures made of clay stand 8 feet high. Images of his two wives are placed by the side of Aiyandar, and not far off are huge figures of his retainers

<sup>1</sup> See J. M. Das, "Note on the Gram Devatā or Tutelary Village Deity of Orissa", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1903), Part III, No. 2.

or attendants, who accompany him on his nightly patrol. They are supposed to be demons, and their demoniacal nature is shown by their hideous features and huge dog-like fangs. Their figures are made of brick and plaster painted over, and are usually *ex voto* offerings.

Aiyanar is not usually propitiated by sacrifices, and his worship, which takes place daily, in the evening, is a quiet, peaceful ceremony. A bell is rung, the villagers assemble at the shrine, and the officiant sprinkles water over the godling and his two wives, and burns some camphor. He then passes round a tray containing the ash, from which each man takes a pinch and marks his forehead and either side of his neck. They then return home assured that they can lay themselves to rest while their godling guards them and their households.

Besides being the guardian of the village, Aiyanar is credited with the power of granting children to the childless and of curing the sick and suffering. In recognition of his services *ex voto* offerings given by grateful clients will be found at his shrine, such as figures of children and of the limbs he has freed from pain. Sometimes also he is referred to as an arbiter in disputes. Each party makes a statement of his claim which he affixes to a trident at the shrine, and it is believed that anyone whose case is false will be grievously afflicted by the god. Wherefore

he makes haste to come to a settlement with his adversary.

The association of the godling with a sacred grove, which is a common feature of non-Aryan cults, is a sure indication that his origin is pre-Brahmanical and that he has no connexion with Brahmanism; but the Brahmans, ever ready to bring the aboriginal gods within the wide circle of Hinduism, have adopted him as a Hindu god and explained him by a myth, which gives him an exalted lineage. They say that he is a son of Siva and Vishnu (in the form of a woman), and give him a name, Harīharaputra, which is expressive of his parentage.

Besides Aiyānar, the masses in South India have a host of village deities, some male and others female. Nearly all the latter are called by names ending in *amma*n, meaning mother, e.g. Ellamma, and they are, consequently, classified generically as "mother-goddesses". Their nature is anything but maternal, for, though they are supposed to be kindly if duly appeased, they are vindictively cruel if their worship is neglected. Some are guardian deities of villages, others are disease godlings who protect their votaries from epidemics and illnesses. By far the most popular and widely worshipped is Mariamma, the goddess of cholera and smallpox, whose power goes far beyond protection from those diseases, for she can effect cures of other diseases and

grant practically anything her suppliants may desire.

The worship of the mother-goddesses has received some Brahmanical sanction by the goddesses being called *Saktis*, i.e. manifestations of the female energy as personified in the consort of Siva. The villagers, however, have no conception of Hindu theogony. To them the mother-goddesses are merely spirits possessed of power, particularly power over demons, and craving for blood as an offering. Theirs is a religion of blood as may be seen from the practices followed in their worship.

The common and most striking characteristic of the worship is the shedding of blood by the sacrifice of buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs and fowls. Buffaloes are favourite victims in the Telugu-speaking districts in the north of Madras and are less frequently slain in the Tamil-speaking districts in the south. One curious part of the sacrifice is that, after the animal has been decapitated, its right foreleg is cut off and placed crosswise in its mouth. The places of sacrifice often become like shambles owing to hecatombs of animals. Festivals may last some days or a week or even a month, during the course of which scores of buffaloes and enormous numbers of sheep, goats and fowls may be slain.

Blood may be offered to the godlings to drink; it may be smeared on the foreheads and breasts

of the worshippers, on their houses and on their cattle; it may be sprinkled along the village boundaries and on the boundary stones. Blood is mixed with balls of rice which are thrown into the air for the spirits or demons to eat, and blood-soaked rice is strewn on the fields, houses and roads.

A noticeable feature of these barbaric rites is that on no account must any of the sacrificial blood be taken across the village boundary. Care is taken to see that no strangers are near at the time of sacrifice, who might be tempted to steal any of it; as a further precaution the blood of the victim is covered over and guarded. Should anyone succeed in getting off with some of it, his village would get the benefit of it, to the deprivation of the sacrificing village. There have, at times, been serious riots on this account, one village sending a man to get some of the blood and supporting him by force against the fury of his attackers.

Some concomitant rites practised in different places are absolutely repulsive. The officiant sometimes puts the liver of the victim in his mouth and wears its entrails round his neck like a gory garland. Sometimes he sucks blood from the carcasses, or drinks it from a bowl, and he may kill a sheep by biting through its jugular vein. An even more revolting practice, which is forbidden in some areas but lingers in others, is

that of impaling young lambs and pigs on stakes placed at the corners of a cart, which is dragged to the village boundary; where impalement is forbidden they are simply tied to the stake. In some places, again, a live pig is buried in the earth up to its neck and cattle are driven over it and trample it to death.

It is to the credit of the Brahmans of South India that their influence has done something to refine this religion of blood. In some parts offerings of coconuts, flowers and fruit have been substituted for sacrifices of animals; garlands of flowers have replaced the disgusting necklaces formed by the victim's entrails; and, if the deities who no longer receive blood offerings have their shrines near those who do, a curtain is hung in front of them to keep out the horrid sight of sacrifice.

Self-torture is by no means unknown in connexion with the worship of the mother-goddesses. In Salem skewers are thrust through the skin below the armpit, the use of the ribs of old umbrellas being a modern utilitarian development; and females have their tongues transfixed by silver needles. At one festival, in honour of Gangamma in North Arcot, the thin bamboos forming the supports of models of cars, which are carried in procession through the streets, are passed through the skin of the bearers, two through the back and two near the abdomen. In

the Madura district worshippers of Mariamman carry pots filled with burning fire in their bare hands in fulfilment of vows. A curious feature of the worship of the latter goddess in North Arcot is that at some festivals her votaries are clad only in the leaves of a sacred tree, the margosa (*Melia Azadirachta*), which is called *nim* in North India. The leaves of the same tree are also used as raiment in Salem by women bound by a vow who wish to have children. They take off their usual clothing, bathe, and put on loose jackets made of the leaves. After this, bearing on their heads lighted lamps made of rice flour, they form a procession, which walks thrice round a temple dedicated to two sister-goddesses, and which is screened from the gaze of the curious by relatives who march with the women.<sup>1</sup>

The people of Bombay also have mother-goddesses (*Mata*), some of whom preside over villages, and also over streets, while others are goddesses of disease. Exorcists act the part of mediums, claiming to be possessed by the mother-goddess, and while the inflatus lasts communicate her will by replies to questions and pretend to have prophetic powers. They submit themselves to different forms of self-torture on special occasions, lashing themselves with scourges or iron chains and sprinkling boiling oil over their heads.

<sup>1</sup> F. J. Richards, *Salem District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1918), p. 121.

They also put lighted wicks and throw red-hot bullets into their mouths, these tricks being especially practised when they are about to exorcise evil spirits.<sup>1</sup>

The worship of godlings in North India is not disfigured by such orgies and is altogether simpler. The villagers are content with an unpretentious sacrifice of a sheep, goat, pig or fowl, or merely offer grain, flowers and fruit. The difference between the nature of the deities and the offerings acceptable to them may be illustrated by the worship of disease godlings in Bengal. There are many of these, of whom Sitala,<sup>2</sup> the goddess of smallpox, is the chief. She is merely represented by a water-pot, a block of stone or an image placed under a tree or enshrined in a hut: the image is that of a naked female riding an ass with her face covered with pustules. She has power over measles as well as smallpox, and receives rice, fruit and sweets with goats and sheep as special offerings during epidemics, when women flock to her shrine and parties of singers chant her praises. Brahmans will officiate as priests for the higher castes, but not for the low castes.

Similar offerings are made to the goddesses of fever and cholera, the latter of whom is repre-

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924), pp. 168-73.

<sup>2</sup> Some would classify Sitala as a goddess of orthodox Hinduism.

sented by a water-pot under a tree: a goatskin stuffed with grass is sometimes stuck on a long bamboo pole when epidemics break out. There is also a male godling for skin diseases like eczema, whose abode is a lump of cowdung placed on an old earthenware pot black with cooking. An old woman chants incantations, which are repeated by the women worshippers; rice, grain, fruit, flowers and a special kind of grass are offered, after which children smash the pot with sticks. A godling who protects children from illness for five (*panch*) years after birth is Panchanan, who is propitiated with the usual simple offerings if they have a small ailment, e.g. a crick in the neck, and is presented with the sacrifice of a goat if they are attacked by a dangerous illness. If some children in the family have died, one born after them is called Pancho or Panchi to win his favour.

In the sub-Himalayan districts of the United Provinces (Gorakhpur, Basti, Gonda and Bahraich) some attribute epidemics, as well as other calamities including drought, to evil spirits, and engage exorcists to get rid of them. The *modus operandi* of the exorcist is simple. He is carried outside the village on a charpoy turned upside down and drives a wooden peg into the ground to which, he assures the villagers, the evil spirit has been tied. Others have a different belief. They declare that plague, cholera and smallpox

are due to the anger of the goddess Devi or Bhavani and prefer making sacrifices of propitiation to seeking medical aid. Unfortunately, too, they hold that the use of medicine would only provoke her wrath still further.

Various symbolical methods of keeping off or driving away diseases or the spirits of disease are practised in Bombay. One consists simply of pouring out a stream of milk in the village and putting thread completely round it so as to keep out the spirits. Another, which is said to be in use throughout the Presidency, employs these two devices as part of a more elaborate ceremony in order to stop an outbreak of cholera. A little wooden cart is made and, after it has been worshipped, five jars containing *ghī* (clarified butter), milk, liquor, cow's urine, and water are put on it with a goat. The cart is then taken outside the village and wheeled round it, a length of thread being paid out at the same time and the contents of the jars poured out in a thin stream. On return to the main gate from which it started the goat is taken out and buried alive. After this the cart is removed outside the village boundary and left there, and with it the disease; to pin the latter down, and prevent its return, a peg is sometimes driven into the ground. One taboo is observed on the day of this ceremony; no villager may leave the village and no one from outside is allowed to enter it.

In Kathiawar plague and cholera are literally carted away with considerable pomp, and Brahmans take part in the ceremony. The goddess is supposed to be installed in a toy cart, which is taken outside the town or village, two men with drawn swords marching by it to prevent her escape, while Brahmans walk behind reciting verses, said to be either from the Vedas or Puranas. When the cart is about a mile from the town, a circle of water is put round it and it is left there; as a further obstacle to the return of the disease threads of cotton are wound round the walls of the town.<sup>1</sup>

A simpler form of expelling epidemic diseases is in vogue in the Konkan, Deccan and Carnatic. A basket is filled with various offerings to the mother-goddesses of disease, such as cooked rice, coconuts, lime and betel-nuts, and taken outside the village boundary, together with a cock or a goat. As it is believed that the basket carries disease with it, the inhabitants of the next village naturally do the same, and so the basket is moved on from village to village and is finally thrown into the sea.<sup>2</sup>

In Berar cholera is similarly averted by a kind of subterfuge. The cholera goddess, whose name

<sup>1</sup> S. Stevenson, *The Rites of the Twice-born* (1920), pp 362-3

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924), pp 258, 260-1, 266-7.

is Marhai, is supposed to be represented by a widow dressed in yellow, seated in a little cart, who is taken outside the village and obliged to stay for one night in the fields. Another method of protecting the village is the slaughter of a buffalo by the village headman. Its head is buried at the village boundary, and, until the ceremony is finished, no fire may be kindled in any house, and the villagers must cook their meals in the open.

Another class of godlings consists of deified persons of divers kinds, tribal ancestors, men distinguished for heroism, women of extraordinary gifts, women who committed suttee, and many others, whose history cannot be traced with any degree of certainty. A typical instance of the deified tribal ancestor is the tutelary deity of the Tharus, who live in the sub-Himalayan country known as the Tarai and whose Hinduism is still only a veneer over animism. According to their legendary lore, their original chief was one Raksha, the son of a Raja, who was banished from his father's court. He and his followers wandered northward, taking as wives any women they could capture or kidnap on the way. In this way the Tharus became a tribe and found a home in their present habitat. Raksha is now represented by a mound of mud with a stone fixed in the middle, on which the heads of fowls are dashed as a sacrifice. He still acts as the guardian and

guide of men who travel away from their homes; every Tharu who does so makes offerings to him before starting and promises more if he returns safely. The godling is believed to be inclined to deafness on account of his great age; vows and prayers are consequently addressed to him in a stentorian voice. Another deity or spirit worshipped by the Tharus is not so easily explained. He is called simply Kua, meaning the well, and his worship consists of throwing sweetmeats down a well and smearing its rim with vermilion.

In the Punjab there is an unequivocal worship of ancestors. Tiny shrines to them are scattered about the fields, and larger shrines are dedicated to the common ancestors of clans; the latter are called Jathera, meaning ancestors. Men who have settled elsewhere return at times to worship at their ancestor's shrine; if the distance is great, they take a brick from the shrine to their village and there build a mud shrine over it. There is a curious connexion between ancestor worship and snake worship in this part of India. The spirits of the dead may become snakes; if this happens they announce the fact in a dream, whereupon shrines must be built and dedicated to them. There is also a recognized class of snake gods, who are believed to have the power both of causing attacks of fever and of relieving pain.

Demons and evil spirits come into a different category, both because they have no priests and

because they are uniformly and consistently evil with none of the attributes of guardianship and benignity associated with village godlings; indeed, it is the function of the latter to drive them away from the village. They are like the gods of the superstitious pagans which, according to Plutarch, were represented as cruel and ferocious tyrants taking pleasure in tormenting mankind. Polydaemonism is particularly prevalent in parts of South India, where it is believed that innumerable demons of evil propensities affect mankind at every turn. It is stated in the *Tinnevelly District Gazetteer* that to judge by their ubiquity, the enthusiasm which their festivals excite, and the close relations which they are believed to have with mankind in all his doings, they are the chief objects of worship among the masses of the people. They are, in fact, the old Dravidian deities, whose power, despite the invasion of Brahmanism, remains undiminished to the present day. Characteristics common to them are that "they delight in the sacrifice of animals, their festivals are invariably accompanied by a dance performed by one whom the demon possesses for the occasion, they go about the world giving trouble, and they have no priests and (with few exceptions) no temples".<sup>1</sup>

In South Canara, however, practically every

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Pate, *Tinnevelly District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1917), pp 113, 114.

village has a demon temple, often a substantial building of considerable size, with a number of images of either human or animal shape. Elsewhere demons are represented by a brick-built obelisk covered with stucco, some 4 or 5 feet high, which stands in front of a shed open at one end. Here offerings are made of cakes, sweet-meats, fruit, milk and toddy; but the principal features of worship (especially at times of festival or epidemics, or in fulfilment of vows) are the sacrifice of animals and the "devil-dance". The devil-dance is performed, generally at night, by a person who is believed to be possessed by the demon god and to be his mouthpiece for the time being. In South Canara, where he is a man of a particular caste, he is stark naked except for a waistband; his face is painted or covered with a hideous mask. Elsewhere, he is dressed up to represent the demon god, he wears a high conical cap, a jacket and breeches embroidered in red with representations of demons, he carries in his hands such things as a club, a trident, a knife, a wand with rattling-rings, and a spear with jingling bells, and he has bangles with jingling bells on his ankles. Music is played, which gradually becomes quicker, louder and more furious. The medium works himself into a frenzy which is shown in different ways, e.g. he may apply a flaming torch to his breast, cut himself with a knife and drink his blood, or drink

the blood of the victim, or devour plantains soaked in blood. His body writhes in convulsive contortions as he whirls and leaps about. The assembled people consult him as if he were an oracle about the causes of and remedies for their troubles, the offerings acceptable to the demon, etc., and he replies with confused mutterings which they take to be divinely inspired. In South Canara disputes are submitted to him for decision and settled by his fiat.

In Malabar men of many different low castes make a living by pretending to be oracles. They act as private practitioners, visiting private houses and performing a dance in the courtyards, during which they slash their foreheads with swords.<sup>1</sup>

The demons, numberless though they are, may be divided into two main classes, those who are dignified by a name and have definite attributes of power and malice manifested in different ways, and those who have no names and are more like hobgoblins. It is the more powerful of the former who enjoys the cult of devil worship just described. They include minor mischievous demons whose tricks resemble those of poltergeists, such as (in Travancore) one called the furnace devil, who breaks pottery when it is being fired in the kiln, another who sets fire to the thatch of houses, a third who throws stones on to houses,

<sup>1</sup> *District Gazetteer of Malabar and Anjengo* (Madras, 1908), p. 157.

breaks the doors and puts dirt into food. Others lurk in waste places,<sup>1</sup> in trees or at cross-roads and, needless almost to say, there are demons who haunt the places where the dead are burnt or buried.<sup>2</sup> The favourite haunt of one demon is the back-yard of a house; Mr F. J. Richards tells us that in one municipality there was a constant demand for licences for the slaughter of sheep as sacrifices to appease the Lord of the Back-yard, as this demon is called.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout India there is a belief that those who have died violent or unnatural deaths, whether by murder, suicide, hanging or accident, become evil spirits, wandering about, malevolent in intent and act. This belief seems even to have had official recognition, for it was formerly the custom to hamstring murderers either before or after execution to prevent their haunting the place of execution and its neighbourhood. The practice was prohibited in British territory in 1830 by the Court of Nizamat Adalat (the supreme criminal court) by an order in which it was stated that it prevailed in many parts.<sup>4</sup> It

<sup>1</sup> In North India the spirit which haunts stretches of high barren ground is proverbially the worst

<sup>2</sup> In South India Brahmans, the high castes and the well-to-do burn the bodies of the dead, the low castes bury them.

<sup>3</sup> *Salem District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1918), p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> G. C. Cheap, *Circular Orders passed by the Nizamat Adawlut for the Lower and Western Provinces from 1796 to 1844* (Calcutta, 1846), p. 183.

appears to have gone on in Travancore until 1862.<sup>1</sup>

In North India there is a kind of classification of the evil spirits of the dead according to their caste or manner of death, though there are an enormous number who are purely local and cannot be reduced to any common denominator. Baghaut, for example, is a generic name for the spirits of those killed by tigers, and Churail (Chudel in Bombay) for women who die in childbirth. Death in the latter case cannot be said to be violent or unnatural, but the spirit has evil propensities because of unfulfilled desires. Fortunately an evil spirit of this species can be recognized by the fact that she has no mouth and her feet are turned backwards. One of the most dangerous is Brahm Pisach, the spirit of a Brahman, who has supernatural power for good when alive and extraordinary power for evil if he meets a violent end. It is believed in some parts that, if he haunts a tree and anyone cuts it down in ignorance, the latter can only escape the evil consequences by making the spirit his family deity and worshipping him regularly. In Bihar this spirit is sometimes adopted as a tutelary deity of a whole village, and worship takes place at a tree, generally the banyan, which he is supposed to haunt. The tree trunk is consequently painted with vermilion, a low mound of earth is

<sup>1</sup> S. Mateer, *The Land of Charity* (1871), p. 204.

made, on which miniature clay figures of horses and elephants are placed, and offerings are made of fruit and flowers. A priest is installed, who is occasionally possessed by the spirit and gives utterance to prophecies. At one place, Chainpur in the Shahabad district, the worship of the spirit of a Brahman is of quite respectable antiquity, for it goes back about 400 years. The Brahman in question sat *dharna* and starved himself to death about A.D. 1527 because he had been dispossessed of some land by a Raja. His cult is a popular one, and it is the practice to present Brahmanical threads of gold and silk at the shrine, and to feed Brahmans, in fulfilment of vows.

There is a widespread belief in possession by evil spirits, which can be expelled by exorcism. A man or woman is believed to be possessed when suffering, for instance, from mental disease, epilepsy or other illness; convulsions are a certain sign of possession in the case of a child; and the remedy is to call in an exorcist to expel the spirit. The methods of exorcism are of the nature either of spirit squaring or of spirit scaring, or they combine both. Efforts are made to induce the spirit to leave by offerings of sweetmeats or the sacrifice of a goat. If these prove ineffectual, physical compulsion is used. The poor creature who is believed to be possessed is soundly beaten, red pepper is applied to his nose, or more drastic

and cruel measures are taken, from which death has before now resulted. A case in which gentler means of persuasion were resorted to may be mentioned here, as it actually led to criminal proceedings. One Kari, a man of a very low caste in the Saran district of Bihar, was troubled by an evil spirit, and on consulting an exorcist, learnt that it had been sent by a neighbour named Gokhul. Kari made haste to come to terms with his enemy and an agreement was drawn up in which Gokhul undertook to recall the evil spirit and never let it trouble Kari again. Should it do so, Gokhul promised to pay a penalty of Rs. 25. The agreement was carefully recorded on a formal document with the signatures of witnesses. Kari, however, found that he was still vexed by the evil spirit and accordingly brought a case against Gokhul charging him with cheating.

One curious method of exorcism practised by the Dosadhs, a low caste of Bihar, is the fire-walking ceremony. A long shallow trench is dug and filled with burning wood. When reduced to embers the Bhagat, or officiating priest, walks over it from end to end, followed by the assembled crowd. Only those possessed by an evil spirit are affected by the fire, and, if their skin is burnt, it is a sign of deliverance from demoniacal possession. This ceremony is only one part of the rites of worship of the demon Rahu, which is performed annually and also on special

occasions to obtain deliverance from illness or trouble.

The fire-walking ceremony is by no means rare. In Madras it sometimes forms part of the festivals held in honour of the mother goddesses and is performed in fulfilment of vows and with the idea of insuring the crops against loss and damage. A remarkable form of it is in vogue among the Bhuiyas of Palamau in Chota Nagpur. A pit is filled with wood, which is set alight, and the priest rides through the flames on the back of a pig, which is then killed and eaten by the worshippers. The godling in whose honour this ceremony takes place is impersonated by a man who beats the worshippers with a leather whip. The same godling is worshipped by another caste, whose priest works himself up into *an ecstatic state and leaps about, lashing his body*, after which he acts as an oracle.

In backward areas the services of the exorcist are in constant demand. If a potter is clumsy and spoils a batch of tiles or pots, he thinks his hand has lost its cunning because of some evil spirit. If the yield of the land is poor, if a cow will not give milk, if a bullock dies, if a child is ailing, the exorcist is consulted about the evil spirit at work and the way to drive or coax him away. A more sinister part of his art is witch-finding. Misfortune may equally well be due to the evil eye or spells of a witch, and it is for him to discover who

is the witch responsible for the mischief and to denounce her.

The witch is in a different category from the exorcist. The latter has a recognized profession and his services can be hired and put to good use in driving away evil spirits. Witches, on the other hand, work secretly for evil ends and they are charged with the wickedness attributed to witches all the world over. They have the power of the evil eye; they cast spells; they make images of the persons they desire to kill or torture and pierce them with pins and needles, thorns and nails; they assemble at night at places of burial and cremation, strip naked, and chant unholy incantations. Women believed to be witches are consequently feared, hated, and sometimes put to death; there were nine murders due to this cause in Bihar in the year 1928.

Women are not the only persons who are believed to dabble in black magic. There are male sorcerers, particularly in Malabar, which is stated in the District Gazetteer to be "pre-eminently the home of witchcraft and magic". "It is remarkable", it is said, "how large a number of people make their livelihood by exorcism and magic." The sorcerers, who are known as Odiyans, are drawn mainly from two low castes, the Paraiyans (Pariahs) and Panans. There is also a class of men called Mantravadis, who make and deal in magic spells, which can be used either

against an enemy or for self-protection against a sorcerer's machinations. The Panans can also be engaged to exorcize devils. One curious method of exorcism is a mock burial of the exorcist. He is placed in a pit covered over with planks, on which a fire is lit and a sacrifice offered.

In order to bring death or pain the traditional method is employed of making a doll to represent the victim and sticking pins, nails, etc., into it or burning it. A variant of this practice is to draw a figure of the victim on a sheet of metal together with mystic diagrams. This is enclosed in another sheet and buried in a path along which he is known to pass. Sometimes nails are stuck into the eyes and stomach of a live frog or lizard, which is put in a coconut shell and buried in the belief that the victim will die at the same time that it does.

The Odiyans are credited with terrible powers derived from what is called child oil or foetus oil. This is distilled from a human foetus of six or seven months' growth. To get it the sorcerer lures or charms away from her house a woman who is in her first pregnancy, takes her away, and removes the foetus, sometimes killing her in the process. There are well-authenticated cases of women being done to death in this way. With the help of this magical oil, he is believed to have the power of rendering himself invisible, or transforming himself into an animal, luring his victims

from their homes even in their sleep, and torturing or killing them at his will.<sup>1</sup>

English doctors are credited with a practice which is only a little less horrible. It is believed that they kidnap boys, drill small holes in their heads, hang them up by the heels over a slow fire, and make a medicine from the drops which ooze out. This medicine, which is called *momiai*, meaning mummy-medicine, is believed to have extraordinary potency, presumably because it contains life-force.

Wizards are believed not only to be able to exorcize but also to have spirits at their command, and in the south of the Gaya district in Bihar, where the people are simple villagers of aboriginal descent, these spirits are the subject of sale and purchase. The wizard hands over to the purchaser a corked bamboo cylinder, which is supposed to contain the spirit. It is taken to the place, usually a tree, which is to be its home and installed there with a little ceremonial rite, the cork being removed and liquor poured on the ground or on the small clay mounds which so often mark a godling's haunt. The spirit becomes the guardian of the fields and crops of the pur-

<sup>1</sup> *District Gazetteer of Malabar and Anjengo* (Madras, 1908), pp. 135, 152, 157. In *The Myth of the Mystic East* (1934), pp. 161-8, Colonel R. H. Elliot gives a most interesting account of the practices attributed to and the dread inspired by sorcerers elsewhere.

chaser, and is an effectual custodian, for belief in its power keeps away thieves. It is believed that anyone who defies the spirit by theft will surely sicken and die, and thieves have been known to restore stolen property on threat of a spirit's vengeance.

The limitations of space forbid anything but a passing mention of other strange beliefs and practices found in the medley of superstitions which make up popular Hinduism, such as the worship of the snake goddess. She is called Manasa in Bengal and the object in view is protection from snake-bite. The goddess is personified in a plant of the same name or a stone rudely carved into the shape of a female seated on a snake, or a shapeless block of stone smeared with vermilion. There is one day in the rainy season (a period when snakes are most dangerous), known as Nagpanchami, which is specially devoted to her worship.

In South India the worship of snakes has wider implications. It is believed, even by Brahmans, that to kill a snake is a sin which will be punished by childlessness or leprosy, and snakes are worshipped in the belief that they are able to confer a number of blessings including, as in so many other forms of worship, the birth of a child, good health and immunity from disease, especially leprosy and skin diseases. Worship goes on before carved and other representations of

snakes, and the lower castes make offerings to live snakes of articles which they will consume, like eggs and milk, as well as less digestible substances.

The worship of snakes is also popular in Bombay and Baroda, where there are temples dedicated to snake gods, while ant-hills are worshipped as the abode of snakes. Here too it is believed that the birth of a child will reward a childless worshipper. Worship of snakes, of which representations are drawn or made of earth, cow-dung and grass, is observed at home on the Nagpanchami day, especially by women; it is a day of partial fasting but also of rest for them. In Baroda it is observed with some pomp. "The Maharani of Baroda, mounted on an elephant, goes in procession to the woods to worship an ant-hill. The pipers who accompany the procession blow their pipes, and allured by the sound, the snakes come out of their holes, when they are worshipped and fed with milk."<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, a brief reference may be made to ceremonies designed to bring the forces of nature under control. In a country where the life and prosperity of the people depend on timely and ample rainfall, worship to prevent scarcity of rain is an important element in religion. The rites, as practised in Bombay for example, consist largely of mimetic magic. Water is poured for days

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924), p. 128.

together by Brahmans and high-caste Hindus on the lingam of Siva in the local temple, or the lingam is submerged in water. Boys also strip naked and go round from house to house with their heads covered by twigs and leaves of the *nim* tree and have water poured over them. Nudity is a part of another simple rite undertaken in order to prevent excessive rain and stop floods. It consists of naked boys throwing live coals into puddles of rain water so as to extinguish them.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere girls merely pour water into hollows in the ground. A gruesome expedient, which is occasionally resorted to in South India if there is prolonged drought, is to disinter the body of a leper or a man who has suffered from leucoderma (which is believed not to begin to decay till a month after death), and throw it into a river. In South India, if there is excessive rain, men strip themselves naked and point flaming torches at the sky or stand on the banks of rivers and reservoirs, when it is feared that they may be breached by floods, and beat drums furiously. The nudity which is so often part of these rites is supposed to shock and scare away evil spirits.

In the Muzaffarpur district of North Bihar the people have a different means of bringing down rain. When the crops suffer from drought,

<sup>1</sup> See R. E. Enthoven, *The Folklore of Bombay* (1924), pp. 317-24.

the low-caste women of the village collect water from five houses and pour it into a pot in which they put a frog. They place the pot in the mortar in which rice is usually ground, and then let the pestle drop on the frog. They sing loudly about the dearth of water and repeat the process until the frog croaks or is killed. The frog, as is well known, croaks when rain is coming, and it is believed that his cry is heard by the god of rain.

In the Central Provinces and Berar there is a special caste, called Garpagari, whose hereditary occupation is that of preventing hail storms. Owing to their beneficent powers in preventing damage to the crops by hail, they used to have a definite place in the village community, being village servants remunerated annually by contributions of grain made by all the villagers. Unfortunately for them, the modern villagers have become sceptical of their thaumaturgic powers, and nowadays they get but little. The *modus operandi* of the hail-wizard is as follows. When he judges, from the appearance of the sky, that hail is near, he goes to the village shrine of Mahabir (Hanuman) with a sword in his hand and entreats him to disperse the clouds. If the sky does not clear, threats are used instead of prayers. The hail-wizard declares that he will kill himself, and, it may be, also his wife and children. He used to give colour to his threats by slashing himself with a sword, but nowadays

he does not go to such lengths and merely draws a little blood from his finger. Two ideas can be traced. The blood is intended to appease the god, the threats to force his hand, the idea being that if the hail-wizard were to kill himself, the god would be to blame for his death.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. V. Russell, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India* (1916), vol. III, pp. 21-2

## Chapter VI

### MODERN DEIFICATIONS

THE deification of human beings, the highest honour which man can give to man, is a common feature of popular Hinduism. With their extraordinary combination of ignorance, credulity and superstition the masses are prone to ascribe supernatural powers to persons of great gifts, singular personality, and even strange habits; and they are ready to greet supposed miracle-workers with the words used by the men of Lystra about Paul and Barnabas: "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men." The criterion is power in some form, and it may be evil as well as good. A remarkable instance of this is seen in one Abdullah Khan, a monster of cruelty, who rose to high office as Governor first of Patna and then of Allahabad under the emperor Shah Jahan. He boasted that he had put 200,000 Hindus to death and sold half a million into slavery, and it was his practice to behead any of his soldiers who fell out on a march. And yet people believed that he could work miracles and used to make offerings to him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Maasir-ul-Umara* (translated by H. Beveridge) (Calcutta, 1912), vol. 1, pp. 97-105

In the following pages it is proposed to give several instances of deification in modern times, which will show for what a strange diversity of reasons this supreme honour has been given. One of the earliest cases recorded during the period of British rule was that of Tilman Henckell, the first Englishman to hold charge of the Jessore district in Bengal, who made it the first object of his administration to help the poor and protect the oppressed, and of whom it has been said that no wrong was too remote for his energy to grapple with. Among others who benefited from his protecting care were the poor manufacturers of salt in the Sundarbans, who had hitherto been ruthlessly exploited and oppressed. Henckell was rewarded by their veneration, the *Calcutta Gazette* of 2 April 1788 stating that "to express their gratitude they have made a representation of his figure or image, which they worship among themselves". It was in the same spirit of actual hero-worship that some old sepoys of Sir James Outram, coming across an ugly little image in which they saw a resemblance to their former commandant, set it up and worshipped it as "Outram Sahib".<sup>1</sup>

A better known case is that of John Nicholson, who for seven or eight years before his death was adored by a small sect, which gave him the designation of Guru, and, much to his annoyance,

<sup>1</sup> Sir F. J. Goldsmid, *James Outram* (1880), vol. 1, p. 98.

worshipped him as an incarnation of divinity. It was apparently only in this way that they could express the mingled awe and love which they felt for a man who inspired terror in battle, and went in and out among them as their protector and their judge. The members of the sect are said to have been a quiet, inoffensive set of people, who wore saffron-coloured robes and called themselves after his name Guru Nikalsenis. The form which worship took appears to have consisted simply of singing hymns in every verse of which the refrain was Guru Nikalsen. As is well known, Nicholson tried to stop this unwelcome worship and flogged his devotees, but this increased rather than diminished their awe and reverence. Floggings, they said, were a just punishment for unholy living. When Nicholson fell at Delhi, one of them cut his throat, saying he could no longer live in a world from which his Guru had departed. Others decided to have the same God as Nicholson, and embraced Christianity.

It is only right to add that Sir George Campbell, a fellow-officer of Nicholson in the Punjab, pooh-poohed the story,<sup>1</sup> and that it has been suggested that the sect was founded with ulterior motives, the adoration of Nicholson being a mere pretence. The British Government in the Punjab, it is said, continuing the practice of its predeces-

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of my Indian Career* (1893), vol. 1, p. 249.

sors, made grants of land to religious orders, and the Nikalsenis thought that they would stand a good chance of getting grants if they had Nicholson as their Guru. This explanation cannot hold ground against the evidence provided by contemporary accounts, which are confirmed by the experience of an officer who accompanied Nicholson on the march to Delhi and was an eye-witness of the veneration paid to him by others than members of the sect. While Nicholson was working in his tent, Sikh sepoyes used to sit round with their eyes riveted on him. Sometimes one of them, carried away by his feelings, would forget Nicholson's order and prostrate himself in worship or prayer. The usual punishment, a flogging, quickly followed.<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous instances of offerings being made at the tombs of Europeans. The spirits of Portuguese soldiers and traders are propitiated by the fishermen of the small French settlement of Mahe on the Malabar coast, who make offerings of toddy and cheroots, articles which, by old tradition, appeal to the taste of Europeans.<sup>2</sup> Bishop Caldwell described in *The Tinnevely Shanars* (published in 1849) the worship of the spirit of a Captain Pole, "or some

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Willoughby, *An Unrecorded Chapter of the Indian Mutiny* (1894), pp. 29-30

<sup>2</sup> E. Thurston, *Omens and Superstitions of Southern India* (1912), pp. 178-9.

such name", who was wounded at the capture of the Travancore lines in 1809 and was buried some 25 miles from the scene of action. This worship, which had been recently established when he wrote, is still going on. There is a flat unornamented stone in front of a temple at Ittamolia in the Tinnevely district, of which all that is now known is that it was placed there in memory of a European who came from Travancore and lost his life in battle. It is said not to be a tomb but merely a place to which men go to lay the ghost by means of offerings suitable to its taste like bread, fowls, cheroots and brandy.<sup>1</sup>

According to one account Captain Pole was known to have been a mighty hunter, and the offerings are made to propitiate his spirit and invoke his continued aid against wild beasts.<sup>2</sup> It is probably he to whom Monier-Williams refers when he mentioned the offering of brandy and cigars at the tomb of a great European sportsman in South India, who delivered his district from the ravages of tigers, so that the people were anxious to secure the good offices of his philanthropic spirit. He also mentioned the less amiable character of a European in South India, who, when alive, was a terror to the district in which

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Pate, *Tinnevely District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1917), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> S. Mateer, *The Land of Charity* (1871), p. 204.

he lived, and whose restless spirit was consequently invested with evil proclivities.<sup>1</sup>

At Beawar, the capital of Merwara in Rajputana, there is a shrine to Colonel Dixon, who died there in 1857, in which, somewhat incongruously, a richly embroidered dress of his Indian wife is preserved in a glass case. At this shrine Sir Walter Lawrence saw the Mers worship every day;<sup>2</sup> nor can this be wondered at, for it was Colonel Dixon who was the saviour of the race, for he transformed them from a race of robbers, believed to be irreclaimable Ishmaelites, whose hand was against every man and every man's hand against them, into a peaceful and contented people.

Still more interesting is the worship of the spirit of Colonel William Wallace at his tomb in the cemetery at the old cantonment at Sirur in the Poona district, 36 miles north-east of Poona. According to the inscription on the tomb, Colonel Wallace died in 1809 at the age of 47 and was "of His Majesty's 74th Regiment of Foot<sup>3</sup> and Commander of the force subsidized by H. H. the Peishwa. A man respected and loved for his ardent gallantry, devoted public zeal, honourable rectitude and noble candour". From other sources we learn that during the

<sup>1</sup> *Modern India and the Indians* (1878), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *The India we served* (1928), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Now forms, with the 71st, the Highland Light Infantry.

second Maratha war he was in command of a division which took or enforced the surrender of Holkar's forts in the Deccan at the end of 1804. He left an endowment yielding a small annual income for the upkeep of his tomb, and his groom (*syce*) was made its caretaker.

Colonel Wallace is revered as a *Sat Purush* or holy man, and all Hindus of Sirur and its neighbourhood, except Brahmans and Marwaris, worship at the tomb, while at harvest-time the villagers bring first-fruits of the grain as food for his spirit. His ghost is said to walk on the nights of the new and full moons, and worship takes place twice a week, on Sundays and Thursdays. It is offered in fulfilment of vows made for the cure of illness and the removal of the curse of barrenness; and newly married couples come and touch the tomb to protect themselves against the malice of evil spirits. Incense is burnt, and some offer coconuts, sweetmeats and sugar, which are distributed among the needy; others sacrifice a goat outside the cemetery, and, after offering it at the tomb-shrine, distribute the meat to beggars.<sup>1</sup> Further information about the worship is contained in a letter to *The Times* of 15 September 1934 by Mr H. G. Rawlinson, C.I.E.,

<sup>1</sup> J. G. Grant Duff, *History of the Mahrattas* (ed. S. M. Edwardes, 1921), vol. II, pp. 380, 425; Lt. Col. H. A. Newell, *Topes and Turban* (1921), pp. 126-7; W. Crooke, *Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (1926), pp. 171-2.

who states that the offerings are intended to feed the spirit, and that once a year, on the anniversary of his death, a cock is sacrificed by the guardian priest of the tomb-shrine, who is a descendant of the groom who was the first caretaker. An American missionary tried to put a stop to these practices, but promptly died of cholera, "which, of course, greatly enhanced Wallace's posthumous reputation". Similar offerings of coconuts, boiled rice and flowers are made at Mahableswar at the tomb of Sir Thomas Sidney Beckwith, who died there of fever in 1831, two years after his appointment as Commander-in-Chief at Bombay.<sup>1</sup>

Two missionaries may be reckoned among the number of those who have been treated as divine beings. One was Dr J. E. Clough, an American Baptist missionary, under whom there was a mass movement to Christianity in the Nellore district during the famine of 1876-8, when he was distinguished for his philanthropy and practical ability, and carried to a successful conclusion the construction of a section of a canal, which gave relief to many thousands. After labouring for forty years among the Telugu-speaking people to the north of Madras, he was surprised and distressed to learn that many of his converts had reverted to some of the practices of their former religion and invoked his name in various

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Mrs Steel in *The Times* of 1 September 1934.

some of which he would accept and some he would refuse for no apparent reason in either case. The credulous, however, interpreted acceptance as a good and refusal as a bad omen, and used his caprice as a kind of oracle to tell whether undertakings would be a success or failure. The power of working miracles was ascribed to him, including the gift of removing barrenness. Accordingly, women vowed that, if they had a child, they would bring it to him and present the jewels it wore. In his old age he began to wear clothes, but his sanctity remained undiminished. When he walked about the village he was fêted by everyone as if he was a living god, and in anticipation of his death a devoted follower put up a building to serve as his tomb and shrine.<sup>1</sup>

A very similar case of silence being rewarded by beatification is reported from the Tanjore district, the saint in this case being designated "the Silent Saint". Like his confrère in Anantapur, he was homeless and speechless, but he was fêted wherever he went and made the object of vows, for the fulfilment of which offerings were made to him. Such was his power that a doctor of more ingenuity than skill made a small fortune by putting his medicines into the saint's hand before dispensing them to his patients, with the

<sup>1</sup> W. Francis, *District Gazetteer of Anantapur* (Madras, 1905), pp. 187-9. When this Gazetteer was written, the man was alive, but he died before its publication.

result that they were of extraordinary efficacy. The saint died at the beginning of this century, and daily worship goes on at his tomb, which is so up-to-date that it contains his portrait.<sup>1</sup>

Another local saint of Tanjore, who preceded the last by about thirty years, is the subject of many absurd beliefs. What is known for certain is that he went about naked, taking anything he liked from the shops and houses, and that he had many votaries who went to consult him about the future and to get cured of disease. His prescription was simple, for he merely told the sufferers to eat plantains, but many cures were effected. One of his peculiarities was that he was not easily accessible, for he received his votaries with volleys of stones and abuse. He is now invested by a halo of legend and credulity credits him with miracles, one of which is that, when arrested for going about in a state of nudity, he escaped by supernatural means. Other miracles which are ascribed to him are still more wonderful. It is said that he could bring down rain from a clear sky, that he could cut off his limbs from his body and attach them again, and—a crowning wonder—that he foretold his death, and when a crowd gathered to watch it, his skull split asunder.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Hemingway, *Tanjore District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1906), p. 219.

<sup>2</sup> F. R. Hemingway, *Tanjore District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1906), pp. 278–9.

Equally astounding were the powers attributed to an ascetic who died about 1890 in a village of the Cuddapah district. Not only did he prophesy future events with the greatest accuracy, but he could project his body to several places at once. More remarkable still, he was believed to have given birth to a son, on whom devolved the maintenance of the shrine in which he was buried.<sup>1</sup>

Another new divinity had the respectable position of chairman of a village union in Tinnevely and enjoyed the reputation of being able to cure diseases and snake-bites. He died about twenty years ago and his tomb has become a shrine in which his photograph hangs in a gilt frame. The worship was given a start when a woman who suffered from a grave illness was bidden in a dream to walk round the tomb. She did so and was cured, and the news of the miracle soon spread. People of all castes, except Brahmans, resort to it in the hope of being cured of disease or of attaining some cherished desire. Special arrangements are made for women possessed by evil spirits. "In front of the shrine a carpet of rich mud is spread in which the grateful victims grovel, gyrating their bodies from the hips, flinging their arms about them, and swaying

<sup>1</sup> C. F. Brackenbury, *Cuddapah District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1915), p. 66.

their heads with hair flowing loose, until a cure is effected."<sup>1</sup>

In all these cases it will be noticed that the recipients of divine honours were men. The tombs of women also become shrines. The place where a woman committed suttee is held sacred, and in Vizagapatam there is hardly a village without a shrine to a woman who made this supreme sacrifice of herself. In one village in this district there is a shrine erected to a woman who committed suicide; the awe in which the spot would have been held was enormously enhanced when an ant-hill was built by ants upon it. A thatched building was erected over the ant-hill and became a shrine, which is covered with *ex voto* offerings.<sup>2</sup> This is not the only case in which an ant-hill has been treated as the sanctuary of a spirit. The people are quite well aware that ants build ant-hills, but seem almost to prefer to persuade themselves that they are spontaneous and incomprehensible outcrops of the earth.

The inventions of modern science not unnaturally excite wonder, but one would have thought that by this time the people would have taken railway engines and motor-cars merely as

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Pate, *Tinnevely District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1917), p. 429.

<sup>2</sup> W. Francis, *Vizagapatam District Gazetteer* (Madras, 1907), p. 315. At the time this Gazetteer was written a sister of the woman was alive.

means of transport. It appears, however, that in some areas they are still thought to be supernatural, for the latest Census Report of the United Provinces states that in parts of the sub-Himalayan districts of Gorakhpur, Basti, Gonda and Bahraich "the railways, motor-cars, and the like" are still worshipped.<sup>1</sup>

It is easier to understand how plague should become deified as a disease goddess and take her place with Sitala, the goddess of smallpox. This happened not long after the first outbreak of plague in Bombay in the year 1896. In Bihar she soon made her appearance in the galaxy of gods under the name of Mother Plague or the Bombay Mother, and in Madras she was made one of the mother-goddesses of disease and given the name of Plague-amman or Plague Mother.

It is also not altogether a matter for surprise that emanations of natural gas, of which the cause is not known, excite a feeling of wonder and awe among ignorant people, and lead to a form of worship, as they are thought to be manifestations of inexplicable power. There was a curious case of this a few years ago. In 1930 gas generated by decomposing night-soil in a trenching ground near Delhi burst into flames. The spot promptly became a place of pilgrimage, and large numbers of the ignorant actually took away

<sup>1</sup> *Census Report of the United Provinces for 1931*, Part I, p. 515.

the earth to their homes, believing it to be impregnated by a divine spirit, which, according to some, was that of the goddess of smallpox.<sup>1</sup>

Less easily intelligible is a quaint tree-cult which was brought to light in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* for 1902 by a learned Bengali Brahman, Hara Prasad Sastri, on whom Government conferred the title of Mahamahopadhyaya in recognition of his erudition. About the year 1890, while walking in the fields in a Bengal district, he noted different persons picking up clods of earth and throwing them at a date-palm tree. On going up to the tree he found that the earth from the clods had formed a mound 8 or 10 feet high, covering several square yards round the tree. On asking the reason for this curious practice, he was informed that the goddess Chandi, a form of Durga, had her abode in the tree and was propitiated by the lumps of earth, which were her food. The result of propitiating her was simply that children who cried at home were soothed and stopped crying.

Ten years later the Pandit revisited the place. He found the old palm tree had died and only its stump remained, but a young tree had succeeded to the worship. The mound of earth was still there, but the offerings had changed. They were no longer clods of earth, but sweetmeats. The goddess had as yet no priest, but she had

<sup>1</sup> *Census of India Report for 1931, Part I, p. 484.*

enlarged her powers. Not only did she stop children crying, but she performed miracles (of which an instance was quoted), and granted children to barren women, situations to the unemployed, and success in lawsuits to the litigious. "Thus", said the Pandit, "in the course of ten years I found there were great changes in this ~~very~~ simple worship. The offerings had improved, the sphere of usefulness of the deity had expanded, a myth had grown up, and it only remained for a priest to appear in order to raise the worship to the dignity of a cult."

## Chapter VII

### BRAHMANS, PRIESTS AND HOLY MEN

THE Brahmans are often described being a priestly caste, but it would be a mistake to suppose either that all Brahmans are priests or that all priests are Brahmans. Their proper functions are not those of ministrants at temples or shrines. They are not required to be spiritual teachers or moral instructors. Their primary duty is to study and expound the sacred writings, and it is their privilege to recite the sacred texts which have to be enunciated at family ceremonies such as births and marriages. A certain number, it is true, work as temple priests and pilgrim priests, i.e. priests who subsist on the fees paid by pilgrims, but Brahmans who officiate in either of these capacities are held to belong to an inferior order and are looked down upon with contempt by other Brahmans. Actually, the number engaged in religious duties of any kind is only a small fraction of the total. Just as some Levites served in the temple at Jerusalem but others did not, but were scattered through the towns and villages of Judaea, so a certain number of priests discharge religious

functions, but the great majority follow numerous other avocations, including agriculture (whether as landlords or tenants), trade, the professions and clerical and humbler pursuits. They get the benefit of their Brahmanhood, however, and reduce their own household expenses by being invited to feasts on the occasion of domestic and ~~other~~ ceremonies, when it is a point of religious honour to entertain Brahmans. It is not the priestly office, but his birthright which makes the Brahman, and he does not lose the right to receive reverence from others because he holds a non-priestly office.) He may, indeed, adopt any occupation provided that it is not one which would sully the extraordinary purity which is supposed to attach to his person.

(It is his privilege by birthright to be the custodian of spiritual knowledge and the intermediary between the gods and men. His privileged position has been challenged in the past, e.g. by the Lingayats, who deny the necessity of Brahmans for the performance of religious ceremonies and have their own priests. It is challenged by many others at the present day, as, for instance, by the sect in Bombay known as the Satya Shodhak Panth, who refuse to acknowledge the right of the Brahmans to a spiritual monopoly, and ~~aver~~ that they do not want middlemen in religion. It is, however, fully and freely acknowledged by the vast majority of Hindus,

who consider that they would not be good Hindus unless they employed Brahmans for the ceremonies connected with births, deaths and marriages.) Not all are qualified to employ them. There are many castes contact with whom would pollute the Brahman. He therefore holds aloof from them, and their ceremonies have to be performed by men of their own family or caste. Such, however, is the value of the ministrations of a Brahman that those who can induce a Brahman, however low he may be in the order of Brahmans, to perform family rites for them, thereby obtain a certain social cachet.) They are regarded as superior to those to whom Brahmans will not minister and so get a rise in the social scale.

(Certain ceremonies are an essential part of family life, and for these ceremonies the Brahman's services are, except in the cases already mentioned, indispensable.) To him is reserved, as of right, the performance of religious ritual for which a knowledge of ancient Sanskrit texts is necessary. The sacred formulae necessary to validate such ceremonies are invested with a magical charm, and it is felt that no ordinary man could recite them, for a mistake would have terrible consequences. Just as it was believed in medieval times that the Devil would be called up if the Lord's Prayer was said backwards, so it is thought that disaster will follow if there is a slip or omission in reciting *mantras* or sacred

texts. His knowledge of them invests the Brahman with a supernatural power. (There is a Hindu saying, expressed in the form of a syllogism, that the whole world is subject to the gods, the gods are subject to the *mantras*, the *mantras* are subject to the Brahmans, and therefore the Brahmans are our gods.) It is not even necessary that the Brahman should understand the meaning of the words he utters.) (Some indeed are ignorant of their meaning, and those who hear them are equally in the dark, for they are in a dead language. They are, however, essential for the due performance of domestic rites, and their mere utterance is efficacious in averting evil influences.)

(It is probably this belief in their mysterious powers as spell-binders, added to the force of custom and tradition, that accounts for the continued reverence of the peasants for the Brahmans. They believe that it is good to be blessed and terrible to be cursed by Brahmans.) They are assured that to give them presents and to entertain and feed them are acts of merit, while the payment of fees to them for the performance of ceremonies is obligatory. They give them the outward reverence which is their birthright, e.g. by respectful salutations on meeting them; according to one saying, a Brahman must be honoured even though he has neither virtue nor merit. But, at any rate in North India, the people do not always respect them, much less regard them

in the light of divinities, and the proverbs which embody popular opinion are full of ridicule of their weaknesses.) The commonest are directed against their avarice and deride them as extortionate and heartless. For example, "There are three blood-suckers (literally butchers) in this world, the flea, the bug and the Brahman." "A Brahman must have his cakes even if your children starve." "A Brahman is always begging but never satisfied." "Vishnu gets the prayers, the Brahman the offerings." Such proverbs are based on the experience of the toad under the harrow, and they voice the peasant's resentment of their exacting demands for fees and presents in return for their services; I myself have seen Brahmins suspend the ceremonies at the wedding of a Raja's son in order to haggle about their fees.

Even, however, while they gibe and jeer at the Brahmins, the people feel that they are indispensable from the religious point of view. Personal unworthiness does not impair the value of their ministrations. They hold the key to sacred mysteries and it makes no difference that those who hold it are wanting in moral virtue—a view which has a parallel in the twenty-sixth of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, which sets forth that the sacraments are effectual even though they be ministered by evil men.

( The person of a Brahman is so sacred that

the murder of one is a deadly sin. Under Hindu rule they were, and in some States under the rule of Hindu Rajas they still are, exempt from capital punishment—a kind of benefit of clergy.) There have, however, been breaches of this rule even in the Maratha empire, the founder of which, Sivaji, observed the principle that it was a ruler's chief duty to protect the gods, cows and Brahmans. And yet we learn from an Irish officer in the Maratha service that some of them were put to death.

I have known them (he wrote) frequently punished very severely as delinquents, some even put to death by order of the prince. 'Tis true that the blood of a Brahman is never shed, but they are dispatched by other means. The late Tuckojee Holkar, who was a Mahratta, put his minister (a Brahman) to death by wrapping him in cloths steeped in oil and setting fire to them. The most common mode is to keep the limbs immersed in cold water until they swell, which carries off the party in a few days.<sup>1</sup>

So far from agreeing that the Brahmans possessed an unbounded influence over the minds of the people, this writer declared that he could never discover any ascendancy of that kind; and it has been pointed out that, in spite of the fact

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Tone, "Illustrations of some Institutions of the Mahratta People", *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799, Miscellaneous Tracts*, p. 127.

that Brahmans acted as Mayors of the Palace to the Maratha rulers, there is no part of India in which they are held in less esteem.<sup>1</sup>

(The chief classes of priests are domestic priests, temple priests, and funeral priests. Those who can afford to do so employ domestic or family priests, called *Purohits*, who officiate at the worship of the god favoured by the family and perform domestic ceremonies and rites of purification.) Those who cannot afford the services of a family priest call in a Brahman from outside as occasion demands for the performance of the domestic ceremonies, etc. Among some castes and in some sects, however, members of the family officiate, e.g. at marriage and death ceremonies, either because Brahmans refuse to minister to them or because they repudiate the need of the Brahmans' services.

Descending in the scale of honour, we come to the temple priest, who belongs to a lower order of Brahmans, presumably because he is a later creation, temple worship having been introduced after family worship. Temple priests are nearly always Brahmans, but there are notable exceptions. In the Deccan there are important shrines in which non-Brahmans officiate, and almost every village contains a temple of the monkey-god Maruti (or Hanuman) with non-Brahman ministrants.

<sup>1</sup> W. Crooke, *Things Indian* (1906), p. 65.

Last and lowest is the funeral priest, who is regarded with contempt and even aversion because of the polluting effect of his work, which involves association with corpses. His name in North India is one of derision, viz. Mahabrahman, i.e. great Brahman, the epithet great being ironical and meaning just the opposite; respectable castes will not even allow him inside their houses except for funerals, when he is indispensable.

\* Brahmins of another inferior grade get a living as astrologers.) Astrology plays a large part in Indian life; omens and the supposed influence of the stars constantly affect the conduct of affairs. The ordinary Hindu would see nothing ironical in the words of Shakespeare: "When we are sick in fortune—often the surfeit of our own behaviour—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, moon and stars, as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves and traitors by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence." The astrologer is an important functionary. (He has to prepare a horoscope when a child is born; when marriages are proposed by parents, the horoscopes of the boy and girl have to be compared to see whether there are planetary influences which would be a bar and impediment to marriage, and whether the marriage would be a lucky

one, e.g. whether the bridegroom would die before or after the bride.) Auspicious days and hours have to be found for important undertakings, such as marriages, railway journeys and the operations of agriculture like ploughing, sowing and reaping. Villagers will consult an astrologer about the health of absent relatives and such trifles as where lost or missing articles can be found, and they are called in to interpret omens and avert the evil influences of the planets. The belief is shared by the educated as well as the uneducated, as I learnt from a personal experience. I had the pleasant task of laying the foundation-stone of some school buildings, a ceremony of which the prelude was the delivery of speeches in a large marquee. When the speeches were over, I was told that the programme had been carefully timed, but the speeches had taken much less time than had been expected. On no account could the stone be laid until the time which the astrologers had declared to be auspicious. There was nothing to do but wait, and the audience and I waited patiently some fifteen minutes till the auspicious hour arrived, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do so.

The influence of the astrologer extends even to the Stock Exchange and the race-course. Men who speculate are known to consult astrologers before buying and selling shares, and racing men before deciding how to bet. Old-fashioned Rajas

have court astrologers, honoured officials who advise them as to the auspicious times for beginning any new venture, starting on a journey, etc. Railway time-tables and the times fixed by astrologers for travelling do not always correspond, but the difficulty can be got over either by taking a special train or by a pious fiction. At the time indicated by the astrologer as auspicious for the Raja's departure, something belonging to him, like a sword, is sent ahead as his representative, and the Raja can then catch his train at the time fixed by the railway time-table.

(From the Brahmans and priests we may pass to the holy men, among whom first place must be given to the Guru.) (The name means a venerable person, one who is a religious teacher or spiritual preceptor.) It is applied to a man of any caste who is believed to be in peculiarly close communion with God and to hold the secret to divine mysteries, whether on account of saintliness of life or character, asceticism, or utterances regarded as inspired. Such a man is adopted as a Guru by seekers after truth, who become his disciples. The attitude of a disciple to his Guru is like that described in Milton's *Areopagitica*. "To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all its locks and keys, into his custody, and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion." The basis of the peculiar veneration for the Guru is well explained

in *The Sayings of Ramakrishna*. There it is stated that the Guru is a mediator bringing man and God together. Whoever can call upon the Almighty with sincerity and intense earnestness needs no Guru, but such a man is rare. Hence the necessity of a Guru or guide. Those who want to reach God must follow one, and only one, guide, and he who looks upon his spiritual guide as a mere man cannot derive any benefit from him. The Guru is, in short, a channel through which God communicates himself to man. He alone can guide his disciples on the path of spiritual progress to full knowledge of God and ultimate release from the chain of births and rebirths.

Some Gurus have founded sects and have been regarded by their followers as divine incarnations. It will readily be understood how an intense feeling of reverence can easily pass into adoration, so that the Guru may actually be worshipped, either in his lifetime or after his death. Some sectarians, moreover, pay semi-divine honours to subsequent heads of the order, on whom the mantle of the founder is believed to have fallen. In Bombay, where they are generally called Maharajas, as well as Gurus, they are worshipped when alive. They make progress through the villages in great state, and when one visits a house, he is enthroned and worshipped as if he were a present deity. His

feet are washed in water or a mixture made of water, *ghī* (clarified butter), milk, sugar and honey, which is sipped by his followers, who believe it has been consecrated by contact with his person.

The adherents of a sect in North India are credited with an extraordinary faith in the virtue of things which the touch of their Guru has hallowed. They partake of food and water which he has either tasted or touched, and sceptical outsiders have consequently given them a derisive name which means those who take the leavings. According to a credible account, the Guru's clothing, hair and nail-parings are all regarded as sacred, and when he dies, his ashes mixed with water are swallowed by his followers.

Gurus are frequently ascetics to whom crowds will come for help and guidance during their lifetime, while their tombs become places of pilgrimage after their death. They teach their disciples how they may make spiritual progress and eventually be united with the divine spirit. Some of the practices which they prescribe involve severe self-discipline. One, who had a large following in the Central Provinces, used to order those who resorted to him to live a solitary life of hardship and privation on the banks of the Godavari, and to repeat the Sanskrit prayer or invocation called the *Gayatri* until the total of a million had been reached. Mere repetition was

not enough. Each time that it was repeated the disciple had to meditate on its meaning. Those whom he judged to be weaker vessels, particularly women, were merely ordered to write the sacred name of Rama on bits of paper which were to be rolled into a certain number of balls, say 108, and thrown into the Godavari river.

Some of these Gurus are undoubtedly men of pure ascetic life, but others are not, and there have been persons among them who were probably mentally deranged. One of them, so far from welcoming disciples, used to throw stones at those who sought his guidance, and if they persisted, would beat them. This treatment, by a curious inversion of ideas, they regarded not as repulsion but as a mark of favour. It will be remembered that those who sought to treat John Nicholson as a present deity had much the same idea, and that the more he flogged them, the more they worshipped him.

A Guru need not be an ascetic nor retire from the world. Spirituality can be obtained by those who lead an ordinary life, and a striking example of this is afforded by the Gurus who are heads of the Radhaswami sect. The second head of it was Salagram Sahib, who rose to be Postmaster-General of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh and received the title of Rai Bahadur. An earnest seeker after truth, he became the disciple of a Guru, who was the founder of the Radha-

swami sect. Salagram Sahib made over his salary to him and was anxious to retire from Government service, but this the Guru would not allow, saying that his official duties would not interfere with spiritual progress. In 1897, however, on the death of his Guru, he gave himself up entirely to a religious life, imparting spiritual counsels to all who desired them. People flocked to him and believed him to be a divine healer and worker of miracles, though Salagram Sahib himself scouted any such pretensions.

The successor of Salagram Sahib held the office of Superintendent in the Accountant-General's office at Allahabad, and the present head of the sect has been described by Mr Paul Brunton, who had several interviews with him, as combining a daily life based on western ways and ideas with the practice of *Yoga*, and as being a practical man of the world and a polished gentleman, as well as an inspired dreamer and a serenely-minded Yogi.<sup>1</sup>

Besides Gurus of this kind there are the family Gurus, who, as explained in the last chapter, may be said to exercise some priestly functions, other than those of ritual, for they initiate boys into religion and act as father confessors and religious teachers to the families whom they serve. They are often Brahmans but may be of other castes, and among some castes in South India they are the

<sup>1</sup> *A Search in Secret India* (1934), pp. 227, 252.

supreme authority in caste matters. They settle disputes, fine or excommunicate the unworthy; and without their sanction there is no readmission to caste. They have been described as the working clergy of Hinduism, the guardians of morality and the one force in modern Hinduism which serves to promote an ideal of morality.<sup>1</sup>

They are often drawn from one or other of the religious orders, of which there are many. Some orders are Saiva, others Vaishnava, and there are different sections divided in doctrine. They draw recruits from all classes and castes, some of whom lead a secular life and are scarcely distinguishable from ordinary laymen, except that they form separate castes. Others, to whom the term religious order more properly applies, live a religious life, are instructed in the tenets of religion, and are capable of instructing others. They commonly live in the institutions known as *maths* (or *sattras* in Assam), which are sometimes called monasteries because their inmates are usually celibates and form a religious community under the authority of a head, who corresponds to an abbot or prior; they live in a collection of buildings or humble huts clustering round a temple and often including a building for the accommodation of travellers and wandering Sadhus or ascetics. There are, however, exceptions to the rule of celibacy and the members of the orders

<sup>1</sup> W. Crooke, *Things Indian* (1906), p. 66.

do not live in conventual seclusion. They are free to go in and out, and though some remain inside engaged in devotions and the study of the scriptures, others wander about the country for long or short periods, either as itinerant teachers or in order to collect contributions from the villages in the neighbourhood, going further afield to beg for alms. They may, perhaps, be more properly compared to the Begging Friars of the Middle Ages who, like them, did not live in monastic solitude but went out into the world and were required to subsist on alms; but, unlike the Friars, their lives are not devoted to ministration to others, and they have no idea of work being a duty to God and man. In Madras some *maths* have the right to appoint the priests and managers of a number of temples.

The larger *maths* have landed estates, worked either by tenants or hired labourers, and the income from land is supplemented by offerings from the pious and by regular contributions from the villagers. The heads of these institutions, who are known as *mahants* (or Gosains in Assam), are looked up to as the supreme authority in religious and social matters by a number of lay disciples. Occasionally they travel round the countryside in what is more like a pontifical progress than a diocesan visitation, for they go about in great state, riding on elephants or carried in palanquins and accompanied by a long train of retainers and

followers. On these progresses they are welcomed with the homage due to those who are believed to hold the keys of heaven, and incidentally receive from the villagers gifts and offerings, of which the value or amount is regulated by the villagers' means or their own demands.

Some of the *mahants* lead a secular rather than a religious life, devoting themselves to estate management, money-lending, and dealings in grain, with no thought of service to others. A certain number are indolent and self-indulgent, or actually notorious for dissolute living. The malversation of funds intended for religious purposes, which should be treated as sacred trusts, is often an open scandal; and some *mahants*, so far from leading a godly and quiet life, are engrossed by litigation about property and endowments. Others, however, are worthy of their calling, as is fully acknowledged by those who have come into contact with them. Sir Denzil Ibbetson put it on record that in the Punjab "they lead quiet, peaceful lives, keeping open house to travellers, training their neophytes, and exercising a wholesome influence upon the people of the neighbourhood. . . . There is an immense number of these men whose influence is almost wholly for good."<sup>1</sup> In Assam the Gosains are said to exercise a civilizing influence on the aboriginal tribes and to be distinguished by en-

<sup>1</sup> *Punjab Castes* (Lahore, 1916), pp. 225-6.

lightenment and liberality of thought,<sup>1</sup> while Sir Bampfylde Fuller, who was Chief Commissioner of that Province, has written: "They inculcate in their disciples pure morality; their influence is altogether for good."<sup>2</sup>

There are hundreds of thousands of men leading a life of real or pretended asceticism outside the *maths*, some belonging to religious orders, but others having no connexion with them and being quite independent. They are known by different names, such as Sadhus, Sannyasis, Bairagis, Gosains and Yogis, all of which are used generically without regard to differences of sects. Some are expressive of their manner of life. Sadhu means a holy man; a Sannyasi is one who abandons the world and is properly speaking a Saiva; the god Siva is the great ascetic *par excellence*, who has renounced all and retired to the Himalayas. A Bairagi is one without attachment to the world and is primarily a Vaishnava; Gosain means one who is lord of his passions; and Yogi one who seeks *Yoga* or union with God. Many Europeans call them compendiously "Fakirs", but this is a misnomer, for a *faqir* is a Muslim, and not a Hindu, religious mendicant.

Whatever their name, the object of all who are genuine devotees is the same, viz. to obtain mystical union with the Supreme Being by re-

<sup>1</sup> *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1908), vol. vi, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies of Indian Life and Sentiment* (1910), p. 113.

nouncing the world and by suppressing, and eventually annihilating, all passion and desires. The body should be purified by ascetic practices and the mind freed from the distractions of the senses. The idea may seem strange to modern Europeans, but it is the form of mysticism common in the East, in which all other relations are submerged in the relation of the soul to God, in making the soul so dependent on, or so lost in, Him that there is no room for individuality. It was also familiar to the Neo-Platonists, who held that the main object of life was "to bring the God that is in us into conformity with the God that is in the universe", and that therefore the body which is an obstacle in the way of this consummation must be subdued. Powers of mental concentration and of metaphysical abstraction were regarded as the highest gifts, and the absorption of our nature in God as the highest stage of virtue. The means of attaining perfection, as enumerated by Lecky, are the same as those recognized by Hindus, viz. "long and patient meditation, silence, abstinence from the distractions and occupations of life, the subjugation of the flesh, a constant attendance on those mysterious rites which detach him from material objects, overawe and elevate his mind, and quicken his realization of the Divine presence".<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals* (1894), vol. 1, pp. 327-8.

*Yoga* implies not only abstemiousness but also the development of the subjective activities by mental concentration, bringing in its train abstraction from mundane affairs, mental tranquillity, and states of ecstasy and trance. There are various means of attaining it. One is the repetition of the name of a deity or of a sacred text, on which thought must be concentrated; or thought may be simply concentrated on ideas of the divine, or names expressive of divinity, without actually repeating them. Again, there are certain exercises of body-control and postures which are believed to facilitate mental concentration, such as controlling the breath and fixing the eyes on one spot, particularly the tip of the nose and the navel, a practice which is calculated to induce a species of self-hypnotism.

The efficacy of *Yoga* is almost universally believed in by Hindus, and laymen as well as ascetics resort to it because of the extraordinary powers ascribed to it, though it is often associated with crude ideas of magic and many of its professors are mere charlatans. It is claimed that an expert in *Yoga* has supernatural knowledge and can exercise control both over other men and over natural phenomena; that he can go without food for weeks or months at a time, be impervious to pain and sensation, read men's thoughts, be blessed by heavenly visions, and go into trances, not to mention the power of levitation and of

projecting one's spirit through space. As explained by H. H. Wilson in his *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*,

when mystic union is effected, the Yogi is liberated from the clog of material incumbrance and acquires an entire command over all worldly substance. He can make himself lighter than the lightest substance, heavier than the heaviest. . . can traverse all space, can animate any dead body by transferring his spirit into it from his own frame, can render himself invisible, can attain all objects, become equally acquainted with the past, present and future, and is finally united with Siva and consequently exempted from being born again upon earth.

The Sadhu<sup>1</sup> (a name which for our purposes may be taken as a general designation for different kinds of ascetics) either wears a distinctive dress or is conspicuous for his undress. He may wear saffron-coloured robes, or be content with a patchwork of rags, or go about in a state of almost complete nudity. If he is a Sannyasi, his skin is covered with a fine powdery ash of greyish-blue colour. He may have sectarian marks smeared on his forehead, part of his nose, and possibly also on his breast and arms. Some have their heads clean shaven; others have their hair braided and coiled up on the head, and very often add artificial braids to the natural hair; others

<sup>1</sup> It means a good or righteous man, and in North India is used of a really holy man, whereas the term Yogi is often applied to those whose holiness is open to question.

again have long dishevelled locks or a dirty matted mop. Most carry rosaries of 36, 64 or 108 beads.

Some live simply, others practise austerities, and a certain number self-torture. Familiar forms of the last are lying or sitting on spikes, wearing sandals set with spikes, holding an arm rigidly erect till it is atrophied, keeping a hand clenched till the nails grow through it, dragging heavy chains, hanging head downwards for some time in the smoke of a fire, and sitting between five fires, i.e. four fires (one at each quarter of the compass) with the fierce sun overhead making the fifth.

Having renounced the world, Sadhus are released from family ties and the obligations imposed by caste. They are socially dead, so that their relations can take possession of their belongings. Being free from caste restrictions, they may eat and drink as they please. Accordingly, though some are pure vegetarians, others are not so particular and can indulge their appetites. A common failing is the taking of *bhang*,<sup>1</sup> of which the intoxicating effect may be seen in their eyes and demeanour. The members of one loathsome but fortunately microscopic sect, known as Aghori or Aghorpanthi, are human ghouls, for they will dig up corpses and consume the putrid flesh. In 1931 two men in the district of Bankura

<sup>1</sup> The *hasheesh* of the Arabs, consisting of the leaves and flowering shoots of the Indian hemp plant (*Cannabis sativa*).

in Bengal were charged with having dug up the newly-buried corpse of a child, cooked it, and eaten part of it; and one of them confessed that he had eaten a little of the heart because he believed it was part of his religion to do so.

By age-long tradition ascetics should have no homes but live away from the haunts of men, though they may go to a village to beg for food. Some, therefore, live in complete solitude in some fixed spot like a cave, and are dependent on the food which the villagers cheerfully bring them, for it is an act of piety to feed holy men. Some live in *maths*, others are nomadic, wandering about from place to place and living on the alms they receive. They generally time their peregrinations so as to fit in with the religious festivals of different localities, and they go in great numbers to places of pilgrimage where larger festivals are celebrated.<sup>1</sup> After some years of wandering many retire to some lonely spot or take up their abode in a village or its neighbourhood, living in a temple, on the bank of a river

<sup>1</sup> As many as 50,000 or 60,000 have been known to attend the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad. Various sects or orders of Sannyasis go in procession to the bathing places headed by their heads or leaders mounted on elephants with rich trappings. Members of an order of Gosains have the right of precedence and go stark naked; they are compelled to wear clothes in public at other times. Quarrels about precedence are apt to lead to fierce fights, and before now a squadron of cavalry has had to be brought up to restore order.

or reservoir, or under a tree and subsisting on the offerings of the villagers.

A certain number are genuine seekers after truth, holy men and humble of heart. Among them are men who have renounced the world after doing their utmost to better it. One such was Gaurishankar Udayashankar, the Brahman Diwan or Prime Minister of Bhaunagar, a man of great talent, who, with Mr Percival of the Indian Civil Service, administered the State during the minority of the Maharaja, was made a C.S.I. in 1877, and in 1886, seven years after his retirement, became a Sannyasi. Another who combined piety with learning was Swami Bhaskarananda of Benares, who died in 1899. He was a naked Sannyasi, but he was also a learned Sanskrit scholar, deeply versed in Vedanta philosophy, and at the same time so sophisticated that he kept a visitors' book. Some, however, merely work themselves up into a state of exaltation which, to a European, seems little more than sublimated egoism. A man of this type was a Yogi with whom the traveller-missionary Wolff had a conversation. Wolff asked him "How can one obtain the knowledge of God?" The Yogi replied curtly: "Do not ask me questions. You may look at me, for I am God." He met his match in Wolff, who rejoined: "You will go to Hell if you speak in such a way."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. Smith, *Life of John Wilson* (1878), p. 126.

The Sadhus are classified in the census returns as religious mendicants, and this is an accurate description of a large number of pseudo-ascetics, who have more mendicity than religion, and whose lifelong indolence makes them an economic drain on the country.<sup>1</sup> Many are simply beggars and vagabonds, or even worse; it is a simple and easy matter for a criminal or fugitive from justice to disguise himself as a Sadhu. Some are absolute humbugs like the man described by one of the earliest English travellers in India, Ralph Fitch, who went there in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Here in Patna, I saw a dissembling prophet, which sat upon a horse in the market place and made as though he slept, and many of the people came and touched his feet with their hands and then kissed their hands. They took him for a great man, but sure he was a lazy lubber.<sup>2</sup>

Not all are so harmless. Some are lecherous pests, who seduce the women who give them

<sup>1</sup> The number returned in 1931 under the head "monks, nuns, and religious mendicants" was 230,000. Besides these there were 800,000 priests, ministers, etc., making a total of over a million supported by religion. The figures, however, vary enormously from census to census, largely because Sadhus are entered indifferently under the head of religious mendicant or that of the ordinary beggar. In 1921 there were half a million monks, nuns and religious mendicants and 1½ million priests, ministers, etc.; the figures for beggars, vagrants and prostitutes (who are grouped together), were 3 millions in 1921 and 1,400,000 in 1931.

<sup>2</sup> The spelling has been modernized.

hospitality; others simply prey on the credulity and simple faith of the people. They are credited with supernatural powers, and it is easy to make money by telling fortunes, selling amulets and charms, and administering drugs and simples, which are expected to work miraculous cures. To all alike the villagers give a ready welcome. To give them alms and hospitality confers spiritual merit. Refusal of them may result in being put under a Sadhu's curse, which is regarded with absolute terror. Many are truculent, hectoring and domineering, quick to anger and prompt to curse. A somewhat cynical proverb of North India, which says that a Yogi is thought to be a sham at home, but a saint abroad, would seem to show that the villagers fully recognize the possibility of being imposed upon by men who roam the countryside in the garb of ascetics; but in spite of this they show an unfailing readiness to give them shelter, sustenance and homage.

A certain number are without doubt mentally deranged, in some cases perhaps because their minds have been affected by austerities too severe for their constitutions. Valuable evidence on this point is contained in an account of his personal observations by Dr Pennell, who may be said to have had expert knowledge, for he had made a study of mental disease. Dr Pennell, who is well known for his fine work as a medical missionary on the Afghan frontier, was anxious to learn

more of the life of Sadhus and decided that the best way was to adopt their dress and habits and travel among them. Accordingly he put on the ochre-coloured robe and begged his way to Rishikesh, a colony of Sadhus near Hardwar. There he was admitted without question as a Christian ascetic and moved freely among the Sadhus—a remarkable example of Hindu toleration. He found that some Sadhus were imbeciles, others suffered from delusional insanity, others from mania, acute in some cases, more or less chronic in others, or passing on into a drivelling dementia. One man asserted that he was a cow in human form and must therefore eat nothing but grass and roots; another ran about stark naked barking like a dog; a third picked up and chewed bits of filth and ordure. On the other hand, as Dr Pennell was careful to point out, many were earnest seekers after a higher spiritual life and unostentatiously devout, one of them being a former Prime Minister of an Indian State. These, however, were a minority, “gems among the rubble”, found “side by side with the basest charlatans and the most immoral caricatures of their own ideals”.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. L. Pennell, *Among the Wild Tribes of the Afghan Frontier* (1909), pp. 213-36.

## Chapter VIII

### SECTARIANISM AND TOLERATION

**I**T has been said that the conventional divisions of Hinduism are better known to the readers of textbooks than to the people themselves, and it is certain that sect means very little to the masses. The two main sects are Vaishnavas and Saivas, those who make Vishnu and Siva respectively the chief object of their worship; but the great majority of the people have no idea that they belong to either. In many parts of the country the lower orders, if asked whether they are Vaishnavas or Saivas, simply do not understand the question and are not aware that their mode of worship differs from that of other Hindus or that there are different denominations. Some may elect for one of the two sects, but on further examination it will probably be found that they have little or no knowledge of the tenets of either, though they may know that Saivas may eat meat and Vaishnavas may not. Their choice is usually determined by such things as wearing a particular sect mark, or the fact that a temple of a particular deity is situated in their village.

So little is sectarianism understood by the people at large that attempts to compile returns

of sects at the census have failed. The task was undertaken in some provinces in 1901, but the results were of little value. Either the people could not say whether they belonged to a sect, or, if they did, the accuracy of the returns was open to considerable doubt. In Madras and Bengal the recording of sects was not undertaken, as it was felt that it would be a waste of time and energy. One in four declared their sects in Bombay, and one in nine in the Central Provinces, while in the United Provinces only one in eleven claimed to be a member of what are known to be the main sects there. When another attempt was made in the latter province at the next census, the result was much the same, viz. one in ten.

Reviewing the general results, the Census Commissioner in 1911, Sir Edward Gait, pointed out that a return of sects was impracticable for three reasons. In the first place there is a bewildering maze of sects, which overlap each other in an extraordinary way. Secondly, it is not a practical possibility to obtain any complete return because only a small minority belong definitely to special sects; and, lastly, the terms Vaishnava and Saiva cover such a multiplicity of beliefs that the return of either means very little.<sup>1</sup>

The Brahmans and the better educated members of the higher castes generally know whether

<sup>1</sup> *Census of India Report for 1911*, Part I, pp. 114-15.

they are Vaishnavas or Saivas, but among the lower castes there is no clear dividing line between the two. Whichever is the particular deity they favour, the common people are not exclusive. Though one god is their favourite, they do homage to all. The Saktas in Bengal, however, are marked off from the rest of the Hindu community by their distinctive form of worship. They adore the consort of Siva in the form of Durga or Kali, and offer sacrifices of goats to her, a practice which is so abhorrent to some strict Vaishnavas in the same province that they will not even mention the name of Durga or Kali. In South and West India, again, the Lingayats are a distinctive sect, for they deny the spiritual authority of Brahmans, a protestant attitude which clearly distinguishes them from other Hindus. Naturally also, the adherents of new sects have a clear idea of the peculiarities of the beliefs and ritual which they have adopted.

Owing to the absence from Hinduism of definite dogmas and the non-existence of a central controlling authority, nonconformity can scarcely be said to exist, and new sects are constantly being formed by men who think they have discovered a new road to eternal truth. Most of these sects are small and have no root. They collect a certain number of followers, who are usually attracted by the personality of a Guru, and then wither away. They generally consist of

peaceful inoffensive people, who are anxious only to practise their religion in quiet, but often get a sinister reputation as they are regarded with prejudice and suspicion by the uninitiated, who do not know what their real doctrines are and imagine that they indulge in shameful secret practices.

There are other well-established sects, some of which are centuries old. In nearly all cases they started reform movements of spiritual devotion, which stirred the dead waters of indifference and formalism and gave a new tone to the popular religion, replacing, for example, fear of devils by love of a god of grace, or they voiced a reaction against the injustices of the caste system and the spiritual monopoly of the Brahman and proclaimed the equality of all men in a religious brotherhood. These sects have tended to lose their spiritual fervour and to relapse into the unenlightened level of the more popular Hinduism, as they become corrupted and debased by the superstitions of the more ignorant. As remarked by Sir Alfred Lyall,

out of the host of saints and devotees . . . there has often arisen some spiritually minded man who reveals a new light, who cries aloud for a great moral change, who creates and propels a deep movement in the hearts of the people. Such teachers have left their mark on Indian society, and their sects endure, but their true impulse gradually subsides; the lamp is passed from hand

to hand, but its light grows fainter and fainter in the darkness of ignorant terror; it remains as a mystic spark to a few initiated and as a mere portent to the vulgar, who live in irrational fear of malignant deities.<sup>1</sup>

One tendency which is especially noticeable is that of deifying the founders or apostles of a creed of refined theism. Those who seek to turn the thoughts of the people to one god are only too often regarded as his incarnation. Thus we find, in the case of the worship of Vithoba in West India that the poet-saint Tukaram is now an object of adoration, and offerings are made to him on one of the steps of Vithoba's temple at Pandharpur, while Choka Mela, another saint, has a shrine outside the temple. Pilgrims, moreover, bring with them the spirits of fifteen different saints or devotees of the god from places at which they died. They are supposed to come in as many palanquins, each escorted by a throng of worshippers, who chant their praises as they proceed on their way.<sup>2</sup>

It is not proposed to describe different sects, but merely to refer to a few in order to show some of the lines on which religious thought has developed, such as advocacy of the need for faith in a personal deity as a means of salvation, the revolt against the spiritual monopoly of Brahmans and the inequalities of the caste system,

<sup>1</sup> *Asiatic Studies* (1884), p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> See N. Macnicol, *Indian Theism* (1915), p. 126.

and the constant tendency to treat the Guru or head of the sect as if he were divinity; in addition to which some modern sects will be mentioned in order to illustrate the tendencies of reforming movements during the last century.

A sect which is typical of the first line of thought is that of the Ramanujas in South India. *They are so called after their founder, Ramanuja*, who taught that individual souls are not identical with God; that salvation must be found in *bhakti*, i.e. faith in, and love of, God, by means of which man will obtain union with God; and that God has become incarnate in various forms, especially that of Rama, for man's salvation. They are divided into two schools called Vadagalai, meaning the northern school, and Tengalai or southern school, the former insisting that only the original Sanskrit Vedas should be used, whereas the latter assert the efficacy of Tamil texts. Their chief doctrinal difference is that the Vadagalai maintain that a man may attain salvation by means of devotion and good works, the Tengalai that it comes only of grace. By a quaint but expressive imagery these doctrines are called the monkey doctrine or theory and the cat doctrine or theory. The cat carries its kittens, which are passive and helpless; so God delivers man without any effort on his part. Self-surrender is, in short, a preliminary to other means of obtaining salvation. The baby monkey, on the other hand, clings and

holds fast to its mother and so co-operates with her. In the same way man must strive to co-operate with God and to obtain deliverance by means of meditation, good works, and faith as a preliminary to self-surrender. There are further differences of doctrine and practice which need not be particularized with one exception, viz. that the Vadagalai hold that Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, has power to grant salvation equal to Vishnu himself, which the Tengalai deny, though they concede her value as a mediator or channel of intercession.

In actual practice the chief ground for dispute is about the Vaishnava sectarian mark. The Vadagalais assert that the trident-shaped mark represents one foot of Vishnu and should be only on the forehead, the Tengalais that it represents both feet of Vishnu and should be prolonged halfway down the nose, so as to give the trident a kind of shaft—a dispute which to an outsider seems like the quarrel of the Big-Endians and Little-Endians in *Gulliver's Travels*. Both agree, however, in stamping, or in some cases branding, emblems of Vishnu on the breast, shoulders and arms.

Both the Kabirpanthis and Satnamis represent the revolt of the lower classes against the domination of Brahmans and the social injustice of the caste system, the former appealing especially to weavers, as its founder, Kabir, was a weaver, and

the latter to tanners and leather workers because its doctrines were spread by Ghasi Das, a Chamar, i.e. a tanner by hereditary occupation, among members of his caste a little over a century ago. The fundamental tenets of both sects are the worship of one supreme God, who requires neither idols nor temples nor Brahman ministrants, the equality of all men, and the abolition of caste distinctions; but, as so often happens, the pervasive influence of caste has reasserted itself and both sects now admit the caste distinctions which their founders denounced. The Satnamis have a sub-sect called Ram-Ramiha, of which the members are such ardent devotees of the incarnation of Vishnu in Rama that they have the name of Rama tattooed all over their bodies.

Reformed doctrines of a somewhat cognate character are held by the Lingayats, a sect which has its greatest strength in the Deccan. Its adherents may justly be described as protestants, for not only did they protest originally against caste distinctions, but they also protested against the Brahmans having a monopoly of the right to perform religious ceremonies. In the course of centuries caste differentiations have been revived, but the anti-Brahman attitude persists, and the Lingayats employ their own priests and have ceremonies for births and deaths which are different from those of orthodox Hinduism. They maintain that there is only one God, Siva, who is

"infinite intelligence and joy, the creator of the world, and the instructor and redeemer of mankind";<sup>1</sup> their name is derived from the fact that they carry a miniature of the lingam on some part of the person.

This sect was started in the twelfth century A.D., and it is interesting to note a new movement in the west of India which is due to impatience with Brahmanical control in religion. This started with a dispute in the Kolhapur State about the use of Sanskrit *mantras* or texts in family ceremonies. There is a difference between the form of Sanskrit used for the twice-born castes and the lower castes known compendiously as Sudras. The former are entitled to texts from the Vedas, which are in an archaic form of Sanskrit; for the latter texts from the Puranas, which are in a later form of Sanskrit, are used. Some Maratha families claimed to have Vedic rites performed instead of Puranic, a pretension which the Brahmins refused. The result was a schism. The families concerned decided to dispense with the services of Brahman priests and to employ priests of their own caste. Their example was followed by others. The movement spread, and a new anti-Brahman sect came into being, called the Satya Shodhak Panth (or Samaj), i.e. the sect (or society) of truth and purity.

<sup>1</sup> Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Saivism, and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913), p. 156.

As an example of the lengths to which the worship of Gurus can be carried, a brief sketch may be given of the history of the Vallabhacharya sect in Bombay. Starting with the premise that in order to make spiritual progress the body must be sound and healthy, it held that privations are neither necessary nor desirable, and that the good things of life may be enjoyed. The members of the sect have consequently been called the Epicureans of the East, and have shown a tendency to sensuality. The sect is characterized by extreme devotion to Krishna, and a neophyte goes through a rite of initiation in which he dedicates himself, and all he has, to Krishna, taking a vow to devote his soul, his life, his faculties, his wife and children, his house, and all his property to the service of the god.

The heads of the sect, who are known as Maharajas, are regarded as the earthly representatives, or incarnations, of Krishna, and their followers prostrate themselves before them, offer flowers and fruit, and wave lights just as if they were living images of the god. Nor is this all, for it is known that women have given their bodies to those whom they regarded as gods in the flesh. Scandals of this kind and the corrupt practices of the sect led to a reform movement under Swami Narayan, who, proclaiming that he was himself an incarnation sent to restore the faith, inculcated chastity and purity of life; the

heads of the sect which he founded are also known as Maharajas.

Of the modern theistic sects the earliest and perhaps the most remarkable is the Brahmo Samaj, which was founded in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Ray. The name means the society of believers in Brahma, i.e. the Supreme Spirit, and its cardinal tenet is an enlightened theism, which has often been compared to Unitarianism. Its object, as stated in the trust-deed of its first hall of prayer, is "the worship and adoration of the eternal, unsearchable, and immutable Being who is the Author and Preserver of the Universe". It was laid down that no sermons, discourses, prayers or hymns were to be permitted except "such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence and virtue, and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds". Idolatry was anathema, so much so that statuary, carvings and pictorial representations were prohibited, besides all sacrifices, offerings and oblations.

The Samaj has high ethical ideals, and there is much in its creed that is imbued with the spirit of Christianity, such as belief in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It conceives of the Supreme Being as a God of infinite power

and goodness, who does not incarnate Himself. He has the providential care of a Divine Father for mankind, and rewards virtue and punishes sin, but His punishments are remedial and not eternal. The Hindu doctrine of the transmigration of souls is not held; it is believed that the soul is immortal, and that there is a state of conscious existence after death. Worship consists of love of God and doing the things that He loves; repentance is the only way to atonement and salvation; divine grace cannot be obtained by rites and ceremonies, and man can have direct communion with God without the intervention of an intercessor.

Probably because its doctrines appeal to the intellect rather than the emotions, the Brahmo Samaj has never made progress among the masses, but has drawn its members from a small intellectual *élite*, mostly in Bengal. It has never been a popular sect, and its membership is even now under 6000; indeed, there is much to be said for the view of Max Müller that it should be regarded as a movement rather than as a sect.<sup>1</sup> Its work has been that of a leaven within Hinduism, the value of which is not to be assessed by figures of numerical strength. It started the movement for the reform of Hinduism from within, and many of the higher conceptions of that religion held by its modern exponents have

<sup>1</sup> *Biographical Essays* (1884), p. 25.

been derived from it. The cause of social reform also owes much to the men of light and leading among its members, who laboured to raise the social and moral level of their countrymen, and took the lead in the movement for the education of women and the improvement of their status.

In the west of India there is a somewhat similar, but less eclectic, theistic body, known as the Prarthana Samaj, or Society of Prayer, founded in 1867, which inculcates a high moral theism and has long been distinguished for devotion to philanthropy and social reform.

A much more popular sect is the Arya Samaj, which does not merely appeal to the intelligentsia, but attracts the masses because of its liberal views on the subject of caste; according to the census of 1931, it has close on a million adherents largely drawn from the lower ranks of society. It is a Hindu revivalist movement, started in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati, whose object was to purify Hinduism and restore it to what he considered to be its pristine form, free from later accretions. "Back to the Vedas" was the constant theme of his preaching. He taught that the Vedas inculcated monotheism; he denounced idolatry; he also proclaimed the sanctity of the cow, which is not a Vedic doctrine. He declared that caste depended not on birth but on worth, and that anyone could become a

Brahman who studied the Vedas and followed their teaching—a creed which has made the sect popular among the lower classes in North India. The worship is characterized by an absence both of image worship and of an established order of priests. It is also a missionary body with organized propaganda which aims at bringing into the fold of Hinduism those who have left it, and it has a certain aggressiveness which may perhaps be regarded as a symptom of vitality. The Arya Samaj, in the words of one of its adherents, is

a movement designed to give Hinduism a consolidated and organized shape, able to withstand attacks of aggressive faiths like Christianity and Islam, and to strengthen Hinduism from within by ridding it of some of its superstitions and degenerative elements as well as the tyranny of priestcraft and a caste system by birth instead of worth and works. Not only has this great movement tried to save, and to some extent succeeded in saving, Hinduism from external attacks and internal weaknesses, but it has given it an aggressive and proselytizing form, so as to reclaim those who gave up Hinduism as the result of earlier attacks and draw near adherents to this most ancient of all the faiths of Hindustan—Vedic Hinduism.<sup>1</sup>

Another modern sect which calls for notice is that of the Radhaswamis, which was founded in 1861 and now claims 100,000 members. Its

<sup>1</sup> *The Religions of the Empire* (1925), p. 302.

fold purpose. The workshops and farms are for physical work, the colleges for mental growth, and "group meetings" for spiritual activities; but the greatest emphasis is laid on the spiritual side, and every member endeavours to carry on his *Yoga* practices regularly, wherever he may be.<sup>1</sup> The colony, it may be added, has received high commendation from the Governor of the United Provinces, Sir Malcolm Hailey, who remarked that it is the fruit and visible proof of the fine spirit of devotional service which is of the essence of the faith of the Radhaswamis, to whose thoroughness and broadminded efficiency all who knew Dayalbagh can testify.<sup>2</sup>

Hinduism in the past has not been a proselytizing religion, though it has always admitted aboriginal tribes to its fold. The process of conversion is gradual. The aboriginals begin to imitate their Hindu neighbours, adopt some of their customs and their gods, get a low Brahman to minister to them, and in course of time are recognized as low caste Hindus. For some time past, however, there has been direct proselytization, particularly in North India, owing to the Hindu revivalist movement and the activities of the Arya Samaj and other bodies. What is called the *Shuddhi* movement has been started for the re-

<sup>1</sup> P. Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (1934), p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *Census Report of the United Provinces for 1931*, Part I, p. 510.

conversion of Hindu perverts and of their descendants belonging to other faiths, notably Islam. *Shuddhi* means purification and refers to the ceremony of purification by which they are re-admitted to Hinduism. The movement is also directed to the conversion of aboriginals or semi-aboriginals, who are admitted to Hinduism after a purifying ceremony.

The object is largely political, viz. to gain greater political strength for the Hindu community by increasing its numerical strength; and there seems to be little idea of a preliminary instruction in the tenets of Hinduism, so that conversion is a simple and easy matter. An interesting account of a mass conversion and purification has been given by Miss Muriel Lester, one of the few Europeans who has witnessed such a ceremony. Altogether 10,000 Santals and other aboriginals or semi-aboriginals were transformed *en masse* into Hindus. Each had to approach a flaming fire as a symbol of purification. The crowd of new converts next knelt round a small open shrine, at which a priest read Sanskrit prayers and, having done this, they filed into a marquee, where their names were recorded by five clerks. Each neophyte had a sect-mark put on his forehead and was given a copy of the *Bhagavata Gita* (which he would be unable to read), and they were then marched out of the marquee. "Am I a Hindu now?" one of them

asked. "Yes, you are a Hindu now" was the reply. Finally each man was given a dinner, a packet of cigarettes, and a small framed picture of Krishna, and the proceedings terminated with an address on the duties of a Hindu.<sup>1</sup>

It has been claimed for Hinduism that it acts on the principle "Live and let live". This claim is justified by the absence of bitter sectarian animosity. There is no objection to nonconformity, and different sects are free to conduct their worship as they please, provided that they do not offend against the social rules prescribed by the caste system. No new sect is banned on the ground of heterodoxy or treated as heretical. Doctrinal schism has not led to feuds, except for faction fights between bodies of Santhiaris, or to suspension of social intercourse except in South India, where there have at times been ~~been fierce~~ sectarian disputes. Persecution for heterodoxy has been rare, except in the remote past. In Madura a festival is still celebrated which commemorates, under the name of the "impalement of the Jains", the execution in the seventh century A.D. of 8000 Jains, by the slow torture of impalement, under the orders of a king who had himself been a Jain but had been converted to Saivism.<sup>2</sup>

The spirit of toleration towards other Hindu sects is shared in both by the unlettered masses

<sup>1</sup> M. Lester, *My Host the Hindu* (1931), pp. 75-81.

<sup>2</sup> V. A. Smith, *Oxford History of India* (1923), pp. 214-15.

and the intellectual exponents of the higher Hinduism. Ramakrishna Paramhansa, for example, declared "The peculiarities of creeds or sects matter little or nothing. Let everyone perform with faith the devotions and duties of his own sect." He illustrated the principle by a legend. There was a zealous devotee of Siva who hated other deities. Siva appeared to him and said "So long as thou hatest other gods I shall never be pleased with thee". The man, however, hardened his heart. Siva then appeared again in the form of Harihara, i.e. one side of his body was Vishnu and the other Siva, as an object lesson showing the unity of divinity.

A spirit of comprehensive toleration is expressed even for non-Hindu faiths; Ramakrishna, using a striking simile, declared "The light of gas illumines different localities with varying intensity, but the life of the light, i.e. the gas, comes from one common reservoir. The religious teachers of all climates and ages are but as many lamp-posts through which is emitted the light of the spirit flowing from one source, the Lord Almighty." More recently again Professor Radhakrishnan, in explaining the outlook of Hinduism, has laid stress on its liberal comprehensiveness and the absence of fanaticism from it. "The main note of Hinduism is one of respect and good will for other creeds."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Hindu View of Life* (1931), p. 37.

There is no need to multiply examples of toleration extended to European Christians in the past. Hindu rulers permitted Christian missions to work in their dominions without let or hindrance. The missionaries of the Syrian Church were not only allowed to propagate their faith but given grants of land. Under the rule of the Marathas there was a Christian church at Poona, the capital, as well as many mosques, and the followers of both religions offered their devotions without interference. The spirit of liberalism, however, is not extended to those who have been converted from Hinduism to Christianity. Among all but the Europeanized classes a Hindu who becomes a convert to Christianity is liable to suffer bitter persecution at the hands of his fellow-castemen, not so much because of his beliefs but because he has broken the laws of caste. He becomes an outcaste; his relatives turn him out of the house; he may be cruelly ill-treated, and some have suffered unto death for their faith.

Neither does liberalism extend to the social sphere in the case of Europeans. To the orthodox Hindu a European is a Mlechchha, a barbarian with whom he cannot break bread and whose shadow will pollute certain kinds of food, while personal contact with him causes contamination which necessitates purification. The better educated are above such bigoted ideas, but they

persist among those who desire to keep their Hinduism and their caste pure and undefiled. The Manipuris of Assam, who are zealots, will demolish a house if a European sets foot in the verandah, and a Brahman official in Madras has been known to have his office purified by a religious ceremony to rid it of the pollution caused by a European Collector, his superior officer, who came on a visit of inspection. But these are extreme cases. The general attitude is like that outlined in the advice which a shrewd Hindu gave to a European who complained that his servants were robbing him of grain which he had got for his horses. The advice the European received was that he should put his hand in the grain, and no one would touch it.

There is the same profession of tolerance towards the faith of Islam on the part of Hindu thinkers and the same intolerance in practice on the part of the masses. Intermarriage between members of the two faiths is impossible unless they abjure their religion. A man who wishes to marry a Muslim woman must first become a Muslim himself. No Hindu woman can marry a Muslim without being entirely cut off from her family and caste: she has to have the same spirit as Ruth, when she said "Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God". The Muslim is as capable of pollution as the Christian; the Hindu who embraces Islam is as

liable to persecution as the convert to Christianity.

Members of the two religions consequently live side by side without fusion. As the result, however, of centuries of association in the same villages, they ordinarily live together without friction, and in some places the more ignorant lower classes even worship at one another's shrines and join in one another's festivals.

There is a strong antithesis between the two creeds. Their followers have different traditions and a different outlook on life, and there is a latent antipathy which the friction caused by a dispute or by interested agitation may kindle into flame. Both are quick to take offence over religious questions, and when they take offence they emphasize the customs in which they differ. Religious animosity is apt to develop into blind fanaticism with astonishing quickness. Hinduism is ordinarily a static and pacific religion, but when aroused by passion, as, for instance, over the question of cow-killing, it gains a militant strength which it does not ordinarily possess. Agitation for the protection of the cow has little force among a people already convinced of its sanctity, unless the appeal is accompanied by a denunciation of its slaughter by Muslims. When such an agitation is started, the latter retaliate by increased sacrifices of cows and do so, if possible, with irritating ostentation. The result

of mutual antipathy is seen in an appalling record of murderous riots between the two communities, the number of which has grown in late years in consequence of political rivalry and the struggle for political power. These riots have been worst in the large cities, where there is always a disorderly element with predatory habits, ready to take advantage of a breakdown of law and order. In the villages communal riots are rarely of great violence or long duration. There the flame of religious passion dies down as quickly as it is kindled, and normal relations are soon resumed. But there is the possibility of organized aggressive action on a large scale, as was shown by an outbreak in 1917 in Shahabad and the adjoining parts of two other districts in Bihar, which had some of the features of a European pogrom and was obviously the result of a plot to terrorize and crush the Muslim minority. The Hindus, without any provocation or other apparent cause, rose *en masse* against the Muslims in a stretch of country covering 3000 square miles, pillaged villages far and wide, destroyed and desecrated mosques, and were only put down when a force of 1000 troops and police was mobilized to restore peace and order.



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