

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

**OU\_172854**

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY







# **A BOOK OF INDIAN CULTURE**



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA · MADRAS  
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO  
DALLAS · SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.  
TORONTO

# A BOOK OF INDIAN CULTURE

COMPILED AND EDITED WITH BRIEF NOTES FOR THE  
USE OF STUDENTS

BY

**D. S. SARMA, M.A.,**

*(Professor, Presidency College, Madras.)*

MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED.  
MADRAS, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA AND LONDON.

1934

*Copyright]*

[**Price Re. 1.**

PRINTED AT  
THE MADRAS PUBLISHING HOUSE LTD.,  
MOUNT ROAD, MADRAS.  
1934

## PREFACE

---

A compilation of this kind on Indian Culture was first suggested to me by my friend, Professor Radhakrishnan, the Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University. The aim of the following selections is to give the young Indian student of to-day a critical account of the highest achievements of ancient India in the field of literature, art, education, ethics and religion. The passages selected are (with one exception) from writers who are acknowledged authorities in their respective subjects. Though the book consists of chapters taken from seven different authors, it possesses a unity. While doing full justice to the genius of ancient India and its great achievements, it points out at the same time its limitations and drawbacks, and suggests in many places how India could best assimilate the culture of Europe. It equips the student not only with the knowledge of the past but also with critical canons which will be of use to him in the future. The note of racial and cultural harmony, which is the purpose of the whole book, is very clearly struck in the wise words of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, in the last chapter.

*Madras,*  
*May 1934.*

D. S. S.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

The compiler wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the following for permission to reprint the copyright material included in this volume:—Dr. Rabindranath Tagore for his *Introduction to Sakuntala*; the Clarendon Press, Oxford, for the passage on "The Characteristics and Achievements of Indian Drama" from *The Sanskrit Drama*, by A. B. Keith; Messrs. Luzac & Co., for the extract on "The Indian Epics" from *Indian Wisdom* by Sir Monier Monier-Williams; Mr. John Murray for "Indian Art" from *The Ideals of Indian Art* by E. B. Havell; the Oxford University Press for the excerpt from *Ancient Indian Education* by F. E. Keay; the author, the Oxford University Press, and the Yale University Press for the extract from *Ethics of India* by E. W. Hopkins; the author and Mr. S. Ganesan, The Current Thought Press, Triplicane, for the extract from the Introduction to the Students' edition of the *Bhagavad Gita*; and the author and Mr. S. Ganesan for the chapter from *Greater India* by Dr. Rabindranath Tagore.

## CONTENTS

---

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
I. INDIAN DRAMA (1): Sakuntala .. .. . RABINDRANATH TAGORE.	1
II. INDIAN DRAMA (2): Its Characteristics and Achievements .. .. . A. B. KEITH.	11
III. INDIAN EPICS .. .. . SIR MONIER MONIER-WILLIAMS.	26
IV. INDIAN ART .. .. . E. B. HAVELL.	46
V. INDIAN EDUCATION .. .. . F. E. KEAY.	65
VI. INDIAN ETHICS .. .. . E. W. HOPKINS.	79
VII. A GREAT INDIAN SCRIPTURE .. .. . D. S. SARMA.	92
VIII. GREATER INDIA .. .. . RABINDRANATH TAGORE.	115
<i>Notes</i> .. .. .	131



CHAPTER I  
INDIAN DRAMA (1):  
SAKUNTALA—ITS INNER MEANING

Would'st thou the young year's blossoms  
and the fruits of its decline,  
And all by which the soul is charmed,  
enraptured, feasted, fed,  
Would'st thou the Earth and Heaven itself  
in one sole name combine?  
I name thee, O Sakuntala! and all at  
once is said.

*Goethe*

Goethe, the master-poet of Europe, has summed up his criticism of *Sakuntala* in a single quatrain; he has not taken the poem to pieces. This quatrain seems to be a small thing like the flame of a candle, but it lights up the whole drama in an instant, and reveals its inner nature. In Goethe's words, *Sakuntala* blends together the young year's blossoms and the fruits of maturity; it combines heaven and earth in one.

We are apt to pass over this eulogy lightly as a mere poetical outburst. We are apt to consider that it only means in effect that Goethe regarded *Sakuntala* as fine poetry. But it is not really so. His stanza breathes not the exaggeration of rapture, but the deliberate judgment of a true critic. There is a special point in his words. Goethe says expressly that *Sakuntala* contains the history of a development—the development of a flower into fruit, of earth into heaven, of matter into spirit.

In truth there are two unions in *Sakuntala*; and the *motif* of the play is the progress from the earlier union of the First Act, with its earthly unstable beauty and romance, to the higher union in the heavenly hermitage of eternal bliss described in the last Act. This drama was meant not for dealing with a particular passion, not for developing a particular character, but for translating the whole subject from one world to another—to elevate love from the sphere of physical beauty to the eternal heaven of moral beauty.

With the greatest ease Kalidas has effected this junction of earth with heaven. His earth so naturally passes into heaven that we do not mark the boundary-line between the two.- In the First Act the poet has not concealed the gross earthiness of the fall of Sakuntala; he has clearly shown, in the conduct of the hero and heroine alike, how much desire contributed to that fall. He has fully painted all the blandishments, playfulness, and fluttering of the intoxicating sense of youth, the struggle between deep bashfulness and strong self-expression. This is a proof of the simplicity of Sakuntala; she was not prepared beforehand for the outburst of passion which the occasion of Dushyanta's visit called forth. Hence she had not learned how to restrain herself, how to hide her feelings. Sakuntala had not known Cupid before; hence her heart was bare of armour, and she could not distrust either the sentiment of love or the character of the lover. The daughter of the hermitage was off her guard, just as the deer there knew not fear.

Dushyanta's conquest of Sakuntala has been very naturally drawn. With equal ease has the poet shown the deeper purity of her character in spite of her fall—

her unimpaired innate chastity. This is another proof of her simplicity.

The flower of the forest needs no servant to brush the dust off her petals. She stands bare; dust settles on her; but in spite of it she easily retains her own beautiful cleanliness. Dust did settle on Sakuntala, but she was not even conscious of it. Like the simple wild deer, like the mountain spring, she stood forth pure in spite of mud.

Kalidas has let his hermitage-bred youthful heroine follow the unsuspecting path of Nature; nowhere has he restrained her. And yet he has developed her into the model of a devoted wife, with her reserve, endurance of sorrow, and life of rigid spiritual discipline. At the beginning, we see her self-forgetful and obedient to Nature's impulses like the plants and flowers; at the end we see her deeper feminine soul sober, patient under ill, intent on austerities, strictly regulated by the sacred laws of piety. With matchless art Kalidas has placed his heroine at the meeting-point of action and calmness, of Nature and Law, of river and ocean, as it were. Her father was a hermit, but her mother was a nymph. Her birth was the outcome of interrupted austerities, but her nurture was in a hermitage, which is just the spot where nature and austerities, beauty and restraint are harmonised. There is none of the conventional bonds of society there, yet we have the harder regulations of religion. Her *gandharva* marriage, too, was of the same type; it had the wildness of nature joined to the social tie of wedlock. The drama *Sakuntala* stands alone and unrivalled in all literature, because it depicts how Restraint can be harmonised with Freedom. All its joys and sorrows, unions and partings, proceed from the conflict of these two forces.

Sakuntala's simplicity is natural, that of Miranda is unnatural. The different circumstances under which the two were brought up account for this difference. Sakuntala's simplicity was not girt round with ignorance, as was the case with Miranda. We see in the First Act that Sakuntala's two companions did not let her remain unaware of the fact that she was in the first bloom of youth. She had learnt to be bashful. But all these things are external. Her simplicity, on the other hand, is more deeply seated, and so also is her purity. To the very end the poet shows that she had no experience of the outside world. Her simplicity is innate. True, she knew something of the world, because the hermitage did not stand altogether outside society; the rules of home life were observed here too. She was inexperienced, though not ignorant of the outside world; but trustfulness was firmly enthroned in her heart. The simplicity which springs from such trustfulness had for a moment caused her fall, but it also redeemed her for ever. This trustfulness kept her constant to patience, forgiveness, and loving kindness, in spite of the cruellest breach of her confidence. Miranda's simplicity was never subjected to such a fiery ordeal; it never clashed with knowledge of the world.

Our rebellious passions raise storms. In this drama Kalidas has extinguished the volcanic fire of tumultuous passion by means of the tears of the penitent heart. But he has not dwelt too long on the disease; he has just given a glimpse of it and then dropped the veil. The desertion of Sakuntala by the amorous Dushyanta, which in real life would have happened as the natural consequence of his character, is here brought about by the curse of Durvasa. Otherwise, the desertion would have been so

extremely cruel and pathetic as to destroy the peace and harmony of the whole play. But the poet has left a small rent in the veil through which we can get an idea of the royal sin. It is in the Fifth Act. Just before Sakuntala arrives at court and is repudiated by her husband, the poet momentarily draws aside the curtain from the King's love affairs. A woman's voice is heard singing behind the scene:

O honey-bee! having sucked the mango-blossoms in  
your search for new honey, you have forgotten  
the recent loving welcome by the lotus!

This tear-stained song of a stricken heart in the royal household gives us a rude shock, especially as our heart was hitherto filled with Dushyanta's love-passages with Sakuntala. Only in the preceding Act we saw Sakuntala setting out for her husband's home in a very holy, sweet, and tender mood, carrying with herself the blessings of the hoary sage Kanwa and the good wishes of the whole forest world. And now a stain falls on the picture we had so hopefully formed of the home of love to which she was going.

When the jester asked, "What means this song?" Dushyanta smiled and said, "We desert our loves after a short spell of love-making, and therefore I have deserved this strong rebuke from Queen Hansapadika." This indication of the fickleness of royal love is not purposeless at the beginning of the Fifth Act. With masterly skill the poet here shows that what Durvasa's curse had brought about had its seeds in human nature.

In passing from the Fourth Act to the Fifth we suddenly enter a new atmosphere; from the ideal world of the hermitage we go forth to the royal court with its

hard hearts, crooked ways of love-making, difficulties of union. The beauteous dream of the hermitage is about to be broken. The two young hermits who are escorting Sakuntala, at once feel that they have entered an altogether different world, "a house encircled by fire!" By such touches at the beginning of the Fifth Act, the poet prepares us for the repudiation of Sakuntala at its end, lest the blow should be too severe for us.

Then comes the repudiation. Sakuntala feels as if she had been suddenly struck with a thunderbolt. Like a deer stricken by a trusted hand, this daughter of the forest looks on in blank surprise, terror, and anguish. At one blow she is hurled away from the hermitage, both literal and metaphorical, in which she has so long lived. She loses her connection with the loving friends, the birds, beasts, and plants, and the beauty, peace, and purity of her former life. She now stands alone, shelterless. In one moment the music of the first four Acts is stilled!

O the deep silence and loneliness that then surround her! She whose tender heart has made the whole world of the hermitage her own folk, to-day stands absolutely alone. She fills this vast vacuity with her mighty sorrow. With rare poetic insight Kalidas has declined to restore Sakuntala to Kanwa's hermitage. After the renunciation by Dushyanta it was impossible for her to live in harmony with that hermitage in the way she had done before . . . She was no longer her former self; her relation with the universe had changed. Had she been placed again amidst her old surroundings, it would only have cruelly exhibited the utter inconsistency of the whole situation. A mighty silence was now needed, worthy of the mighty grief of the mourner. But the poet has not shown us the picture

of Sakuntala in the new hermitage—parted from the friends of her girlhood, and nursing the grief of separation from her lover. The silence of the poet only deepens our sense of the silence and vacancy which here reigned round Sakuntala. Had the repudiated wife been taken back to Kanwa's home, that hermitage would have spoken. To our imagination its trees and creepers would have wept, the two girl friends would have mourned for Sakuntala, even if the poet had not said a word about it. But in the unfamiliar hermitage of Marichi, all is still and silent to us; only we have before our mind's eye a picture of the world-abandoned Sakuntala's infinite sorrow, disciplined by penance, sedate, and resigned—seated like a recluse rapt in meditation.

Dushyanta is now consumed by remorse. This remorse is *tapasya*. So long as Sakuntala was not won by means of this repentance, there was no glory in winning her . . . . One sudden gust of youthful impulse had in a moment given her up to Dushyanta, but that was not the true, the full winning of her. The best means of winning is by devotion, by *tapasya*. What is easily gained is as easily lost. Therefore, the poet has made the two lovers undergo a long and austere *tapasya* that they may gain each other truly, eternally. If Dushyanta had accepted Sakuntala when she was first brought to his court, she would have only occupied a corner of the royal household, and passed the rest of her life in neglect, gloom, and uselessness.

It was a blessing in disguise for Sakuntala that Dushyanta abjured her with cruel sternness. When afterwards this cruelty reacted on himself, it prevented him from remaining indifferent to Sakuntala. His unceasing

and intense grief fused his heart and welded Sakuntala with it. Never before had the King met with such an experience. Never before had he had the occasion and means of truly loving. Kings are unlucky in this respect; their desires are so easily satisfied that they never get what is to be gained by devotion alone. Fate now plunged Dushyanta into deep grief and thus made him worthy of true love—made him renounce the rôle of a rake.

Thus has Kalidas burnt away vice in the eternal fire of the sinner's heart; he has not tried to conceal it from the outside. When the curtain drops in the last Act, we feel that all the evil has been destroyed as on a funeral pyre, and the peace born of a perfect and satisfactory fruition reigns in our hearts. Kalidas has internally cut right away the roots of the poison tree, which a sudden force from the outside had planted. He has made the physical union of Dushyanta and Sakuntala tread the path of sorrow, and thereby chastened and sublimated it into a moral union. Hence did Goethe rightly say that *Sakuntala* combines the blossoms of Spring with the fruits of Autumn, it combines Heaven and Earth. Truly in *Sakuntala* there is one Paradise Lost and another Paradise Regained.

The poet has shown how the union of Dushyanta and Sakuntala in the First Act as mere lovers is futile, while their union in the last Act as the parents of Bharata is a true union. The First Act is full of brilliancy and movement. We have there a hermit's daughter in the exuberance of youth, her two companions running over with playfulness, the newly flowering forest creeper, the bee intoxicated with perfume, the fascinated King peeping from behind the trees. From this Eden of bliss

Sakuntala, the mere sweetheart of Dushyanta, is exiled in disgrace. But far different was the aspect of the other hermitage where Sakuntala, the mother of Bharata and the incarnation of goodness, took refuge. There no hermit girls water the trees, nor bedew the creepers with their loving sister-like looks, nor feed the young fawn with handfuls of paddy. There a single boy fills the loving bosom of the entire forest-world; he absorbs all the liveliness of the trees, creepers, flowers and foliage. The matrons of the hermitage, in their loving anxiety, are fully taken up with the unruly boy. When Sakuntala appears, we see her clad in a dusty robe, face pale with austerities, doing the penance of a lorn wife, pure-souled. Her long penances have purged her of the evil of her first union with Dushyanta; she is now invested with the dignity of a matron, she is the image of motherhood, tender and good. Who can repudiate her now?

The poet has shown here, as in *Kumara Sambhava*, that the Beauty that goes hand in hand with Moral Law is eternal, that the calm, controlled and beneficent form of Love is its best form, that beauty is truly charming under restraint and decays quickly when it gets wild and unfettered. This ancient poet of India refuses to recognise Love as its own highest glory; he proclaims that Goodness is the final goal of Love. He teaches us that the Love of man and woman is not beautiful, not lasting, not fruitful, so long as it is self-centred, so long as it does not beget Goodness, so long as it does not diffuse itself into society over son and daughter, guests and neighbours.

The two peculiar principles of India are the beneficent *tie of home life* on the one hand, and the *liberty of*

*the soul* abstracted from the world on the other. In the world India is variously connected with many races and many creeds; she cannot reject any of them. But on the altar of devotion (*tapasya*) India sits alone. Kalidas has shown, both in *Sakuntala* and *Kumara Sambhava*, that there is a harmony between these two principles, an easy transition from the one to the other. In his hermitage a human boy plays with lion cubs, and the hermit spirit is reconciled with the spirit of the householder.

On the foundation of the hermitage of recluses Kalidas has built the home of the householder. He has rescued the relation of the sexes from the sway of lust and enthroned it on the holy and pure seat of asceticism. In the sacred books of the Hindus the ordered relation of the sexes has been defined by strict injunctions and laws. Kalidas has demonstrated *that* relation by means of the elements of Beauty. The Beauty that he adores is lit up by grace, modesty, and goodness; in its intensity it is true to one for ever; in its range it embraces the whole universe. It is fulfilled by renunciation, gratified by sorrow, and rendered eternal by religion. In the midst of this beauty, the impetuous unruly love of man and woman has restrained itself and attained to a profound peace, like a wild torrent merged in the ocean of goodness. Therefore is such love higher and more wonderful than wild and untrained Passion.\*

---

\*This article was originally written by the author in Bengali and was translated into English by Professor Jadunath Sarkar.

## CHAPTER II

### INDIAN DRAMA (2):

#### ITS CHARACTERISTICS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Sanskrit drama may legitimately be regarded as the highest product of Indian poetry, and as summing up in itself the final conception of literary art achieved by the very self-conscious creators of Indian literature. This art was essentially aristocratic; the drama was never popular in the sense in which the Greek drama possessed that quality. From an early period in Indian history we find the distinction of class reflected in a distinction of language; culture was reserved largely for the two higher castes, the Brahmin and the Kshatriya or ruling class. It was in this rarified atmosphere that the Sanskrit drama came into being, and it was probably to *litterati* of high cultivation that its creation from the hints present in the religion and in the epic was due. The Brahmin, in fact, much abused as he has been in this as in other matters, was the source of intellectual distinction of India. As he produced Indian philosophy, so by another effort of his intellect he evolved the subtle and effective form of the drama. Brahmins, it must be remembered, had long been the inheritors of the epic tradition, and this tradition they turned into happy use in the evolution of the drama.

The drama bears, therefore, essential traces of its connexion with the Brahmins. They were idealists in outlook, capable of large generalizations, but regardless of accuracy in detail, and to create a realistic drama was wholly incompatible with their temperament. The accu-

rate delineation of facts or character was to them nothing; they aimed at the creation in the mind of the audience of sentiment, and what was necessary for this end was all that was attempted. All poetry was, in the later analysis, which is implicit in the practice of earlier poets, essentially a means of suggesting feeling, and this function devolved most of all on the drama. Nothing, therefore, is of value save what tends to this end, and it is the function of the true dramatist to lay aside everything which is irrelevant for this purpose.

It follows from this principle that the plot is a secondary element in the drama in its highest form, the heroic play or Nataka. To complicate it would divert the mind from emotion to intellectual interest, and affect injuriously the production of sentiment. The dramatist, therefore, will normally choose a well-known theme which in itself is apt to place the spectator in the appropriate frame of mind to be affected by the appropriate emotion. It is then his duty by the skill with which he handles the theme to bring out in the fullest degree the sentiment appropriate to the piece. This is in essentials the task set before themselves by the great dramatists; Kalidasa makes subtle changes in the story of Sakuntala, not for the sake of improving the plot as such, but because the alterations are necessary to exhibit in perfection the sentiment of love, which must be evoked in the hearts of the audience. The crudities of the epic tale left Sakuntala a business-like young woman and Dushyanta a selfish and calculating lover; both blemishes had to be removed in order that the spectator might realise within himself, in ideal form, the tenderness of a girl's first affection and the honourable devotion of the king, clouded only by a curse against which he had no power.

The emotions, which thus it was desired to evoke were, however, strictly limited by the Brahminical theory of life. The actions and status of man in any existence depend on no accident; they are essentially the working out of deeds done in a previous birth, and these again are explained by yet earlier actions from time without beginning. Indian drama is thus deprived of a motif which is invaluable to Greek tragedy, and everywhere provides a deep and profound tragic element, the intervention of forces beyond control or calculations in the affairs of man, confronting his mind with obstacles upon which the greatest intellect and the most determined will are shattered. A conception of this kind would deprive the working of the law of the act of all validity, and, however much in popular ideas the inexorable character of the act might be obscured by notions of an age before the evolution of the belief of the inevitable operation of the act, in the deliberate form of expression in drama this principle could not be forgotten. We lose, therefore, the spectacle of the good man striving in vain against an inexorable doom; we lose even the wicked man whose power of intellect and will make us admire him, even though we welcome his defeat. The wicked man who perished is merely, in the view of Sanskrit drama, a criminal undergoing punishment, for whose sufferings we should feel no sympathy whatever; such a person is not a suitable hero for any drama, and it is a mere reading of modern sentiment into ancient literature to treat Duryodhana in the *Urubhanga* as the hero of the drama. He justly pays the full penalty for insolence and contempt of Vishnu.

It follows, therefore, that the sentiments which are to be evoked by a Sanskrit Nataka are essentially the heroic

or the erotic, with that of wonder as a valued subordinate element, appropriate in the *dénouement*. The wonderful well consorts with the ideal characters of legend, which accepts without incredulity or discomfort the intervention of the divine in human affairs, and therefore follows with ready acceptance the solution of the knot in the *Sakuntala* or the *Vikramorvasi*. Heroism and love, of course, cannot be evoked without the aid of episodes which menace the hero and heroine with the failure to attain their aims; there must be danger and interference with the course of true love, but the final result must see concord achieved. Hence it is impossible to expect that any drama shall be a true tragedy; in the long run the hero and the heroine must be rewarded by perfect happiness and union. The *Nagananda* of Harsha illustrates the rule to perfection; the sublimity of self-sacrifice suggests real tragedy, but this would be wholly out of harmony with the spirit of India, and the intervention of Gauri is invoked to secure that the self-sacrifice is crowned by a complete and immediate reward in this life. The figure of an Antigone might have been paralleled in Indian life; it would not be acceptable to the spirit of Indian drama.

Idealist as it is, the spirit of drama declines to permit of a division of sentiment; it will not allow the enemy of the hero to rival him in any degree; nothing is more striking than the failure to realize the possibility of a great dramatic creation presented by the character of Ravana as the rival of Rama for Sita's love. Ravana varies in the hands of the dramatists, but all tend to reduce him to the status of a boastful and rather stupid villain, who is inferior at every point to his rival. Equally effectively the drama banishes from the possibilities the conception

of a struggle of conscience in the mind of the hero or the heroine; if this were represented, it would create a similar struggle in the mind of the audience, and destroy the unity and purity of the sentiment, which it is the part of the drama to generate.

The style similarly is explained and justified by the end of suggesting sentiment. The lyric stanzas, at first sight strangely undramatic, find their full explanation when it is remembered how effective each is in exciting the appropriate emotion in the mind of the audience, which, deeply versed in Sanskrit poetry, is keen to appreciate the effect of each stanza. The simplicity or even negligence of the prose of the drama is thus also explained and excused. It is not necessary to excite sentiment, it serves merely as the mode of communicating facts, and of enabling the audience to follow the action until an opportunity is afforded to excite feeling by the melody of a verse, all the more effective from its sudden emergence from the flatness of its environment. The same consideration explains the importance of those elements of which we can form so faint an impression, the dance, music, song, and the mimetic art. The elaborate code of gestures laid down in the theory, and unquestionably bulking large in practice, was all intended to produce in cultivated spirits the sentiments appropriate to the play.

The ideal character of the heroic drama extends itself even to the *Natika*, where a closer approach to real life might be expected. The dramatists, however, make no attempt at realism; they choose their subjects from the legend, and they cast over the trivial *amourettes* of their heroes the glamour derived from the assurance that the winning in marriage of a maiden will assure them uni-

versal rule. The action of the play is thus not suffered to degenerate into a portrayal of the domestic difficulties of the harem system under polygamic conditions; the dramatists do not seek realism; but are content to reproduce a stereotyped scheme of love, jealousy, parting, and reunion, a sequence well calculated to evoke the sentiment of love in the mind of the audience. Even in the *Prakarana*, in which realism might be expected, seeing that it condescends to heroes of less than royal or divine status, there is no actual exception; though the author of the *Mricchakatika* has had the power to infuse a semblance of life and actuality into his characters, Bhavabhuti shows us in the *Malatimadhava* nothing but types suggesting the erotic sentiment. Equally ideal is the *Vyayoga* with its suggestion of heroism and its deliberate selection of its subject from the epic tradition.

Tragedy proper is denied us by these conditions of Indian thought, and comedy in any of its higher forms is also difficult; it might legitimately be expected to prevail in the *Natika* or the *Prakarana*, but it is unduly subordinated to the erotic sentiment and, though not absent, is comparatively undeveloped. The *Prahasana* and the *Bhana* indeed appeal to the comic sentiment, but only in an inferior and degraded form, a fact expressed in the failure of the classical drama to preserve a single specimen of either form of composition.

Limited by the nature of the intellectual movement which produced it, the Sanskrit drama could never achieve the perfection of Greek tragedy or comedy. Kalidasa, greatest of Indian dramatists, experiences no uneasiness at the structure of life or the working of the world. He

accepts without question or discontent the fabric of Indian society. When Goethe writes of him:

Willst du die Blüthe des frühen, die Früchte des späteren  
Jahres,

Willst du, was reizt and entzückt, willst du, was sättigt  
und nährt,

Willst du den Himmel, die Erde, mit einem Namen  
begreifen,

Nenn' ich Sakuntala dich, und so ist alles gasagt

the praise is doubtless just in a measure, but it may easily be pressed further than is justifiable. For the deeper questions of human life Kalidasa has no message for us; they raised, so far as we can see, no question in his own mind; the whole Brahminical system, as restored to glory under the Guptas, seems to have satisfied him, and to have left him at peace with the universe. Fascinating and exquisite as is the *Sakuntala*, it moves in a narrow world, removed far from the cruelty of real life, and it neither seeks to answer, nor does it solve, the riddles of life. Bhavabhuti, it is true, shows some sense of the complexity and difficulty of existence, of the conflict between one duty and another, and the sorrow thus resulting, but with him also there prevailed the rule that all must end in harmony. Sita, who in the older story is actually finally taken away from the husband who allowed himself to treat her as if her purity were sullied by her captivity in Ravana's hands, is restored to Rama by divine favour, an ending infinitely less dramatic than final severance after vindication. How serious a limitation in dramatic outlook is produced by the Brahminical theory of life, the whole history of the Sanskrit drama shows. Moreover, acceptance of the Brahminic tradition permits

the production of such a play as the *Chandakausika* where reason and humanity are revolted beyond measure by the insane vengeance taken by the sage Visvamitra on the unfortunate king for an act of charity.

The drama suffered also from its close dependence on the epic, and the failure of the poets to recognize that the epic subjects were often as a whole undramatic. Hence frequently, as in the vast majority of the Rama dramas and those based on the Mahabharata, we have nothing but the recasting of the epic narrative into a semi-dramatic form, without real dramatic structure. There was nothing in the theory to hint at the error of such a course; on the contrary to the poets the subject was one admirably suitable, since in itself it suggested the appropriate sentiments, and therefore left them merely the duty of heightening the effects. This led on the high road to the outward signs of the degradation of the drama, the abandoning of any interest in anything save the production of lyric or narrative stanzas of perfection of form, judged in accordance with a taste which progressively declined into a rejection of simplicity and the search for what was recondite. To the later poets the drama is an exercise in style, and that, as contrasted with the highest products of Indian literature, a fantastic and degraded one.

To the Brahmin ideal individuality has no appeal; the law of life has no room for deviation from type; the caste system is rigid, and for each rank in life there is a definite round of duties, whence departure is undesirable and dangerous. The drama likewise has no desire for individual figures, but only for typical characters. The defect from the Aristotelian as from the modern point of view of Rama dramas is simply that Rama is conceived

as an ideal, a man without faults, and therefore for us lacking in the essential traits of humanity. Similarly in the style of the drama we are denied any differentiation of individuals as contrasted with classes. The divergence in the use of Sanskrit or Prakrit, and in the different kinds of Prakrit, marks the essential distinction of men and women, and of those of high and those of humble rank, but beyond this characterization does not go. We are treated to an artificial court speech, which assorts with stereotyped emotions, refined, elegant, sentimental, rich in the compliments of court gallantry, often pathetic, marked with a distinct strain of philosophical commonplace, and fond of suggested meanings and *double entendres*, hinting at the events yet to come. But the dramatists made no serious attempt to create individual characters, and to assign to them a speech of their own; they vary greatly in merit as regards characterization, but even the best dramas paint types, not individuals.

Indifference to individuality necessarily meant indifference to action, and therefore to plot, and this lies at the basis of the steady progress by which the dialogue was neglected in favour of the stanzas. The latter express the general; they draw highly condensed, but also often extremely poetical, pictures of the beauty of Nature in one of its many aspects, or of the charms of the beloved; or they enunciate the Brahminical solutions of the problems of life and conduct. In them the individual has no place; the beloved may be described, but she is merely typical. These stanzas appealed to the audience; we have no echo in India of the criticisms which were levelled in Greece against Euripides, for the introduction of sentiments unfitted to his characters and the scenes involved, and we have no hint that Indian theory ever recognized that the

drama by the tenth century A.D. was in a state of decadence.

The peculiar and limited view of the drama was intimately connected with its Brahminical character. The drama of Greece was popular; it appealed to all free Athenian citizens, an infinitely wider class than that for which the dramas of India in Sanskrit and Prakrit were composed, and it was written in a language easily comprehended by all those who viewed the spectacle. From the period of the earliest dramas known to us the full comprehension of the words can have been confined to a limited section of the audience, which, however, had sufficient pleasure in the spectacle, in the song, the pantomimic dances, and the music, and sufficient general comprehension of the drama to follow it adequately enough. Such an audience, however, acted as a stimulus to refinement and elaboration; the dramatist could neglect the prime necessity of being understood which weighed on the Greek dramatists, and indulge in the production of something recondite, calculated to manifest his skill in metrical form and management of words. The fact that Sanskrit was not a normal living language presented him with the temptation, to which none of the later dramatists rises superior, of the free use of the vast store of alleged synonyms presented by the lexica, freed from any inconvenient necessity, such as exists in every living language, of using words only in that precise nuance which every synonym possesses in a living dialect.

The same tendency to artificiality was undoubtedly stimulated by the fact that plays for their reputation must have depended largely on their being read, not witnessed, however important it may have been for the poet to secure

the honour of public performance. The popularity and the number of the Kavyas which have come down to us attests the existence of an effective public which, if it did not read the works, at least enjoyed having them read aloud, and the dramatist was thus encouraged, while adhering to the dramatic form, to vie in this *genre* of literature with the effects produced in the Kavya. The Kavya, however, was undergoing throughout its history a tendency to seek mere stylistic effects, and this influence must largely have contributed to the elaboration of style of the drama. It is significant that the Kavyas and dramas of Kalidasa show a relative simplicity which contrasts effectively with the complexities of Bhavabhuti in drama, and Bharavi and Magha in the Kavya.

To understand the Indian drama we have aid from a work of curious character and importance, the *Kamasutra* or *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana, which was doubtless familiar to the dramatists from Kalidasa onwards. The world which produced the classical drama was one in which the pessimism of Buddhism, with its condemnation of the value of pleasure, had given way to the worship of the great sectarian divinities Siva and Vishnu, in whose service the enjoyment of pleasure was legitimate and proper. The Buddhists themselves admittedly felt the force of the demand for a life of ease; we have preserved verses satirizing their love of women, wine, soft living, and luxury, and there is abundant evidence of decline of austerity in the order. The eclecticism of Harsha is sufficiently significant; the policy which at the great festival at Prayaga reported by Hiuan Tsang resulted in the dedication of a statue to the Buddha on the first day, to the Sun, the favourite deity of his father, on the second,

and to Siva on the third, excludes any possibility of belief in the depth of Harsha's Buddhist beliefs. If there were any doubt as to the strange transformation of feeling among Buddhists, it would be removed by the benediction which opens the *Nagananda*, where the Buddha is invoked as rallied on his hard-heartedness by the ladies of Mara's train. The process of accommodation had evidently gone very far. The philosophy of the age shows equally the lack of serious interest in the old tenets of Buddhism; we have the great development of logical studies in lieu of insistence on the truths of misery and the path to its removal, while the *chef-d'œuvre* of the period outside Buddhist circles is the complicated and fantastic system of the Samkhya philosophy, which adequately reflects the artistic spirit of the time in its comparison of nature with a dancer who makes her *début*, and gracefully retires from the stage when she has satisfied her audience. The spirit of Asoka has entirely disappeared from the royal families of India, and the courts demanded amusement with refinement, just as they sought for elegance in art. The interests of this world are centred in the pleasures of life, the festivals which amused the court and the people by the pomp of their celebration from time to time, and in the intervals the amusements of the palace and the harem, sports in the water, the game of the swing, the plucking of flowers, song, dance, pantomime, and such other diversions as were necessary to while away the endless leisure of princes, who left the business of their realms to ministers and soldiers, while they spared themselves any fatigue more serious than that of love encounters. The manners of their princes were aped by their rich subjects, and there was no dearth of courtiers and parasites to aid them in their diversions. The man about

town (*Nagaraka*) as sketched by the *Kamasutra* is rich and cultivated, devoted to the niceties of attire and personal adornment, perfumed, pomaded, and garlanded; he is a musician, and a lover of books; caged birds afford him pleasure of eyes, and diversion in teaching them speech; a lovely garden with an arbour presents facilities for amusement and repose. In the day time the care of the toilet, cock-fights, ram-fights, excursions in the neighbouring country, fill his time; while at night, after a concert or ballet, there are the joys of love, in which the *Kamasutra* gives him more elaborate instruction than the *Ars Amoris* ever contemplated. The luxury of polygamy did not suffice such a man; he is allowed to enjoy the society of courtesans, and in them, as in Athens, he finds the intellectual interests which are denied to his legitimate wives. With them and the more refined and cultured of the band of hangers-on, high and low, with whom he is surrounded, he can indulge in the pleasures of the discussion of literature, and appreciate the fine efforts of the poets and dramatists. From such a nature, of course, anything heroic cannot be expected, and the poets recognize this state of affairs; but it demands refinement, beauty, luxury, and the demand is fully met. Love is naturally a capital theme, but the dramatists suffer from one grave difficulty from the condition of the society which they depict. The ideal of a romantic love between two persons free and independent, masters of their own destinies, is in great measure denied to them, and they are reduced to the banality of the intrigue between the king and the damsel who is destined to be his wife, but who by some accident has been introduced into his harem in a humble position.

For the dramatists the favour of a king was the chief object to be aimed at, and kings are eminently very willing to lend their names to dramatic and other compositions, whatever part they actively took in their production. The persistence of the rumour which regards Harsha as winning his fame in part at the expense of Bana may be unjust to the king, but at any rate it expresses what was popular belief in the possibility of such a happening in poetical circles, and it is indeed incredible that a king should have been so scrupulous as to refuse any aid in his literary toils from his court poets. Competitions in exhibitions of poetry were in favour with monarchs, but they were not the only patrons; their actions excited imitation, and even in Buddhist and Jain circles the desire to adopt the expedient of drama in connection with religion was evinced. But even when applied by Brahmins, Buddhists, or Jains to philosophy or religion, the drama bore throughout the unmistakable stamp of its original predominance in circles whose chief interest was gallantry; the *Nagananda* bears eloquent evidence of this for Buddhist ideas, the *Probodha-chandrodaya* for Brahmin philosophy, and the *Moharaja-parajaya* for Jainism.

A society of this kind was certain to encourage refinement and elegance in poetry; it was equally certain to lead to artificiality and unreality. But we may be certain that the true poetic taste existed; it is attested not merely by the existence and fame of such dramas as those of Kalidasa, but in the kindred sphere of music it has an interesting exposition in the Third Act of *Mricchakatika*, in which, following with slight changes the precedent of Bhasa, Charudatta is made to express to the unresponsive ears of Maitreya, his one faithful friend, the effect produc-

ed on his ears by the, sweet singing of Rebhila, which has come to console him in the midst of his sorrow:—

The notes of love, peace, sweetness, could I trace,  
The note that thrills, the note of passion too,  
The note of woman's loveliness and grace,  
Ah, my poor words add nothing, nothing new.  
But as the notes in sweetest cadence rang,  
I thought it was my hidden love who sang.  
The melody of song, the stricken strings,  
In undertone that half unconscious clings,  
More clearly sounding as the passions rise,  
But ever sweeter as the music dies.  
Words that strong passions fain would say again,  
Yet checks their second utterance—in vain;  
For music sweet as this lives on until  
I walk as hearing sweetest music still.

\*

\*

\*

\*

### CHAPTER III

## INDIAN EPICS

I proceed to note a few obvious points that force themselves on the attention in comparing the two great Indian Epics with each other, and with the Homeric poems. I have already stated that the episodes of the Mahabharata occupy more than three-fourths of the whole poem. It is, in fact, not one poem, but a combination of many poems; not a Kavya, like the poem of Valmiki, by one author, but an Ithihasa by many authors. This is one great distinctive feature in comparing it with the Ramayana. In both Epics there is a leading story, about which are collected a multitude of other stories; but in the Mahabharata the main narrative only acts as a slender thread to connect together a vast mass of independent legends, and religious, moral, and political precepts; while in the Ramayana the episodes, though numerous, never break the solid chain of one principal and paramount subject, which is ever kept in view. Moreover, in the Ramayana there are few didactic discourses and a remarkable paucity of sententious maxims.

It should be remembered that the two Epics belong to different periods and different localities. Not only was a large part of the Mahabharata composed later than the Ramayana, parts of it being comparatively modern, but the places which gave birth to the two poems are distinct. Moreover, in the Ramayana the circle of territory represented as occupied by the Aryans is more restricted than that in the Mahabharata. It reaches to Videha or Mithila and Anga in the East, to Surashtra in

the South-west, to the Yamuna and the great Dandaka forest in the South. Whereas in the Mahabharata the Aryan settlers are described as having extended themselves to the mouths of the Ganges in the East, to the mouth of the Godavari in the Coramandel coast, and to the Malabar coast in the West; and even the inhabitants of Ceylon bring tribute to the Northern kings. It is well known that in India different customs and opinions frequently prevail in districts almost adjacent, and it is certain that Brahminism never gained the ascendancy in the more martial north which it acquired in the neighbourhood of Oude, so that in the Mahabharata we have far more allusions to Buddhistic scepticism than we have in the sister Epic. In fact, each poem, though often running parallel to the other, has yet a distinct point of departure; and the Mahabharata as it became current in various localities, diverged more into by-paths and cross-roads than its sister. Hence the Ramayana is in some respects a more finished composition than the Mahabharata, and depicts a more polished state of society, and a more advanced civilisation. In fact, the Mahabharata presents a complete circle of post-Vedic mythology, including many myths which have their germ in the Veda, and continually enlarging its circumference to embrace the later phases of Hinduism, with its whole train of confused and conflicting legends. From this storehouse are drawn much of the Puranas, and many of the more recent heroic poems and dramas. Here we have repeated many of the legends of the Ramayana, and even the history of Rama himself. Here also we have long discourses on religion, politics, morality, and philosophy introduced without any particular connection with the plot. Here again are most of the narratives of the incarnations of

Vishnu, numberless stories connected with the worship of Siva, and various details of the life of Krishna. Those which especially bear on the modern worship of Krishna are contained in the supplement called *Harivamsa*, which is itself a long poem consisting of 16,374 stanzas—longer than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined. Hence the religious system of the *Mahabharata* is far more popular, liberal and comprehensive than that of the *Ramayana*. It is true that the god Vishnu is connected with Krishna in the *Mahabharata*, as he is with Rama in the *Ramayana*, but in the latter Rama is everything, whereas in the *Mahabharata*, Krishna is by no means the centre of the system. His divinity is even occasionally disputed. The five Pandavas have also partially divine natures, and by turns become prominent. Sometimes Arjuna, sometimes Yudhishtira, at others Bhima, appears to be the principal orb round which the plot moves. Moreover, in various passages Siva is described as supreme, and receives worship from Krishna. In others, Krishna is exalted above all, and receives honour from Siva. In fact, while the *Ramayana* generally represents one-sided and exclusive Brahminism, the *Mahabharata* reflects the multilateral character of Hinduism—its monotheism and polytheism, its spirituality and materialism, its strictness and laxity, its priestcraft and anti-priestcraft, its heirarchical intolerance and rationalistic philosophy, combined. Not that there was any intentional variety in the original design of the work, but that almost every shade of opinion found expression in a compilation formed by gradual accretion through a long period.

In unison with its more secular, popular and human character, the *Mahabharata* has, as a rule, less of mere mythical allegory, and more of historical probability in

its narratives than the Ramayana. The reverse, however, sometimes holds good. For example, in the Ramayana IV. xl. we have a simple division of the world into four quarters or regions, whereas in the Mahabharata VI. 236, etc., we have the fanciful division (afterwards adopted by the Puranas) into seven circular Dvipas or continents, surrounded respectively by seven oceans in concentric belts, *viz.*, (1) of salt water, (2) of sugar-cane juice, (3) of wine, (4) of clarified butter, (5) of curdled milk, (6) of milk, and (7) of fresh water; the mountain Meru, or the abode of the gods, being in the centre of Jambudvipa, (the Earth) which again is divided into nine Varshas or countries separated by eight ranges of mountains, the Varsha called Bharata (India) lying south of the Himavat range.

Notwithstanding these wild ideas and absurd figments, the Mahabharata contains many more illustrations of real life and of domestic and social habits and manners than the sister Epic. Its diction, again, is more varied than that of the Ramayana. The bulk of the latter poem (notwithstanding interpolations and additions) being by one author, is written with uniform simplicity of style and metre; and the antiquity of the greater part is proved by the absence of any studied elaboration of diction. The Mahabharata, on the other hand, though generally simple and natural in its language, and free from the conceits and artificial constructions of later writers, comprehends a greater diversity of composition, rising sometimes to the higher style, and using not only loose and irregular, but also studiously complex grammatical forms, and from the mixture of ancient legends, occasional archaisms and Vedic formations.

In contrasting these two Indian poems with the Iliad and the Odyssey, we may observe many points of similarity. Some parallel passages have been already pointed out. We must expect to find the distinctive genius of two different people (though both of the Aryan race) in widely distinctive localities, colouring their Epic poetry very differently, notwithstanding general features of resemblance. The Ramayana and Mahabharata are no less wonderful than the Homeric poems as monuments of the human mind, and no less interesting as pictures of human life and manners in ancient times, yet they bear in a remarkable degree the peculiar impress ever stamped on the productions of Asiatic nations and separating them from European. On the side of art and harmony of proportion, they can no more compete with the Iliad and the Odyssey than the unnatural outline of the ten-headed and twenty-armed Ravana can bear comparison with the symmetry of a Grecian statue. While the simplicity of the one commends itself to the most refined classical taste, the exaggerations of the other only excite the wonder of the Asiatic minds, or if attractive to European, can only please imaginations nursed in an Oriental school.

Thus in the Iliad, time, space, and action are all restricted within the narrowest limits. In the Odyssey they are allowed a wider, though not too wide, a cycle; but in the Ramayana and Mahabharata their range is almost unbounded. The Ramayana, as it traces the life of a single individual with tolerable continuity, is in this respect more like the Odyssey than the Iliad. In other points, especially in its plot, its greater simplicity of style, and its comparative freedom from irrelevant

episodes, it more resembles the Iliad. There are many graphic passages in both the Ramayana and Mahabharata which, for beauty of description cannot be surpassed by anything in Homer. It should be observed, moreover, that the diction of the Indian Epics is more polished, regular, and cultivated, and the language altogether in a more advanced stage of development than that of Homer. This, of course, tells to the disadvantage of the style on the side of nervous force and vigour; and it must be admitted that in the Sanskrit poems there is a great redundance of epithets, too liberal a use of metaphor, simile and hyperbole, and far too much repetition, amplification, and prolixity.

In fact, the European who wishes to estimate rightly the Indian Epics, must be prepared not to judge them exclusively from his own point of view. He should bear in mind that to satisfy the ordinary Oriental taste, poetry requires to be seasoned with exaggeration.

Again, an Occidental student's appreciation of many passages will depend upon his familiarity with Indian mythology, as well as Oriental customs, scenery, and even the characteristic idiosyncrasies of the animal creation in the East. Most of the similes in Hindu Epic poetry are taken from the habits and notions of Asiatic animals, such as elephants and tigers or from peculiarities in the aspect of Indian plants and natural objects: Then, as to the description of scenery in which Hindu poets are certainly more graphic and picturesque than either Greek or Latin, the whole appearance of external nature in the East, the exuberance of vegetation, the profusion of trees and fruits and flowers, the glare of burning skies, the freshness of the rainy season, the fury of storms, the

serenity of Indian moonlight and the gigantic mould in which natural objects are generally cast—these and many other features are difficult to be realised by a European. We must also make allowance for difference in Eastern manners; though, after conceding a wide margin in this direction, it must be confessed that the disregard of all delicacy in laying bare the most revolting particulars of certain ancient legends which we now and then encounter in the Indian Epics (especially in the Mahabharata) is a serious blot, and one which never disfigures the pages of Homer, notwithstanding his occasional freedom of expression. Yet there are not wanting indications in the Indian Epics of a higher degree of civilisation than that represented in the Homeric poems. The battle-fields of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, though spoiled by childish exaggerations and the use of supernatural weapons, are not made barbarous by wanton cruelties; and the description of Ayodhya and Lanka imply far greater luxury and refinement than those of Sparta and Troy.

The constant interruption of the principal story by tedious episodes, in both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, added to the rambling prolixity of the story itself, will always be regarded as the chief drawback in Hindu Epic poetry, and constitutes one of its most marked features of distinction. Even in this respect, however, the Iliad has not escaped the censure of critics. Many believe that this poem is the result of fusion of different songs on many subjects long current in various localities, intermixed with interpolations, something after the manner of Mahabharata. But the artistic instincts of the Greeks required that all the parts and appendages and more recent additions should be blended into one compact,

homogeneous and symmetrical whole. Although we have certainly in Homer occasional digressions or parentheses, such as the description of the 'Shield of Achilles,' the 'Story of Venus and Mars', these are not like Indian episodes. If not absolutely essential to the completeness of the Epic conception, they appear to arise naturally out of the business of the plot, and cause no violent disruption of its unity. On the contrary, with Eastern writers and narrators of stories, continuity is often designedly interrupted. They delight in stringing together a number of distinct stories—detached from each other, yet connected like the figures on a frieze. They even purposely break the sequence of each; so that before one is ended another is commenced, and ere this is complete, others are interwoven; the result being a curious intertwining of stories within stories, the slender thread of an original narrative running through them all. A familiar instance of this is afforded by the well-known collection of tales called *Hitopadesha*, and by the *Arabian Nights*. The same tendency is observable in the composition of Epic poems—far more, however, in the *Mahabharata* than in the *Ramayana*.

Passing on to a comparison of the plot and personages of the *Ramayana* with those of the *Iliad*, without supposing, as some have done, that either poem has been imitated from the other, it is certainly true, and so far remarkable, that the subject of both is a war undertaken to recover the wife of one of the warriors, carried off by a hero on the other side; and that Rama, in this respect, corresponds to Menelaus, while in others, he may be compared to Achilles, Sita answering to Helen, Sparta to Ayodhya, Lanka to Troy. It may even be true that some

sort of analogy may be traced between the parts played by Agamemnon and Sugriva, Patroclus and Lakshmana, Nestor and Jambavat. Again Ulysses, in one respect, may be compared to Hanumat; and Hector, as the bravest warrior on the Trojan side, may in some points be likened to Indrajit, in others to the indignant Vibhishana, or again in the Mahabharata to Duryodana, while Achilles has qualities in common with Arjuna. Other resemblances might be indicated; but these comparisons cannot be carried out to any extent without encountering difficulties at every step, so that any theory of an interchange of ideas between Hindu and Greek Epic poets becomes untenable. Rama's character has really nothing in common with that of Menelaus, and very little with that of Achilles; although, as the bravest and most powerful of the warriors he is rather to be compared with the latter than the former hero. If in his anger he is occasionally Achillean, his whole nature is cast in a less human mould than that of the Grecian hero. He is the type of a perfect husband, son, and brother. Sita also rises in character far above Helen and even above Penelope, both in her sublime devotion and loyalty to her husband, and her indomitable patience and endurance under suffering and temptation. As for Bharata and Lakshmana, they are models of fraternal duty; Kausalya of maternal tenderness, Dasaratha of paternal love; and it may be affirmed generally that the whole moral tone of the Ramayana is certainly above that of the Iliad. Again, in the Iliad the subject is really the anger of Achilles; and when that is satisfied the drama closes. The fall of Troy is not considered necessary to the completion of the plot. Whereas in the Ramayana the whole action points to the capture of Lanka and destruction of the ravisher. No

one too can read either the Ramayana or Mahabharata without feeling that they rise above the Homeric poems in this—that a deep religious meaning appears to underlie all the narrative, and that the wildest allegory may be intended to conceive a sublime moral symbolising the conflict between good and evil and teaching the hopelessness of victory in so terrible a contest without purity of soul, self-abnegation, and subjugation of the passions.

In reality it is the religious element of the Indian Epics that constitutes one of the principal features of contrast in comparing them with the Homeric. We cannot, of course, do more than indicate here the bare outlines of so interesting a subject as a comparison between the gods of India, Rome, and Greece thus:—

Indra and Siva certainly offer points of analogy to Jupiter and Zeus; Durga or Parvati to Juno; Krishna to Apollo; Sri to Ceres; Prithivi to Cybele; Varuna to Neptune, and, in his earlier character, to Uranus; Saraswathi, goddess of speech and arts, to Minerva; Kartikeya or Skanda, god of War, to Mars; Yama to Pluto or Minos; Kuvera to Plutus; Visvakarman to Vulcan; Kama, god of Love, to Cupid; Rati, his wife, to Venus; Narada to Mercury; Hanumat to Pan; Ushas, and in the later mythology Aruna, to Eos and Aurora; Vayu to Aeolus; Ganesa, as presiding over the opening and beginning of all undertakings, to Janus; the Asvini-kumaras to the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux.

But in Greece, mythology, which was in many respects fully systematised when the Homeric poems were composed, never passed certain limits, or outgrew a certain symmetry of outline. In the Iliad and the Odyssey, a god is little more than idealised humanity. His form and his actions are seldom out of keeping with his character. Hindu mythology, on the other hand, springing

from the same source as that of Europe, but spreading and ramifying with the rank of luxuriance of an Indian forest, speedily outgrew all harmony of proportions, and surrounded itself with an intricate undergrowth of monstrous and confused allegory. Doubtless the gods of Indian and Grecian Epics preserve some traces of their common origin resembling each other in various ways; interfering in human concerns, exhibiting human infirmities, taking part in the battles of their favourite heroes, furnishing them\* with celestial arms, or interposing directly to protect them.

But in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and in the Puranas to which they led, the shape and operations of divine and semi-divine beings are generally suggestive of the monstrous, the frightful and the incredible. The human form, however idealised, is seldom thought adequate to the expression of divine attributes. Brahma is four-faced; Siva, three-eyed and sometimes five-headed; Indra has a thousand eyes; Kartikeya, six faces; Ravana, ten heads; Ganesa has the head of an elephant. Nearly every god and goddess has at least four arms, with symbols of obscure import exhibited in every hand. The deeds of heroes, who are themselves half gods, transport the imagination into the region of the wildest chimera; and a whole pantheon presents itself, teeming with grotesque fancies, with horrible creations, half-animals, half-gods, with man-eating ogres, many-headed giants and disgusting demons, to an extent which the refined and delicate sensibilities of the Greeks and Romans would not have tolerated.

Moreover, in the Indian Epics, the boundaries between the natural and supernatural, between earth and

heaven, between the divine, human, and even animal creations, are singularly vague and undefined; troops of deities and semi-divine personages appear on the stage on every occasion. Gods, men, and animals are ever changing places. A constant communication is kept up between the two worlds, and such is their mutual interdependence that each seems to need the other's help. If distressed mortals are assisted out of their difficulties by divine interposition, the tables are often turned and perturbed gods, themselves reduced to pitiful straits, are forced to implore the aid of mortal warriors in their conflicts with the demons. They even look to mortals for their daily sustenance and are represented as actually living on the sacrifices offered to them by human beings, and at every sacrificial ceremony assemble in troops, eager to feed upon their shares. In fact, sacrifice with the Hindus is not merely expiatory or placatory; it is necessary for the food and support of the gods. If there were no sacrifices, the gods would starve to death. This alone will account for the interest they take in the destruction of demons, whose great aim was to obstruct these sources of their sustenance. Much in the same way the spirits of dead men are supposed to depend for existence and happiness on the living, and to be fed with cakes of rice and libations of water at the Shradha ceremonies.

Again, not only are men aided by animals which usurp human functions, but the gods also are dependent on and associated with birds and beasts of all kinds, and even with plants. Most of the principal deities are described as using animals for their *vahanas* or vehicles. Brahma is carried on a swan, and sometimes seated on a lotus; Vishnu is borne on or attended by a being, half-eagle; half-man (called Garuda); Lakshmi is seated on

a lotus or carries one in her hand; Siva has a bull for his vehicle or companion; Kartikeya, god of war, has a peacock; Indra has an elephant; Yama, god of death, has a buffalo (Mahisha); Kamadeva, a parrot and fish; Ganesa, a rat; Agni, a ram; Varuna, a fish; Durga, a tiger. The latter is sometimes represented with her husband on a bull, Siva himself being also associated with a tiger and antelope as well as countless serpents. Vishnu (Hari. Narayana) is also represented as the Supreme Being sleeping on a thousand-headed serpent called Sesha (or Anantha, 'the Infinite').

This Sesha is, moreover, held to be the chief of a race of Nagas or semi-divine beings, sometimes stated to be one thousand in number, half-serpents, half-men, their heads being human and their bodies snake-like. They inhabit the seven Patalas or regions under the earth, which, with the seven superincumbent worlds, are supposed to rest on the thousand heads of the serpent Sesha, who typifies infinity—inasmuch as, according to a common myth, he supports the Supreme Being between the intervals of creation, as well as the worlds created at the commencement of each Kalpa. Again, the earth is sometimes fabled to be supported by the vast heads and backs of eight male and eight female mythical elephants who all have names and are the elephants of the eight quarters. When any of these shakes his body the whole earth quakes.

In fact, it is not merely in a confused, exaggerated, and overgrown mythology that the difference between the Indian and Grecian Epics lies. It is in the injudicious and excessive use of it. In the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the spiritual and the supernatural are everywhere

so dominant and overpowering that anything merely human seems altogether out of place.

In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the religious and supernatural are perhaps scarcely less prevalent. The gods are continually interposing and superintending; but they do so as if they were themselves little removed from men or at least without destroying the dramatic probability of the poem, or neutralising its general air of plain matter-of-fact humanity. Again, granted that in Homer there is frequent mention of the future existence of the soul and its condition of happiness or misery hereafter, and that the Homeric descriptions of disembodied spirits correspond in many points with the Hindu notions on the same subject—yet even these doctrines do not stand out with such exaggerated reality in Homer as to make human concerns appear unreal. Nor is there in his poems the slightest allusion to the soul's free existence in a former body, and its liability to pass into other bodies hereafter—a theory which in Hindu poetry invests present actions with mysterious meanings, and gives a deep distinctive colouring to Indian theology.

Above all, although priests are occasionally mentioned in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* there is wholly wanting in the Homeric poems any recognition of a regular hierarchy, or the necessity for a mediatorial caste of sacrificers. This, which may be called the sacerdotal element of the Indian Epics, is more or less woven into their very tissue. Brahminism has been at work in these productions almost as much as the imagination of the poet; and boldly claiming a monopoly of all knowledge, human and divine, has appropriated this, as it has every other department of literature, and warped it to its own purposes.

Its policy having been to check the development of intellect and keep the inferior castes in perpetual childhood, it encouraged an appetite for exaggeration, more insatiable than would be tolerated in the most extravagant European fairy tale. This has been done more in the Ramayana than in the Mahabharata; but even in the later Epic, full as it is of geographical, chronological, and historical details, few assertions can be trusted. Time is measured by millions of years, space by millions of miles; and if a battle has to be described, nothing is thought of it unless millions of soldiers, elephants and horses are brought into the field.

This difference in the religious systems of Europe and India becomes still more noteworthy, when it is borne in mind that the wildest fictions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata are to this very day intimately bound up with the religious creed of the Hindus. It is certain that the more intelligent among them, like the more educated Greeks and Romans, regarded and still regard the fictions of mythology as allegorical. But both in Europe and Asia the mass of the people, not troubling themselves about the mystical significance of symbols, took emblem and allegory for reality. And this, doubtless, they are apt to do still, as much in the West as in the East. Among European nations, however, even the ductile faith of the masses is sufficiently controlled by common sense to prevent the fervour of religious men from imposing any great extravagance on their credulity, and much as the Homeric poems are still admired, no one in any part of the world now dreams of placing the slightest faith in their legends, so as to connect them with the religious opinions and practices. In India a complete contrast in this respect

may be observed. • The myths of the Indian Epics are still closely interwoven with *present* faith. In fact, the capacity of an uneducated Hindu for accepting and admiring the most monstrous fictions is apparently unlimited: hence the absence of all history in the literature of India. A plain relation of facts has little charm for the ordinary Hindu mind.

Even in the delineation of heroic character, where Indian poets exhibit much skill, they cannot avoid ministering to the craving for the marvellous which appears to be almost inseparable from the mental constitution of Eastern peoples.

Homer's characters are like Shakespeare's. They are true heroes, if you will, but they are always men; never perfect, never free from human weaknesses, inconsistencies and caprices of temper. If their deeds are sometimes praeterhuman, they do not commit improbabilities which are absolutely absurd. Moreover, he does not seem to delineate his characters; he allows them to delineate themselves. They stand out like photographs, in all the reality of nature. We are not so much told what they do or say. They appear rather to speak and act for themselves. In the Hindu Epics the poet gives us too long and too tedious descriptions in his own person; and as a rule, his characters are either too good or too bad. How far more natural is Achilles, with all his faults, than Rama, with his almost painful correctness of conduct! Even the cruel vengeance that Achilles perpetrates on the dead Hector strikes us as more likely to be true than Rama's magnanimous treatment of the fallen Ravana. True, even the heroes sometimes commit what a European would call crimes; and the Pandavas were certainly guilty

of one inhuman act of treachery. In their anxiety to provide for their own escape from a horrible death, they enticed an outcaste woman and her five sons into their inflammable lac-house, and then burnt her alive. But the guilt of this transaction is neutralized to a Hindu by the woman being an outcaste; and besides, it is the savage Bhima who sets fire to the house. Rama and Lakshmana again were betrayed into a deed of cruelty in mutilating Surpanakha. For this however, the fiery Lakshmana was responsible. If the better heroes sin, they do not sin like men. We see in them no portraits of ourselves. The pictures are too much one colour. There are few gradations of light and shadow, and little artistic blending of opposite hues. On the one side we have all gods or demi-gods; on the other all demons or fiends. We miss real human beings with mixed characters. There is no mirror held up to inconsistent humanity. Duryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers are too uniformly vicious to be types of real men. Lakshmana has perhaps the most natural character among the heroes of the Ramayana, and Bhima among those of the Mahabharata. In many respects the character of the latter is not unlike that of Achilles; but in drawing his most human heroes the Indian poet still displays a perpetual tendency to run into extravagance.

It must be admitted, however, that in exhibiting pictures of domestic life and manners the Sanskrit Epics are even more true and real than the Greek and Roman. In the delineation of women the Hindu poet throws aside all exaggerated colouring, and draws from nature. Kaikeyi, Kausalya, Mandodari (the favourite wife of Ravana), and even the hump-backed Manthara (Ramayana II. viii.), are all drawn to the very life. Sita, Draupadi, and Damayanti engage our affections and our

interest far more than Helen, or even than Penelope. Indeed, Hindu wives are generally perfect patterns of conjugal fidelity, nor can it be doubted that in these delightful portraits of the Pativrata or 'devoted wife' we have true representations of the purity and simplicity of Hindu domestic manners in early times. We may also gather from the Epic poems many interesting hints as to the social position occupied by Hindu women before the Muhammadan conquest. No one can read the Ramayana and Mahabharata without coming to the conclusion that the habit of secluding women, and of treating them as inferiors is, to a certain extent, natural to all Eastern nations, and prevailed in the earliest times. Yet various passages in both the Epics clearly establish the fact, that women in India were subjected to less social restraint in former days than they are at present, and even enjoyed considerable liberty. True, the ancient lawgiver, Manu, speaks of women as having no will of their own, and unfit for independence; but he probably described a state of society which it was the aim of the priesthood to establish, rather than that which really existed in his own time. At a later period the pride of Brahminism, and still more recently the influence of Muhammadanism, deprived women of even such freedom as they once enjoyed; so that at the present day no Hindu woman has, in theory, any independence. It is not merely that she is not her own mistress; she is not her own property, and never, under any circumstances, can be. She belongs to her father first, who gives her away to her husband, to whom she belongs for ever. She is not considered capable of so high a form of religion as man, and she does not mix freely in society. But in ancient times, when the epic songs were current in India, women were not confined to

intercourse with their own families; they did very much as they pleased, travelled about, and showed themselves unreservedly in public, and, if of the Kshatriya caste, were occasionally allowed to choose their own husbands from among a number of assembled suitors. It is clear, moreover, that, in many instances, there was considerable dignity and elevation about the female character, and that much mutual affection prevailed in families. Nothing can be more beautiful and touching than the pictures of domestic and social happiness in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Children are dutiful to their parents and submissive to their superiors; younger brothers are respectful to elder brothers; parents are fondly attached to their children, watchful over their interests and ready to sacrifice themselves for their welfare; wives are loyal, devoted, and obedient to their husbands, yet show much independence of character, and do not hesitate to express their own opinions; husbands are tenderly affectionate towards their wives, and treat them with respect and courtesy; daughters and women, generally, are virtuous and modest, yet, spirited, and, when occasion requires, firm and courageous; love and harmony reign throughout the family circle. Indeed, in depicting scenes of domestic affection, and expressing those universal feelings and emotions which belong to human nature in all time and in all places, Sanskrit Epic poetry is unrivalled even by Greek Epos. It is not often that Homer takes us out of the battle-field; and if we except the lamentations over the bodies of Patroclus and Hector, the visit of Priam to the tent of Achilles, and the parting of Hector and Andromache, there are no such pathetic passages in the Iliad as the death of the hermit boy, the pleadings of Sita for permission to accompany her husband into exile, and the whole ordeal scene

at the end of the Ramayana. In the Indian Epics such passages abound, and, besides giving a very high idea of the purity and happiness of domestic life in ancient India, indicate a capacity in Hindu women for the discharge of the most sacred and important social duties.

We must guard against the supposition that the women of India at the present day have altogether fallen from their ancient character. Notwithstanding the corrupting example of Islamism, and the degrading tendency of modern Hinduism, some remarkable instances may still be found of moral and even intellectual excellence. These, however, are exceptions, and we may rest assured that, until Asiatic women, whether Hindu or Muslim, are elevated and educated, our efforts to raise Asiatic nations to the level of European will be fruitless. Let us hope that when the Ramayana and Mahabharata shall no longer be held sacred as repositories of faith and storehouses of trustworthy tradition, the enlightened Hindu may still learn from these poems to honour the weaker sex; and that Indian women, restored to their ancient liberty and raised to a still higher position by becoming partakers of the 'fulness of the blessing' of Christianity, may do for our Eastern Empire what they have done for Europe—soften, invigorate and dignify the character of its people.

## CHAPTER IV

### INDIAN ART

The historical background of Indian art is that which is furnished by the record of India's great spiritual teachers, by the exploits of her heroes, and by the lives of her noble men and women. It may seem often to the Western critic that all Indian literature is wanting in the historic sense, just as Indian sculpture and painting are assumed to be crude and inartistic for neglect of common physiological and other scientific facts. But just as Indian art is thoroughly scientific in the Indian sense, so Indian history also fulfils adequately the purpose which Indian historians had in view.

In the great period of Hindu and Buddhistic sculpture fundamental physiological truths are never disregarded, though minor anatomical details are rigorously suppressed in order to achieve the end for which the artist was striving. Though artistic facts were not always sought for within the limits of the human or animal world, yet the laws of the structure of man or beast were never ignorantly outraged. Indian artistic anatomy is a possible and consistent ideal anatomy, and Indian perspective is a possible and consistent ideal perspective. The offence, to the modern European mind, is that the science of Hindu and Buddhist art transcends the limits of modern Western science which would keep art, like itself, chained to the observation of natural effects and phenomena, as they are impressed on the retina of the ordinary human eye.

In the same way Indian history is not all a chaos of wild and fantastic legend, without system and without sequence, though such facts as the day on which Buddha died, or the exact date of the battle of Kurukshetra, were never considered of sufficient importance to be drummed into the heads of schoolboys. Indian history, like Indian philosophy and Indian art, is a part of Indian religion. The scientific basis is there; the chronological sequence is not disregarded, but just as all Indian art aims at showing the relation between the seen and unseen, between the material universe and the spiritual, so Indian history is much more concerned with the bearings which the human events and actions have upon human conduct than with compiling a bare record of the events and actions themselves. Indian history is a spiritual guide and moral text book for Indian people, not a scientific chronicle of passing events. Everyday, in one of the innumerable worlds, a Buddha may die, so the day of Gautama's decease matters little to us: the way he lived and the essence of his teaching are the things which are counted in the roll of the world's evolution.

Then again, Indian History, like Indian art, is ideal. The modern Western scholar is shocked at the confusion between poetry, romance, and history which is found in ancient records, both in the East and in the West—even in the Christian Bible. He assumes that the sole aim of the historian is to reveal the bare threads of the warp and weft in the loom of time, by picking out the fair flowers of the imagination, with which poetry and religion have lovingly embroidered it. But to the Oriental there is a truth in idealism intrinsically more true than what we call the bare, the naked truth. Western science can never reveal the springs of human action, nor discover the spirit-

ual bearing of human events, however minutely it may dissect and explain the organisation of matter. The 'higher criticism' can never destroy the essential truths of the New Testament, nor can the searchlight of modern science diminish the truth of revelation which shines in the Buddhist and Hindu Scriptures. History is both art and science; the historian needs to be a seer and a poet to present facts in their true significance and to give to each event its relative spiritual importance. The embroidery of the great artist does not weaken the fabric which Time weaves for himself; it strengthens while it beautifies. And to those who believe in a spiritual world as even more actual and real than the phenomenal world there is as much reality in the embroidery as in the plain warp and weft with which it is interwoven. Though the foolish and unskilful embroiderer may spoil the warp, yet it is only through the imagination that we can link together the seen and the unseen; and without imagination science itself loses its vital force, and the modern scientific historian may become the falsest of guides.

There is evidence enough to show that both Eastern and Western ways of thought may lead into a morass. Art in the East may degenerate into a mechanical repetition of debased hierarchical formularies; history, both sacred and profane, may sink into the most degraded obscurantism. And in the West, also, art may end itself in mere virtuosity, or colour photography, machine-made sculpture, and the pianola: the historic sense may be sterilised through a foolish craze for autographs, buttons, and snuff-boxes. In the middle path, where safety lies, East and West, art and science, may go together hand in hand. Imagination must always lean upon reason; reason must ever seek a higher inspiration than its own.

Siva is greater than Ganesha: yet Ganesha is always to be first invoked.

In Buddhist art the familiar story of the Great Renunciation and all the events of Gautama's life until the final attainment of Nirvana form the historical background for the expression of Indian ideals. As commentaries upon these events, the legends of his former lives, called the *Jatakas*, are added to explain symbolically the process of evolution by which the soul gradually obtains liberation from its material attachments: a process perceived by Indian seers several millenia before Western science announced that all matter is instinct with life.

Through such historical facts and fictions containing eternal verities, the Indian sculptor and painter instructed the crowds of pious pilgrims who thronged the procession-paths enclosing the innumerable relic-shrines of Buddhism, and the aisles of thousands of Chaityas, or churches, where the members of the Sangha met for worship. As aids to meditation also, the walls and ceilings of the great Buddhist Viharas, the monastic universities, were covered with similar historical and mythological frescoes or sculptures.

Though in the preceding chapters I have followed archaeological precedent in assuming that the representation of the divine ideal in the Indian art, founded upon the ideal heroic type of Aryan poetry, is first discovered in Buddhist sculpture and painting, it is by no means certain that the Indian conception of the Buddha as a divinity was not adapted from earlier anthropomorphic images worshipped by other sects.

We have seen that it is not until a comparatively late period in Buddhism that the person of the Buddha

as a divinity is represented in art; yet it is quite certain that anthropomorphic idols were worshipped in India long before the earliest Gandhara sculpture. References to such images occur in several passages in the Mahabharata; *e.g.*, in the Bhishma Parva it is mentioned, as an omen of coming disaster, that "the idols of the Kuru king in their temples tremble and laugh, and dance and weep."

Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara of the Jains, a contemporary of the Buddha, is commonly assumed to be the founder of Jainism; but the Jains themselves claim for their religion a much greater antiquity, and it is possible that the earliest images of the Tirthankaras, or deified heroes, may have been the prototype followed by the Indian Buddhist image-makers.

But it was not in sculpture or in painting that the Jain creative genius asserted itself. They were magnificent builders and, as examples of architectural design, the two towers of victory at Chittor, of the ninth and fifteenth centuries A.D., are unsurpassed of their kind in the whole world, while for consummate craftsmanship and decorative beauty the vaulted roofs of shrines like that of Mount Abu, built by a merchant prince, Vimala Sah, in A.D., 1031, equal anything to be seen in Buddhist or Hindu buildings. Though it may not be quite true that, as Fergusson says, the Jains believed to a greater extent than other Indian sects in the efficacy of temple-building as a means of salvation, their wonderful 'Cities of temples' crowning the sacred hills of Palitana and Girnar in Gujerat have a beauty of their own which is quite unique. The great majority of these temples are small, being the gifts of single wealthy persons, and, to quote the same

authority, "they are deficient in that grandeur of proportion that marks the buildings undertaken by royal command or belonging to important organised communities." The charm of Palitana is due to its environment and the poetic feeling with which the site has been treated architecturally. The sculpture is comparatively unimportant.

The Jain figure-sculptors occasionally worked on a colossal scale in making the images of their saints, the Tirthankaras. Probably the finest examples are the detached figures at Sravan Belgola, Karkala, and Yannur, in Mysore, which range in height from thirty-five to seventy feet. These are very noble as art, quite apart from their imposing dimensions. But, as a rule, Jain figure-sculpture seems to lack the feeling and imagination of the best Buddhist and Hindu art.

The reason for this must be attributed to the character of Jain religious tenets. The sect of the Jains, like that of the Saivites, has always preserved more of the asceticism ingrained in orthodox Brahminical teaching than did the Buddhists, or their spiritual successors, the Vaishnavaites. The Jain ideal of quietism was to be attained by the austerities of the Hindu ascetic, and the Jain saints, having reached the heaven of their desires, troubled themselves no more with any worldly affairs.

Even down to the present day, though life is regarded as the most sacred principle in nature, the Jains hold it to be the highest virtue for a man or woman to retire to some lonely consecrated spot and obtain final release from worldly cares by a process of slow starvation. At Sravan Belgola, the hill to the North of that on which the great statue of Gomata stands is full of such associations and many inscriptions on the rocks record the passing away of

devout Jain kings and queens, and others less distinguished, who thus attained Nirvana.

In Jainism there are no divine incarnations of heroes, like Krishna, who labour for the material prosperity of humanity; neither did the Jain saints or deities develop into personifications of nature's manifold aspects. The Jain sculptors and painters were therefore limited to a very narrow range of ideas: they had no rich mythology of lives of the saints, full of wonders and of human interest, to illustrate; no grand conception of nature's moods—only the fixed, immutable pose of the ascetic absorbed in contemplation. Thus Jain art, as regards painting and sculpture, deserves more than that of any other Hindu sect the reproach of poverty of invention, which is often, without any justification, laid upon Indian art in general.

The Buddhist Stupas of Bharhut, Sanchi, and Amaravati, with the sculptured rails which enclose their procession-paths, belong to the transition period of Indian art, dating from about the time of Asoka, or the third century B.C., down to the third or fourth century A.D. After that time the Buddhist dynasties of Northern India succumbed to their Hindu rivals, and Buddhism itself was gradually absorbed in the general current of Hindu thought, from out of which the two great modern sects, the Vaishnavaites and Saivaites, began to emerge.

In India Buddha eventually took his place in the Hindu theogony as one of the *Avatars* of Vishnu, and the heroes of the great Epics, Krishna and Rama, came forward as the most prominent figures in national art and drama. But in the meantime the artistic traditions of Buddhism had found congenial soil in China, from whence

they spread to Korea, and Japan, and in Ceylon. The disasters to the Buddhist kingdoms in Northern India had also stimulated colonial enterprise, and in the great colony of Java Indian Buddhist art flourished magnificently until the conversion of the islanders to Islam.

The splendid seven-terraced shrine of Borobudur, which has escaped Muhammadan and Christian iconoclasm, contains the most perfect series of Buddhist historical sculptures now existing. Along the pilgrims' procession-paths on five different terraces are sculptured one hundred and twenty panels illustrating events in the life of Gautama, and a similar number of scenes from the *Jatakas*.

The best sculptures of Borobudur, which belong probably to the eighth and ninth centuries A.D., reach the highest point of Buddhist plastic art. Fergusson, in his history of Indian architecture, made the grievous mistake of assigning the zenith of Indian sculpture to the time of the later Amaravati reliefs, or about the third century A.D., and this cardinal error has not only led astray nearly all European writers on Indian art ever since, but has formed the basis on which Indian art has been presented to the art-student by the national museums of Great Britain.

The travesty of Indian art-history which is thus put before the European public is as misleading as it would be for the museums of Tokio to exhibit Gothic art of the eleventh century as representing the zenith of medieval art in Europe, and for Japanese art-critics to write of European sculpture of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as unworthy of serious consideration. Not only has Indian art-history been thus horribly distorted, but the

whole official system of art-education in India has been based upon a similar misconception and perversion of Indian ideals.

The art of India up to the fourth century A.D., was purely elective and transitional. The spirit of Indian thought was struggling to find definite artistic expression in sculpture and painting, but the form of expression was not artistically perfected until about the seventh or eighth centuries, when most of the great sculpture and painting of India was produced. From the seventh or eighth to the fourteenth century was the great period of Indian art, corresponding to the highest development of Gothic art in Europe, and it is by the achievement of this epoch, rather than by those of Mogul Hindustan, that India's place in the art-history of the world will eventually be resolved.

With one important exception, the Ajanta cave-paintings, practically the whole of the art of this period now existent belongs to sculpture or architectural design. This may partly be accounted for by the wholesale destruction of Indian paintings which took place under Muhammadan rule, especially in the time of Aurangazib; it being much easier to obliterate paintings than to destroy sculpture. But the principal reason is probably that the spirit of *bhakti*, which animated all the great art of the Buddhist-Hindu period, took more delight in sculpture than in painting on account of the greater labour and cost involved in it; from the idea that the greater the labour devoted to the service of the gods the greater would be the merit won by the devotee.

It should not be inferred from this that painting, as an art, never reached a high degree of perfection in India.

The finest of the Ajanta paintings exhibit an amazing technical skill, a fertility of invention, and a power of expressing high religious ideals unsurpassed in any art. Although, after the time of the Buddhist supremacy, sculpture was generally preferred to painting in sacred buildings, it was custom in every royal palace to have a *chitra-sala*, or hall of painting, decorated with frescoes. The art of the Mogul miniature paintings, some of which are as fine as the finest 'fine art' of the West, was not entirely an importation into India from Persia, but largely a revival of the art of Buddhist and Hindu court painters.

Nevertheless, the remains of Indian religious painting are now too fragmentary to be placed beside the enormous production of the great schools of China and Japan; and the Mogul court painters, like the fine art of modern Europe, represented a distraction and amusement for cultured dilettanti rather than a great national art tradition like that of the Far East. In the national art of Asia, China and Japan stand as supreme in their schools of painting as India does in her sculpture and architecture.

After the third or fourth century A.D., so erroneously considered as the culminating point of Indian sculpture, the Saivaites began to add a new and in some ways a unique chapter to the history of Indian art, with their great cave temples, and sculptures in stone and bronze. Like the Jains, the Saivaites were originally strict followers of the ascetic ideal: Siva being the personification of the meditative life, of that higher knowledge which is the most direct path for the soul's liberation. But, so long as the Buddhists maintained their identity as a separate sect of Hinduism their wonderful activity in artistic creation seems to have stimulated the Saivaites

of Northern India to emulate the achievements of their rivals, and many of the finest Indian monuments of the pre-Muhammadan epoch—*e.g.*, the temple of Elephanta and that of Kailasa at Ellora—were dedicated to the worship of Siva.

It would, however, be quite fallacious to attempt a history of Indian art upon a rigid sectarian classification. The different currents of religious thought represented by the diverse sects of Hinduism intermingle at so many points that the only clear demarcations in art-history are dynastic, racial, and provincial or local. Thus the Buddhist Mahayana images of Nepal often symbolise the same ideas as the Saivaite sculptures of Elephanta and Ellora; and it is often difficult to distinguish between Mahayana sculptures of the eight and ninth centuries and those of the Saivaites.

Though Siva, like Vishnu, is reputed to have manifested himself in human incarnations, the incidents of the ascetic's life do not give much scope for the exercise of the artist's descriptive power, and most of the great groups of Saivaite sculpture illustrate the myths of Hindu cosmogony connected with Siva's powers either as the Creator or Destroyer of the universe, or popular stories of his relations with the Earth Mother, as represented by Uma or Parvati. But after Sankaracharya, in the eighth century A.D., overcame the Buddhist philosophers in contests of dialectical skill, and thus established the spiritual ascendancy of the Saivaite cult, the Vedic objections to anthropomorphic religious symbolism seems to have revived in Northern India; and this, together with the influence of Muhammadan iconoclasm during Aurangzib's long, intolerant reign, almost reduced Saivaite icono-

graphy in the north to the symbols of the *Lingam* and the bull. The prohibition of image worship on the part of Saivaite and Jain reformers at this period may have been directed by motives of political expediency, in order to avert persecution in their faith by fanatical followers of Islam.

The splendid traditions of the Saivaite figure sculptors were carried down to modern times by the bronze workers employed in the temples of Southern India and Ceylon. There are doubtless a great many fine Saivaite bronzes still buried underground. Many are hidden away in temples into which Europeans are not allowed to penetrate. Now that some educated Indians are beginning to take an intelligent interest in their national art we may expect that more of these treasures will be brought to light, and treated with greater artistic consideration than they are by the superstitious guardians of the temples. The degrading and vulgar modern practice of dressing up of temple images with gaudy drapery, like children's dolls reduce the status of a sculptor to that of a maker of lay figures, and accounts in some degree for the contempt with which all Indian sculpture has been regarded by Anglo-Indians.

Though Saivism assimilated a great deal of the humanistic teaching of Gautama, the modern Vaishnavaites are more entitled to be considered the artistic heirs of Buddhism, Gautama himself, ignored by the Saivaites, is recognised as one of the incarnations of Vishnu. In the stories of Ramachandra and Krishna, also incarnations of Vishnu, and of other heroes of epics, Vaishnavaites art finds human types more closely related to the ethical

ideal of Buddhism than to the, ascetic ideal of the Saivaites.

But here again we must not draw such distinctions too closely; for the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are as much the common property of all Hinduism as the English Bible and Shakespeare belong to all English-speaking people. The Indian epics contain a portrait-gallery of ideal types of men and women which afford to every good Hindu the highest exemplars of moral conduct, and every Hindu artist an inexhaustible mine of subject-matter.

It is somewhat surprising for the student of Indian art to find that though the adventures of Rama and Sita and the exploits of the Pandava heroes have such a deep hold on popular imagination, even in the present day, and though the whole text of the great epics is regarded as holy writ, it is rarely that the subjects of important sculptures seem to have been taken directly from them in the great creative period of Indian art. The finest series of reliefs illustrating the Ramayana are not in India but in the courtyard of a Vaishnavite temple at Prambanam, in Java; they are ascribed to about the eleventh century A.D. An incident in the Mahabharata is illustrated in one of the series of sculptures at Mamallapuram, near Madras; and the temple of Angkor Vat, in Kambodia, has reliefs on a grand scale dealing with other events of the great war; but, with these exceptions, there is now hardly any important Indian sculpture illustrating the epics. Puranic literature supplies the subjects of practically all Hindu religious sculpture.

I think that the explanation of this is that the temples were held to be the dwelling places of the *devas*, and

consequently the figures of human beings could only appropriately be represented on the exterior. Thus the principal sculptures within the sacred precincts related exclusively to the divinities who were worshipped therein, and generally to events which took place in the paradise of the gods.

From various references in Hindu dramatic writings we may conclude that the history of Rama and Sita and of the Pandava heroes from whom many of the Hindu kings claimed descent were frequently illustrated in the fresco paintings of the royal *chitrasalas*, or picture-halls, which have now entirely disappeared. The epic of Indian womanhood and the Iliad of Asia seem now to be out of place in the up-to-date Indian Prince's picture-gallery imported wholesale from Europe, and the Indian aristocracy is mostly concerned in obliterating all the remaining vestiges of Indian artistic culture.

The more modern Vaishnavaite literature and art are centred in the *bhakti* cult and in the events of Krishna's early life at Brindaban, before he became the spiritual guide and champion of the Pandavas in the great war. In some of the popular art which relates to this aspect of Vaishnavism the spiritual significance of Krishna's relations with Radha and the *gopis* is given a grossly material interpretation. But it would be wrong to infer that the obscenities which occasionally disfigure Hindu temples are necessarily indicative of moral depravity. In the matter of sexual relationship, Indian civilisation, in every stratum of society, holds up a standard of morality as high as Europe has ever done.

The splendid sun-temples in Mudhera in Gujerat and of Kanarak in Orissa belong to a sub-section of

Vaishnava cult, still represented by the Sauras, or those who worship Vishnu in his manifestation as Surya-Narayana. The former dates from about the eleventh century, and is, even in its present ruined condition, one of the noblest monuments of Indian architecture; the latter belongs to the thirteenth century, and is distinguished by its fine sculpture, especially the two grand war-horses and the elephants, which stand in front of it.

The sectarian classification of Buddhist-Hindu art, though it is useful as indicating roughly the variety of subject-matter in sculpture and painting, and to some extent the difference of architectural forms, does not imply any divergence in artistic ideals. In this respect Jain, Buddhist, Saivaite and Vaishnavaite merely represent different aspects of one idea, different streams of thought flowing in one direction in the same watershed. In the same locality and of the same date Jain or Buddhist, Saivaite or Vaishnavaite can only be distinguished from each other by the choice of symbols, and then often with difficulty.

The political supremacy of the Moguls, established by Babar in 1526, brought about a large re-adjustment of artistic conditions, but no fundamental change in artistic ideals. The royal palace, rather than the temple or monastery, became more exclusively the centre of creative art; for the Puritan sentiment of Islam, even under the free-thinker Akbar, would not concede to the highest expression of art any but material aims and a strictly secular scope. This Philistine influence reacted on the religious art of Hinduism, and no doubt stimulated, if it did not originate, the propaganda against the ritualistic use of images started by Jain and Saivaite religious teachers.

From the sixteenth century the creative impulse in Hindu art began to diminish, though its technical traditions have maintained their vitality down to modern times.

In the Muhammadan courts there was no place for the sculptor, except as a decorative craftsman; but in architecture Hindu idealism received a fresh impulse dealing with new constructive problems, and Islam added to its prestige by the magnificence of the mosques built with the aid of Jain and Hindu temple craftsmen. Indian Saracenic architecture testifies not so much to the creative genius of the Moguls as to their capacity for assimilating the artistic culture of the alien subject races. Christianity might have advanced much more rapidly in India if its leaders had not, with the Puritanical intolerance of Aurangazib, refused to allow the genius of Indian art to glorify the Christian church, and tried to propagate the beauty of the Eastern faith with the whitewashed ugliness of Western formality.

In the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir, and Shah Jehan the court painters fulfilled the same role as they had done under the former Buddhist and Hindu rulers; but the Mogul emperors laid no claim to a divine ancestry, and priestly influence was no longer supreme in the state. The dominant themes in the art of the period were therefore not religious, but the romance of love and of war; the legends of Mussalman and Rajput chivalry, the pageantry of state ceremonial, and portraiture.

Owing to the presence of Persian artists at the Mogul court, European critics have generally classified all the painting of the time under the name of Indo-Persian, assuming, as so many have done with regard to early Indian Buddhist sculpture, that the creative impulse in the Indian art came always from without, instead of from

within. These are illogical and inartistic assumptions. The Persian painters at Akbar's Court were neither technically nor artistically superior to the Hindus. The creative stimulus came partly from the invigorating atmosphere of Akbar's Court, and from his own magnetic personality. Hindu art has been cramped by the rigid ritualistic prescriptions imposed by the Brahmin priests, who were not artists, like many of the Buddhist monks, but of a purely literary caste. The illiterate but broad-minded Akbar gave both Mussalman and Hindu artists their intellectual and spiritual freedom. In adapting itself to the new social order Indian art enlarged its boundaries and renewed its former vitality, assimilating the foreign technical traditions, but always maintaining its own ideals. Regarded as whole, the Indian school of painting of the Mogul epoch is as distinct and original in artistic expression as any of the schools of Persia, China, or Japan.

With the ascension of Aurangazib the fierce iconoclasm of the first Muhammadan invaders of Hindustan was renewed, and the fine arts, including music, were placed under a fanatical priestly interdict, more detrimental to Indian art than all the asceticism of Hinduism. In modern times the influence of Western 'education', with its purely commercial ideals, has been even more depressing to the Indian art than the iconoclasm of Aurangazib. Educated India under British rule, while affecting to exchange its own culture for that of the West, has remained entirely aloof from those vital movements in the British art and craft, which in the last half-century have derived so much impetus from the study and exploitation of the Oriental art. Anglo-Indian departmentalism, always slow to move in art matters, still takes refuge

in British Early Victorian formularies, and the theory that India has never shown any original genius for sculpture or painting continues to produce hopeless confusion in the whole conduct of art-education. Under present circumstances it would be far better if India were allowed to work out her own artistic salvation, without interference from the State. Western methods of education have opened a rift between the artistic castes and the 'educated' such as never existed in any previous time in Indian history. The remedy lies, not in making the Indian artists more literate in the European sense, not in teaching them anatomy, perspective and model-drawing, nor in manufacturing regulation pattern-books according to Anglo-Indian taste, but in making the *literati*, educators and educated, conscious of the deficiencies of their own education which render them unable to appreciate the artistic wealth lying at their doors.

Far behind this intellectual and administrative chaos there remains in India a native living tradition of art, deep-rooted in the ancient culture of Hinduism, richer and more full of strength than eclectic learning of the modern academies and art-guilds of Europe; only waiting for the spiritual and intellectual quickening which will renew its old creative instinct. The new impulse will come, as Emerson has said, not at the call of a legislature: it will come as always, unannounced, and spring up between the feet of brave and earnest men.

Even now the signs of coming renaissance are not wanting. It is impossible to believe that India will wholly succumb, body and soul, to the materialism of modern Europe; and, seeing how much both Asia and Europe owe to Indian culture, it would be foolish for

politicians to regard the reassertion of Indian idealism with suspicion and distrust. It is indeed a happy augury for the spiritual and intellectual progress of humanity, and for the ultimate disappearance of those differences and prejudices which make the gulf between East and West.

## CHAPTER V

### INDIAN EDUCATION

Few countries, and certainly no Western ones, have had systems of education which have had such a long and continuous history with so few modifications as some of the educational systems of India. The long centuries through which they have held sway show that they must have possessed elements which were of value, and that they were not unsuited to the needs of those who developed and adopted them. They produced many great men and earnest seekers after truth, and their output on the intellectual side is by no means inconsiderable. They developed many noble educational ideals, which are a valuable contribution to educational thought and practice. But the early vigour, which showed itself in the great contributions which India made to the science of grammar and mathematics and philosophy and other subjects, had long since spent itself when that momentous change began, which was brought about by the introduction of Western education and learning. The Brahmanic educational system had become stereotyped and formal and unable to meet the needs of a progressive civilization. We have then to seek for the causes of its decay and failure and the reasons why it was unsuitable for present-day conditions in India. But we must also seek to understand what elements of permanent value it possessed and what contributions it has to make to the educational thought of the world in general and India in particular. In considering these questions we shall be most concerned with the Brahmanic system and the education of special classes of the Hindu community which were more or less

connected with it, as this is the oldest system, and also that which has had most effect upon India as a whole. Buddhist education was an offshoot from the Brahmanic education, and very closely connected with it in ideals and practice; while the Muhammadan education was a foreign system which was transplanted to India, and grew up in its new soil with very little connection with, or influence upon, the Brahmanic system, and was, with a few exceptions, open only to that minority of the population which embraced the Muhammadan faith.

If education is described as a preparation for life, or for complete living, we may say that the ancient Indian educators would fully have accepted this doctrine. But it would have included preparation not only for this life, but also for a future existence. The harmonizing of these two purposes in due proportions has always been a difficult task for educators. If it could be perfectly accomplished many of the problems of education would be solved. But in practice there has always been oscillation. Thus in the Middle Ages in Europe stress was laid upon preparation for the world to come, while modern European systems often tend unduly to ignore this side of education. India has had the same problem to face, and has had similar difficulties in meeting it. The young Brahman was being prepared by the education he received for his practical duties in life as a priest and teacher of others, but the need of preparing himself for the life after death was also included in the teaching he received. The same may be said of the young Kshatriyas and Vaisyas who were required not only to fit themselves for their practical work in life, but also to study the Vedas, and give heed to the teaching of religion.

Owing, however, to the current philosophy which taught the unreality of this world of time, and that the highest wisdom was to seek release from the worldly fetters which held the soul in bondage, and that the highest knowledge was to become acquainted with the method by which release could be obtained, there was a tendency to despise the practical duties of life and the preparation for them. The idea of the four stages, or *ashramas*, seems to have been formulated to try and check this tendency by inculcating the desirability of a student passing to the state of a householder before he became a forest hermit or wandering ascetic; but many passed straight from the student life to the life of complete renunciation of the world, and the Upanishads show us how there was a tendency amongst the more earnest to despise the ordinary learning of the schools and preparation for this life in comparison with the higher philosophic knowledge which was concerned with the life beyond. This was not confined to the Brahmans, but Kshatriyas and others also were affected by this movement, and the two religions of Jainism and Buddhism were founded by Kshatriyas. Buddhism also, in encouraging the life of meditation and the joining of an order of monks, was, like Brahmanic philosophy, setting forth an ideal of life which despised, or regarded as unreal, this fleeting world of time, and hence made that education which was a preparation for the practical duties of life, something on a lower plane than that which was a preparation for the other world.

The underlying conception of all this philosophic thought which had such a profound influence upon Indian education was the doctrine of transmigration of souls and of *Karma*. According to this doctrine the result

of all actions, good or bad, has to be reaped in this life or in a life to come, and our present life is governed by our actions in a previous life. So long as there are actions the fruits of which have to be reaped, a man is condemned to be born and reborn in different forms of life, ascending or descending in the scale, and this weary round of existence goes on unceasingly unless a man can in some way obtain release and cut the chain of transmigration. This doctrine, in slightly different forms, is held by all the recognized philosophical schools of Hinduism, as well as by Buddhism and Jainism, and the main purpose of their philosophy was to discover the true way by which deliverance might be accomplished. In some phases of Indian philosophy the world is regarded as an illusion, or *Maya*, and the only real existence is an impersonal Unknown, or Brahman. We are not concerned here with the truth or otherwise of these philosophic conceptions, nor with the various ways which were set forth for the obtaining of salvation, but it must be observed that their influence upon the intellectual life of India was such as to turn intellectual effort almost entirely in one direction, and other studies were regarded as chiefly preparation for, and as leading up to, these. There was thus a cramping of thought, and were not wanting those who gave their branches of learning, many of the brilliant of Indian scholars spent their lives upon these philosophic conceptions. The worldliness which thus gained a hold upon the Brahman schools made them more and more out of touch with the ordinary life of the world, and helped to make them unfit to mould the Indian peoples in the paths of progress and general culture.

It is obvious, however, that if all were to forsake the world for a hermit or monastic life the bonds of society would soon be broken, and the work of the world come to a stop. It was to meet this difficulty, as we have seen, that it was prescribed that the general practice should be for a student to become a householder before entering upon the ascetic life; but there was also another doctrine formulated, which gave comfort to those who felt themselves unable to forsake the world, by admitting that if a man performed well the duties of the station in which he was born he might progress spiritually on condition that he kept himself from attachment to the things of the world. Thus in the *Bhagavad Gita*, when the young Kshatriya warrior Arjuna is about to go into battle and feels some qualms with regard to engaging in a strife against relatives, Krishna, who has appeared to him in the form of a charioteer, encourages him to do his duty. He urges upon him the doctrine that in performing all social and religious duties of his caste in a spirit of indifference, and without the least regard for the direct or indirect results which may accrue from them, he may be freed from the necessity of reaping the fruit which would otherwise attach to them, and progress towards union with the Supreme.

\*                    \*                    \*                    \*

The very idea of each man being born to perform certain functions in life according to his caste tended to a narrowing of the purpose of education, and to its being regarded as chiefly concerned with preparing a boy to fulfil the duties of his particular occupation in life. Thus while, on the one hand, the underlying philosophic thought tended towards a spirit of other-worldliness and to education being conceived as a preparation for what

lay beyond this life, on the other hand it tended towards a narrow vocationalism, and those especially who were shut out from the study of the Vedas and the higher philosophical thought received little direct religious education, and their training was confined to the acquisition of those subjects or mechanical arts which they needed for their caste occupation. Thus for the mass of the people education came to be regarded from a narrowly utilitarian point of view, and when the popular elementary schools grew up to provide for the need of simple instruction for the commercial and agricultural classes, they also, like the caste training, were largely utilitarian in their outlook. Even the Brahmanic schools often tended to become utilitarian, and those who attended them were often aiming at gaining just that knowledge which would enable them to earn their livelihood, either in connection with the performance of religious rites for the people, or in the service of the State. It is not, of course, to be understood that there was no religious basis for the education of those who were not aiming at the life of absolute renunciation of the world. Far from it. The deeply religious nature of the Indian peoples has led them to surround all actions of life with religious associations, and even those who were shut out from the study of the Vedas had their religious rites. These indeed often were connected with the grossest idolatry and superstition, which became, however, parts of the Hindu system, and the very fact that the highest ideals were possible only for the few gave these lower forms of religion a greater opportunity to spread amongst the people.

The doctrine of transmigration and *Karma* on the one hand may have tended to set before men a high moral standard by making them feel the importance of all

actions, as the fruit of these had to be reaped at some time or other; but in its more extreme form the doctrine taught that even good actions, as well as bad, were to be avoided, for the fruit of these also would have to be reaped, and so the cycle of births would have to be prolonged. Thus India came under the sway of a philosophy of pessimism which allowed little place in the universe for the action of Providence, or the working of moral purpose, and there was little to encourage men to progress or hopeful endeavour. In the early Vedic times life was more joyous and free, and this was the time when great intellectual movements began in India. But as the gloomy view of existence came to have more and more hold over Indian life and thought the sap of intellectual effort dried up and the progress of civilization was arrested. Hence the early promise of the ancient Brahmanic education, with its many noble ideals and possibilities of development, was not fulfilled, and it was led into a more and more narrow groove, and was incapable of supplying the needs of a progressive and advancing civilization.

The philosophic conceptions of the doctrine of transmigration also underlay the caste system, which was justified and explained on the ground that a man was born into a particular caste according to his merits or demerits in a previous existence. The caste system indeed was not without its good points. It gave stability to society, and established guilds which preserved learning and craftsmanship. It was a system of mutual responsibility, and the richer members of the caste were expected to stand behind the poorer members in case of need. But, on the other hand, it discouraged originality and enterprise, and promoted stagnation and division. There was no possibility for a man to pass from one caste to another, and

hence on its educational side it was the narrowest form of vocational training the world has ever seen. There was no incentive for a boy to rise above a certain level, and no freedom of intercourse amongst the different occupations. In this narrow vocational system there was no idea of general culture or of study for the sake of study, nor was there the possibility of new avenues of learning being opened up. The individual was being educated not so much for his own sake as for the sake of society, and individualism had very little scope, if any, for development.

Brahmanic education, as well as other forms of education in India, looked to the past for its ideals rather than to the future. Whatever variations or new ideas were permitted within Brahmanism, it was always on the two conditions that the absolute authority of the Vedas should be recognized, and also the supremacy of the Brahman priesthood. And so in education also it was the ideals of the past which ever governed its development. The duty of the teacher was to pass on as nearly as he himself had received it the mass of tradition which had been handed down from past ages. As this increased in bulk, and specialization became necessary, it was still the past to which the student was taught to look for guidance, and the ancient standards were regarded as authoritative. Thus in grammar, after the great work of Panini and Patanjali the science became fixed, and though an enormous number of works on grammar have been written in India since, it was always recognized that these ancient authorities must not be departed from. Education also became stereotyped, and the same methods which were followed hundred of years before the Christian era continued with little change down to modern times.

In criticizing the ancient Indian education one can say that it had many of the same defects that the education of Europe had before the Revival of Learning, and like that education it needed some new breath of life to quicken it and transform it. In the case of India that new force has come from the West in the introduction of Western learning and Western ideas. India is at present passing through a period of intellectual, social, political, and religious ferment which is in many ways similar to the change through which Europe passed during the Renaissance. In no direction has the change been more apparent than in education. Schools on western lines started by Government, or missionary societies, or Muhammadan or Hindu associations, or other bodies, have not only spread all over India, but have been welcomed and highly appreciated by the people, and there is an increasing demand for even greater facilities. The education of girls has indeed been slow in its progress compared with that which has been made in the education of boys, and the technical training of the craftsmen still proceeds very much on the old lines. Moreover, the Brahmanic learning is still being passed on to a few in the old traditional way, and the Muhammadan *Maktabs* still give instruction to the young Muhammadans in the Koran. But more and more the Western education advances, and there is a danger lest educational practices and ideals which have been found useful in Europe should be regarded as being of necessity equally suited to the needs of India. This is not always the case, and it may be that as education progresses in India many of the ideals which were worked out by ancient Indian educators will reassert themselves, and in a modern form, and in conjunction with many Western ideals may prove of great service to those

engaged in the great task of educating the rising generation of India.

One of the most characteristic of Indian educational ideals is the relation between pupil and teacher. This relationship receives a great deal of attention in the ancient books, both Hindu and Buddhist. Great reverence and respect is required from the pupil, while the teacher on his part has also high responsibilities. The idea of this relationship of pupil to teacher has indeed been sometimes so developed that it has led to the teacher, or *Guru*, receiving divine honours from his pupil, or disciple, in some forms of Hinduism, and sects which have sprung from it. In a more sober conception of this relationship, it is thought of as that of father and son, and so far was this idea carried out that the pupil was considered to be in a closer relation to the teacher than to his real father. The pupil often resided at the house of his teacher, and, even when this was not the case, was always in close contact with him. The paternal relationship of the teacher towards the pupil was emphasized by the absence of any regular fee. The teacher, having accepted the responsibility of the position, was considered morally bound to perform his duty towards the pupil, and moreover in the case of the Brahman preceptor, to teach was a duty which he owed to society. The pupil, on the other hand, was carrying out the filial relationship not only in the respect he paid to the teacher, but also in attending to the service of his household. The ideal is thus a domestic one, and it is quite foreign to the Indian system that there should be a large institution or a large class of pupils taught together. The Indian ideal would seem to be one teacher for each pupil, and though on practical grounds this may not often have been realized,

yet so far as the evidence is available, we find, as a rule, quite a small number of pupils taught by each teacher. Where there was a centre of learning corresponding to a university, this seems to have been a collection of such small classes grouped in one place. The same teacher, moreover, generally taught the pupil from the beginning to the end of the period of learning. In the West it is the institution rather than the teacher which is emphasized, and it is the school or college which a student regards as his *alma mater*. In India it is the teacher rather than the institution that is prominent, and the same affection and reverence which a Western student has for his *alma mater* is in India bestowed with a life-long devotion upon the teacher. Even the introduction of Western education with its many teachers, and many classes, has not entirely broken down this ideal, in spite of the complications which it produces. To an Indian student a teacher who only appears at stated hours to teach or lecture, and is not accessible at all times to answer questions and give advice on all manner of subjects, is an anomaly. Such a relationship, no doubt, throws a greatly increased responsibility upon the teacher, and where the teacher is not worthy of his position may be attended with grave dangers. But where the teacher is a man who reaches a high intellectual, moral, and spiritual standard, there is much to be said for the Indian ideal. There is no country in the world where the responsibilities and opportunities of the teacher are greater than they are in India.

Closely connected with the family relationship which exists between teacher and pupil is the employment of monitors to assist the teacher in his instruction. These fulfil the place of elder brothers of the family. The

monitorial system of Bell and Lancaster, which Bell is said to have devised by seeing the method used in schools in India, is but a caricature of the Indian ideal. In English schools the prefectual system has associated the elder boys with the masters in the government and discipline of the school, and it is generally recognized as being one of the most valuable parts of their training. According to the Indian idea the more advanced scholars are associated with the master in the work of teaching, and though the system may have been originally devised to help the master in solving the problem of teaching several pupils at different stages at the same time, it must have been a valuable training for the monitors themselves. In India the bullying of younger boys by older ones is almost unknown, and the respect shown by the younger boys towards the older boys is very marked. The resuscitation of this ancient Indian ideal of monitors would therefore be worth a trial, and it is not unlikely that it might show very excellent results if the conditions were also fulfilled that the class be small, and that it was composed of pupils all at different stages of progress.

An ideal of Indian life which has a close bearing on education is that which has been happily termed *naissance oblige*. The evils of the caste system are indeed manifest, and have already been referred to; but we must not overlook the fact that it has also had its useful side, and from the educational point of view it has brought about a vast system of vocational training which was made possible by the fact that a boy's future career was determined from his very birth, for upon his birth depended both his duties and privileges in life. Moreover, this vocational training was permeated by the idea of the family, and was carried out under conditions which brought it into

close contact with life. The decay of the caste system, with all its attendant evils, seems inevitable under the conditions of modern life. But it is to be hoped that as it passes some of its nobler phases may be preserved, and that the vocational idea of education which it has fostered may not be lost. The tendency to extend a uniform system and so to reduce all education to the dead level of a code-bound type is already at work in India, and the ideal of vocational training needs to be made much more prominent. How to develop a system of vocational education which may incorporate the best elements of the old ideals with the claims of modern education is no easy problem, but it is one which will have eventually to be faced.

Those who study India from the point of view of its philosophy alone may get the impression that the people of India are a race of impractical dreamers who spend much of their time in meditating on lofty abstractions. That philosophical speculation has been carried to a very high point in India is of course true, but the practical side of life has also been cultivated, and a great deal of social life has been permeated by utilitarianism. In education this is reflected in the vocational ideals to which we have referred. But the spiritual basis which underlies life is never left out of sight, and in the ultimate analysis is regarded as paramount. The great difficulty which the people of India have felt has been to preserve a unity between the spiritual and the practical point of view, and this has often led to impractical other-worldliness on the one hand and narrow vocationalism on the other. But no view of life would be regarded as adequate which did not rest ultimately on a spiritual basis, and hence in education it is regarded as essential that a pupil's

life should be lived in a religious environment and permeated by religious ideals. It is this which creates a very difficult problem for a Government which seeks to preserve a strictly neutral attitude in religious matters.

The Brahmanic settlements were probably most frequently situated in forests in ancient times. The contact with Nature and absence of the evils of city life which this involved must have been important factors in creating an atmosphere which was most helpful in the formation of spiritual ideals. The classic poets love to depict the beautiful surroundings of the *āśramas* and the simple life of their inhabitants in contact with both animate and inanimate Nature. Though the Brahmanic education was no doubt also carried on in towns, especially in later times, the forest sanctuary has always been the Indian ideal. This is another of the ancient educational ideals which is most important, and one that is worthy of the attention of modern educationists.

\* \* \* \*

The future of India lies in its children, and this land, with its vast population, presents a wonderful opportunity as well as a huge responsibility to its educators. There are, and will no doubt always be, many controversies with regard to the most desirable development that its educational system shall take; but it is to be hoped that there will arise therefrom a system which, while incorporating new and old, will transcend both in its practice as well as in its ideals.

## CHAPTER VI

### INDIAN ETHICS

It may occur to some reader that it might be worth while to conclude the subject of Hindu ethics with a comparison between the ethics of India and that of America. But, besides being invidious, it would really serve no useful purpose to prove that India's ethical systems of more than two thousand years ago were not erected on modern ideas of social service and philanthropic institutions. Then, too, in contrast to life to-day, the conditions under which the ethics of India was formulated must be considered. When a Hindu law book declares that there can be no proper Veda-study in a city and another warns the priest to 'avoid going often into cities', this means that the rules of life laid down in the early Brahmanic code were composed for villagers, where lay the real life of most of the people for whom the priests made their rules. It is clear also that Buddhistic rules are intended primarily for the monastic life or for the life of a hermit rather than for the world at large. For, though provision is made for the laity, by providing them with general rules of good behaviour and teaching them elementary truths, the heart of Buddha's doctrine is for the recluse. Social activities can play but little part in such a scheme.

Again, we in America, reaping the fruit of century-long effort, have swept into the rubbish heap many of the restrictions under which the ethics of India has progressed upon its sorely beset but upward way. Polytheism and idolatry, as practised in many of the sects, tend to place beside ethics other objects of serious consideration as of

profound importance. One must not only have a clean heart, but one must keep the idol clean; "for in it dwells God". One must go on pilgrimages as well as give in charity. One's food must be ritually pure as one's soul must also be pure. One must have five great virtues, truthfulness, uprightness, compassion, charity, non-destruction of life, but, equally, one must perform the five great ceremonies. Loving devotion to God implies observance of ritual as well as observance of morality. Such, for example, in the religion of Ramanuja are some of the difficulties under which ethics is, as it were, weighed down. Love of God and good conduct are not enough; they make only part of a heavy load attached to morality as essential to it and increasing the burden of righteousness. They are not enough in the minds of many Christians, who think that one should go on a pilgrimage once a week and attend to many ritualistic observances. But on the whole we are freer, because we have fewer of these rival obligations; though it must not be forgotten that many Hindu sects also have renounced idolatry and ritualism of all kinds in favour of faith and clean living.

But on the whole, what with all these inhibitions exercised upon morality, of the age, of the environment, and of the rubbish heap, piled high with caste, ritual, Karma, and austerity, it is not probable that it will occur to anybody to desire to exchange our own ethical inheritance for that of India. So that there can be no harm in standing off at a safe distance and calling closer attention to any object of virtue that is to be admired there, even if we decide not to import it for our own use.

There is in India a doctrine called non-injury, which in some regards transcends any ethical teaching to be found

in Christianity as known in America. It is the gentle doctrine of harmlessness, which more than covers the precept of the catechism 'to hurt nobody by word nor by deed', for it means that it is a sin, and a sin far worse than lying or stealing, needlessly to maim or kill any living creature. This is not a teaching of Christianity, though it has been engrafted upon it and finds expression in a small degree in the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the very existence of this society being, however, an indictment of ordinary practice. This ancient rule of Hindu ethics embodies toward all animal life a sympathetic attitude which repels the robust West and is excluded from its 'many virtues'. To kill for sport is a commendable amusement practised by clergy and laity alike; to be a Christian gentleman one does not have to be gentle.

Moreover, there is the irresistible argument<sup>o</sup> that it is natural to maim and kill. Brutes are cruel, so why should not men be brutal? Then again, this doctrine of harmlessness is ridiculous when carried to extremes. One must not kill vermin, what? And the belief that vegetable matter is alive leads even to the inculcation of sympathy for trees: "You should not break the bough of the tree that has sheltered you."

In respect of this last point, it may be said that the sacredness of life in a tree, depends, of course, on the idea one has of a tree. The Buddhists did not imagine the tree itself to be alive but to be inhabited by a dryad or Naga, whose very existence depended on the life of the tree: it was a hamadryad which one slew in slaying the tree. The Brahmin, on the other hand, held that the tree itself was alive; it was a living being, with senses to feel,

hear, taste, smell, and see and it shrank from hurt. There is a chapter in the great epic which explains this at length. To cut down a tree is like killing a bird; one should repent, tell of the evil deed, and fast for three days. Trees are cursed for their actions as if they were moral creatures, though elsewhere it is said that morality is confined to human beings. But the tales of virtuous beasts and kind trees ('the tree does not refuse shelter even to the man who comes to cut it down') show that trees were regarded as having a moral nature and indeed they even inherit a sin cast upon them by a god, and, just like men, they expect to go to heaven when they die. Some modern scholars argue that plants think as well as feel, but perhaps it is enough to maintain that they have feelings.

So much for trees. But exaggerations of this sort may be compared to speaking the truth with such scrupulosity as to endanger one's life by so doing, or to the exquisite Buddhistic sin of 'stealing the perfume of a flower.' It does not impair the value of the general precept. And there is something valuable and beautiful in the doctrine that one should feel such sympathy for other living beings that one refuses to hurt them, that one will not unnecessarily injure an insect, that one will not needlessly maim and kill animals, that one will refuse to follow 'warrior ethics' and not even kill in war.

This more than humane doctrine was carried out consistently by the Buddhists of India (in Ceylon and Japan the fighting spirit prevailed against it) and it is still practised by the Jains, in what we regard as its risible form, while among Brahm̃ns it held good as a moral precept except where the higher law of sacrifice and 'righteous war' made it impossible to follow it. The

priests would have lost their livelihood in one case and the warriors in the other, if they had given up sacrifice and war; but we need not impugn the motives of those who honestly thought that offering meat to gods and Manes or that 'fighting righteously' was a religious duty. As it was, the worshippers of Vishnu gave up even sacrificial slaughter and contented themselves with making offerings of cakes and flowers and paste images. But the general principle of 'harmlessness' is surely one that must commend itself to the enlightened moral sense of the West. It would do away, not as a matter of sentiment, as it is now, but as a matter of duty, with cruelty and war, and that is enough in its favour. It might eventually lead to the suppression of needless slaughter and killing for fun; yet we must remember how far behind India in this regard we are ethically and not frighten our many virtues into revolt against all attempts to elevate them. But the world has been changed before this and a new renaissance is always possible. The Brahmin soon rose above the old savage notion that "the eater will hereafter be eaten by the eaten", as a reason for not killing animals. He began to see life as whole and, years before the thought that all life is one had dawned on the West, he declared that "to take oneself as the norm" in ethics was the inevitable corollary of "every soul is a part of the All-soul" in philosophy. Love thy neighbour as thyself, in a new interpretation, became his rule. Moralizing his law of retribution he turned it for himself into a law of mercy. As I suffer (said he), so suffers the one whom I hurt; and the animal pleading for life suffers as well as the man injured and dying. To injure this other life, which in reality is one with my life, as both our lives are one with divine life, what could be more sinful? "He who

injures another life, goes to hell", was the Buddhist's religious attempt to check the abuse of cruelty. We may pass lightly over the fear of hell, but not when it is of our own making; the hell of war and the hell of cruelty are real enough and the only way to escape from them is to follow the moral rule of the Hindu, which thus aims at a social service of unprecedented value.

Eventually (perhaps) the world will come to believe that this one doctrine, which, however, has a host of implications, such as not injuring by speech or by malicious thought, is of more importance even than the costliest philanthropic institutions, though it would be absurd to maintain that public service in the Western sense was unknown to the ancient Hindus. Works of public charity were frequently erected by those able to pay for them (including women) and the planting of trees and constructing of bathing pools, besides the giving of private wealth in charity, were not unusual, as it might be guessed from the casual reference in the epic to the proper procedure when one has proved oneself a public benefactor: "Let no man through desire (of praise) continue to live where he has given away his wealth."

The ethics of non-injury may be extended to include self-sacrifice to prevent injury to another, as it is often thus extended in Buddhistic writings, and to the thought of self-surrender, which is prominent in the later religion of Buddha and of Ramanuja; or the process may be inverted and the moral value of self-sacrifice and of self-surrender to God may precede all analysis and spring into being as a mutual expression of love, as in Christianity, so that West and East may meet by different ways on a common ground. Much is done to-day in the West

toward the saving of life and amelioration of living beings and the idea has been expanded into an active pursuit of the salvation of others, which on the human side goes farther than the mere cessation from doing harm. Yet it is in its whole scope that the Hindu ethic surpasses ours; in the inclusion of beasts and birds and even of trees and flowers in its all-embracing tenderness and kindly sympathy. And we, who are only beginning to hear that trees and flowers have life and feeling comparable in weak degree to our own, and condone, if we do not inflict, so much of the misery suffered by dumb animals, may properly, as we learn to be less cruel, turn back with some humility to the time long before the Christian era, when so good and perfect a doctrine was not only preached as an ethical ideal but was accepted by millions of people as the normal rule of life for every good man, and confess that, however excellent our ethics may be, India has taught us something better than we knew.

It has been cynically said that the more statutes there are against a vice the more probable is it that the statutes are needed. Thus, because the Hindus were for ever inculcating the virtue of speaking truthfully, the inference should be that they were naturally consummate liars, not that they were lovers of truth. By the same rule, the Hindus must have been monsters of cruelty. But both conclusions would be faulty, though the injunctions against these vices undoubtedly reflect the fact that in India, as in any country five hundred years before the Christian era, or even a thousand years after it, there were a host of people who were really only half-civilised and not very deeply affected by any moral precepts. Thinking India, the India we know from literature and history, was actually a small group within an endless environment

of barbarous tribes, which were not extirpated, like our Indians, but assimilated, as well as such hordes could be assimilated, that is, slowly and not thoroughly, so that the environment affected the civilised group as well as the group affected the rude mass with which it was struggling. Now, while some savages are truthful, very few are humane, and many of these barbarians were the rawest recruits from the hill-tribes. We must imagine the vast rural population as largely composed of this admixture of a few high and many lower people, believing for the most part in every crude superstition, practising every sort of religious-magical rite, and ill-trained ethically. It implies therefore no real condemnation of Hindu ethics, as taught by members of the civilised community, that their teachers felt obliged to insist strongly on what they regarded as the chief moral rules to be popularly inculcated, speaking the truth and reverence for life. The Hindus as a people were perhaps not over-truthful (what people is?), though the British judge who put down thuggery in the last century has left on record the statement that he had heard hundreds of cases among the rural population 'in which the property and life of the speaker depended on a lie and he refused to tell it', and, like all people of low intelligence, the half-civilised tribesmen were careless of suffering in others. So much more to the credit of the better classes is it that they so persistently hammered into their countrymen the divine precept of the sacredness of life that, long before the Christian era, not to injure or kill had become an axiom of decent behaviour.

Yet the object of this recapitulation is not to criticise adversely any system of ethics, but rather to spread out before the reader the pro and contra that can be urged in

regard to India's morality, that is, to show the outstanding features of India's ethical life in the old days. As we have seen, in India, as in other lands, ethics was hampered as well as helped by religion. To perform sacrifices was for many centuries more important than to be moral, or rather, it was more immoral not to serve the gods than to serve the men, for that was what it came to. But finally the point was reached when men no longer asked, 'Is it not better to sin against men than against the gods?' Instead, they said that to be moral was better service than to be ritualistic, for they had come unheeded to the discovery that it was more religious to cleanse the soul than to utter prayers. The Pharisee's brother was not unknown in India and his scrupulous care of the outer observance led him to maintain, long after the opposing view had been promulgated, that the sins of the soul could be washed away by the stream of religious ritual, which is still flowing on beside the Ganges. But his view was virtually superseded ages ago: 'If a man be intemperate and lustful, of what use is penance, of what use is sacrifice?' India evolved for herself the idea of a merciful God, of a soul that must be pure, of a life that must be harmless and helpful, even the idea that, as his highest duty, man must seek to do that which is beneficial to all men, *sarvaprāja-hitam*, as it is expressed in the Ramayana. Despite the handicap of an over-stretched ritual, which nearly blinded her to the greater light of ethics, India emerged with the belief that religion is a matter not of form but of mind and will, and that a good character is more essential than a good ritual. Her priests thought that they were gods on earth; her kings were taught that they were themselves vicegerents of the gods and embodied divinity; and her philosophers maintained that every-

body was essentially divine; but all this made no difference in the theory of what a good citizen, be he priest, king, philosopher, or common man, should be and do. Even the gods, if they would be reborn in the highest state hereafter,—for the gods were subject to decay and re-birth,—were warned that they 'must avoid all evil acts, all evil words, all evil thoughts, and do much and boundless good.'

The rewards of virtuous conduct are, as has been shown, interpreted variously. In the earlier period, when the gods were like men and good men joined the gods in the sky, sensual pleasures for the virtuous after death were merely enlarged and intensified; for there was no lack of virtue in sensuality. With increasing moral and bodily restraint, heaven was resolved into a state of peace and joy devoid of sense gratification. The body now could not be resurrected; even the *jiva*, or vital animal spirit, passed, as something material, with the body, and pure soul alone remained to enjoy its own immaterial bliss. But in whatever form presented, the idea of a place free from sin (as sin was conceived from time to time) remained. There were of course contending interpretations of the future life. The old belief that good Aryans "shone like constellations, being forms of light in the sky," persisted. And side by side with this was the notion (also antique) that the 'other world' lay not in the sky but in the extreme north, "on the northern flank of the Himalayas, where in a pure and happy land good men are reborn", but the usual idea was that heaven is in the sky, where the clouds are, and this heaven is described as a place in which 'there is neither hunger nor thirst nor weariness nor old age nor sin.' Finally there is *Nirvana* or *Brahma* as goal of the weary philosophic soul—peace

or existence as part of pure, intelligent, blissful Being. In all these forms of happiness hereafter sin will be no more, only bliss which is incompatible with sin. Nay, but there is one more possible existence hereafter, later imagined but now more universally the object of religious faith—life with God, who in His own Person is both Absolute Being, Brahma, and Virtue incorporate, or perfect Righteousness, *Sa Brahma Paramo Dharmah*.

\* \* \* \*

India has indeed preserved for us a most remarkable record, perhaps the most remarkable record in the history of the human race, of man's never ceasing effort to raise himself above the control of the senses to a moral and spiritual height. We can watch the struggle going on for nearly two thousand years. The native belief that the gods in the sky are watching to see whether man worships them correctly and is "straight" in conduct as the gods are straight and true; the feeling that wrong-doing is sinful because it is not in accord with the ways and wish of the gods; the temporary chaos resulting from the conviction that the gods can be overcome by magical means and that the gods after all are only forms of One God, who represents all life and as such has no regard for morality; the recovery therefrom, through the increasing certainty that this One God, while representing all life, represents, above all, spiritual life, and that all besides pure sinless spirit (soul) is of no importance or even is a mere illusion of the senses; the firm conviction that the emancipation of the soul is based on a cleansing process, which frees it from sin; the sudden irruption of materialism, which denies God and yet holds that to free oneself from all ill one must free oneself first from all evil; the gradual weakening of this

materialism with the belief that the Great Master is himself a divine exemplar of virtue and that to be like him, to imitate him in ethical conduct and devotion to man, in sympathy and in self-sacrifice, is the only way to reach lasting happiness; the endowment of the All-soul with ethical qualities, after the denial that it has any qualities at all, first by identifying Righteousness with God and then by making ethical conduct a part of the knowledge through which man may become divine; the final effort to free oneself from all sin by casting oneself before God and trusting to His grace to accept the suppliant and forgive what sins still burden him; the ever growing insistence upon gentleness and compassion as marks of the truly virtuous; the belief that religion itself is based upon ethics; the realization that men are all brothers, no matter what their social rank, and that it is better to be a virtuous slave than an immoral master; the perpetual endeavour to find a synthesis of religion and morality, ending in the conviction that morality and sympathetic kindness are essential elements of religion itself—this record of a people's spiritual and ethical development, in its greatness and in its weakness, in its back-sliding and in its irresistible advance, is one of extraordinary and poignant interest.

And when we of the West visit India hoping to instil into the Hindus the "higher spirituality" of which we vaunt ourselves the proud possessors, it will be well to remember that, as a goal to living, strict morality and high spirituality will not seem to the Hindus a sudden revelation from abroad, but that they have had that goal before them for many centuries.

What India needs is to realize herself, to broaden out her spiritual heritage until it meets the further require-

ments of this later age, not to rest upon the foundation already nobly erected by her own saints and scholars, but to continue to build along the same inspiring lines. The Hindu epic says "every man is king in his own house," *sarvas sve sve grihe raja*, and everyone likes to feel that one is living in a spiritual house of one's own, of which one is hereditary lord. It is well for the Hindu to be able to think: This is our spiritual and ethical heritage; here is the word of our own saint, who says, "bless them that curse you"; of our own sage, who declares that "the Vedas do not purify an immoral man"; here is the injunction, taught us long ago, to define a nobleman as one who is noble of soul; here is the statement that God is a spirit devoid of all evil and that righteousness is divine; here is the commandment to pity the unfortunate and to seek, not condescendingly but sympathetically, to do good to all.

It is upon this basis that the Hindu can best go forward, extending the sympathy taught of old to the more comprehensive needs of to-day and rearing upon the foundation his fathers builded a still greater edifice of good works, in harmony with their ancient endeavour but commensurable with the wider outlook now demanded.

CHAPTER VII  
A GREAT INDIAN SCRIPTURE:  
THE BHAGAVAD GITA

I  
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GITA

The Bhagavad Gita is not only an authoritative Hindu scripture read every day by millions of men and women in this country, but also one of the world's greatest books. It has passed through countless editions, it has been commented on by a host of scholars, and it has been translated into many Asiatic and European languages. It is treasured everywhere as a precious possession because one sees in it some of the greatest heights to which the human spirit ever soared in its contemplation of God and the problem of life. Therefore it behoves every Hindu student to study reverently this remarkable book, and, what is more important, to try to bring its teaching into vital relation with his everyday life. It should be remembered that the Gita is a book addressed not to the hermit living in a forest, nor to the theologian trying to build a system of thought, but to the common man, to the average citizen who lives in society and who is anxious to know what his duty is and how he should discharge it and thus work out his highest good.

The best way for a beginner who wants to study the Gita is to go through the bare text or translation several times without any commentary, marking all the passages that appeal to him most and bringing his inner life to bear on them. When once he attempts to do this, he will find that the Gita comes into contact with his spiritual

life at various points and sheds a tender and gracious light on them. Gradually his mind will be illumined, and he will see a wealth of meaning too deep for words in verses which others pass by without a comment. There are hundreds of passages in the Gita which will startle us with new suggestions when we begin to apply to them our own experience. As we grow old in years, we see a wider and wider application of the sacred words. In fact the more we know of life, and the more we taste of its sweets and bitters, the better shall we understand the meaning of this great scripture. Its great popularity is due not so much to any specific doctrine it teaches, as to its immortal expression of the various phases of man's spiritual experience. One can no doubt read it through in a couple of hours. But it will take a lifetime to understand all that it implies. We may even say that the Gita will not begin to yield its real meaning to us until we learn to brood over its verses lovingly for several years and try to translate them into our lives. Every student should therefore read the book for himself every day, brood over it and try to live by it. After he has thus exhausted his own experience in interpreting it to himself in terms of his own life, he might turn to some of the great commentaries for understanding the difficult verses, especially those which presuppose a knowledge of the scientific theories, like the Samkhya, which were current at the time when the Gita was produced.

## II

### THE AGE OF THE GITA\*

The Epic age that gave birth to the Gita was an age of expansion when Brahmanism became Hinduism.

---

\*The student is warned that the account given in this section is largely a matter of hypothesis and imagination.

By the Epic age we mean that period in our history when the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, including the Gita, took their final shape. It is now admitted that the nucleus of the two Epics had been in existence long before this period. But it was the Hindu Renaissance which followed the decline of the Mauryan empire in the second century B. C. that gave to these books their present didactic form and setting. The special problem of India then was, as it is again to-day, how to bring about a unity in a vast mass of heterogeneous population containing various races with different levels of culture. The Upanishads had no doubt proclaimed a universal religion based on the inherent divinity of the human soul. But the age that followed that great era of religious revelation was one of rather little minds. The Brahman priests of the Sutra period made little attempt to translate the Upanishadic ideals into the realities of life. By their Grihya-Sutras and Dharma-Sutras they had organized their own class and prescribed to themselves a rigorous discipline. But they still worshipped the old gods and clung to the old and narrow conceptions of Dharma, as if the seers of the Upanishads had never lived and taught. The rigour of the old sacrificial religion was in no way lessened and the parochial character of the Brahmanical ethics was still maintained. Except for the advance in the Law of Karma and the recognition of the sovereign virtue of the new Atma-Vidya taught in the Upanishads, the religion of the early Sutras was in no way different from that of the pre-Upanishadic period. The Brahmans of the Sutra age never attempted to remould their institutions in the light of the new universal religion. Meanwhile what they never attempted to do Buddha attempted and succeeded for a time. That great statesman and teacher

widened the concept of Dharma, worked out a scheme of life in accordance with the speculations of the age of the Upanishads and founded a religion which in theory at least recognised no racial or class distinctions. Though he formally repudiated the authority of the Vedic tradition, he was in some respects far more faithful to it in spirit than those who accepted it and made a fetish of its letter. His new religion cleared the ground and made such large political institutions as the Mauryan empire possible. But apparently it levelled down too much. For in a few generations the superstitions of the lower strata choked the ethical idealism of the higher classes in the Buddhist fold. When the moral severity of the early Bhikkus gave place to fantastic beliefs, Buddhism began to decline. Moreover the great emphasis laid by Buddha on monastic life robbed society of its most efficient members. No wonder therefore that the Hindu thinkers came to look upon Buddhism as an anti-social force as well as a heresy. According to its scheme of life domestic virtues were at a discount, and many necessary steps in the spiritual growth of man were skipped. Renunciation and contemplation were always preferred to citizenship and action, and the principle of *Sannyasa* was believed to be of universal validity.

The reaction came at last during the so-called Epic age. Both the religions had to set their houses in order. The Brahmans had learnt a lesson from the Buddhist Sangha. They saw the mistake they had committed in not carrying the masses with them. They had made their knowledge a sort of secret doctrine and not a rule of life. If the peculiar circumstances of their country rendered levelling down of all social distinctions undesirable, it was their duty to begin the work of levelling up. As they

had failed to do this, they had the humiliation of seeing what they regarded as heresy become the religion of the paramount State. That State was now declining under the rule of Asoka's successors, and so there was a chance for them to recover the lost ground. The Hindu Renaissance that followed the decline of the Mauryan empire is best studied in the existing recensions of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These ancient sagas which the people loved were made the instruments of a great religious revival. The old ballads were rewritten, supplemented, and so overlaid with didactic matter that they became the Vedas of the multitude. The teaching of the Upanishads was brought home to the understanding of the common man through the ideal characters and the dialogues in the Epics. Thus at last the gates of the temple were thrown open to all classes. The knowledge which had remained the exclusive possession of a small class was made available for all. In theory the old restriction was still retained, but it was meaningless when in practice every Vedantic truth was explicitly taught in these popular encyclopædias of Hinduism.

At the same time the Hindu scheme of life which is expressed by the formula of *Dharmarthakamamoksha* and which had originated in the Sutra period was now definitely fixed and widely taught. The nation-builders of the Epic age clearly laid down that the purpose of life was fourfold, namely, dharma (duty), artha (wealth) kama (desire), and moksha (liberation). The first three of these constitute the path of *Pravritti* (active life), and have to be gained in domestic life. That is, a man has to be a member of society and discharge his duties as a householder and citizen. He has to acquire wealth, gratify his legitimate desires, practise virtue and work

for salvation. The final stage of life for which his whole career has been a preparation is one of *Nivritti* or complete surrender, and hence of moksha, or liberation. Thus the formula of *Dharmarthakamamoksha*, which indicates the ideal of complete life taking into account all the facts of human nature without doing violence either to the flesh or to the spirit, was a corrective to the monastic Buddhism of the times. It was proclaimed in a thousand different ways in all the literature of the Hindu Renaissance—the two Epics, the Code of Manu and the subsequent Puranas. This point regarding the two paths of *Pravritti* and *Nivritti*, the former gradually leading to the latter, should be carefully borne in mind, for we shall find that it gives the clue to the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita.

In accordance with the scheme of life thus outlined, domestic virtues were glorified and a philosophy of active life was developed. Ideal types of character representing all stages of life were clothed in epic grandeur and set before the nation. We have in the Epics not only the ideal hermit or sannyasin, but also the ideal king, the chaste wife, the loyal brother, the disciplined student, the righteous citizen and the faithful servant. It is difficult to exaggerate the educative influence on the national mind of such concrete examples as Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Yudhishtira and Bhishma. These have moulded Hindu society as the Homeric characters moulded Hellenic society. Thus the abstract truths of the Upanishads became vital forces holding together a great civilization only when they were incarnated in epic types. The formula of *Dharmarthakamamoksha* would have remained only a formula if it had not been exemplified in a thousand ways by the innumerable lives of the saints in the Epics and

the Puranas. True, many of these stories are rather wild and fantastic. But behind all their 'extravagant imagery one can see the single, unalterable and perfect scheme of life which has sustained Hindu society throughout its chequered history.

When religion was thus brought home to the masses it underwent some inevitable modifications. A highly metaphysical or mystical religion could only be for the few. The Vedantic Absolute which, according to the famous words of Yajnavalkya, could only be described by the expression "Not this, not that" is not for the multitude. On the other hand, if it was to become popular, an appeal had to be made to the hearts and imaginations of men. Therefore the cold and austere metaphysic was kept in the background, and the warm theistic elements in the Upanishads were developed to the fullest extent, and emphasis was laid on the personal aspects of the Deity. In place of the impersonal or supra-personal Absolute we have now an Isvara, a personal God, who has created all beings, who upholds the order of the universe and who readily responds to the call of *bhakti* or devotion. For instance, the Bhagavan of the Gita is not only the immanent principle in the universe, not only "the thread on which the pearls of creation are strung," but also the Friend and Saviour of men. He assures us that no man who does good ever treads the path of woe, that no devotee of His will ever perish, and that those who love Him will soon find Him 'entering their hearts and dispelling the darkness of ignorance by the shining lamp of wisdom.' He assures us that in times of national decadence He appears on the scene to protect the righteous, that no sin can really pursue a man who has taken refuge in Him, and that peace comes to the soul which

recognises Him as 'the Lord of all the worlds, the Friend of all beings and the Recipient of all sacrifices and austerities.' Thus He is not only a creator and destroyer, but also a loving protector. Hence arose in this period the Hindu conception of *Trimurti* or the threefold form of God. One and the same Isvara was viewed from three different points of view, viz., of creation, protection and destruction.

But the most noteworthy development in the popularization of religion in the Epic age is the doctrine of Avatar or divine incarnation. It is but a step from that of Trimurti. In the Upanishads the Absolute is described as a Being not only transcendental but also immanent. All created beings are only His partial manifestations. All men are inherently divine. The divinity in man becomes most resplendent when he identifies himself with the eternal order of the universe and carries out the will of God. Great national heroes whose lives or teachings have become a permanent possession to posterity are therefore to be reckoned as special manifestations of God on earth. It is Vishnu, the Protector, himself that out of His compassion for mankind comes down from time to time in the shape of such god-like men. Thus the feeling for the concrete in religion led not only to the development of Theism, but also to the conceptions of Trimurti and Avatars. The further steps in the same process were temples, images, processions and pilgrimages—in a word, all the paraphernalia of a popular religion with which we are well acquainted.

This religious expansion by which Brahmanism became Hinduism during the Epic age was partly the result of a new political outlook. In the literature of the pre-

ceding ages it is only the kingdoms between the Himalayas and the Vindhya that figure prominently, and the tribes beyond these barriers are considered as being more or less beyond the pale of civilization. In other words, we have no all-India outlook. But after the Mauryan empire and the missions of Asoka, we have not only an all-India outlook, but also the influence of foreign civilizations on our own. For the first time probably in our history it is felt that India, in spite of all its complexities of races, kingdoms and creeds, is really one. This fundamental unity is enforced in several passages in the Mahabharata, and its recognition is one of the great landmarks of this period. The heroes of the great Epic are significantly represented as having under their sway the whole of India. Further both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata mention various foreign nations like the Greeks, the Scythians and the Parthians. The invasions of Alexander and the establishment of Hellenic kingdoms on the frontiers of India had already brought together the cultures of the two distinguished branches of the Indo-Germanic family. Thus in its clash of cultures, its great mental expansion, its schemes of evangelization, its concern for the masses, its search for unity, its pride in the past, its hopes for the future and its enthusiasm for reconstruction, the so-called Epic age was a period of Renaissance. And the finest flower of that Renaissance is the Bhagavad Gita.

### III

#### THE FORM OF THE GITA

It is well-known that the Gita is an episode in the didactic Epic, the Mahabharata. It occurs just before the momentous battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas

on the holy field of Kurukshetra. While the heroes are blowing their conchs, and the clash of weapons is about to begin, Arjuna raises his famous bow, but seeing in front of him his teachers, kinsmen and friends whom he has to kill, he is overcome with grief and pity. He drops his bow and refuses to fight. Thereupon his friend and charioteer, Krishna, discusses with him all the implications of duty, removes his difficulties and makes him do the work for which he has come to the battlefield.

The Gita is thus a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna at a very dramatic moment in the great war. Without in any way denying the historicity of the incident on which the scripture is based we may say that the dialogue was a recognised literary form through which religious teaching was conveyed in ancient times. It is frequently used in the Upanishads and the Buddhist scriptures. The device of the story of the Mahabharata itself is that of a dialogue within a dialogue. In the Santi-Parva of the Epic we have long and interminable dialogues between Bhishma and Yudhishtira on Hindu philosophy, ethics and sociology. And the characters in such dialogues are sometimes historical characters and sometimes purely mythical ones. Even Prajapati, the Lord of beings, figures occasionally as a character. So the Gita is following a well-known literary tradition when it gives its teaching in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, who are frequently described in the Epic as Nara and Narayana. The indication is accordingly clear that it is a dialogue between man and God, and that the teaching is supremely authoritative. The originality of the Gita, however, consists in its choosing an intensely dramatic moment to deliver its message. Its purpose, as we shall see, is to reiterate the message of the

Upanishads and apply it to everyday life. Its gospel is the old gospel of knowledge, but applied to a life of action. Therefore in form as well as subject-matter the Gita follows the ancient tradition, and at the same time it is a wonderful extension of that tradition.

Now in this dialogue we should clearly understand the position of Arjuna to whom the teaching is addressed. Arjuna is the hero of the Epic. He is the chosen instrument of divine justice. To him is assigned the most important role in the great war. He has long been consecrated to this task. His whole life has been a preparation for it. And now when the critical moment comes he falters. He is swayed by personal feelings and hesitates to obey the stern call of duty. He fails to become the instrument of divine justice because the consequences are painful to him. He is convinced that his cause is righteous. He knows that his brother Dharmaraja is the very embodiment of righteousness, while the enemy Duryodhana is the very embodiment of wickedness, and that it is his duty as a Kshatriya prince to overthrow evil which has been so long and so shamelessly triumphant in the land. He has accordingly come to the battlefield with the intention of fighting, and has led thither a host of allied armies. The hopes of all men are centred in him and his well-known prowess. And he also knows that he has by his side Isvara Himself in human form to guide and direct him, and therefore he is bound to succeed. In spite of all this, he is carried away by a weak sentimentality because many persons near and dear to him will have to be killed inevitably in the discharge of his duty. His position is similar to that of a judge who hesitates to pronounce the sentence of death on a relative of his who has been proved in his court to be guilty of murder.

Arjuna is the supreme example of a man who is tempted to desert his post of duty at a critical hour, because the consequences of remaining there are extremely painful to him.

As for the other interlocutor in the dialogue, we have already said that He stands for the Supreme Deity. The identification of Krishna with Isvara is one of the fundamental principles that give to the Mahabharata its epic unity. The great Epic is one of growth. It is the work of several hands during several ages. It is as much a Samhita or collection as the Rig Veda or the Upanishads. Hence its bewildering complexity. But behind all its complexity there is a unity which is implied as much in its conception of the Avatar as in the feud between two noble houses. For a fight between two allied tribes which took place in the remote past was magnified by tradition into an event of tremendous importance in which the national imagination saw an ethical and religious significance. Such a great war involving the fate of so many peoples could not have been fought without the intervention of God. Hence the idea which shaped the later recensions of the Epic was that the poem described a colossal fight between the forces of good and the forces of evil in which the former came out victorious with the help of God in human form. Accordingly there is always the insistence on the righteousness of the Pandava cause, the characterization of the war as a *dharmayuddha* and the identification of Krishna with the Supreme Deity. But as several hands worked at the picture it must be admitted we have no consistent work of art. Different levels are reached in the delineation of the Avatar. It is only in the Bhagavad Gita that this master conception which is fitfully present throughout the Epic is fully realised and

justified. Had it not been for the Gita, the conception of the Avatar would not have been the ideal of power that it has been. It is hardly necessary to say that this conception in some form or other has dominated the religious thought of almost all races. Avatar, Bodhisattva, Messiah, Saviour, Prophet—these are only different names for almost the same conception. The ideal Person thus indicated is either an exemplary man of action or a super-human religious teacher. The hero of the Ramayana is an example of the former, and the founder of Buddhism is an example of the latter. The Ramayana attempts a single task, that of representing the Avatar as a man of action, and therefore it is more of an artistic success than the Mahabharata which attempts the more ambitious task of combining the two ideals. For Krishna, the Avatar of the Mahabharata, who holds all the strings of action, was conceived to be both a man of action and a religious teacher. Probably we have here a confluence of two streams of tradition—one descending from Krishna, the Kshatriya prince of Mathura, and the other from Krishna, the disciple of Ghora Angirasa mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad who taught that a man's life is the true sacrifice—a doctrine which is so well amplified in the fourth chapter of the Gita. Whatever that may be, the artists who wrought at the figure of the Avatar in the Mahabharata undertook too great a task and were only partially successful. Either the historical matter was too stubborn for them, or they could not rise to the spiritual heights necessary for the realisation of such a grand conception. The different portraits of Krishna in the Epic remind one of the different figures of Buddha in the frescoes of Ajanta. For these great works of art, like the Mahabharata, are not by a single hand. Nor do they

belong to a single age. The anonymous artists of different epochs, though working on a common tradition and with the same hieratic purpose, achieved different measures of success. The different figures of Buddha only reveal the minds of different ages and the skill or the want of skill of different artists. They do not affect the character or the teaching of the Blessed One. So it is with the portraiture of the Bhagavan in the Mahabharata. What He was in history we can only guess by the reflection we see of Him in Epic and Purana, in song and legend. That He is an Avatar is established beyond a doubt by His sublime teaching which is treasured for us in the Gita. He has therefore become the Beloved of India, and is looked upon as a fuller revelation of Isvara than even the hero of the Ramayana.

#### IV

### THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

We have already said that the message of the Gita is the same as the message of the Upanishads applied to everyday life. The central teaching of the Upanishads is best illustrated by the following verse from the favourite Upanishad of the Author of the Gita, namely, the Kathopanishad:—

“The One who controls all and who is the inner soul of all beings and who makes His one form into many—the wise who perceive Him abiding in themselves shall have eternal happiness, and not others.”

The Gita applies this gospel of ancient wisdom to the everyday life of the common man and says:—

“He from whom all beings proceed and by whom all this is pervaded—by worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty does man attain perfection.”

Thus the later scripture makes the performance of one's duty the means to the spiritual vision and happiness described in the earlier scriptures. The Upanishads concern themselves more or less with the end of the spiritual journey, while the Gita, which is a layman's Upanishad, concerns itself rather with the beginnings of it. The path of light begins with moral discipline and obedience to the law. It ends in spiritual freedom when the individual feels he is a part and parcel of the all-embracing Spirit. The Gita compares spiritual life to a hill with a serene life of contemplation at the top and an active life of service at the base. It is thus a gospel of spiritual life with a particular emphasis on its ethical stages, as it is addressed to a layman. It has a small word 'YOGA' which it uses comprehensively to denote the whole of spiritual life. 'YOGA' gives the clue to the Gita. This word is not used here in any narrow or technical sense of thought-control, but in a broad and comprehensive sense meaning spiritual life in all its manifold phases. Yoga is cognate with the English word 'yoke' and means union or fellowship with God. Spiritual life is nothing but fellowship with God through service, through devotion, and through contemplation. The Gita accordingly uses the word 'YOGA' often and often in its seven hundred verses and rightly calls itself a Yoga-Sastra. Its Isvara is termed a Yogeswara, and the ideal man that it delineates is called a Yogin.

· True spiritual life begins with moral discipline and faith in God. The Gita accordingly condemns in severe

terms all evil-doers, atheists, free-thinkers and religious hypocrites who, without ever making a sincere attempt to reach God, go the downward path. These do not know what spiritual life is and must pass through countless years of travail and tribulation before they see the light. Then there are men who are satisfied with low types of religion and inferior standards of conduct. The Gita gently takes these in hand and leads them up to a higher level. Rituals, sacrifices, popular forms of worship, severe penances, ascetic ways of life and cast-iron rules of traditional ethics are criticised in a spirit of sympathy and love and replaced by a purer and more inward and living religion. It is pointed out that rituals may be observed, but that they should serve to purify the heart. Sacrifices may be offered, but they should be the sacrifices of the spirit and not merely of material objects. Popular deities may be worshipped, but it should be understood that they are only partial manifestations of the one immanent and transcendental Isvara. The technical Yoga of concentration may be practised, but it should be practised without unnecessary torture of the body, and it should lead to a state of mind in which the Yogin feels the happiness and misery of others as his own. And, lastly, the traditional rules of Dharma should be followed, but they should ever be in living contact with the final aim of all ethical and religious life, namely, fellowship with God. It should be recognised that all these are only means to an end, and not ends in themselves. Their value has to be judged by the degree to which they promote the end. And the end is Yoga or the union of the soul with God. The Gita has no patience with those who would make them ends in themselves and thus block all further progress. It condemns

them as fools, unwise men, men of little minds, and even men of fiendish obstinacy. It tolerates neither the arrogant freethinker who discards all scriptures and becomes a law unto himself, nor the blind literalist who makes a fetish of his scriptures and follows the letter of the law and kills its spirit.

Nothing is more typical of the wisdom and the progressive spirit of the Gita in this respect than the way in which it extends the traditional concepts of Yoga, Karma, Yajna and Dharma. We have already said that Yoga in the Gita is not merely thought-control as in the technical Yoga-sastra, but the whole of spiritual life which aims at union with the Supreme. Similarly, Karma in the Gita does not mean merely obligatory or optional rites as in the ritualistic codes, but all human actions from the lowest acts of self-preservation prompted by nature to the highest acts of self-forgetting love prompted by Spirit. And the status of one's soul is to be determined ethically and not ritualistically. It is to be judged by the standard of moral purity, and not of ceremonial purity. So also Yajna in the Gita does not mean animal sacrifices, nor sacrifices of merely material objects, but all activities of man prompted by a spirit of sacrifice. A life of self-control is a sacrifice, a life of disinterested scholarship is a sacrifice, and even a simple exercise in breath-control done for the purification of the mind is a sacrifice in its own way. Lastly, Dharma in the Gita is not simply the caste duty of popular ethics, but the duty imposed on man by his own nature and tendencies as well as by his birth and profession, and it has always to be judged in the light of the end it has in view. Thus the Gita everywhere follows the old tradition, but extends it in such a way as to recreate it. Hence none of these ancient formulas can

do justice to the width of its outlook or the profundity of its teaching.

It is sometimes said that the Gita is a gospel of *nishkamakarma* or selfless action. Even this time-honoured formula does not adequately express the meaning of the scripture. For it expresses only the negative side of its teaching, but not its positive side. It only points out that the Gita wants us to eliminate *kama* or selfish desire which is generally at the back of human action, but it does not point out that the Gita substitutes in its place *jnana* or the knowledge of a higher Self. The ideal Yogin does not merely cease to be a man of the world. He becomes a man of God. He is a man who works in this world discharging his duties efficiently and selflessly, but who lives in a world of Spirit where success and failure have a different connotation. For when the soul puts forth its moral energy in the form of a righteous act, a gentle word or a kind thought, it may fail in the external world; but, as every religious man knows, it is crowned with success in the internal world of Spirit. As long as a man sets the goal of his life in the external world, he is subject to uncertainty. And even when he succeeds, his success can give him no permanent joy. But if he shifts his goal from the material world to the spiritual world, he will soon realise that there is no such thing as failure in life. The ideal Yogin of the Gita is one who has set the goal of his life not in this world, nor in a heaven which he hopes to reach after death, but in a world of Spirit of which he is a denizen even here and now. That world is not only one of permanence and reality, but also one of freedom. The more a man feels at home there and does his work here, the more he has of eternal life. To abide in it constantly and to feel that he is no longer

a separate self with interests of his own, but an agent of God carrying out His high purpose—that is the goal of man's life according to the Gita, and not merely to do *nishkamakarma*.

Again, it should be noted that the Bhakti or devotion taught in the Gita is not the excessive emotionalism of some of the Bhakti schools of mediaeval India. In fact one of the most remarkable features of this scripture is the perfect balance it maintains between the various components of spiritual life. Its conception of Yoga or fellowship with God involves incessant work as well as ardent love and serene wisdom. To be drawn towards God is to imitate Him and to work as He works. For does not God work incessantly? Does not the whole creation under His direction move on in an easy and effortless manner? Does He not maintain the law and order of the universe? Does He not send us sunlight every day, and now send forth rain and now withhold it? And has God any object to gain by all this work? Has He anything to achieve which He has not already? And does all this work of His as Isvara in any way interfere with His eternal rest and profound peace as Brahman, the Absolute? These are some of the questions suggested by the Gita to the Yogin who wants to live in fellowship with God. In several passages it enforces its teaching by the example of Isvara. And it eloquently points out that the ideal Yogin who lives in unbroken fellowship with God experiences profound rest even when he is engaged in incessant action. He ever acts, and yet he acts not. This is not merely a Samkhya doctrine, as some suppose, but the expression of a profound mystic experience.

Some of the modern formulas that we have learnt from the West in recent years fare no better in their interpretation of the Gita. To say that the Gita is a gospel of duty for duty's sake or that it is a gospel of social service or humanitarian work is to narrow unduly the scope of the great scripture, and even to mistake its meaning. Duty for duty's sake is a cold and Stoic doctrine, and the ideal character that it sets before us is the wise man who is not perturbed by the desires and passions of the world. The Gita also, of course, teaches us that we should cultivate a calm indifference to outward circumstances and detach ourselves from the world. Equability or indifference to the so-called pairs of opposites—pleasure and pain, heat and cold, success and failure, gain and loss—is taught on almost every page of the scripture. But, as the very word Yoga implies, detachment from the pleasures and pains of the world is only the negative side of spiritual life, the positive side being attachment to God. The Gita clearly says that until this contact is well established the negative self-discipline alone would be ineffectual and purposeless. The ideal Yogin of the Gita accordingly is not merely a wise man who relies on his own strength of mind in the face of trials and temptations. He is not merely a philosopher treating with contempt the vain shows of the world. No doubt, he does stand up against all forms of evil and injustice, and he does treat with contempt the vain shows of the world. But his strength is derived from God. His insight is due to the illumination of Grace. And his contempt towards the vanities of the world is due to his perception of the realities of the spiritual world behind it. The Yogin is a man who has surrendered his self-will, and lives only to carry

out the will of God. He is a man who lives in God and in whom God shows Himself. Your Stoical wise man can never have the feeling of self-forgetting love, devotion, joy and exaltation of spirit which the Yogin has, who always lives in the presence of God and does His work.

Similarly, the Gita is not merely a gospel of social service or humanitarian work. The ideal Yogin that it describes is not a man who puts mankind in place of God. He does not worship society, he worships God. He is a servant of God before he becomes a servant of man. To him divine service comes first, and social service next. With him work for humanity is only a mark or manifestation of that abounding life which comes to one who has entered the kingdom of Spirit. Social service which is divorced from spirituality is only an artificial flower which has neither life nor fragrance. The Gita, no doubt, in a famous phrase insists on the importance of work for the good of the world. But it insists much more on finding God who is the source of all goodness.

Nor, again, is it correct to say that the Gita is opposed to the ancient ideal of Sannyasa or renunciation. There can be no religion without renunciation. One cannot be both a man of God and a man of the world. What the Gita says is that an informal Sannyasa should be practised in active life before one is fit for formal Sannyasa. The spirit of Sannyasa should pervade all the activities of a man whether he is a student or a householder or a recluse. We should learn to live in the world without becoming worldly, as a lotus leaf lives in water without becoming wet. Our senses should learn to move freely amidst sense objects without feeling attraction or repulsion, and

to act always in obedience to the higher Self. True Sannyasa does not consist merely in retiring from the world, but in subduing it to the purposes of the soul. *Pravritti* and *Nivritti* need not be two different paths opposed to each other. On the other hand the former should be a preparation for the latter. Therefore, while recognising that the aim of the Gita, along with the other literature of the Epic age, is to correct the over-emphasis on mere formal Sannyasa, we should not commit the mistake of thinking that it goes against all Hindu tradition and exalts mere works above love and knowledge of God.

What then is the true message of the Gita? The formula at the end of every chapter of the scripture calls it a Yoga-Sastra. No other formula ancient or modern can indicate the scope of the Gita better than this. For the Gita is a gospel of spiritual life in all its phases. In a hundred different ways it points out the increasing happiness of Yoga or union with God gained through service, love and knowledge, and the increasing misery of Kama or mere self-centred desire. The soul which is of divine origin can have peace and rest only in a world of Spirit, where there are harmony, permanence and freedom, and not in this world which is full of strife and change and bondage. The path of Yoga leads us into that spiritual world while we are still remaining in this, whereas the path of desire leads us only round and round this world. In other words, when a man eradicates his desires based on the delusive notion of a separate self and trains his heart to flow out in love and sympathy towards all beings, and looks upon the faithful discharge of his duties as the highest form of worship of God, he treads the path of light which leads him to his true home. On the other hand, if he cherishes his desires and hugs the delusion

that he is a separate individual with interests of his own, always in opposition to those of others, and looks upon his duties as only means to self-assertion or self-aggrandisement, he treads the path of darkness and wanders aimlessly in the world of change which we call Samsara.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GREATER INDIA

The History of India,—of whom is it the history? This history began with the day when the white-skinned Aryans, overcoming all obstacles natural as well as human, made their entry into India. Sweeping aside the vast enveloping curtain of forest, which stretched across her from East to West, they brought on the scene sunny fields adorned with corn and fruit, and their toil and skill thus laid the foundation. And yet they could not say that this India was exclusively their India.

The non-Aryans became fused with the Aryans. Even in the first blush of the latter's victorious supremacy, they used to take to themselves non-Aryan girls in marriage. And in the Buddhist age such intermingling became freer. When, thereafter, the Brahminic Samaj set to work to repair its barriers and make its encircling walls impregnable, they found some parts of the country come to such a pass that Brahmins of sufficiently pure stock could not be found to conduct the Vedic ceremonies, and these either had to be imported, or new creations made by investiture with the sacred thread. The white skin, on the colour of which the difference between Brahmin and Sudra had originally been founded, had meanwhile tarnished into brown. The Sudras, with their different manners and ideals, gods and rituals, had been taken into the social polity. And a larger Indian, or Hindu, Samaj had been evolved which not only was not one with the Aryan Samaj of the Vedic times, but in many respects even antagonistic.

But was India able to draw the line of her history there? Did Providence allow her to make the assertion that the History of India was the history of the Hindus? No. For, while in Hindu India the Rajputs were busy fighting each other in the vanity of a suicidal competition of bravery, the Mussalmans swept in through the breaches created by their dissensions, and scattering themselves all over the country they also made it their own by living and dying on its soil.

If now we try to draw the line here crying: "Stop! Enough! Let us make the History of India a history of Hindu and Muslim!" will the great Architect, who is broadening out the history of humanity in ever-increasing circles, modify His plan simply to gratify our pride?

Whether India is to be yours or mine, whether it is to belong more to the Hindu, or to the Moslem, or whether some other race is to assert a greater supremacy than either,—that is not the problem with which Providence is exercised. It is not as if, at the bar of the judgment seat of the Almighty, different advocates are engaged in pleading the rival causes of Hindu, Moslem, or Westerner, and that the party which wins the decree shall finally plant the standard of permanent possession. It is our vanity which makes us think that it is a battle between contending rights,—the only battle is the eternal one between Truth and untruth.

The Ultimate, the Perfect, is concerned with the All, and is evolving itself through every kind of obstacle and opposing force. Only to the extent that our efforts assist in the progress of this evolution can they be successful. Attempts to push on oneself alone, whether made by individuals or nations, have no importance in the

processes of Providence. That Alexander did not succeed in bringing the whole earth under the flag of Greece was merely a case of unsatisfied ambition which has long ceased to be of concern to the world. The preparation of Rome for a world-empire was shattered to pieces by the Barbarians, but this fall of Rome's pride is not bewailed by the world to-day. Greece and Rome shipped their golden harvests on the bark of time,—their failure to get a passage on it for themselves as well, proved no loss, but rather lightened its burden.

So, in the evolving History of India, the principle at work is not the ultimate glorification of the Hindu, or any other race. In India, the history of humanity is seeking to elaborate a specific ideal, to give to general perfection a special form which shall be for the gain of all humanity;—nothing less than this is its end and aim. And in the creation of this ideal type, if Hindu, Moslem or Christian should have to submerge the aggressive part of their individuality, that may hurt their sectarian pride, but will not be accounted a loss by the standard of Truth and Right.

We are all here to co-operate in the making of Greater India. If any one factor should become rebellious and arrogate to itself an undue predominance, that will only interfere with the general progress. The section which is unable or unwilling to adapt itself to the entire scheme, but struggles to keep up a separate existence, will have to drop out and be lost, sooner or later. And the component which, realising its dedication to the ultimate ideal, acknowledges its own individual unimportance, will lose only its pettiness and find permanence for its greatness in that of the whole.

So, for ourselves, we must bear in mind that India is not engaged in recording solely our story, but that it is we who are called upon to take our place in the great drama, which has India for its stage. If we do not fit ourselves to play our part, it is we who shall have to go. If we stand aloof from the rest, in the pride of past achievement, content with heaping up obstacles around ourselves, God will punish us, either by afflicting us with sorrow unceasing till He has brought us to a level with the rest, or by casting us aside as mere impediments. If we insist on segregating ourselves in our pride of exclusiveness, fondly clinging to the belief that Providence is specially concerned in our own particular development, if we persist in regarding our *dharma* as ours alone, our institutions as specially fit only for ourselves, our places of worship as requiring to be carefully guarded against all incomers, our wisdom as dependent for its safety on being locked up in our strong rooms, then we shall simply await, in the prison of our own contriving, for the execution of the death sentence which in that case the world of humanity will surely pronounce against us.

Of late the British have come in and occupied an important place in India's history. This was not an uncalled for, accidental intrusion. If India had been deprived of touch with the West, she would have lacked an element essential for her attainment of perfection. Europe now has her lamp ablaze. We must light our torches at its wick and make a fresh start on the highway of time. That our forefathers, three thousand years ago, had finished extracting all that was of value from the universe, is not a worthy thought. We are not so unfortunate, nor the universe so poor. Had it been true

that all that is to be done has been done in the past, once for all, then our continued existence could only be a burden to the earth, and so would not be possible.

With what present duty, in what future hope, can they live who imagine that they have attained completeness in their great grand-fathers,—whose sole idea is to shield themselves against the influence of the Modern behind the barriers of antiquated belief and custom?

The Englishman has come through the breach in our crumbling walls, as the messenger of the Lord of the world-festival, to tell us that the world has need of us; not where we are petty, but where we can help with the force of our Life, to rouse the World in wisdom, love and work, in the expansion of insight, knowledge and mutuality. Unless we can justify the mission on which the Englishman has been sent, until we can set out with him to honour the invitation of which he is the bearer, he cannot but remain with us as our tormentor, the disturber of our quietism. So long as we fail to make good the arrival of the Englishman, it shall not be within our power to get rid of him.

The India to which the Englishman has come with his message is the India which is shooting up towards the future from within the bursting seed of the past. This new India belongs to humanity. What right have *we* to say who shall and who shall not find a place therein? Who is this "We"? Bengali, Marathi or Panjabi, Hindu or Mussalman? Only the larger "We" in whom all these,—Hindu, Moslem and Englishman, and whosoever else there be,—may eventually unite shall have the right to dictate who is to remain and who is to leave.

On us to-day is thrown the responsibility of building up this greater India, and for that purpose our immediate duty is to justify our meeting with the Englishman. It shall not be permitted to us to say that we would rather remain aloof, inactive, irresponsive, unwilling to give and to take, and thus to make poorer the India that is to be.

So the greatest men of modern India have all made it their life's work to bring about a *rapprochement* with the West. The chief example is Rammohan Roy. He stood alone in his day for the union of India with the world on the broad base of humanity. No blind belief, no ancestral habit was allowed to obscure his vision. With a wonderful breadth of heart and intellect he accepted the West without betraying the East. He, alone, laid the foundation of new Bengal.

Rammohan Roy cheerfully put up with persecution in order to extend the field of our knowledge and work, right across from East to West, to gain for us the eternal rights of man in the pursuit of Truth, to enable us to realise that we too had inherited the earth. It was he who first felt and declared that for us Buddha, Christ and Mohammed have spent their lives; that for each one of us has been stored up the fruits of the discipline of our Rishis; that in whatsoever part of the world who-soever has removed obstacles in the path of wisdom or, breaking the bondage of dead matter, has given freedom to man's true *shakti*, he is our very own, and through him is each one of us glorified.

Rammohan Roy did not assist India to repair her barriers, or to keep cowering behind them,—he led her out into the freedom of Space and Time, and built for her a bridge between the East and the West. That is why

his spirit still lives with us, his power of stimulating India's creative energies is not yet exhausted. No blind habit of mind, no pettiness of racial pride, were able to make him commit the folly of rebellion against the manifest purpose of time. That grand purpose which could not have found its fulfilment in the past, but is ever marching onwards to the future, found in him a gallant, unflinching standard-bearer.

In the Deccan, Ranade spent his life in the making of this same bridge between the East and the West. In his very nature there was that creative faculty of synthesis which brings men together, builds up the Samaj, does away with discord and inequity and circumvents all obstacles in the way of knowledge, love and will-power. And so he rose superior to all the petty or unworthy considerations prevalent in his time, in spite of all the various conflicts of ideas and interests between the Indian and the Englishman. His largeness of heart and breadth of mind impelled him to make a lifelong endeavour to clear the way for an acceptance of whatever elements in the British are of value for the true History of India, and to strive for the removal of whatever obstructions stand in the way of India's attainment of perfection.

And the Mahatma who passed away from us only the other day—Swami Vivekananda—he likewise took his stand in the middle, with the East on his right, and the West on his left. His message was not to keep India bound in her latter-day narrowness by ignoring in her history the advent of the West. His genius was for assimilation, for harmony, for creation. He dedicated his life to opening up the high road by which the thought-

treasure of the East may pass to the West, and of the West to the East.

Then there was the day when Bankimchandra invited both East and West to a veritable festival of union in the pages of his *Bangadarshan*. From that day the literature of Bengal felt the call of time, responded to it, and having thus justified herself took her place on the road to immortality. Bengali literature has made such wonderful progress because she cut through all the artificial bonds which would have hampered her communion with the world literature, and regulated her growth in such wise as to be enabled to make her own, naturally and with ease, the science and ideals of the West. Bankim is great, not merely by what he wrote, but because his genius helped to pave the way for such growth.

Thus, from whatever view-point we take a survey, we see that the epoch-makers of modern India, in whom the greatness of man becomes manifest, are gifted, as the very essence of their nature, with that breadth of understanding in which the differences of East and West do not hurt, or conflict with, one another, but where both find their ultimate harmony.

Many of us who belong to the educated class, think that these attempts at union of the different races belonging to India are for the purpose of gaining political strength. Thus, as in so many other cases, do we view the Great as subservient to the Small. That we in India should attain unity, is a much greater thing than any particular purpose which our union may serve,—for it is a function of our humanity itself. That we are not succeeding in becoming united is due to some basic defect

in our manhood, which also is the reason why on every side we perceive our lack of *shakti*. It is our own sin that destroys our *dharmā*, which again makes for the destruction of everything else.

Our attempts at union can only become successful when they are made from the standpoint of Righteousness, which cannot be brought within the confines of any petty pride or narrow expediency. And if Righteousness be our guiding principle these efforts will not remain restricted to the different classes of Indians alone, but the Englishman also needs must join hands in the good work.

What then are we to make of the antagonism which has arisen of late between the Englishman and the Indian, educated as well as uneducated? Is there nothing real in this? Is it only the machination of a few conspirators? Is this antagonism essentially different in purpose from the constant action and reaction of making and breaking which are at work in the making of Indian History? It is very necessary for us to come to a true understanding of its meaning.

In our religious literature, opposition is reckoned as one of the means of union. Ravana, for instance, is said to have gained his salvation because of the valiant fight that he fought. The meaning is simply this, that to have to own defeat after a manful contest with truth is to gain it all the more completely. To accept with a too ready acquiescence is not a full acceptance at all. That is why all science is based on a severe scepticism.

We began with a blind, foolish, insensate begging at the door of Europe, with our critical sense entirely benumbed. That was not the way to make any real gain.

Whether it be wisdom, or political rights, they have to be earned, that is to say to be attained by one's own *shakti*, after a successful struggle against obstructing forces. If they be put into our hands by others, by way of alms, they do not become ours at all. To take in a form which is derogatory can only lead to loss. Hence our reaction against the culture of Europe and its ideals. A feeling of wounded self-respect is prompting us to return upon ourselves.

This revulsion was necessary for the purpose of the History which, as I say, Time is evolving in this land of India. Of what we were receiving weakly, unquestioningly, in sheer poverty of spirit, it was not possible for us to appraise the value: therefore we were unable to appropriate it at its worth, and so to put it to use. It remained with us merely as an ornamental incubus. And when we realised this, our desire to get away from it was only natural.

Rammohan Roy was able to assimilate the ideals of Europe so completely because he was not overwhelmed by them: there was no poverty or weakness on his side. He had ground of his own on which he could take his stand and where he could secure his acquisitions. The true wealth of India was not hidden from him, for this he had already made his own. Consequently he had with him the touchstone by which he could test the wealth of others. He did not sell himself by holding out a beggar's palms, but assessed the true value of whatever he took.

This *shakti* which was natural to our first great leader, is steadily developing itself amongst us through constantly conflicting stresses and strains, actions and reactions. Pendulum-wise do our movements touch now

this extreme, now the other. An undue eagerness of acceptance and an undue timidity of rejection assail us by turns. Nevertheless are we being carried forward to our goal.

Our soul which was overburdened with uncritically accumulated foreign ideas has now swung to the opposite extreme of wholesale rejection. But the cause of the present tension of feelings is not this alone.

The West has come as India's guest; we cannot send away the visitor while the object of his visit remains unfulfilled; he must be properly accommodated. But, whatever be the reason,—whether it be some defect in our power of recognition, or the miserliness of the West in revealing itself in its truth,—if the flow of this great purpose of Time should receive a check, there is bound to be a disastrous irruption.

If we do not come into touch with what is true, what is best, in the Englishman; if we find in him merely a merchant, or a military man, or a bureaucrat; if he will not come down to the plane in which man may commune with man and take him into confidence;—if, in fine, the Indian and the Englishman needs must remain apart, then will they be to each other a perennial source of unhappiness. In such case the party which is in power will try to make powerless the dissatisfaction of the weaker by repressive legislation, but will not be able to allay it. Nor will the former find any satisfaction in the situation; and feeling the Indian only to be a source of trouble the Englishman will more and more try to ignore his very existence.

There was a time when high-souled Englishmen like David Hare came very near to us and held up before our

hearts the greatness of the English character. The students of that day truly and freely surrendered their hearts to the British connexion. The English professor of to-day not only does not succeed in exhibiting the best that is in his race to his pupils, but he lowers the English ideal in their eyes. As the result, the students cannot enter into the spirit of English literature as they used to do. They gulp it down but do not relish it, and we see no longer the same enthusiastic revelling in the delights of Shakespeare or Byron. The *rapprochement* which might have resulted from a genuine appreciation of the same literature has thus received a set-back.

This is not only the case in the sphere of education. In no capacity, be it as magistrate, merchant, or policeman, does the Englishman present to us the highest that his racial culture has attained, and so is India deprived of the greatest gain that might have been hers by reason of his arrival; on the contrary, her self-respect is wounded and her powers deprived on every side of their natural development.

All the trouble that we see now-a-days is caused by this failure of the East and the West to come together. Bound to be near each other, and yet unable to be friends, is an intolerable situation between man and man, and hurtful withal. Therefore the desire to put an end to it must become overwhelming sooner or later. Such a rebellion, being a rebellion of the heart, will not take account of material gains or losses; it will even risk death.

And yet it is also true that such rebelliousness can only be a temporary phase. In spite of all retarding factors our impact with the West must be made good,—there can be no escape for India until she has made her

own whatever there may be worth the taking from the West. Until the fruit is ripe it does not get released from the stem, nor can it ripen at all if it insists on untimely release.

Before concluding I must say one word more. It is we who are responsible for the failure of the Englishman to give us of his best. If we remove our own poverty we can make him overcome his miserliness. We must exert our powers in every direction before the Englishman shall be able to give what he has been sent here to give. If we are content to stand at his door empty-handed we shall only be turned away, again and again.

The best that is in the Englishman is not a thing that may be acquired by us in slothful ease; it must be strenuously won. If the Englishman should be moved to pity, that would be the worst thing for us. It is our manhood which must awaken his. We should remember that the Englishman himself has had to realise his best through supreme toil and suffering. We must cultivate the like power within ourselves. There is no easier way of gaining the best.

Those of us who go to the Englishman's durbar with bowed heads and folded hands, seeking emoluments of office or badges of honour,—we only attract his pettiness and help to distort his true manifestation in India. Those, again, who in a blind fury of passion would violently assail him, succeed in evoking only the sinful side of the Englishman's nature. If, then, it be true that it is our frailty which excites his insolence, his greed, his cowardice or his cruelty, why blame him? Rather should we take the blame on ourselves.

In his own country the Englishman's lower nature is kept under control and his higher nature roused to its fullest capacity by the social forces around him. The social conscience there, being awake, compels each individual, with all its force, to take his stand on a high level and maintain his place there with unceasing effort. In this country his society is unable to perform the same function. Anglo-Indian society is not concerned with the whole Englishman. It is either a society of civilians or of merchants or of soldiers—each of these limited by their own business and become encased in a hard crust of prejudice and superstition. So they develop into thorough-going civilians, or mere merchants, or blatant soldiers. We cannot find the man in them. \* \*

On the other hand, the decay and weakness of the Indian Samaj itself is also a bar to the rousing of the true British spirit, wherefore both are losers. It is our own fault, I repeat, that we meet only Burra Sahibs and not great Englishmen. And to this we owe all the sufferings and insults with which we have to put up. We have no remedy but to acknowledge our sin and get rid of it. *Nayamatma Balahinena Labhyah*. Self-realisation is not for the weak,—nor the highest truth.

Neither tall talk nor violence, but only sacrifice and service are true tests of strength. Until the Indian can give up his fear, his self-interest, his luxury, in his quest for the best and the highest, in his service of the Motherland, our demanding from the Government will but be empty begging and will aggravate both our incapacity and our humiliation. When we shall have made our country our own by sacrifice and established our claim to it by applying our own powers for its reclamation, then we shall not need to stand abjectly at the Englishman's door.

And if we are not abject, the Englishman need not lower himself. Then may we become colleagues and enter into mutual arrangements.

Until we can cast off our individual or Samajic folly; as long as we remain unable to grant to our own countrymen the full rights of man; as long as our Zamindars continue to look on their tenantry as part of the property, our men in power glory in keeping their subordinates under their heels, our higher castes think nothing of looking down on the lowest castes as worse than beasts; so long shall we not have the right or power to demand from the Englishman proper behaviour towards ourselves.

At every turn,—in her religion, in her Samaj, in her daily practice—does the India of to-day fail to do justice to herself. She does not purify her soul by sacrifice, and so on every side she suffers futility. She cannot meet the outsider on equal terms and so receives nothing of value from him. No cleverness or violence can deliver her from the sufferings and insults of which the Englishman is but the instrument. Only when she can meet him as his equal, will all reason for antagonism, and with it all conflict, disappear. Then will the East and the West unite in India,—country with country, race with race, knowledge with knowledge, endeavour with endeavour. Then will the History of India come to an end, merged in the History of the World which will begin.

---



**NOTES.**



## CHAPTER I.

### INDIAN DRAMA.

#### Sakuntala—Its inner meaning.

This is taken from Rabindranath Tagore's Introduction to the English stage version of Kalidas's *Sakuntala* prepared by Laurence Binyon and Kedar Nath Das Gupta and published in 1920.

Tagore, the author of *Gitanjali* and *Sadhana* and many other works, the great national poet of India, requires no introduction. Happily he is still with us. That he is not only a great poet and mystic but also a great literary critic is shown by this penetrating criticism of *Sakuntala*, which deserves to be more widely read than it is. To enable the student to follow this criticism, we give here a short summary of the plot of the drama:—

While Sakuntala, the daughter of the sage Visvamitra by the nymph Menaka, is being brought up by the sage Kanwa in his hermitage in the forest, she is seen by king Dushyanta of Hastinapura, who falls in love with her. The king induces her to contract with him a *gandharva* marriage, gives her a ring as a pledge of his love, and returns to his capital. After his departure Sakuntala becomes so much engrossed with thoughts of him that she does not notice the approach of the choleric sage Durvasa when he comes to Kanwa's hermitage. Enraged by what seems like disrespect, Durvasa puts a curse upon her, and says that her husband shall forget her and disown her. He afterwards relents, however, and promises that the curse shall be removed as soon as Dushyanta sees the ring. When

Kanwa learns that Sakuntala is married and is with child, he sends her off to Dushyanta with a small escort. On her way Sakuntala bathes in a sacred pool and there loses her ring. When she reaches the palace the king does not recognise her on account of Durvasa's curse, and repudiates all that she has to say. At this tragic moment, a figure of light, the nymph Menaka, appears in the sky and bears Sakuntala away. Meanwhile the police seize a fisherman and accuse him of the theft of a royal ring which he actually found in a fish he had caught. It is Dushyanta's ring which Sakuntala had dropped in the pool on her way. When it is taken to the king he recognises it, remembers all about Sakuntala, and is touched by remorse and grief. But at this moment Indra's charioteer, Matali, comes and summons the king to aid the gods in battle. While returning victorious from the battle Dushyanta reaches the hermitage of Maricha. Here he sees a gallant boy playing with a young lion to the terror of the two maidens who accompany him. The king soon learns that it is his own son Bharata, and that Sakuntala is leading an ascetic's life in Maricha's hermitage. He takes his wife and son to his bosom and they return home, and it is made clear to all that Dushyanta was guiltless of the wrong done to Sakuntala. It should be remembered that Bharata, the son of Sakuntala by Dushyanta, was the head of a long race of kings, and has given his name to India, which is known in Sanskrit as Bharata-varsha.

- P. 3. *gandharva marriage*—one of the eight forms of marriage described by Hindu law-givers.
- P. 7. *tapasya*—religious austerity, penance.
- P. 9. *Kumara-Sambhava*—A poem by Kalidasa describing the birth of the war god, Kumara.

## CHAPTER II

### INDIAN DRAMA.

#### Its Characteristics and Achievements.

This chapter is taken from *The Sanskrit Drama* by A. B. Keith, Regius Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology, Edinburgh University. Professor Keith has published many books on Indian Culture and on Constitutional Government and Law. His *Samkhya System* was published in 1918, *Karma Mimamsa* and *Indian Logic* in 1921, *Buddhist Philosophy* in 1923, *Classical Sanskrit Literature* and *Sanskrit Drama* in 1923–1924, and *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda* in 1925.

- P. 13. *Urubhanga*—A one-act play by Bhasa celebrating the fight between Bhima and Duryodhana in which the latter has his thighs broken and is killed. Keith rejects the view that the play is a tragedy and that Duryodhana is the hero. He thinks that “the *Urubhanga*’s conclusion is happy, not tragic, for the worshipper of Krishna.”
- P. 14. *Vikramorvasi*—One of the three dramas of Kalidasa. The theme is the love of Pururavas, a king, and Urvasi, a heavenly nymph. It reaches great lyrical heights in the fourth act.
- P. 14. *Nagananda*—One of the three dramas ascribed to King Harsha, who reigned in Kanayakubja from 606 to 648 A. D. It is based on a Buddhist legend of the self-sacrifice of Jimutavahana, a prince of the Vidyadharas.

The prince gives himself up as an offering to the divine bird Garuda in place of Sankhachuda. In the end he is brought back to life by the goddess Gauri.

- P. 14. *Antigone*—the daughter of Oedipus and the heroine of a famous tragedy by Sophocles. After her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, had killed each other in battle, and Creon, the king of Thebes, would not allow Polynices to be buried, Antigone defied the tyrant and buried the body of her brother. Creon thereupon ordered her to be shut up in a cave where she killed herself.
- P. 15. *Natika*—a short or light comedy.
- P. 16. *Prakarana*—a species of drama in which the plot is the invention of the poet.
- P. 16. *Mricchakatika*—A drama in ten acts supposed to have been written by King Sudraka, who is more or less a legendary figure. The play cleverly combines political and love intrigues.
- P. 16. *Malatimadhava*—One of the three plays of Bhavabhuti, who flourished about 700 A.D. In this the love of Malati and Madhava, after being thwarted for a time by Nandana, the king's boon companion, ends in marriage and finally meets with the approval of the king. It is a romantic play interspersed with grisly supernatural elements.
- P. 16. *Vyayoga*—A species of one-act play in which there is a sort of military spectacle and no feminine interest.

- P. 16. *Prahasana*—A low comedy or a farce.
- P. 16. *Bhana*—A species of monodrama.
- P. 17. *Willst du, etc.* See Page 1 for an English translation of this passage.
- P. 17. *The Guptas*—The famous dynasty of Hindu kings who ruled in Northern India from 320 A.D. to 480 A.D.
- P. 18. *Chandakausika*—One of the two plays by Kshemisvara. It sets forth the well-known story of the trial of Harischandra's character by Visvamitra.
- P. 21. *Kavya*—A heroic poem.
- P. 21. *Bharavi*—the author of *Kiratarjuniya*, a Kavya.
- P. 21. *Magha*—the author of *Sisupala-Vadha*, also called Magha-Kavya.
- P. 21. *Kamasastra*—the science of erotics.
- P. 22. *Mara*—the Buddhist goddess of Evil.
- P. 22. *chef-d'oeuvre*—masterpiece.
- P. 24. *Bana*—the author of *Harshacharita*, a historical narrative, and of *Kadambari*, a romance. He was patronised by Harsha (606–648 A.D.).
- P. 24. *Prabodha-chandrodaya*—An allegorical drama on Vedanta by Krishnamisra, who belonged to the eleventh century.
- P. 24. *Moharajaparajaya*—An allegorical Jain drama describing the conversion to Jainism of Kumarapala, the king of Gujarat, in the 13th century.
- P. 25. *Rebhila*—A musician in *Mricchakatika*.

## CHAPTER III

### THE INDIAN EPICS.

This is an extract from *Indian Wisdom*, by the famous English Orientalist, Sir Monier Monier-Williams (1819–1899).

Monier-Williams was born in Bombay in 1819. He was the third son of Colonel Monier-Williams, Surveyor-general, Bombay Presidency. In 1822 he was sent to England, where he was educated at Chelsea and Brighton and later at London. He went to Balliol College, Oxford, in 1838. He studied Sanskrit under Professor Wilson and gained the Boden Scholarship in 1843. Next year he was appointed to the Professorship of Sanskrit, Persian and Hindustani in the East India Company's College at Haileybury. He held this post for about fifteen years till the College was closed after the Indian Mutiny in 1858. In 1860 Monier-Williams became Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford and undertook three journeys to India in 1875, 1876, and 1883 to collect funds for the establishment of an institution of Oriental Culture at Oxford. The result of his strenuous endeavours was the Indian Institute, which was opened in 1896 by Lord George Hamilton, the then Secretary of State for India. Monier-Williams presented to this institute a very valuable collection of manuscripts and books, and he was its keeper and perpetual Curator. In 1887 he was knighted. Owing to failing health, however, he relinquished his professional duties and had always to spend the winter in the south of France. He died on April 11th, 1899 at the ripe age of eighty.

Besides *Indian Wisdom* (1875) Monier-Williams wrote several books on Indian Culture. These may be divided into three groups:—(a) Language: *Sanskrit Grammar* (1846), *Hindustani Grammar* (1862), *English-Sanskrit Dictionary*

(1851), and *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1872); (b) Literature: Editions of Kalidasa's *Vikramorvasi* and *Sakuntala*, and *Nalopakhyaṇa* from the *Mahabharata* (1849, 1853 and 1879), *Indian Epic Poetry* (1873) and *Indian Wisdom* (1875); (c) Religion: *Hinduism* (1877), *Religious Life and Thought in India* (1883), *Buddhism* (1889) and *Brahmanism* (1891).

P. 26. *Kavya*—A *Kavya* is a court epic, while an *Itihāsa* is a natural epic incorporating within itself many a legend and heroic story.

P. 27. *three-fourths of the whole poem.* Monier-Williams adds the following foot-note here:—

“Although the *Mahabharata* is so much longer than the *Ramayana* as to preclude the idea of its being, like that poem, the work of one or even a few authors, yet it is the number of the episodes which after all causes the disparity. Separated from these, the main story of the *Mahabharata* is not longer than the other epic.”

P. 28. *Hari-Vamsa*—As Monier-Williams says in a foot-note, this bears to the *Mahabharata* a relation very similar to that which the *Uttara-Kanda* bears to the *Ramayana*.

P. 28. *The five Pandavas*—They are Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. They are the sons of Pandu—the first three by one wife, and the next two by another.

P. 28. *Sometimes Arjuna, etc.* “In this respect the *Mahabharata* resembles the *Iliad*. Achilles is scarcely its hero. Other warriors too much divide the interest with him” Monier-Williams.

- P. 30. *have been already pointed out*—in chapters XII and XIII of *Indian Wisdom*.
- P. 32. *wanton cruelties*—Monier-Williams points out in a foot-note the contrast between Rama's treatment of his fallen foe, Ravana, and Achilles' treatment of Hector.
- P. 33. *Menelaus*—the husband of Helen who was carried off by Paris.
- P. 33. *Achilles*—the principal hero of the *Iliad*.
- P. 34. *Agamemnon*—the commander-in-chief of the Greek forces in the Trojan war.
- P. 34. *Sugriva*—the king of Kishkindha and the commander of the monkey forces, the allies of Rama in his war against Ravana.
- P. 34. *Patroclus*—the intimate friend of Achilles. He was slain by Hector in the Trojan war. It was the desire of avenging his death that led Achilles back to the battlefield.
- P. 34. *Nestor*—the king of Pylos who, in spite of his extreme old age, sailed with the other Greek heroes against Troy. He distinguished himself in the war by his knowledge, eloquence, wisdom and justice.
- P. 34. *Jambavat*—the king of the bears who aided Rama in his invasion of Lanka. He always acts the part of a sage counsellor.
- P. 34. *Ulysses*—He is called Odysseus by the Greeks. He was one of the principal heroes in the Trojan war, distinguished for his resourcefulness, eloquence, and valour. When any work had to be done which required peculiar skill, it

was entrusted to him. He is said to have devised the stratagem of the wooden horse, and he was one of those concealed in it. But the most celebrated part of his story consists in his adventures after the destruction of Troy. These form the theme of Homer's *Odyssey*.

- P. 34. *Hanumat*—the celebrated monkey chief who assisted Rama in his war against Ravana and who afterwards became his most devoted servant.
- P. 34. *Hector*—the eldest son of Priam and Hecuba. In the Trojan war he killed Patroclus, the friend of Achilles, and was himself killed later by Achilles.
- P. 34. *Indrajit*—the son of Ravana, who had the magical power of becoming invisible. He was killed by Lakshmana in the war with Ravana.
- P. 34. *Vibhishana*—the younger brother of Ravana. He was opposed to the cruel practices of his brother, and so quarrelled with him and allied himself with Rama. He was raised to the throne of Lanka after the death of Ravana. Monier-Williams points out in a foot-note that "Hector like Vibhishana was indignant with the ravisher, but he does not refuse to fight on his brother's side."
- P. 34. *Duryodhana*—the eldest son of king Dhritarashtra, and the leader of the Kaurava princes in the great war of the *Mahabharata*.
- P. 34. *Penelope*—the wife of Ulysses. During the long absence of Ulysses she was surrounded by numerous suitors, whom she put off by

declaring that before she could make her choice she must finish weaving a large robe which she was making for her father-in-law. She worked at the robe during the day, and undid all that she had done every night. In this way she deceived the suitors for twenty years till Ulysses returned. Monier-Williams says in a foot-note, "One cannot help suspecting Penelope of giving way to a little womanly vanity in allowing herself to be surrounded by so many suitors though she repudiated their advances."

- P. 38. *the seven Patalas*—According to Hindu mythology there are fourteen worlds resting on the head of the thousand-headed serpent Sesha—seven regions under the earth and seven above it. The former are known as *Patalas*.
- P. 38. *each Kalpa*—According to one calculation a kalpa, which is equivalent to one thousand yugas, comprises 4,320,000,000 human years.
- P. 39. *Homeric descriptions of disembodied spirits*—"It is curious that the Hindu notion of the restless state of the soul until the Sraddha is performed agrees with the ancient classical superstition that the ghosts of the dead wandered about as long as their bodies remained unburied, and were not suffered to mingle with those of the other dead." Monier-Williams.
- P. 42. *Surpanakha*—the sister of Ravana, who made advances to Rama and Lakshmana. It was her mutilation that brought on the war between Rama and Ravana, for in pleading

for revenge she dwelt on the beauty of Sita and instigated her brother to carry her off.

P. 42. *Manthara*—An ugly deformed woman, the servant of Kaikeyi. She stirred up her mistress's jealousy against Rama and led her to persuade King Dasaratha to banish Rama from Ayodhya.

P. 42. *Damayanti*—the wife of Nala and the heroine of *Nalopakhyanam* in the *Mahabharata*.

P. 44. *Children are dutiful to their parents*—Monier-Williams adds in a note:—

"Filial respect and affection is quite as noteworthy a feature in the Hindu character now as in ancient times. It is common for unmarried soldiers to stint themselves almost to starvation point, that they may send home money to their aged parents. In fact, in proportion to the weakness or rather total absence of the *national* is the strength of the *family* bond. In England and America, where national life is strongest, children are less respectful to their parents."

P. 44. *Andromache*—the wife of Hector.

P. 44. *the death of the hermit boy*—This refers to the pathetic story narrated by King Dasaratha. After the exile of his son Rama, Dasaratha confesses how he accidentally killed in his youthful days a hermit boy, the only son of his old and aged parents, and how his own bereavement is a punishment for that deed of blood. Monier-Williams gives a metrical

translation of the story in one of the chapters of his *Indian Wisdom*.

- P. 44. *the whole ordeal scene*—This refers to the ordeal of fire by which Sita determined to prove her purity. She entered the flames in the presence of men and gods, and Agni, the god of fire, led her forth and placed her in the arms of Rama unhurt.

## CHAPTER IV

### INDIAN ART.

This chapter is taken from Havell's *Ideals of Indian Art*. E. B. Havell was the Superintendent of the Madras School of Arts (1884-92), and the Principal of the Calcutta School of Art (1896-1906). He organised art education on Indian lines and helped to form the new school of Indian painting. He published a number of books on art of which the following are the most important:—*The Ideals of Indian Art; Indian Sculpture and Painting; The Ancient and Mediaeval Architecture of India; Essays on Indian Art, Industry and Education; The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India; A Handbook to Agra and the Taj; A Handbook of Indian Art; The Himalayas in Indian Art*.

P. 50. *the earliest Gandhara sculpture*—Gandhara was a province on the Indian frontier including a part of modern Afghanistan. The Buddhist sculpture of this region, belonging to the early centuries of the Christian era, was very much influenced by Graeco-Roman ideals of art. The best works in this style were produced during the reigns of Kanishka and Huvishka.

P. 50. *the two towers of victory at Chittor*—Chittor is in Rajputana. The earlier of the two towers mentioned is known as the Tower of Fame. It is 80 ft. high and is adorned with sculptures representing Adinatha, the first of the Jain Tirthankaras. The other tower, known as the Tower of Victory, was erected in A.D.

1439 by the Rana of Mewar to commemorate a victory over Mahmud of Malwa.

- P. 50. *Mount Abu*—in the Aravalli Hills in Rajputana. It contains the finest specimens of Jain architecture.
- P. 51. *Gomata*—A Jain saint whose colossal statue is found in Sravan Belgola in West Mysore.
- P. 52. *The Buddhist Stupas of Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati*—Bharhut and Sanchi in Central India, and Amaravati in the Guntur District in the Madras Presidency, are justly famous for their Buddhist monuments. It may be noted that the sculptures of Amaravati are now partly in the British Museum and partly in the Madras Museum. A stupa is a big mound erected over sacred relics.
- P. 53. *The best sculptures of Borobudur*—Borobudur is in the island of Java. Here a hill has been carved into a vast Buddhist shrine with nine terraces and countless images of Buddha in various poses illustrating the *Jataka* tales.
- P. 53. *Gothic Art*—The finest examples of Gothic Architecture with the pointed arch are found in the cathedrals of Amiens, Rheims, Paris (Notre Dame), Rouen, Strasbourg, and Chartres in France; Cologne and Marburg in Germany; Seville, Salamanca and Toledo in Spain; Milan and Venice in Italy; and in Westminster Abbey in England.
- P. 54. *Ajanta Cave paintings*—These well-known works of Buddhist art in the Hyderabad territory be-

long to various periods extending from the third century to the seventh century A.D.

- P. 56. *Elephanta*—an island near Bombay. It contains the famous sculpture of Trimurti.
- P. 56. *Ellora*—a place in Hyderabad, not far from Ajanta, famous for its rock-cut temple of Kailasa.
- P. 56. *Mahayana*—the Northern school of Buddhism which developed a Bhakti cult.
- P. 58. *Mamallapuram*—popularly called Mahabalipuram, about thirty miles from Madras. It contains the famous composition of the so-called Arjuna's penance on the face of a living rock, besides many wonderful specimens of animal sculpture.

## CHAPTER V

### INDIAN EDUCATION.

This chapter is taken from *Ancient Indian Education* by the Rev. F. E. Keay. It forms the concluding chapter of the book, which was originally written as a thesis for the M.A. degree in the University of London on the origin, development and ideals of education in Ancient India, and published by the Oxford University Press in 1918. A few passages have been omitted.

- P. 72. *Panini*—the greatest of Indian grammarians. He was the author of *Ashtadhyayi*, the standard work on Sanskrit grammar. He is supposed to have lived in the seventh century B.C.
- P. 72. *Patanjali*—the author of *Mahabbashya*, a celebrated commentator on Panini's grammar. He is supposed to have lived about 200 B.C.
- P. 76. *Bell and Lancaster*—Andrew Bell (1753–1832) was the superintendent of the Madras Male Orphan Asylum in 1789, where he developed the monitorial system of education, which he explained later in his book, *An Experiment in Education* (1797). Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838) was another advocate of the monitorial system. He published in 1803 his first pamphlet on education in which he acknowledged his indebtedness to Bell.
- P. 76. *naissance oblige*—This phrase has been coined on the model of *noblesse oblige*. It means birth has its obligations.

## CHAPTER VI

### INDIAN ETHICS.

This chapter, which has been slightly abridged for the purposes of this volume, comes from *The Ethics of India* (1924), by E. W. Hopkins, sometime Professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology, Yale University. It forms the concluding chapter of his book. It bears the heading *Pro and Contra*, as the author there summarises all that he has to say for and against Indian ethics. Other works by the same author are:—*Caste in Ancient India*, (1881); *Manu's Law Book*, (1884); *Religions of India*, (1895); and *The Great Epic of India*, (1901).

Hopkins died in 1932.

## CHAPTER VII

### A GREAT INDIAN SCRIPTURE.

This chapter is taken from the Introduction to the Students' Edition of the *Gita* published by the present Editor in 1930. For detailed notes see the Students' Edition, pages 243–245.

- P. 93. *the Samkhya*—One of the six schools of Hindu philosophy. It was founded by the sage Kapila. We find many traces of Samkhya speculation in the *Gita*.
- P. 94. *Atma-Vidya*—The knowledge of the Absolute, the highest-teaching of the *Upanishads*.
- P. 97. *Pravritti and Nivritti*—Life of action and life of retirement and contemplation.
- P. 98. *Yajnavalkya*—A celebrated sage, whose discourses form a part of the *Brihadarayaka Upanishad*. In his teaching we reach the highest summits of Indian religious thought.
- P. 102. *Dharmaraja*—Another name for Yudhishtira.
- P. 112. *in a famous phrase*—*Lokasangraha*, which means the welfare of the world.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GREATER INDIA.

This chapter is taken from *Greater India* (1921) by Rabindranath Tagore. It forms the concluding chapter of that book and bears the heading "East and West in Greater India."

- P. 120. *Rammohan Roy*—The great Indian social reformer (1774–1833) and founder of the Brahmo Samaj.
- P. 121. *Ranade*—The great social reformer, scholar and judge (1842–1901), the founder of the Social Conference movement and the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay.
- P. 121. *Swami Vivekananda*—The great apostle of Hinduism and of the Ramakrishna movement, (1863–1902), who represented India at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893.
- P. 121. *the other day*—This was written in 1909–10.
- P. 122. *Bankim Chandra*—The great Bengali novelist (1838–1894), whose novel *Ananda Math* contains the well-known "Bande Mataram" song.
- P. 125. *David Hare*—One of the pioneers of education in Bengal, like Dr. Miller in Southern India. There is a school named after him in Calcutta.
- P. 128. *Burra Sahibs*—Literally big masters, or chief officials.
- P. 128. *Nayamatma*, etc.—This passage occurs in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. It means "This soul cannot be realised by a weakling."

**OTHER BOOKS**

*By*

**D. S. SARMA.**

**A Primer of Hinduism**

**Hinduism To-day**

**Students' Edition of the**

**Bhagavad Gita**

**The Gita and Spiritual Life**

**The Kathopanishad and the Gita**

# A PRIMER OF HINDUISM

BY D. S. SARMA

*Professor, Presidency College, Madras.*

**Price Re. 1.**

## **Some Press Opinions on the "Primer"**

"A book like the present one supplies a real want and should be in the hands of every school boy"

—*The Hindu, Madras.*

"This is one of the best handbooks on Hindu religion that we have come across."

—*The Indian Social Reformer, Bombay.*

"Professor Sarma by successfully attempting this task in his Primer of Hinduism has done a distinct service to the cause of religious instruction in schools."

—*The South Indian Teacher, Madras.*

"A brilliant little volume written in a simple dialectical form..... It ought to be in the hands of all those who want to understand what Higher Hinduism is..... Heads of Hindu institutions who desire to introduce religious instruction in schools and colleges cannot wish for a more suitable text-book. But it is more than a text-book and will appeal to all classes of readers."

—*The Pioneer, Allahabad.*

"Professor Sarma deserves the thanks of all students of Hinduism for bringing out this able exposition of the cardinal features of that great religion..... The book deserves to be translated into all the vernaculars of the country....."

—*The Educational Review, Madras.*

"In the form of questions and answers of the simplest type the main principles of Hinduism are beautifully set out in this Primer..... On the whole the book is a masterly production."

—*The Mahratta, Poona.*

"This small book of 150 pages contains much that should be of interest at the present time..... The general reader will be, perhaps, surprised to find that the 'poor heathen' for whose conversion he from time to time subscribes his shilling is far better provided for than is civilised Europe."

—*The New Age, London.*

"The book...is an excellent Primer on Hinduism written in the form of a dialogue..... We recommend the book for being prescribed as a text-book in schools and even in colleges for the junior course."

—*The Servant of India, Poona.*

# The Works of Sir Rabindranath Tagore.

Re. 1 each.

Chitra	Nationalism
Crescent Moon, The	Poems from Tagore
Cycle of Spring, The	Poems of Kabir
Fruit Gathering	Post Office, The
Gardener, The	Sadhana
Gitanjali	Stray Birds
Hungry Stones	Stories from Tagore
Lover's Gift	Thoughts

Re. 1-4 each.

Creative Unity	King of the Dark Chamber,
Fugitive, The	The
Personality	Red Oleanders
Glances of Bengal	

Re. 1-8 each.

Broken Ties	My Reminiscences
Mashi	Sacrifice

Rs. 2 each.

Birthday Book	The Home and the World
Gora	The Wreck

Lectures and Addresses. Selected by Prof. A. X. Soares  
Cr. 8vo. 3s.

Rabindranath Tagore. A Biographical Study. By Ernest  
Rhys. Cheaper Impression. Illustrated. Ex. Cr. 8vo.  
8s. 6d. net.

Fireflies. Illustrated. Cr. 8vo. 6s. net.

## The Caravan Library.

Cloth Binding. 3s. 6d. net.

Gitanjali.	Sadhana : The Realisation
The Gardener	of Life.
The Home and the World.	











