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The Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lectures, 1945

RELIGION AS A QUEST FOR VALUES

BY

A. R. WADIA,

Pro-Vice-Chancellor,
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda

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To

PROFESSOR S. RADHAKRISHNAN

Philosopher and Friend

PREFACE

There is a certain discrepancy in the date of my Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lectures. In a letter, dated 17th February, 1946, I was informed by the Registrar of Calcutta University that I had been appointed Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lecturer for the year 1945. Late as this intimation was, I should have been prepared to give these lectures in the winter of 1946-47, but the shortness of notice as well as the unsettled conditions in Calcutta at the time made me ask for a year's postponement. I am deeply grateful to the authorities of Calcutta University for having acceded to my request, and the lectures were actually delivered in January, 1948. Though the temptation to enlarge my lectures into a regular book was very strong—as some of my predecessors have actually done—I thought it best to keep to the original lecture form, and I have avoided making any substantial changes. In Lecture VI, dealing with the mystic poets of India, I had made no reference to Chaitanya, as I thought that to an audience in Calcutta I would be carrying coals to Newcastle by dwelling on so well-known a figure as Chaitanya. But after the lecture several friends in the audience considered this omission to be a serious defect and pressed me to introduce this topic in the published version of my lectures. This I have readily and willingly now done. This is the only important change I have made. All other changes, and there have been many, would come only within the editorial rights of a writer.

It is not easy to be original in dealing with so hackneyed a topic as religion. All I can claim to have done is an honest attempt to bring out the best in all religions, even the lowest animistic and magical faiths. Whether I have succeeded in this or not, it is for the reader to judge. Under the terms of the Endowment I had to bring out the importance of the life and

teachings of Christ. I have tried to do this as conscientiously as I could, short of accepting the divinity of Christ. But in this I have not been false to the requirements of the pious founder, for the object of the Endowment has been thus stated in the letter of the Registrar :

> " The Lectureship was founded with the object that the Lecturer should endeavour to show that the highest ideal for man lies in love and service to his fellow-men according to the essence of the teaching and life of Christ and that life lived under the guidance of this ideal constitutes the highest advancement of human personality, the acceptance of a particular creed or dogma being of subordinate importance."

This passage brings out the genuinely catholic outlook of the Founder of the Endowment as a sincere follower of Christ. I kept this aim before me, while preparing the Lectures, for I whole-heartedly subscribe to this view, though I am not a professed follower of Christ in the sense of being called a Christian.

The main utility of writing a preface is that it enables one to give expression to one's obligations. In the course of the lectures I have noted the sources of the passages quoted by me. I should like to express my obligation, deeper than words can ever convey, to these thinkers and writers from whom I have learned so much, far too many to be mentioned individually. I must, however, be explicit in expressing my obligation to certain books for the wealth of information I have gathered from them : Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Dr. O. M. Wall's *Sex and Sex Worship*, and the volumes in The Heritage of India Series. Nor can I thank adequately the inquiring young minds of my students whose searching questions forced me to think out religious problems. I should particularly like to acknowledge my obligation to the stimulating discussions year after year in Mysore with my friend, Rajasevasakta V. Subrahmanya Iyer, from whom I have learned most about Advaita, even though he has not succeeded in making me agree with him. I owe a good deal to Mr. B. V. Narayan Reddy, Manager, The Bank of Mysore,

Bangalore. His normal prosaic occupation has not dulled his keen religious and aesthetic sense. I have found in him a kindred soul, whose talks were heartening, as lending support to views usually considered heterodox. I feel particularly grateful to him for having placed his fine library at my disposal and permitted me to take away some books to Gwalior when I left Bangalore in 1946.

It is my pleasant duty to place on record my gratitude to His Highness The Maharaja Scindia of Gwalior and the Government of Madhya Bharat for having readily permitted me to be away at Calcutta for my lectures, when I was Principal, Victoria College, Gwalior.

I shall never forget those gentlemen who attended my lectures day after day and whose appreciative remarks were such a great encouragement to me.

To my old student and colleague in the University of Mysore, Mr. Narayan Rao Nikam, and Mr. C. M. Shukla of Baroda College, I am deeply indebted for having prepared the Index.

While going through the Index I was surprised to find that in spite of my best efforts some misprints had been left uncorrected. I can but apologise for this, not without being envious of the professional proof-reader of the West, whose searching eye so easily detects misprints.

Last but not least I should like to express my sincere thanks to Mr. S. N. Kanjilal, Superintendent of the Calcutta University Press for expediting the printing of these lectures.

THE MAHARAJA SAYAJIRAO UNIVERSITY, A. R. WADIA
BARODA, *19th November, 1949*

LECTURE I

Introductory

I deem it a great honour to have been appointed by the authorities of the Calcutta University to deliver the Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lectures on Comparative Religion. I am conscious of the great scholars that in previous years were my predecessors, and I deem it a particular honour that I should follow in the wake of so erudite an authority on religion as the revered teacher of my Oxford days, Professor C. C. J. Webb, and of so well-known a professor of philosophy as my one-time colleague at Mysore and always a friend, Dr. Radhakrishnan, and of another valued friend like Mr. Haridas Bhattacharyya of Dacca University, who had the distinction of being the first Indian to be appointed under this endowment. I can but humbly hope to come up to the high standard expected of the Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lecturers. That is the only way in which I can justify the choice of Calcutta University, and that is the only way in which I can adequately, if at all, express my gratitude. The invitation of Calcutta University has given me an opportunity to weave a life-time's study of religions and religious problems into a coherent expression of my religious convictions.

I propose to give a series of eight lectures on *Religion as a Quest for Values*. While monotheism as religion in the highest sense of the term is simple in itself, no student of the religious history of mankind can possibly be ignorant of the many and tortuous ways by which through centuries, nay millenia, they have sought to understand and to attain the Divine. I do not propose to undertake a historical survey of the religious quest of mankind, for this task has been already performed by many able scholars. I have rather tried to get at the root of the religious problem. I have sought to utilise the

wealth of historical material to bring out the central importance of religion in the life of man. It has been a great endeavour on the part of man to understand the mysterious forces playing around him and to come into direct contact with them. This endeavour has not been easy. In the course of it man has blundered egregiously, he has behaved cruelly, he has given free vent to his sexual urge, he has grown arrogant with fanaticism and put his gods to shame by his unbridled violence in persecuting the so-called heretics. Nevertheless the religious quest of man has made him ultimately more intelligent, more humane, more refined, more moral. Religion is anything but simple. Its complexity involves all the infinite workings of the human mind, of its emotional life and the dim workings of its unconscious. As soon as man had begun to think and seek a rational explanation of things, he found in religion a bulwark of irrationalism and he had to expose its weaknesses. But every success gained in this direction has been followed by a new orientation of the religious quest. It would be no exaggeration to say that religion has flourished on opposition, and if it has had to admit its errors, it has gone ahead with fresh confidence in its search for truth. There is in religion an eternal element. It represents a field of inquiry which sets an eternal challenge to the heart and intellect of man. In religion there is always something mysterious. This lure of the mysterious has not left untouched even so great a mathematical and scientific genius as Einstein when he says: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science."

Long though the history of religion has been, history has no record of any society which has had no religion—except perhaps the short-lived attempt on the part of Soviet Russia to annihilate religion. Attacks on religion have been fairly frequent. India has always prided herself on her religious spirit, but even here the early existence of the Charvakas shows how doubt and atheism can give a rude shock to the complacent dogmatism of the orthodox and force them into thinking so as to refute agnosticism or atheism. Never popular, and now dead for centuries, the Charvaka philosophy in its day played a useful

part. Similarly in ancient Greece the poetic religious mythology sanctified by the genius of Homer and Hesiod did not escape criticism at the hands of the earliest Greek thinkers. Xenophanes was typical in his satire against religion: "Yes, and if oxen and horses or lions had hands, and could paint with their hands, and produce works of art as men do, horses would paint the forms of the gods like horses, and oxen like oxen, and make their bodies in the image of their several kinds."

In the age of science we are passing through to-day, it would be very surprising indeed if the claims of religion passed unnoticed without even bitter attacks. Karl Marx's criticism of religion as the opium of the people has passed into history, while many have come to look upon religion as a "gigantic social hoax". This attitude is not confined to Europe or America. It has invaded India as a sort of appendix to western science and western education. A letter which appeared in *The Times of India* from a Bengali correspondent so recently as on 8th October, 1946, is quite typical: "Throughout centuries and even now it is causing mischief in India and elsewhere in the world. This very word *religion* is dangerous". My good friend Rajasevasakta V. Subrahmanya Iyer of Mysore never tires of reminding me that "children in years as well as children in thought have always strongest belief in the supernatural and that adults in thought do not need religion". An apparent confirmation comes from America in an article by Dr. H. B. Carlson on "Attitudes of Undergraduate Students" in *Journal of Social Psychology*. He found "the correlation co-efficient between religious belief and intelligence to be $-0{\cdot}19$, showing a slight tendency for the unintelligent to hold most strongly to religious beliefs."[1]

In the light of this feeling by no means uncommon, it would hardly be justifiable for a student of religion to proceed on the assumption that religion is an unchallengeable fact. If we are to escape the charge of dogmatism, it will be necessary to linger for a while on those forces which have brought both obloquy and ridicule to religion. And to do so we shall have to

[1] Quoted in R. B. Cattell's *Psychology and the Religious Quest*, p. 46.

focus attention on the intellectual history of Europe, for the agnosticism and atheism of to-day have found their native home on the soil of Europe and America, and it is from them that the agnostics and atheists of India and the East generally have drawn their inspiration.

The ancient Greeks touched the high watermark in philosophical thinking, necessarily confined to a comparatively few high spirits. But religion in the highest sense of holy piety or of mysticism hardly touched the soul of the Greeks. The religion of the imperialistic Romans bordered on the superstitious rather than on The Holy. The introduction of Christianity into Europe marks the beginning of her religious history. However profound its general influence may have been, it may be legitimately doubted whether Christianity has ever swayed the soul of Europe as the pagan civilisation of the Greeks and Romans has touched her intellect as well as her heart. Christ belonged to the East and has never been acclimatised in the cold, adventurous, boisterous, imperialistic and scientific climate of Europe. For a thousand years the stranglehold of the Popes kept down the real native European temperament, but the day came when it had to meet the challenge of new intellectual forces no less than four times since the age of the great astronomers: Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler. The Church had flourished on the dogmatism of the Bible. Not merely was it taken to be the last word in morality and religion, but it was also made to do the work of a text-book on science with its story of the Creation and the myth of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. The story of the pivotal position of man on earth and of the earth in the heavens received a rude shock when Copernicus proved that the earth was only a planet which revolved round the sun. The spurious eminence that the earth had enjoyed for centuries came down with a crash and with it brought down the cosmology of the Bible. The Church battled for a couple of centuries to put down this "heresy", but Galileo's historic cry of "Il muove" in spite of all the tortures to which his frail body was subjected, and Bruno's martyrdom set the seal of truth on the "heresy" and the Church was forced to bow to it and to recast the cosmo-

logy of the Bible into a more respectable and scientific mould. Men got used to the new astronomy and continued in their reverence for Christ and in their devotion to the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant, as the accredited representative of God and of Christ on earth. They wisely distinguished between the cosmology and the religious core of Biblical teaching.

The second crisis came four centuries later with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. It did not seek to put an end to the myth of Adam and Eve, but the theory of evolution with which Darwin's name will be perpetually associated had that effect. It gave the go-by to the old romantic ideas of the Golden Age and the progressive degeneration of mankind. It discarded the idea of the creation of the world in six days with succeeding fiats of God's will: "Let there be..." It linked up evolution with the astronomical view of the earth as a piece of molten fire thrown off by some sun and taking millions of years to cool down and become a mass of solid earth with vast expanses of water in between. At some unknown epoch there came into being life with an amoeba. From such an insignificant beginning through countless ages sprang up fishes and reptiles, birds and mammals. Among the mammals was seen the anthropoid and this creature was the ancestor of *Homo Sapiens*, who lived like a savage in caves and on trees, lived on roots and fruits and in the ice age was forced to take to meat as food in order to survive. Great as were the marvels produced in the course of this evolution, there was nothing to surpass the miracle of the birth of man fighting for his very existence against all the inclemencies of weather and the might of brutes. But man had that in him which ultimately made him the master of the universe and he came to inherit the whole earth for his habitation, not as a gift from God, but as the result of his capacity and genius to overcome untold difficulties and sufferings. He discovered fire and agriculture, unearthed the mineral wealth hidden in the bowels of the earth, broke up dense forests to build up smiling cities, scanned the vast seas on rafts and in ships, built up commerce and culture, evoked music out of wires and painted scenes with colours to

match nature, evolved a complex social organisation till the savage of our early history emerged as the Civilised Man whom we recognise in ourselves. Such in brief is the panorama of human history that Darwin's theory gave rise to as against the old Biblical version of the creation of the world and of man as its ready-made lord and master. This happened ninety years ago and threw the Churches into a furore. The lessons of the age of Copernicus and Bruno were easily forgotten except that in the England of the 19th century there was no danger of Darwin dying as a martyr to truth as Socrates and Bruno had done. Short of this extreme penalty he had to face obloquy and ridicule of every sort. Fortunately he did not have to fight a lonely battle against the unreasoning hordes of orthodoxy. He had valiant co-workers in Herbert Spencer and Arthur Wallace and most of all in the intrepid Thomas Huxley, who gave and took blows with all the ingenuity that his command over language gave him. It was a battle of words, not unmixed with humour as when Huxley was asked whether his ancestor was a monkey or a man, and Huxley's sharp retort has passed into history that his ancestry ended where his questioner's began.

Clergymen felt most perturbed by the theory of evolution and thought that its acceptance would mean the death of religion. But they suffered from the usual deficiencies of the clerical outlook on life. They have always taken the unessential for the essential, and identified the tale of creation with the truth of religion. After ninety years the battle has not yet ended, but many clergymen have wisely reconciled themselves to the acceptance of evolution as a fact of science, and have wisely stressed that the fact of religion as a search for the divine has no more been discredited by Darwin's researches than it had been by the Copernican revolution. Men have grown wiser and they do not go to the Bible to learn science, but still go to it as a most valuable chapter in the history of religion, full of a high morality and rich religious experience covering some two millenia, culminating in the magnificent passion of Christ. Scientists have attacked Christianity, but they have not attacked Christ, for Christ did not set himself up as a scientist, but only

as what he really was : a man with a mission to make men righteous and love one another and make them aspire to be god-like, for whatever be the man's origin his ultimate destiny is to rise above his material environment and establish his kinship with the divine. Darwin's thought has not put an end to this quest of the human heart and genius. It will remain a difference of opinion whether it is better to picture man as the favoured creature of God, falling a victim to the wiles of a serpent and the alluring temptation of a beautiful but an erring Eve, or to picture man as born in all the misery of bestiality to carve out for himself a great future and assert his sway over the whole earth. In short it is a choice between Man the Disinherited and Man the Architect of His Own Fortunes. I have no hesitation in making my choice, and that has been the choice of most men too in our generation. If God can create through the fiats of his will, not dissociated from an element of caprice in his likes and dislikes, He can also will that the world should evolve slowly but steadily from chaos to cosmos through millenia. It implies to a man of religion that God has not created the world in six days and abandoned it to the caprice and ill-will of men, but rather that behind all the grim story of the world's evolution there has been the working of some Mind that religion names God. The second crisis has been tided over. We are most of us evolutionists to-day, and yet have not given up the eternal quest which we call religion.

Curiously enough just eight years after Darwin's *Origin of Species* appeared another great book *Das Kapital* of the communist Karl Marx. It too was a challenge to religion and especially to the Bible. But its appeal was comparatively slow, though when it did come with the fury of an avalanche in the person of Lenin in 1917, it shook the world to its foundations, and we are still in the midst of that revolution. Purporting to be a masterly survey of the economic history of mankind, it soon developed into a political theory of a classless society, pouring all the vitriol of wrath on the bourgeoisie as the exploiters who must needs be extirpated. Incidentally, though effectually, this wrath covered men of religion, who preached the

nobility of humility and poverty and helped to make the poor poorer, or worse still, became the allies of the rich in perpetuating the worst features of poverty. No wonder if Marx turned an iconoclast and preached with all the fire of the old Jewish Prophets a new faith which aimed at the annihilation of religion. On the historical plane this has perhaps been the greatest crisis in the history of religion. Scientists had only laboured in their field, and if their teachings had come into conflict with the accepted dogmas of religion, it was not their concern and they did not throw themselves into the battle. But it was different with professional politicians like Lenin and Trotsky. They took the message of their master with all the zeal of anti-religious apostles, and made it a part of their party discipline that all members of the communist party should be confirmed atheists. They imitated their opponents by banning all that came into conflict with their new-found creed, and instead of a violent persecution of the clergy in Russia they adopted the more effective weapon of ridiculing and caricaturing, and this was not difficult to do with the recent example of the unholy escapades of the notorious Rasputin. It appeared as if the Holy Russian Church was doomed to extinction, and if the Churches could be converted into schools or hospitals, the contents of the Churches could become fit ornaments to adorn the show-cases in museums, as mementoes of a by-gone age marked by superstition and persecution. The Christian world generally resented this persecution of the Church. But it did not affect the popularity of the Russian Revolution with the masses of the poor outside Russia and with a few intellectuals who found their spiritual food in this new creed of Historical Materialism.

With the death of Lenin the original missionary zeal passed. With the expulsion of Trotsky, Stalin was left a clear field and Stalin's politics has been dictated by a stark realism and he has given up playing the rôle of an out-and-out revolutionary and has been content to go his own way, slow perhaps, but steady. To-day in Russia religion is no more the disinherited and has raised its head once again. The apologists of Soviet Russia now seek to

impress upon the world that the Russian Government had never really banned religion, that they had never gone beyond withdrawing all state aid and recognition from the Church, that it had not objected to the holding of church services and the people had not been persecuted because they had held their icons in reverence. We shall not know the truth for a long time to come, for Russia has become as mysterious as, or perhaps even more than, the China of the Manchu Empire with its horror of foreign eyes prying into the details of their life. Perhaps there is some truth in this apologistic attitude, for it is quite an established fact that the masses of Russians were illiterate but had held tenaciously to their loyalty to the Church and their Little Father, the Czar, and it is almost a psychological impossibility that vast masses of church-ridden people could have overnight transformed themselves into open enemies of the Church and become militant protagonists of atheism. After the German attack on the Russians a new wave of patriotism passed over Russia, the acerbities of the recent past were forgotten, and even the despised clergy threw themselves into the fray, and the orthodox and the atheists fought for their country like one man till their heroism was rewarded with a resounding victory, and Germany was doomed and the conquering armies of Russia swept over the length and breadth of Germany. It was in the moment of victory that the Christians led by their Archbishops and Bishops openly held a thanks-giving service which Stalin did not object to, and perhaps even encouraged as an aid to strengthening Russian patriotism and was not averse to the splendid love for Russia shown even by the erstwhile enemies of the Soviet regime. Any way the crisis has passed in the history of religion. Even the solitary state that stood out against religion has bowed to the will of the people to be religious. Religion of course is still looked askance by the State as such. It remains the private affair of the individual, and in this respect Russia is neither better nor worse than countries like U. S. A. and France which have had no state religion as such. I am not sure if every member of the Communist party in Russia is still pledged to atheism, but once the Communists find themselves firmly seated

in the saddle and fear no rival, perhaps this last vestige of the fear of, or contempt for, religion may vanish, and Christianity may begin a new chapter in its history in Russia.

If the hurdle of communist opposition has been more or less successfully overcome, and quantitatively it was the most formidable, a new hurdle has been in the way of religion for the last half a century in the form of Psychology. The last fifty years of Psychology have seen in it far more development and progress than in the previous 3,000 years of its existence. The old Psychology proceeded on the assumption that man is a rational creature and generations of text-books on Deductive Logic have dinned into our ears the definition of man as a rational animal as the *ne plus ultra* of human psychology. We dare not abjure our right to rationality, but we are no more in a position to deny that in man there is a core of irrationality which neither science nor philosophy has been able to overcome. I look upon this as the most dangerous attack on religion, and though the masses may be ignorant of psychological developments in recent times, qualitatively, *i.e.*, from the stand-point of the intelligentsia, it offers a challenge to the very existence of religion, which religion must either meet or definitely go under

The psychological attack has to be studied under three heads: the Crowd Psychology, the Psycho-analysis of Freud, and the Negative Psychology of Religion as found, *e.g.*, in the works of Leuba. I speak of the Negative Psychology of Religion as opposed to what may be called the Positive Psychology of Religion, which seeks to justify religion as a valid human experience and having a basis in the objective world. In this category I would place the great Gifford Lectures of William James on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a pioneering work of great historical importance, and the more scholarly work of Pratt: *Religious Consciousness*. Thus we see that the psychological opponents of religion have not had it all their way, and in the field of this new science an Amurath has met an Amurath. The duel within psychology is far above the head of the man in the street. It has taxed the thinker very heavily and, if he has

not been able to decide for himself, he has been tempted to take refuge in the epicurean agnosticism of Omar Khayyam :

> "Myself when young did eagerly frequent
> Doctor and saint and heard great argument
> About it and about : but evermore
> Came out by the same door as in I went."

McDougall's *Social Psychology*, published in 1908, marks an epoch in the history not merely of Psychology but of social sciences in general. As against the mere rationalism of older psychologists, who were usually philosophers, McDougall brought out the importance of instincts and emotions in the life of man and how they colour the so-called rationalism of man. He indeed provides for the rationalisation of our instinctive life, but he left the door open to others to point out how in the life of ordinary men, and even in the life of the intelligentsia, blind unthinking imitation and an unconscious suggestibility working uncritically go to the formation of man's so-called thinking. This was brought out all the more vividly in the study of Crowd Psychology by such masters as Le Bon and Sir Martin Conway. Crowds as distinguished from the individuals that make them up have a distinctive psychological set-up, in which the crowds inflamed by slogans or set up by an astute political or religious demagogue can literally be led by the nose. In literature we have the unrivalled oration of Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* playing on the fickle character of a mob. The best of us, once we find ourselves in a crowd or under the spell of a great orator, have experienced a benumbing of our capacity to think and felt obsessed by the power of eloquence. Not till we return home and sit thinking in a cool atmosphere do we become conscious of the logical fallacies and of the tub-thumping clap-trap of the speaker and the infectious enthusiasm and plaudits of an uncritical crowd. It has been asked : is religion anything more than mass hysteria, fostered by a long history of suffering martyrs and by the art of the clergymen exploiting the stupidity and credulity of illiterate masses, and by the educated working under the tender religious impressions inflicted on them in their

childhood and exploited by the educational systems dominated by the Churches?

Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* came out in 1900 with all the freshness and novelty associated with great discoveries like Darwin's or Einstein's, and threw a flood of light on the most hidden depths of man's mind. Dreams had been always treated as pleasant or unpleasant but as meaningless nonsense woven during sleep. Off and on a mysterious prophetic value had been assigned to dreams, but it had never struck any one to find in them a clue to a man's inner life, to his repressions and complexes. Freud approached his work as a pathologist, and his conclusions were found to be not absolutely applicable to normal individuals. His extreme emphasis on sex and his rather broad interpretation of its activities have been rightly disowned by his own early collaborators like Jung and Adler. Any way religion has come in for a good deal of rough handling at the hands of Psycho-analysts. Religious taboos and the conventions of religious morality have been described as being responsible for unhealthy repressions which have played havoc with the normal growth of many individuals. Thus it is that Freud has come to speak of the obsessional neurosis as a "private religion", while religion itself has been described as "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity". Thus has religion come to be looked upon not as an expression of a healthy soul, but as a disease of the soul, as a relic of early ignorant humanity reproducing the old father-and-sons' conflict into the God-and-individuals' relationship. The old stories of Oedipus and Electra have been used to bring out the sexual nature of the worship of the gods and goddesses of ancient mythological religions and as embedded in human psychology. Even the worship of Christ and Mary has been depicted as a later manifestation of the old hidden complexes embedded in the human heart.

If the Psycho-analysts have come to look upon religion as something neurotic of which an enlightened humanity should be ashamed and should hasten to shake itself free from its incubus, another famous school of psychologists has come to look upon religion as a creation of human mind without any objective

validity. This phase of thought has not been entirely unknown in the history of religion, for Voltaire even in the 18th century had said that if God did not exist, mankind would have to create one. And in the 19th century Feuerbach made himself responsible for the famous gibe that in the beginning God made man in His own image, and later man returned the compliment by making God in his own image. The great Nancy School associated with the famous name of Coué has discovered the power of mind as a remarkable curative force. Baudouin's book, *Suggestion and Auto-Suggestion*, seeks to explain the technique adopted by Coué, who began as a hypnotist, but ultimately came to discover that all hypnotism in the last resort is just self-hypnotism or Auto-suggestion. A suggestion made powerfully induces auto-suggestion and the miracles and peculiar psychological phenomena associated with mysticism, as *e.g.*, the sign of the Cross produced on the breast of St. Teresa, all came to be diagnosed as the workings of mind itself with no more objective significance than in the case of the physician who cures a neurotic patient with injections of mere water or induces sleep by giving flour pills as morphia. Thus has the great fabric of historic religions been sought to be reduced to a subjective hallucination. Psychologists like Leuba have made full use of these great psychological discoveries to show up religion in all its nakedness as a figment of the human mind, a disease for the normal, a cure for the neurotic, but in either case without any objective basis.

Psychologists are not concerned to deny that religion may have a pragmatic value, that it may be a good social incentive to keep the anti-social elements in check, that in short it is good "for children in age and in intellect" and nothing more. Men of religion can never accept this position. It amounts to reducing religion to the level of alcohol as a means of drowning one's sorrow or of opium which helps us to get away from the ugly realities of life, and like De Quincey get lost in the unreal but pleasant dreams of an opium-addict. The man of religion finds a champion in MacMurray who asserts that "it is high treason to say you believe in God because it is helpful to believe

in Him."[1] Perhaps the psychologist has blundered, and if he has, it is for us who believe in religion to show where he has gone astray.

Freud and his like were not the first who led mankind into a morass through a purely psychological approach to reality. Locke and Berkeley did it in the 17th and 18th centuries and if they went beyond the limitations of their own premises and believed in matter and in God respectively, it was not difficult for the astute intellect of Hume to take their thought to its logical conclusion and make scepticism the only possible philosophy. But Hume like Bernard Shaw of our generation had a sufficient sense of humour to laugh at his own conclusions and to admit that his arguments were irrefutable, nevertheless they carried no conviction. Hume showed how simple and rational it is to start with mind as a *tabula rasa* and with impressions and to build up our world of ideas through imagination and association, but we would thereby be confined only to our own ideas; all we would be entitled to say is that we know only our ideas, and who could be so bold as to say that there was anything outside our ideas? It took all the genius of Kant and Hegel and the scientists of the 19th century to bring back mankind to the solid basis of a world which forces us to take it seriously as a fact and not as a mere idea in the human mind.

Has history repeated itself? Are we in the 20th century to set ourselves to the task of re-establishing religion and belief in God or the divine as solid objective facts, and not as mere creations of the poet and the prophet, still less as the vapourings of a diseased brain? Any one who presumes to address the Calcutta University under the terms of the Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Endowment, will have to set himself to this task before he can hope to make his reflections real and carry conviction to his audience or to his readers.

The only way open to us is to deny the right of the psychologist to make his subjective approach the only path to

[1] Quoted by Cattell in *Psychology and the Religious Quest*, p 59.

knowledge, and to begin the study of religion with a study of its objective basis as found in the history of religion. Comparative religion affords us a vast mass of material to guide us on our way. *Prima facie* it presents the appearance of a veritable jungle of beliefs and practices, apparently unreasonable, even immoral, a mass of blunders, ultimately leading to a few towering lights : the great founders of religions : Zoroaster and Moses, Krishna and Buddha, Christ and Mahomed, with a vast army of great camp-followers like the Christian saints and Hindu *rishis* and *bhaktas*, and Muslim *pirs*, each of whom has sought to keep alive the flame of his Master's life and teaching. We are apt to make a fetish of science and to look upon it as the only standard of truth, forgetting all the while how the path of science itself has been strewn with blunders, and how ideas like the Ptolemaic Astronomy or even Newton's conceptions held sway for centuries till they were dethroned from their pedestals by Copernicus and Einstein in our generation, and to-day we are left wondering how mankind could have been so foolish as to exalt the tiny speck of our earth over the mighty effulgence of the sun. But any scientist would admit that the so-called errors had always a grain of truth, and knowledge is always a march from error to truth. May it not be that the men of religion from animists to monotheists and Vedantins have a certain intuition like the poets and the artists, and that they have steadily, though slowly and dimly, sought to pierce the veil of mystery? It has been a long march, it has not yet ended, but man has never admitted defeat. From the anthropoid to the divine has been man's proud destiny.

There are three possible approaches to the study of religion. We may start from the nature of man himself. We are familiar with the traditional definition of man as a religious animal. That this is historically correct cannot possibly be questioned. But is there anything so fundamental in his nature that he is willy-nilly driven to religion? This question can only be answered on the psychological plane. If psychology comes to the conclusion that there is something in human nature which makes him religious, but also suggests that religion is only a

subjective phenomenon without anything objective to justify its existence as an objective fact, we have to take up the second approach and study religion in its historical manifestations from the earliest and the crudest to the highest and the most exalted. It may then be argued that what exists is not necessarily true, because the concept of God may be just a figment of the mind as that of a mermaid or a satyr. If this argument is to be refuted we have to begin our third approach and dive into philosophy and see if it throws any light on the fundamental problems of religion.

Adopting the psychological approach we find two sets of facts, which we may describe as negative and positive, giving rise to the religious feeling in man. Apart from the mythical accounts of the origin of man as found in different religious mythologies and taking our stand on the evolutionary theory we can imagine the *Homo Sapiens* as the early savage left to himself to make the best of a hostile world, struggling for bare existence, ignorant of the laws governing the world of nature. Ignorance is the mother of fear, and the germs of thought even in the primitive man would begin in wonder, the mother of all thought. In the midst of this unintelligible world the primitive man must feel obsessed by the sense of his own helplessness and his uncontrolled imagination would infect every natural object with anthropomorphism, with an uncanny power to thwart the poor man at every step. The great movements of nature would leave him abashed and cringing before their might. As to how long man lived like a mere animal and as to how or when he emerged from savagery we have no record and we shall perhaps never know. Perhaps it would be no exaggeration if we say that the recorded history of man covers just a little more than a minute on the dial of a clock and that nearly 59 minutes represent the unknown antecedents in the history of man. History began about 5000 years ago and we find records of man's attempts to pierce into the mystery of the universe, and they are the mythologies. Conscious of our knowledge of, and command over, the forces of nature to-day, we may brush aside the mythologies of the olden races as mere rubbish, but all mythology is incipient philosophy. It represents man's earliest efforts to

understand nature. The myth of Apollo rising every morning in his chariot and pair is as fair an explanation of the rising sun as the intellect of the early man could conceive. It bears a close analogy to the Rig Vedic representation of Surya as a dark-red god riding in a chariot drawn by seven steeds. Similarly the explanation of lunar eclipse as the result of the moon being swallowed up by Rahu is as good an explanation of a purely natural phenomenon as the mind or imagination of early man can be expected to have evolved.

But as with the discovery of agriculture and the consequent possibility of settling down in particular spots the mind of man grew, he was not content with the religion of mere fear and helplessness. He began to develop a new self-consciousness and new power to resist even the will of the gods. The reign of magic represents this phase of religious development, with which I shall deal in the next lecture. With magic and the sense of power it bred we have the beginnings of the positive side of man's religion. The love of power gave place to the love of the beautiful and the just and the true till love emerged as the greatest ideal of life. All these pursuits are deeply rooted in the nature of man, and he cannot get away from them any more than he can from the wild urge of hunger or of sex.

Conscious of his helplessness and weakness generally, man sought help from outside himself and he found it in the various forms of nature, and why should we blame him, when even now the sun and the moon and the stars are so much of mysteries and the scientists of to-day are still struggling to harness the force of solar rays? The history of religion shows how the expanding needs of human nature found vent in the discovery of fresh gods and goddesses, all attempts to pierce the veil of nature and to understand something of its mysterious movements. The greatest force in the development of religion has been the force of growing morality. Century after century the crudities of gods have become self-exposed to the deepening conscience of man, and even within monotheism there is nothing more instructive than the Old Testament, which is as much a record of the developing monotheism of the Jews from the time of

Moses, as it is a record of their own secular history. The God that was hungering for the burnt offerings from his devotees and for the blood of bullocks in the early history of Israel was the same god that inspired Micah (VI 7-8) to say—and this is a far cry indeed from the sayings of the earlier prophets: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?" In the march of the Hebrew soul from an emphasis on the altars reeking with the blood of sacrificed animals to the emphasis on the contrite heart that we find in the Psalms and in Isaiah, we mark a tremendous moral stride towards the discovery of the divine.

Man has hungered for food and found it in the world around of fruits and vegetables, grains and pulses. He has thirsted and found water in lakes and rivers. His heart has not desired anything and not found it in his environment: beauty, truth, justice, mercy. Where he has failed to find what satisfies him perfectly, he has not hesitated to create it, but his creations have all been limited by his experiences so that his wildest imagination ultimately comes down to the crudities of his every-day experience to be woven afresh in all the golden tints of his imagination. Man has searched for the divine through the ages and sometimes found it in power and sometimes in beauty and sometimes in the moral worth of human endeavours. But nothing has satisfied him for long and he has gone forward like the tireless pilgrim. In his search of The Holy he has discovered God, Who speaks to him in various languages and reveals Himself in various forms. The historic Socrates and Christ, Buddha and Mahavir, Zoroaster and Laotse, Mahomed and Bahaullah have all been discoverers of The Holy, and if we apply the simple test: "by their life shall ye judge them," he would be a bold spirit indeed that would deny that they have disclosed to us a world of divinity in which man has discovered himself to be not an alien, but an embodiment, however humble, of the divine.

If the atheist or the agnostic argues that religion does not and cannot give us an established fact, we shall have to admit it

upto a limit, but even at the risk of being involved in the fallacy of *tu quoque* we shall have to retort that absolute certainty has not been given to man in any department of knowledge. If there is an element of uncertainty about some of the basic conceptions of religion, that uncertainty is to be found even in philosophy and science. The essential point to note is that observation and experiment are *prima facie* the only means of establishing certainty, but then they refer only to what can be observed and experimented upon. It would, however, be foolish to conclude that there is nothing outside of, or beyond, what can be observed and experimented upon. In this connection I am reminded of a story which will bear quoting at this stage. There was a man lecturing on God and a wag in the audience got up and said that he would believe that God exists only if he could see God. The lecturer retorted: "Young man, put your common sense on the table and I shall then believe that it exists." It holds out the simple truth that there are facts, whose existence we cannot doubt, simply because they do not appeal to any one of our senses. It only establishes the limitedness of our sense experience. Whether religion comes within the scope of such non-sensual reality is an open question and can only be tackled with philosophically.

It is a remarkable phenomenon of our age that science has lost its old spirit of cock-suredness that it seemed to develop in the latter half of the 19th century. The scientists then seemed confident of bringing the whole world under their domain and developed a superiority complex, which the scientists of to-day are innocent of. Perhaps the complexities of two world wars have had something to do with the note of humility we find in the utterances of scientists to-day. It is interesting to bring together a few of such utterances. Dr. J. S. Haldane writes: "The conclusion forced upon me in the course of a life devoted to natural science is that the universe as it is assumed to be in physical science is only an idealized world, while the real universe is the spiritual universe in which spiritual values count for everything."[1] Nor does he hesitate to say in another place:

[1] *The Sciences and Philosophy*, p. 278.

"The advance of scientific knowledge does not seem to make either our universe or our life in it any less mysterious."[1]

Professor Eddington in his *Space, Time and Gravity* writes: "All through the world runs that unknown content, which must surely be the stuff of our consciousness. Here is a hint of aspects deep within the world of physics, and yet unattainable by the methods of physics. And, moreover, we have found that where science has progressed the farthest, the mind has but regained from nature that which the mind has put into its nature."[2] Einstein, the greatest scientist of the age, has never been unconscious of the very strict limitations of scientific inquiries, and has always made it clear that his theory of relativity was only a matter of physics and he would have nothing to do with the metaphysical or anti-metaphysical meanings that others had sought to read in it. Max Planck, another towering name in modern physics, modestly admits: "Thus every science contains an element of caprice and hence of transitoriness in its very structure, a defect which cannot be eradicated because it is rooted in the very nature of the case."[3] In his *Where is Science Going?* he quotes Einstein: "I believe that the present fashion of applying the axioms of physical science to human life is not only entirely a mistake, but has also something reprehensible in it."[4] A few pages later Max Planck himself sums up the situation when he writes: "Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature, and that is because in the last analysis we ourselves are part of nature and therefore part of the mystery we are trying to solve." It is an interesting paradox of modern science that while in the last century it prided itself on its concreteness as against the abstractness of philosophy, to-day it admits: "the physical world has become progressively more and more abstract."[5] Once this is admitted, it is no argument against religion that its

[1] *Ibid*, p. 165.
[2] Pp. 200-201.
[3] *The Philosophy of Physics*, p. 15.
[4] P. 209.
[5] Max Planck: *Universe in the Light of Modern Physics*, p. 14.

concepts are abstract and cannot be proved and therefore they are unreal.

The general attitude of the greatest scientists of the world to-day on the limitations of science cannot be better summarised than in the words of Sir Arthur Eddington in his *Nature of the Physical World*: "In the mystic sense of the creation around us, in the expression of art, in a yearning towards God, the soul grows upward and finds the fulfilment of something implanted in its nature. The sanction for this development is within us, a striving born with our consciousness or an Inner Light proceeding from a greater power than ours. Science can scarcely question this sanction, for the pursuit of science springs from a striving which the mind is impelled to follow, a questioning that will not be suppressed. Whether in the intellectual pursuits of science or in the mystical pursuits of the spirit, the light beckons ahead and the purpose surging in our nature responds." The same great scientist said even more emphatically when he was interviewed by New York Times: "I believe that the mind has the power to set aside statistical laws that hold good in organic matter. The course of the world is not predetermined by physical laws. It may be altered by uncaused volition of human beings."

If science is forced to make such admissions about its limits, philosophy too as such is not in a better position. The Ultimate Category of all European Philosophy comes out in the end as a mystery transcending human intellect. Whether it be Plato's Idea of the Good, or Aristotle's God, or the Nous of the Stoics or the Logos of the Neo-Platonists, or the Substance of Spinoza or the Self of the Empiricists, or the *Ding-an-sich* of Kant or the Absolute of Hegel, or the Will of Schopenhauer, or the *Elan Vital* of Bergson, or the Matter of the Materialists—in every case we come to the limits of thought where a particular philosopher finds himself forced to admit the existence of a certain category of thought as the logical end of his philosophy but he has to admit also that it remains a mystery in its ultimate nature. The key-note of this thought was struck very early in the history of philosophy, when in the *Brihad-Aranyaka-*

Upanishad[1] we read: "Hence, now there is the teaching 'Not thus! Not so!' (*neti, neti*), for there is nothing higher than this, that he is thus. Now the designation for him is 'the real of the Real.' Verily breathing creatures are the real. He is their Real." So *Brahman* is, but what it is remains a mystery which cannot be expounded in words. The great Sankara does not go beyond this in his ultimate position in spite of all his acute analysis of knowledge. For him all knowledge involves a dualism and all dualism falls short of *Brahman*. There is of course one way open to the *jnani* and that is that though not knowing *Brahman*, he can realise his identity with *Brahman*, *i.e.* become *Brahman*, though even the use of this word "become" is misleading, because it implies that the *jnani* becomes what he was not, whereas the whole force of Sankara's interpretation of the *Upanishadic* teaching is that everything is Brahman, including man, but it is given to him alone to realise that identity in fact, though even he cannot lay claim to any knowledge of *Brahman*. This position ultimately rests on the idea that man can attain such a stage when he is merged in *Brahman* and loses all sense of distinction involved between thee and me. The discovery of this psychological possibility perhaps constitutes the greatest discovery of Hindu psychology, some millenia before the days of Freud and Coué. It would indeed be on unassailable ground if the mystic pronouncements of all Indian rishis bore out the testimony of Sankara. Unfortunately it has not been so. The *Upanishads* themselves have been subjected to rival interpretations, and Sankara's conclusions have been violently challenged by Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya, and these philosophical disputes have taken away a good deal from the certainty of philosophic conclusions of Indian thinkers, for if they differ, the only court of appeal is to reason, and reason, we find, has to plead guilty to its own limitations. It asserts—Something is, but is not in a position to say what it is. To imitate the language of Bradley—*That* is certain, but its *What* is unknown.

[1] *Second Adhyaya, Third Brahmana*, para 6 : *Hume's translation*, p. 97.

It has been claimed on behalf of Indian thought that India has been always religious and that the conflict between philosophy and religion that has been such a marked feature of the history of European philosophy is not to be found in the history of Indian philosophy. This statement is true only up to a point, as I pointed out in my paper on *Philosophy and Religion*.[1] The claim is true only in the sense that religion and philosophy alike accept the incomprehensibility of the *Brahman* of philosophy or of the God of religion. They merge in a thinker like Kabir :—

" There is an endless world, O my brother, and there is the Nameless Being of whom naught can be said.

Only he knows it who has reached that region : it is other than all that is heard and said.

No form, no body, no length, no breadth is seen there : how can I tell you that which it is?

He comes to the path of the Infinite on whom the grace of the Lord descends : he is freed from births and deaths who attains to Him.

It cannot be told by the words of mouth, it cannot be written on paper :

It is like a dumb person who tastes a sweet thing—how shall it be explained?"[2]

This phase of thought is by no means completely absent in European thought. Kabir or any Indian mystic could have penned the ideas which Thomas à Kempis expressed when he wrote : "Ah, Lord God, when shall I be entirely united and lost in Thee, and altogether forgetful of myself : Thou in me, and I in Thee? even so, grant that we may in like manner continue together in one."

European philosophers have discounted such mystic utterances and preferred to go the way of reason, however negative it may prove to be in the end. In India Gaudapada and Sankara

[1] *Proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress*, 1926 and *The Monist*, October, 1927, (Vol. xxxvii, No. 4).

[2] *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore : Poem LXXXVI

can claim to have been the only pure rationalists in Hindu philosophy. The concept of *Isvara* or *Saguna Brahman* has been successfully reduced by Sankara's relentless logic to the world of *maya*, and to this extent he has killed all that we normally understand by religion. If he has found room for religion at all in his thought, he has done it, not as a thinker but as a psychologist conscious of the frailties of humanity and its incapacity to do without religion. It is a concession to humanity, not a fact of philosophic truth. I shall deal with this more explicitly in a later lecture. At present I am just interested in pointing out how religion and philosophy alike are at one in affirming the existence of something ultimately real, and how both also agree in admitting the incapacity of human thought to grasp completely the full significance of what they believe to be real. In Europe the conflict between religion and philosophy became explicit because religious fanaticism denied the right of man to think and this attitude had to be challenged and ultimately defeated. In India this conflict, though so clearly latent in Advaita, never became a reality, because Sankara was prepared to accept religion as a fact, though only for "children in years or in intellect" as a modern disciple of his puts it. He founded *mutts* and temples, gave a new fillip to caste as against Buddhism, came to be looked upon as a man of religion, while to a bare handful of men in his own age or in the succeeding centuries has it been given to rise above all religion and rest content with pure philosophic thought. In India philosophy itself has become a part of a man's religion, for his philosophy is as much a matter of his birth as his religious beliefs and religious practices. Philosophic thought has driven many to an anti-religious attitude in Europe, and religion in Europe has thereby been forced to undergo epochs of purification from superstitions and errors. Religion in India has been allowed to go on unchecked and uncorrected as a concern of the ignorant masses who must remain perennial strangers to the vivifying and purifying draughts of philosophic reasoning.

The whole problem of the philosophy of religion has come to be this: how to transform the dogmatism of traditional religion into something which can stand the test of thought?

In this transformation the unessential and the untrue must drop out, and the core that remains must retain its dual loyalty to the demands of thought and of heart as well. If man has always displayed a religious hunger, there must be something in the objective world to satisfy that hunger. There is a joy in that search for the divine which nothing can equal. They who continue in that search succeed in achieving that happiness and that peace of mind to which all others remain strangers. That is why modern Europe in spite of all her triumphs in the material scientific world is so unhappy, and has been suffering from a diseased soul. Bertrand Russell, who has done a lot to lay many a religious superstition to rest, is forced to confess that "The world, always full of pain, is particularly so in our own age,"[1] and Cattell is driven to speak of "Social melancholia" and to say "It is the decay of the religious explanation of life which has poisoned that quiet assurance of purpose."[2]

Thought has failed to achieve complete success in its attempt to understand the world. That is the tragedy of all our scientific knowledge. Failure here has only intensified man's religious quest. If scientists have become humble in their claims, no priest in an educated society can hereafter hope to exploit man's will to believe as he has been doing through the ages. We are prepared to admit that a man can be moral without being religious, but it remains equally true as that astute student of human nature, Somerset Maugham, has said: "A man is more likely to be a good man if he has learned goodness through the love of God than through a perusal of Herbert Spencer."

If we are driven to recognise the limitations of scientific and philosophic thought, the very existence of the mysterious makes room for religion, and the test for all true religion lies in prayer as was long ago enunciated by Novalis: "Prayer is to religion what thinking is to philosophy: to pray is to make religion."[3] It is a full-blooded recognition of man's weakness and dependence on some higher power. It is not just a formula to be repeated

[1] Quoted in Cattell's *Psychology and the Religious Quest*, p. 40.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[3] Quoted in *The Power of Prayer*, ed. Rt. Rev. Patterson, p. 165.

formally and mechanically, as it tends to be with the orthodox. Genuine prayer comes from the depths of the human soul pervading the whole life of the man of religion. It "consists in an elevation of the spirit unto God, which may be while we work and walk and eat and drink, and even while we rest; yea, even in sleeping our will ought to bless Him always." [1] Such was the case with men like Kabir and Tukaram, Rumi and Eckhart. With them prayer was not "the garment of an hour," but "a source of strength and guidance in every expression of life." Even the most anti-religious psychologist will have to admit that the man of prayer is the most peaceful on earth. In the midst of sorrows he is calm and collected and radiates consolation all around. Something within him seems to give him an insight into the ills of life as having their significance in the scheme of things, and he feels as Christ did when he knelt down and prayed: "Father, if you be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." [2]

When man lost belief in God, he necessarily lost the healing and the energising power of prayer too. But even on Coué's own premises if thought can heal in the form of auto-suggestion, prayer can give a new sense of vitality to the fading soul. British Medical Journal, June 18, 1910, bore an eloquent testimony to faith which is worth quoting:

"Nothing in life is more wonderful than faith, the one great moving force which we can neither weigh in the balance nor test in the crucible. Intangible as the ether, ineluctable as gravitation, the radium of the moral and mental spheres, mysterious, indefinable, known only by its effects, faith pours out an unfailing stream of energy while abating nor jot nor tittle of its potency .....Faith is indeed one of the miracles of human life which science is as ready to accept as it is to study its effects." [3]

Further evidence comes from Dr. Hyslop speaking at a medical congress: "As an alienist, and one whose whole life has been concerned with the sufferings of the mind, I would state

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 558.

[2] *St. Luke*, xxii, 42.

[3] Quoted in *The Power of Prayer*, p. 179.

that of all the hygienic measures to counteract disturbed sleep, depression of spirits and all the miserable sequels of a distressed mind, I would undoubtedly give the first place to the simple habit of prayer."[1]

There is no doubt that modern western civilisation has lost its grip on religion. While the anti-religious attitude is not so pronounced as it was half a century ago, most people feel a lacuna in their life : a sense of bewilderment. That is why to thousands of westerners Theosophy and the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and of Gandhiji have come as a great relief, as an escape from the pompous emptiness of mere material wealth exemplified in commerce and empires. Few Europeans have experienced the ennui of the soul so much or given expression to it with such consummate artistry as Romain Rolland. In his classic *Jean Christophe* there are few pages so moving as those in which he depicts Jean's loneliness of spirit as he found himself in Paris moneyless and friendless. Jean was driven to pray in that bitter moment: "To whom did he pray? To whom could he pray? He did not believe in God; he believed there was no God at all... Still he had to pray, he had to pray to himself... In the muffled silence of his heart he felt the presence of the Eternal Being, of his God.....He rose calm and comforted". Through the voice of Jean, Rolland makes the voice of intellectual Europe and America speak out the anguish of its soul and discover the healing virtues of prayer. God discovers Himself most when man's mind is darkened. There is a popular saying in our vernaculars : "*sookhe soni, dookhe Ram*" : in prosperity, we think of the goldsmith, in adversity of Ram. It is when the soul is in the dark that the light of God shines all the more brightly. It was not mere pessimism that made Schopenhauer write: "Religions are like glow-worms : before they can give light, it must be dark."

The soul of man has always been in darkness. Centuries of science have not completely dispelled that darkness. No wonder if the great Newton always took off his hat whenever he heard

[1] *Ibid.*, quoted p. 180.

the name of God. The great Kant became a mystic when he spoke of the mystery of the starry sky above him and the moral law within him. The voice of prayer has been the voice of the Psalmist: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."[1] Science and philosophy have often been critics of religion, and if they have not succeeded in burying religion—and this may be taken as a sign of the vitality and truth of religion—they have certainly helped to purify religion of most of its dross: its superstitions, its cruelties, its fanaticism. They have brought us to the height from which we can truthfully say: he who finds truth only in his own religion and has no eye for truth in any other religion is still groping in the dark; he alone has found truth of God who has learned to appreciate the efforts of all religions in getting at God. The man of religion does not speak of religions, he knows only the quest for God in his fellow-pilgrims. The Divine is there, we search for it and find it in bits till the great religious geniuses like Zoroaster and Moses, Christ and Mahomed, Buddha and Krishna sum up the religious quest and give a new orientation and a new meaning to old beliefs.

There is a chronological history of religion. But the later is not necessarily the better. A pure religion has not succeeded in ousting the evils masquerading as religion. Men in their search for the Divine have not all followed one beaten track. They have been inspired by different motives. That is why in the apparently irreligious and immoral we find a core of religion. We need to disentangle it to appreciate its religious worth. That is how we get a logical history of religion, if the use of this expression be permitted. I have aimed at an exposition of this logical history of religion: different motives giving rise to different types of religion. These motives may be summarised as the desire for power, for beauty, for justice, for truth, for love, culminating in the concept of God as the Holy, as the harmony of Beauty and Truth, Justice and Love. They have often appeared in actual history, sometimes each by itself, more often

[1] *Psalm*, l. 10.

together but in a pattern so confused and tangled as to be unintelligible. They have satisfied the religious hunger of mankind in varying degrees, and cannot be brushed aside as mere idle vapourings of ignorance. They had a meaning in their day and I shall seek to unravel it, disclose a pattern with a meaning, which in its day carried mankind one step forward in their religious pilgrimage.

LECTURE II

Religion as a Quest for Power

In the introductory lecture it was sought to be shown that man had not succeeded in avoiding religion in one form or another, and it would not be wrong to define him not merely as a rational animal but even more as a religious animal. But religion has always been very complex and it has meant different things to different peoples, and even within a more or less homogeneous group it has meant different things to different individuals. Men are religious for various reasons. In highly cultured societies like the Hindus, Muslims and Christians we come across examples of men and women who have turned away from this world as something sordid and dedicated themselves to a single-hearted pursuit of God, content with nothing less than a full communion with, or absorption in, Him. Such were and are the mystics. With the vast masses of men and women, however, religion has not meant something selfless or so remote as the life hereafter, but they have sought in it some ground for comfort and hope in their mundane disappointments and sorrows, and even for success in their daily life: good rains and a successful crop, good trade and a safe return of their ships, good business, success in love, a fruitful marriage, a well-furnished table, and fine clothes, in short, everything that makes life comfortable and happy in the most hedonistic sense of the term. Many have sought in it beauty that can satisfy their most aesthetic desires. Many have sought in it a full fruition of their moral ideals as found in justice and truth, benevolence and love. In brief, religion has meant for most people something that is needed in this life *here and now* to make it more worth living, more beautiful, more moral and more abiding. These various motives have been working in all religions from the lowest to the highest in an exceedingly

complex pattern. It will be my endeavour to disentangle these various motifs and show how they all work, may be in varying degrees, at all levels of religious life in a community.

When did religion arise?—is a legitimate question, but as unanswerable as the question: When did society arise? Was there ever a period when there was no society? Perhaps there was, when man just emerging from his anthropoid stock was a roaming animal with no vestige of any virtue that we have come to associate with humanity as such. We cannot even say that family was the unit of the earliest society, for with our anthropological researches we have come to see that the close-knit patriarchal family, with which the civilised man has been acquainted ever since the historic times began, is an institution of much later growth, preceded by the matriarchal family, and this perhaps by group marriages, while the stage of promiscuity may have been at least a hypothetical probability. We can hope to study social organisations in their earliest form only in the primitive societies of to-day or of the recent past, and reconstruct a pattern of the earliest human society. And when we do so, we find the rudiments of religion, heavily weighted with what we to-day speak of as magic. But where does magic begin and religion end or *vice versa* are questions which have continued to baffle anthropologists of all countries.

The relation of religion and magic constitutes one of the most difficult as well as one of the most fascinating chapters in Anthropology. The distinction between religion and magic to-day is fairly clear-cut. By religion we imply a belief in some supernatural power or powers, vastly superior to ourselves to whom we pray for favours and success in our endeavours; it implies an attitude of humility and submissiveness, which finds classic expression in Job's self-surrender in Old Testament: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him". Magic on the other hand has come to have with us an evil flavour. It connotes the practice of malevolent arts for individual revenge or success, without any regard for moral principles. Thus put religion and magic appear to be at poles asunder. As against the submissiveness of religion we are face to face with the domineer-

ing tone of the magician : thus shall it be. From the standpoint of the exalted religions to which we have been accustomed all primitive religions have more magic than religion in them, and this contrast has given rise to various theories of the possible relationship between religion and magic.

Anthropologists have got into the habit of arguing about the priority of magic or religion, as if the two, though contradictory in spirit, may not be found with their courses running concurrently. Life is not all logic and it makes room for many a strange bed-fellow. In the infant science of Anthropology there are few names so towering as that of Sir James Frazer, whose *Golden Bough* is a veritable mine of information on primitive life and ideas. While recognising that in early societies the functions of the priest and the sorcerer were often combined, he yet looks upon ancient magic as the "very foundation of religion" and that it was only when magic failed that religion had its birth. This view has not found favour with scholars like Andrew Lang. R. R. Marett is on firmer ground when he looks upon religion and magic as arising out of some social phenomenon "originally one and indivisible." This question of the origin of religion and magic as distinguished from each other will perhaps never be solved, for we can hope to have no data for its solution in a world where primitive races are fast disappearing under the pressure of civilisation, and it is impossible to come across a community so primitive as to present all the features of the earliest human society. But we can reconstruct one in imagination just as much as the zoologist can reconstruct the skeleton of a dinosaur or any other species of animal that has disappeared from the face of the earth.

If we begin with the earliest man as just emerging from his animal ancestry, it would be justifiable to say that millenia might have passed before his religious consciousness began. Helpless and forlorn, shivering in the cold blasts of snow-storms, fleeing from the advancing tide of floods, frightened out of his wits by the quivers of earthquakes, terrified by lightning and thunder, the primitive man must have been subjected to waves

of fear, and fear is the mother of religion, as it has not ceased to be such even in the case of the civilised man of to-day. Humility and submissiveness as the characteristic features of religion may be expected to have marked primitive religion as well. It was only when some astute leader of the human herd sought to establish his authority by an appeal to some supernatural power as enshrined in a tree or a brook or a stone that magic could have reared its head. But this is a guess, though a logical one. The fact remains that in our discovery of the most primitive societies we find religion and magic not as antagonistic forces working against each other, but as somehow working together cheek by jowl. The functions of the priest and the magician were not distinguished, and the *Shaman* of Siberia has come to be recognised as the typical priest-magician of all primitive societies. Religion was the great unifying force in all early and later societies. The wrath of the unseen spirits was a greater cohesive force than any physical punishment that could be inflicted by the tribal chief or by a tribe as a whole. Predominantly social, it fostered the sense of unity through its rites and ceremonies, feasts and fasts. At the same time the labours of anthropologists like Taylor and Frazer, Crawley and Rivers, Spencer and Gillen have brought out the fact that all primitive religion is suffused with magic as well. Man's inferiority complex is also curiously accompanied by a superiority complex and at some stage of his evolution he discovered or thought he had discovered means of coercing some spirit or spirits to respond to his will. So long as this invocation was in the interests of social solidarity as a means of producing better crops or of bringing disaster to enemy groups, such magic continued to be somewhat religious in character as well. But it soon degenerated into individual magic as a means of bringing disease and even death to one's personal enemies, or blighting the crops of a neighbour or making his cattle run dry. Such magic was and is anti-social in character and has come to be looked down upon by all advanced religions and peoples as something unholy, inconsistent with the spirit of true and genuine religion. But the fact remains that magic, social or anti-social,

is an integral part of primitive societies, and its fundamental aim is to secure power, whether for the society or for the individual. The quest for power becomes the driving motive of magico-religion. I am using this idea of power in a very broad sense as including all the good things of life: land, money, love of men or women, victory in war, good crops, abundance of things to eat and drink: in short, everything that makes life worth living and contributes to the joy of life. This phase of religious life, however, does not escape the charge of being dead to ideas of beauty or of morality. A blind worship of power to secure the necessities of life or of luxury is quite consistent with the spirit of magic which is out to exploit life for all that it is worth.

A close study of primitive magico-religion brings out the interesting fact that sex plays a very important part, and all power-religion is directly or indirectly focussed in sex. Modern psychology, both on its normal and abnormal sides, has brought out the sex urge as being along with hunger one of the two most dominating facts of life. If Freud was not correct in reducing all abnormalities of life as due to sex, he certainly succeeded in bringing out its importance in all the manifestations of human life, religion not excluded. Making all due allowance for exaggerations inevitable in a new discovery, it is impossible to deny the rôle that sex has played in the evolution of religion, and most particularly in its phase of power-religion.

Even to-day in the year 1948 sex has remained a profound mystery. The birth of a male or a female child still remains a mystery. Sex as a means of procreation would deserve to be called a miracle but for its extreme commonness. If this be true to-day, when science has succeeded in conquering the heights of air as well as the depths of land and sea, one can understand what a mystery sex must have been to the ignorant primitive man, more an animal than a *homo sapiens*. Bronislaw Malinowsky in his *Father in Primitive Psychology* mentions a most astounding fact which goes to show that men and women can come together as animals do and yet not connect their act with the birth of their children. It will bear

quotation : " The Melanesian natives of the Trobriand Islands, north-east of Papua, believe that a woman bears a child because a spirit (baloma) wishes to be reincarnated. The baloma changes itself to a very small baby. The spirit of some friend of the mother picks out this baby from the crowds of would-be-borns who drift about the sea, and puts it on the mother's head and the child is born. No father is needed. The Trobrianders do not believe in fatherhood. A man's relation to his wife's children is denoted by the word *tama*, naturally untranslatable. The *tama* loves the children, but they are not of his clan, they are of their mother's. Their *kadar* (mother's brother) is their male head and they are of his village. As proof of the needlessness of the male the Trobrianders point to one or two excessively ugly women whom no man would touch and yet they have had children." One can easily conceive with what force the discovery of the real function of sex must have come to the primitive man. That even the rutting season was not unknown to man in the distant past is borne out by Lady Richmond Brown in her *Review of Unknown Tribes and Unchartered Seas* : " The Chucunaques' (in America) most primitive social trait is the limiting of sexual intercourse to a definite annual rutting season, a habit recorded by others in some of the tribes of California and Australia."

Once the function of sex was understood, the primitive mind was not slow in making it the principle of explanation of the varied phenomena of life. Even the supernatural world came to be peopled with male and female spirits ; gods could be conceived only in conjunction with goddesses. Osiris and Isis in ancient Egypt, Baal and Baalat in Babylon, Shiva and Parvati, Vishnu and Lakshmi in Hindu India, Zeus and Hera in ancient Greece, Jupiter and Juno in ancient Rome, Odin and Fiorgyn in Scandinavia—such a list could be multiplied *ad nauseam*. It certainly lends colour to the view of the pure rationalists like Voltaire and Feurbach that man created god rather than that god created man. No god is worth the name without the *sakti* in Hindu parlance that is embodied in his wife. The function of sex in the plant world is perhaps a modern discovery in the

scientific world, but in a crude imaginative way it was anticipated by the primitive man when he spoke of the Mother Earth fructified by the rays of the Sun as her husband. These personifications of nature as powerful gods or beautiful goddesses wedded to one another, not without rivalries and jealousies, lend a colour of romance and beauty to primitive religions, as we shall see more fully in the succeeding lecture.

This anthropomorphism is intelligible, for thoughts soar beyond the limitations of language, and even in the highest moral religions we are constrained to express our highest religious ideas in terms of human relationships. Christians are accustomed to speak of God as our Father, and Hindus of Kali as Mother, while in polytheistic religions the union of gods and goddesses is spoken of in unabashed language as sexual. Even the highest mystics in their hunger for union with God do not hesitate to use the language of sex, and this is particularly noticeable in the case of Christian women mystics, who look upon their mystic love as marriage and the Roman Catholic Church itself is proud to call itself the bride of Christ.

Far more arresting to a student of religion is the open worship of sex and sexual relationship which is to be found almost as a universal phenomenon in different parts of the world, and has come to be known as phallic worship. While the Latin word *phallus* from the Greek word *phallos* has come to stand as symbolic of the male organ of generation, the Sanskrit word *yoni* has been adopted even by western writers as symbolic of the female vulva. Since fish has the shape of a *yoni* it came to be a symbol of various goddesses like Ashtoreth of the Phoenicians, Isis of the Egyptians, Aphrodite of the Greeks and Venus of the Romans. It was particularly sacred to goddess Mylitta of the Assyrians and to Freya, wife of Odin, in Scandinavia.[1] The consumption of fish particularly on Fridays—the day sacred to Freya—is still common in Europe, though now it is due to its association with the Good Friday of Christ's crucifixion. The feminine triangle

[1] *Sex and Sex Worship* by O. M. Wall, p. 100.

of the *Mons Veneris* came to be looked upon as a very sacred symbol for all that is pure, chaste and true.[1]

But with the general supremacy of the male, it is the phallus that has come to be endowed with divine honours in parts of the world far removed from each other, and this very fact points to the universality of sex symbolism in religion. The Bull was dominant in Assyria and came to be adopted in Iran and the sacredness of the bull is still a feature of Zoroastrianism, while Nandi as the vehicle of Shiva and the *Lingam* are a common sight in all the Shaivite temples in India. As to the origin of *Lingam* worship in India we have the interesting story in *Linga Purana*. It is related therein that one day Brahma, Vishnu and Vasistha and several others visited Shiva, but he was so busy with his wife that he took no notice of them. They were so enraged that they cursed him in no measured terms. When Shiva recovered from his orgy and heard about the curses, he felt ashamed, but turned the tables in his favour by ordaining the worship of *Lingam*. He is reported as saying: "My shame has killed me; but it has also given me new life, and a new shape which is that of the *Lingam*! You, my subjects, regard it as my double self! Yes, the *lingam* is I myself, and I ordain that man shall offer it henceforth their sacrifices and worship. Those who honour me under the symbol of the *Lingam* shall obtain, without fail, the object of all their desires, and a place in *Kailasa*. I am the Supreme Being and so is my *Lingam*. To render to it the honours due to a god is an action of the highest merit.....Let my priests go and teach these truths to men, and compel them to embrace the worship of my *Lingam*." The *Lingam* is Shiva himself; "it is white; it has three eyes, and five faces; it is arrayed in a tiger's skin. It existed before the world, and it is the origin and beginning of all beings. It disperses our terrors and our fears, and grants us the object of all our desires."[2] But this phallic or *lingam* worship is by no means peculiar to India. Greek and Roman

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 465.

[2] Quoted on p. 630 in Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies by Abbe Dubois. *Lingam* is the male genital, and *Kailasa* is the abode of Shiva.

matrons used medals and jewellery in this form to make them fertile, and modern Egypt in spite of Islam uses it as a charm. There is in the Vatican Museum at Rome a statue of the Diana of the Ephesians with her bosom covered with breasts, and great was Diana of the Ephesians proclaimed to be! Dr. Wall notes how the Abbey Church of Coulombs, Diocese Chartres in France, claimed to possess the prepuce of Jesus, which had been cut off at the time of his circumcision, and it was believed that a pregnant woman touching it would be assured of a safe and easy confinement, and no less a person than Henry V of England borrowed it for the sake of his wife. [1]

From the *lingam* to the bull is a matter of easy transition and the bull was looked upon as the progenitor of mankind in ancient Assyria. It became so sacred in decadent Zoroastrianism that its urine came to be looked upon as holy and having great virtues as cleaning not merely physical evils but as purging one even of one's sins. And in India there is no Shaivite temple without its Nandi (bull) as its chief guardian.

Similarly the serpent has played a great part in religious worship as a symbol of the divine. Freudian Psychology has familiarised us with the idea that the serpent in dreams is a phallic symbol. That this idea is not far fetched can be borne testimony to by every student of primitive religion wherein serpent worship occupies no mean position. The staff of Aesculapius is called the staff of life; "it symbolises virility, vigor, health—a lingam erect under the influence of sexual passion symbolised by the snake," [2] and this can be seen in a Greek statue of the god as well as in that of his daughter Hygeia. [3] The temptation of Adam by Eve and of Eve by a serpent, making them self-conscious about their sex, speaks for itself. Grandchamp in his painting of Eve represents the serpent with the head of a man and Ruskin has noted it as an immemorial fact that in sexual matters man is generally the

[1] O. M. Wall: *Sex and Sex Worship*, p. 389.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 535.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 536.

aggressor—and this in spite of the modern Shavian teaching in *Man and Superman* that man is the hunted creature and woman is the hunter. In India too serpent worship is quite common, and the fact that its images are found in millions round *peepul* trees, which again are worshipped by women in general and barren women in particular, has its unmistakable phallic significance.

But sex in religion reached its zenith in the open worship of Priapus in ancient Greece and Rome, and of Seti in ancient Egypt. In Greece and Rome a girl on attaining maturity " was taken by the priestesses to the temples of Priapus, whose images were represented with rigid erect penises and the girl was instructed in the uses of the organ of Priapus, or even compelled to have connection with the god, after which she was no longer a girl but a woman." [1] Hence the word *priapism* so commonly used in sexual pathology. Similarly in Egypt Seti was looked upon as the Giver of Life and his images were as those of Priapus.

From the symbol to the act is a matter of another easy transition, and we find it abundantly illustrated not merely in the crude orgies of the so-called savages but even among the most civilised peoples. Dionysus was the god of vine in Greece, and came to be the god of drunkenness and debauchery. Bacchus was his Roman counterpart, and the festivals of Dionysia and Bacchanalia were the last word in sexual orgies. In the early days of Rome only women were admitted to these secret rites of Dionysus, but later men were also admitted and then began what has come to be known to the succeeding ages as the most systematised orgies ever seen on earth. They " congregated at night, wine flowed in abundance, and the company was soon drunken ; the most outrageous excesses were practised and the initiates, youths or maidens, who objected were murdered rather than have them complain in public." [2] The same tale was repeated in the Floralia, a festival in honour of Flora, the Goddess of Flowers, in the Eleusion Mysteries and in the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 168.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 567.

Lupercalia. These Greek and Roman festivals have disappeared with the glory that was Greece and the splendour that was Rome. But a similar festival is still observed, though in a very diluted form, in Holi in our own country. It is spoken of as the holiday of the Sudras and is marked by vulgar language used by men and women alike, though not accompanied by such orgies as marked the Greek and Roman festivals noted above. But sexual excesses in the name of religion are not unknown in India. In the Times of India of 1 September, 1928, the rite of promiscuous intercourse is mentioned by a correspondent as common in Sind, Kathiawar and Gujrat under the names *Vama-Marga, Vamachara, Shaktism.*

I have stated these facts somewhat baldly almost to the point of reducing religious festivals to an absurdity. But there is a deep meaning attached to the original phallic worship which raises it far above the level of mere vulgarity. We have already noted the innocence of Trobrianders in the matter of the birth of children, but once this stage was passed and the function of sex apprehended, the primitive man must have seen in it the one creative function performed by him long before he made himself conspicuous as a tool-making creature, as Bergson has described man to be. Literally naked without a roof over his head, he was yet the creator of his children. It was all mysterious, but also something great. In it he saw a solution of the mystery of the whole universe, and this conviction must have deepened as he discovered agriculture, settled down to a home of his own, reared flocks of cattle and produced his own food. His whole prosperity depended on the fertility of his cattle and the fertility of his soil. The importance of the bull and the cow was patent and in agricultural communities the worship of the Mother Cow became logically inevitable, and the virility of the bull came to be recognised as much as it is to-day in our dairy farms, though in those early days it naturally took the form of religious worship. Agriculture demanded labour and a large family was an economic asset. Polygamy became an economic institution, the fertility of women an economic necessity, and all that revolved round sex became sacred. The

worship of Priapus and of Seti was practised in the interests of fertility, as it was thought that a woman sanctified by contact with a god was bound to be fertile. The same idea lay behind that institution in ancient Babylon to which W. T. Stead forcibly drew the attention of the public in the last years of the 19th century in his famous *The Tribute of Modern Babylon*. Every maiden in Babylon had to pass a night in the temple and give herself to a stranger to ensure her fertility. Even the orgies of the Dionysia, Bacchanalia and Lupercalia had their justification, however crude it may sound to us, in their being spring festivals when nature had her rebirth after the grimness of winter and the devotees felt that by their action they were helping nature to be as fertile and as prolific as possible.

This is further illustrated by Sir James Frazer in his illuminating discussion of sympathetic or homoeopathic magic. In many parts of the world sexual intercourse has been definitely looked upon as a sure means of ensuring the fertility of the soil. The Pipiles of Central America kept apart from their wives for four days before sowing the seeds in the ground so that "on the night before planting they might indulge their passions to the fullest extent; certain persons are even said to have been appointed to perform their sexual act at the very moment when the first seeds were deposited in the ground". "In some parts of Java at the season when the bloom will soon be on the rice, the husbandman and his wife visit their fields by night and engage in sexual intercourse for the purpose of promoting the growth of the crop". In the Leti, Sarmata and some other islands between New Guinea and Australia the sun is looked upon as the male principle by whom the earth as the female principle is fertilised. Once a year at the beginning of the rainy season when the Sun is taken to be paying his fertilising visit pigs and dogs are sacrificed in profusion, "men and women alike indulge in a saturnalia; and the mystic union of the sun and the earth is dramatically represented in public, amid song and dance, by the real union of the sexes under the tree." The Baganda of

Central Africa associate the intercourse of the sexes so intimately with the fertility of the soil that they look upon a barren woman as a hindrance and she is generally sent away from her husband's house. Contrarywise fertile parents, especially of twins, are looked upon as particularly fitted to transfer their fertility to plantain trees by their appropriate intercourse in their own groves as well as their friends', for plantains constitute their staple food.

Nor is this attitude confined to the uncivilised races of Africa and Pacific Islands. Even in a Christian country like Ukraine in Russia "on St. George's Day (the twenty-third of April) the priest in his robes, attended by his acolytes, goes out to the fields of the village, where the crops are beginning to show green above the ground, and bless them. After that the young married people lie down in couples on the sown fields, and roll several times over them, in the belief that this will promote growth of the crops." A similar custom is to be found in some parts of Germany where at harvest men and women, who have reaped the corn, roll together on the field.

I have taken these interesting facts from that treasure-house of anthropological data, Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*.[1] He also notes how human mind works in a contrary fashion too. Thus *e.g.*, certain tribes in Central America practise continence as a means of promoting the growth of crops. The Keckchi Indians sleep apart from their wives and eat no flesh for five days, while the Lanquineros and the Cajaboneros abstain for thirteen days. Some of the Germans of Transylvania practise abstinence for the whole period during which they are engaged in sowing the fields. At Kalotasgez in Hungary it is believed that want of abstinence would make the corn mildewed.

In all this material we find an exemplification of what Sir James Frazer has familiarised us with as homeopathic or sympathetic magic. It gives men a new sense of independence and power that they are no more at the mercy of rains or arbitrary gods, but can by their own actions influence the soil

[1] The Abridged Edition. pp. 186-189.

to give all the wealth that it could. In the struggle for existence magical rites, however obscene they may appear to the later more sophisticated generations, made for wealth and power, and that was the main motive in all early religions. Of what use is a god if he cannot bend to the will of his worshippers? This motive also explains why in primitive religion evil spirits are more zealously propitiated than good spirits, and we need not pretend to be surprised when we know how evil men in power are more fawned upon than the straight and honest officers whose palms do not itch and who are impervious to flattering lies. When a savage was asked why the worship of the devil and evil spirits was preferred to that of God as a good spirit, he is reported to have naively replied: "He is a good fellow who will not do any harm, why should he be worshipped?"

In the brief resume of the primitive religion that I have just presented the emphasis has fallen on the worship of sex, as it gave man his first consciousness of power. But it would be hardly justifiable to conclude that all early religion centres in sex and nothing more. If the origin of religion as opposed to magic is to be traced to fear: whether it was the fear of the lightning and the thunder or the fear of the dead and the ghosts, the early man sought to overcome his limitations by developing a sense of power, however spurious it may have been, through his magic and in this his consciousness of sex gave him a great fillip. The main motive behind this power magic was good living: enough food and good health and a strong progeny. Since in this lecture I am dealing with primitive religion I may as well briefly review a few other features of it, which are not directly connected with sex but are taken to contribute to the growth of communal or individual power. Every society has the inherent right to safeguard itself against enemies seen or unseen and to take steps to preserve all that is considered to be necessary for the well-being of the group concerned. Most of the taboos are easily explicable, *e.g.*, the prejudices against menstrual women as unclean, or the killing of totem animals except for ceremonial reasons so that the strength and power of

a sacred animal could be passed on to the votaries who eat it, a custom which was in full force in India till the times of Buddha and Mahavir and still lingers in India among the animistic tribes and on occasions when Vedic sacrifices are still practised. In a province where cocoanuts form an important part of the daily diet and ritual in one form or another, unripe cocoanuts are taboo so that they may not be touched or wantonly destroyed. Civilised people may appreciate the significance of law, but the uncivilised can be made to obey only through the fear of religious taboos.

The connection between rains and good crops came to be easily apprehended, but the cause of rain remained a mystery with the savage tribes and gave rise to magical rites. The Bari in Africa take it for granted that rain can be produced at will and look to their chief as a rain-maker. "If no rain comes after the offering of a number of goats, an ox is sacrificed and a great feast held with much drumming, and if the rain still holds off for three weeks the rainmaker is killed, and his cattle divided amongst his subjects."[1] Verily in his case could it be said with vengeance "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." This chief is also credited with the power "of keeping off the rain by whistling and sweeping away the threatening thunderstorm with a wisp of grass to represent a broom."[1] It is not stated whether the failure of the thunderstorm to obey the chief costs the poor chief his life. This custom of the Bari may throw some light on the curious custom among the Timni, another African tribe. They have a sort of king, who is elected "but the day before his election his future subjects have the privilege of subjecting him to a tremendous thrashing, either as a test of endurance or for some other now forgotten reason."[2] So says Dr. Keane, but it may be to ensure that the King is strong enough to make the clouds and storms obey his will. The Mois of Indo-China "worship toads, because their repeated croaks bring down the rain so necessary for the growth of

[1] A. H. Keane's *The World's People*, p. 108.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

paddy."[1] Logicians would describe it as the fallacy of *post hoc, propter hoc*. But to ignorant men in their innocence all worship comes natural that brings them what they want.

Nothing makes the savage tribes so abhorrent to civilised peoples as the fact of cannibalism. Very often it is in the last resort an unseemly solution of the food problem. When animals are not caught for food, the corpses of the enemies come to be looked upon as very legitimate substitutes. Once the sense of horror of eating a human being is overcome it would be an easy transition to eating a fellow-tribesman as well. If this is not done, it is only because the sense of social solidarity makes cannibalism within a tribe a suicidal procedure. But this does not affect people who have died through natural causes, and Dr. Keane mentions the case of the Cocomas of the Upper Amazons, who " ate their own dead, grinding the bones to drink in their fermented liquor, and explaining that it was better to be inside a friend than to be swallowed up in the cold earth."[2] After this ingenious reason who can venture to say that reasoning is the prerogative only of the educated or only of the civilised? The very word *cannibal* is a variant of *caribal* derived from the man-eating Caribs of New Granada among whom "the living were the graves of the dead" for the husband ate his wife, the brother his brother or sister, the son his father.[2]

All primitive practices are reducible in the last resort to a desire to live, with its inevitable concomitants of the desire for food whether by hunting or by agriculture, for wife and progeny, for success against the spirits of the dead or other malignant spirits. All the crudities of primitive religion could be rationalised in terms of power. Take so typical a prayer as that of the Fiji Islanders quoted by Max Muller in his *Last Essays*: "Let us live and let those who speak evil of us perish! Let the enemy be clubbed, swept away, utterly destroyed, piled in heaps! Let their teeth be broken! May they fall headlong into a pit! Let

[1] *The Illustrated Weekly of India* : 11 March, 1934.

[2] A. H. Keane's *The World's People*, p. 237.

us live and let our enemies perish!" In the same strain, but on a more humble key, runs the prayer of the Hottentots :

> " Thou father of fathers, thou art one father!
> Thou, O Tsui-goa;
> Let stream the thunder-cloud!
> Let our flocks live!
> Let us also live!
> I am weak indeed
> From thirst, from hunger,
> Oh that I may eat the fruits of the fields."

In fact as soon as people begin to display any other motive in their religious practices they have already taken a step forward towards civilisation.

But this desire for survival and for power is by no means ousted by the other motives which go to nourish religions in all parts of the world. In fact power-religion continued to flourish in the earliest great civilisations like those of the Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Greeks and Romans. Even among the most advanced peoples pure religion—and by pure religion I mean religion without any admixture of magical practices—has been the monopoly of a few high souls : Mystics and God-intoxicated *Bhaktas*. For the rank and file all religion is tainted with a certain amount of magic, open or camouflaged. Even so late as the 16th century the great Paracelsus opined that "the magical is a great hidden wisdom and reason is a great open folly". That this should have been the view of Paracelsus, one of the earliest scientists, throws light on the work of magic in the evolution of human genius. In its defiance of the will of the gods, magic has something of the Promethean fire in it. But magic never claimed to be absolute. It set to work within certain well-defined limits and according to certain set laws so that magic from the beginning was an indirect recognition of the rule of law in the whole realm of nature. That is why modern science claims magic as its ancestor, for science too refuses to take things for granted and is wedded to the spirit of a meticulous inquiry into, and mastery of, the secrets of nature. The success of magic depended on a

meticulous performance of the magical rites which would not permit a departure even by a hair's breadth from the strict order of incantations and rites. Among the Zoroastrians a legend persists that years ago a ceremony was performed to produce a certain result, but it failed and when the cause of the failure was investigated it was found that a hair of the priest's beard had found its way among the viands and vitiated the whole ceremony.

It is impossible to deny the vogue of magic as a survival even among the highest religions. Islam may claim to be the most rationalistic among the religions to-day, but the worship of the Ka'aba in Mecca can only be taken to be a survival of the past idol-worship in Arabia and marking the continuity of Mecca as a connecting link between the old and the new religion. Among the African tribes who have accepted Islam the continuance of many old practices, magical in character, still survives, even though palpably inconsistent with the pure monotheistic teachings of the Quran. Christianity has suffered as badly in this respect. How easy it is to have horizontal conversions, as against vertical conversions, so graphically described by Dr. Stanley Jones! We have numerous examples among the Indian Christians recruited from the lower rungs of Hindu society. A Catholic priest told me how he felt his heart breaking when he noticed that the tomb of one Indian Christian had a hole in it and was told that it was made to pour toddy into the tomb as the deceased was particularly fond of this drink. The Samoyads in Russia are nominally orthodox Christians, but they still retain many of their old pagan beliefs: "As long as things go well with him, he is a Christian, but should his reindeer die, or other catastrophe happen, he immediately returns to his old God *Num* or *Chaddi*.....The wooden cross on the Samoyad graves is supplemented by an overturned sledge to convey the dead safely over the snows of the under-world and although Chaddi is no longer honoured with human victims, only a few years ago a young girl was sacrificed to him in Nova Zemlya."[1] In the Philippines some of the Sulu Islanders get

[1] *Ibid.* p. 182-183

themselves baptised, and keep up their harems and "when asked how many gods are there reply *four*, meaning the Christian Trinity and Allah".[1]

From the standpoint of power the worship of domestic animals as of rivers is quite logical. The buffalo among the Todas of the Nilgiris and the cow among the Hindus are of such economic importance that their life becomes sacred, their preservation becomes a religious duty, and their worship a sure means of ensuring their preservation. The whole prosperity of Egypt through the ages has depended on the life-giving waters of the Nile and the Nile was the core of Egyptian religion. If the worship of rivers has died down in most parts of the world, it is still a very living thing in India. Ganga and Jumna in the North, Godavri and Kistna in the Centre and the Cauvery in the South of India are not mere waters for millions of Hindus, but are veritably sources of physical wealth and of purification not merely of bodily dirt but even of sins as well.

Once we grasp this fundamental idea it will be easy to understand the idea of sacrifices, and even the crudeness which marks them becomes at least intelligible. A sacrifice implies our giving up of what we value and treasure most, and if social solidarity is the supreme means of ensuring individual survival, nothing can be so valuable that it is not worth sacrificing for the highest end—social solidarity. A flood of light is thrown on this aspect of sacrifice by the Biblical story of Abraham and his son Isaac. In order to test his faith God commanded Abraham to offer his only son Isaac as a burnt offering. So great was the faith of Abraham that he was prepared to do God's bidding, but just as he was on the point of slaying his son, the angel of the Lord called out to him and said "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."[2] This incident is reported in connection with a people who claim to have been the earliest monotheists on the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 221.
[2] *Genesis* 22. 12

face of the earth. If the God Yahweh could make this demand, even though it be but to test Abraham's faith, one can understand how in the crude primitive religions the idea of sacrificing human beings—be it a wife or son or daughter—finds an intelligible place in their religious rites. If sacrifice is needed as a propitiation of the deity, a human being, particularly of a hostile tribe, would be as good a substitute as one's kith and kin. The blood of human beings has run right across all early religions and the idea that if a bridge is to be built, a human being must be offered to propitiate the river spirit lingers even to-day in our country where the highest and the lowest types of religion exist side by side. It is the shedding of blood that constituted the chief virtue in human sacrifices. With the advance of moral ideas when it came to be felt that a human being was too sacred to be sacrificed, countless animals came handy as good efficient substitutes. And in the advancing tide of civilisation a time came when even the sacrifice of animals came to be looked upon as unholy. The Old Testament is a most interesting document to show how succeeding Prophets, all speaking in the name of Lord God of Israel, came themselves to be vehicles of an expanding and a humane morality. In the early books the perpetually recurring emphasis on, and demand for, burnt offerings in all gruesome details gives us a very forbidding picture of God. Most refreshing is the contrast presented by the Psalmist when he says :

"For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it; thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit : a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."[1]

But even here the burnt offerings are not altogether discountenanced. We have to pass on to the age of Isaiah and Micah to catch the spirit of Judaism at its highest and its purest. "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"[2]

[1] *Psalm*, 51. 16-17.

[2] *Micah*, 6. 7-8.

To-day in all civilised countries we have travelled far beyond the range of animal sacrifices, but not without leaving behind an idea that red colour as the colour of blood is very auspicious and in India where animal sacrifices are still common among the lower classes, the higher classes content themselves with the smearing of the harmless *kumkum* (vermilion). It is surprising to see how many of our most innocent customs are derived from old crude practices of our ancestors. The old phallic worship has left us the inheritance of the auspiciousness of the fish, thanks to its resemblance to vulva, as it was freely used as a symbol for goddesses.[1] In magic literature we come across symbols commonly used like the famous swastika, which had a phallic origin. The cross has become now a symbol of divine suffering since the time of Christ's crucifixion, but long before his time it had been in vogue and had phallic significance. So too the Christian wedding ring and the feminine triangle of the world-famous Y. M. C. A. Zoology tells us how in our body we carry the remnants of parts which may have been useful once but are now useless, *e.g.*, the nipples in man and the appendix, which has come to be more a source of disease than of help. So too in our religious conceptions there has been a continuity of which we are hardly aware, but advancing knowledge and advancing ethical conceptions have made us rise above the crudities of our ancient religious practices and made us either abandon them or carry them forward with a new interpretation and a new value. I have already referred to the pre-Islamic sacredness of the Ka'aba which Islam has thought it wise to continue as giving a unity to the brotherhood of Islam scattered over all the world. Christianity has been even more accommodating. Most of the old Roman holidays connected with pagan gods have been quietly transformed into holidays connected with Christian saints. Even the most sacred Christian holiday, Christmas as the birthday of Christ, is spurious in the eyes of sober history, for it was really celebrated in Rome as the birthday of Mithra,

[1] *Vide* Dr. Wall's *Sex and Sex Worship*, pp. 383, 385, 391, 405.

the Iranian deity, whose worship had spread right across the Roman Empire upto the shores of Britain and in the heart of imperial Rome itself. Not till nearly four centuries after the crucifixion of Christ did his birthday come to be identified with the birthday of Mithra, the last challenge that Christianity had to overcome before it came to be the religion of Europe. In Germany and England there is the harmless custom of kissing any girl who stands below a branch of the mistletoe, an indispensable decoration of a Christian house at Christmas time. Who would think that this innocent and amusing custom goes back to ancient Phoenicia when the goddess Mylitta had her temples decorated with mistletoe, and it was connected with the Phoenician religion which required every woman once in her life to give herself to a man and when she was ready to do so, she had to sit under the mistletoe?

These ancient crudities have passed away from the consciousness of most genuinely religious people. I have tried to explain them as having their origin in man's desire for power. If in the advanced religions the crude manifestations of these desires have vanished, the desire itself is as strong as ever even among the most advanced of us. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini nor Winston Churchill nor Roosevelt disdained an appeal to God to bring victory to their armies with as much fire as the ancient prophets of Israel appealed passionately to their Lord God of Hosts. Even the atheistic Stalin relaxed when the pent-up religious feelings of the Russians were allowed a vent in a solemn religious thanksgiving when the Russian flag flew over Berlin and the defeat of Hitler and his hordes was complete. We are proud to call ourselves civilised, but we are conscious of our limitations as much as our primitive ancestors, and we have not ceased to pray. We still pray for success in life and for salvation, whatever conception of salvation we may have. An English friend of mine in Mysore rather prided himself on his atheistic attitude to life and did not refrain from gibes at the "stupidity" of the religious as he called it. But when his last illness came and he was removed to the hospital, he saw that his end was near and as he was in pain he turned pathetically to his Christian

nurse and said: "Nurse, pray for me." There spoke in him the inheritance of millenia.

As I shall try to show in the succeeding lectures there comes a stage in the evolution of man's religion when he becomes so God-intoxicated that he rises above all the external paraphernalia of religion. He discards the priests and has no need for even the most beautiful temples or mosques or churches and still less for the beautiful ceremonial through which most men seek to approach their God. Such God-intoxicated mystics have only one desire: communion or union with God, and for nothing else. But high-souled mystics are one in a million. Most of us are earthy, wedded to the joys of life in spite of its sorrows, and most of us wish to make this life here and now a success. We refuse to believe that God brought us into this world only to test us for our fitness for some life hereafter, or that in creating this world He wanted it to be literally a vale of tears. If this were the dominant idea in all religions, religion would be more of a liability than an asset. But in spite of the pessimism that sometimes leaks out of most high religions, the rank and file have not let go their hold on life and have adapted it to their own needs and converted tragedies into festivities. So men and women still pray for wealth and progeny, success in their undertakings and defeat for their enemies. I have been always struck by the prayer of Christ and often tempted to repeat it—not the Lord's Prayer with which we are all more or less familiar—but the prayer that escaped his lips when in great tribulation he prayed: "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."[1] Many religious souls, if not at the level of the mystics, have risen above the pursuit of the ordinary joys of life. But even they like Christ find it necessary to pray that the cup of sorrow and suffering be removed. Most religious souls go a step further and claim a right to pray to their Father for their full share in the joys of life.

[1] *St. Mark*, 14. 36.

This brings me to the last part of this lecture: Should prayer be petitionary?

Prayer is the very essence of religion. It is marked by a sweet humility, if not always by sweet reasonableness, and thus stands in marked contrast to the arrogant self-assertiveness of magic. Prayers may be classified as referring to the self or others or God. The last type is perhaps the most exalted as coming from the hearts of the mystics who have nothing to ask for except the love of God. But few people are capable of rising to this height. Most people are content to turn to God in humble thanksgiving for favours received, and certainly in their hour of tribulation, and such prayers are definitely petitionary in character. Tribes of primitive people or civilised nations may ask for favours or render thanks on behalf of the community as a whole. But individuals usually are tempted to pray for their own private ends. Mystics may condemn this or such a high moralist as Emerson may stigmatise it out of court as he has done in the following passage:—

"Prayer that craves a particular commodity, or anything less than all good, is vicious. Prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life from the highest point of view. It is the soliloquy of a beholding and jubilant soul. It is the spirit of God pronouncing His works good. But prayer as a means to effect a private end is meanness and theft. It supposes dualism and not unity in nature and consciousness. As soon as man is one with God he will not beg. He will then see prayer in all action. The prayer of the farmer kneeling in the field to weed it, the prayer of the rower kneeling with the stroke of his oar are true prayers heard throughout nature, though for cheap ends."

This may be taken to be an amplification of Carlyle's formula: work is worship. It is certainly exalted. It is certainly also a condemnation of the common complaint against God that He has not answered this or that particular prayer of this or that particular ego. Such criticism is palpably absurd once we realise how selfish and even evil are some of the prayers offered by men and women, and how contradictory too they are with the varying moods and caprices of ordinary men. It is indeed a blessing from the standpoint of the community that

God turns a deaf ear to such patently selfish prayers. Still men do pray and will continue to pray. If not logically justifiable, such prayers must be taken to be psychological facts and if even the most civilised man and the most educated amongst them continue to pray in the year 1948, it is a proof of the fact that men and women in the last resort and at the lowest level of religion still cling to a sense of power as defined early in this lecture, and that points to the fact that power is still a value that has not lost its significance since the days of animistic and phallic worship. High-brow moralists may still continue to condemn money as filthy lucre, but as Mr. Joad shrewdly observes: "Money may not bring us happiness, but it at least enables us to live comfortably in our misery." The methods of our prayers have certainly changed, but hardly the contents of prayers. In a world which most of us find hostile and as our aspirations wither, we instinctively turn to a Power from Whom we can expect a sympathetic hearing and response. It may be an illusion as all phallic worship was, but it is an illusion which gives a meaning and strength to life and the student of religion cannot pass it by. Power as a value to be pursued in life still has its sway and makes men and women religious. This will be challenged by men of pure religion, but I believe in stating facts, and I believe with Maeterlinck that "it is not bad to stir the sleepy recesses of the mind sometimes."[2]

LECTURE III

Religion as a Quest for Beauty

In the pursuit of power and all its implications there is a certain crudeness. It is only when religion succeeds in concealing that crudeness that it takes its first real spiritual step, and that is done when religion becomes beautiful, and after years of a study of religion, I feel convinced that without this adjunct of the beautiful, religion could not have survived, so far as the vast masses of humanity are concerned. Mrs. Annie Besant [1] has recorded her conversation with the famous Dean of Westminister, Dean Stanley, a man of surprisingly liberal views for a priest, in which he showed his love and his pride in the glorious Westminster Abbey, but it was also "easy to see that old historical associations, love of music, of painting, of stately architecture were the bonds that held him to the old historic Church of England," a very heterodox statement from the standpoint of orthodox Christianity, but it is true of many other Christians as well. We are familiar with all the rationalist criticisms of Christianity, and all the Protestant fulminations against Papacy and all the Soviet criticisms of the orthodox Greek Church, but we have the least number of rationalists even in Europe and America, and the Roman Catholics far outnumber the Protestants, and the Greek Church has survived political revolutions though shorn of its power and prestige. If we had to seek for an explanation we would find it to a great extent in the exquisite music and the pageantry of the Catholic and Greek Churches. In India too we have the interesting phenomenon of a "Hinduism," criticised and at times even reviled, going strong nevertheless as we shall see more fully a little later.

[1] Quoted in *Annie Besant* by W. T. Stead, p. 67.

If religion is the deepest thing in the life of men and no sacrifice is considered too great from the standpoint of religion, we can understand how the finest creative arts have laid their choicest treasures on the altar of religion. In the most primitive village the temple constitutes its centre of attraction. Its architecture is distinct. In the Nilgiris in South India the cone-shaped roof marks out the temple of the Todas. In every village the *gopuram* stands out prominent in India just as much as the steeple of the church in a European village. In the cities from the earliest dawn of civilisation all the wealth of architecture has gone to the building of the temples. In the ruins of Babylon even to-day the ziggurat or the lofty platform of bricks rising in several stages marks the spot on which rose the ancient temple to be seen for miles around in the plains of Mesopotamia. The solid walls and the ornamented arches still display the art which drew its votaries. The building of the Temple at Jerusalem continued for centuries to be the dream of the Jewish Prophets, and Cyrus the Great, a Gentile, is still revered as the instrument of God, through whom that dream came again to be realised.

Puritans may look down upon beauty as skin-deep or condemn it as a snare of the devil. But the love of the beautiful is as deeply ingrained in human nature as anything else. Art is the religion of the artist, but it is equally the pabulum on which the religion of the ordinary man is fed. Polytheism is crude and immoral, but it was beautiful and thus got a long lease of life. The legends and the myths of various old peoples were, in the words of Creuzer, "like the idioms of one original and general mother-tongue." The sun and the moon and the earth gave rise to myths which were of a universal character, though embellished with different names and settings. Ancient mythologies had a religious origin, but their vogue was fundamentally artistic. In a drab world of struggle, these tales recounted by the genius of Homer or Hesiod, Vyasa or Valmiki, held forth a variety of beautiful patterns, which passed from words of sweet poetry to exquisite marble and canvas and all combined in the stately Parthenon of Athens, or the impressive temples in

Madura and Rameshwaram, or the wonderful rock temples of Buddhist India. They are all veritable poems in stone.

In the previous lecture we have already seen the cult of the goddess, emerging steadily out of the primitive sex consciousness and finding expression in beautiful myths. Natural phenomena like the rising of the sun and moon, the return of the spring and the fertilising waters of rivers came to have stories woven round them.

The prosperity of Egypt was bound up with the Nile and it became the centre of its religious mythology. Out of the vast waste of water came forth the Sun God known as Khepra at dawn, as Ra at noon, and as Tum in the evening. He created the wind God, Shu, and his consort, Tefnut, who sent the rains and was known as the Spitter. He had Isis as his daughter and the tragic end of her husband Osiris at the hands of his brother Set made her a wanderer, and her tears gave rise to the Nile floods. The destruction caused by it was attributed to Ra who wanted to destroy his enemies among mankind. Imagination was running riot and moral principles were not so crystallised as to weigh much with the gods and goddesses. This is seen much more clearly in the myths of ancient Greece. Uranus was ousted by his son Cronos and as Cronos was in the habit of eating up his own children, his sister and wife Rhea saved Jupiter, who, at last succeeded in dethroning his father and came to be at the head of the divine hierarchy to carry on love affairs with goddesses and mortal women as well. Apollo, the Sun God, became the chief centre of worship. He was the most beautiful of the gods and became the male counterpart of Venus. His exploits in killing Python and his connection with the Delphic Oracle made him the god of prophecy. His mad infatuation for Daphne caused her to save herself from his unwelcome embrace only by turning herself into a laurel tree. The god was disappointed but was generous enough to give it the gift of ever-green leaves so that the laurel wreath came to be the most valued reward at the Olympic Games and has become a by-word of praise as in winning the laurels. The story of the birth of Venus has its own beauty. In the

struggle between Uranus and his son Cronos the genitals of Uranus were cut and thrown into sea, and after drifting a white foam was formed out of the immortal flesh and it took the form of a beautiful maiden and at Cyprus she stood out as Venus: the unmatched ideal of a beautiful woman as in Botticelli's Birth of Venus. Venus of Milo is still considered to be the ideal of feminine beauty.

Nor must we omit to refer to the greatness of Apollo as the God of the Muses: Clio (history), Euterpe (lyric poetry), Thalia (comedy), Melpomene (tragedy), Terpsichore (dance and song), Erato (love song), Polymnia (sublime hymn), Urania (astronomy), and Calliope (epic poetry). They have passed into all literature. Or take the story of Orpheus and Eurydice: Orpheus was the son of the Muse Calliope and was the master that could draw the wildest animals to come to him with the meekness of doves. He won the love of beautiful Eurydice, but lost her on the very night of their wedding as a venomous serpent stung her to death. Orpheus followed her to Hades and his music lulled the terrifying Cerberus and softened even the heart of Pluto, the god of the underworld. She was given back to him on one condition that he should not look back at her till he had reached the upper world. But just as he was approaching the upper world, his curiousity to see her got the better of him and he lost Eurydice, and he fell ultimately a victim to the fury of the votaries of Bacchus. How such a pure and touching story came to be associated with the infamous Dionysian orgies, known as Orphic Mysteries, suggesting Orpheus as the founder of this cult, passes one's understanding, unless it is taken as implying a process of purification which ultimately led to the rebirth of man as God, for "the Orphic carried to the grave on his golden scroll the boast: 'I am the child of Earth and of the starry Heaven', and then later 'I too am become God'."[1]

As religion all this was rubbish, and so long as it was looked upon as religion, there was ample justification for the

[1] *Five Stages of Greek Religion* by Gilbert Murray, p. 148.

revolt of Socrates against the traditional gods and goddesses of ancient Greece. He had to pay for it with his life, and the pagan worship lingered for a few centuries more before it was elbowed out by the advancing tide of Christianity. But in Greek poetry and Greek art we find the very foundations of the native culture of Europe. The Renaissance is unintelligible without them, and so too all subsequent European poetry and art. Who would grudge to give to the Greeks all possible praise for their classic imagination and that vivid sense of beauty which created the Parthenon and the ideals of masculine and feminine beauty before which we stand bewitched and humbly learn how divine the beautiful can be? Thus is the religion of the Greeks redeemed by its exaltation of the beautiful. If it did not make real gods and goddesses of men and women, it at least made men and women look divine.

In Teutonic mythology too we have a good deal of fine romance and poetry but little that could stand examination as religion. Thor and Odin as gods of a virile and adventurous race had their part to play in the evolution of Teutonic races, but they belong to a dead past and even the satellites of Hitler did not succeed in reviving the worship of Odin and Thor as German gods against the Christ of Jewish extraction. The thunder of Thor enlivens only the pages of books and the story of its prowess but beguiles a wintry evening, as children gather round the hearth. A god that had to don a woman's dress to recover his hammer so as to be in a position to safeguard the gods against the Frost-giants is a *reductio ad absurdum* of religion. Many things could be explained away as allegories embodying esoteric truths, but even allegorising has its limits.

Olympus and Valhalla have become mere memories enshrined only in literature, whereas their Indian counterparts in Kailas and Vaikuntha as the abodes of Shiva and Vishnu respectively, the two chief gods of millions of Hindus, live even to-day. When speaking of what has come to be known as Hinduism, I am fully conscious of the caution uttered from this platform by Mr. Haridas Bhattacharya when he said : "Extreme caution is needed in dealing with a faith like Hinduism which

a writer does not live or see from within."[1] But perhaps it is equally true that the spectator in the field sees more of the game than the players themselves. If not a Hindu by religion, I am at least an Indian, belonging to a community that came to India according to tradition some three centuries before the Norman conquest of England, and very likely much earlier in the days of Darius the Great, and at the time when Taxila was a flourishing city, for the ruins of a fire-temple are seen there even to-day, and Zoroastrianism in India apart from its affinities with the Vedic religion has been profoundly affected by the beliefs and practices of the teeming millions of Hindus round about it. I shall try to bring as dispassionate an attitude as possible to bear on my study of Hinduism. If a slight autobiographical digression may be permitted to me, I do not mind admitting there was a time in my school and college days when I used to think that if ever I changed my religion it would be for Hinduism. I dare not truthfully make that statement to-day, partly because I have come to look upon religions as so many labels and so I have ceased to believe in conversions, and partly because I have become acutely conscious of the limitations of what has come to be known as Hinduism. Any way I have approached the study of the religion of the Hindus with a strong bias in favour of it rather than against it. But what is admirable in Vedanta is not necessarily to be found in the Hinduism of the masses.

On the very threshold of this subject we are confronted with the question : what is Hinduism? That it should ever have come to stand for a religion is a great affront to pure etymology, for the word *Hindu* originally had no more religious associations than the word *European* or *American*. It had a purely territorial significance as referring to people living on the Sindhu, and because of the inability or unwillingness on the part of my Iranian ancestors to pronounce the word *Sindhu* correctly, it became *Hindu*. Through Iran the word was taken up by the

[1] *The Foundations of Living Faiths*, p. 283.

Muslims and then by the Christians. For so strong a faith as Islam, which was made to look upon all non-Islamic peoples as Kaffirs, it was a simple matter to dub all the peoples of India as Hindus even in the religious sense. The term has come to stay, but not without creating difficulties. Such faiths as Jainism and Buddhism, which were really not merely reform movements, but revolutionary movements against the ancient authority of the Vedas have had their followers classified as Hindus. Even the Parsees have narrowly missed this classification, perhaps because of their numerical insignificance and even historical obscurity till the 18th century. For the orthodox caste-ridden Hindus, the aborigines and the Pariahs were really outside the Hindu fold, and Dr. Ambedkar was not wrong from the etymological standpoint when he pleaded for distinguishing his people from the orthodox Hindus, and if his claim was pooh-poohed it was more because of the political exigencies of the twentieth century India than from a purely religious motive. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that Hinduism is not homogeneous in its contents and so it is impossible to define it. It contains animism and fetichism with their magical practices at one end and such a high philosophy as Vedanta at the other end. In between comes Brahminism with its recognition of the Vedas and emphasis on caste, not merely as a social organisation, but also as a principle of religion.

The only possible way of studying the so-called Hinduism is to recognise the various levels of religious thought which go to its make-up. I shall not speak of Hinduism as a religion. I would deal with it under four headings :

1. The primitive religion of the aborigines and the untouchables, who were never absorbed within the Aryan fold and on the whole have been outside the main current of religion in India. The serpent worship has come as an inheritance from the old Dravidians and so also the worship of village gods, particularly Marimma. This comes within the scope of the previous lecture and has been alluded to as occasion arose.
2. The Vedic religion with its emphasis on caste and on the Brahmin as god on earth is Brahminism.

3. The cults of Vishnu and Shiva especially as developed in the *Puranas* fall within the scope of this lecture, for I look upon them as an expression of the joy of life and as a pursuit of beauty.
4. Vedanta as the philosophic religion of India has attained a very high level, but is confined to a very few people.

When we find Hinduism praised to the skies by some western scholars and condemned in no measured terms by other western scholars and even by the enlightened Hindus themselves, as when Vivekanand described it as the religion of the kitchen or Gandhiji condemned the Hindu temples as brothels, it is clear that there is some great confusion of thought, which could only be avoided by eschewing the term Hinduism as a religious category. The praise has always been showered on Vedanta. Abusive criticism has been levelled at all the three other forms of the religion of the Hindus.

It is an intriguing question as to how so cultured a people as the Hindus have come to possess so heterogenous an inheritance of religion. It could be appreciated only in the light of the psychology of the Hindus. In the West ever since the days of Socrates and even earlier, there has always been a certain reformist fervour which has challenged the ideas of the day. Socrates paid for it by his glorious death and even the so-called Dark Ages in Europe were illuminated by the defiance of men of science and religion alike. Science had its countless martyrs as religion itself. The Renaissance and the Reformation were revolutionary movements, and if the Renaissance itself was peaceful, its inevitable repercussions in the religious field were dyed with blood. If the old mutual active hostility of the Christian Churches has settled down to an attitude of agreeing to differ, the tussle between the Christians and the Jews has come right down till to-day, though not unmixed with economic and racial prejudices. The individualism of the European temperament has a flair for accentuating even slight differences of opinion and each philosopher tends to start afresh, clearing the ground for himself by a criticism of his predecessors. Hence European Philosophy has certainly a continuity of thought, but

no book or thinker has tended to be looked upon as the last word of wisdom with the exception of Aristotle in the middle ages.

In India on the other hand the philosophic tradition has been different. The Indian thinker has not been keen on showing how clever or how original he is. Knowing how deep-seated is the reverence for the Vedas among the Hindus, each thinker seeks to make that his starting point. The Upanishads themselves display a daring search after truth, marked by an unsurpassed earnestness of outlook and penetrating thought far removed from the mythological and poetical character of the Vedas, and yet the Hindu tradition insists that the Upanishads are a part of the Vedas, and when the great *acharyas* claim the authority of the Vedas for their systems they have in mind more the Upanishads than the Vedas as such. This attitude conceals the vast strides that Upanishadic seers took in thought, transcending the poetic effusions of the Vedic seers. This attitude becomes all the more marked when we come to the great Vedanta systems of philosophy associated with the towering names of Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhava. None of them has cared to write what any of them would care to claim as his own philosophy. Their writings take the form of commentaries on the Upanishads and the Gita, but each of them gives his own interpretations, totally different from one another, and each such interpretation is sought to be established on the authority of the texts. And each of these great *acharyas* has left behind a doctrine which has come to be hereditarily accepted as a part of religion. This tendency has exposed Hindu philosophy to the charge of being rather theology than pure philosophy as understood in the West, as, *e.g.*, is to be found in Professor Brehier's Preface to Monsieur Masson Oursel's book, *History of Philosophy in the Orient*. The passage, though long, is worth quoting :

"The writings brought forward by the orientalists do not belong to a class comparable to the writings with which the historian of the Western philosophy has to deal. They resemble much more those with which the anthropologists and the historians of religion are concerned, such as the details of the sacred rites, ceremonials and myths. That is what we find

when we examine the thoughts of the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia. Monsieur Masson calls them 'implicit Philosophy'. But it is very much the same with more evolved beliefs in India and China. In the beginnings of Hindu thought the sacrificial rite and later the Buddhistic methods of achieving salvation found their echo in Brahminism and Yoga practices. Our Western methods of research have sought to find in them a value apart from their practical one, *e.g.*, a value of truth. This worship of reason has created a philosophical literature to which there is no corresponding one, or at least a corresponding one did not arise till very late. in the East. Of course religions have continued to exist in the West together with supernatural and mystical practices, but despite all their contacts with philosophy they have remained separate and apart. The problem of the relations between faith and reason forced itself upon Europe from the time Christianity became its dominating religion. Monsieur Masson Oursel says that this problem stimulated medieval thought but is an unknown problem in the Orient. It was born amongst us because Christianity found that philosophy remained autonomous and independent because our philosophy was born in the Greek epoch, and has followed its own separate existence."

This was penned in 1939 and I find in it a confirmation of the conclusions to which I myself had arrived in 1926 in my paper on *Philosophy and Religion*.[1] This view had been earlier controverted by Mr. V. Subrahmanya Iyer of Mysore in his paper "*Was Sankara a Theologian?*" His answer of course was an emphatic negative. But his argument boils down to this that Sankara developed his conclusions on independent logical grounds and if he quoted the old texts in support of his conclusions it was only to give them an added weight. This view has not found favour with many Hindu scholars, for the part that Sankara played in the establishment of the four great *mutts* at Sringeri in the South, Puri in the East, Joshi in the North and Dwarka in the West, which have all retained their distinctively religious character, and the beautiful *stotras* which Sankara composed as religious hymns, go to show the religious bias which Sankara had, and it would be equally true to say that he accepted the authority of the Upanishads and the Gita and

1 *Proceedings of the Indian Philosophical Congress*, 1926 and *The Monist*, Vol. xxxvii, No. 4, October, 1927.

sought to give them added weight by showing how they could be supported on logical grounds. It will remain a difference of opinion among the Hindus themselves, but it effectually establishes the point that the Hindu mind is not keen on letting itself go on unchartered seas and that it would rather move within the spacious limits set by the great *rishis* of old. It is an exemplification of the native Hindu conservatism, and this conservatism has gone to such lengths that all old customs and practices have continued to exist, till India has become a veritable museum of religious antiques, and one has to dig hard to separate the pure nuggets of religion from the oddities that can only be described in modern psychological language as infantile regressions. This habit of mind accounts for the existence cheek by jowl of all the four levels of religious thought I mentioned a little earlier.

The continued existence of old outworn customs and practices has been usually cited as a proof of Hindu tolerance. It may with equal justice be looked upon as due to the unwillingness of the Brahmins to share their higher religious thought with all others and to the social aloofness that the caste system has so rigorously built up. The net result is that the low have remained low and the high have stagnated. The European reformer has been keen on discarding the old. The Indian reformer has been keen on retaining the old. India has produced some eminent exceptions to the rule : Buddha, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi. But it is interesting to note the modern tendency in the study of Buddha to show that he really continued the Upanishadic tradition ; the conscious attempt on the part of Raja Ram Mohan Roy to graft the new Testament on the Upanishads ; and the tendency in Gandhiji himself to show that whatever he thinks is Hinduism is the correct interpretation of the Upanishadic and Gitaic teaching. In this respect Gandhiji is true to the psychology of the Hindus : exhibiting an unwillingness to claim any novelty in his thought and to bring in the new only by camouflaging the old.

I have had to undertake this digression in order to show how apart from the aborigines and the Harijans even the most

highly educated Hindus have managed to combine in themselves, without really harmonising, conflicting tendencies that are found in Vedanta as such, Brahminism, and the popular religious cults of Shiva and Krishna. In this lecture I should like to show how these religious cults have survived because of their appeal to the sense of beauty.

Chronologically the Vedic religion certainly came into being long before Vedanta, and I shall deal with them in the two succeeding lectures. The popular religions of Vishnu and Shiva cannot be dated with any exactitude. By identifying Shiva with Rudra it is possible to take back the Shiva cult to the Vedic times, while the softer cult of Vishnu can be more easily carried back to the Vedas. But it is clear that the Vedic Gods like Indra, Agni, Surya represented forces of nature, while Varuna at a higher level of thought stood forth as the Lord of *Rita, i.e.*, of cosmic harmony and righteousness, and the conception of *Visvadevah* brought out the unity of Godhead. There was no idol worship in the Vedic Age, and that is a fact very rigorously insisted upon by the Arya Samajists of to-day under the inspiration of Dayanand Saraswati with his call, *Back to the Vedas*. Vaishnavism and Shaivism of later Hinduism stand out by themselves with a very thin connection with the pure Vedic religion.

The old idea that Aryans came to India as harbingers of a new civilisation and came into contact with rude uncivilised peoples whom the conquerors had to Aryanise has now certainly to be given up. Just as the Aryan conquerors of Greece came into contact with the rich Cretan civilisation and absorbed it, and as the Aryan conquerors from Iran absorbed the rich Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations, so too we have now to admit with our richer knowledge of ancient Indian History that the pre-Aryan Indians were a highly civilised people, and even if the culture of Mohenjo-Daro was Sumerian, the Dravidian culture of South India had attained a high level, though from the standpoint of religion they were on a lower level with their serpent-worship and *lingam-worship*, and the worship of the female element. Hindu chronology is always uncertain and

Rishi Agastya's Aryanising mission to South India ended with the Dravidianisation of Aryanism as much as with the Aryanisation of Dravidianism. Mr. O. C. Gangoly remarks in this connection in his *South Indian Bronzes*[1]:—

"Agastya led the first Brahmin immigration (to South India). His object was to transport bodily the Aryan systems of thought and culture in all its branches and to envelop and overlap the Dravidian civilization, which had already attained a high degree of development quite independent of Aryan influence. The existing popular lore and the religious ideas of the Dravidian races were adapted and woven into a new body of puranic literature with special local association; and lastly the primitive Dravidian gods which had then become subjects of worship were adopted and admitted into the new pantheon clothed in an Aryan dress and changed under a new name. In this way many of the female deities formerly associated with the earlier forms of worship were accepted as consorts or sakti of the various Aryan gods. So we find that in many of the southern temples the original deities are associated with a consort who has no counterpart in north Aryan pantheon. The Kartikeya or Subrahmanya has two wives, one of whom is the original Deb Jani and the other is the Baliramayee, who is never mentioned in the northern Puranas. So the names of Minakshi and Siva-Kama Sundaraj as consorts of Siva are never heard of in North India. Those that could not be accepted as in any way related to or associated with North Aryan deities were tolerated as *grama devtas* or village deities, and have been all along venerated and worshipped under their old Tamil names side by side with the orthodox image-worship prevailing in the main temples."

Shiva, the god of the Himalayas, and the *lingam* worship have come to be identified, and this goes back to the epic age. Whatever may have been the animosities between the Saivites and the Vaishnavites it is interesting to note that "The Island of Rameshwaram is said to contain the original lingam which Rama himself founded.....According to the legends Hanuman was deputed by Rama to go and fetch the lingams from Benares, one to be founded by Rama and another by Sita."[2] Mr. Gangoli's belief finds a substantiation in the extreme anthropomorphism of worship in the great South Indian temples: the ritual of the

[1] p. 10.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

marriage of Siva and Parvati or of Vishnu and Luxmi and the daily ritual which accompanies the removal of the image of the god to the room of his consort at night. This may have no religious appeal to the Vedantic Hindu and still less to people of other faiths, but to the vast masses of Hindu millions it does have a religious appeal associated as it is with rich music and the famous dances which have grown round temple worship. The thorough-going logical Hindu mind has even created a class of *deva-dasis* who now for centuries have formed a part and parcel of temple establishments. That these *deva-dasis* have been led into an evil life through the machinations of unscrupulous priests and other rich worshippers has spurred the reformers to abolish the institution even by legislation in recent years. But that they have maintained the beauty of art through centuries cannot be denied. Nowhere in the world has art been such a loyal handmaid to religion as in India, and even the crudities of religion in India from the standpoint of the highest ethical monotheisms have been redeemed by art, and they have survived because of their artistic setting.

As soon as the Dravidian influences began to assert themselves in India, idolatry took a firm root, and the great creative epoch of Indian sculpture began with it. It is not possible to say that all idols in Hindu temples come within the category of the beautiful, but many do, and particularly so in South India where the temples, big and small, have had a long history, free from the trammels of iconoclastic foreigners. The image of Kanya Kumari in the extreme south, the dancing Nataraj in Chidambaram and the reclining image of Ranganathswamy in Seringapatam are some of the most beautiful idols that still have their worshippers in millions. But the beauty of images still in worship is hidden by the wealth of dress and ornaments that devout Hindus wish to see their gods and goddesses adorned in. The beauty of these images comes out in full force where they have ceased to be worshipped through the exigencies of time. The image of Venugopal, for example, in the temple of Somnathpur in Mysore, can rank with the most exquisite products of ancient Greece in its perfect proportions or the

expressiveness of its features. Proportionate to the beauty of the idols have risen the temples on the embellishments of which generations have laboured. The extremely meticulous carvings that we find on the Meenakshi Temple at Madura or the temple at Rameshwaram with its gorgeous corridor, the finest in the world, or in that monument of human industry and art, the Kailas temple in Ellora, or those poems in marble which are to be found in the Jain temples at Mt. Abu, to mention but a few examples of Hindu religious architecture, all go to redeem idolatry as an expression of religious fervour. The full-bosomed women sculptured in Hindu art give expression to the twofold mission of woman in life: her motherhood for the race and her beauty as an inspiration to the artist.

If religious architecture invites the devotee because of its outside, the elaborate ritual within has gone to tighten the hold of religion on millions. The vestal virgins of ancient Rome have become a mere memory. Their counterparts in India are still to be found in the *deva-dasis*, women dedicated to the temples from their infancy. That they come within the category of fallen women cannot be denied, but that they have kept alive the art of music and dancing is equally true. Indian music has attained heights of melody and sweetness and apart from its secularisation in an advancing civilisation it has had its inspiration in religion. The tender-hearted and lively Krishna and the love of Radha have been the endless topics of devotional songs, and even the ascetic Siva in his beneficent aspect as well as in his wrathful moods has inspired poets and musicians. Behind the mythical tale of how Siva taught his own vigorous *tandava* dance to his disciple Tandu and the tender *lasya* dance to his consort Parvati, and how she in her turn taught it to Usha,[1] lies the realisation of the power and the fascination of music and the all-engrossing rhythm of the dance. Reading about these things in cold print gives one no idea of its power to sway the minds and hearts of men and women and children alike. All the living traditions of the art of dance in India go

[1] G. Venkatachalam: *Dance in India*, p. 120.

back to religion for its inspiration. The *Bhārata Nātyam* of Tanjore is a beautiful harmonisation of *nritya* or pure dancing and of *abhinaya* or the art of gesture which is peculiarly Indian. It involves a play of eyes, face, limbs and hands and feet which literally takes one to the gods. It was the monopoly of the *deva-dasis* particularly dedicated to Śaivite temples, coached up by generations of hereditary *nattuvans* or the teachers of these dances, and their vigour and verve have to be seen to be appreciated. *Kathakali* or the dance drama of Kerala is an integral part of religion in Malabar. Speaking of it Mr. G. Venkatachalam, the well-known art critic, says: "I have no doubt in my mind whatsoever that its original impulse was in magic, and even to-day its elemental nature can be felt by any sensitive person. It must have played a tremendous part in the religious rites of the ancient peoples, who knew how to invoke invisible powers, both of evil and good, by symbols of sounds and gestures."[1] It is the narration of a story in the form of a dance drama. There is continuous music in it as in the western opera, but it is sung and played by an orchestra, and not by the actors, who only dance and act and succeed in unravelling the plot by the appropriateness of their actions. The make-up and the costume of the dancers is extremely elaborate and perhaps even bizarre, but to the simple villagers in Malabar it is a nine-hours' strenuous amusement from 9 in the evening to 6 o'clock next morning. It covers long episodes from the Ramayana or the Mahabharata and keeps up the memory of religious folk-lore. As against the *Bhārata Nātyam*, *Kathakali* is purely a masculine art, even women's rôles being played by men. More like the western opera is the *Mohini Attam* of Malabar in which the dancer sings as well.

If South India has had the distinction of preserving the traditional dances, North India may also claim to have played her part through the Manipuri and Kathak dances. In its origin the former was associated with the spring festival, but in course of time it became a part of the Radha-Krishna cult and has

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 100.

become famous as *Rasa-Leela*. It has 'retained' its joy without lapsing into the excesses of the Holi festival. Similarly the Kathak dance finds its inspiration in the Radha-Krishna themes.

All these dances to-day have come to the phase of secularisation through the genius of Uday Sankar and Gopinath and Ram Gopal as well of eminent women dancers like Balasaraswati, Rukmini Devi, Srimati Shanta, Menaka and Sadhana Bose. While admiring their art we should not forget the old veteran Jatti Tayamma, who taught it to Uday Sankar and Menaka and Ragini Devi. This secularisation has come in good time, for the institution of *deva-dasis* is inevitably doomed. Whatever may have been the justification for a class of evil-reputed hereditary nautch-girls in the past, the modern age cannot willingly confirm this degradation of hundreds of women without stultifying its claim to be democratic. But out of evil cometh good, and generations of such women have kept alive the beauty that is Indian music and the splendour that is Indian dance. Not the least of their services is that the departing breath of their art has been passed on to a new generation of men and women to whom perhaps the religious tradition means nothing, but the beauty of art means everything: "Eyes must go where the hands are; mind where the eyes are; *bhava* will rise where the mind is; and *rasa* will follow the *bhava*." [1]

So let us hope religious prostitution will pass out of India as it passed out centuries ago in Babylon and Rome. Whether it could find any justification as being a bulwark to safeguard the sanctity of respectable women is a matter of opinion which could be dealt with by sociologists.

In this lecture I have been constrained to take up this topic as I was faced with the question: Hindus claim to be highly spiritual, why then have they tolerated and even exalted practices, which in plain language can only be called naked eroticism? Side by side with so exalted a philosophy as that of Vedanta, how can the stories of Sri Krishna and the Gopis survive as religious lore, or how can the cult of

[1] Quoted on p. 123 in *Dance in India* by G. Venkatachalam.

the *lingam* continue? How can we explain the carvings of the nude and the lascivious in temples even at Puri and on the temple cars, when the same would invite the attention of the police, if sold as picture post-cards? I cannot give an ethical justification for all this, any more than a learned Vedantin or Gandhiji can. But one can understand their survival in the light of beauty. If I am asked why in mighty Babylon and in glorious Greece beauty did not continue to bolster up their old religions, my answer would be that the psychology of Indians has been different from that of those peoples. The ethical religion of Zarāthustra swamped the old idolatry out of existence in Western Asia, and the reforming zeal of Socrates and the Stoics undermined the very foundations of the old Greek and Roman polytheism and paved the way for the advancing tide of Christianity, which was prepared to keep up old pagan festivals shorn of their old pagan associations but suffused with the new Christian ideology. In India, Buddha and Gandhiji apart, there has never been such a great reformer as to make a frontal attack on old practices of doubtful religious value. On the other hand there has always been a tendency on the part of the *jnani* and the highest *bhakta* to extend full toleration to all classes to worship as they liked, and moral criteria were not allowed to come in the way of religious practices. This is seen clearly in the observance of Hindu festivals even to-day.

Take for example the observance of Divali, which we Parsees observe with as much gusto as the Hindus themselves. As devoted to the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, it is intelligible. But Divali is said to be observed for other reasons also. It is regarded as sacred because Rama won his victory over Ravana. Another reason is that Krishna, unwilling to overcome wicked Naraksura because of his *tapas*, ultimately overpowered him, but granted him *moksha* on his death, and Divali is in honour of Naraksura's *moksha*! But when it is associated with the memory of Bali it takes an odd turn. There is no denying that Raja Bali was a good king and beloved of his subjects, and yet the gods did not take kindly to his popularity and planned his destruction, and

nominated Vishnu to undo him. In his dwarf *avatar* Vishnu asked for just three paces of land from Bali and when this request was granted Vishnu covered the three worlds with just two steps and Bali was accused of not keeping his word, for there was no land for the third pace. Bali was sent to the nether regions and was reduced to begging a solitary favour from Vishnu that he should be permitted to visit his kingdom once a year. The prayer was granted and when Bali comes once a year it is a day of rejoicing and he is welcomed with sweets and lights. Such a day is the Onam day in Malabar and in some other parts of India Diwali is the day to welcome the beloved Bali. What a sorry plight for a good king to be reduced to! There is certainly no ethics about it, though there might be some intelligible history behind it that as an Asura king Bali was conquered by the Aryans just as Ravana was. But who can deny the aesthetic value of Onam or of Diwali? Life has drabness enough and no opportunity should be missed to make it happy and joyous. Diwali is a universal holiday and has a perfect aesthetic justification; similarly the odd custom of sanctified gambling on the new year's day after Diwali. Here too the justification is sought in the blessing of Parvati that all who gambled on the first day of Kartik would meet with success in the coming year. No less an individual than Dharamaraja was fond of gambling, and so if has become a religious rite sacred to Maharajas right down to the sweeper. There is no morality about it, there can be no real religion about it, but as a means of enjoyment it has always had its votaries, though gambling is something which always means success to a few and loss to many more. The worship of Ganesh as the god that brings luck and overcomes obstructions has been woven round an interesting story of Shiva and Parvati and has its aesthetic and psychological value. It is doubtful if any educated Hindu takes these stories to-day at their face value. So far as my experience goes all my Hindu friends have a fine sense of humour and laugh at these stories, but they all partake joyously in these festivals which mean so much to their womenfolk, the most sincere upholders of religious beliefs: good, bad

and indifferent alike. These mythologies were the incipient philosophies of the primitive mind and many men still remain children at heart and these festivals certainly constitute a happy break in the dull monotony of life and in a continuous struggle against poverty. To many who cannot think of the difficult problems of morality and religion, beauty can appeal with all the greater force and it constitutes the mainstay of their religion.

This does not apply merely to Hindus. It applies to Islam as well. Of all the great religions it is the simplest, even puritanically so. It has a moral grandeur with no intrinsic artistic appeal. But its followers have imported into it all the colour and joy that they possibly could. Even so tragic an event as the death of Hussein at Kerbala has been transformed at least in India into the pageantry of Mohurrum processions and beautiful *tazias*. As against the austere monotheism of the Prophet we have the worship of the tombs of *pirs*, which has become a peculiar feature of Islam in India and added to the architectural glories of India. The beauty of mosques is one of the finest features of Islamic culture, whether it be the Jumma Masjid of Delhi, or the exquisite Moti Masjid of Agra or the stately San Sophia of Constantinople, or the many coloured tiled domes and minarets of mosques in Baghdad. Perhaps the most aesthetic experience in Islam is the voice of the Muezzin who in the limpid musical Arabic of the Quran calls out: "*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, ashadu anna la ilaha illallah va Muhammadun rasulu'llah*", and he calls the faithful to prayer: "*Hajju'ala's-salat*", and then on the Id days or even on every Friday to see hundreds of thousands lined in rows in their rhythmic bendings and bowings is a sight worth seeing. An officer in the Turkish army is said to have observed that in Muslim prayers he saw an excellent device for physical exercise conducive to health and graceful movements.

More than Islam Christianity has cultivated the beautiful to perfection. Who could have imagined in the days of Tiberius that the simple Son of Man who roamed round Gallili as the champion of the poor and the weak and the diseased, and sought

death on the Cross, would be deified and have [illegible] costly Crusades fought for the possession of his empty tomb and have most magnificent buildings reared for his worship? It would be futile to pretend that Christ succeeded in imparting his wonderfully high moral principles to his followers or that the religious impulse that he initiated has really permeated the masses of his nominal followers in Europe and America. To most of them, however, the aesthetic appeal of the Christian Churches has meant a good deal. Dean Stanley had the moral courage to give expression to the statement quoted in the beginning of this lecture. Most Christians should echo that statement, if only they could sincerely analyse their religious feelings. We in India who have had our education through English have become perfectly familiar with the ideology of the Protestant Churches and seem to think that to be the best representative of Christianity. But the fact remains that even after nearly five centuries of Luther, Protestant denominations are all hopelessly divided into numerous sects, and as yet all of them put together are behind the Roman Catholic Church in numbers and the Greek Church in the days of the Czars of Russia. The reason is not far to seek. Protestantism has sought to appeal within limits to the head, while the Catholic and the Greek Churches have appealed to the eye and the ear of the masses. Catholicism has produced the most learned and the most persevering set of priests the world has ever seen. They have thoroughly mastered human psychology and made full use of it to keep up the morale of their followers. Art has been their mightiest instrument. The magnificent Gothic cathedrals, combining the massiveness and ornateness of Hindu temples with the delicacy and grace of the Muslim mosques, still dominate cities in Europe, even though the original religious impulse may have lost its intensity in this critical age of Science.

The tragic end of Christ has been the inspiration of countless artists, but even more the figure of Mary has played a wonderful part in the development of Christian religion. In the sober account of the Gospels Mary hardly plays any important part in the life of Christ. To the man who called upon his

followers to leave their fathers and mothers and follow him, his own mother could not have been the centre of his life. This is made all the more clear in the episode narrated by St. Matthew (12.47-50) :

> "Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.
> But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my Mother? and who are my brethren?
> And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!
> For whosoever will do the will of my father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

But the Catholic Church with its full understanding of the import of mother worship in religious history made Mary the Mother, the centre of a beautiful cult and Maryolatry was the result. There is nothing so appealing to a man as the love of the mother.

> "A mother is a mother still
> The holiest thing alive."

wrote Coleridge. And Mary, the Mother of God, came to be the embodiment of that beauty which the pagan goddesses might envy. In all the Christian Churches—apart from the purely Puritan churches—the face of Mary looks down with exquisite love on the infant son at her breast or in her arms or lap, or looks up to the bleeding figure of her grown-up son. The greatest masters in medieval and Renaissance Europe vied with one another in creating Madonnas and it would be difficult to say which country or which artist could be awarded the palm. As we study the paintings of Mary in the churches or the museums or the picture galleries of Europe, we are struck by the national features with which Italian masters like Bellini and Raphael, Tizian, Lotto and Andrea Del Sarto have painted the Mother of God.. The melting smile of Corregio's Madonna has ever been an inspiration to me. Giovanfrancesco Barbieri's moving picture of Mary contemplating with infinite sadness a crown of thorns in her hand leaves unforgettable memories even

to a non-Christian like myself. We cross over to Spain and see Murillo's Madonna pressing the infant Christ to her bosom and her dark eyes lost in an ethereal gaze heavenwards. We turn to Holland and see the robust and rosy full-breasted Madonnas of Rubens and Rembrandt and Van Dyck's Madonna with her eyes raised to heaven. The religious motif may not be as strong in Europe as elsewhere, but nowhere has it been given a more beautiful and moving setting. The very human story of Christ's life is full of incidents which invite the artist's brush and the sculptor's chisel and the pathos of the Cross is hard to beat in the annals of humanity. The *Mater Dolorosa* has come to be the embodiment of divine motherhood.

And then there is the Church music: the sonorous Mass, the limpid hymns and the swell of the organ filling the aisles with its music and filling the hearts and minds of the worshippers with a sweet awe that becomes an undying memory.

This is the Christianity of the masses to be found not in the love for the teachings of Christ, but in the pathos of his end, the beauty of his mother, divine in more senses than one, and her grace and her intercession with her son on behalf of the sinners.

Christianity in India has had on the whole a very limited appeal. With the ridiculous habit of giving European names to Indian converts and with the Churches built in European style and the pictures of Christ and Mary and the saints presented on European models, Christianity has been looked upon by Indians generally as an alien religion. But the rising national consciousness in India has not left the Indian Christians untouched and that has led to a new interesting movement among the Indian Catholic artists encouraged by the psychologically astute Roman Catholic priests, of painting Christian scenes in an Indian setting with Indian features and Indian dress. The movement started with the works of Mr. A. D. Thomas and Mr. Angelo da Fonseca and has been carried further by the genius of Miss Angela Trinidade. To say that their works stand any comparison with the European masters of Christian art would not be justifiable. To say that their art has given a new

life to the forces of Christianity in India would be perfectly true. This new Indian Christian art has brought Christ and Mary nearer to the hearts of their worshippers and has brought Christianity within the pale of Indian religions.

This peculiar nationalising of a religion can be seen to much greater advantage in the case of Buddhism in China. There is more than humour in the cock-suredness of the American drug-store proprietor who refused to believe that Buddha was born in India for the simple reason that all the pictures and statues of Buddha he had seen were distinctively Chinese. Even in India in the Grecianised regions of Taxilla the images of Buddha bear a markedly Grecian stamp, and with the migration of Buddhism to China and Japan the Buddhist artists could not but portray Buddha as a Mongolian with narrow slits of eyes and prominent cheek bones. That is the type of Buddha that the Chinese and the Japanese have taken to their hearts. In his Mongolian features they see a reflection of their own faces transfigured in the halo and the aroma of their own spiritual yearnings. Buddhism in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia is inconceivable without the artistic setting that it has received in these lands. The high ethics of Buddha finds its way to the hearts of its devotees only through their eyes, and Buddhist art and Buddhist religion have merged into an indissoluble unity.

Need we wonder that Unitarianism is far more logical, but much less appealing than the Christianity of the Churches? The masses require a religion with a myth which has an artistic value and it is in the aroma of beauty that religions flourish.

In Protestant Europe art has been secularised but to that extent it has lost something precious. The new cult of art for art's sake can only attain the prestige of a passing fashion, it cannot touch men's souls as the Greek art did for the Greeks, or as the Hindu art touches the souls of Hindus and the Christian art of the old masters still continues to touch the hearts of Christians.

Philosophers recognise beauty as one of the ultimate values. It is a value which sways the savage in his uncouth attempts to the beautiful. The civilised man looks to art as the

vehicle for his search into the infinite realms of beauty. Behind the power of nature we see the play of gods and goddesses, behind the beauty of woman we see the divinity of motherhood, behind the sufferings of men we see the emergence of new ideals. The search for beauty is eternal and there can be no religion which has no appeal in beauty, and that is why the religious man in his quest looks to it to sustain his higher moral and spiritual endeavours. Robert Bridges spoke truth when with poetic instinct he wrote: "The world is unto God a work of art," and so too it has been to man.

With his usual insight Hegel wrote: "In Art we have to do with no mere toy of pleasure or of utility, but with the liberation of the mind from the content and forms of the finite, with the presence and union of the Absolute within the sensuous and the phenomenal, and with an unfolding of truth which is not exhausted in the evolution of nature." In man's quest for the divine he has found a noble ally in art. Through its aid he has succeeded in expressing the inexpressible: the mystery of creation, the wild urge of sex, the sweetness of motherhood, the significance of suffering, the oneness of life in plants and trees, in animals and men. The Hindu art in its very attempt to depict the supernatural in all its forms, the beautiful as well as the frightful, has a vast range, bizarre at times but powerful in its presentation of the Rakshasas like Ravan and Mahishasura or of Kali; but it can be limpid and gracious as well especially in the delineation of Krishna and Rama, Radha and Seeta. There is a palpable attempt to transcend the usual natural forms so as to bring out the intricate pattern of diversity in unity that all nature presents. The multi-armed and multi-faced gods and goddesses seek to go beyond the limitations of nature to bring out the divine might. The huge figures of Shiva and of Buddha that we find in rock temples again give an impression of physical might and of serene quietude. The wealth of ornamentation covering every inch of space whether of a temple or of an image is very peculiar to Hindu religious art. It gives a sense of heaviness, and a bird's eye view is not immediately so pleasing as a detailed study ultimately proves alluring. Gothic art is akin

to Hindu art in its eye for minute details. But the general tradition of European art as inherited from the Greeks is that of simplicity and naturalness, apparently so realistic and yet of transcendent beauty. Islamic art too shares the simplicity of Greek art, and has created the elegance of the dome and the minaret, the beauty of geometrical figures, of flowers and birds, of picturesque landscape gardens with the play of numerous fountains. Beauty is thus a pathway to Godhead and kindles the soul of man.

A man must have a deadened soul, if he does not see God in beauty and feel tempted to repeat in such scenes: "If there be a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here."

LECTURE IV

Religion as a Quest for the Moral Good

In the history of religion the transition from the worship of power to the worship of beauty was a momentous step. But the worship of mere beauty with its polytheistic gods and goddesses did not make men better. In fact the life of these immortals whether in the old Greek or Hindu mythology was anything but morally elevating, and if the good in man had to assert itself, it had to revolt against polytheism and to discover the one good God that could become an ideal for man to make him rise above his animal self. It is not possible to say with any dogmatism as to who was first responsible for introducing monotheism. The discovery of a truth is not the monopoly of any one people or of any one prophet. Great ideas can arise almost contemporaneously in different parts of God's earth. Such a period seems to have been about 1500 to 1000 B.C. when the Vedas steadily but surely developed the idea of Visvadevah, when Moses exalted the god of his tribe, Yahweh, as the universal God of all mankind, and Zarathustra poured out his soul to Ahura Mazda as the sole righteous creator of the universe. If it were possible to date all three of them with any exactness, it would be possible to say who was the first monotheist. In ancient Egypt too there was a strain of pure monotheism, but it did not take root, and we need not take note of it. Moses has been assigned 1300 B.C. as his date. The European scholars date the Vedas about 1500 B.C. though the Hindu tradition carries it back much earlier. Mr. Tilak's astronomical researches carry the Vedas back to 4500 B.C. Similarly Western scholars place Zarathustra (Zoroaster) at 1000 B.C., though the Zoroastrian tradition carries back the date much earlier. It is interesting to note that even in Aristotle's time some three centuries before Christ Zoroaster was looked upon as a hoary figure, almost legendary, going back 5000

years earlier. But in the discovery of truth time is a mere accident and we shall not labour to show who was the earliest monotheist, but proceed to deal with the religions which conceived of God in moral terms. "The history of mankind is the history of purification of the idea of God" said Edmond Jaloux, and monotheistic religions have always led to a purification of moral ideas, and one God has stood for an exalted morality. I shall proceed to deal in this lecture with Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Islam.

Judaism

The Old Testament is a remarkable book. It is certainly a religious book, but it is on the whole also sober history, free from mythological lore, and above all, unlike any other book it presents a record of the growth of the moral and religious conceptions of a single people. That the advent of Moses was preceded by polytheism and the worship of false gods cannot be denied. But once Moses proclaimed Yahweh as the one God, and the ten commandments as emanating from Yahweh, the monotheism of the Hebrews was firmly set on its legs, from which there has been no going back, though lapses were there, which necessitated a continuous stream of prophets to keep the Israelites on the path of righteousness. The third commandment against the worship of "any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" is of great religious importance as abolishing idolatry. But most people have found it exceedingly hard to keep away from the worship of some concrete form, and again and again the Israelites lapsed into idolatry and the Prophets had to proclaim in thundering tones the verdict of God against their sins. They are branded by God as being "stiff-necked," and even 600 years after Moses, Habakkuk, a minor prophet but very poetical, had to pen his condemnation of idolatry: "Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it"

(1.19). On the whole the Jews have kept true to their religion with a remarkable fidelity and have suffered for their religion as no other people have suffered.

The message of Moses, great as it was, was yet incomplete. The idea that the Jews were the chosen people of God, who was particularly interested in their prosperity, made them lay an undue emphasis on their temporal power, and the absence of any conception of life hereafter made them all the more tenacious of their kingdom and their Temple at Jerusalem. Politically the Jews have been always unfortunate except in the brief period of the glory of David and Solomon, and so their hankering after the building up of a new Jerusalem and the Temple therein as the embodiment on earth of their worldly ambitions has a pathetic interest, which is as living to-day as it ever was in the chequered history of the Jews. Cyrus, the alien conqueror, is looked upon as the Lord's Anointed, for he rebuilt the Temple of the Jews and gave a fresh inspiration to them.[1] Their tenacity for earthly power becomes intelligible when we find that for some centuries they had developed no idea of a life hereafter. Even in *Job* we read :

" Are not my days few ? Cease then and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,

Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death." (X. 20-21). And again in *Job* XIV. 10 we read : " But man dieth, and wasteth away : yea, man giveth up the ghost and where is he ?"

Jewish eschatology dates only from the time of their Babylonian captivity when they came into contact with Zoroastrianism and borrowed the idea of heaven and hell, and thus gained for themselves a new incentive to endure the thwacks of life. But on the whole it has been to them just a foreign accretion which has not affected the roots of their life. In spite of all their innumerable misfortunes they have not lost faith in Yahweh as their rock of ages, they have not lost their pride that Yahweh had taken them under his special protection, that He

[1] *Isaiah*, Chapter 45.

would chastise them like a stern father, but also forgive them like a fond father. They have never forgotten the burden of the song of Moses: "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God and I will prepare him an habitation: my father's God and I will exalt him" (*Exodus* XV 2). Nor have they forgotten the promise of God: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, for all the earth is mine.

And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (*Exodus* XIX 5-6).

Here we find the key to the religion of Israel as being so national in character. It has never cared to be a missionary religion. At times with the pride of conquerors it has converted people as in *Esther* VIII 17: "And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them," but it was not due to any evangelical zeal. Rather it expressed only the fear in the hearts of the conquered.

For the student of religion the main interest of the Old Testament lies in this that it gives, as no other scripture does, a picture of the growth in the moral idea of God, which has acted upon the growth of the moral ideas themselves. In the early books in the midst of a dreary recital of genealogical trees we find the conception of God as the God of Hosts, a survival of the tribal conception of God, a pride in victory and a callousness to the sufferings of the enemy. *E.g.*, in *Psalm* XVIII 37-40 we find a boastful sense of triumph over the enemy: "I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them that they were consumed.

"I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet.

"For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle: thou hast subdued under me those that rose up against me.

"Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies; that I might destroy them that hate me."

In the early books we find a crude emphasis on burnt offerings as if God hungered for them and insisted upon their being presented with meticulous care about details most minute. Sacrifices of animals galore figure right through. As the god, so the worship. But a time came in the Jewish consciousness when the Prophets saw the futility of these sacrifices and made them preach a new morality nowhere so beautifully and poetically expressed as in Hosea and in Micah. Herein we breathe a new atmosphere perfumed with the fragrance of a new breath. It is a new God that speaks in Hosea (VI 4 & 6):

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.

"For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Later in *Amos* (V. 18-24) we find Yahweh again running down burnt offerings and meat offerings and the peace offerings of fat beasts and the noise of songs and the melody of viols, bursting out in lyric beauty: "Let judgment run down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." Perhaps the high water-mark of Jewish ethics is reached in *Micah* (VI. 7-8). We have quoted these passages before, but they are worth quoting again.

"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

We find here the moral stature of God himself has grown. We have gone beyond the petulant complaints of God in the earlier books where excessive and meticulous emphasis was placed on the exact number and quality of animals to be sacrificed and grumblings against the sins of the "stiff-necked" Jews.

In *Psalm 50* God cuts the ground from all bloody sacrifices by saying through the mouth of the Psalmist: "If I were

hungry I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High." In the very first chapter of *Isaiah* (I. 14-17) God is made to say:

"Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. . . .

". . . when ye make many prayers I will not hear them: your hands are full of blood.

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;

"Learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

In the earlier books right from the Genesis we find the idea of mere social responsibility as when the sin of Adam and Eve is visited upon the heads of all their progeny generation to generation, and in *Exodus* (XX. 5) declaiming against idol worship God is made to say: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." It is a far cry from Exodus to Ezekiel where we come across the idea of individual responsibility in unmistakable terms: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." (XVIII. 20.)

In spite of the war-mongering atmosphere of the early books in the Old Testament, we later find a softer moral precept in Leviticus: "The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him; he is as thyself" and presumably this would include an enemy too. In the Proverbs the Jews were told "if thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink."

The Talmud seems to shed all Jewish exclusiveness when it says: "The pious among the heathen have their share in

the world to come " and calls upon them to " Love God in the men whom He has created."

In spite of its high ethics Judaism has never become a world religion nor is it ever likely to be, for it has not lost hold of its original national or racial character. The vision of the New Jerusalem has never left the Jews even in the darkest days of their history. The prophecy that was made in *Kings* early in Jewish history was repeated in their latest scriptures, especially in *Haggai* (II. 14-23) and in *Zechariah* (VIII. 7-8): " Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Behold I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness." This sounds hollow to the sceptic when he remembers the tragic history of the Jews, but they have not been sceptics. They have been scattered on the face of the earth, many of them under the stress of persecution have become Christians, but many still hold on, building up their new Zion.

To the dispassionate historian the importance of Judaism is not to be gauged by the numbers of the Jews, but in the fact that it gave birth to the greatest Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, through whom the message of Judaea has gone over all the world. Christian theologians are fond of quoting texts from Isaiah and Zechariah (IX. 9) which seek to foretell the birth and mission of Jesus. But the Jews have repudiated him. They wanted and want a king with a golden crown, not a crown of thorns. They wanted and want an earthly kingdom wherein the genius of their race could flower, and not the kingdom of God that Jesus preached. The influence of the Old Testament is to be found in the Quran as much as in the New Testament. The Prophet of Arabia learned a good deal from the Jewish Prophets: their abhorrence of idol-worship, their insistence on circumcision, their abhorrence of pork; and Islam treasures certain Jewish holidays and traditions as much as the Jews themselves. In Islam as in Christianity, two of the three great world religions flourishing to-day, Judaism lives with zest.

Nor can the world forget the limpid beauty of much of the Old Testament as poetry of the highest order. And who can deny the genius of the race? Any other people in their place will have allowed themselves to decay and perish from the face of the earth and be swamped out of existence. They have had to live in ghettoes, but they have preferred to live their own life. There is no department of European Christian culture in which the Jews have not played their part: the great Spinoza in philosophy, and Bergson in our own generation; Mendelssohn in the realm of music; Heine and Thomas Mann in literature; Einstein, whose genius has revolutionised mathematics and science; and that other great genius, Karl Marx, whose dialectic has produced a social philosophy, which threatens to uproot all humanity from its old moorings and yet may lead to the birth of a new society, a new heaven on earth.

Verily, the Jews have played a part in world history. The hand of God has certainly been on them, though not in the way that they have hungered for. The New Jerusalem may yet be building, though it may be as far off from old Jerusalem as New York is from York.

Zoroastrianism

We shall now pass on to perhaps an earlier epoch, the epoch of Zarathustra of ancient Iran. He is more familiarly known through his Grecianised name, Zoroaster, and I may as well stick to this more familiar form. The only works definitely attributed to him are the five *Gathas* which supply the foundations of Zoroastrianism. He is the first Aryan monotheist, and perhaps of the world. Whether the ancient Aryans had their first home in the Arctics, when the climate there was milder and permitted human habitation, as has been asserted by Mr. B. G. Tilak, till the climate grew worse and they had to migrate southwards, the Hindu branch coming down to India and the Iranian branch remaining in Iran, or whether the Aryans had their home in Iran and one branch, because of economic reasons or some religious schism, came to India, are questions on which scholars

have burned much midnight oil and it is difficult to say anything very definitely. But the evidence of literature, both the *Vedas* and the *Gathas*, clearly goes to show a common origin. Avesta as the language of the *Gathas* is as akin to Sanskrit as modern Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi and Bengali are to one another and to their common source, Sanskrit; or as Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese are to one another and to their common source, Latin. The key to the *Gathas* was completely lost during the centuries of turmoil that followed the conquest of Iran first by Alexander and a millenium later by the Arabs. The *Gathas* lived only in Pehlavi translations and it was only the labours of European savants beginning with the intrepid Anquetil Du Perron that succeeded in deciphering Avesta, and this was possible only through Sanskrit. In more recent years Mr. J. M. Chatterji has sought to translate the *Gathas* by applying the rules of Panini's grammar. There is a wonderful parallelism of certain basic words as noted below :

Sanskrit.	Avesta.
Veda (knowledge)	*a-vista* (knowledge)
Soma (an intoxicant drink)	*Homa* (same as Soma)
Yajna (sacrifice)	*Yasna* (worship, prayer)
Gita (song)	*Gatha* (song)
Atharvan (fire priest)	*Athravan* (fire priest).

It is impossible to-day to doubt that the Hindus and the Iranians had a common religion at some time and a common culture and belonged to the same racial stock. Mr. Chatterji has been rather novel in advancing the view that the *Gathas* constitute " the Bhrigu portion of the Atharva Veda, otherwise called Upastha (Avesta) " and speaking of Zarathustra as " Atharvan Zarathustra." Parsee scholars have not looked sympathetically at this view, and I am also inclined to be against it, as *Atharva Veda* comes far later than *Rig-Veda*, and in so far as it is magical in character it is far removed from the *Gathas* which are a sustained attack on old polytheism with its blood sacrifices and organised priesthoods. I am not

competent to say anything about the exact relationship between the Sanskrit of the *Rig-Veda* and the Avesta of the *Gathas*, whether the one is older than the other or vice versa. As a student of religious thought, however, I am inclined to think that the *Rig-Veda* is earlier, for we find in it polytheism still subsisting, for a plurality of names of gods naturally implies a plurality of gods, and these gods are easily identifiable with natural forces. On the other hand there is a distinct tendency towards monotheism both in the conception of Visvadevah and that oft-quoted verse: "The sages called it in many ways,"[1] which makes Max Muller speak of Rig-Veda as henotheistic in character. As against this groping attitude the *Gathas* of Zoroaster preach a distinct monotheism and perhaps constitute a definite revolt against the earlier creed as represented in the Rig-Veda. This is illustrated in a very interesting way by the Vedic and the Iranian usage of the two terms *Deva* and *Asura*. In Sanskrit the term *Deva*, like the Latin *Deus*, has always carried a very exalted meaning as referring to God and the divine. But in Avesta it is always used in a bad sense as implying demons. The term *Asura* in the earlier portions of the Rig Veda is used in a good sense, but later its meaning changes and it stands for evil spirits. This is instructive as the Sanskrit *Asura* is identical with the Avestaic *Ahura* just as much as the Sanskrit *Sindhu* is identical with the Iranian *Hindu* and shows how religious animosity and acute differences affected the meaning of *Asura* and it came to be identified with the god of the rival religion.

The *Gathas* constitute a very peculiar type of scriptures. They have not the commanding tone of Thus-saith-the-Lord of Old Testament, nor even the more subdued tone of Christ speaking with authority of the Father in Heaven, and gently reproving his followers with "O ye of little faith," nor the clear-cut fiats of the Quran. None of them leaves any room for thought, except as an interpretation to support the original dogma. As against these scriptures the Gathas present themselves as an autobiographical record of a great soul struggling to maintain itself in its new-won enlightenment about the true nature of godhead as

Ahura Mazda. Like all great teachers of mankind he felt a sense of frustration in a hostile world. In *Yasna* 46.1 and 2 we find a poignant note of sorrow: "To what land shall I turn, whither shall I flee? I am severed from all classes of people, Kings have become slaves of falsehood. How shall I worship thee, O Ahura Mazda?" He feels that he is poor in worldly goods and does not command the respect and the attention of the world, and so craves for God's help all the more. Like a true Prophet of God he has got the missionary zeal to pass on his faith to others, but he would rather have them accept his message only after due thought. In *Yasna* 45.1 he says: "I shall now speak forth. Listen unto me, ye, who have come from near and far. Think deeply over all this. Never let the teacher of Untruth deceive you. Let the voice of evil be silenced". In *Yasna* 45.3 the Prophet says: "I will speak of that which Mazda Ahura, the all-knowing, revealed to me first in this life. Those of you who put not in practice this word as I think and utter it, to them shall be woe at the end of life". These are words uttered in humility but with a full consciousness of his divine mission. We do not find in it the blazing anger of Israel's Yahweh. There is in it just a plain statement that those who will not listen to his words of wisdom will live to rue their indifference.

The picture of the society of Zoroaster's time that we get from the Gathas is that of an agricultural society emerging from the pastoral stage. There is an exaltation of agriculture as conducive to a settled life, as in *Yasna* 31.10 wherein an active life is exalted and this has been taken to refer to agriculture.[1] Consistent with the spirit of the Gathas is the saying in the *Vendidad* "he that soweth corn soweth righteousness". He preaches against the Kavis and the Karpans. The word *Karpan* is connected with the Sanskrit word *Kalpa*, meaning religious ritual, and is palpably used with reference to priests who were lost in rituals, and animal sacrifices. The word *Kavi*, though originally it

[1] Kavasji Kanga's Gujarati translation.

had a good meaning, came to be used in connection with priests in a derogatory sense. Zoroaster's denunciations of the Kavis and the Karpans remind us of Christ's denunciations of the Scribes and the Pharisees. In *Yasna* 32.12 we have a clear repudiation of animal sacrifices :

"For a long time the Grehmas (priests) and the Kavis have been devoting all their thought and energy to the slaughter of the ox with shouts of joy, imagining that this would help these followers of falsehood; and they say that the cow is to be sacrificed that favours may be obtained".

The essence of Zoroaster's message is that there is but one God, Ahura Mazda, who is righteous and wants mankind to be righteous and he holds out the doctrine of heaven and hell for the first time in human history as the reward for a good life and punishment for an evil life respectively. The idea of a life after death existed earlier in Egyptian religion, but it was just a continuation of this life with all its paraphernalia as we find in Tutankhamen's tomb : vehicles and boats and furniture and ornaments. The Greeks too had the idea of a shadowy world in which the good and the bad jostled each other. Zoroastrian eschatology of heaven and hell was taken up by the Jews and from them it has become the inheritance of the Christians and the Muslims. The whole burden of Zoroaster's teaching is to be found in his unwavering emphasis on good life, and this has become crystallised in the now famous Zoroastrian formula : *humta, hukhta, huvareshta* : pure thoughts, pure words, pure deeds. It is impossible to have a more succinct summary of moral life from the moral as well as from the psychological standpoint, for in the last resort acts spring from words and words from thoughts.

I have spoken of Zoroaster's teaching as monotheism, but the idea of Zoroastrian dualism has taken strong root in popular religious consciousness as well as in books on religion, and so it is necessary for me to deal with this topic. The basis for this reputed dualism is to be found in *Yasna* 45.2 : "I shall tell you now of those twin spirits, which took their birth at the beginning of life. The benevolent Spirit of Goodness thus spake to

the Spirit of Evil: Neither our thoughts nor commands, nor our understandings, nor our beliefs, nor our deeds, nor our consciences, nor our souls can ever be one". The twin Spirits referred to are *Spenta Mainyush*, the Spirit of Goodness, and *Angra Mainyush*, the Spirit of Evil. This gives expression to the eternal opposition between the good and the evil. It must be admitted that in later Zoroastrianism as represented, *e.g.* in the *Vendidad* these Spirits are looked upon as creative spirits of good and evil things respectively, and the former is identified with Ahura Mazda. In the very first chapter of Vendidad we read:

> "As the first best of regions and countries, I, who am Ahura Mazda, produced Airyana-vaejo the best place near the Vehedati river. Thereupon as an opposition to it Angra Mainyush the deadly, produced a mighty serpent and frost caused by the devas."
> "As the second best of the regions and countries, I, who am Ahura Mazda, produced Gau, in which Sughada is situated. Thereupon in opposition to it, Angra Mainyush the deadly, produced a pestilence which is fatal to cattle, big and small."

And so it goes on page after page. Undoubtedly this is naked dualism, but it cannot be rightly ascribed to Zoroaster himself. So far as the teaching of the Gathas is concerned, Ahura Mazda alone is pictured as the creator. This is done in the form of rhetorical questions: "I shall ask Thee, tell me aright, O Ahura, who created the earth and the skies above? Who made the waters and the trees in the fields?. . . Who created the lights of good effect and the darkness? Who created morning, noon and night?" Such passages effectually dispose of the theory of two creators. We have already noticed that Zoroaster lays emphasis on free choice or will and this is a *sine qua non* for all morality, for without free will there can be no moral responsibility. Moral choice is between good and evil. If we look upon the world as an evolving world the good itself becomes the enemy of the better and pain and struggle become the marked features of an evolving moral personality. *Spenta Mainyush* and *Angra Mainyush* are mere personifications of man's deliberate will to be good or evil. In so far as we choose to do evil we place ourselves in direct opposition to God, and declare ourselves to be the followers

of *Druj*, the Spirit of Lie, *Angra Mainyush*. In so far as *Spenta Mainyush* is the spirit of Ahura Mazda, it is really indistinguishable from Ahura Mazda. If following the triadic language of Hegel we permit ourselves the use of philosophical jargon, we may say that *Angra Mainyush* is the negative of *Spenta Mainyush* and the good triumphing over the evil is Ahura Mazda, the perfect synthesis in morality. Mere goodness apart from evil is innocence and innocence is not virtue. That is why we do not apply moral categories to the lapses of children, while we become harsh in condemning a grown-up man who has lied or deceived, because we expect something better from him, as being capable of choosing good in preference to all the seductive charms of evil.

In so far as Christian missionaries have done their best to popularise the so-called dualism of Zoroaster, which has been looked upon as the historical harbinger of the Manichean heresy in the Christian Church, there has been a tendency among Parsee scholars to repudiate this dualism by insisting that Ahura Mazda is really one and that he created both the spirits of *Spenta Mainyush* and *Angra Mainyush*. By doing so they put *Angra Mainyush* within Ahura Mazda and take away his complete purity from evil. This truth is very well grasped by Sir Mahomed Iqbal in his *Development of Metaphysics in Persia*. Referring to Zoroaster's teaching in this connection he says: "But to maintain that there are twin spirits, creators of reality and non-reality and at the same time to hold that these two spirits are united in the Supreme Being, is virtually to say that the principle of evil constitutes a part of the very essence of God; and the conflict between Good and Evil is nothing more than the struggle of God against himself."

In all theism there has been a conflict between the all-powerfulness of God and His all-goodness. Any one can well ask with Maeterlinck "If He could not create the best, why did He create the worst?"[1] The problem of evil has really been the rock on which all uncritical theism is apt to flounder. Let it be

[1] *The Great Beyond*, p. 100.

said to the credit of Zoroaster that on the very threshold of theism he grasped the complexity of the problem and sought its solution by preserving intact God's power as creator, and maintaining His goodness by making *Angra Mainyush* not an equal rival but a mere negation of good. The dualism of Zoroaster is not a metaphysical dualism at all. It is only Ethical Dualism, and this dualism is inherent in all theism that seeks to preserve the moral supremacy of God. Thus we find Satan in the Old Testament tempting Eve and thwarting the will of God, but no Jewish Prophet saw in this any denial of the goodness or righteousness of God. In Quran too, which is more monotheistic than most monotheisms, there is the conception of Iblis, defiant from the beginning, refusing to render obeisance to Allah. Mr. T. Rezwi in his book *Parsis : A People of the Book* has made a useful collection of passages in the Quran bearing on Dualism. In Chapter 23 the Iblis or Satan is the leader of the unbelieving people and in Chapter 7 he is shown as a tempter leading men to evil. In Chapter 20 he is portrayed as the greatest enemy of God by his opposition to God's prophets. With all due deference to Christian missionaries let it be said that if Zoroastrianism is dualism, no less is Christianity dualism. But there are good and intrepid Christians who are not frightened by words and do not run away from describing Christianity as dualism. One such is the great Dr. Albert Schweitzer, a genuine Christian if ever there was one. In his *Christianity and the Religions of the World* he boldly argues that every theistic religion that claims to be ethical must be dualistic. "Every rational faith", says he, "has to choose between two things : either to be an ethical religion or to be a religion that explains the world. We Christians choose the former as that which is of higher value". The solution of the problem advanced by Zoroaster still holds at the theistic level. Not merely have all the succeeding monotheisms had to follow in his wake, but even theistic philosophers like the Personal Idealists of recent years have taken up the same line of argument. It has not been found possible by them to reconcile the omnipotence of God with His all-goodness.

One or the other needs to be sacrificed, and theists prefer to have a good, righteous God even with limited powers rather than an omnipotent God with an evil will. If a solution is to be found we shall have to transcend theism, as the Vedantins have done and Buddha sought to do. So we shall rest with the position that Zoroaster's religion was dualistic only as an ethical dualism, and we can only ask: how is it any the less monotheistic if it involves ethical dualism? The real point to note is that Zoroaster preaches that the final victory will be the victory of Truth over Lie, of Righteousness over Unrighteousness. In this too the Prophets of the Old Testament and Christ and Mahomed are all at one. Evil can thwart the smooth progress of the good, but ultimately it will be laid low, and the worshipper of Ahura Mazda will emerge triumphant.

There is another feature of Zoroastrianism which has been made a target of attack, and that is that its followers are fire-worshippers. Perhaps there is some superficial justification for this idea so far as the present practice of Zoroastrians goes, but certainly not to such an extent as to identify the worship of Ahura Mazda with the worship of fire. The religion of Iran that preceded the advent of Zoroaster was idolatry with its usual accompaniment of magic, or it was some type of nature worship we are familiar with in connection with the Vedas. Nature worship has some grandeur about it: the majestic power of the sun, the soothing beauty of the moon, the fertility of the earth, the beneficence of water, and the utility of fire must all be mentioned to the credit side of nature worship. As in the Vedas, pure nature worship is direct and can avoid the idol worship with its usual shortcomings. Zoroaster like the other succeeding prophets sought to go to the great beneficent power behind all these entitites of nature. If we admit the psychological necessity of having something concrete before us at the time of prayer, we are driven to admit a prima facie justification for idol worship, whether it be an image or a symbol like the Cross. It may be conceded with even greater force that the elements of nature are sufficiently concrete for the purposes of worship and are certainly so exalted as to be looked

upon as worthy symbols of Godhead. This was the reform of Zoroaster. In the Gathas we do find references to *Athar* or fire, but never as god, always as a symbol of Ahura Mazda. After the time of Zoroaster in the age of the *Vendidad* we find a tendency on the part of the priests to revive the old nature worship but as subordinate to Ahura Mazda. Preservation of the purity of water is hygienically justifiable. Purity of fire is good too, but it became so much of a fetich that it came to be forgotten that fire could never be defiled, because it itself is the most powerful purifying substance. Let it be said to the credit of Zoroastrian priests that they have never revived idolatry and Zoroastrian temples have taken the form of fire-temples, where the sacred fire once consecrated is not allowed to be extinguished. Unlike the sacred buildings of other religions, the fire-temples of the Zoroastrians have been housed till lately in most drab buildings with no architectural pretensions and could hardly be distinguished from the ordinary dwelling houses round about. But to the devout Zoroastrian, as perhaps even to others, there is a beauty in a fire that can continue burning with sandalwood or ordinary fuel wood for centuries. The most ancient fire-temple in the world to-day is the Iran-Shah consecrated at Sanjan 1200 years ago, and after removal from place to place according to the political exigencies of different times it has been resting for over a century in Udwada in a very spacious building. To know that it has been continuously burning for 1200 years and more is also to feel an aesthetic thrill akin to that caused by the beauty which surrounds a Hindu temple or a Christian church or an Islamic mosque. Zoroastrians still feel a glow of grateful pride in Firdusi who at a time when the greatness of Zoroastrianism had become a matter of dead history sought to revive and immortalise the ancient glories of Iran in his Shah-Nama, and who amongst us can withhold a look of reverent awe as we listen to the lines of Firdusi :

ma gui ke atash parastan budand
parestandegan-i-yak yazdan budand

"Say not that (the Iranians) were worshippers of fire; they were worshippers of one God." Nor can we miss the remark of Markham in his History of Persia: "It is, indeed, very remarkable that of all the nations in the world, Persia is the only one that has never, at any period of her history, worshipped graven images of any kind".

Even if Zoroastrians are known as fire-worshippers to the man in the street, they cannot claim the monopoly of it, for fire has played a very important part in religious worship of all climes and times. The Vedic worship of *Agni* is still a living tradition. In the Old Testament in the *Genesis* Light is spoken of as the first creation; Isaiah speaks of God as "an everlasting light" and Psalm 84 speaks of Lord God as Sun. Moses saw God as fire on Mount Sinai: "Verily I am the Lord." In Christian parlance Christ is the Light of the World. There is that expressive picture by Holman Hunt depicting Christ with a lantern in the world of darkness.

So far as numbers go, the Zoroastrians in the world to-day hardly number more than a lakh and a quarter, of whom barely ten thousand are in Iran, but even from these thin ranks many have become converts to Bahaism. Like the Jews dreaming of their Messiah, there are still Zoroastrians who await the birth of Saoshyant who will reestablish the faith of Zoroaster on earth. I cannot pretend to be one of them. I can but repeat what I wrote ten years ago in my little book on Zoroaster:

"During its triumphant career of over two millenia it (Zoroastrianism) came into living contact with millions of people both to the east and west of Iran, and in this period it transferred a good deal of its moral and spiritual vigour to other people. The Hebrews and the Christians and the Muslims have all drunk deep, consciously or unconsciously, at the fount of Zoroastrianism, and the best of Zoroastrianism lives in the best of other religions. It is perhaps this consciousness that made the conversion from Zoroastrianism to Islam so very easy after the Muslim conquest of Persia and more definitely took away the zeal to spread their faith among others. A flame that has passed on its light to countless other flames must disdain so sordid a feeling as jealousy. Good thoughts, good words, and good deedsare not the monopoly of Zoroastrians. In the dim antiquity Zoroaster

preached it and his reward is that it has become the common inheritance of all humanity." [1]

Zoroastrianism as a religion is marked by a deep practicality because of its emphasis on moral life. Nothing else can take its place: neither mere rituals, nor mere worship, nor even the grace of Ahura Mazda. Man must sow as he reaps. Its ethics is marked by a sense of man's struggle with the forces of evil around him, but faith in Ahura Mazda gives him a strength to fight the good fight and overcome evil. That gives it a bracing cheerfulness and a joy in life, and that is why Zoroastrianism is a perfect stranger to the ascetic practices which are so sternly enjoined in other religions. Enjoy life, but strictly within the limits of morality: this may be taken as the sum and substance of the Zoroastrian attitude to life.

Before I pass on to the next topic I should like to make one admission. I have been speaking of *Zoroastrianism*, though I know it is a complete misnomer, for the correct word is *Mazdayasnism*: the worship of Mazda. *Zoroastrianism* is a word made fashionable by European scholars on the analogy of Christianity and Buddhism. In these two cases there is some justification, for Christ and Buddha have been deified and the religions are justifiably named after them. But Zoroaster like Mahomed only claimed to be a Prophet and so *Zoroastrianism* is as misleading as *Mahomedanism*. The Muslims very wisely have stuck to the word *Islam*. If I have clung to a wrong usage it is only to avoid confusion, for language, however wrong, is a social inheritance, and individuals willynilly have to conform to the general usage.

There have been scholars in Europe who have thrown doubt on the very existence of Zoroaster, but such an attitude has found no acceptance. It is true that Zoroaster's date goes so far back that his personality has become somewhat shadowy.

[1] P. 132 of my book on Zoroaster, published by Natesan & Co, Madras. In my remarks on Zoroastrianism in this lecture I have made use of the material I had gathered and used in my book. I may also refer the reader to my paper on *Dualism in Avesta and Its Philosophic Import* read before the Oriental Conference in 1935.

We miss in him those soft experiences which have made Buddha and Christ such loving and beloved souls. We miss in him the details which have made the figure of Mahomed so lifelike. But no shadowy figure could have produced the *Gathas*, so rich as a record of personal religious struggle. The fifth *Gatha* is brief, but as a record of his daughter's marriage it becomes a grand wedding hymn, bringing out the sacredness of holy matrimony. However shadowy his personality may have become through the lapse of centuries and the political upheavals of Iran, his work has endured. Even when his message was distorted by his own followers who brought back the worship of the elements as the angels of Ahura Mazda and brought in all the rigid ritualism which Zoroaster himself had decried, the purity of his moral message was not touched. Plato and Aristotle looked upon Persia as a barbarian country because of its size, but did not fail to find in it much to learn and praise, and so did Herodotus, who was proud that Greece had emerged triumphant in the struggle against Persia, but the pride was great because Persia was great, and that greatness was due to Zoroaster, who had stamped his personality on the life of Persia. It was not a mere accident that some years ago the whole Muslim audience in Teheran sprang to their feet, when the figure of Zoroaster came on the stage during the performance of Ishqui's *Rastakhiz*, a drama which deplored the decay of Iran and looked to the spirit of Zoroaster to revive her ancient glory. Thirteen hundred years have passed by since almost overnight Iran changed her religion, but it was fundamentally a change in name for the transition was only from the monotheism of Zoroaster to the monotheism of Mahomed, the moral ideal at its best remained the same, the symbolism of fire still continues in Iran, though not in the form of a consecrated fire-temple.

Islam

From Zoroastrianism to Islam is not a far cry whether in time or spirit. The priest-ridden Zoroastrianism of the Sassanian times had sapped the religious zeal and the moral stamina of the

Iranians, and when the Arabs drunk with the new wine of Allah fell upon Iran, they found her an easy prey. They brought a new whiff of the crisp desert air and the religion of Arabia developed into the Saracenic civilisation. The birth of Islam constitutes a veritable miracle in the history of religion, for the Arabia of the pre-Islamic days had no religion worth the name, had no culture. It was marked by crude idolatry. It was an Arabia which could sacrifice young girls by burying them alive. Life was cheap. Men were wild, who had not tasted the soft graces of a civilised life. It appeared impossible that such a people could produce a Prophet who within the space of his own lifetime could transform a wild country into a nursery of new religious values. But the impossible did happen as if to prove that to God nothing is impossible. Islam means submission or resignation to the will of God and claimed to be the religion of peace. The miracle became possible, because Mahomed came into close contact with the Jews and presumably impressed by their religion was willing to imbibe many of their ideas and their practices. It is significant that for the major portion of his life he turned towards Jerusalem in his prayers till one day in 624 A.D. he turned towards Mecca, and since then Mecca has become the Qibla of the whole Moslem world. In the Quran references to Biblical characters are galore, and some of the Jewish holidays have passed into Islam. Mariam as the mother of Christ had a sacred place in the new religion and it is on record that the Prophet was proud that he was born in the reign of the Zoroastrian Nowshirwan-i-Adul and he had a Zoroastrian convert to help him in consolidating the new faith. He was not unwilling to learn from others, the Prophets particularly, as he was prepared to admit that " The Prophets of God are as sons of the same Father."[2] Thus it happens that the Quran contains a good deal that was old, but a great personality as he was, he moulded it to form a new whole, bearing the impress of his own Arabia and ready to mould the religion of future generations.

Like all Prophets Mahomed was literally God-intoxicated and had complete faith not merely in the greatness and power of

God, but even more in His goodness. He felt His presence always and all around him. The incident in Cave Thor is significant. He and his trusted companion Abu Bakr had to be hiding in the Cave to escape the pursuit of their enemies. They were so near that Abu Bakr lost nerve and whispered : " If they bowed a little they would find us," and the Prophet coolly replied " Stop, O Abu Bakr ! You think we are two. We are not two. There is a Third and that is Allah " [1] Needless to say this confidence came to be fully justified. The Quran does not breathe the atmosphere of wild Arabia. Its pages are scattered with endless repititions of " God is merciful," " God is forgiving."

Mahomed had been brought up in idolatry, but his contact with the Jews and the Christians and the Zoroastrians, coupled with his own deep religious instinct made him abhor idolatry, an abhorrence which has become part and parcel of Islamic inheritance. Even the retention of the formless Kaaba as the centre of worship for the Islamic world is strictly un-Islamic, but it was retained perhaps more on psychological grounds as catering to the psychology of the masses than on purely religious grounds. It certainly served to be the connecting link between the pre-Islamic and the Islamic eras. But the urge towards the concrete in religious worship has asserted itself even in iconoclastic Islam in the form of tombs of pirs and this is particularly true of Islam in India.

I shall not linger on the ethics of the Quran, for every dispassionate student of it must pay homage to its exalted character. It has a touching regard for the helplessness of the widow and the orphan. The Quran has developed a code, which is marked by a remarkable equity and a robust common sense and a breadth of view which certainly makes of Mahomed a great Hero and a great Maker of History. As Sir Mahomed Iqbal is so fond of pointing out in his illuminating *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Relgious Thought in Islam*, " The

[1] *The Religious Experiences of the Prophet of Islam* by M. Aslam in *The Aryan Path*, February, 1935.

Quran is a book which emphasises 'deed' rather than 'idea'."[1] Though its name implies resignation to the will of God there is a certain air of activity in it, which has made Islam a great force even in the secular history of mankind. The Muslims have shown a great sense of history and the inspiration for it is to be traced to the pregnant saying of the Prophet: "Do not vilify time, for time is God." [2]

In spite of all its great inherent qualities it has to be admitted that Islam as a religion has not found favour with the followers of other religions nor has it left to the same extent that religious impression on other religions that stand to the credit side of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity or Buddhism. But it is the fault of the followers of Islam rather than of Islam itself. Any way it would be useful to asses the various criticisms that have been passed against Islam and see how far they are due to any flaw in the teachings of the Prophet himself and how far to the usual lapse on the part of followers as in the case of other religions as well.

There are two criticisms from which the Prophet himself must be completely absolved. The first is that Islam is a very intolerant religion. With all the reverence that he bestowed upon the Bible it was inevitable that he should look upon the Jews and Christians as People of the Book, a distinction which came to be accorded to Zoroastrians as well and it logically followed that the People-not-of-the-Book came in a different category. But even here the position of the Prophet is quite clear. There can be no question of any forcible conversion of the People-of-the-Book, and he did not countenance the forcible conversion of others too. In Chap. 2, verse 256 the Quran clearly states that "There is no compulsion in religion," though it also makes it clear in the succeeding Verse that those who prefer the devil to God will have to be in darkness and that they will have to abide in fire. Presumably this refers to life after death in hell for all false worshippers, and so it cannot be construed as justifying

[1] P. i.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

forcible conversion. There are similar passages in the Quran, *e.g.*, Chap. xvii, Sec. 7, Verses 56-57 ; Chap. 76, Sec. 2, Verse 31. The passage in Chap. vi, Sec. 13, Verse 105 is particularly explicit : " Indeed there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord; whoever will therefore see, it is for (the good of) his own soul and whoever will be blind, it shall be against himself ; *and I am not a keeper over you.*" The last words are very pertinent, for it clearly shows that the Prophet does not claim the right or duty to force others against their will. In the other passages cited above he does emphasise the sufferings that will overtake the unbelievers, presumably in the life hereafter; if not, this meaning would contradict 6.105. But a too zealous follower may easily arrogate to himself the right to visit the sufferings by fire on unbelievers even in this life, and the history of Islam goes to show that its fair name has been sullied by such fanatics. That this danger was not absent from the consciousness of the Prophet is clearly brought out four verses later in the same Chapter 6 ;" And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides God, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse God out of ignorance. Thus have we made fair-seeming to every people their deeds; then to their Lord shall be their return, and He will inform them of what they did." Even a more explicit statement has been attributed to the Prophet : " Whatsoever be your religion, associate with those who think otherwise. All have a quarter of the Heavens to which they turn, and wheresoever they turn—there is the Face of Allah." In the face of these passages it is not fair to hold the Prophet guilty of all the manifestations of religious intolerance that his followers have been unfortunately guilty of. There are other statements attributed to the Prophet which do honour to him.[1]

The Prophet has said, 'If any Muslim will oppress a non-Muslim, cause him a loss, or burden him with duties beyond his capacity, or take away anything from him without his consent, then on the Day of Judgment I will be supporter of the non-

[1] Vide *Harijan* : 24 August, 1947.

Muslim and lodge complaint before God against the Muslim (Collection of Hadis known as *Jamaiul Fawae*, Volume II, Page 13; also *Mishkat*).

The Prophet says, 'I am committed to the non-Muslims that they will do whatever they like in their places of worship. I will not charge them with duties beyond their capacity, and I will protect them against their foreign enemies, and that they should have full liberty and freedom in matters of their religion' (*Ibid.*, page 14).

"The blood of a non-Muslim is as good as that of mine," says that Prophet. "Any Muslim, guilty of shedding the blood of an innocent non-Muslim, will be guilty of shedding my blood". (*Hayaul Qulub*).

The second charge against Islam has been that it is too puritanical, that it lacks in a flair for art and the beautiful. In proof of it may be mentioned the unfortunate vandalism that has deprived most beautiful idols and statues of their faces or their noses in North India particularly. If Islam is really puritanical, Aurungzib may be taken as a good sample. Aurungzib had a distaste for music and the musicians lost his patronage. They devised an ingenious plan to draw his attention to their grievances. They took past his balcony a gaily dressed corpse upon a bier and chanted mournful funeral songs. They did succeed in exciting the curiosity of Aurungzib and to his inquiry they replied that music had died from neglect and they were taking its corpse to the burial ground. They must have been taken aback when they got a witheringly unsympathetic reply: "Very well, make the grave deep, so that neither voice nor echo may issue from it."[1] The extreme fear that the Prophet had of the dangers of idolatry made painting and sculpture languish as fine arts, but Muslim orthodoxy sat somewhat lightly on the pleasure-loving Iranians, and so Saracenic culture did ultimately succeed in giving an impetus to fine arts, especially architecture and gardening, and to ease and elegance of

[1] *Music of India* by Popley, p. 19

life in which the Grand Moguls of India have had no equals. Orthodox Muslims still bewail the corroding influence of Iranian culture. There is some truth in this from the strictly narrow religious outlook, but the influence of Iran did succeed in giving an artistic stamp to the simple creed of the Prophet. The traditional fanaticism of the Muslims has been softened thereby and the reproach that Islam did not care for the beautiful has become unjustifiable.

Islam was certainly puritanical in the sense that it was not meant for the rich. Arabia was a poor country and Mahomed had tasted poverty and could appreciate the pangs of hunger and thirst. The mercy that he preached to all came from his full-blooded conviction in the mercy of God. One of the five pillars of Islam includes the poor-rate to which every Muslim who could has to contribute. The Ramzan fast has become world famous: to do without food and even water from morning till sunset day after day for a month in the blistering climate of Arabia is a rigorous discipline. That the Prophet did not want his religion to be soft is illustrated by an interesting anecdote in his life. A man came to him and said: "I love thee, O Apostle of God." "Be ready for poverty," he replied. When the disciple said "I love Allah," the Prophet replied "Be prepared to face suffering." Verily was Mahomed conscious of those dark moments to which the religious soul hungering after God is doomed as has been abundantly proved in the history of mysticism whether of the east or of the west.

This very emphasis on poverty has created a false impression among Muslims, as among the Hindus, that beggary as such is something honourable, and has given rise to a tribe of people hanging round about mosques and sponging on the religiosity of the better-off. That the Prophet did not exalt beggary and was rather intent on producing a zest for honourable work is shown by another anecdote. A starving man came to Mahomed for help, and was asked what he possessed. The answer was that he had a carpet to cover himself and a jug for drinking water. He was asked to bring both and they were sold by the Prophet for two pieces of silver. With one the man was asked to buy food

and with the other to buy a hatchet. When this was brought to him Mahomed with his own hand fixed a handle, and asked the man to go to the woods and cut wood, sell it and come back after a fortnight. A fortnight passed and the man returned with ten silver pieces jingling in his pocket. That is the right spirit and none but a shirker of work would fail to see a real antidote to poverty in work.

His historical influence on the history of the world is beyond question. For four centuries after Mahomed the Caliphate stood forth as the very embodiment of culture. Mahomed had said: "in the pursuit of knowledge go even to China." His followers did, not merely to living China, but to the dead Greece and Rome as well. What remained neglected by an intolerant Christianity as pagan books was resuscitated by the Arabs. Plato and Aristotle lived again in Arabic. The spirit of science had a new birth, and Roger Bacon, one of the early pioneers of European science, is reported to have said that the only way to attain knowledge was to learn Arabic and Arabic science. The medieval masters of European philosophy received their first impetus from Arabian philosophers like Averroes. The range of Saracenic civilisation was a joint product of the religious impetus of Arabia and the secular culture of the Iranians. India has had her full share of this and can never forget the spirit of culture and broad-based statesmanship of Akbar or the architectural genius of Shah Jehan or the songs of Kabir.

Islam began to decay when she was possessed of that apocryphal story of the Caliph who was out for destroying all books on the ground that if they contained what was contradicted by the Quran they were false and if they contained what the Quran contained they were superfluous. I have deliberately used the word *apocryphal*, for I know that the veracity of this story has been challenged by Muslims. I am not concerned with the historical aspect of it, but it is certain that at one stage in its history Islam was obsessed by this spirit and its decay was inevitable.

Any impartial historian of Islam will have to admit that its greatness has been marred by two defects. I am only concerned

to show how far, if at all, the teaching in the Quran was itself responsible for these two defects : the concept of *jihad* and the institution of the purdah.

That *jihads* have played an important part in the achievement of Muslim Empires cannot be denied. If Islam was sincere in preaching toleration and mercy as made out by me, how can the very idea of *jihad* find an ethical justification ? The criticism is legitimate, but can be met. Socrates and Christ achieved greatness by their heroic deaths and Buddha by his unique renunciation. Mahomed did not choose to adopt either of these modes to achieve his mission. Socrates, Christ and Buddha lived in highly cultured societies to whom reason could appeal sooner or later, and all three sought to achieve their ends through sweet reasonableness. Mahomed was born in a very crude community to whom the sword represented the law of life. It must be said to the credit of Mahomed that he did try to appeal to the reason of his fellow-tribesmen, but he failed, and his life was forfeit. The might of the sword awaited him, and he would not have been vouchsafed those historic trials which brought out Socrates and Christ as inspiring geniuses. Mahomed would not have been given a chance to justify himself. In his environment his desire to save himself from his enemies was justifiable, and the only way to do so was to fly from Mecca and take refuge in Medina. That was the only chance of not merely saving his own life, but even more precious and permanent than his life, his mission as the Prophet of God. Even at Medina he did not have a smooth course, and if he finally succeeded in winning over the people of Medina he had to face the continued opposition of his fellow-Meccans. It was a question of sword against sword and the Prophet took up the challenge. To the wild Arab followers fighting came easy, and the Prophet supplied an added incentive by promising the joys of the paradise to all who fell in the sacred war. Thus was the *jihad* born. The Muslim arms won and the warring tribes of Arabia were welded into one nation under the banner of Islam. If not ethically in the highest sense of the term, at least psychologically we can understand how the lessons learned in the

jihad of the Prophet did not die with him, but lived as a memory for centuries and it has not lost its force even in the year of grace 1948. The real spirit of the *jihad* has been beautifully illustrated in the life of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein, on the historic field of Kerbala. He was anxious to avoid the shedding of blood, but he was not afraid to die. When he was asked to submit as a criminal he replied : "Do you think to terrify me with death?" He could not forget that there was God above : "Our trust is in God alone" and he died a hero. His son, Ali, was a chip of the old block in his fearless love of truth. "Are we not in the right, Father ?" he asked. "By Al'ah we have ever been in the right." "When it is so, what fear have we to give our lives for the right ?" This bravery has marked the soldiers of Islam at their best. That it has been invoked for unworthy ends by political adventurers is more the misfortune of Islam than even of its victims.

That religion cannot possibly be a matter of compulsion has been recognised by every religious teacher, Mahomed included. But the fanatical followers, whether Christian or Muslim, have forgotten this elementary principle. So long as the Muslims had a love for culture, the *jihads* did not prove an unmixed evil, for they were willing to learn from others and they had a good deal to teach to others. But once they ceased to learn and fanaticism took possession of the virile masses of Muslims, the *jihad* came to possess an evil odour with all non-Muslims. But so far as the Prophet himself is concerned, he resorted to arms only in genuine self-defence lest the message he was so anxious to preach be lost with the death of himself and his followers. In his environment there was sufficient justification for this defensive war, but in the course of centuries *jihad* has become a convenient excuse to wage any war. Even purely secular and political movements have been given the appearance of religious wars, and this has been particularly easy with the Muslim masses, who have been deliberately kept away from knowledge as such. All non-Muslims have become Kaffirs and this in the face of the deep reverence showered on Moses and Christ and Mariam (Mary) and on the peoples of the Book. The Prophet's

attitude to *jihad* can be found in two passages in the Quran. In Chapter 9, Section 9, Verse 73 we read : "O Prophet ! strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites and be unyielding to them : and their abode is hell, and evil is the destination." In the succeeding verses there is a regular tirade against renegades, and in Verse 80 we read : "Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them ; and even if thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times, God will not forgive them ; this is because they disbelieve in God and His Apostle, and God does not guide the transgressing people." In the context and with reference to other passages on religious tolerance it appears that all these sections referred to people who had been opposing the Prophet in his own lifetime. Hard as the words are against hypocrites they have parallels in Old Testament as well as in the New, and also in Zoroaster's *Gathas*. These sections do not bear out the idea that Islam can be forced on people at the point of the sword, and the higher types of Muslims would be the first to admit this. It is fair to note that even with his own opponents the Prophet could be forgiving as *e.g.* in the case of Abdulla bin Ubayy, who had thwarted the Prophet, and yet when he died, the Prophet was asked to offer the funeral prayers and he did so magnanimously. It is the privilege of man to rise at times above even his own teachings. In Chapter 25, Section 5, Verse 52, the Quran says : "So do not follow the unbelievers, and strive against them with a mighty striving with it" and in Verses 56 and 57 we read : "And we have not sent thee but as a giver of good news and as a warner. Say : I do not ask you aught in return except that he, who will, may take the way to his Lord." This is as explicit as it can be : the Prophet is only a warner, and God has not given him the right to force his message even on the unwilling. We cannot but conclude that the use of *Jihad* for any but a strictly defensive purpose in the cause of religion finds no support in the Quran, and later Islamic states used the idea for their own political ends and brought the Quran into inevitable disrepute.

The second defect in the history of Islam is the institution of the *purdah*. When we remember the extremely low status of

woman in pre-Islamic Arabia and the low status of woman in Hinduism and the Christianity of the Churches we cannot but praise the Prophet for his enlightened attitude to women and his solicitude for their rights. He himself was a faithful husband to Khadija, and if after her death he married other wives it was to safeguard the position of the widows of his followers who had fallen in the battles in defence of the new religion. It was his duty to provide for them. He called upon his living followers to take up the responsibility of maintaining these widows and the only honourable way in which it could be done was to have them married legally. He had to practise what he preached and he did his share of the responsible work. Islamic Law has been very just and generous to women, but what it has given has been taken away through the back door of the purdah. For the purdah has kept women in ignorance—except in the case of the wealthy, and so helpless that they are at the utter mercy of their menfolk. It has now been generally accepted even by hostile critics of Islam that the purdah as it exists in its most rigorous form in India, or even in the comparatively more liberal form as it existed in Turkey and other Islamic countries, did not exist in the Arabia of the Prophet. There is only one verse in the Quran bearing on this topic : Chap. 24, Section 4, Verse 31 : "And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women) or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women ; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known ; and turn to God all of you, O believers ! so that you may be successful."[2] It is clear from this that women have been enjoined to cover their bosoms with the covering which goes over their head, as distinguished from the

face. That women were not called upon to veil their faces is brought out in the preceding verse which is addressed to men: "Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; God is aware of what they do." Thus the injunction to men and women alike is couched in exactly the same language, and yet men go free and women are imprisoned behind a rigorous purdah. Here we get the usual tyranny of man. But the Quran is not responsible for a manifest twist given by Muslims in subsequent centuries. There is a later passage in the Quran, Chap. 33. 59, which is taken to override the inspiration of the passage cited above: "O Prophet, say to thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers that they let down upon them their over-garments; this will be more proper, that they may be known, and thus they will not be given trouble; and God is forgiving, merciful." It is certainly not clear to me that this is in flat contradiction to the previous passages. It implies that in Medina Muslim women were molested and to suit the particular circumstances the Prophet may have asked his women followers to take extra care of their person. On the whole the conclusion is inevitable that the spirit of broad-minded treatment of women laid down in the Quran is inconsistent with the narrowness of the purdah as such.

Islam is a great religion. It has been its misfortune that the perverse use of the *jihad* has not made it popular with the followers of other religions. It has suffered more at the hands of its followers than any other religion and it has created a fear and even a hatred for it among non-Muslims, which is very unfair to Islam as preached by the Prophet himself. To-day it still ranks as one of the three great world-religions. The fine common sense of Quranic injunctions has a value far beyond its own confines. Perhaps its strongest claim to greatness is to be found in its unflinching emphasis on the equality of men and the brotherhood of Islam. Buddha and Christ perhaps were more insistent on human equality, but their followers have not given effect to it so effectually as the followers of Islam have done. The Prophet

succeeded in gathering round him a band of devoted followers and there was no Judas in his life. His remarkable capacity to secure the devotion of all who came into his fold is brought out in the episode recorded by Abuzar, a companion of the Prophet. In a moment of weakness Abuzar abused somebody as "Thou son of a negress." The Prophet was annoyed but just said: "Abuzar, both the scales are equal, the white have no preference over the black." At this simple reproof Abuzar felt abashed and he went to the man he had abused and said: "Come, trample on my face and forgive me." If simple words spoken by the Prophet without any anger could have had such a magnificent effect, one can understand the secret of success which transformed the wild untamed Arabia into the most civilised and foremost country of the world for some four centuries.[1]

In this lecture I have dealt with the quest for moral values so zealously pursued by the Jewish Prophets, Zoroaster and Mahomed. There is a passionate intensity and force in their utterances which have left their permanent impress on the religious history of mankind. As Plato was fond of arguing, and most students of ethics will agree with him, virtue is one, for all virtues imply one another. There cannot be watertight compartments dividing one virtue from another, and it is only in this sense that I would venture to differentiate between these three religions and the other religions I have still to deal with. In Judaism we find an emphasis on justice and righteousness, in Zoroastrianism we find an emphasis on purity of life, and in Islam we find an emphasis on mercy and equality and the spirit of forgiveness. Each of them has carried religion to a higher level and aspired to make man more like the God he was taught to worship. All of them sought a higher life on earth whether in the form of a New Jerusalem, a rejuvenated Iran or a New Mecca. All of them have been subjected to the misinterpretations of the professional priests, but the message of

[1] The translation of passages in the Quran has been taken from the Translation of the Holy Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali, M.A., LL.B., published by Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Ishaat-i-Islam, Lahore, India.

the Prophets of God is there for all to imbibe in their lives, and in them religion definitely allied itself with the realisation of the moral ideal, with the pursuit of power and beauty as but aids to the achievement of the Good. All of them claimed to have attained truth as direct revelation from God. They disdained to establish it on logical grounds. They were intent only on their message being accepted and lived. Religion as a quest for the moral good has been their permanent legacy to a humanity groping in darkness.

LECTURE V

Religion as a Quest for Truth

The great monotheisms we have already dealt with claimed truth for their message as revealed directly by God. They came from His prophets and whatever was uttered by them had to be accepted as gospel truth. In India on the other hand we come across a phase of religion, which may truly be described as a search for truth. It did not come *cap-à-pie*. The Indian soul had to search for it with a passion and an intensity that have given India a unique place in the spiritual history of mankind. The difference between India and the rest of the world has been very neatly put by L. Adams Beck: "She it is who has taught that man is a soul with a body, in contradiction of the western conception that man is a body with a soul."[1] It may also be admitted that the Indian outlook has been mostly metaphysical with an emphasis on the Infinite transcending the limitations of space and time. In the second lecture we have already discussed the extreme difficulty of defining Hinduism and had to repudiate the use of the term in its religious connotation. Hindu writers, however, seem to glorify this vagueness of Hinduism as testifying to its cosmopolitanism, as making room within itself for all sorts of religious beliefs and modes of worship. Pandit Shyam Shankar[2] is forced to the conclusion that "Hinduism is a miscellany of many systems of religion" with nothing common except the doctrine of *karma*. But even this cannot be taken as the differentia of Hinduism, as it is a doctrine shared by Jainism and Buddhism, which may have been offshoots of "Hinduism," but strictly cannot be taken as "Hinduism." Valuable as cosmopolitanism may be, it has

[1] *The Story of Oriental Philosophy*, p. 191.

[2] *Religions of the Empire*: the essay on *Orthodox Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma*, p. 35.

limits and a religion which claims to be all things to all men must in the long run lose its distinctive character and even its soul. It is for this reason that I have eschewed the use of the term *Hinduism* as having any religious significance and prefer to distinguish the different levels of religious quest in the history of Hindus. We have dealt with the lower phases of it as represented by the magical animi sm of the jungle tribes and the popular cults of Shiva and Vishnu. In this lecture I propose to take up the religions that owe their origin to the Vedas: Brahminism and the Vedanta, and the rebelling school of thought, represented by Buddhism. There are numerous other offshoots, each quite important in its own way, as *e.g.* Jainism, but for lack of time I can hardly take even a passing notice of them.

The Vedas

Of the four Vedas the Rig-Veda has been usually considered to be the most important from the religious standpoint. The Hindus claim it to be the oldest book in the world, but this is not its chief merit. It is a history of man's soul in its advance towards the infinite. If the Old Testament shows an evolution in the moral conception of God, the Rig-Veda shows an evolution in the conception of divinity itself. It represents man's effort to solve the mystery that is the universe. The tenth *Mandala* of Rig-Veda has a passage which strikes the key-note of the inquiring soul:

> "The first subtle bond connecting Entity with Nullity
> This ray that kindled dormant Life, where was it then?
> Before? or above? Were there parturient powers and latent qualities
> And fecund principles beneath and active forces
> That energised aloft? Who knows? Who can declare?
> How and from what has sprung the Universe? The Gods
> Themselves are subsequent to its development.
> Who can then penetrate the secret of its rise?
> Whether 'twas formed or not, made or not made, He only
> Who in the highest heaven sits, the Omniscient Lord,
> Assuredly knows all, or haply knows He not."

If the names of numerous gods mentioned in the Vedas can be taken as an index of their separate existence, the polytheism of the Vedas cannot be denied, nor need it be denied, as it affords evidence for its hoary antiquity and presents in its purity the worship of the different elements, and brings out in all its richness the many-sided approach of the unknown Vedic seers in their religious quest. There were the terrestrial gods, the *Vasus*, comprising *Agni* (Fire), *Prithvi* (Earth), *Soma* (a strong drink), *Yama* (death) etc. There were the atmospheric gods, the Rudras, comprising *Indra* (Sky), *Surya* (Sun), *Vayu* (Wind) etc. There were the more abstract heavenly gods, the *Adityas*, comprising *Varuna*, *Prajapati*, *Visvakarma*, *Hiranyagarbha*, etc.

Indra figured as a great Aryan God, who was worshipped as the giver of success against the hated Dasyus, who were the original Dravidian inhabitants of India. His worship has completely died out presumably because his work has been done and the Dasyus all conquered. Each of the gods has hymns addressed to him, invoking his blessings according to the varying needs of the worshipper. In course of time Varuna came to have great importance as the upholder of the moral order, *Rta*, and brought out the aspect of harmony, law and order in the universe. In this important work Varuna had as his friend and ally Mitra, who figured in Avesta too and in Roman history as in Mithraism, the last opponent that Christianity had to overcome before establishing its sway in Europe. Varuna displayed the soft forgiving nature associated with the highest monotheisms. Vishnu and Rudra were minor deities, that hardly gave any promise of their future greatness in the Hindu pantheon. The Vedas cast a sanctity on all things of value to the life of man : animals like the cow and the bull, plants, sages, ancestors, all came in for their share of worship. The *Soma* drink itself, so beloved of the gods, was looked upon as a deity and was a part of religious ritual. But the most important thing to note is the consciousness of the Vedic seers that behind all the paraphernalia of nature and its gods was some unity, as we find clearly expressed in the well-known passage :

"The one Being sages speak of in many ways; they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan".[1] The One Unborn, the One Unknown, and similar expressions tend to give a monistic tinge to the Vedic thought, and make it the forerunner of both monism and monotheism in India.

The religious value of the Vedas has changed substantially in the course of centuries. Many of the Vedic gods have been forgotten, certainly at least not worshipped. But they have continued to be looked upon as the ultimate basis of all that is religious in India. There were elements in Vedic worship which were bound sooner or later to be questioned. One such was the excessive importance given to Soma and its worship. There is a long hymn addressed to *Soma* as deified, invoking his blessings:

> "Away have fled those ailments and diseases;
> The powers of darkness have been all affrighted.
> With mighty strength in us has Soma mounted;
> We have arrived where men prolong existence.
>
> The drop drunk deeply in our hearts, O Fathers,
> Us mortal that immortal god has entered.
> That Soma we would worship with oblation;
> We would be in his mercy and good graces."[2]

Then there were animal sacrifices too. More than all this the Vedas developed a magical content as in the Atharva Veda particularly, which has in all religious history come into conflict with the pure religious feelings of mankind.

Brahminism

The Vedas developed on two main lines: the ritualistic and the philosophic. The former may well be called Brahminism for two main reasons. The Vedic texts came to be endowed with such a magical force as even to coerce gods and bring down rains from the heavens and bring about a complete fruition

[1] *Rig-Veda* 1, 164. 6.

[2] *Rig-Veda* VII, 48, 11-12 translated by A. A Macdonell.

of the devotees' wishes. They had to be recited with meticulous exactitude and numerous rites so that it became the work of specialists, and they were the Brahmins. Since they were the inevitable intermediaries between the gods and men and the well-being of all depended on them it was an easy transition for them to claim to be the gods on earth and for the people to accept their claim at its face value. We see the crystallised fullness of it in the Code of Manu and in the growing tightening of the caste system till it has broken up the Hindu society into innumerable fragments with some sixty million people on the border line who are treated as Hindus or not as Hindus according to the political exigencies or the degree of orthodoxy respectively. So much so has this been the case that if Hinduism as a religion can be said to have anything in common it is the rigid observance of the caste-rules. It is this orthodox caste-ridden Brahminism that has come to be known as *Sanatana Dharma*. It is rigid. It does not want converts and tends to be very intolerant of the slightest breaches of caste-rules, though it tolerates an expression of views so long as they are not sought to be implemented in practice. In recent years mostly due to political influences *Sanatana Dharma* has lost its original vigour, but I think it slumbers and may wake up as soon as circumstances permit. Through centuries of Indian history reformers have arisen from the time of Buddha and Mahavir right down to the days of Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Dayanand Saraswati, who have succeeded only in adding to the number of castes, and the reforming bodies themselves have usually become caste-ridden. From the purely spiritual standpoint the orthodox Brahminism is so magical on the one hand, and so narrow in its social outlook or in its ethical vision that I shall not linger on it, for an adequate treatment of it will take me far beyond into the regions of Hindu sociology and even of politics.

The Upanishads

The second line of Vedic development brings us to the Upanishads, which constitute the richest and the greatest

achievement of Hindu genius and which have deservedly placed India in the front line of the spiritual kingdom. Like all Hindu chronology it is as difficult to date exactly the Upanishads as it is to date the Vedas. That they came several centuries after the Vedas has been admitted on all hands. That they were composed by many seers and at long intervals from one another has also been accepted. The orthodox Hindu tradition includes them as a part of the Vedas. But the approach and the contents are so different that in any other country they would have been looked upon as different, marking a break with the old rather than as a continuation of the old. In the Upanishads we find a repudiation of the ritualistic and supplicatory tone of the Vedas. This we find most definitely in the *Mundaka Upanishad*, First Khanda, verses 3, to 6 :

> " Saunaka, verily indeed a great householder, approached Angiras according to rule, and asked ' Through understanding of what, pray, does all this world become understood, sir? '
>
> To him then he said. ' There are two knowledges to be known—as indeed the knowers of Brahma are wont to say: a higher (*para* and a lower (*apara*).
>
> Of these the lower is the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda the Atharva-Veda.
>
> Now the higher is that whereby that Imperishable *aksara* is apprehended.
>
> That which is invisible, ungraspable, without family, without caste (*avarna*) :—
>
> Without sight or hearing is It, without hand or foot, Eternal all-pervading, omnipresent, exceedingly subtile; That is the Imperishable, which the wise perceive as the source of beings."

The Upanishads have taken a long stride from the personal gods of the Vedas to the Imperishable It. In the Second *Mundaka* Second Khanda, verse 11, we learn :

> " Brahma, indeed, is this immortal. Brahma before,
> Brahma behind, to right and to left.
> Stretched forth below and above,
> Brahma, indeed, is this whole world, this widest extent."

[1] The translation of Upanishadic passages has been taken from *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, translated by R. E. Hume.

In the third *Mundaka*, Second Khanda, verse 9 we learn :

"He, verily, who knows that supreme Brahma, becomes very Brahma. In his family no one ignorant of Brahma arises. He crosses over sorrow. He crosses over sin (*pāpman*). Liberated from the knots of the heart, he becomes immortal."

This is the very quintessence of the Upanishadic teaching, as Anquetil Duperron noted even in the early days of oriental scholarship in Europe. His Latin translation gave it as the summary of this Upanishad : "*Quisquis Deum intellegit, Deus fit*" (Whoever knows God becomes God).[1] But this is very misleading, as the connotation of God is so markedly different from that of Brahma. For *Mundaka* definitely takes a new stride when it rises above the concept of personality and a personal God. The theist, whether in Europe or in India, has not hesitated to call this atheism, and perhaps justly too, but it is an atheism, if this term is to be used at all, which has an aroma of spirituality and a depth of outlook to which the ordinary atheists as known to the West are complete strangers.

Mundaka Upanishad has been generally looked upon by Advaitins as establishing the non-dual character of *Brahman* and the identity of *Atman* with *Brahman*. This is looked upon as the highest wisdom that man can attain, and transcending the duality involved in all knowledge, he realises or rather becomes conscious of himself as Brahman.

It is admitted on all hands that the Upanishads took some centuries to be composed and the authors were several, almost all anonymous. It would be strange indeed if such a composition presented a complete unity of doctrine without any inconsistencies or at least without markedly differing emphases. The Upanishadic teaching was by its very name esoteric and mysterious. *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad* makes it clear that "One should not tell this to one who is not a son or to one who is not a pupil" (VI. 3. 12). *Katha Upanishad* lays down that "Not by reasoning (*tarka*) is this thought (*mati*) to be attained" (II. 1. 9). They lay claim to a certain intuition, which goes

[1] Quoted by Hume, p. 377.

beyond all mere logical arguments. This has naturally exposed the Upanishads to the charge that they are not philosophy, but theology. Be it noted, however, that they are markedly free from the dogmatism that is inevitably connected with all theology. There is a sustained effort to unravel the mystery of life. Similies, analogies, metaphors, and even myths are all resorted to to lead the inquiring pupil from darkness to light, but reasoning fails because the final truth to be grasped is too deep for words. Language shares the finitude of human mind and the Ultimate that is infinite is found to be beyond the grasp of mere thought. Hence the importance of describing the ultimate in terms of *Neti, Neti.* Even the negatives serve to bring out effectually the transcending character of *Brahman.* Thought may fail to grasp the full significance of the Infinite, but it is driven to the affirmation of the Infinite, and that has been the great achievement of the Upanishads. It has laid to rest all shallow materialism and scepticism so far as India is concerned. Whether in their positive content they posit the Person as the ultimate category has been a matter of dispute, and has given rise to the main schools of Vedanta: *Advaita, Visistadvaita* and *Dvaita.* There are endless passages in the Upanishads which go to support the interpretation of Sankara. But to speak of his thought as monism is rather misleading, for he has not used the word *a-dvaita* (not-two), for nothing. *Brahman* is the all-pervading reality, unchanging, constant, eternal. It is behind all the passing show of life, but this, just because it is passing is not Reality, it is *Maya. Jaganmithya* has given rise to the interpretation of *Maya* as illusion, and the world as illusion but something that is rooted in Reality cannot be a mere illusion. The unchanging and the changing seem to be two entirely different entities and give rise to the idea of duality, but since the changing is rooted in the unchanging, it cannot be entirely different from the unchanging, and cannot be identical with it either. Thus it is not two, it is not one, it is not-two *Advaita.* The important question as to why *Maya* comes into being and its exact relation to *Brahman* are both taken to be *anirvachanya* (inexplicable), defended on the ground that meta

physics is concerned with what is, *i.e.*, truth, and we have to take the Real as we find it. *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad* in II.1.20 brings out the meaning of *satyasya satya*, the Real of the real: "As a spider might come out with his thread, as small sparks come forth from the fire, even so from this Soul come forth all vital energies (*Prana*), all worlds, all gods, all beings. The mystic meaning (*upanishad*) thereof is The Real of the real (*satyasya satya*)". Hence it is that terms like idealism and realism do not become easily applicable to Vedantic teaching. In so far as it transcends thought, it is not idealism and in so far as it denies the reality of the world it is not realism. It is just Advaita. Yājnavālkyā's discourse to his wife Maitreyi has become classic in its emphasis on the *Atman* as the Reality that is to be found in the love of the wife, the love of the sons, the love of wealth, the love of Brahmanhood, the love of Kshatrahood, the love of the worlds, the love of the gods, the love of all beings. "Lo verily, not for love of all is all dear but for the love of the Soul all is dear" (*Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad* II.4.5). The fullness of such a thought can only be brought out through the force of analogies. And few such analogies can be so striking as in *Brihad-Aranyaka* II.4.12: "It is as a lump of salt cast in water would dissolve right into the water; there would not be (any) of it to seize forth, as it were (*iva*), but wherever one may take, it is salty indeed—so, lo verily, this great Being (*bhuta*), infinite, limitless, is just a mass of knowledge." Again in the same Upanishad IV.3.7, we read: "As a man, when in the embrace of a beloved wife, knows nothing within or without, so this person when in the embrace of the intelligent Soul, knows nothing within or without."

Advaita

Is the Upanishadic teaching theistic? If by theism we mean, as it certainly does in English, a belief in a personal God, the Upanishads are *prima facie* not theistic. Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya give a theistic interpretation of the Upani-

shads. The Gita gives its support to it. We shall deal with this in the next lecture, confining ourselves at present to the Advaita Vedanta, and from this standpoint the Upanishads technically are atheistic, but atheism has such an evil odour in its association with European thought, that it fails to bring out the essentially spiritual character of *Advaita Vedanta*. It rises above the level of prayers, and it raises man to a level of thought where all distinctions vanish and the *Atman* within the individual stands revealed as the *Atman* that is in the whole universe. *Isa Upanishad* bears witness to the moral implications of this doctrine: "Who sees all beings in himself and himself in all beings—he will dislike none" (verse 6). No wonder if Deussen becomes lyrical in his praise of Vedanta and speaks of it "in its unfalsified form" as "the strongest support of pure morality," and one can appreciate his advice: "Indians, keep to it." But it behoves a serious student to pause and consider the implications of this thought from the standpoint of morals and religion.

The highest theism looks upon God in the highest ethical terms. God is good and to say anything that contradicts this would be taken as naked and unabashed blasphemy. It is claimed for Vedanta at least in its Advaitic form that it transcends not merely all the limitations of thought, but even of morality. "That great birthless Self which is identified with the intellect and is in the midst of the organs, lies in the ether which is within the heart. It is the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all. It does not become better through good work nor worse through bad work."[1] This is perfectly logical and intelligible with reference to the *Atman* in its universal sense, but it is apt to be misleading with reference to an individual ego as *atman*. In the life of Hindu humanity it has given rise to a perversity of teaching that one who has realised Brahman cannot be tainted by anything immoral, and as being above morality he can be immoral with

[1] *Brihad-Aranyaka*, IV. 4.22 translated by Swami Madhavananda. Dr. Hume's use of He" rather than of "It" is misleading with reference to Atman.

impunity. Moral purity is undoubtedly the basis on which the *jnani* must proceed in his quest for truth, but when he is said to be above moral good and evil, there is a danger of its abuse. There is another sense in which one may use the phrase *above-good-and-evil*. It would refer to that equanimity of mind that rises above all the joys and sorrows of life, and this brings in the danger of indifference to all the rich drama of life. This brings us nearer to a very important question as to the significance of *Advaita Vedanta* for the day-to-day life of ordinary mortals.

In the Vedas we see a joy in life, in the beauties of nature, in the will to propagate and to enjoy the good things of life. The prayers addressed to the gods are all earthly and bear witness to the fine youth of humanity: exuberant in imagining gods, lively in enjoying the sweets of life. The Upanisads by contrast are stern and austere. They have no place for the frivolities of life. There is a deep desire to rise above all the ills of life and to attain *moksha*: freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. Kahola, the son of Kushitaka, asked Yajnavalkya to explain the Brahman that is immediate and direct and the self that is within all, and Yajnavalkya replied: "That which transcends hunger and thirst, grief, delusion, decay and death. Knowing this very Self the Brahmans renounce the desire for sons, for wealth and for the worlds, and lead a mendicant life. That which is the desire for sons is the desire for wealth, and that which is the desire for wealth is the desire for the worlds, for both these are but desires. Therefore, the knower of Brahman, having known all about scholarship, should try to live upon that strength which comes of knowledge; having known all about this strength as well as scholarship, he becomes meditative; having known all about meditativeness and its opposite, he becomes a knower of Brahman. How does that knower of Brahman behave? Howsoever he may behave he is just such. Except this everything is perishable."[2] *Mundaka Upanishad* throws scorn on all who follow such "unsafe boats" as the Vedas and the sacrificial forms. "The fools who approve that

as the better, go again to old age and death " (I.2.7). The very anxiety to escape all the cycles of life implies clearly that life is not worth living and that it would be far better if we could bid it good-bye. In popular parlance this means pessimism. But a *jnani* would argue that pessimism would imply the worthlessness of life as the last word, whereas the Upanishadic teaching takes us far beyond all the ills of life :

> " From the unreal lead me to the real !
> From darkness lead me to light !
> From death lead me to immortality !"

Thus runs the famous prayer and to call this pessimism would indeed be a travesty of words. Nor can it be correctly called optimism, if by optimism is meant a cheerful view of life as we find in the Vedas. Swami Nikhilananda is very assertive when he says : " Vedanta has nothing to do with pessimism or optimism, or any 'ism' for the matter of that. It only teaches truth."[1] We need not quarrel about words and we accept the position that the Upanisads are neither optimistic nor pessimistic. But the question ceases to be a matter of words when we raise the question : what is the attitude to life inculcated by the Upanisads or more particularly by *Advaita Vedanta*? If the knowledge of life is the highest thing in life, Sankara's insistence on *jnana* as the means to *moksha* cannot but be accepted. It may also be conceded to Sankara that he does recognise morality as the prius of all *jnana*. But it would mean that an ethical life would not by itself lead to *moksha*. It would conduce to a better or higher life and lead to a better birth in the next life as a reward. A good moral life, however, by itself cannot lead to *moksha*, if *jnana* alone leads to it. Sankara's *Advaitism* has so captured the imagination of the world both in India and the West with its daring and relentless logic that Indian thought has often presented itself to its critics as a cold bleak system void of those

[1] P. xxxv of his Preface to his translation of *Mandukyopanishad*.

softer nuances that distinguish theism at its best. A system of thought so rigorous as Sankara's would for ever remain a closed book to all but a few *jnanis*, and if these few in each generation took such a detached view of life as to be insensible to the good and evil alike in it, it would not make much difference to the work-a-day world, which would jog along with its petty successes and failures but without any improvement.

It is difficult to look upon Sankara as a reformer except that his logic drove out of existence a decadent Buddhism and led to a revival of old Hindu religious and social practices. His logic had room only for the *Nirguna Brahman*, that can neither be worshipped nor pleased nor appeased with fruits or animals. A mere emphasis on *Nirguna Brahman* would have made short work of all religion and brought down the ethics of *karma* from its pedestal and one can well imagine the resulting chaos in life, when every knave could have laid claim to be an adept in understanding *Tat tvam asi* and posed as being above all moral good and evil. That this danger was easily foreseen is clear from the very secrecy in which the Upanishadic lore was sought to be preserved from the unworthy. For the rank and file Sankara was content to come down from his heights and introduce the *Saguna Brahman*, the qualified as against the qualitiless *Brahman* of the *jnani*, just for the sake of the masses: something concrete to worship and to satisfy the ignorant, for in actual fact the *Saguna Brahman* or *Iswara* is as much a part of *Maya* as anything else in this fleeting world of ignorance. One can understand this attitude of mind, but it is rather surprising that Sankara should have done so much to strengthen the Siva worship and to establish four *mutts* in all the four directions of this vast continent: Sringeri in the south, Puri in the east, Joshi in the north and Dwarka in the west. These *mutts* have worked for centuries as the bulwark of orthodox Brahminism with full emphasis on caste and its appendage of the untouchables and even unapproachables. It remains an open question whether the annihilation of the degenerate Buddhism was not purchased at too heavy a price: the re-establishment of a high philosophy for the few and the complex paraphernalia of popular

worship for the masses, neither of which took note of the supremacy of ethical life, the one subordinating it to knowledge and the other to the ritualism of religion. Buddha seemed to have lived in vain so far as India was concerned. This attitude of observing Dharma in terms of caste duties ensured the working of the social machinery, but Hindu ethics has missed through the ages the burning passion of curing social evils and that breath of universal love which have distinguished Buddhism and Christianity at their best. The distinction which Sankara made between the *paramarthika* and the *vyavaharika* served to give a semblance of consistency to the conflicting demands of high philosophy and mundane life. Even so erudite a member of the Ramakrishna Mission as Swami Nikhilananda sees no discrepancy in this and quotes the authority of Ramakrishna Parmahamsa himself: "Perform your work keeping always the knowledge of Advaita in your pocket."[1] Professor Hiriyanna gives the imprimatur of his wide and discerning scholarship by saying: "Practical utility need not rest on metaphysical validity."[2] If this were to be pressed far enough, it would lead to a very dangerous position, for placing metaphysical truth beyond ethics would tempt a man to think that an intellectual belief need not be lived up to, and the dualism of life and thought would be complete.

I have had to take note of the Advaitic aspect of the Upanishads as expounded by Sankara, for in him we find the best example of a supra-ethical intellectualism. Needless to say that the exposition of the meaning of the Upanishads had not to wait for the birth of Sankara a thousand years later. They must have been known by many, even though not fully expounded. Their high position as the Vedas themselves must have ensured their general authority, if not popularity with people at large. But their very secrecy and esoteric character brought about a revolt and the leader of that revolt was Gautama Buddha.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

[2] *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, p. 377.

Buddha

In the histories of Indian philosophy Buddhism and Jainism have both been treated as heretical schools, for both repudiated the authority of the Vedas and the Upanishads. The conflict between Buddhism and orthodox Brahminism continued for a thousand years. With the eclectic genius of the Hindu mind an attempt was made to include Buddhism within the Hindu fold by making Buddha one of the *avatars* of Vishnu, but even so Buddha remained a stranger within the fold. His followers were finally won over by the dialectical genius of Sankara. On the whole, it would be true to say that Buddha's approach to the problems of life and of philosophy was miles away from the Upanishads, and in sober history Buddha must be treated as a great and noble rebel against the Vedic and the Upanishadic tradition in Indian philosophy.

In recent years an attempt has been made both by western scholars and by Indian historians of Indian Philosophy like Professor Radhakrishnan to show that Buddha was no revolutionary, and that his thinking was a mere continuation of the Upanishadic tradition and that the Buddhistic *Nirvana*, far from being *sunya* (nothing) had a positive content and approximated to the *Sat-Chit-Anandam* of the Upanishadic seers. The attempt is ingenious, but does not carry conviction. It is impossible to get over the fundamental difference between the Upanishadic outlook on life and that of Buddha. The Upanishads are fundamentally metaphysical, Buddha's teaching is fundamentally ethical. This is something unique in the history of India and this is what really distinguishes Buddha from all that preceded him or from most of them that have come after him.

Buddha was born a Hindu and brought up as a Hindu. There are therefore certain Hindu conceptions which were as native to him as to any other Hindu. Such were the doctrines of *karma* and transmigration of soul, which he never gave up, though his attempt to do away with soul as a substratum of *karma* was a brilliant failure. Early in life he believed in the

efficacy of *tapas* (austerity) and tried this way to attain enlightenment. But he found it a failure and gave it up. The exquisite pen-picture that he has given of his unsuccessful attempt is worth noting especially for the vigorous protest that he registers against ascetic mortification of body :

> " I remember when a crab-apple was my only daily food. I remember when a single grain of rice was my only daily food. And by only partaking of a single grain of rice a day as my food, my body became extremely thin and lean; like dried-up withered reeds became my arms and legs; my hips like a camel's hoof; like a pleat of hair my spine. As project the rafters of a house's roof, so raggedly stuck out my ribs. As in a deep-lying brook the watery mirror beneath appears so small as almost to disappear, so in the deep hollows of my eye-pits my eye-balls well-nigh wholly disappeared As a gourd becomes shrivelled up and hollow in the hot sun, so did the skin of my head become parched and withered. And pressing my stomach, my hand touched my spine, and feeling my spine, my hand felt through to the stomach in front. And when I rubbed my limbs the hair upon them came out rotten at the roots. And yet with all this rigorous mortification I came no jot nearer to the rich supernatural felicity of clearness of knowledge."

His truly revolutionary character with reference to the Hindu tradition comes out in his repudiation of rituals, caste and metaphysics, and his insistence on good life alone as qualifying for *Nirvana* as an escape from the cycle of births and deaths.

We have already noted in an earlier lecture the tendency in the Hindu mind of intense loyalty to the written text. In *Anguttara* Buddha is reported to have said : "Do not accept what you hear by report, do not accept tradition, do not accept a statement because it is found in our books, nor because it is found in accord with your belief, nor because it is the saying of your teacher."

The ritualism of the Hindus left him cold. On hearing a Brahmin praise the virtues of the Bahuka river as capable of washing away the sins of sinners, Buddha said :

> "The Bahuka, the Adhika, cannot purify the fool of his sin, bathe he himself ever so often. . . . No river can cleanse the doer of evil,

> the man of malice, the perpetrator of crime. To the pure it is ever the holy month of Phaggu. To the pure it is always a perpetual fast. To the man of good deeds it is a vow everlasting. Have thy bath here, even here, O Brahmin, be kind to all beings. If thou speakest not false, if thou killest not life, if thou takest not what is given thee, secure in self-denial—what wouldst thou gain by going to Gaya ? Any water is Gaya to thee."[1]

He did not believe that spirit can be exalted by neglecting the body, as was often taken for granted both in the early history of Christianity and elsewhere. On Buddha's authority we have it that "To keep the body in good health is a duty. Otherwise we cannot trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our minds strong and clear. Water surrounds the lotus flower, but does not wet its petals."[2] And again : " The lamp that is not cleansed and not filled with oil will be extinguished ; and a body that is unkempt, unwashed and weakened by penance will not be a fit receptacle for the light of truth."[3]

The Hindu mind is nothing if not metaphysical. Nowhere does the originality of Buddha's mind come out so vigorously as in his studied attempts to eschew metaphysics. It may be a matter of dispute among scholars whether Buddha was an atheist or an agnostic. But there can be no dispute about the fact that God or gods do not find a place in his system of thought. As against the perpetual reliance on gods to which the average man tends, Buddha did not hesitate to lay all his weight on self-help : " Therefore be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge unto yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast the truth as a lamp. Look not for refuge to any one besides yourselves."

Buddha's lack of interest in metaphysical inquiries is abundantly clear. Perhaps having the metaphysical disquisitions of the Upanishads in mind, and feeling their futility from the standpoint of ordinary man or of ordinary life he studiously avoided getting into a metaphysical quagmire. The story of

[1] Laksminarsu : *Essence of Buddhism*, p. 230.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Vacchagotta is very pertinent in this connection. He approached Buddha with the question: "How does the matter stand, venerable Gautama? is there the ego ?" Silence was the only reply he got. He varied the question: "How does the matter stand ? Is there not the ego ?" Stony silence was again all he got, and he departed. Ananda as a good and loyal disciple ventured to ask the significance of this silence and he had the satisfaction of getting a reply: "If I had said there is an ego I would have confirmed the belief in the permanence of what is transient. If I had said there is no ego it would have confirmed the belief in annihilation." [1] The spirit of this reply is well brought out in the words of the Chinese mystic, Lao Tsu: "He who knows the way cares not to speak of it. He who is ever ready to discuss it does not know it."

Buddha's teaching had a metaphysics—or at least certain metaphysical implications—but he was never very explicit about it. He tried to do without the unity of soul in his doctrine of *anatta* and tried to illustrate the possibility of rebirth of *karmas* rather than of soul through his brilliant simile of one torch lighting another. Similarly his treatment of *Nirvana* was far from clear. Attempts have been recently made to show how both these conceptions of Buddha become intelligible only if taken in the light of Upanishadic teaching. I am inclined to accept this, but I shall not linger on it as it would take us far afield into metaphysics. What is of importance to note is that *Nirvana*, whether interpreted positively or negatively, is the goal to be attained through an ethical life—not through *jnana*, not through *karma* as religious ritual, not through the mystic devotion to a god outside us. In all his teaching it is ethics that stands out supreme and that was his greatest contribution to human history. And his quest for love constitutes his greatest importance in the history of morality.

Buddha gave a new meaning to asceticism when he declared "I preach asceticism inasmuch as I preach the burning away of all conditions of the heart that are evil. One who does so is

[1] L. Adams Beck: *The Story of Oriental Philosophy*, p. 173.

a pure ascetic." In exalted language he declares the glory of the moral man : " The odour of flowers travels not against the wind, nor that of a sandal, nor the fragrant powder of frankincenese or jasmine, but the sweet odour of good men travels with the wind and against it." He pointed to the path of morality as the Middle Path, which gave five commandments in the negative : not to kill, not to steal, not to be unchaste, not to lie and not to drink intoxicants. More positively put is the Noble Eightfold Path enunciated by him : rightness in views, aspirations, speech, behaviour, livelihood, effort, mindfulness and concentration. There is nothing in all this which we do not find in all the other great religions as well, whether in India or outside. But at the time that he preached his thoughts they came with all the freshness of spring to the India that had been lost in ritualism and petty caste observances.

Usually so sympathetic a student of things Indian as Dr. Albert Schweitzer finds a flaw in Buddha's ethical teaching that it is incomplete, that his compassion is limited by his life and world negation. "Nowhere does the Master demand that because all life is suffering man should strive, in so far as is possible, to bring help to every human being and to every living thing. He only commands the avoidance of pitiless actions."[1] It is difficult to accept the cogency of this criticism in the face of the whole life of Buddha, which was nothing, if not marked by a deep and genuine compassion for the whole of suffering humanity. His message was taken up in its fullness by Asoka and by the Mahayana School with its development of the conception of the Bodhisatvas postponing their Buddhahood because of their will to be of maximum use to humanity. Dr. Schweitzer himself quotes several fine passages from Mahayana as testifying to the spirit of active compassion which he fails to find in Buddha. He, however, loses sight of the main fact that drove the Prince of the Sakhyas to leave his princely heritage, his loving father, his beautiful wife, his beloved son, and all for seeking enlightenment not for himself

[1] *Indian Thought and Its Development*, p. 103.

but for all mankind. "*Buddho bhaveyam jagato hitaya,*" said the Master : For the good of the world will I be enlightened.

From the standpoint of India the most dominant characteristic of his ethical teaching is his revolt against caste. In an age when the highest teachers as in the Upanishads spoke in mystic language, afraid that their teachings would go to people of lower castes unworthy of philosophic training and in a country where the keys to the higher life, whether in the present birth or next birth, were rigidly kept in the hands of Brahmins, the significance of Buddha's revolt against caste cannot be over-emphasised. It is admitted that so far as the monks were concerned, men, and later women too, of varied castes and occupations became zealous converts to Buddha's fold. Rhys Davids in his Introduction to *Ambhatta Sutta* notes the varied people who became monks or nuns : Upali a barber, Sunita of a low tribe, Sati a fisher-woman, Nanda a cowherd, and so the list could be multiplied. But it is argued even by so enlightened a Hindu as Professor Radhakrishnan that Buddha did not attack caste as an institution and that in fact caste flourished as much among the Buddhists as among the Hindus. The latter fact is unfortunately true, for the poison of caste is so deeprooted in the Hindu soul that no religion and no people that have come to India have escaped its contamination. The Hindu communities like the Khojas and the Memons and Bohras that became converts to Islam are still caste-ridden to a considerable extent. It is worse among the Indian Christians especially in South India, where Brahmin Christians constitute a caste by themselves and see to it that even in the Church they are not defiled by the touch of the Pariah Christians. But it would be utterly false to argue that either Mahomed or Christ countenanced caste. The same must be said of Buddha. The Hindu converts to Buddha's way of life brought their heritage with them and it was only a matter of time when metaphysical discussions flourished galore once again, naturally at the cost of that vivifying touch of ethics which was so peculiarly Buddha's own. Similarly caste consciousness was as strong among the Buddhists as among the Hindus. Nevertheless it is true that Buddha did not countenance

caste. He explicitly said : " I have preached the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrines, for in respect of the truths, Ananda, the Tathaghata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher who keeps something back." His injunction to his disciples when he sent them forth is quite explicit : " Go into all lands and preach this gospel. Tell them that the poor and the lowly, the rich and high, are all one, and that all castes unite in this religion as do the rivers in the sea." And again : " My doctrine is like the sky. There is room for all without exception : men, women, boys, girls, poor and rich." In the *Dhammapada* he gives an ethical interpretation of the Brahmin as in the Gita and in the same strain as Yudhisthira does in the Mahabharata, with this difference that Buddha practised what he preached, whereas in orthodox Brahminism lip service is rendered to the Brahmin by qualities, while for all practical purposes it is the Brahmin by birth that alone counts.

> "He who is thoughtful, blameless, settled, dutiful, without passion and who has attained the highest end, him I call indeed a Brahmana.
>
> Him I call a Brahmana who does not offend by body, word or thought, and is controlled on these three points.
>
> A man does not become a Brahmana by his plaited hair, by his family or by birth. In whom there is truth and righteousness, he is blessed, he is a Brahmana.
>
> I do not call a man a Brahmana because of his origin or of his mother. He is indeed arrogant and he is wealthy ; but the poor who is free from all attachments, him I call indeed a Brahmana."

In the *Amagandha Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata* it is stated explicitly that defilement does not come from eating this or that, but from evil deeds and words and thoughts. That Buddha failed to annihilate caste in India was not so much his misfortune as of India. That he succeeded in softening its rigour must be laid down to his credit. In the temple of Jagannath at Puri there is no caste distinction. Would it be an unjustifiable flight of fancy if we find a reason for this rare catholicity in the fact that there was a temple of Buddha there ?

There now remain two general questions to be considered before we come to the end of our presentation of Buddhism: What is the place of Buddhism in the history of religion and what is its place in the evolution of Indian culture?

If by religion is meant a belief in a personal God, it is certainly questionable whether the teaching of Buddha himself can be taken to be religious. He neither asserts nor denies the existence of God and we can legitimately conclude that God occupies no central place in his thought. Buddha's doctrine is certainly a philosophy, a way of life, an ethic, not a religion in the usual sense of the term. But with the death of Buddha and in the absence of his powerful personality his followers must have found it difficult to face the metaphysical onslaughts of veteran Hindu metaphysicians. Buddhism came to be inevitably involved in metaphysical discussions and came to develop schools of thought with which we are not directly concerned. What does concern us here is the development of Mahayana Buddhism, which came to deify Buddha and thus transformed an ethical philosophy into a full-fledged theism. The transformation of the untheistic, if not atheistic, teaching of Buddha into a theistic philosophy with its concomitant theology and ritual constitutes a remarkable chapter in the history of religion, and throws a flood of light on the psychology of religion. That Mahayana traces its inspiration to the spoken words of Buddha cannot be denied. Whether the theistic structure of Mahayana can be justified as legitimate certainly remains an open question. Ritualism invariably blunts the edge of morality and very soon Buddhism lost that zest of a crusade against the empty pretensions of caste, and it is no wonder that caste came to be tolerated within the Buddhist Church as much as it has been within Islam and Christianity in India. Buddha was the last person to claim divinity for himself. He did not even claim to be a prophet of God. He only claimed to be a Tathagata who caused a way to appear—a way that had not appeared before. "I am only a way-shower, and you as wayfarers must walk in the way of your own choosing". It is an odd tragedy too that the teacher who taught the utterly transient character of our body should have

even his teeth worshipped in costly temples and have his own effigies worshipped. The development of the doctrine of the Bodhisatvas made it possible for the old popular polytheism to reassert itself. The Hinduisation of Buddha became complete when he came to be looked upon as an *avatar* of Vishnu. What Buddhism lost as a religion Brahminism gained in prestige. Professor Radhakrishnan puts it not as a defeat or expulsion of Buddhism from India but as an absorption. If it was absorption, it was absorbing Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. Verily Buddha could say: *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

Was the birth of Buddhism in India a gain, and its death in India a loss to India ? Most Indians would accept the first part of the question, though there are some who find in Buddhism the birth of pessimism and loss of the joy of life which marked the great Vedic hymns. That Buddha did emphasise suffering and to that extent was pessimistic need not be denied. But we have already seen the note of sadness in the Upanishadic seers and so he was certainly not the originator of it. It could be argued that if Buddhism spoiled the spirit of India, its exit was a distinct advantage. And that is what most Hindus would say, especially as it is claimed that Brahminism under Buddha's influence shed the animal sacrifices and adopted Ahimsa as its ethical ideal. This may be a gain but it is impossible to lose sight of the fact that the original ethical impulse in Buddha did not long survive him, and the Buddhist and the Brahmin were content to argue about it and about till old religious superstitions revived and had a longer lease of life. Years ago in my student days I had the good fortune to listen to a lecture by the late Mr. G. K. Gokhale, one of the greatest and noblest figures India has produced in recent years. I shall never forget the force with which he pointed out the great weakness of us Indians that we lack in "righteous indignation," that we let sleeping dogs lie even when they should be roused to life. This explains why the great social evils in the decadent Brahminism could not move the Hindu soul and therefore could not rouse it to a sustained burning passionate zest for reform.

Patriotism apart we would have to admit the truth in Matthew Arnold's famous lines :

> " The East bow'd low before the blast
> In patient deep disdain.
> She let the legions thunder past,
> And plunged in thought again."

That there is something grand in this disdainful attitude of the great rishis may not be denied. Alexander felt it even at the moment of his triumph and countless others have felt this strange fascination, but such an attitude does not necessarily make for raising the level of a society, and we know how true it is of India. We may admit that the popularly known Hinduism has absorbed many features of Buddha's teaching, but in so far as it has not absorbed that ethical impulse and that ethical compassion and love which marked Buddha, it would be true to say that India has exiled Buddha. We may admire and even stand in silent adoration before the beautiful statue of Buddha at Ajanta or at Buddha-Gaya, but it can only be with a tinge of sorrow that his message did not find a native congenial soil in his own country.[1] Asoka was but one exception that proved the rule.

How rapidly the message of Buddha got tainted in India is vouched for by the rapid decay of the monastic orders that Buddha had brought into existence, not to be nurseries of idleness but to serve as missionaries who could go abroad and spread the message of the Noble Eightfold Path. He had meant it for men only, but the chivalry of Ananda got over his native shrewdness and he permitted the inclusion of women too in nunneries, and that hastened the decay of true religion, even as he had foreseen. This can be seen in an interesting passage in Sinha and Basu's *History of Prostitution in India* :

> "No doubt the Bhikkus and the Bhikkhunis were held in high esteem by the lay people, though in some cases the former presumed too much on this veneration. Once a Bhikkhu went to the house of a lay lady Suppabha and asked her for alms. She had nothing

[1] This topic has been dealt with at fuller length in my paper on *Buddha as a Revolutionary Force in Indian Culture* published in *Philosophy* of The Royal Institute of Philosophy, London, April, 1948.

valuable to give except her body which she cheerfully offered for the gratification of the monk. Sometimes women of fashion invited stout Bhikkus to yield them a variety of carnal pleasures; and the latter took advantage of the implication that since they were not nuns, sexual congress with them would not amount to a violation of the canon law. So they always took every such opportunity by the forelock."[1]

The subject-matter of this lecture has brought out the fact how India has played a unique part in developing a spiritual attitude on the basis of truth, and achieved a magnificent success. But this success was deliberately confined to a few by the Upanishadic seers. And when Buddha sought to make it the common property of all mankind the effort was not sustained by his successors and the ethical impulse was lost and Buddha's democracy in religion and his love became but a memory to India and had to seek a more congenial soil in the far-off East.

China has played no particular rôle in the history of religion, for with her devotion to the "Good Earth", her simple homely virtues of industry and thrift and devotion to the family, she developed her culture under the inspiration of Confucius. But she missed the glow of religious fervour and found it only when Buddha already deified found a new home in Chinese hearts. In spite of the old absolutism in government China has always been intensely democratic in her outlook and life, and the gospel of Buddha suited her psychology. If to-day we look upon Buddhism as a world religion and as a rival to Christianity and Islam, it is only because the Chinese and the Japanese and the South-Eastern Asiatics have held fast by the Dhamma of Buddha and kept alive the memory of Buddha the Compassionate.

LECTURE VI

Religion as a Quest for Love

Bhagwad Gita

In the last lecture I pointed out that the advaitic interpretation of the Upanishads was not the only possible interpretation, that there was possible also a theistic interpretation, and this was done by Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya. Both developed the view that the individual *atmans* were not completely identical with the *Paratman,* but they were dependent on it and found their full fruition in a mystic rapport with the *Paratman,* conceived as the only and supreme God. This development has been generally associated with the worship of Vishnu, and Vaishnavism has had a tremendous vogue in all parts of India, but it is not so much the philosophy of it, as rather the *bhakti* or devotional aspect of it that has generally held the field. This characteristic has been attributed to the immense influence of Bhagavad Gita. It does not claim to be esoterically philosophical like the Upanishads. Its appeal is essentially popular and its dramatic setting as a part of the Mahabharata has always had a fascinating appeal for all in India : the learned and the simple alike. Its language is comparatively simple, and its thoughts taken each by itself are quite simple. The trouble arises when we are faced with contradictions. It is impossible to let them exist in watertight compartments, and if they are to be harmonised into a coherent whole, the commentator becomes inevitable. The highest luminaries among Hindus have tried their hand at it, the great founders of the Vedanta systems as well as countless scholars have felt called upon to expound the Gita. No book of the Hindus has received such lavish praise as the Gita, which Sir Edwin Arnold's genius has made famous as *The Song Celestial.* If the commentaries have not all proved to be illuminating, they have served

to bring out the extreme complexity of the Gita thought, as has been frankly admitted by Professor D. S. Sarma in his *Lectures on the Gita* :[1] "Even with all the helps that we have, we have to admit that the Gita as a whole is rather irregular. It is irregular as the mountains are irregular, as the forests are irregular, as the ocean is irregular. The fact of the matter is that it is a poem, a collection of songs—not a work of theology or philosophy. Its appeal is to the whole man and not to his isolated logical understanding. The Gita touches our hearts, convinces our minds, and shapes our wills. It covers the whole way of man's pilgrimage to the feet of God." If such be the Gita, no wonder if men of diverse temperaments have read it and read into it what their hearts most desired. Such is the vitality of a great book and the Gita with its varied strands of thought has always challenged the intellectual Hindu to think for himself, and this service is most needed in a community so conservative as the Hindus. It has to be said that if the Upanishads best bear the advaitic interpretation, the Gita has distinctly a very strong bias in favour of theism. Krishna, the divine charioteer, focuses in Himself the spiritual aspirations of millions of Hindus, and calls upon all to seek refuge in Him and be purged of their sins. He reveals Himself as the Redeemer. But unlike the Prophets of the other great monotheisms he does not merely propound his doctrines. He is willing to enter into arguments and carry conviction to Arjuna, who represents in himself the curious inquirer into the mysteries and conundrums of life. It is surprising how in our own times we have had a plethora of books on the Gita and how each differs from the other. It will suffice if I briefly refer to three great interpretations that have appeared during the last generation.

Bal Gangadhar Tilak the great scholar has been completely over-shadowed by his achievements as Lokmanya Tilak in his crowded political life, but his *Gita Rahasya* has become a key to the political life of Maharashtra certainly, and even perhaps of

[1] P. 19.

India. He speaks of the Gita as *Karma-Yoga-Sastra*, and he can never forget the military setting of Kurukshetra and the divine injunction to Arjuna to fight. *Karma* as action, not merely the *karma* as religious rituals, becomes the key-note of his interpretation. He accepts the place of *jnana* and *bhakti* in life, but both are subordinated to the imperious demands of active life. "I differ from almost all the commentators", says he, "when I say that the Gita enjoins Action, even after the perfection in *Jnana* and *Bhakti* is attained and the Deity is reached through these mediums." He even goes to the length of saying: "*Jnana-Yoga* there is, yes. *Bhakti-Yoga* there is, yes. Who says not? But they are both subservient to the *Karma-Yoga* preached in the Gita."[1] If it came to his choosing he would rather keep the first three chapters of the Gita, for they are an exhortation to Arjuna to act, whereas the other chapters lead to metaphysical discussions. I still remember how at Cambridge years ago my friend, Mr. Sri Prakash, the High Commissioner for India in Pakistan, young as he then was, deplored the fact that the virile Gita had become the book of the Europeans, while the New Testament had become the book of the Hindus. Perhaps he found his inspiration in Lokmanya.

We have to turn to Gandhiji to find how he puts a different meaning into the same three chapters. Gandhiji too has been a great *Karma-Yogin*,[2] but he refuses to take the battle-field of Kurukshetra literally. He sees in it only a spiritual battle-field: "under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring." This was what he felt in 1888-89 when he was only in his teens. Since then he has attained the stature of a world teacher and he is all the more convinced that the Gita is the book on *Ahimsa* or non-violence.

More of a thinker than either Tilak or Gandhiji, Aurobindo Ghosh, the Sage of Pondicherry, in his *Essays on the Gita* as

[1] *Gita-Rahasya or the Science of Karma-Yoga*, Vol. I, p. XXV.

[2] *Vide* my *Presidential Address* to the Indian Philosophical Congress at Dacca in 1930, dealing with Gandhiji as a thinker.

in his more recent book *The Life Divine* gives a definitely spiritual meaning to Gita, in which *jnana*, *bhakti* and *karma* find their own significance, unified in the total personality of man as the eternal *Avatar* of the Divine in the inner heart of man. He looks upon the Gita as asking all "to give up all *dharmas* except the one broad and vast rule of living consciously in the Divine and acting from that consciousness." While Tilak seeks to find in the Gita a justification of his own political career, Aurobindo takes a different view: "That which the Gita teaches is not a human, but a divine action; not the performance of social duties, but the abandonment of other standards of duty or conduct for a selfless performance of the divine will, working through our nature; not social service, but the action of the Best, the God-possessed, the Master-Men, done impersonally for the sake of the world, and as a sacrifice to Him who stands behind man and nature."[1]

Verily when great minds differ, the humble are more than ever perplexed, and the best thing they can do is to leave the commentators alone and go straight to the words of the Master, Krishna himself, and draw what inspiration they can from his words. What each man chooses will in the last resort be a matter of his temperament, and he will have to decide for himself whether he will approach Lord Krishna through actions, or devotion or knowledge. Perhaps he will find that the Lord needs all three, for each by itself will be incomplete. If man is to realise his full destiny he must show how in his life all his actions proceed from a sense of devotion to God, but if this devotion has to escape caprice it will have to be based on knowledge. Thus does the Gita justify itself not merely as a great book on morality and religion but also as a great book on philosophy as well.

In Hindu culture there is no more perplexing figure than Krishna. There is the Krishna of Brindavan, of the Gopis, the flute player, who wins the hearts of all by his pranks as by his music and his looks. There is a good deal in it which

[1] *Essays on the Gita.*

frankly repels the man of austere morals or of puritanical religion. There is the Krishna of Hindu mystic poetry, in which he stands out in all his fullness as the embodiment of divinity. This is the Krishna we find in the Alvars and the *Bhakti* poets of the Middle Ages. There is the Krishna of the Gita standing forth as a world teacher, the perfected type of the divine in man. There is the Krishna of religion showing in his own life the evolution of human life: his various *avatars* as fish, tortoise, boar, man-lion, then as dwarf Vaman to put down Bali, Parasuram as the destroyer of Kshatriyas, Ramchandra and Krishna. Later generations have made Buddha too an Avatar of Vishnu, and his last Avatar is yet in the womb of the future as Kalki. Of all these Avatars Rama and Krishna figure most in Hindu folklore: Rama as the righteous self-sacrificing son, Krishna as the divine teacher that brought the battle of Kurukshetra to a successful issue for the Pandavas. Hindu religious poetry is replete with references to these tales which compass all times and all forms of divinity.

The Krishna of the Gita is the Krishna *par excellence* for the serious thinker. It is the Hindu contribution to the world, in which the whole thought of previous centuries is fused and presented as a whole. Partisans will emphasise different aspects of it. But behind all the irregularity in its structure and its language there is a plan in it and it has to be unravelled.

True to its setting the Gita begins with an exaltation of action, performed in the spirit of *dharma* and without an eye to rewards.[1] This conception of *Nishkam Karma* is one of the most original contributions of the Gita to ethics. The orthodox have identified the *dharma* of a man with the duties of the caste in which he is born, but this is against the spirit of the Gita, for it distinctly lays down that caste is not a matter of birth, it is essentially a matter of the *gunas* that a man has in himself. In IV 13 Krishna declares that he made the four castes on the basis of *guna* and *karma*. That this is not a matter of birth is made clear in XVIII 41-45, where the qualities of each caste are

[1] *Gita* III. 8.

specifically laid down. The ethical significance of this is brought out all the more clearly in the Mahabharata where we read: "Not birth, not sacrament, not learning make one *dvija* (twice-born), but righteous conduct alone makes it so." Dharmaraja himself says in the same epic: "A Brahmin is not to be known as such merely by his name or from the accident of birth, nor is a Sudra by his. Where virtue and righteous conduct is found, there is the Brahmana. A Sudra is he who is without them". The Sanatana-Dharmists look upon the Gita as authoritative for continuing the caste system in its present form, but they are true more to the letter than to the spirit of the text. The fallacy arises because of their naive assumption that a man born in a particular caste has necessarily the qualities attributed to that caste, but even a most elementary survey of individuals would go to show how the Brahminic qualities are lacking in many born Brahmins and are present in men of other castes. The ethical basis of caste is usually forgotten and that is why the caste system in India has developed into something monstrous in its rigidity and in its attitude towards the Panchamas or the Mlechchas.

Actions performed in the spirit of detachment become only possible if the doer has the faith that he is but an instrument of divine will and that by his actions he is furthering the divine purpose. Such is the promise held out by Sri Krishna in IX 32: "Taking refuge in Me, they also, O son of Pritha, who might be of inferior birth—women, Vaishyas, as well as Sudras—even they attain to the Supreme Goal". This is the basis of that *Bhakti* which has been one of the most distinctive contributions of India to the religious growth of mankind. Just as Sri Krishna extends his benevolent protection to all irrespective of caste, so too his numerous Bhaktas hold fast to that faith and achieve off and on a democracy, especially in Chaitanya, to which the spirit of caste is a complete stranger.

But *Bhakti* by itself develops only an emotional attitude of mere faith and Sri Krishna launches into a philosophic disquisition to support that faith and give it a rational foundation. This is a very distinctive feature of the Gita in the theistic literature of the world. Whether it supports the Advaitic interpretation of

Sankara or the theistic interpretation of Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya will remain a matter of opinion. But it is impossible to overlook the strong theistic aroma of the Gita. Those great verses—IV 6, 7, 8—in which Sri Krishna holds out the promise that at all times when *Dharma* declines and *Adharma* flourishes he will be born again and again to protect the good and destroy the wicked, have served as beacon lights in the history of India, for the flame of Sri Krishna's love has kept alive the flame of hope in the darkest hours of India's history and given her children a capacity to endure all calamities. No wonder that the Gita has served as the basic inspiration of *Bhaktas* in succeeding centuries.

Great though the Gita is, it has not escaped criticism at the hands of critics like Dr. Albert Schweitzer:

> "But Hinduism in the Bhagwad Gita does not yet take the actual step of demanding ethical deeds. Love to God is an end in itself. Hinduism does not make love to God find expression in love to mankind. Because it fails to reach the idea of active love, the ethic of the Bhagwad Gita is like a smoky fire from which no flame flares upward." [1]

It is open to any good man, even if he be an atheist, to do a good action just for the sake of helping a man in need. But all theistic mysticism is rooted in the love of Christ or Krishna or Buddha or Allah, as the case may be, and the ethical incentive in all such cases must come only from that love of God inherent in it. And it happens in all great religions that the love of God does manifest itself in the love of His creatures, men and animals alike, and this perhaps should become easier in the philosophy of India where everything is taken to be rooted in the divine, and the gulf between the human and the divine is not so rigidly marked as in the theisms of the Semitic variety. If this has not actually been the case in India, except in the palmy days of Buddha and Asoka, the fault must lie at the door of the caste system which has put artificial barriers to human

[1] *Indian Thought and Its Development*, p. 198.

love, and it is just the glory of Indian *Bhaktism* that in the face of a cruel social system time and again the *Bhaktas* rose in revolt against it and extended their love to the lowest just because like themselves they too were the children of the God they worshipped. And I shall now proceed to illustrate this.

Vaishnavism in South India

Tamilnad has played a very important part in the development of the *Bhakti* movement. It was usually an attempt to get over the limitations of caste and hence the ranks of the *Bhaktas* included even the Sudras and the untouchables. The Tamilnad with its rigour of caste, which has not died out even to-day, perhaps for this very reason gave a fillip to the revolt, and if it has not succeeded as much as it should have, it at least serves as a perpetual reminder to people to rise above caste.

Few people outside South India are aware of a great book which ranks as the Tamil Veda. It is called *Sacred Kural* and was composed by Tiruvalluvar. Its date is uncertain, but is usually assigned to 100-300 A.C. It bears signs of Buddhistic influence especially in its moral outlook and is written in a deep religious spirit. It begins with an invocation to Bhagwan. It bears no trace of idolatry and it has become a priceless treasure to all who know Tamil. No testimony can be more eloquent than that of Mr. H. A. Popley, who has not merely translated *The Kural* into English, but writes thus in his Preface: "Ever since I began to study this little book twenty eight years ago, it has been with the New Testament my daily companion in all my travels, and I have learnt to love it, and to rejoice in its homely, high-minded teaching." Such a tribute coming from a Christian missionary has its own lesson to teach.

" 'Tis hard to swim this world's wide sea,
Unless we cling to Him—Ocean of grace and good.
The head that bows not to our God Supreme
Is useless as a senseless sense.
Who then can swim this mighty sea of births ?
Not they, who cling not to our Sovereign's feet " [1]

[1] *The Sacred Kural*, p. 37 by H. A. Popley.

And there is a beautiful little poem on Love from which I shall quote the last four couplets :

" As the sun's heat burns up all boneless things,
So Virtue doth burn up all loveless things.
To live the home-life with a loveless heart
Is like a withered tree flowering in barren sand.
To those who lack the inward means of love
What use is there in any outward means ?
The living soul subsists in love ;
The loveless are but skin and bone."[1]

And so it goes on in its presentation of many things ethical into which men of all creeds can dip and come out refreshed.

The famous Alvars, however, mark the beginning of pure *Bhakti* poetry. An Alvar was one who had deep knowledge of God and was immersed in Him. The key-note of the Alvars is to be found in a verse like this from Tirumalisai : "Let thy grace be for me to-day or to-morrow, or let it wait still and come later. I am sure, O Narayana, that I am not without thee, nor art thou without me."[2]

The Alvars include Brahmins naturally, but Nammalvar, who is spoken of as the "greatest, most famous and most voluminous of the Alvars" was a Sudra :

" Sages with wisdom won by virtuous toil
Assert ' His colour, glorious beauty, name,
His form—are such and such.' But all their toil
Has measured not the greatness of my lord :
Their wisdom's light is but a wretched lamp "[3]

Another of them was a king of Travancore and his devotion took such an odd form that he found it best to abdicate so as to devote himself all the more to religious devotion. Andal was a woman and Tiruppan Alvar was a Panchama.

That the *bhakti* of the Alvars was a type of blind devotion could not be denied, nor could it be denied that it had not always

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[2] *Hymns of the Alvars* by J. S. M. Hooper, p. 27.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

a high ethical trait in it. This is particularly marked in Tirumangal who belonged to the caste of thieves. His devotion did not prevent him from robbing a Buddhist temple at Negapatam of a golden image of Buddha. With it he proceeded to rebuild the temple of Ranganathan at Srirangam, the chief Vaishnava centre. "When obstreperous workmen demanded payment he saw to their being drowned in the Kaveri and consoled their indignant relatives by telling them that they would be happier at the feet of Sri Ranganathan than they had been on earth."[1] Unfortunately such stories are not uncommon in Hindu folklore and no doubt detract from the ethical character of such devotion.

The birth of Ramanuja marks an epoch in the history of Vaishnavism. To the vague emotional *bhakti* of the Ālvars he gave a philosophical background by measuring swords with the followers of Sankara and giving a theistic interpretation to the Upanishads and exalting the theistic character of the Gita. That he was one of the most dynamic figures in Indian history cannot be denied in the light of his achievements. He was not content with giving a new interpretation to old scriptures. He was even more keen on creating a new society, a new democracy of men bound together in the worship of Vishnu. Like every Brahmin Ramanuja was given a *mantra* at the time of his initiation by his guru, on the usual promise that he was to keep it secret from all. But he broke his promise and divulged it to a mixed gathering including even the Chandalas. When he was taken to task for such a breach of the Brahmanic code, he gave an answer which reminds us of Socrates and Christ: "To be true to you and the word I gave you, or to be true to myself and the infinitely greater cause of humanity: which is nobler? To keep your gift of heavenly knowledge all to myself, as a miser hoards his wealth, or to share it with those who have been denied all religious comfort—the latter course seemed to me far truer than being bound by the bonds of my promise.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

If there is a hell for having broken my word to you, I will suffer its tortures willingly and gladly. But if there should be any merit in my act in divulging your secret *mantra* to those less fortunately placed in life than ourselves, God be blessed.[1] For his new heretical teaching he had to pay a heavy price and when he was hounded out of his country he found refuge in Melkote in Mysore State. He admitted the outcastes within his fold, but that the path of the social reformer is far more difficult in India than in any other country is shown by the subsequent history of his cult, which has developed into a rigid caste hierarchy as strong as any other. But the new impulse he gave to theism had its repercussions all over India.

Vaishnavism in Northern and Western India

The Hindu mystic poetry bears no direct evidence of that great historical event, the Muslim conquest of India, and the introduction of a new culture in India. But it is more than probable that the intense monotheism of Islam gave a great impetus to the Hindu monotheists to reassert their faith in the traditional Gods of India whether Vishnu or Siva. Even direct evidence of this influence is forthcoming in the titanic figure of Kabir. His birth is doubtful, but presumably he was a Mahomedan by birth and was certainly brought up in a Mahomedan family. But there was some inner urge in him towards Vaishnavism, and Rama became as much a part of his devotion as Allah, if not more. Like a true *bhakta* he did not distinguish between the two:

1. "Brother, whence came two divine masters of the world? who has led you astray?
   Allah, Rama, Karim, Keshava, Hari, Hazrat, are but names given.
2. Jewels and jewels are made of one gold bar; but in it is one nature.
   In speech and hearing only, two are made: one *Namaz*, another *Puja*.
3. He is Mahadeo, he Mohammad: Brahma is called Adam.
   One is called Bindu, one Turk, both live on the one earth.

[1] *The Secret of Sri Ramanuja* by R. Ramaswami: Illustrated Weekly of India: 24th April, 1932.

4. One reads the Vedas, another Khutbas: one is Maulvi, one is Pande.
   Each is called by a separate name: both are pots of the one clay.
5. Kabir says both alike have gone astray: none has found Rama.
   One sacrificed a goat, another a cow: in argument they have lost their life." [1]

These verses strike the key-note of his reform. It was not without difficulty that he had himself taken as a pupil by Ramananda, a great Bhakta, but Kabir outgrew him and lived to teach his teacher a lesson or two. Ramananda wanted to perform the *Shradha* ceremony for his dead guru, and sent his disciples for milk. Kabir went where bones of dead cows lay, justifying his action by saying: "I thought the milk of dead cows best suited to the dead guru." On another occasion on the banks of the Ganges he overheard some Brahmins saying that they were thirsty. He went to the river and brought them water in his pitcher. The Brahmins were offended, but he coolly replied: "If Ganga water is defiled by my touch, how is it going to purge you of your sins?" If bathing in a river can bring one release, he argued, fishes must all find their salvation more than men. His religious outlook was sufficiently deep to give him a wonderful sense of humour and he was not above playing pranks to drive home his message. Jahan Gasht, a Muslim saint, had come to India with a sense of Muslim superiority. He wanted to visit Kabir and Kabir welcomed him, but not before he had a pig tied at his front door. Jahan Gasht was disgusted and was about to go away when Kabir called him and would not let him go. When the Muslim visitor asked him why he had kept an unclean thing at his very doorstep, Kabir replied: "O Jahan Gasht, I have kept the unlawful thing outside my house, but you keep it within your heart. Had it not been in your heart your eyes would not have noticed it. Whatever you keep within your heart is made manifest. There is nothing lawful or unlawful. There are but creeds which men have made. God has created nothing which we should call clean or unclean. I look on nothing as lower or higher." [2]

[1] *Bijak* (*Shabda* 30) translated by Rev. Ahmed Shah, p. 110.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

No one has perceived the kinship between the human and the divine more clearly than did Kabir. There are endless passages where he points out how the divine is within us, and he illustrates it beautifully :

Kasturi kundal base, mrug dhunde bun mahi ;
Aise ghat ghat Ram hai, pur dunya dekhi nahi.

(There is musk in the deer's navel. It smells it and goes on hunting for it, when all the time it is within itself ; so too Ram is within us but the world will not see this).

Kabir must have been a very dynamic personality, for not merely did he gather round himself a faithful body of followers, both Muslims and Hindus, who started a Kabir Panth, which still exists, though it has sunk to the level of the numerous sects scattered over the length and breadth of India, but what is more, he succeeded in lighting the flame of piety in other masters who started their own new faiths. The chief among these was Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, a bold venture to bridge the gulf that kept the Muslims and the Hindus apart from one another. Kabir's songs even to-day constitute a part of Sikh liturgy, and no poet in India has had such a vogue wherever Hindi is spoken or understood as Kabir. Jag Jivan Das, the founder of the Sat Nami Sect, and Bribhan, the founder of the Sodh Sect, both were offshoots of Kabir. Akbar and Kabir were the two sincere apostles of the unity of Hindu-Muslim culture. The former was dominated by a political motive, the latter by a genuine religious impulse, and it has been the misfortune of India that neither achieved the measure of success they deserved. Nanak sang :

" *Pushpa madhya jo bās rahat hai, darpan mahi jo chāi*
Taisehi Hari basat nirantar, ghat hi me khojo bhāi "

(As in the flower the perfume dwells, and in the mirror the reflection, so Hari indwells in all, seek Him within thee, O brother).

How even Muslims were affected by the Bhakti movement is illustrated by Darya Sahib of Marwar in the 18th century who sang as a Hindu mystic would have sung : [1]

[1] *Hindi Religious Poetry* by Rev. Ahmed Shah and Rev. Ormerod, p. 131.

" *Ādi anta merā hai Ram : oon bin aur sakal bekām.*
Kahā karun tera Beda Purānū ; jin hai sakal jagat bharmānā.
Kahā karun teri anubhao bani ; jinme meri buddhi bhulāni.
Kahā karun ye mān badai ; Rām binā subhi dukha dāi.
Kahā karun terā sānkh aur joga ; Rāma binā sub bandhan roga.
Kahā karun indriyākā sukha ; Ram binā deva sub dukha.
Dariyā kahe Rām guru mukhyā : Hari bin dukhi, Ram sang sukhia."

(For me the beginning and end is Rama ; without Ram all else is useless.

What shall I do with your Veda and Puran ? The whole world is misled by them.

What shall I do with your reasoned discourses ? Therein my mind is led astray.

What shall I do with name and fame ? Without Rama all are sources of sorrow.

What shall I do with your Sankhya and Yoga ? Without Rama these are fetters of disease.

What shall I do with pleasures of sense ? Without Rama all yield naught but pain.

Says Dariya, the illumined of Rama, without Hari is grief, with Rama is bliss.")

Raidas, a *chamar*, a contemporary of Kabir, could rise above the limitations of his birth and humble occupation of shoe-making, and use language reminiscent of both Hindu and Muslim lore : [1]

" *Khālik, sikhastā main tera, de didār oommedgār, bekarār jiva merā.*
Auval ākhir ilāha, ādam feristā bandā.
Jiski panāh pir paigambar, main garib kyā gandā.
Tu hājar hajur jog ik, aur nahi hai dujā ;
Jiske ishk ashra nahi, kyā nivāz, kyā pujā.
Nāli doj hanoj be bakhat ; kami khitmatkār tumāharā ;
Dar mānda der jawāb na pave, kahe Raidas bichārā."

(Broken am I, O my Creator, grant the vision I crave, my soul is vexed.

God is beginning, God is end ; man and angel are both his servants ;

Through his grace saints and prophets are born—what am I poor unclean wretch !

It is Thou alone whose presence all must seek, there is none else beside Thee !

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

If any trust not in His love, what use are prayers in mosques or temples ?
Still is this maker of shoes in misery, a lowly attendant upon Thee.
Weary and worn at Thy door, unanswered, says this poor Raidas.)

It was the glory of this poor cobbler to have inspired a famous princess of Jodhpur, married to a Prince of Udaipur. Meera, the sweetest nightingale in Hindi poetry, found her inspiration in Raidas :[1]

" *Guru milyā Raidās ji dini gyana ki gootki* "
(For my guru I found Raidas, who gave me a sip of wisdom)

And this wisdom was nothing else than being lost in Girdhar Gopal :

" *Mere to Girdhar Gopal, dusra na koi*
Dusra na koi, sādhao, dusra na koi "

(Mine is Girdhar Gopal and nobody else, nobody else).

" *Chot lagi nij nām Hariki, mahāre hibde khatki* "

(I am pierced through with the name of Hari : deep in my heart is it lodged).

" *Rājkulki lāj gamāi, sandhan ke sangme bhatki,*
Nit ooth Harijike mandir jāhyan, nāchyān de de chootki
.....
Meerake Prabhu Girdhar Nagar, janam maran sam chootki "

(I abandoned the honour of my royal house and roamed in the company of *sadhus*. Ever I went to the temple of Hari and danced to the snapping of fingers.....Mira's Lord is Giridhar Nagar, so I am freed from birth and death.)

But the poet that raised the worship of Rama to the highest height was Tulsi Das, whose Ramayana has worked into people's hearts in the United Provinces as not even the original Valmiki's Ramayana has done. In deep humility he was content to be at the feet of Rama :

" *Tu garibko nāvaj, main garib Terā ;*
Var ek kahiye Prabhu : Tulsidās merā."

(Thou art gracious to the poor, my poor self is thine. Say but once, O Lord, the words : Tulsidas is mine) [2]

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 73-76. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

And so the love of Hari has engulfed India. Even the money-making Gujarat did not escape the divine madness and Narasimha Mehta has been to Gujaratis a mine of inspiration :

" *Sukh sansāri mithyākāri mānjo*
Krishnā vinā bijun sarve kachun ;
Jugal kar jodi kari Narsaiyo em kahe,
Janma prati janma Harinej jāchun."

(Believe the happiness of this world to be useless. Without Krishna everything is incomplete. Narsaiya says birth after birth I shall seek only Hari.)

Maharashtra has surpassed Gujarat both in the quality and quantity of religious poetry. Jnaneshwar started the great epoch of Marathi religious poetry and found every joy in the Lord of Rukmini. Namdeo like a mystic of a very high order did not hesitate to denounce idolatry : "No guru can show me God : wherever I go there are stone gods painted red. How can a stone god speak? When will he ever utter speech? My mind is weary of those who say 'God, God.' Everywhere I go, they say : 'worship a stone.' He is God whom Nama beholds in his heart. Nama will never forsake the feet of Krishna."[1]

It is quite intelligible how with such views he was not perturbed by the Muslims desecrating the temples, but could say : "A god of stone and a worshipper who is deceived.....such gods were broken by the Turks. They threw them into the river."[2]

Janābāi sang with feminine intensity and rapture :

" Of God my meat and drink I make,
God is the bed on which I lie.
God is whate'er I give or take ;
God's constant fellowship have I
For God is here and God is there,—
No place that empty is of Him.
Yea, lady Vitha, I declare,
I fill the world up to the brim."[3]

[1] *Psalms of Maratha Saints* p. 24, translated by Rev. N. Macnicol.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 31.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

A fine note of fellowship is struck by Eknath in *The Scorner*:

"Who praises and who scorns me too,
Both are my mother. Ay, I view
My scorners as my mother true.
For such are kind to me. They say
Hard words that wash my soil away,
As does a mother's bathing. They
Are friends indeed and strength supply
To me. Were I to blame them, why,
The guilty one would then be I."[1]

But the most towering poet is Tukaram with his *Abhangs*, a priceless heritage of the Maratha people. He too revolted against the old pilgrimages and ceremonials. Like Janābai he too was a Sudra, but he had a high soul and gave a new meaning to life. Once he refused to travel to Benares in spite of the importunities of friends. He gave them, however, an unripe gourd and asked them to dip it in the Ganges and see if it would become sweet thereby. A few samples of his wisdom may be culled:

"……The good man's breast
Is of all men's the tenderest.
……
That man is God's own counterfeit."[2]

"Ah, wherefore fast or wherefore go
To solitude apart?
Whether thou joy or sorrow know
Have God within thy heart."[3]

The humble anti-philosopher speaks out in these lines:

"To such pay thou no heed: the words he saith
Are only chaff, empty of loving faith.
He praises high *Advait* which only brings
To speaker and to hearer pain and scaithe.
He fills his belly saying, 'I am Brahm'.
Waste not thy words upon him; shamed and dumb
Is he, blasphemer, when he meets the saints.
Who scorns God's love Tuka calls vilest scum."[4]

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 53. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 79. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 84. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

"Now here before thee, Lord, I stand,
Attentive to thy least command.
The self within me now is dead,
And thou enthroned in its stead."[1]

The temptation to quote further is hard to resist, so fine and elevating is his thought, so humble and yet so great. One can imagine, even if it be a myth, how the great Shivaji must have stood fascinated by the songs of a fellow-Sudra.

Any account of Vaishnavism will not be complete without a pointed reference to the work of Chaitanya in Bengal. Born in a middle-class Brahmin family of Nadia, his beauty and his gentleness alike attracted people to him as born to greatness. He was from his earliest years a worshipper of Krishna. That he was not fully conscious of the implications of that worship is shown by the story that he in his youth tried to tear open his breast because he was told that Krishna was within his breast. That he had a high sense of humanity is shown by the story relating to a fellow-student, Raghunath by name. Raghunath was aspiring to be a great teacher of *Nyaya* and prepared a book on the subject. Nimai, the young Chaitanya, without that ambition had also prepared a thesis on the subject. When it was shown to Raghunath, Raghunath burst into tears, for he recognised its superior merits and saw in it a rival to his own book. When Nimai was told about this, with a remarkable sympathy he embraced Raghunath and said: "Is that all? Then weep no more, my brother! This Nyaya is after all a fruitless philosophy, and as such can neither be bad nor good. Here it goes" and he flung his own manuscripts into the river. With such a capacity for friendship one can understand how in later life when he came forth as a great Vaishnava *Bhakta* he was able to gather round him a band of followers who sang and danced with him singing the glory of Hari. Haridas was tortured for his faith but he was not daunted by it. Even as he received stroke after stroke of the whip he thought more of his torturers than of his own pain

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

and finally said: "My Lord, have pity on these poor fellows. Let not their offence against me be taken note of. They are ignorant men and cannot realise the enormity of their offence." With these words he swooned away and was saved from further torture. Another follower of Chaitanya was Mukunda. When he was told that he would be able to see Hari after ten million births he felt overjoyed at the prospect and began dancing, for to a Vaishnavite *bhakta* time is nothing and the vision of God everything. This is clearly seen in one of the prayers of Chaitanya himself:

> "O God, I do not pray for wealth or resources of family or social relationships, or for a beautiful wife or the blessings of the Muses. May I attain and retain through the cycle of births and rebirths a devotion for Thee, untainted by selfish motives."

In Chaitanya himself we have to note one great feature of his mysticism and that was that he had a consuming love for all human beings as the children of Hari. He would not hesitate to embrace even a leper, a phenomenon of marked import in a country like India where the needs of men are usually forgotten in the search for God or sacrificed to the Moloch of caste.[1]

Saiva Bhakti

Great though the heritage of Vaishnava poetry has been, it has not monopolised the hungry heart of the Hindu *bhakta*. Shiva has had his share both in the north and south. One can understand the devotion that has been inspired by Krishna and Rama, because of their fine human qualities, their grace and softness and tribulations to which an unkind world of their own kindred had subjected them. Hindu artists delight in giving to Krishna's features all the soft feminine beauty and sensuous curves that have made his statues and paintings so alluring. Shiva of the Puranas has no such softness. He has not cared to be born an *Avatar*. He is a beggar, fond of roaming about cremation and burial grounds. Such a god prima facie is

[1] The facts relating to Chaitanya's life have been taken from S. K. Ghosh's *Lord Gauranga*.

not likely to rouse the religious rapture of the devotee. But he has done so in India. It may be that the primitive *lingam* worship has associated with it the creative might of Shiva. His dwelling in the Kailas in the eternal snows of the Himalayas has given him an Olympian character. As the god who saved the world by swallowing the poison that came out of the churning of the sea and as the God who sent the life-giving waters of the sacred Ganga he has appealed to the imagination of the people in millions. In spite of his ascetic and austere exterior there is a benignant aspect which seeks to be propitious to his devotees as the very name *Shiva* (auspicious) implies. Whatever be the reasons that have made for the greatness of Shiva in traditional Hinduism, it cannot be denied that it has produced a rich crop of *Bhakti* poetry. Manikka Vasahar exalts Shiva in these terms :

" Indra or Vishnu or Brahm,
Their divine bliss crave not I ;
I seek the love of Thy saints,
Though my house perish thereby.
To the worst hell I will go,
So but thy grace be with me.
Best of all, how could my heart
Think of a god beside Thee ?" [1]

Sambandar sings :

" Those Buddhists and mad Jains may slander speak.
Such speech befits the wand'rers from the day.
But he who came to earth and begged for alms,
He is the thief who stole my heart away " [2]

More noteworthy is the protest of the genuine *bhakta* against the mere external manifestations of religion as we find in Apparaswami :

" Why bathe in Ganga's stream or Kāveri ?
Why go to Comorin in Kongu's land ?
Why seek the waters of the sounding sea ?
Release is theirs, and theirs alone, who call
In every place upon the Lord of all.

[1] *Hymns of the Tamil Saivite Saints*, translated by Kingsbury and Philips, p. 89.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Why chant the Vedas, hear the Sāstras' lore ?
Why daily teach the books of righteousness ?
Why the Vēdāngas six say o'er and o'er ?
Release is theirs, and theirs alone, whose heart
From thinking of its Lord shall ne'er depart.

Why roam the jungle, wander cities through ?
Why plague life with unstinting penance hard ?
Why eat no flesh and gaze into the blue ?
Release is theirs, and theirs alone, who cry
Unceasing to the Lord of wisdom high.

Why fast and starve, why suffer pains austere ?
Why climb the mountains, doing penance harsh ?
Why go to bathe in waters far and near ?
Release is theirs, and theirs alone, who call
At every time upon the Lord of all." [1]

How the note of softness and of love can be produced by the God of Asceticism can be seen in a stanza by Manikka Vasahar :

" I ask not kin, nor name, nor place,
Nor learned men's society.
Man's lore for me no value has ;
Kuttālam's Lord, I come to Thee.
Wilt Thou one boon on me bestow,
A heart to melt in longing sweet,
As yearns ov'r new-born calf the cow,
In yearning for Thy sacred feet ?" [2]

In the twelfth century South India produced a remarkable teacher in Basava, the founder of the Lingayat or Veerashaiva Sect, which still flourishes, though it has lost the original vigour of Basava and has reduced itself to a sect among other sects of Hindus. Basava found his inspiration in Shiva as the leveller of all distinctions and looked upon the *Lingam* as the emblem of *Shiva Decksha*, whereby the Brahmin and the Sudra alike lose their inequality and in fact become higher than the Brahmins. Basava's prayer is significant : "Oh Lord, do not subject me to the sin of considering myself of a superior caste. A man is to work not for his own benefit, but for the good of

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 57. [2] P. 125.

the community as a whole." Basava started as a democratic leader and his position as the prime minister of Bijjalla, a Jain king, gave him prestige and power to spread his message. The *Lingam* had to be worshipped as the symbolical embodiment of Divine Energy, pervading a man's body, mind and soul. It involves *shraddha* (faith) and *nishta* (firmness). The *Lingam* worship implies not merely the observance of the ordinary rules of morality, but a total repudiation of caste distinctions. A Veerashaiva writer says: "Dost thou choose to discriminate caste? Dost thou know what your ancestors were by caste? Vyasa was the son of a fisher-woman. Vasistha was the son of Urvashi. What matters it that a man is *Swapacha* by caste or birth? If he is a devotee of Shiva, then indeed is he of high caste." [1]

For over two centuries Veerashaivism was the state religion of the ruling house of the Wodeyars of Mysore and Kannada poetry owes a good deal to Veerashaiva writers. Sarvajna's verses on caste are worth remembering:

> "When light enters pariah dwelling, is it also outcaste for that?
> Oh, talk not of high caste or outcaste.
> The man on whose homestead God's blessing doth shine
> Is surely a noble of lineage divine.
> We all tread the same mother earth;
> The water we drink is the same;
> Our hearth-fire's glow no distinction doth show;
> Then whence cometh caste in God's name?" [2]

Great though Shaivism has been in South India, its native home is found in Bengal. Oddly enough here it has taken the form of the worship of Kali as the Divine Mother, for Shiva himself is spoken of as Bholanath, the lord of forgetfulness. Lost in his ascetic meditation, he is apt to forget his devotee's interests and so his *Sakti* in Kali works: her power is unlimited and her energy unsleeping. Kali-worship in Bengal has become associated with a certain grimness inevitable in animal sacrifices. But it is most interesting to note that the Saiva *bhaktas* of

[1] Pawate's *Veerashaivism*, p. 39-40.
[2] Rice's *Canarese Literature*, p. 73.

Bengal have sought to rise above it. Ramaprasad Sen has been a very prolific writer and he writes about the foolishness of popular religious ideas :

> " The worshipper of Kali laughs at the name of Gaya and at ancestral offerings there and the story of salvation by ancestors' merits. Certainly Siva has said that if a man dies at Kashi he attains salvation. But devotion is the root of everything, and salvation but her handmaid who follows her. What is the worth of salvation if it means absorption, the mixing of water with water? Sugar I love to eat, but I have no wish to become sugar." [1]
>
> " Mind, why art thou so anxious ? Utter Kali's name and sit in meditation.....
>
> Fashion her image with the stuff of mind, and set it on the lotus throne of your heart. Parched rice and plantains, ah! how vainly do you offer these! Feed her with the nectar of devotion and satisfy your own mind.
>
> Why seek to illumine her with lamp and lantern and candle ? Light the jewelled lamp of the mind, let it flash its lustre day and night.
>
> Why do you bring sheep and goats and buffaloes for sacrifice ? saying 'Victory to Kali, Victory to Kali.' Sacrifice the six passions." [2]

Kangal has similar verses, driving home the lesson of true devotion and slashing against caste :

> " You may give your sun-dried rice, you may give your sweetmeats, but do not think that with these you can gratify the mother.
>
> Light the lamp of knowledge, offer the incense of an earnest soul, then only will that one who is divine fulfil all your desires
>
> Wild buffaloes and goats, these are the mother's children; she does not want them as a sacrifice.
>
> If you would offer sacrifice, then slay your selfishness, and lay your love of ease upon the altar.
>
> Kangal in anguish says: Where men make caste distinct from caste there can be no *sakti*-worship. Let all the castes be one and call to her as Mother, else will the Mother never grant us mercy." [3]

[1] *Bengali Religious Lyrics, Sakta*, translated by E. J. Thomposon and A. M. Spencer, p. 40.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 42. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

These religious poems whether in the north or south India have a remarkable unanimity about the true inwardness of devotion which rises above all pilgrimages and sacrifices and caste distinctions. They have been on men's lips, but caste has gone on with all the fullness of strength born of centuries. Our own days have witnessed a change of outlook, thanks to our political struggles, but it remains to be seen whether there will be a permanent change in the mentality and the caste-exclusiveness that reign in most of our cities and practically in all our villages. But if this new political outlook has any sincerity in it, it will find most useful allies in these religious poems. So far they seem to have played only an aesthetic role, charming people by their melodious music and helping people to while away idle hours at the close of day. Their divine inspiration does not seem to have yet entered the souls of the hearers, else would caste have disappeared from India ages ago.[1]

In the religious history of India the *bhakti* movements have not been an unmixed blessing. Their revolt against caste failed to break it and they themselves could find living room in India only by constituting themselves into new sects and castes and thus tended all the more to add to the fragmentation of Hindu society. When it went beyond the Masters it often degenerated into a mumbling of the names of Rama or Krishna or Hari or Shiva or Kali, but this did not touch their lives. Worse still, it has created a band of wandering beggars, who have cheapened the religious quest and taken away from it all deep sincerity and made room for hypocrisy and even immorality. Students of the Psychology of Religion have been struck by the play of erotic feelings in popular worship. Even the highest mystics have found in the sexual embrace the only analogy they could have to bring out the

1 Bengal in the last half a century has produced two great religious geniuses: Rama Krishna Paramahamsa and Rabindranath Tagore. Both have become world figures, and their teachings have become so well-known by now that they do not need being repeated by me. Elsewhere I have paid my homage to both and to Swami Vivekananda too. I have thought it better to give more prominence to poets of an older age, less known outside their provinces.

union of God and man. Lesser minds have found in it an excuse to make it the main approach to the union with God, and ignorant women have become willing instruments to perpetuate this pseudo-religion. Mere *bhakti* is too emotional to stand the wear and tear of daily life, it needs to be balanced by a certain mental strength. A Namdeo, a Tukaram, a Ramprasad, a Narasimha Mehta, an Apparswami were religious geniuses, lesser prophets, who had the full vision of God in their hearts and could resist the temptations of beautiful women. But men and women who merely repeat their songs are apt to create an emotional voluptuousness in themselves, which will take them away—and has taken them away—from the pure nectar of religious quest.

With the emotional religious fervour of Hindus it is not surprising, if India has become the home of religious poetry par excellence, but it would be misleading to conclude that India has had a monopoly of it. Two other religions have produced a crop of rich mystic poetry, Islam and Christianity, and they deserve more than a mere passing notice.

Sufism

In Islam a great part has been played by Sufism. In 1924 at the Conference of Some Living Religions within the Empire held in London, Sufi Hafiz Raushan Ali read an illuminating paper on Sufism.[1] It is a spirited plea to look upon it as indigenous to Islam and to trace it even to the Prophet himself. This is in refutation of the views often advanced that Sufism was a creation of the Persian spirit as a sort of revolt against the spirit of orthodox Islam, and also that it was the result of Buddhist and Vedantic influences. Sufi Raushan Ali does not explain how it is that if Sufism was a part of orthodox Islamic tradition it came to be persecuted in Iran, so much so that Sufi poets thought discretion to be the better part of valour and wrote their poetry in language redolent of wine and women, when their real meaning was

1 *Religions of the Empire*, published by Duckworth, pp. 135-147

to bring out the unity of God and man. This cannot be looked upon as an idle tradition. Even Omar Khayam is taken to be a Sufi, though in his English garb he has come to stand for a pensive mood of making the best of life and recording his protest against the interminable disputes of wrangling philosophers. He would rather be content with

> " A Book of Verses beneath the Bough,
> A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
> Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
> Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!"

In Persian Sufi poetry wine represented divine inspiration and woman represented the love of God. But whether Khayam is to be looked upon as a God-intoxicated Sufi or not, there can be no doubt about Hafiz and Saadi and the greatest of them all, Jalaluddin Rumi. Let us ruminate over Rumi's great lines :

> I died from the mineral and became a plant;
> I died from the plant and reappeared in an animal;
> I died from the animal and became a man;
> Wherefore then should I fear? When did I grow less by dying?
> Next time I shall die from the man
> That I may grow the wings of angels.
> From the angel too I must seek advance;
> All things shall perish save His face.
>
> Once more shall I wing my way above the angels;
> I shall become that which entereth not the imagination.
> Then let me become naught, naught, for the harp-string
> Crieth unto me : " Verily unto Him do we return "

The God-intoxicated Sufi speaks in Baba Kuhi of Shiraz :

> " In the market, in the cloister—only God I saw.
> In the valley and on the mountain—only God I saw.
> Him I have seen beside me oft in Tribulation ;
> In favour and in fortune only God I saw.
> In prayer and in fasting, in praise and contemplation,
> In the religion of the Prophet—only God I saw.
> Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
> Dualities nor causes—only God I saw.
> I opened mine eyes and by the light of His Face around me
> In all the eye discovered—only God I saw.

Like a candle I was melting in His fire:
Amidst the flames outflashing only God I saw.
Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,
But when I looked with God's eyes—only God I saw.
I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,
And lo! I was the All-living—only God I saw."[1]

Whether Sufism is Islamic or a heretical offshoot is a question that cannot be answered without a clear understanding of what Islam stands for and what Sufism stands for. Islam is definitely theistic, opposing man to God. In the Quranic teaching with its emphasis on the life hereafter in Paradise and personal immortality guaranteed to all believers there can be no question about absorption of the type that Buddha and Sankara taught. Now if Sufism teaches that the mystic love of man for God makes only for a closer rapport between man and God without any idea of his absorption in God, certainly Sufism is consistent with the spirit of Islam. But there is every reason to believe that Sufis in Iran taught a type of absorption, as when Rumi in the lines quoted above talks of becoming "naught, naught" and this would be very heretical. So Sufism was heretical from the Islamic standpoint. The concept of *fana* occupies a high place in Sufi philosophy. It can mean annihilation at least in the sense of absorption in Rumi's sense. Sufi Raushan Ali speaks of it as "total effacement of one's self, so much so that the adept becomes merged in Divine presence" - and he quotes the Quranic injunction "Turn to your Creator, surrender yourself to him." Mystic poetry has always taken a double form: one of an advaitic character and the other of a theistic character. Poets are not philosophers as a rule and they themselves lapse from one attitude into another. There are passages in Kabir which would imply *Advaita*, quite different from his usual recognition of a personal deity. Kabir was a Sufi as much as any poet of Iran and there were other Muslims too in India in this category. Accepting Sufi Raushan Ali's contention about the orthodox character of Sufism, it may yet

[1] *Persian Lyrics* (Benn's Augustan Books of Poetry) quoted by M. Yamunacharya in *The Aesthetic Approach to God.*

be argued that several Muslim poets were outside the pale of Islamic Sufism and in their case the influence of Vedanta or of Buddhism could not be denied. Orthodox Muslims would certainly look upon Abu Ali of Sind as a heretic, for like an *Advaitin* he had the courage to address God as "O Thou I."[1] The Sufi ideal is well brought out in Shabistari, "See but One, say but One, know but One."

European Mysticism

Europeans are not by nature deeply religious. Their greatness has consisted in carrying on the Graeco-Roman tradition of a highly centralised political life with imperialistic ambitions, coupled with a marvellous daring and an adventurous spirit rising at times to the level of madness, but a madness that has a tinge of the divine in it, for the scientific spirit of Europe is at bottom a search for truth. However earth-bound Europe may have been, she has produced some great mystics, though that poetry may not have penetrated the masses as it has in India and Iran, the two greatest homes of mysticism in the world. The material for a study of European mysticism is vast and it has been tapped with that thoroughness which we have come to associate with European scholarship. The quest for God in Europe has extended over centuries. Apart from the orgies associated with mysterious cults that marked religion in Greece, we have its philosophic counterpart in Neo-Platonism of Plotinus and Proclus. They found a God "known only by ecstacy—a God who is the repose he gives—a God of whom the more you deny the more do you affirm."[2] But to the rationalist all post-Aristotelian philosophy marks a decay from the palmy days of Plato and Aristotle, and Plotinus was only the last flicker that heralded the end of Greek philosophy. This coincided with the advent of Christianity and it created a new fermentation of heart centering in the Passion of Christ. This was more marked in the warm climate of southern Europe, Italy and Spain in

[1] Quoted by Nicol Macnicol in *The Living Religions of the Indian People*, p. 146.
[2] R. A. Vaughan : *Hours with the Mystics*, p. 135.

particular. But the cold climate of north Europe was not bereft of that hunger for God which has been the core of religion. Thomas a Kempis and Eckart in Germany and Ruysbroeck in Holland are outstanding examples of the love of God. Here is the cry of Thomas a Kempis' heart :

> " Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. I am Thy servant; O give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies. Incline my heart unto the words of Thy mouth. Let Thy speech distil as the dew. The children of Israel spake in old time to Moses, Speak Thou unto us and we will hear, but let not the Lord speak unto us lest we die. Not thus, O Lord, not thus do I pray, but rather with Samuel the Prophet, I beseech Thee humbly and earnestly, Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Let not Moses speak to me, nor any prophet, but rather speak Thou, O Lord God, who didst inspire and illuminate all the Prophets. Thou alone without them canst perfectly fill me with knowledge, whilst they without Thee shall profit nothing"[1]

European mysticism has been studied so extensively that I shall not presume to throw any fresh light on it. Even in Europe the two types of mystic experience have been quite common. Eckart's language implies pantheism, but whether theistic or pantheistic there are certain universal characteristics which mark out a mystic above all others. His devotion to the incomprehensible Ultimate always manifests itself in a consuming love of his fellow-men. This gives him an unmistakable stamp of holiness, which is the religious virtue *par excellence*. He breathes a peace which passeth understanding. He seems to be at peace with all the world, a peace which radiates joy and a rugged determination not to take the ills of life at their face value, for they see deeper and so understand better. They have a dynamic quality which makes them draw and be drawn towards mankind, and the more men need their help all the better. We are familiar with that type in India, but I have not found a more telling description than is given by Eckart of himself.

> " Thou wishest me good morrow. I never had an ill morrow, for, I am hungered, I praise God; am I freezing, doth it hail, snow,

[1] Book III, Chap. II.

rain, is it fair weather or foul, I praise God; and therefore never had I ill morrow. Thou didst say, God prosper thee. I have never been unprosperous, for I know how to live with God; I know that what He doth is best, and what God giveth or ordaineth for me, be it pain or pleasure, that I take cheerfully from Him as the best of all, and so I had never adversity. Thou wishest God to bless me. I was never unblessed, for I desire to be only in the will of God, and I have so given up my will to the will of God, that what God willeth I will."

When he was asked what he would do, if God cast him into hell, he replied with an air of injured innocence:

"Cast me into hell? His goodness holds him back therefrom. Yet if He did, I should have two arms to embrace Him withal. One arm is true Humility and therewith am I one with His holy humanity. And with the right arm of Love, that joineth His holy Godhead, I would embrace Him, so He must come into hell with me likewise. And even so, I would sooner be in hell, and have God, than in heaven, and not have Him."[1]

To the man in the street this must all sound stark madness, but it is divine madness, madness that marches humanity forward in its upward struggle, for with such people evil loses all its edge and we are able to see things in better perspective: *sub specie æternitatis*. The Prophets who discourse to us of their faith, born of incommunicable knowledge, in the God that is Love, fill the hearts of men with love for their fellowmen and attain the zenith of humanity.

[1] *Hours with the Mystics* by Vaughan, p 198.

LECTURE VII

Religion as a Quest for the Holy

Ever since the publication of Rudolf Otto's great book *The Idea of the Holy*, holiness has come to be accepted as the ultimate religious category. It certainly includes the idea of moral goodness, but an atheist or an agnostic, however good he may be, can lay no claim to holiness. It implies also humility and love, resting on some comprehension of the divine. Otto uses the term *numinous* to distinguish the holy from the merely good, and finds in its nature something "that grips or stirs the human mind with this or that determinative state". The numerous characters that we have met with in the course of the previous lectures: the prophets, the saints, the mystics partake of the holy, but in its most universal character the Holy finds its best expression in the personality of Jesus Christ. When I say this, I do not imply thereby any reference to his divinity nor to any of the Christian Churches, none of which has really caught his spirit and none can or will, for there is something so individual in him that it defies all attempts at organisation without distorting that spirit. It is a common gibe that there have been only two Christians after Christ, one in history: St. Francis of Assissi and the other in fiction: the Bishop in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. In recent years I have heard it said that there are only two Christians alive to-day: one who is outside all Christian Churches, Mahatma Gandhi, and the other is Dr. Albert Schweitzer. These are palpable exaggerations, for few who came into any intimate contact with Charles Andrews would dare to deny that he was a fine specimen of what a Christian in this imperfect world can be expected to be. And there must be many more in the present age as there must have

been in the past. But the fact remains that Christ has laid down standards so high, at times even so impossible, that it is open only to some individuals here and there to make a conscious attempt to be Christlike.

As a student of a Christian college in Bombay long ago I had to study the Bible compulsorily, and I have to admit it to my shame that I spent my Bible hours in studying Shakespeare, for any compulsory attendance can only affect physical attendance, it cannot fetter the mind. But what I failed to learn as a matter of compulsion, I have learned voluntarily and to my greatest advantage. As a student of philosophy that excessive emphasis on the literal divinity of Christ has always left me cold, though I would be the last person to deny that if there is any divinity in humanity it is perhaps to be found most in Christ. I have nothing to do with the Christ of Christian Theology. My whole interest is centred in the Christ of history, and the difference between the two is to be found in the difference between the first three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke on the one hand and the fourth Gospel of St. John, the Acts and the Epistles of St. Paul on the other. It is recognised that the real founder of Christianity as a creed was St. Paul, and in the light of the history of Christianity I have always sympathised with the cry that has been raised again and again in the course of centuries: Back to Christ. The historical Christ is the human Christ as against the divine Christ painted by St. John and St. Paul. In order to make a popular appeal to the masses every religion has found it necessary to weave a myth about its founder. It has played its part. Whether these myths should continue to clog genuine religious life in this age of enlightenment remains an open question. A God allowing himself to be insulted, bruised and ultimately crucified is logically a contradiction in terms, however much we may talk of the "divine mystery" and the human incapacity to fathom its meaning. But there is a marvellous beauty in a man suffering for his convictions and victimised by a fanatical mob, and the cry with which the mortal life of Christ ended: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken

me?" has far more meaning and beauty in the religious quest of mankind than most Christians imagine. I shall now attempt in the brief space of an hour to catch the impress of the man that walked on earth 1948 years ago.

In the early Gospels Christ is spoken of as the Son of Man and these are the words in which he describes himself; "My Father in Heaven and I are one" (*St. John* 10.30), but he also says "My Father is greater than I" (*St. John* 14.28). Born in a humble family, from the first till the last he remained a friend of the poor, and the revolution effected by so simple a soul with such simple poor companions as he had, is itself a miracle far greater than any ascribed to him of walking on the sea or feeding thousands with a loaf of bread. His gentleness attracted little children to him and he recognised in their innocence the key to a higher life: "Suffer the little ones to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God" (*St. Mark* 10.14). Buddha had proclaimed his love for all mankind and Christ too reaffirmed this great ethical ideal, but he coupled it with the Fatherhood of God and gave it a warm family setting so that all men are children of God and by that very fact are bound in the loving bonds of brotherhood. This conception gives rise to the most original contribution of Christ to ethical teaching. If man is the child of God, it is impossible that any man can be wholly evil and the worst of men must trail the divinity that is his birth right. The worst of sinners can rise to the realisation of his real spiritual nature. Most human beings find it very difficult to accept this position and that is why a miraculous value is ascribed to the grace of Christ, and yet it expresses a simple truth, though sinners may not always be willing to transform themselves into saints. Nothing has affected me more than the simple story of the woman found in adultery. According to the Mosaic Law she had to be stoned, and Christ said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." None had the courage to do so and they went away one by one and after some time Christ found her alone and asked her: "Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord.

And Jesus said unto her: Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more."[1] The extreme magnanimity of the simple injunction marks an epoch in the ethical history of mankind, and illustrates that numinous quality in him which made sinners conscious of their sin and ashamed of it without the usual terrors of punishment here or hereafter. This leads on to a further discovery that the kingdom of God is not outside us, but within us, and it is ours if we but seek it. Ordinary morality may teach us that honesty is the best policy and that is a precept of commercial morality. But the precept gains a spiritual value when Christ says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (*Matthew* 6.33). If but men can be just in their dealings with one another, life would be much better than it is. But we are so obsessed by the business-is-business type of morality that we fail to see how unrighteousness keeps the injurer and the injured alike very low. If on the other hand we all acted righteously, it would be so much to our mutual advantage that the world could be literally transformed into the Kingdom of God.

With a religious genius like Christ there can be no halting faith in God. He is there, not as a matter of logical proof, but as his inner witness. It is faith indeed, a faith that is not blind but instinct with the spirit of righteousness and is prepared to show itself in life, and if man through his finitude errs, there is always the way of repentance open to him to retrace his steps. Repentance has to be sincere, if it has to have any spiritual value. "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him."[2] "Repent ye, Repent ye" is the cry that goes out of Christ's lips again and again for only by inner purification can we hope to attain righteousness.

We have already seen the lure of Love as a religious value. Buddha was undoubtedly great, especially when he accepted the invitation to a prostitute's house for dinner, for thereby he made

[1] St. John: 8.4-11.
[2] St. Luke: 17.3.

for her redemption as a consequence of her spiritual awakening. But on the whole Love as the central principle of religious life was more the achievement of Christ, for there was a more positive background in Christ's teaching than the difficult conception of Nirvana, which at one stage appeared to be but one another word for *sunya* (nothing). Buddha's starting point was the sense of suffering and he sought its solution in ridding one of the cycle of births and deaths. Christ was not obsessed by the sinfulness of man because of his exalted destiny to attain the kingdom of God here and now and thus rise above all the ills of life. Buddha's outlook resulted in a sense of despair and has given it a life-negating character. In this Christ was more positive, though in the normal consciousness of the Christians the sense of sin dominates to an unhealthy extent, almost morbid in its insistence. But this is not what we find in the life or teaching of Christ. Even in Europe and America the sense of sin has not been allowed to affect their week-day attitude to life, for thanks to the robust virility of their Graeco-Roman culture they have not lost that sense of joy in nature and art that they miss in orthodox Christianity.

This is the simple picture of Christ that I have gathered from my reading of New Testament: a simple peasant wandering from place to place, helping men and women alike to rid themselves of the ills of life and teaching them a higher life which would open to them the gates of heaven on earth itself. Above all he had an abiding faith in the Love of God, and it was this that gave his teaching the stamp of holiness.

Several questions suggest themselves as to the place of Christ in history. That he did not start with a sense of mission in life is illustrated by the act of baptism that he allowed himself at the hands of St. John the Baptist, a piece of ceremonial that many lesser individuals have got over in their religious quest. That he was not by any means hostile to his Jewish inheritance is shown abundantly by his mastery of the Prophets and his capacity to argue with the Scribes and the Pharisees on their own ground, and very explicitly by his declaration "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (*Matthew* 5.17). His nostalgic

feeling for Jerusalem comes out in his passionate outburst: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the Prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather brood under her wings, and ye would not" (*Luke* 13.34).

As his soul grew in its inner vision he became, like all true prophets, anti-ritualistic. The mummery of the Scribes and Pharisees disgusted him. "Ye hypocrites" is his usual salutation to them, prima facie conflicting with his gentleness. But there are limits to gentleness even of Christ. He could be gentle with people who in their simplicity and ignorance had sinned but had repented or could repent. But he would have no traffic with a band of men who had desecrated religion for their own aggrandisement and showed no signs of repentance. His appeal was to the simple children of nature, not to those who were proud of their learning and looked down upon the humble with all the haughty pride of superiority. Christ would have nothing to do with them, except to show them up in their true colours. As against the mere ritualism and formalism of official Judaism he had to bring out the real inwardness of religious life. Rituals may have some validity for the children in intellect who can rise only through the concrete symbolical presentation of something spiritual. But concentrating one's full strength on ritualism is to invite a fossilisation of religious life, and the Scribes and the Pharisees had attained that stage and meant to maintain it even if it involved the stoning of prophets. The Temple at Jerusalem, for which Christ had a regard that made him drive out angrily the usurers who had desecrated it, did not maintain that interest till the last, as he felt more and more the inwardness of prayer: "But thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (*Matthew* 6.6). He could not stand that hypocrisy which made people call him Lord and he burst out: "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father in heaven"

(*Matthew* 7.21). Nor was he content with formal prayers addressed to God. They must ensue in right action worthy of his followers, and the only test of it is that they have "love to one another." St. Paul fully absorbed this lesson when in his *First Epistle to the Corinthians* he says "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?" and that his followers "are one body in Christ, and every one members of one another" (*Romans* 12.5).

The main interest in a career like Christ's is the tragedy of his cruel end. The martyrdom of Socrates certainly gave an added zest to his pupils like Plato to carry on their Master's work, and later on in Christian Europe the martyrdom of numerous saints and preachers gave a new incentive to their faith. Much more so was it bound to be in the case of Christ himself. His crucifixion was an event pregnant with an immense future, and if that future has not meant a complete realisation of his message on earth, it started new values and a new outlook and above all gave an impetus to social service that has been left unmatched in any other religion. That a myth has gathered round his resurrection is not inconsistent with the psychology of religion, for such a death is bound to be taken symbolically. That death is the precursor of life was the very essence of the Orphic Mysteries which were so common in the Roman Empire and Judaea was but a part of the Empire. The life of spring follows only the death of winter and the whole freshness of nature is bound up with the withering of leaves in autumn and the bareness of trees in winter. Christ was fully alive to this significance when he is reported to have said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (*John* 12.24). There can be no charge of exaggeration, if we affirm that the message of Christ sprouted from his death and lived because of the tragic poetry that came to be woven round it. If the Kingdom of God is within us here and now, its fruition must be here and now, but only if we let the selfishness in us, which is the root of all evil, die. Plato said: "The true art of living is the art of dying" and Indian life at

its best is full of this truth. Man may still be the Unknown, but it is certainly known that Man the Animal must die before Man the Spirit can live, and only thus can he fulfil his mission in life.

May it not be that the salvation that is offered by Christ is really salvation from our lower selves and from the canons of a low life, which manifest themselves in the meannesses of our commercial life, our distrust and hatred of one another, our superiority complexes, our keenness to exploit the weak, and the worship of all false values as represented particularly by Mammon ? Perhaps this would be treated as too cheap a solution, unworthy of the Kingdom that is promised to the righteous. If we, however, take seriously the words of Christ : "The Kingdom of God is within you," there is no other explanation possible. In fact the rationalist thinker has long been protesting against the cruelty of God implied in condemning a man, however great a sinner he be, to the eternal fires of hell, and all because he had sinned for the short space of thirty years of active life out of three score years and ten, which the Bible allots to the life of man, and this too in a very imperfect world dominated by temptations.

Any questioning of the wisdom of God and any rational answer will be condemned by the orthodox as rank blasphemy, but it is so much easier for priests to strengthen their hold on the masses by promising the joys of heaven after a life time spent in sinning, even because of a death-bed confession, than by making them really good. A comment on this attitude is supplied by the story of the sinner who "repented" of his sins when he felt nearing death, but as luck would have it he recovered and there was time for repenting of his repentance, for the pleasures of this life are nearer, however achieved, than the distant joys of heaven.

Assuming that the Kingdom of God can be achieved here, the question arises whether it has ever been achieved, and the answer must be a painful negative. It is a trite criticism that Christianity has failed, and it has invited the retort that it has not failed because it has not been tried at all. Europe and

America had a magnificent opportunity to show what Christ's ethics could have done to make a heaven of this sordid earth, but the chance was never taken. As Swift with his usual bitingness said : "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love, one another," and history supplies evidence to show how Christian love manifested itself in sending the best and bravest to an early death because they were too honest to conceal their thoughts. Somerset Maugham spoke a painful truth when he said : "The Bible is an oriental book. Its alien imagery has nothing to do with us. Those hyperboles, those luscious metaphors, are foreign to our genius." Yes, it is. It would be even more correct to say that The New Testament is really foreign to men all over the world. We have not yet got over our animal nature and our animal passions break out at the slightest opportunity. In the hour of sorrow especially after a devastating war we "repent," but hardly are the tears of one generation dried when hatred and revenge find a new birth and each succeeding war has excelled its predecessor in wanton cruelty.

Europe and America as a whole have failed, but they have had one relieving feature that in almost every generation since the earliest years of Christ's ministry people have been found to take up seriously his call : " Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature !" I feel that most of them have erred in their enthusiasm in taking too commercial a view of "redeeming human souls" as if they were a marketable commodity, and the so-called conversions have occupied far too much of their attention, and the result has often been, in the pregnant phrase of a noble and high-souled missionary like Dr. Stanley Jones, a " horizontal conversion," not a " vertical conversion." But there have been vertical conversions whether of men born Christians or born in other faiths, and they have borne glowing witness to the spirit of Christ. St. Paul was the first of them, however much we may differ from him in his theology. Another was St. Thomas who founded Christianity in India more than a thousand years before the European commercial adventurers set foot on Indian soil. Then there were

St. Augustine with a sense of sin, ever eager to make up for the past, and St. Xavier and a whole host of saintly men and women who toiled for Christ's sake, spread his message and served mankind. Our own generation has seen Kagawa in Japan, Sadhu Sundar Singh in India, Albert Schweitzer toiling in distant Africa as a physician, and Charlie Andrews who loved India and served Indians just because he was so true a follower of Christ.

Apart, however, from the adventurous, militant and individualistic make-up of the Europe of history, there is a deeper reason why the ethics of Christ has found few thorough-going followers. There are few more moving passages even in the New Testament than those in *St. Matthew* (5.38-48) :

" 38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth :

39. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.

.....

43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ;

45. That ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven : for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ? do not even the publicans the same ?

47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others ? do not even the publicans so ?

48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The logic is relentless and the setting is epic. Christ was true to his own teaching, when at Calvary death faced him and he was heroic enough to say : " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do " (*Luke* 23.34). Only Christ could have said like this, and if there be others, they can be only described as Christlike. Tolstoy and Gandhiji have tried the experiment,

but they have met with no more success than Christ was able to achieve even with his own most trustworthy followers. The reason can be bluntly put in four words: It is almost impossible. A few individuals may follow it, but it is utterly inapplicable to any social organisation. Any ethics that is not to be dissipated in an orgy of words must take note of human nature, and human nature is far too complex to yield to any set formula. That there is something so fine in human nature that an act of love or forgiveness on the part of an opponent of ours may effect a vital change in us is not impossible, but to expect that this would be or could be achieved in every case is palpably fallacious. The old idea that prisons should be excessively harsh may have been wrong, for it tended to brutalise the prisoners all the more. But to say that prisons should be made as soft as possible would be equally erroneous. Psychologists must recognise a variety of human temperaments, which require individual treatment. One man may be so constituted that love would effect a radical change, in another it would only be exploited and nothing short of real severe punishment would have any effect. The success of Christ's ethics presupposes a fitness in all individuals to respond to, and to benefit by, love. But such fitness is rarely visible. I cannot imagine that the principle: "resist not evil" would have had any effect on a man like Hitler. That is why all governments can pay but lip homage to Christ's ethical injunctions we are considering. If it is merely stated as a distant ideal we can accept it at its face value, for in a society where this principle could succeed, the individuals will have advanced so far in their spiritual development that the attainment of the Kingdom of God here and now could be visualised. That such an ideal is worth aspiring after cannot be denied, and that explains why people who have in themselves nothing Christlike yet feel compelled to pay homage to his life and teachings.

There is one aspect of Christ's ethical teaching which is unduly harsh and difficult to reconcile with his proverbially gentle nature. In *Luke* 14.26 we read: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children,

and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he canno be my disciple." It is difficult to believe that such an ide could have come out of the lips of the man who had said "Love your enemies" and "resist not evil". If any meanin can be read into such a harsh injunction, it can only mean tha in case of a conflict between one's father and mother on the on hand and the teachings of Christ on the other, preference shoul be necessarily given to the latter. This is intelligible, but to mak the hatred of one's father and mother a condition precedent to th acceptance of Christ's teachings can only be taken as a passin aberration of a harsh mood, and we shall leave it at that.

Christ's appeal to all "that labour and are heavy-laden to come to him and find rest has had great vogue in subsequen centuries and come to be identified with the power of his grac but shorn of a genuine repentance it cannot lead to a re regeneration of heart, especially when we remember his saying "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance Even Rasputin's perversion of this saying cannot detract fro its intrinsic nobility and it bears witness to the faith that he c heal the maimed in spirit and make them whole, conscious of t divinity within them. The religion of the priests dominated racial or caste prejudices has always proceeded on the assumpti that the touch of the unholy will defile and pollute the hol But the religion of Christ has maintained that the touch of t holy can revitalise even the unholy.

In the history of religion there has been no greater trage than that of Calvary, and no figure more moving than that Christ. If the mantle of the pomp and power of the Rom Empire had not fallen on his followers, Christianity might ha continued poor, but it would have had a genuine power in t spiritual realm. But with wealth came decay and official Chr tianity has been mostly a denial of Christ in essence. T glorious churches, adorned with all the wealth of Europ artistic genius, and the unforgettable music as the sonor Latin hymns roll through lofty aisles, the festivals and grandeur of Church dignitaries have glorified the name of Chr the humble carpenter, who died on the Cross to make men be

and nobler. But in actual fact they have detracted from the purity and simplicity of his life and teachings. The most real and genuine appreciation of his life has not come from those who call themselves his followers, but from those who, while being bitter critics of Christianity, have had nothing but praise for the holy life that was Christ's. Nietzsche who threw scorn on Christian ethics as slave-morality had an admiration for Christ, for who could fail to see in him a Superman, heroic in his struggles against fanatical Jews, the haughty Romans, and weak-kneed wavering companions? Judas was not the only Christian to have betrayed his Master. Christ himself would not disdain to echo the words of Nietzsche, even if it be in a different context, "It is indecent nowadays to be a Christian."[1]

We are told that numerically the Christians are in a majority in the world to-day. This may not mean much in a generation that is used to empty churches. The real greatness of Christ comes out in the zest with which other religions are anxious to show that they have what Christianity has, and even go to the extent of reinterpreting their faiths in terms of Christ. In Japan, the humble servant of Christ in the person of Kagawa plays a role which may do the soul of Japan far more good than the sabre-rattling of her militarists ever did. In China, Madame Chiang-Kai-Shek, a professed Christian, has brought a new spirit to bear on the ages-old culture of China. What Christ has meant to the Negroes of America can only be appreciated by those who have known the meaning of suffering. Their spirituals have the true note of religious poetry in an age and in a country that prima facie bear the stamp only of official Christian churches.

In India perhaps Christ has met with a reception that goes far beyond the few millions that proclaim themselves as of his fold. The great Raja Ram Mohan Roy felt his call and saw in him a key to a revival of the spiritual inheritance of our hoary Mother India. Keshub Chandra Sen speaking of Christ paid a glowing tribute to him :

> " He lives in all Christian lives, and in all Christian influences at work around us. You may deny his doctrine, you may even

[1] *The Twilight of the Idols.*

> hate his name, but you cannot resist his influence. Christ exists throughout Christendom like an all-pervading leaven, mysteriously and imperceptibly leavening the lives of millions of men and women "[1]

It has struck me most of all that in India we have got so used to speaking of, and thinking of, Gandhiji as Christ. That a Christian Bishop should have set this fashion is a great tribute to the greatness of Gandhiji as to the sincere Christianity of the Bishop himself. That we should follow this practice speaks well of our catholicity and our genuine religious feeling. We are familiar with the fact that there was a time in Gandhiji's evolution when he narrowly missed conversion to Christianity and we cannot read his *Atma-Katha* without feeling the New Testament peeping out of endless passages. He could have easily labelled himself a Christian, but then his great influence over Indians would have been reduced to zero. His Hinduism is miles removed from the orthodox *Sanatana Dharma* and his interpretation of the Gita and the Upanishads and the Dharma Sastras all bear the stamp of the invisible personality of Christ. This is no less true of Dr. Radhakrishnan's *Hindu View of Life*. It has gone through several editions and has received great praise both in the West and in India. But who can say that he could have written that book without being first of all soaked in the spirit of The New Testament ? The Hinduism he has portrayed is not the Hinduism that has lived with its castes, but the Hinduism of the future recast and remodelled on the pattern of Christ. It has been a common gibe that the Europeans came to the Orient with the Bible in one hand and a bottle of whisky in the other. There are Indians for whom the spirit of the West lives in drink, but the better type of Indians has seen in the historic figure of Christ a new dispensation, a new birth, though not in the sense in which Christian missionaries have usually wanted it. There is at least one missionary, Dr. Stanley Jones, whose *Christ of the Indian Road* is a fit memorial to many in India who have been touched by the spirit of Christ and have

[1] Quoted in P. C. Mazumdar's *The Oriental Christ*, p. 25.

not cared to be known as Christians, for what after all is in a name? If ever the words of some thoughtless Indians have tried to belittle the work of these missions I can but ask them to find their reward in the words of their Master: "For I was hungry and ye gave meat. I was thirsty and ye gave me drink..... Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Swami Vivekananda had the courage once to describe the traditional Hinduism of the masses as the religion of the kitchen, and thanks to it India has not known the real union of hearts. We need to digest one great saying of Christ more than any other: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." (*St. Matthew* 15.11).

We have all heard of Renan's great *Life of Christ*. He does not accept his divinity and Renan was traduced by the orthodox, and so a tribute coming from him has greater worth, a tribute which may well be echoed by all, who whether Christians or not have felt in their hearts the meaning of Christ:

> "This sublime person, who each day still presides over the destiny of the world, we may call divine, not in the sense that Jesus has absorbed all the divine, or has been adequate to it (to employ an expression of the schoolmen), but in the sense that Jesus is the one who has caused his fellow-men to take the greatest step towards the divine."

Religions are many, but Religion is one. In that one Religion along with the other great prophets and teachers Christ too will always find a leading and an abiding place. "The tale of his life will cause ceaseless tears, his sufferings will soften the best hearts" and all the ages will proclaim as they think of him: ECCE HOMO!

LECTURE VIII

The Religion of the Future

In the course of the last six lectures I have tried to bring out briefly, but as fully as one can within the limits of lectures, the richness and the complexity of the religious life of mankind. There has been an undoubted evolution of religious values, though unfortunately too slowly for the ardent reformer so that even today much remains under the cloak of religion, which does no credit either to the God worshipped or His worshippers. But there is the purifying light of the Prophets and great saints, always inciting us to a higher life, and the seed sown cannot but sprout one day for the upliftment of all mankind.

Our survey of the religious quest has brought out three main types of religious life.

The first type is what may be briefly called orthodox. They number the majority among the professed followers of a religion, and constitute its backbone, good or bad. They are usually addicted to a meticulous performance of rituals, observance of feasts and the undertaking of pilgrimages. Many of them are good in the usual moral sense of the term *i.e.*, they are good citizens and are not obnoxious neighbours. But they suffer from a sense of superiority; for them their religion is the best and other religions are only the second best, if they are considered to be good at all. They have a narrow outlook on life and consequently a narrow heart: in Swift's caustic language they have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love, one another. Under a mistaken sense of loyalty to their religion, they at times even develop into fanatics and look upon human souls as a sort of mercantile commodity that should be won over to their faith through persuasion, if possible, or force, if necessary. Such people are apt to be more true to the letter of their scriptures and are completely blind to their real

spirit. They are the people who wrangle all their life and feel happy if they think they have won a victory, however verbal it be, over their adversaries. They are the type of people so despised by Christ as Scribes and Pharisees, and every religion, Christianity not excluded, has produced its own Scribes and Pharisees in abundance. They are the type to whom Christ had to say: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for Sabbath" (St. Mark 2. 27). They flourish on the ignorance and credulity of the masses.

The second type is the mystic type. They are rather few, for they are the real spiritual geniuses. They rise above texts and can enter into the very heart of religion. They rely on some inner vision, some inner conviction, some direct inspiration. They rise above their narrow environment and inevitably come into conflict with the ignorant hordes of the orthodox. But strong in their inner faith, they bear patiently all the persecutions, petty and even excruciating, to which they are subjected. They constitute the very core of religion. Persecuted in their life time they often come to be adored as martyrs and saints by the posterity, and some are even deified.

The third type is of those who give an outlet to their sense of deep religion through the spirit of service. Christian missionaries, especially teachers and physicians, and monastic orders come under this category. The members of the Rama-Krishna Mission in India emulate their example and have started a new tradition of service. They have a certain mystic tinge in them, even if they are not all full-fledged mystics. All of them have an abiding faith in God or some spiritual principle. They have an inner certainty about it and are content to serve mankind as best they can, for in men they see the children of God.

The first type serves merely to maintain a religious tradition. If religion has come to have a bad odour about it, it is entirely due to the excesses of this type. The more we can do without it, the better it will be for humanity and for religion. The day will be happy indeed when there will be no priests to fan the flames of fanaticism, and fanaticism will only figure in histories

as a relic of human folly. The second type at times gets lost in a merely emotional frenzy, but it is the main source of religious inspiration and the world would be poorer without mystics. The third type as the servants of humanity will always make religion a priceless treasure of humanity.

In the religious evolution of mankind we have now come to a stage when polytheism has become an anachronism, to which only the backward people still remain addicted. I refuse to believe that God is partial to the followers of only this or that historic monotheism. If God is what He is said to be, there can be no need for conversion from one great religion to another great religion. But I do feel that it is the duty of every religious person to wean people from the low types of religion fostering magic and animal sacrifices, for they are really anti-religious. One can but trust the progressive vogue of education to see that all these lower types of religion find a natural and early grave.

If a referendum were taken all over the world for the continuance of religion, we may be sure that the vast majority will vote for it. The minority voting against religion will contain people superficially educated and without any deep sense of the values of life. They remind us of Maeterlinck's pregnant statement: "I want to live my own life, say young girls and young boys, and they live only their death." But as against these raw specimens of humanity the minority voting against religion will undoubtedly contain men and women, highly refined and with a sensitiveness of soul worthy of admiration, men like Ingersoll and Bradlaugh. In this free age we have to respect the reasoned opinions of all, and even admire Bradlaugh and Ingersoll for their Promethean spirit of rebellion, and Winwood Reade, who in his great book, The Martyrdom of Man, seeks to reduce religion to Virtue, place our Hope in the happiness of our posterity, and to find Faith only in the perfectibility of Man. He looks forward to the day "when the European God of the nineteenth century will be classed with the gods of Olympus and the Nile." In this age of science this is a phase of thought which need cause no surprise. But as already shown in the very first lecture this phase is more of the 19th than of the 20th century. The atheism of

the 19th century has been found to be bleak, dogmatic and blind to peculiar human experiences. The tide has turned, and the scientists and the philosophers of the 20th century have given a new and fresh lease of life to an irrepressible hunger of the soul which finds its food only in religion. In the great pages of Professor Whitehead we find a union of mathematics and science, philosophy and religion. He looks upon religion as "the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real and yet waiting to be realised; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension, something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest."[1] This is the verdict of the greatest philosopher of our day. To him "the worship of God is not a rule of safety—it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure."[2] If the philosopher cannot hope to grasp the concept of God in its full concreteness, he at least is driven to deduce its reality. It is left to the mystic as the religious genius to assert the truth of God. It is the province of philosophy to curb the excesses religious emotion and to sift the truth of religion. Any way after the exuberant hopes held out by science of annihilating God and religion, Europe has come back to the idea of Macterlinck that "to cease searching for God means to lose Him and to lose oneself without any hope." The West in its worship of science has come to develop the demon of science thirsting for human blood with its myriad weapons of destruction. The West has come to a morass. Its finest spirits feel themselves strangers within its stifling atmosphere and to escape from it they turn to the East. Romain Rolland quotes a fine example in Michelet:

> "The West is too narrow. Greece is small: I stifle there. Judaea is dry: I pant there. Let me look towards Asia and the profound

[1] *Science and the Modern World*, p. 238.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 239.

> East for a little while. There lies my great poem, as vast as the Indian Ocean, blessed, gilded with the sun, the book of divine harmony wherein is no dissonance. A serene peace reigns there, and in the midst of conflict an infinite sweetness, a boundless fraternity, which spreads over all living things, an ocean (without bound or bottom) of love, of pity, of clemency. I have found the object of my search: The Bible of Kindness."[1]

Rolland himself, a towering genius, who has devoted his whole life to the reconciliation of mankind, has been captivated by the greatness of India, not merely by her great past and her classics, but by her present capacity to lead the world in the realm of spirit. It is an honour to India that so great a man has played the foremost role in introducing to the West Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in full biographies and his lyrical rhapsody in praise of Tagore and Gandhiji touches us in our love of the lofty as in the love of our country:

> "O Tagore! O Gandhi! rivers of India, who like the Indus and the Ganges, clasp within your double embrace the Orient and the Occident—the latter a tragedy of heroic action, the former a vast dream of heroic light—both streaming forth from the home of God, on this world tilled by the ploughshares of Hate and Violence, scatter His seeds."

This tribute is surely well deserved, for whatever her shortcomings India has kept alive the spiritual yearnings of mankind. Religion at its highest has produced a type of man with such marked noble characteristics and so precious that the world cannot afford to let it die. It would be worth while lingering on these characteristics. The first characteristic is a faith in the spiritual quality of the world, something that makes even a particle of dust shine in its spiritual setting. Of such faith were the Bhaktas in India, the Sufis in Iran, the Prophets of Israel, the Christian mystics. The second characteristic is that he bears witness to God within Him. Even in the most dualistic of religions where God is conceived as being beyond the universe and far transcending it there is a recognition of a special bond between man and God as *e.g.* in Israel and in Islam. This consciousness breeds a

[1] Quoted by Rolland in his *Life of Ramakrishna*.

peculiar strength of character: a will to defy opposition, a marvellous capacity to suffer. The Hindu's capacity to bear the misfortunes of life evokes admiration. It is due to his belief in the principle of *Karma*, which itself is but a part of the harmony of nature in the moral sphere. The father of Jnaneshwar had taken *sanyas*, but gave it up and married. This exposed him to persecution, but he bore it bravely and young Jnaneshwar grew up in this atmosphere and became a great *bhakta* to be followed by crowds. Luther could say: "I can, and will retract nothing". This type of courage comes only to those who are inspired by high ideals and a faith in God:

> "God's in his heaven
> All's right with the world."

The third characteristic, and I think from the purely religious standpoint the most important one, is an anti-ritualistic attitude, shedding the mere externals of religion. Ritualism comes so easy to most men that it comes to have a disproportionate value in the eyes of the so-called religious. There are millions of Muslims who are so meticulous in their observance of prayers five times a day and of Ramzan for a month and of a *haj* to Mecca. It creates such a full sense of securing heaven that the more difficult part of the moral implications of the Quran are apt to be forgotten. Christ's open rebuke about the Sabbath did not prevent the Scotch in Edinburgh some decades ago from carrying on a campaign that trams should not work on Sundays. An orthodox Parsee still imagines that the application of bull's urine to his body purifies it and his most sacred bath consists in taking it both externally and internally. Somerset Maugham with his usual caustic humour has a dig at the missionaries when in His *Rain* he makes the missionary Davidson say: "The inhabitants of these islands will never be thoroughly Christianised till every boy of more than ten years is made to wear a pair of trousers."[2] All such people have yet to learn the great lesson taught by Kabir:

> "*Sabahi bhumi Benarasi, saba nir Ganga toy,*
> *Jnani atmaram hai, jo nimal ghat hoy*"
>
> (to the *jnani* and the pure in mind every place is Benares and all water is the water of the Ganges).

But by far the finest characteristic of a man of religion is his high sense of morality. St. James (1. 27) says: "Pure religion and undefiled before God is this: to visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world". In the Quran too the solicitude shown by Mahomed for the widows and the orphans is most touching and the Muslim who carries out all the moral injunctions of the Quran shows himself a gentleman in the highest sense of the term. The glory of a Buddhist is to be found in the spirit of gentleness and helpfulness that he brings to bear on his fellow-men, and a true Zoroastrian finds himself as s uch only to the extent that he is pure in his thoughts, words and deeds. "Under heaven one family" are words which bring out the spirit of all men who believe in God, in whatever way he may choose to worship Him, for this is far less important than the loving act that a man can render to a brother in this universal family. The great words of Christ strike a truly spiritual note: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8. 36).

I am not unaware that man may believe in no God and yet be capable of a high morality, for a man may act morally without thinking out the rationale of morality. If he thinks at all, he will have to fall back on religion or on some sort of metaphysics. If he is able to sustain his moral endeavour without such a basis it is a tribute to the religious environment in which he may have been brought up, but which he has later in life come to disown. I am aware too that many a so-called man of religion allows his judgments and acts to be clouded by the murkiness of his communal or national atmosphere, but the essential greatness of men of religion, however few they be, is that they maintain a universalism in their outlook to bear out the great words of Romain Rolland: "When a man has reached a certain stage in the development of the soul, he knows no nation, he feels the happiness of or unhappiness of the neighbouring peoples as his own. The storm clouds are at his feet. Around him is nothing but the sky, the whole heavens, the kingdom of the Eagle!" The love of God becomes a matter of

words, unless it develops love for His creatures, and once it enters a soul, it has started on its eternal career of conquest.

The evolution of religion has brought out one point beyond doubt that the great monotheisms of to-day have inherited a spiritual and moral fervour that makes one religion as good as another. If we accept this, the primitive superiority complex of every religion must disappear, and all conversions from one great religion to another get themselves reduced to an absurdity. God may have disclosed Himself in many regions and through many prophets, and spoken in different tongues but with one meaning. There is no need for wrangling that the God of the Quran is superior to the God of the Old or New Testament or vice-versa, or that either of them is superior to the God of the Gita or of Mahayana Buddhism. The earlier prophets like Zoroaster and Moses had the advantage of novelty and freshness. The later Prophets have absorbed the best of their teachings and declared the glory and goodness of God just like a torch taken up from their predecessors to light up the waning faith of succeeding generations. A good Zoroastrian merges in a good Christian or a good Muslim or a good Buddhist or a good Vaishnavite or a good Shaivite. The differences crop up in modes of worship. One could wish that every religion would cease to overemphasise the merely external trappings of a religion, though the history of religions as well as the psychology of worship have brought out the fact that ordinary men and women need to buttress up their faith with some sort of ritualistic worship. Most persons cannot but be conscious of the presence of God as a fact and prayer is a continuous reminder to them of that fact. A prayer in the deep recesses of one's heart is perhaps the best, but there are many who require something to concentrate their attention upon while praying, and for them some ritual becomes a necessity. It does not matter much whether we worship before fire or sun as the symbol of God, or before a Cross as the symbol of Christ, or before an idol of Buddha or Krishna or Shiva, before Mecca as a sacred place or before the Ka'aba as the symbol of Muslim unity. But a time does come in the life of every man of God when such an external prop

for worship becomes a superfluity. It is said of Guru Nanak that he was lying one day with his feet turned towards the Ka'aba in Mecca. He was reprimanded and he sagely asked: "Where am I to turn my feet, for God is all around me?" While endorsing this ritualism we shall have to see that the ritual is such as not to involve a violation of the rights of others or is not so repulsive as to cause a lowering of religious values. In short, symbolism has its place in religious life, it is only when it seeks to usurp the place of Godhead that it becomes perverted and reduces itself to the level of a fetish.

It has been a great aspiration of the best and the highest of mankind that one God must imply one religion. But every Prophet who has attempted to do this has succeeded only in adding one more religion, each one so much like the other except in details of lesser importance that I was led to plead for giving up all attempts at conversion as really futile, and even harmful, as it generates needlessly bad blood among the followers of different religions worshipping in their heart of hearts one and the same God. But the evolution of religion has brought out two distinct types of religion, and it is questionable whether they could or would be ever reduced to one type. The first and the most usual type is the one that believes in one and only one Personal God. Such has been the religion of the Prophets in the East and West alike. The other type finds no justification for believing in any personal God, but does recognise a spiritual principle as the one ultimate thing in the universe, and the Vedanta of the Advaitic type is by far the most outstanding example of it. The Buddhism of Buddha himself can also come under this category. But even here a compromise has been effected by creating the concept of *Iswara* as *Saguna Brahman* for purposes of worship, and we have already seen how Mahayana Buddhism has elevated Buddha to godhood and invested him with all the attributes of God. The pure Advaitin and the pure Buddhist may still claim that theism is bad philosophy and that his own philosophy can be the only religion worthy of the *jnani*. I am inclined to think that the difference between the two types will never be completely bridged, that at bottom it is a matter of

temperament as to which type will appeal to whom. In his *In Memoriam* Tennyson puts the case for theism thus :

"If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,
I heard a voice 'believe no more',
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

"A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answered 'I have felt.'"

Such has been the attitude of the great mystics and the great prophets as well. They resent all attempts at argument as leading one away from the living presence of God. But such *ipse-dixits* leave the thinker cold and he insists on a rational foundation for believing in God, if God exists at all. A German philosopher in a lecture at Bombay some half a century ago is said to have argued thus in favour of Vedanta : Christianity says "Love your neighbour as yourself. But Christianity does not say why you should love your neighbour. What is the reason? It is easy in the Vedanta, because your neighbour is yourself".[1] I have heard this argument from Hindu Advaitins and it is quite good so far as it goes. Unfortunately it does not explain why people in India treat men of one caste as different from men of another, even though they are not different from ourselves? Why should so much importance be attached to caste distinctions in the very land where as a theory no one is different from any one else? The German philosopher is less than just when he suggests that Christianity does not explain why we should love our neighbour. It does give a reason and that is that we are all children of one God. I think this is a superior reason, for the non-recognition of all differences cuts both ways. If we are not differnt from one another, how is it at all possible to enter into any relationship with one another whether by way of good or evil behaviour? Ramaprasad, the

[1] Quoted by K. Natarajan in his essay on *Hinduism* in *Modern Trends in World Religions* edited by Eustace Haydon, p. 57.

Saivite poet of Bengal, brings out the essential characteristic of the theist when he says: "Sugar I love to eat, but I have no wish to become sugar." This is put as neatly as possible and discloses a fundamental difference in outlook which perhaps nothing will completely bridge. The theist feels his weakness and limitations and turns to God for strength and help and feels strong only in that assurance. His heart is suffused with softness and love for the humblest of God's creatures. The Advaitin on the other hand feels strong in his consciousness of *Aham Brahmasmi* and disdains all values even of the good and evil as belonging to a lower stage of thought. But even the strictest Advaitin cannot maintain this attitude right through his mundane existence, and so even while decrying *Iswara* creates one for the satisfaction of his emotional and religious needs and for all practical purposes becomes indistinguishable from the ordinary run of theists.

So far as western philosophy is concerned the attempt to adduce metaphysical proofs for the existence of God has been given up since the devastating onslaught of Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. He himself gave a theistic foundation to his ethics by bringing in the conception of God as the ultimate postulate of all morality. But even this has been challenged on the ground that morality is a social phenomenon and morality finds its full justification in the fact that without it no society can subsist and so there is no need to have recourse to a God outside society. We have certainly had examples of many towering personalities, including that Saint of Rationalism, John Stuart Mill, who have preached and sustained in their lives a high ethical life. The 19th century was full of this way of thinking, but the twentieth century has brought about a revival of religious thought as something *sui generis*, which is independent of both metaphysics and ethics. The majority of these thinkers under the leadership of William James have been drawn to theism and find in mystic experience full authority for their belief. In so far as mystic experience is rooted in feeling and in some sort of intuitiveness it has given rise to frauds, but there have been mystics in all ages and in all climes who have borne witness to

the truth of their mystic experiences by the purity of their thought and their own life. "By their fruits shall ye judge them." By this test the deliverances of the mystics have to be accepted for their emphasis on goodness and purity of life. At the level of mere thought the dispute between the theistic and the Advaitic attitudes to life will never be solved, for as the Advaintin himself admits at the thought level dualism must be there and cannot be transcended, and when it is transcended as in *Nivritti Yoga* we can no more speak of it. But just because of the difficulties of language in most mystic literature we find an oscillation between the two attitudes as the mystic himself does not always know whether his quest has ended in the Divine Person of God or in some Divine Principle. We find this oscillation in Kabir, we find it in Eckart. Plato was not immune from it. The reason is that even if the ultimate reality is not a person with all the limitations of our personality we cannot but personify it to suit the needs of language as well as of our heart. So oscillation continues with varying emphasis. In Emerson and in Aldoux Huxley we find a certain approximation to pantheism of the Advaitic type. Contrarywise in Ramakrishna and in Vivekananda we find a recognition of both attitudes. Gandhiji enjoys the reputation of being a great man of religion though he has never claimed to be a prophet. But it is very difficult to make out what he means by God. He has never made a secret of the fact that he has been deeply attracted by the great Prophets and has said that he has been moved most by the Gita of Krishna and the Ramayana of Tulsidas. But when he says "I worship God as Truth only" he raises a question whether he himself does not lapse into a non-theistic attitude. This is made clearer in what he wrote from Yeravda Mandir :

> "The word *Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means Being. As nothing is or exists in reality except Truth, that is why Sat or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact, it is more correct to say that truth is God than to say that God is truth. But as we cannot do without a ruler or a general, names of God such as King of Kings or the All-Mighty are and will remain more usually current. On deeper thinking, however, it will be

realised that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God."

If in recent years some of the great spirits of the West have been attracted by Indian thought, it is even more true that many great spirits in the East, and not the least in India, have been affected by the highest thought of the West. This is as it really should be, for Truth can have no geographical or national boundaries. An incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda throws a flood of light on this mutual influence :

"The Swami knew he was going to die. It is our belief in India that a Yogi can, within limits, determine the hour of his death. This man determined that he would die on a particular day. On the previous day he felt a little better, as people often do before the end. He came out of his room, from which he had not emerged for some time, went to his fellow-monks, served them with food and washed their hands. When they expressed their surprise he answered—"Jesus washed the feet of his disciples." [1]

Such a simple answer speaks volumes for the deep impression that the personality of Christ has made on the Indian mind. The Ramakrishna Mission itself is Swami Vivekananda's creation based on the Christian ideal of service. India has known orders of *sanyasins* for millenia, but never before were they consecrated to the service of the ignorant, the suffering, as the numerous educational institutions and dispensaries and hospitals maintained by the Mission have been. Ramakrishna himself, though a stranger to the knowledge of the West, must have been affected by the *Zeit-Geist* when he came to recognise : "Jiva is Shiva (all living beings are God). Who then dare talk of showing mercy to them ? Not mercy, but service, service, for man must be regarded as God" [2] He was conscious of the dangers of creeds and of *-isms*. Life must be open to all currents of new knowledge, from wheresoever they may come, for as he put it "A river has no need of barriers. If it dams itself up it stagnates and becomes foul." [3] And again he says : "The roof is within a

[1] *Modern Trends in World Religions* : Essay on *The Task of Hinduism* by K. Natarajan, p. 228.

[2] Quoted in Romain Rolland's *Life of Ramkrishna*, p. 96.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 208.

man's sight but it is very difficult to reach it.....but he who has reached it can let down a rope and pull others upto him upon the roof.''[1] Vivekananda caught the inspiration of his Master and boldly declared: "If you want to find God, serve man!"[2] Even in a more exalted key he said on another occasion: "May I be born and reborn again and suffer a thousand miseries if only I am able to worship the only God in whom I believe, the sum total of all souls, and above all my God the wicked, my God the afflicted, my God the poor of all races!"[3] Verily even in the 19th century India was capable of producing a new Buddha and inculcating again the spirit of the Bodhisatvas to postpone their *nirvana* just for the sake of serving mankind. It would be but fair to acknowledge that owing to the inspiration of Christ the zest to serve has taken a wider significance, and India is richer with the new spirit that courses through her blood to-day.

Now that we see the eagerness of the West to learn from the East and of the East to learn from the West: not merely the so-called materialism of the West, but a deep spirituality that runs in Western philosophy and religion at their highest, we can say that the East and West can meet not merely "when two strong men stand face to face" as Rudyard Kipling taught, but even more when they meet in the spirit of God, and see one another as children of the same Father.

To people who still look upon religion as fit only for the children in years and children in intellect we have the long history of religion in reply. From the early crudities we have passed on to a conception of God, at once so simple and so complex that men of religion only feel His presence, while the men of philosophy can take refuge only in *Neti, Neti,* to bring out the positive implications behind all negatives. It has not created the conception of a moral God just out of fancy, but because the metaphysics of ethical life demands it. If philosophers have accepted it, it is because the logic of thought requires some positive background for the play of the universe which

[1] *Ibid.* p. 310.
[2] Quoted in Romain Rolland's *Life of Vivekananda*, p. 11.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 29

is such a magnificent mixture of tragedy and comedy. It is doubtful if we shall ever gain a fuller insight into God than the great teachings of Zoroaster and Christ have vouchsafed to us. The pregnant present goads on our heart and mind alike to recognise some mysterious hand in the shaping of the world. If it has not completely entered our heart, it has at least made us see the futility of mere ritualistic religions which neither make us better nor more enlightened, but only confirm us in our narrow prejudices. If we are still unable to say whether God is a He or an It, we are at least able to see that some great Mind pervades the whole universe so that nothing is that is not in God. If we are still so perverse as to pit one nationality against another, we have been able to learn this at least that the God of nations is superior to the god of this or that tribe, of this or of that nation. If we are still in the dark about the future and look at events around us with fear and dismay, we are still able to catch the divine confidence of the *Bhaktas*, a faith which even an atheist like Shelley cannot deny :

"O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

So in spite of many dark nights that religion has passed through, it still continues to be something that calls us to a brighter day. It is imposible to do without religion and even Oscar Wilde who has no place in the history of religion is constrained to say : "Everything to be true must become a religion". Religions tend to develop into narrow creeds, but what is living in any religion is the attitude behind it, and religion can best be defined as an attitude to life, which makes us conscious of some great power beyond and behind us, making us conscious of our limitations but giving us a sense of strength and kinship that we are not alone in the world fighting our lone battles and that through our struggles we find ourselves as men who are akin to the divine. It is a definition broad enough to include in it not only the great monotheisms, but also the great *Nirvana* of Buddha and the *Brahman* of the Upanishads, and even perhaps a

Scepticism, that doubts but to learn, and an Atheism which goes beyond all shallow materialism.

While giving these lectures I have been feeling as if I have been on a pilgrimage to places rendered sacred by the footsteps of the great Prophets and teachers of mankind. Rai in ancient Iran, Jerusalem, Mecca, Kurukshetra, Benares, Gaya and Sarnath have each claimed a reverential survey. It has been a source of great encouragement that in this pilgrimage some of you have kept me company day after day. If as a result of it you have felt with me strengthend in the faith that in religion we find a quest for values, some low, some high, but all enriching our life, this pilgrimage will not have been undertaken in vain. Perhaps we may even venture to take a peep at the future and venture on a few thoughts by way of summation as to what the future of religion is likely to be. With the rising tide of science and communism, the Christianity of the Churches reared on the myth of the Resurrection, may not be able to survive, but Christ, the loving Son of Man and the embodiment of suffering humanity, Christ, the friend of the poor and the weak, will assuredly live as the Great Ideal. Islam too has great practical common sense in it and has spiritual value in it to be worthy of continuing as a world religion, provided the tendency of its followers to resort to violence for material ends under the cloak of religion can be curbed in the spirit of the Prophet Mahomed himself. Vaishnavism and Shaivism, shorn of their Puranic associations and accretions, may yet continue to figure in India as exalted monotheisms in the spirit of the *Bhaktas* who have sung of them as exalting ideals.

For those who can think *Advaita Vedanta* has a future but it will be only for the few who will strive to realise the Brahman within them and are so honest and bold as not to compromise with the superficialities of popular religion. But it will have no appeal for those who would rather eat sugar than become 'sugar in the expressive phrase of Ramaprasad Sen.

There may also be a few who will find in the pursusit of science a new religion : a life devoted to the unravelling of the secrets of nature. A true scientist is not likely to be lost in the

pride of new discoveries, for like Newton and Einstein he will be sufficiently humble to recognise that beyond his discoveries there still lies an ocean of facts yet to be discovered. This very fact will breathe in him true humility, the hall-mark of the religious spirit.

There will be others who walking in the foot-steps of Buddha will seek to find in morality and in the spirit of service their real God. For them God is nothing but the service of mankind, and Goodness itself becomes God.

East and West to-day have become but relative terms. The theist, the Vedantin, the scientist, the ethicist will pursue their paths in both East and West. In the final resort religion is the pursuit of the highest values : beauty, truth, love, holiness. The pilgrims to the shrines of religion may tread the same or varied paths, but they have to learn one great lesson from China where the Confucian bows before the Buddhist and the Taoist Temples and the Buddhist and the Taoist bow before a Confucian shrine. It is a recognition of the catholicity of true religion. It implies much more than mere tolerance, which has a somewhat pedantic tinge and savours of the superiority complex. It implies a real appreciation of others' faith. May the religion of the future be such that people may recognise the one God, the Supreme Value, behind the different names and the differing paraphernalia of worship and bow to one another's temples as pilgrim worshippers at the shrines of what the theists call God, the Vedantins call Brahman, and the scientists call Truth, and the Ethicists call the Good. Human nature is complex and cannot be stereotyped like the standardised articles of commerce. The world is big enough to permit differing manifestations of the religious spirit. "In my Father's house are many mansions," said Christ (St. John 14.2), and there are different paths to reach the Lord of the Universe, as Shri Krishna taught in the Bhagwad Gita.

The test of all true religion is what we make of our life here and now by creating greater and greater harmony and understanding among ourselves. The lover of God must also show himself a lover of mankind, and it is in this spirit that I should like to

end this series of lectures in the words of St. Paul, for whom I cannot pretend to have an unqualified admiration, but who certainly had the chief hand in taking the life and teachings of Christ far beyond the narrow confines of Judea.

"Finally brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be always with you." (II Corinthians 13.11)

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