VII

RELIGION: CULTS, DOCTRINES AND METAPHYSICS

(1) THE RELIGION OF THE VEDAS

Gods of the Rg Veda

The earliest civilized inhabitants of India worshipped a Mother Goddess and a horned fertility god; they had sacred trees and animals, and ritual ablutions apparently played an important part in their religious life. Beyond this much has been said and written about the religion of the Harappan people, but in the absence of intelligible texts any efforts at further defining it are very speculative. The salient features of Harappan religion appeared again in a new form at a much later date, and we must assume that it never died, but was quietly practised by the humbler people, gradually developing from contact with other doctrines and cults, until it gathered enough strength to reappear, and largely to overlay the old faith of the Aryan rulers of India.

We have much knowledge of the religion of the early Aryans from the 1028 hymns of the Rg Veda, which is the oldest religious text in the world still looked on as sacred, and which was probably composed between 1500 and 900 B.C. The Rg Veda is a collection of hymns for use at the sacrifices of the aristocratic Aryan cult. The three later Vedas, the Sāma, Yajur and Atharva, are of somewhat different character. The Sāma Veda is almost useless to the historian, being a collection of certain verses of the Rg Veda arranged for liturgical purposes. The Yajur Veda, compiled a century or two later than the Rg Veda, contains sacrificial formulæ in prose and verse to be pronounced by the adhvaryu, or priest who performed the manual part of the sacrifice. It exists in various recensions (sāṃhitās), which are of two types, the “Black” giving the formulæ with rubricated instructions, and the “White” adding detailed instructions in a lengthy appendix called a Brāhmaṇa. The Atharva Veda consists mainly of magical spells and incantations in verse, and was certainly compiled after the Rg and Yajur. It possesses, however, an atmosphere of simple animism and sympathetic magic, and seems to reflect a lower cultural level than that of the Rg Veda, deriving from the plebeian religion of the Aryan and containing many non-Aryan
elements. The massive Brāhmaṇas, which are looked on as appendices to the Vedas, and the mystical Āranyakas and Upaniṣads, which are in turn appendices to the Brāhmaṇas, complete the literature generally known as Vedic. The material in the Brāhmaṇas looks back in the main to the period between c. 800 and 600 B.C., and the earliest Upaniṣads overlap with the latest Brāhmaṇas, though some Upaniṣads are certainly of much more recent date. The religion of the people who composed this literature was not that of later India, and many scholars refer to it as Brāhmaṇism or Vedism, to distinguish it from Hinduism, to which it bears a relation similar to that between the sacrificial Judaism of the temple and the later Judaism of the synagogue.

Much of the Rg Veda is imperfectly understood; the oldest exegetical work on it, the Nirukta (Etymology) of Yāska, perhaps dating from 500 B.C., shows that at a very early period the brāhmaṇas had forgotten the true meaning of many obsolete words. But the broad outlines of the religion of the Rg Veda are clear enough. The chief objects of worship were the devas, a word cognate with the Latin deus. The root from which this word is derived, div, is connected with brightness and radiance, and the devas by connotation were “the shining ones”. The early gods of the Āryans, like those of the Greeks, were chiefly connected with the sky and were predominantly male. A few goddesses occur in the Rg Veda; for instance Prithvi, a vague and rarely mentioned personification of the earth, Aditi, a mysterious and tenuous figure, the great mother of the gods, Uṣas, the goddess of the dawn, to whom a number of lovely hymns were addressed, Rātri, the spirit of the night, who has a beautiful hymn to herself (p. 404), and Aranyāni, the Lady of the Forest, a nature goddess of little importance who is praised in one very late hymn (p. 405); none of these, however, played a significant part in the cult.

At a remote period the ancestors of the Āryans, Iranians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Slavs and Celts had similar, if not identical, beliefs; but by the time the Āryans had entered India their religion had developed far from the old Indo-European faith. The great father god of the Indo-European peoples, who appears in Greek as Zeus and in Latin as Ju-piter, was known to the Āryans as Dyaus, the personified heaven, but his star had already set. Father Heaven was often mentioned as the parent of other divinities, but few hymns were composed in his honour, and he was eclipsed by his children.

From the point of view of the Āryan warrior the greatest god was Indra, who fulfilled the dual function of war-god and weather-god. Though his name was different he had many of the characteristics of
the Greek Zeus and the Germanic Thor. As Indra *tonans* he rode at the head of the Āryan host and destroyed the fortresses of the Dāsas; as Indra *pluvius* he slew the evil dragon Vṛtra who held back the waters, and thus he brought rain to the parched land (p. 402ff). Indra was associated with storm and thunder, and, like Zeus and Thor, his hand bore the thunderbolt (*vajra*), with which he destroyed his enemies. He was a rowdy amoral deity, fond of feasting and drinking. One hymn, according to the usual interpretation, shows us the drunken Indra bragging in his cups, though it may well represent the feelings of a worshipper who has drunk liberally of the sacred drink *soma*:

"Like wild winds
the draughts have raised me up. Have I been drinking soma

"The draughts have borne me up,
as swift steeds a chariot. Have I . . . ?

"Frenzy has come upon me,
as a cow to her dear calf. Have I . . . ?

"As a carpenter bends the seat of a chariot
I bend this frenzy round my heart. Have I . . . ?

"Not even as a mote in my eye
do the five tribes count with me. Have I . . . ?

"The heavens above
do not equal one half of me. Have I . . . ?

"In my glory I have passed beyond the sky
and the great earth. Have I . . . ?

"I will pick up the earth,
and put it here or put it there. Have I . . . ?"1

With Indra in his course across the sky rode the bright host of *Maruts*, singing martial songs as they aided the war-god in his battles. They were the lesser spirits of the storm, conceived on the analogy of the host of Āryan warriors charging into battle beside their leader. The Āryans evidently had many legends in which Indra was the protagonist, but none of them can be reconstructed in detail from the cryptic allusions of the hymns. Two of Indra’s traits connect him with Indo-European mythology, for they were applied to various gods and heroes throughout ancient Europe—he was a dragon-slayer (p. 402), and a wild rider of the storm. The former feature of his character may have been a very early borrowing from Mesopotamia.

Several gods were associated with the sun. *Sūrya* (the common word for sun) drove across the sky in a flaming chariot, like the Greek
Helios. *Savitr*, the Stimulator, was another solar god, a beautiful verse in whose honour is the most holy of all the verses of the Veda (p. 163). *Pusan* too was in some measure a solar god, driving daily across the sky, but his main function was that of guardian of roads, herdsman and straying cattle. *Vishnu*, a god connected in part with the sacrifice, also had solar characteristics, covering the earth in three paces, a trait which he retained in later Hinduism, when his importance greatly increased. On the fringes of the solar pantheon was *Surya*, the sun-god’s daughter, who seems never to have been worshipped, but merely served to connect her two husbands, the *Asvins* ("Horsemens" also called *Nasatya*), with the sun; these are described as driving across the sky in their three-wheeled chariot, but in the hymns they are not closely associated with natural phenomena. They are twins—a fact which connects them with the Greek Dioscuri and twin gods of pre-Christian Baltic mythology. The Asvins appear chiefly as helpers of men; among their many good deeds they are said to have rescued shipwrecked mariners, provided artificial legs for the maimed, and found husbands for old maids.

The fire-god, *Agni* (which means simply "fire", and is related to the Latin *ignis*), was the object of much primitive mysticism and speculation. He was the god of the priest, who dealt with him at the fire-sacrifice; he was also the god of the home, for he dwelt in the domestic hearth; he was the intermediary between gods and men, for he consumed the sacrifice and carried it to the gods. He dwelt in the waters of heaven in the form of lightning, and on earth in many forms. He was hidden in the fire-sticks, with which the sacrificial fire was kindled and which were personified as his parents. Agni, in fact, was here, there and everywhere. Was there only one Agni, or were there many Aignis? How could Agni be one and many at the same time? Questions like these are asked in the *Rg Veda*, and show the earliest signs of the tendency towards monism, which was to bear fruit in the Upanishads.

*Soma* was a divinity of special character. Soma was originally a plant, not certainly identified, from which a potent drink was produced, which was drunk only at sacrifices, and which caused the most invigorating effects, as we have seen from the hymn quoted above. The Zoroastrians of Persia had a similar drink, which they called *haoma*, the same word as soma in its Iranian form; the plant identified with *haoma* by the modern Parsis is a bitter herb, which has no specially inebriating qualities, and which is therefore not the soma of the Veda. The drink prepared from the plant can scarcely have been alcoholic, for it was made with great ceremony in the course of the sacrifice, when the herb was pressed between stones, mixed
with milk, strained and drunk on the same day. Sugar and honey, which produce fermentation, were not usually mixed with it, and the brief period between its brewing and consumption cannot have been long enough for the generation of alcohol in appreciable quantity. The effects of soma, with vivid hallucinations and the sense of expanding to enormous dimensions, are rather like those attributed to such drugs as hashish. Soma may well have been hemp, which grows wild in many parts of India, Central Asia and South Russia, and from which modern Indians produce a narcotic drink called bhang.

Like many ancient peoples the Indians connected the growth of plants with the moon, with which Soma, the king of plants, was later identified. So important was the god Soma considered by the ancient editors of the Rg Veda that they extracted all the hymns in his honour and placed them in a separate “book” (mandala), the ninth of the ten which constitute the whole. He was the special god of the brāhmans, who referred to him as their “king” or patron deity. He is sometimes even called the king of the gods, but by the ordinary Āryan it is doubtful if he was so highly esteemed.

Varuṇa, second only to Indra in importance, was a god of a type rather different from the others. He is known as an Asura, a term, also applied to certain lesser gods, which in later Hinduism came to mean a class of demons, but which was in Persia adopted by the reformer Zarathuṣtra in its local form as part of the title of the great god of light, Ahura Mazda. Just as the shadowy Dyaus represents the high god of the Indo-European peoples before their separation, so Varuṇa may have been the high god of the Indo-Iranians before the two peoples divided, one to settle in N.-W. India and the other in the Persian highlands. The name is connected by some authorities with the shadowy Greek heaven-god Uranus. At the time of the composition of the Veda, Varuṇa’s prestige was waning before that of Indra, but he retained some importance for many centuries.

Varuṇa was first and foremost a king—not a boisterous tribal war-lord like Indra, but a mighty emperor sitting in a great palace in the heavens, often with associated gods around him. Most important of these was Mitra, a god with some solar characteristics, but mainly connected with vows and compacts. Mitra was represented in the Zoroastrian pantheon, and, under his Greco-Iranian name Mithras, was widely worshipped in the Roman Empire in early Christian times. Around Varuṇa sat his scouts or spies (spaṭ), who flew all over the world and brought back reports on the conduct of mortals.

Varuṇa was the guardian of Rta, the cosmic order, a concept which was perhaps the highest flight of Rg Vedic thought. The world takes its regular course, day follows night and season succeeds season,
because of Rta; man must live according to Rta; in later days “non-
Rta” (anRta) became one of the commonest words for untruth and
sin. Rta depended on Varuṇa, who was sometimes looked on as its
maker, and was thus a sort of creator-god.

Of all the Āryan gods Varuṇa was ethically the highest. He was
always aware of the deeds of men, and was omnipresent, in the
theistic as opposed to the pantheistic sense. Two men, even in the
most secret of places or at the ends of the earth, cannot make plans
alone—a third person, Varuṇa, is always there. The worshipper
approached Varuṇa in a spirit different from that in which he prayed
to the other gods, most of whom were lively, cheerful fellows, whom
men need not fear if they offered regular sacrifices. Varuṇa was so
pure and holy that the mere performance of sacrifice would not ensure
his favour, for he abhorred sin, or that which was not conformable
to Rta. The idea of sin included many purely ritual sins and breaches
of taboo, but it also certainly included lying, which Varuṇa and Mitra
particularly loathed, and evil deeds prompted by anger, drink,
gambling, and the influence of wicked men. When he sang to Varuṇa
the cheerful Vedic poet often put on sackcloth and ashes, and prayed
to his deity with fear and trembling, for Varuṇa was the severe
punisher of sin. Not only did Varuṇa punish the sins of the individual
but, like the Yahweh of the Old Testament, he visited the sins of
his ancestors upon him, and his ubiquity ensured that there was no
escape for the sinner. He caught and bound evil-doers in his snares,
so that they became diseased, especially with dropsy, and when they
died they descended to the “House of Clay”, apparently a sort of
gloomy subterranean Sheol, very different from the happy “World
of the Fathers”, the Āryan heaven.

So humble was the worshipper in Varuṇa’s presence, so conscious
of weakness, guilt and shortcoming, that on reading the hymns to
Varuṇa one is inevitably reminded of the penitential psalms of the
Old Testament. It has been suggested that Varuṇa owes much of his
caracter to Semitic influence—certainly not to the Jews, for the
penitential psalms were composed after the hymns to Varuṇa, and as
far as we know the early Hebrews never came in contact with the
Āryans, but perhaps to the Babylonians, who often approached their
gods in a similar penitential spirit. We quote a typical hymn to
Varuṇa; it is obviously the prayer of a man afflicted with dropsy.

“Let me not go to the House of Clay, O Varuṇa!
Forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!
When I go tottering, like a blown-up bladder,
forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!”
"Holy One, in want of wisdom I have opposed you.
Forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!
Though in the midst of waters, thirst has seized your worshipper.
Forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!

"Whatever sin we mortals have committed
against the people of the gods,
if, foolish, we have thwarted your decrees,
O god, do not destroy us in your anger!"

Yama, lord of the dead, was a sort of Adam, the first man to die, who became guardian of the World of the Fathers, where the blessed dead, those who have performed the rites of the Aryans, feast joyfully forever.

Rudra (perhaps meaning "the Howler"), like Varuna, had a dangerous side to his character, but, unlike Varuna, was quite amoral. He resembled the Greek Apollo in that he was an archer-god, whose arrows brought disease. Like Indra he was associated with the storm, but he lacked Indra's popular and genial character. He was a remote god, dwelling in the mountains, and was generally an object of fear, invoked to ward off his arrows of plague and disaster. He had, however, a beneficent aspect, for he was guardian of healing herbs, and as such might give health to those whom he capriciously favoured.

There were many other gods, such as Tuṣṭr, the Vedic Vulcan, Aryaman, guardian of compacts and marriage, and Vāyu, the wind-god, who, though important, cannot be described here. There were also demigods of various kinds, among them Viśvedevas, a vague group of indeterminate deities, the Maruts, or storm-spirits, already mentioned, Rbhus, gnomes who worked in metal, Gandharvas, divine musicians, originally a single divinity but later looked on as many, and the lovely Apsarases, comparable to the nymphs of Greece, who might become the mistresses of gods and men.

No Homer or Hesiod attempted to construct a definitive genealogy of all these gods; their relationships are usually vague, and there is no tidy scheme of precedence among them. Each god must have had his own special devotees and priests, and the Rg Veda is the result of an imperfect syncretism of many tribal beliefs and cults. Already in the latest stratum of the Vedic hymns gods are equated or paired together, and there are doubts as to which god is really the greatest. In one hymn4 this important question is asked as a refrain to every verse—"Whom, then, shall we honour with our oblations?"; later theologians were so puzzled by this that they decided that there was a god called Ka (Who?), to whom the hymn was addressed.
Religion: Cults, Doctrines and Metaphysics

Sacrifice

The centre of the Aryan cult was sacrifice. The cult of the domestic hearth existed in many ancient Indo-European communities, and small domestic sacrifices, performed by the head of the house, must have been as important in the days of the Rg Veda as they were in later Hinduism, but the earliest texts describing them are the Gṛhya Sūtras (p. 113) of a much more recent period. The Rg Veda is rather concerned with great sacrifices, paid for by chiefs and wealthier tribesmen. They were already complex rites involving much preparation, the slaughter of numerous animals, and the participation of several well-trained priests.

The main purpose of the sacrifice was the gratification of the gods in order to obtain boons from them. The gods descended to the sacred straw (barhis) on the sacrificial field, drank and ate with the worshippers, and duly rewarded them with success in war, progeny, increase of cattle and long life, on a quid pro quo basis. The solemn Varuṇa and the grim and unpredictable Rudra are exceptional in the Vedic pantheon. Most of the gods were good natured. Guilt-offerings and thank-offerings, of the kind offered by the ancient Hebrews, are almost unheard of in the Veda.

Nevertheless the ceremony must have had its element of awe and wonder. The worshippers, inebriated with soma, saw wondrous visions of the gods; they experienced strange sensations of power; they could reach up and touch the heavens; they became immortal; they were gods themselves. The priests, who alone knew the rituals and formulae whereby the gods were brought to the sacrifice, were masters of a great mystery. With these ideas, which are explicitly stated in the hymns, went others less obvious. Often in the Rg Veda we read of a mysterious entity called brahman; in many contexts brahman is the magical power in the sacred utterance (mantra), but sometimes it has a wider connotation, and implies a sort of supernatural electricity, known to students of primitive religion as mana. The possessor of brahman, by a common process of secondary word formation in Sanskrit, became known as brāhmaṇa,* the tribal priest and magician. In later Vedic times the connection of brahman with speech became more and more pronounced, and the brāhmaṇa's magic was thought to lie in the words he uttered. The words and syllables of the Veda were analysed, and, though the texts were still unwritten, the letters of the alphabet were recognized and personified as eternal divinities. The metres used in the Veda were also thought of as gods. Later certain syllables were believed to be particularly holy.

* In this book usually written in its modern form brāhmaṇ to avoid confusion with the sacred texts of the same name.
notably \( OM \) (the \textit{prañava}), which contains the essence of the Vedas and is pregnant with the utmost power and mystery.

A second conception, which is hinted at in many hymns of the \textit{Rg Veda}, and becomes prominent in the latest stratum, is also widely known in primitive religions—the mystical identification of god, victim and sacrificer. From these ideas the sacrifice obtained an even greater importance in the scheme of things than it had had at the time of the composition of the earlier parts of the \textit{Rg Veda}. By the end of the period it was widely believed that the universe itself arose from a primeval sacrifice.

Though Varuṇa may sometimes have been looked on as a sort of creator, and there are suggestions of Indra’s having fulfilled the same function (p. 402), there is no clearly defined creator-god in the main body of the \textit{Rg Veda}. By the end of the Rg Vedic period, however, such a god had developed, whether wholly from the speculations of the brāhmaṇs or from non-Āryan influences. This god was Prajāpati, “the Lord of Beings”, often identified with Brahmā, the masculine form of the neuter brahman. Prajāpati was thought of as a primeval man (\textit{puruṣa}), who existed before the foundation of the universe. The man was sacrificed, presumably to himself, by the gods, who apparently were his children.* From the body of the divine victim the universe was produced. The “Hymn of the Primeval Man”, in which this first cosmic sacrifice is described, bristles with obscurities, but its purport is quite clear.

“\begin{quote}
When the gods made a sacrifice
with the Man as their victim,
Spring was the melted butter, Summer the fuel,
and Autumn the oblation.
\end{quote}

“\begin{quote}
From that all-embracing sacrifice
the clotted butter was collected.
From it he† made the animals
of air and wood and village.
\end{quote}

“\begin{quote}
From that all-embracing sacrifice
were born the hymns and chants,
from that the metres were born,
from that the sacrificial spells were born.
\end{quote}

“\begin{quote}
Thence were born horses,
and all beings with two rows of teeth.
Thence were born cattle,
and thence goats and sheep.
\end{quote}

* In the Edda the god Wōdan, in order to obtain magic power, is sacrificed by himself to himself.
† Presumably “the Man” Prajāpati himself, who survived his own dismemberment.
"When they divided the Man,  
into how many parts did they divide him?  
What was his mouth, what were his arms,  
what were his thighs and his feet called?

"The brāhmaṇ was his mouth,  
of his arms was made the warrior,  
his thighs became the vaiśya,  
of his feet the sūdra was born.

"The moon arose from his mind,  
from his eye was born the sun,  
from his mouth Indra and Agni,  
from his breath the wind was born.

"From his navel came the air,  
from his head there came the sky,  
from his feet the earth, the four quarters from his ear,  
thus they fashioned the worlds.

"With Sacrifice the gods sacrificed to Sacrifice—  
these were the first of the sacred laws.  
These mighty beings reached the sky,*  
where are the eternal spirits, the gods."

By this time a new attitude to the sacrifice had developed, and the  
rite had become a supernal mystery. By means of it the priests mystically  
repeated the primeval sacrifice, and the world was born anew.  
Without regular sacrifices all cosmic processes would cease, and chaos  
would come again. Thus the order of nature was on ultimate analysis  
not dependent on the gods at all, but on the brāhmaṇa, who by the  
magic of the sacrifice maintained and compelled them. The brāhmaṇa  
was more powerful than any earthly king or any god; by his  
accurate performance of sacrifice he maintained all things, and was  
therefore the supreme social servant; by the slightest variation of  
ritual he could turn the sacrifice against his patrons and destroy them,  
and was therefore the most dangerous of enemies.

This is the basic doctrine of the Brāhmaṇas, and it prevailed in  
many Āryan communities in North India from about 900 B.C. onwards, and left its mark on Hinduism in the exaltation of the brāhmaṇ. In this period many of the old gods of the Rg Veda lost their  
greatness, and became comparatively unimportant, while others rose  
in popularity, notably Viṣṇu and Rudra; the latter was already sometimes called by the epithet Śiva, "the Propitious", originally a depre-  
catory euphemism.

* It is not clear who are the mighty beings referred to. They are not, the gods them-  
selves, and the last verse may be a later addition.
New Developments of Doctrine

As Āryan culture pressed further down the Gangā it absorbed new ideas about the after-life. In the Rg Veda the fate of the dead seems to have been finally decided when they died—they went either to the "World of the Fathers" or to the "House of Clay", where they remained indefinitely. But in one late hymn it is suggested in cryptic language that they might pass to the waters or remain in plants. This may be a reference to metempsychosis in the crude form believed in by many primitive peoples, according to which the souls of the dead pass to animals, plants or natural objects before being reborn in a human body. The Brāhmaṇa literature, which had lost the optimism of the Rg Veda, recognized the possibility of death even in heaven.

In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad the first form of the doctrine of transmigration is given. The souls of those who have lived lives of sacrifice, charity and austerity, after certain obscure peregrinations, pass to the World of the Fathers, the paradise of Yama; thence, after a period of bliss, they go to the moon; from the moon they go to empty space, whence they pass to the air, and descend to earth in the rain. There they "become food, . . . and are offered again in the altar fire which is man, to be born again in the fire of woman", while the unrighteous are reincarnated as worms, birds or insects. This doctrine, which seems to rest on a primitive belief that conception occurred through the eating by one of the parents of a fruit or vegetable containing the latent soul of the offspring, is put forward as a rare and new one, and was not universally held at the time of the composition of the Upaniṣad. Even in the days of the Buddha, transmigration may not have been believed in by everyone, but it seems to have gained ground very rapidly in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. Thus the magnificently logical Indian doctrines of samsāra, or transmigration, and karma, the result of the deeds of one life affecting the next, had humble beginnings in a soul theory of quite primitive type; but even at this early period they had an ethical content, and had attained some degree of elaboration.

In whatever way the doctrine of transmigration was developed it involved belief in the repeated passage of the soul from life to life, either for all eternity or for an inestimably long time. It linked all forms of life into a single system. The gods themselves must pass away, and be replaced by other gods. As one Indra died, another was born. The souls of the departed, though now in bliss, would sooner or later pass to new abodes. Animals, insects, and according to some sects plants, all lived under the same law. With remarkable imaginative insight some sages taught that even water,
dust and air were filled with minute animalculæ, and that these too had souls which were the same, in essence, as those of men. The whole of life thus passed through innumerable changes.

It was generally, though not universally, thought that these changes were determined by conduct. As one behaved in the present life so one’s status in the scale of existence would in future be exalted or abased, and one’s lot would be happy or wretched. This doctrine of *karma* (literally “deed”) soon became fundamental to most Indian thought. It provided a satisfactory explanation of the mystery of suffering, which has troubled many thoughtful souls all over the world, and it justified the manifest social inequalities of the Āryan community.

To the ordinary man such a doctrine might not appear distasteful, and the fact that it quickly obtained almost universal acceptance shows that it met in great measure ancient India’s spiritual needs. Indeed in many respects the idea of *samsāra*, which offers infinite potentialities of new experience to the soul, and which holds out hope even to the humblest of living things and the most evil of beings, might seem more attractive than the traditional static heaven and hell of the West. But to many earnest people the thought of transmigration was not pleasant. Death was always terrible, and the prospect of having to die innumerable times was not a happy one. Life, even when devoid of the major sorrows, was drab and inadequate, while continual rebirth seemed monotonously boring. The growth of the doctrine of transmigration coincided with the development of pessimistic ideas. Rebirth in heaven was not enough—a way had to be found to escape the cycle of birth and death altogether. It was found, to the satisfaction of the best minds of the times, in mystical knowledge, achieved by much meditation and asceticism.

*Asceticism*

In a late hymn of the *Rg Veda* we read of a class of holy men different from the brāhmans, the “silent ones” (*munis*), who wear the wind as a girdle, and who, drunk with their own silence, rise on the wind and fly in the paths of the demigods and birds. The muni knows all men’s thoughts, for he has drunk of the magic cup of Rudra, which is poison to ordinary mortals. Another class of early ascetic, much mentioned in the *Atharva Veda*, was the *vrātya*. This term, in its later broad meaning, implied an Āryan who had fallen from the faith and no longer respected the Vedas; but the *vrātya* of the *Atharva Veda* was a priest of a non-Vedic fertility cult, which involved ritual dancing and flagellation. He travelled from place to place in a cart, with a woman whom he prostituted, and a musician who performed
for him at his rites. The status and nature of the vrātyas are still not wholly clear, but it is evident that great efforts were made to convert them to the Āryan faith and to find room for them in the orthodox cult, and they were probably one of the chief sources of the new doctrines and practices.

By the time of the Upaniṣads asceticism had become very widespread, and it was through the ascetics, rather than the orthodox sacrificial priests, that the new teachings developed and spread. Some ascetics were solitary psychopaths, dwelling in the depths of the forests, and suffering self-inflicted tortures of hunger, thirst, heat, cold and rain. Others dwelt in “penance-grounds” on the outskirts of towns, where, like some of the less reputable holy-men of later times, they would indulge in fantastic self-torture, sitting near blazing fires in the hot sun, lying on beds of thorns or spikes, hanging for hours head downwards from the branches of trees, or holding their arms motionless above their heads until they atrophied.

Most of the new developments in thought, however, came from ascetics of less rigorous discipline, whose chief practices were the mental and spiritual exercises of meditation. Some of these dwelt alone on the outskirts of towns and villages, while others lived in huts, under the leadership of an elder. Others wandered, often in large groups, begging alms, proclaiming their doctrines to all who wished to listen, and disputing with their rivals. Some were completely naked, while others wore simple garments.

The original motive of Indian asceticism was the acquisition of magical power. The brāhmaṇas claimed this already, by virtue of their birth and training, but there were other types of power, obtainable by other means. By the time of the Upaniṣads faith in the cosmic mystery of the sacrifice had perhaps begun to wane, even among the brāhmaṇas themselves. Though sacrificial mysticism did not immediately disappear the rite once more came to be thought of as a means of obtaining prosperity, long life, and rebirth in heaven, rather than of sustaining the cosmos. Indeed the wealthy patrons of sacrifices had probably always had the former as their main motive.

In the eastern parts of the Gangā Basin Brāhmanism was not so deeply entrenched as in the west, and older non-Āryan currents of belief flowed more strongly. The sacrificial cult did not wholly meet the needs of these lands, where firmly founded kingdoms were growing in power and material civilization was rapidly progressing.

The ascetic, even though his penance was of the most severe type, rose far above the heights achieved by the sacrificial priest. Once he had inured his body to pain and privation immeasurable joys awaited him. The hermit of the lower type had much to look for-
ward to even on the material plane, in the form of honour and respect which as an ordinary man he could never hope for, and complete freedom from worldly cares and fears. This sense of freedom, of a great load lifted from one's shoulders by casting aside one's family and possessions, is evident in many passages of calm joy in the religious literature of India. But there were greater incentives to asceticism than these. As he advanced in his self-training the hermit acquired powers beyond those of ordinary mortals. He saw past, present and future; he mounted the heavens, and was graciously received at the courts of the gods, while divinities descended to earth and visited him in his hermitage. By the magical power acquired through his asceticism he could work miracles—he could crumble mountains into the sea; if offended, he could burn up his enemies with the glance of his eye; or cause the crops of a whole people to fail; if respected, his magical power could protect a great city, increase its wealth, and defend it from famine, pestilence and invasion. In fact the magic potency formerly ascribed to the sacrifice now began to be attributed to asceticism. In the succeeding age the idea that the universe was founded and maintained through sacrifice slipped into the background; in its place it was widely believed that the cosmos depended on the penances of the great god Śiva, meditating for ever in the fastnesses of the Himālayas, and on the continued austerities of his human followers.

If ascetism had its charms even for the less spiritual, they were still greater for the questing souls who took to a life of hardship from truly religious motives. As his mystical exercises developed his psychic faculties, the ascetic obtained insight which no words could express. Gradually plumbing the cosmic mystery, his soul entered realms far beyond the comparatively tawdry heavens where the great gods dwelt in light and splendour. Going "from darkness to darkness deeper yet" he solved the mystery beyond all mysteries; he understood, fully and finally, the nature of the universe and of himself, and he reached a realm of truth and bliss, beyond birth and death, joy and sorrow, good and evil. And with this transcendent knowledge came another realization—he was completely, utterly, free. He had found ultimate salvation, the final triumph of the soul. The ascetic who reached the goal of his quest was a conqueror above all conquerors. There was none greater than he in the whole universe.

The metaphysical interpretation of the ascetic's mystical knowledge varied from sect to sect, but the fundamental experience was the same, and, as has been many times pointed out, was not appreciably different from that of the Western saints and mystics, whether Greek,
Jewish, Christian or Muslim. But Indian mysticism is unique in its elaboration of techniques for inducing ecstasy, and in the complex metaphysical systems built upon interpretations of mystical experience. Where in other religions mysticism is of varying importance, in those of India it is fundamental.

The great development of asceticism and mysticism soon became too strong for the more earthbound and materialistic Brāhmaṇism to ignore. Places were found for the hermit and the wandering ascetic in the Āryan social structure by the formula of the four stages of life (p. 159f), which first appear in the Dharma Sūtras. Accounts of the discussions and teachings of some of the more orthodox of the early mystics were collected and added to the Brāhmaṇas as Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. A little later short treatises of mystical character were composed in verse, and also appended to the Brāhmaṇas as Upaniṣads. Later still a method of mystical training, often known as yoga ("union") (p. 327ff), was accepted as an orthodox element of the Hindu system. Indian religion had taken a new direction.

It has been suggested that the development of ascetic and mystical doctrines, especially in the heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism, represents a reaction of the warrior class to the pretensions of the brāhmaṇas and to the sterility of the sacrificial cult. This, however, is certainly not the whole truth. Buddha and Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, were kṣatriyas; they proclaimed the futility of sacrifice, and more than one passage in the Buddhist scriptures may be interpreted in an anti-brāhmaṇic sense. But many of the teachers of the new doctrines were themselves brāhmaṇas. The Upaniṣads, which represent the thought of the more orthodox mystics, in no way oppose sacrifice, but maintain its qualified validity; and passages speaking respectfully of brāhmaṇas are quite as frequent in the Buddhist scriptures as those which disparage them.

There was certainly some opposition to brāhmaṇic pretensions, and dissatisfaction with the sacrificial cult; but behind this, and the growth of pessimisfl, asceticism and mysticism, lay a deep psychological anxiety. The time of which we speak was one of great social change, when old tribal units were breaking up. The feeling of group solidarity which the tribe gave was removed, and men stood face to face with the world, with no refuge in their kinsmen. Chieftains were overthrown, their courts dispersed, their lands and tribesmen absorbed in the greater kingdoms. A new order was coming into being. "[Great heroes and mighty kings] have had to give up their glory; we have seen the deaths of [demigods and demons]; the oceans have dried up; mountains have crumbled; the Pole Star is
shaken; the Earth founders; the gods perish. I am like a frog in a dry well"; so speaks a king in one of the Upaniṣads. Despite the great growth of material civilization at the time the hearts of many men were failing them for fear of what should come to pass upon earth. It is chiefly to this deep feeling of insecurity that we must attribute the growth of pessimism and asceticism in the middle centuries of the first millennium B.C.

Speculation and Gnosis

Asceticism was not merely a means of escape from an unhappy and unsatisfying world; it had a positive aspect, for it was in part inspired by a desire for knowledge, for the wisdom which the four Vedas could not give. Thus the growth of asceticism is not only a measure of the psychological uncertainty of the times, but also of their thirst for knowledge. It is not just to India to stigmatize her ancient wisdom as mere "life-negation".

All through the first millennium B.C. intelligent minds in India were striving for convincing explanations of the cosmic mystery. In the latest phase of the Rg Veda poets began to wonder about creation, which was not adequately explained by the current mythology. As we have seen, creation was thought of by some as the effect of a primeval sacrifice. It was also suggested that it was due to a sort of sexual act; elsewhere the world was said to have originated in a "Golden Embryo" (Hiranyagarbha), the prototype of the Cosmic Egg (p. 490) of later Hindu mythology. In one hymn the poet states that the world arose from warmth (tapas, later usually meaning penance or asceticism), and then rather regretfully admits that he is not sure of this hypothesis, and suggests that perhaps even the high god Prajapati does not know the truth.

This wonderful "Hymn of Creation", one of the oldest surviving records of philosophic doubt in the history of the world, marks the development of a high stage of abstract thinking, and it is the work of a very great poet, whose vision of the mysterious chaos before creation, and of mighty ineffable forces working in the depths of the primeval void, is portrayed with impressive economy of language.

"Then even nothingness was not, nor existence.
There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?

"Then there were neither death nor immortality,
nor was there then the torch of night and day.
The One breathed windlessly and self-sustaining.
There was that One then, and there was no other."
"At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.  
All this was only unillumined water.  
That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing,  
arose at last, born of the power of heat.

"In the beginning desire descended on it—  
that was the primal seed, born of the mind.  
The sages who have searched their hearts with wisdom  
know that which is is kin to that which is not.

"And they have stretched their cord across the void,  
and know what was above, and what below.*  
Seminal powers made fertile mighty forces.  
Below was strength, and over it was impulse.

"But, after all, who knows, and who can say  
whence it all came, and how creation happened?  
The gods themselves are later than creation,  
so who knows truly whence it has arisen?

"Whence all creation had its origin,  
he, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not,  
he, who surveys it all from highest heaven,  
he knows—or maybe even he does not know."13

In the centuries succeeding the composition of the Rg Veda, however, speculation was mainly concerned with the symbolism of the sacrifice.

"Dawn is the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun its eye, the wind its breath, fire its mouth; the year is the body of the sacrificial horse, heaven its back, the sky its belly, earth its chest, the four quarters its sides . . . the seasons its limbs, the months and fortnights its joints; days and nights are its feet, the stars its bones, the heavens its flesh. Its half-digested food is sand, its bowels the rivers, its liver and lungs the mountains, its hair plants and trees. When the sun rises it is the horse’s fore-quarters, when it sets it is its hind-quarters. When the horse shakes itself it lightens; when it kicks, it thunders; when it makes water, it rains. Sound is its voice."14

The symbolism of the sacrifice was carried much further than this. Every word or action of the ritual was identified with some aspect of the cosmos. The intellectual ingenuity spent on this process of finding pratikas or symbols must have been considerable, but it was largely sterile. Yet the questing spirit of the "Hymn of Creation" never wholly disappeared, and in the 6th century B.C. it bore fruit in a

* My translation of this obscure verse is very free.
great wave of thought which was to alter the whole religious life of India.

The early Upaniṣads and the scriptures of Buddhism and Jainism, all of which look back to the 7th or 6th centuries B.C. (though the latter were much later in their final composition), show that there existed a bewildering variety of speculations and theories on the origin of the universe, the nature of the soul, and kindred problems. Some of these were accepted by one or other brāhmanic school and incorporated into orthodox belief. Others were the germinal bases of heterodox sects, two of which survive to this day, but most of which have long since vanished, and are only remembered in passing references in the scriptures of their opponents.

Among the more orthodox teachings we find creation ascribed to the self-consciousness of the primeval Person (Puruṣa, i.e. Prajāpati), who felt fear, loneliness, and the need of companionship. The Person divided himself, and produced a wife. This couple, taking the forms of animals and men, created the whole universe. The idea of creation by a cosmic sexual act was one which played a great part in later religious thought. The theme is repeated in various forms in later Vedic literature, in some of which tapas—the power derived from asceticism—is an essential feature in the process of creation—a significant shifting of emphasis from the older theory that the world depended on a primeval sacrifice.

Other more heterodox teachers put forward naturalistic and atheistic cosmogonic theories. Some believed that the world began as water; others postulated fire, wind, or ether (ākāśa, p. 499) as the ultimate basis of the universe. For some the universe was based neither on a deity nor even on an impersonal entity, but on a principle—fate (niyati), time (kāla), nature (svabhāva), or chance (samgati). It was suggested that the world developed not by the intervention of god or forces external to it, but by a process of internal evolution or “ripening” (parināma). Some teachers, like the Buddha, taught that speculation on first causes was a futile waste of time. There were out-and-out pyrrhonists, denying the possibility of any certain knowledge at all, and materialists, who rejected the existence of the soul and all other immaterial entities, while some teachers proclaimed that the world was made of eternal atoms. The intellectual life of India in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. was as vigorous and pullulating as the jungle after rains.

The propagators of these doctrines, even of materialism and scepticism, were nearly all ascetics, though the literature of the time mentions more than one king who took a keen interest in the new ideas. Chief of these philosopher kings were Janaka of Videha and
Ajītaśatrū of Kāśi (Vārānasi), both of whom probably lived in the 7th century B.C. The forest hermits (vānaprasthā) seem to have departed less far from Vedic orthodoxy than the wanderers (parivrājaka), who maintained a bewildering variety of doctrines. It was chiefly among the former that the literature of the Upaniṣads developed.

The term Upaniṣad means literally "a session", sitting at the feet of a master who imparts esoteric doctrines. There are said to be 108 Upaniṣads altogether, but many of these are late sectarian works of little importance. The earlier Upaniṣads, like the great Bhādārānyaka and the Chāndogya, are in prose and consist of a series of short expositions of some aspect of the new doctrines, often in the form of question and answer. The Upaniṣads of somewhat later composition, like the Kaṭha and the Śvetāsvatara, are in verse, and their contents are more closely integrated. Though the speculations of the Upaniṣads differ very considerably, their main purport is the same. One entity, often called Brahman, the term used in the Rg Veda to mean the magic of the sacred word (p. 241), fills all space and time. This is the ground beyond and below all forms and phenomena, and from it the whole Universe, including the gods themselves, has emerged.

The great and saving knowledge which the Upaniṣads claim to impart lies not in the mere recognition of the existence of Brahman, but in continual consciousness of it. For Brahman resides in the human soul—indeed Brahman is the human soul, is Ṭatman, the Self. When a man realizes this fact fully he is wholly freed from transmigration. His soul becomes one with Brahman, and he transcends joy and sorrow, life and death. In sleep a man's spirit is set free; it wanders through the universe as a bird or a god, it becomes a king or a brāhmaṇ. Beyond dreaming is dreamless sleep, where the soul's experiences are such that they cannot be expressed; and beyond this again is Brahman. When he reaches Brahman, man is free.

In their struggle to express the inexpressible the sages of the Upaniṣads used imagery of every kind. Sometimes the idea of the soul is rather primitive, and it is described as a tiny manikin in the heart; sometimes it is said to be the breath, or a mysterious fluid which flows in the veins; but sometimes it is thought of as quite incorporeal and immeasurable:

"'Fetch me a fruit of the banyan tree.'
"'Here is one, sir.'
"'Break it.'
"'I have broken it, sir.'
"'What do you see?'
"'Very tiny seeds, sir.'
""Break one."
""I have broken it, sir."
""Now what do you see?"
""Nothing, sir."

"'My son,' the father said, 'what you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists. Believe me, my son, in that essence is the Self of all that is. That is the True, that is the Self. And you are that Self, Śvetaketu!'""16

Here the soul is the inmost self of the being, in no sense material, though ideas of a sort of soul-stuff, a subtle matter of which the soul was composed, persisted, especially among the Jains. The term Ātman came to mean indiscriminately "soul" and "self", which lends a certain ambiguity to many passages in the Hindu scriptures.

The identity of the souls of the individual and the universe is reiterated throughout the Upaniṣadic literature, with varying emphasis, and with differing interpretations of the nature of the identity and the character of the universal soul. Tat tvam asī, "you (the individual) are that (universal essence)"", the words of the father to the son in the passage we have quoted, is the leading theme of the Upaniṣads. The one eternal undifferentiated essence, above good and evil, is in a condition of consciousness which is beyond deep sleep (sūṣupti), but is yet awake and living. Though it fills the whole of space, by a mysterious verity which defies logic but is proved by experience it dwells in the core of the human heart. It is generally thought of as uniform and impersonal, and the word Brahma is of neuter gender. Thus all the multifariousness and incoherence of the universe is explained away, and reduced to a single entity.

""Put this salt in water, and come to me in the morning."
""The son did as he was told. The father said: 'Fetch the salt.' The son looked for it, but could not find it, because it had dissolved.
""'Taste the water from the top,' said the father. 'How does it taste?'
""'Of salt,' the son replied.
""'Taste from the middle. How does it taste?'
""'Of salt,' the son replied.
""'Taste from the bottom. How does it taste?'
""'Of salt,' the son replied.

"'Then the father said: 'You don't perceive that the one Reality (sat) exists in your own body, my son, but it is truly there. Everything which is has its being in that subtle essence. That is Reality! That is the Soul! And you are that, Śvetaketu!'""17

The Universal Essence is sometimes defined in purely negative terms. "The Self can only be described as 'Not this, not this'. It
is incomprehensible, imperishable, ... unattached, ... unfettered, ... It does not suffer, ... It does not fail."^18 But, despite the negations of this passage, the sage Yājñavalkya, to whom it is attributed, could not escape giving the Universal Essence a degree of personality, and in one place almost identified it with the High God.

"That great unborn Self, comprised of knowledge, is ... the ether in the heart. In that is the ruler and lord, the king of all things. He grows no greater by good deeds, nor smaller by evil deeds, but he is the lord of all things, the king of all things, the protector of all things."^19

In the verse Upaniṣads the World Spirit is described rather as a god than as a cosmic essence.

"He encircles all things, radiant and bodyless, unharmed, and untouched by evil, All-seeing, all-wise, all-present, self-existent, he has made all things well for ever and ever."^20

In the Upaniṣad from which this is taken the World Spirit is referred to as Ṣa, "the Lord". The Kaṭha Upaniṣad calls the Spirit "the Person" (Puruṣa), reminding us of the divine victim of the primeval sacrifice from which the world was born. In one passage the World Spirit is mentioned with fear and dread, recalling that earlier felt for the god Varuṇa:

"All things whatever, the whole world, produced [from Brahman] tremble in its breath. It is a great terror, an upraised thunderbolt. They who know this become immortal.

"From terror [of Brahman] the Fire burns. From terror [of Brahman] the Sun shines. From fear of Brahman Indra, and the Wind, and Death as the fifth all run away."^21

The Śvetāsuvarṇa Upaniṣad, which is later than those previously mentioned, describes the World Spirit in completely theistic terms. It is no longer an impersonal essence, but a creator god—in fact the god Rudra, or Śiva. Rudra may be reached not only by meditation and penance, but also by devotion and worship.

"The snarer, who rules alone in his might, he who governs the world in his power, is always one and the same, though all else rise and decay. ...
"There is one, Rudra alone, . . .
who rules the world in his might.
He stands behind all beings, he made all the worlds,
and protects them, and rolls them up at the end of time.

"The Lord lives in the faces of all beings,
in their heads, in their necks.
He lives in the inmost heart of all,
the all-pervading, all-present Śiva."

This brings us very near to the religious atmosphere of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the most exalted and beautiful of India's religious poems, which teaches a fully-fledged theism and is part of the more recent Hinduism rather than of the old Brāhmaṇism, which slowly changed from a religion of sacrifice to one of devotion.

*Ethics of the Upaniṣads*

In general the Upaniṣads proclaim salvation by knowledge or realization rather than by faith or works. Their ethics are fundamentally pragmatic. Good and evil are resolved in the all-pervading Brahman, and are relative terms only. From the point of view of the seeker after truth, that is good which leads him to the realization of Brahman, and evil the reverse. Thus anything which discourages the meditative life is ultimately bad, and among the most serious of these obstacles are selfish desires. In more than one context it is said that the universe came into existence through a primeval desire of the World Soul; to attain bliss the hermit must, so to speak, restore the state of things before creation. The normal values of the world, sacrifice, benevolence, and even asceticism, are only good in so far as they lead the soul upwards.

"There are three branches of the Law. Sacrifice, study and charity are the first, austerity is the second, and to dwell in celibacy in the house of one's teacher . . . is the third. By all these one only reaches the worlds of the blessed, but the man who is fixed in Brahman finds immortality.""23

"The wise men of old did not want children. 'What should we do with children,' they said, 'when we have Brahman and the world besides?' And they conquered their desire for sons and wealth and the heavenly worlds, and wandered about as beggars. . . . He who knows [the mystery of Brahman] becomes calm, restrained, satisfied, patient and confident, and he sees himself in the [Great] Self, sees all things as the Self. . . . Evil does not overcome him, but he overcomes evil. . . . Free from evil, free from decay, free from hatred, free from thirst, he becomes a [true] brāhmaṇ."

Occasionally it is suggested, especially in the later Upaniṣads, that all desires whatever are incompatible with the saving knowledge.
"When all desires which cling to the heart
fall away
then the mortal becomes immortal,
and in this life finds Brahman.

"When all the earthly ties of the heart
are sundered,
then the mortal becomes immortal.
This is the end of all instruction."²⁵

A life of ascetism was not absolutely necessary to salvation—even
kings are said to have realized Brahman while still ruling—but the
saving knowledge was at best very hard to obtain, and doubly diffi-
cult for one whose mind was full of material cares and desires. All
pleasure was therefore suspect.

"The good is one thing and the pleasant another.
Both, with their different ends, control a man.
But it is well with him who chooses the good,
while he who chooses the pleasant misses his mark."²⁶

Though often rather negative, the ethical attitude of the Upani-
ṣads is neither unmoral nor antinomian. He who has not ceased
from evil conduct will never obtain Brahman. Here and there are
passages of high ethical value among the reiterated mystical similes
and parables of the texts. Thus honesty is highly extolled.

"Satyakāma son of Jabālā said to his mother: 'Mother, I want to be a
student. What is my family?'

"'I don't know your family, my dear,' she said. 'I had you in my youth,
when I travelled about a lot as a servant—and I just don't know! My
name is Jabālā, and yours is Satyakāma, so say you are Satyakāma Jābāla.'²⁷

"He went to Gautama Hāridrumata, and said: 'I want to be your student,
sir. May I come?'

"'What is your family, my friend?' he asked.

"'I don't know my family, sir,' he answered. 'I asked my mother, and
she said that she had me in her youth, when she used to travel about a lot
as a servant. . . . She said that as she was Jabālā and I was Satyakāma I
was to give my name as Satyakāma Jābāla.'

"'Nobody but a true brāhmaṇ would be so honest!' he said. . . . 'Go
and fetch me fuel, my friend, and I will initiate you, for you have not swerved
from the truth.'"²⁸

A further fine ethical passage occurs in the form of a legend in the
Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad. We quote this passage partly because
an allusion to it must have puzzled many readers of T. S. Eliot.²⁹

* A patronymic, which would give the impression that the boy was the son of a man
named Jabāla.
"The threefold descendants of Prajāpati, gods, men and demons, were once students at the feet of their father. When they had finished their training the gods said: ‘Sir, tell us something [good for our souls].’ He uttered the syllable DA, and then asked them whether they had understood.

‘We understood’, they answered. ‘You told us DAMAYATA (be self-controlled).’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘you understood indeed!’

Then the men asked him, and he uttered the same syllable DA, and then asked them whether they had understood. ‘We understood,’ they answered. ‘You told us DATTĀ (give).’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘you understood indeed!’

Then the demons asked him, ... and he uttered the same syllable DA, and then asked them whether they had understood. ‘We understood,’ they answered. ‘You told us DAYADHAM (be merciful).’ ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘you understood indeed!’

And the blessed voice of the thunder ever repeats DA DA DA—be self-controlled, give, be merciful. So these three should ever be taught —self-control, charity and mercy."29

Perhaps the highest ethical flight of the Upaniṣads occurs in the instructions said to have been given by Yājñavalkya to his favourite wife before taking up the life of an ascetic. Remembering the double meaning of the word ātman, "self" or "soul", the passage may be read in two ways, but the context shows that the Higher Self is intended. This Higher Self, the World Soul, the mystic recognizes in all things, and loves them for their participation with himself in the unity of the spirit. The passage is too long to quote in full, but we paraphrase its most important parts.

"Yājñavalkya had two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. Maitreyī knew something of the World Soul, but Kātyāyanī only knew what every woman knows. When he wished to enter on another phase of life Yājñavalkya said: ‘Maitreyī, I am leaving home. Let me make a settlement on you and Kātyāyanī.’

‘Maitreyī asked: ‘My lord, if I owned the whole earth and all its wealth, should I be immortal?’

‘No,’ Yājñavalkya replied, ‘your life would be the life of the wealthy, and there is no prospect of immortality in wealth.’

‘Maitreyī said: ‘Of what use to me are things which will not give me immortality? Give me rather your knowledge, my lord.’

‘Lady,’ he replied, ‘you are truly dear to me, and now you are even dearer. So if you like I will teach you. Listen carefully!

‘A husband is not dear for love of the husband—a husband is dear for love of the Self. Similarly wife, sons, wealth, cattle, priests and warriors, worlds, gods, the Vedas, everything—none of them are dear in their own right, but all are dear for love of the Self.

‘Truly you can see and hear and perceive and know the Self, Maitreyī.

* A traditional onomatopoeic expression of the sound of thunder.
And when you have seen, heard, perceived and known the Self you will know all things.

"Where there seems to be a duality of self and not-self one sees, smells, tastes, perceives, hears, touches and knows something other. But when all is the Self there is no consciousness of anything other than Self. . . . Thus Maitrey! I have instructed you—this is immortality!"

"When he had said this Yajñavalkya went away."³⁰

(II) BUDDHISM

The Buddha

While the doctrines of the Upaniṣads found a place in the brāhmaṇic system, there were other teachings which could not be harmonized with orthodoxy, but were fostered and developed by heterodox sects. Chief among the teachers of such doctrines was the man who at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth century B.C. established a community of yellow-robed followers, and was known by them as the Buddha, the Enlightened or Awakened. Even if judged only by his posthumous effects on the world at large, he was certainly the greatest man to have been born in India.

The traditional story of the Buddha, like those of most saints and heroes of ancient days, has suffered much at the hands of higher criticism. The story of his birth and early life appears only in the later books of the Buddhist Scriptures, and many of the references to him in those parts of the canon which purport to give his teachings verbatim are by no means reliable. Even the "Sermon of the Turning of the Wheel of the Law", which is said to be the first sermon preached after the Buddha's enlightenment, and which is the basic teaching of all Buddhist sects, is of dubious authenticity, and in the form in which we have it is not among the earliest parts of the canon. Much doubt now exists as to the real doctrines of the historical Buddha, as distinct from those of Buddhism. One eminent authority suggested that they differed but little from the teachings of the Upaniṣadic sages,³¹ while another held that he rejected the doctrine of transmigration, and taught merely the almost self-evident truism that one generation is affected by the deeds of the preceding one.³² We here discuss, however, not the life of the Buddha, but what his later followers believed about his life, and not what he taught, but what Buddhism taught.

Certain facts about the Buddha's life are reasonably certain. He was the son of a chief of the Śākyas, a small tribe of the Nepalese terai. He became an ascetic, and propounded a new doctrine which gained the support of numerous disciples. After many years
of teaching in the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha and in the tribal lands to the north of the Gangā, he died at the age of eighty at some time between the years 486 and 473 B.C., probably nearer the former date than the latter. The story of his life as told by his followers is far more vivid and colourful than this dry outline, and it is infinitely more important, for it has influenced countless millions throughout the whole of Asia east of Afghānīstān.

One night Mahāmāyī, chief queen of Śuddhodana, king of the Śākyas, dreamt that she was carried away to the divine lake Anavatapta in the Himālayas, where she was bathed by the heavenly guardians of the four quarters of the universe. A great white elephant holding a lotus flower in his trunk approached her, and entered her side (pl. XVc). Next day the dream was interpreted for her by wise men—she had conceived a wonderful son, who would be either a Universal Emperor (p. 84f) or a Universal Teacher. The child was born in a grove of sāl trees called Lumbini, near the capital of the Śākyas, Kapilavastu, while his mother was on the way to her parents’ home for her confinement. At birth he stood upright, took seven strides, and spoke: “This is my last birth—henceforth there is no more birth for me.”

The boy was named Siddhārtha, at a great ceremony on the fifth day from his birth. His gotra name was Gautama (in Pāli, Gotama) by which he is commonly referred to in Buddhist literature. The soothsayers prophesied that he would become a Universal Emperor, with the exception of one, who declared that four signs would convince him of the misery of the world, and he would become a Universal Teacher. To prevent this prophecy coming true King Śuddhodana resolved that he should never know the sorrows of the world. He was reared in delightful palaces, from whose parks every sign of death, disease and misery was removed. He learned all the arts that a prince should learn, and excelled as a student. He married his cousin Yaśodhāra, whom he won at a great contest at which he performed feats of strength and skill which put to shame all other contestants, including his envious cousin Devadatta.

But for all his prosperity and success he was not inwardly happy, and for all the efforts of his father he did see the four signs foretold, which were to decide his career, for the gods knew his destiny, and it was they who placed the signs before him. One day, as he was driving round the royal park with his faithful charioteer Channa, he saw an aged man, in the last stages of infirmity and decrepitude—actually a god, who had taken this disguise in order that Siddhārtha Gautama might become a Buddha: Siddhārtha asked Channa who this repulsive being was, and when he learned that all men must grow old he was even more troubled in mind. This was the first sign. The second came a little later, in the same way, in the

* Throughout this section and generally in this book we employ Sanskrit forms of Buddhist names and terms, for the sake of consistency. The reader who goes on to more detailed study may meet them in their Pāli forms, as used by the Sthāvira-Vāda Buddhists.
form of a very sick man, covered with boils and shivering with fever. The third was even more terrible—a corpse, being carried to the cremation-ground, followed by weeping mourners. But the fourth sign brought hope and consolation—a wandering religious beggar, clad in a simple yellow robe, peaceful and calm, with a mien of inward joy. On seeing him Siddhārtha realized where his destiny lay, and set his heart on becoming a wanderer.

Hearing of this King Saddhodhana doubled his precautions. Siddhārtha was made a virtual prisoner, though still surrounded with pleasures and luxuries of all kinds; his heart knew no peace, and he could never forget the four signs. One morning the news was brought to him that Yaśodharā had given birth to a son, but it gave him no pleasure. That night there were great festivities, but when all were sleeping he roused Channa, who saddled his favourite horse Kaṇṭhaka, and he rode off into the night, surrounded by rejoicing demigods, who cushioned the fall of his horse’s hoofs so that no one should hear his departure (p. 455, and pl. XXIVc).

When far from the city he stripped off his jewellery and fine garments, and put on a hermit’s robe, provided by an attendant demigod. With his sword he cut off his flowing hair, and sent it back to his father with his garments by the hand of Channa. The horse Kaṇṭhaka dropped dead from grief when he found that he was to be parted from his master, and was reborn in one of the heavens. Thus Siddhārtha performed his “Great Going Forth” (Mahābhūmikasraya) and became a wandering ascetic, owning nothing but the robe he wore.

At first he begged his food as a wanderer, but he soon gave up this life for that of a forest hermit. From a sage named Ālāra Kālāma he learned the technique of meditation, and the lore of Brahman as taught in the Upaniṣads; but he was not convinced that man could obtain liberation from sorrow by mental discipline and knowledge, so he joined forces with five ascetics who were practising the most rigorous self-mortification in the hope of wearing away their karma and obtaining final bliss.

His penances became so severe that the five quickly recognized him as their leader. For six years he tortured himself until he was nothing but a walking skeleton. One day, worn out by penance and hunger, he fainted, and his followers believed that he was dead. But after a while he recovered consciousness, and realized that his fasts and penances had been useless. He again began to beg food, and his body regained its strength. The five disciples left him in disgust at his backsiding.

One day Siddhārtha Gautama, now thirty-five years old, was seated beneath a large pipal tree on the outskirts of the town of Gayā, in the realm of Bimbisāra king of Magadha. Sujātā, the daughter of a nearby farmer, brought him a large bowl of rice boiled in milk. After eating some of this he bathed, and that evening, again sitting beneath the pipal tree, he made a solemn vow that, though his bones wasted away and his blood dried up, he would not leave his seat until the riddle of suffering was solved.

So for forty-nine days he sat beneath the tree. At first he was surrounded by hosts of gods and spirits, awaiting the great moment of enlightenment;
but they soon fled, for Māra, the spirit of the world and of sensual pleasure, the Buddhist devil, approached. For days Gautama withstood temptations of all kinds (pl. XIX). Māra, disguised as a messenger, brought news that the wicked cousin Devadatta had revolted, thrown Suddhodana into prison, and seized Yasodharā, but Gautama was not moved. Māra called his demon hosts, and attacked him with whirlwind, tempest, flood and earthquake, but he sat firm, cross-legged beneath the tree. Then the tempter called on Gautama to produce evidence of his goodness and benevolence; he touched the ground with his hand, and the Earth itself spoke with a voice of thunder: "I am his witness".

Māra then tried gentler means of shaking Gautama's resolve. He called his three beautiful daughters, Desire, Pleasure and Passion, who danced and sang before him, and tried every means of seduction. Their wiles were quite ineffectual. They offered him Universal Empire; but he was unmoved.

At last the demon hosts gave up the struggle and Gautama, left alone, sank deeper and deeper into meditation. At the dawning of the forty-ninth day he knew the truth. He had found the secret of sorrow, and understood at last why the world is full of suffering and unhappiness of all kinds, and what man must do to overcome them. He was fully enlightened—a Buddha. For another seven weeks he remained under the Tree of Wisdom (bodhi), meditating on the great truths he had found.

For a time he doubted whether he should proclaim his wisdom to the world, as it was so recondite and difficult to express that few would understand it; but the god Brahmā himself descended from heaven and persuaded him to teach the world. Leaving the Tree of Wisdom, he journeyed to the Deer Park near Vārāṇasi (the modern Sārnāth), where his five former disciples had settled to continue their penances.

To these five ascetics the Buddha preached his first sermon, or, in Buddhist phraseology, "set in motion the Wheel of the Law". The five were so impressed with his new doctrine that they gave up their austerities and once more became his disciples. A few days later a band of sixty young ascetics became his followers, and he sent them out in all directions to preach the Buddhist Dharma. Soon his name was well known throughout the Gangā Plain, and the greatest kings of the time favoured him and his followers. He gathered together a disciplined body of monks (called bhikṣus, or in Pāli bhikkhus, literally "beggars"), knit together by a common garb, the yellow robes of the order, and a common discipline, according to tradition laid down in detail by the Buddha himself. Many stories are told of his long years of preaching. He returned to Kapilavastu, and converted his father, wife and son Rāhula, as well as many other members of the court, including his cousin Devadatta, whose heart remained full of jealousy. At the request of his foster-mother and aunt, Krṣā-Gautami, he allowed with much misgiving the formation of a community of nuns. Devadatta grew so jealous of him that once he even tried to kill the Buddha, by arranging for a mad elephant to be let loose in his path; but the beast, impressed by the Buddha's gentleness and fearlessness, calmly bowed at his feet (pl. XXIVa). He averted a war between the Śākyas and the Koliyas, by walking between
the assembled armies and convincing them of the uselessness and evil of bloodshed. He went alone to the camp of a notorious bandit, Aṅgulimāla, and converted him and his followers from their evil ways.

Though according to legend his life was attended by many wonders, the earliest traditions record few miracles accomplished by the Buddha himself. Once he is said to have performed feats of levitation and other miracles at Śrāvasti, as a result of a challenge from rival teachers, but he sternly forbade the monks to imitate him, and there is no record of his healing the sick by supernatural means. One touching story of the Buddha is interesting in this connexion, since it contrasts strikingly with the Gospel stories of the miracles of Jesus. A woman, stricken with grief at the death of her only son, and hearing that the Buddha was in the vicinity, brought the child’s corpse to him in the hope that he would restore it to life. He asked her first to go to the nearby town and bring a handful of mustard seed from a family in which no one had died. She went from house to house, but of course could find no such family, until at last she understood the inevitability of death and sorrow, and became a nun.

For eight months of the year the Buddha and his followers would travel from place to place, preaching to all and sundry. For the four months of the rainy season, roughly corresponding to the English summer, they would stop in one of the parks given to the Buddhist order by wealthy lay followers, living in huts of bamboo and reed—the first form of the great Buddhist monasteries of later times. For over forty years his reputation grew and the Saṅgha (literally Society, the Buddhist Order) increased in numbers and influence. With the exception of the conspiracy of Devadatta he suffered no persecution, though a few of his followers were maltreated by their religious opponents. His ministry was a long, calm and peaceful one, in this respect very different from that of Jesus.

The end came at the age of eighty. He spent the last rainy season of his life near the city of Vaiśāli, and after the rains he and his followers journeyed northwards towards the country which had been the home of his youth. On the way he prepared his disciples for his death. He told them that his body was now like a worn-out cart, creaking at every joint. He declared that he had made no distinction between esoteric and exoteric teaching, but had preached the full doctrine to them.* When he was gone they were to look for no new leader—the Doctrine (Dharma) which he had preached would lead them. They must rely on themselves, be their own lamps, and look for no refuge outside themselves.

At the town of Pāvā he was entertained by a lay disciple, Cunda the smith, and ate a meal of pork.† Soon after this he was attacked by dysentery, but

* We cannot, of course, rely on the verbatim accuracy of the account of the Buddha’s death, and this passage may be an interpolation directed against early heterodox schools which claimed to possess secret teachings of the Buddha. It is equally possible, however, that it refers to the teachers of the Upaniṣads, who kept their most secret doctrines for their closest disciples.

† Most modern Buddhists claim that the last meal was of truffles, and the Pali phrase sukhara-maddava, “sweetness of pigs”, is certainly ambiguous. But early commentators took it to mean a choice cut of pork.
he insisted on moving on to the nearby town of Kuśinagara (Pāli, Kuśinārā). Here, on the outskirts of the town, he lay down under a sāl tree, and that night he died. His last words were: "All composite things decay. Strive diligently!" This was his "Final Blowing-out" (Parinirvāṇa). His sorrowing disciples cremated his body, and his ashes were divided between the representatives of various tribal peoples and King Ajātaśatru of Magadha.

The Growth of Buddhism

According to tradition a great gathering of monks met at the Magadhan capital of Rājagrha soon after the Buddha’s death. At this council Upāli, one of the chief disciples, recited the Vinaya Piṭaka, or rules of the Order, as he recalled having heard the Buddha give them. Another disciple, Ānanda, who bears a position in Buddhism similar to that of St. John in Christianity, recited the Sutta Piṭaka, the great collection of the Buddha’s sermons on matters of doctrine and ethics. Though there may have been a council of some sort, the story as it stands is certainly untrue, for it is quite evident that the scriptures of Buddhism grew by a long process of development and accretion, perhaps over several centuries.

A second general council is said to have been held at Vaiśālī, one hundred years after the Buddha’s death. Here schism raised its head, ostensibly over small points of monastic discipline, and the Order broke into two sections, the orthodox Sthaviravādins (Pāli Theravādi) or “Believers in the Teaching of the Elders”, and the Mahāsaṅghikas or “Members of the Great Community”. The tradition of the second council is as dubious as that of the first, but it at least records that schism began very early. The minor points of discipline on which the Order divided were soon followed by doctrinal differences of much greater importance.

Numerous such differences appeared at the third great council, held at Pāṭaliputra under the patronage of Aśoka, which resulted in the expulsion of many heretics and the establishment of the Sthaviravāda school as orthodox. At this council it is said that the last section was added to the Pāli scriptures, the Kathāvatthu of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, dealing with psychology and metaphysics. In fact many of the works of this part of the canon are of later composition, and the details of the account of the council are suspect, but the record shows that by this time widespread differences had developed within the Order.

Meanwhile great changes were taking place in the constitution of Buddhism. Some modern authorities believe that the Buddha had no intention of founding a new religion, and never looked on his
doctrine as distinct from the popular cults of the time, but rather as transcending them—a sort of super-doctrine, which would help his followers further along the road to salvation than Brāhmaṇism or Upaniṣadic gnosis. This view is, in our opinion, very questionable. Though the traditions of Buddhism give little evidence of direct antagonism between Buddhists and brāhmaṇs at this early period there was much antagonism between Buddhists and other heterodox sects, such as Jainas and Ājīvikas. These sects did not merely wrangle over doctrinal points, but carried on vigorous propaganda among laymen for their support. We believe that even in the days of the Buddha himself the Order consciously tried to build up a following of layfolk, who would pay to the Buddha their chief if not their only homage. The enormous gifts which so many wealthy people are said to have made to the Order are no doubt exaggerated, but the tradition is more probably partly true than wholly false, and at least some of the wealthy merchants who so liberally supported the new teachings must have looked upon themselves as lay Buddhists.

Whatever its position in the Buddha’s lifetime, 200 years later Buddhism was a distinct religion. Aśoka classified all the religions of his empire under five heads; the (Buddhist) Saṅgha, the Brāhmaṇa, the Ājīvika, the Nirgranthas (or Jainas), and "other sects". He further declared that, while he gave his chief patronage to the Buddhists, he honoured and respected them all, and called on his subjects to do likewise.36

By Aśoka’s time India was covered with vihāras, which were both monasteries and temples. In becoming a religion Buddhism borrowed and adapted much from the popular beliefs of the time. Its simple ritual was in no way based on sacrificial Brāhmaṇism, but on the cult of caiyāyas, or sacred spots. These were often small groves of trees, or single sacred trees, on the outskirts of villages, and might also include tumuli, such as those in which the ashes of chiefs were buried. These caiyāyas were the abodes of earth-spirits and genii who, to the simpler folk, were more accessible and less expensive to worship than the great gods of the Āryans. The Jaina scriptures show that unorthodox holy-men often made their homes in or near the caiyāyas, no doubt in order to obtain alms from visitors; and the Buddha is said to have respected these local shrines, and to have encouraged his lay followers to revere them.

Soon after the Buddha’s death many communities of monks gave up the practice of constant travel except in the rainy season, and settled permanently on the outskirts of towns and villages, often near the local caiyāyas. With time many of these little monasteries grew in size and importance.
It was the cult of the caitya that Buddhism made its own. According to tradition stūpas or tumuli were built by the recipients over the divided ashes of the Buddha. Other stūpas, containing the remains of locally revered monks and ascetics of other denominations, rose up all over India in succeeding centuries. Aśoka unearthed the ashes of the Buddha from their original resting places and divided them still further, rearing stūpas for them all over India. The sacred grove or tree of the old popular cult became the Bodhi Tree, a pipal planted near the stūpa to commemorate the Buddha's enlightenment, an object of great reverence. The original Bodhi Tree of Gayā, under which the Buddha sat, became an object of pilgrimage, and cuttings of it were carried as far as Ceylon. One feature of the Buddhist Cult which has now vanished is the column, perhaps the survival of a phallic emblem or megalith. Such columns existed in many ancient Buddhist monasteries, but their place in the cult is not clear. Temples proper or shrine-rooms do not appear to have been erected until the beginning of the Christian era, when the Buddha began to be worshipped in the form of an image.

His simpler followers evidently raised the Buddha almost to divinity even in his lifetime, and after his death he was worshipped in his symbols—the stūpa, recalling his parinirvāṇa, and the tree, recalling his enlightenment. The worship consisted of circumambulation in the auspicious clockwise direction, and prostrations, with offerings of flowers. Though the more intelligent monks may have recognized his true status, for the ordinary believer he was the greatest of the gods. This is not surprising, for to this day Indians feel and show the utmost respect for those whom they consider holy. It is rather a matter of surprise that it was only 500 years after the Buddha's death that a theology developed which gave full recognition to this state of affairs.

With the support of Aśoka Buddhism greatly expanded, spreading throughout India and to Ceylon. There is some doubt as to how far the doctrine had developed at this time, but at least a rudimentary canon existed, though perhaps not yet committed to writing. The great Buddhist holy places—the Lumbini Grove at Kapilavastu where the Buddha was born, the Tree of Wisdom at Gayā where he gained enlightenment, the Deer Park near Vārānasī where he preached his first sermon, and the grove near Kuśinagara where he died—were visited by many pilgrims, including Aśoka himself.

Though there is a tradition of cruel persecution under Puṣyamitra Śuṅga the faith continued to grow. Of all the religious remains of between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 so far discovered in India those of Buddhism outnumber those of Brāhmanism, Hinduism and
Jainism together. The old stūpas were enlarged and beautified with carved railings, terraces and gateways. All classes of the community, kings, princes, merchants and craftsmen, made donations to the Order, which are recorded in numerous inscriptions. Though the individual monk was bound by his vows to own no property except bare necessities, and to touch no silver or gold, the monasteries grew rich on the alms of the faithful. The revenues of whole villages were alienated to them by pious kings, and even the individual monks began to take their vows of poverty lightly, for more than one inscription records donations made to the Order by ordained members of it.

Though there is little evidence of strong sectarian animus within the Order, sects already existed, and the scriptures had been codified in more than one recension. It is possible that much of the Pāli canon of the Sthāvira-vādins, in the form in which we have it, emanates from the great monastery on a hilltop near the modern village of Sānci, the remains of which are among the finest relics of early Buddhism.

Another very important sect, the Sarvāstivādins, was strong in the region of Mathurā and in Kashmir. It was in Kashmir, according to a tradition preserved in China, that, under the patronage of Kaniska (1st–2nd century A.D., p. 611f), a fourth great council was held, at which the Sarvāstivādin doctrines were codified in a summary, the Mahāvibhaṣa. It was chiefly among the Sarvāstivādins, but also in the old schism of the Mahāsaṅghikas, that new ideas developed, which were to form the basis of the division of Buddhism into the "Great" and "Lesser Vehicles" (Mahāyāna and Hinayāna). The brāhmaṇas and their lay supporters had by now largely turned from the older gods, whom they worshipped with animal sacrifices, towards others, who were worshipped with reverent devotion. In N.-W. India the rule of Greeks, Śakas and Kušānas in turn had thrown open the gates to the West, and ideas from Persia and beyond entered India in greater strength than before. In these conditions teachers of the early Christian centuries gave to Buddhism a wholly new outlook. They claimed to have found a new and great vehicle which would carry many souls to salvation, while the Sthāvira-vādins and kindred sects had but a small one. The Great Vehicle soon became popular in many parts of India, for it fitted the mood of the times and the needs of many simple people better than did the Lesser Vehicle, which then began to lose ground. In Ceylon, however, the Lesser Vehicle resisted all the attacks of the new sects and thence it was later taken to Burma, Thailand and other parts of South-East Asia, where it became the national religion.

The Great Vehicle, on the other hand, itself soon divided by various
schisms, was carried by a succession of Indian monks to China and thence to Japan. By the time of the Guptas it predominated, and Hsuan Tsang, in the 7th century, found the Lesser Vehicle almost extinct in most of India, and only flourishing in a few parts of the West; evidently it had ceased to make a strong emotional appeal in the India of early Hinduism. Buddhism as a whole was already declining. In many places great monasteries were in ruins, and places of pilgrimage almost deserted. But the faith was still important, and had thousands of monks and many prosperous monasteries. Chief of these was Nālandā (p. 166), which, under the patronage of kings of the Pāla line, remained a centre of Buddhist piety and learning until the Muslim invasion. From Nālandā the missionary monk Padmasambhava went forth to convert Tibet to Buddhism in the 8th century, while pilgrims from as far afield as China and South-East Asia visited it to learn the pure doctrine.

At this time the general standards of culture in North India were declining. From the end of the Gupta period onwards Indian religion became more and more permeated with primitive ideas of sympathetic magic and sexual mysticism, and Buddhism was much affected by these developments. A third vehicle, "the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt" (Vajrayāna), appeared in Eastern India in the 8th century, and grew rapidly in Bengal and Bihār. It was this form of Buddhism, modified by primitive local cults and practices, which was finally established in Tibet in the 11th century, as a result of missions sent from the great Vajrayāna monastery of Vikramāśila, in Bihār.

Anti-Buddhist persecution was not wholly unknown at this time. In the 6th century the Hūṇa king Mihirakula destroyed monasteries and killed monks. A fanatical Śaivite king of Bengal, Śaśānka, in the course of an attack on Kānyakubja at the very beginning of the 7th century, almost destroyed the Tree of Wisdom at Gayā. There are other less reliable accounts of persecution, but it is certain that this was not the main cause of the disappearance of Buddhism from India. A more important factor was the revived and reformed Hinduism, which began to spread northwards from the Tamil country from the 9th century onwards, when the great theologian Śaṅkara travelled the length and breadth of India disputing with the Buddhists. Behind him he left an organized body of Hindu monks to carry on his work. The new form of devotional Hinduism made a very vigorous appeal to the ordinary man, and the persistent tendency of Hinduism to assimilate, rather than to attack, was always at work.

As early as the Gupta period Buddhist monks often took part in Hindu processions. The Buddhist family, which gave its chief support to the local monastery, would at all times rely on the services
of brāhmaṇs at births, marriages and deaths. If for a time Buddhism became to all intents and purposes a separate religion, denying the Vedas, the ordinary layman might not see it in that light. For him Buddhism was one of many cults and faiths, by no means mutually exclusive, all of which led to salvation, and all of which were respectable and worthy of honour. Thus, in medieval North India, the Buddha came to be looked on as the ninth of the ten incarnations of the great god Viṣṇu, (p. 309), and Buddhism gradually lost its individuality, becoming a special and rather unorthodox Hindu sect, which, like many others, did not survive. Hinduism, relying for its strength mainly on independent brāhmaṇs and ascetics and on domestic ceremonies, suffered from the Muslim invasion but was not seriously weakened by it. Buddhism, by now mainly concentrated in large monasteries and already rapidly declining in influence, could not stand up to the change. In the first rush of the Muslim advance down the Gangā Nālandā and other great monasteries of Bihār were sacked, libraries were burnt, and monks were put to the sword. Most of the survivors fled to the mountains of Nepāl and Tibet, but some Buddhist monasteries still survived in Bihār and East Bengal. An illuminated Buddhist manuscript contains a colophon stating that it was prepared in Bihār in the 15th century.37 This is our last record of Indian Buddhism, until its revival in recent years.

The Lesser Vehicle

According to Sinhalese tradition the Pāli canon of the Sthaviravādin school was committed to writing in Ceylon, in the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmaṇi (89–77 B.C.), after it had been finally established at a great council of Sinhalese monks. If we are to believe tradition it had already been sifted and codified at the three councils of Rājagrha, Vaiśāḷī and Pāṭaliputra, and had been passed down by word of mouth for some four centuries by teachers who had not the strict mnemonic system of the Vedic schools. As late as the 5th century A.D. written scriptures were rare, and the pilgrim Fa-hsien was hard put to it to find a good copy of the Vinaya Pitaka. Probably even the codification of the canon in Ceylon did not wholly end the process of accretion and interpolation.

At the same time as the canon old commentaries in Sinhalese Prākrit were also committed to writing. These were translated into Pāli, and no doubt considerably altered and expanded, by the great doctor Buddhaghosa, who worked in Ceylon in the 5th century. The original commentaries have completely vanished, and some have doubted whether they ever existed, but it is certain that Buddhaghosa had access to many early traditions not recorded elsewhere.
Yakṣī, bearing a chaunī. Dīārāgānī, Bihar.
? 1st century B.C.
(Now in Patnā Museum)

Līṅgī, Gudimallam, Madras. 1st century
B.C.
Ipsaras. Khajurâho. 10th-11th century A.D
As it stands today the Pāli canon of the Sthaviravādins, including the scriptures, commentaries and semi-canonical texts, would fill a fair-sized bookcase. It consists of three sections called "baskets" (piṭaka), from the fact that the long strips of prepared palm-leaf on which the texts were written were originally stored in baskets. These three are known as the Vinaya ("Conduct"), Sutta ("Sermon") and Abhidhamma ("Metaphysics") Piṭakas.

The Vinaya Piṭaka contains pronouncements attributed to the Buddha, laying down numerous rules for the conduct of the Order. With each rule the circumstances which led the Buddha to propound it are given, and thus the Vinaya contains much early traditional matter.

The largest and most important of the "Three Baskets" is the Sutta Piṭaka, which is divided into five "Groups" (Nikāya):

1. Dīgha (Long) Nikāya, a collection of long sermons ascribed to the Buddha, with accounts of the circumstances in which he preached them.
2. Majjhima (Medium) Nikāya, shorter sermons.
4. Aṅguttara (Graduated) Nikāya, a collection of over 2,000 brief statements, arranged rather artificially in eleven sections, according to the number of topics treated in each statement. Thus Section Two contains a discussion on the two things which a man should avoid, Section Three, one on the trinity of thought, word and deed, and so on.
5. Khuddaka (Minor) Nikāya, miscellaneous works in prose and verse, some very ancient, but certainly added to the canon later than the four other Nikāyas. Among the contents of the Khuddaka are the Dhammapada ("Verses on Virtue"), the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā ("Hymns of the Elders Monks and Nuns"), which contain some of India's greatest religious poetry, and the Jātaka, a collection of over 500 poems, briefly outlining folktales and other stories, which were originally intended to be told in the words of a narrator. The tales are told in full in a prose commentary attributed to Buddhaghosa, which is invariably published with the verses. Many of the tales are secular, and they do not all convey a very exalted message, but they have all been given an odour of sanctity by being ascribed to the Buddha, who is said to have told them as recollections of his previous births as a Bodhisattva, a being destined to become a Buddha. These racy and vivid stories are great as literature, and will be considered elsewhere in that aspect (p. 455ff). They are an invaluable source of social history.

The third Piṭaka, Abhidhamma, consists of some dryly pedantic works on Buddhist psychology and metaphysics of little interest except to the specialist. It is certainly later than the other two Piṭakas.

* The Pāli form. The Sanskrit is Śāstra. As the Sthaviravādins regularly used Pāli, Pāli forms of names and terms are generally employed in this section, except where the Sanskrit form is better known.
As well as the canon and its many commentaries there are several semi-canonical works. Chief of these is the "Questions of Menander" (Milinda-pañha), an account of the discussions of the Greco-Bactrian king and the monk Nāgasena, which is written with such literary and dialectical skill that it has been suggested, without much evidence, that the author knew something of Plato. Of a different character are the verse chronicles which tell the history of Buddhism in Ceylon, and give valuable information on political and social history also. Of these, the earliest, Dipavamsa (the "Island Chronicle") dates from the 4th century A.D., and has no literary merit, but the Mahāvamsa ("Great Chronicle"), of the following century, contains passages of beauty and vigour (p. 459f). It was continued as the Cūlavamsa ("Lesser Chronicle") by a succession of monks down to the fall of the kingdom of Kandy to the British at the beginning of the 19th century and we understand that a further appendix has recently been added, bringing it down to the present day.

The basic propositions of this great body of literature are not metaphysical but psychological. Sorrow, suffering, dissatisfaction, and all the manifold unpleasantnesses which are referred to by the word dukkha, are inherent in life as it is ordinarily lived; they can only be eliminated by giving up "thirst" (tanha, often translated "craving"), which includes personal ambition, desire, longing, and selfishness of all kinds. According to orthodox teaching the cause of this "thirst" is the innate but mistaken conviction of individuality—that there is in each living being a permanent core, an ego or soul. While this doctrine was subscribed to at a very early period by all Buddhist sects some modern authorities deny that it was propounded by the Buddha, and claim that he merely taught the abandonment of selfishness and individualism on the lower plane of everyday life, but maintained the existence of an eternal soul. This proposition we find hard to believe, despite certain apparent inconsistencies in the Pali scriptures. If we can place any reliance at all upon the legend of the Buddha's life, the knowledge gained under the Tree of Wisdom was startlingly original, and not a mere rehash of the lore of the Upaniṣadic sages with a comparatively slight shifting of emphasis.

Whatever the Buddha's original doctrine, there can be no question about the fundamental teaching of Buddhism, the kernel of which is contained in the "Sermon of the Turning of the Wheel of the Law" (Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta), which the Buddha is said to have preached to his first disciples at Vārānasi. This contains the "Four Noble Truths", and the "Noble Eightfold Path", which are accepted as basic categories by all Buddhist sects. We give it in a somewhat abridged form.
"Thus I have heard. Once the Master was at Vārānasī, at the deer park called Isipatana. There the Master addressed the five monks:

"'There are two ends not to be served by a wanderer. What are those two? The pursuit of desires and of the pleasure which springs from desires, which is base, common, leading to rebirth, ignoble and unprofitable; and the pursuit of pain and hardship, which is grievous, ignoble and unprofitable. The Middle Way of the Tathāgata* avoids both these ends; it is enlightened, it brings clear vision, it makes for wisdom, and leads to peace, insight, full wisdom and Nirvāṇa. What is this Middle Way? . . . It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection and Right Meditation. This is the Middle Way. . . .

"'And this is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow—in short all the five components of individuality are sorrow.

"'And this is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow. [It arises from] thirst, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure now here, now there—the thirst for sensual pleasure, the thirst for continued life, the thirst for power.

"'And this is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that thirst so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

"'And this is the Noble Truth of the Way which Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection and Right Meditation.'""

Though there are many difficulties in interpreting the finer points of this short sermon its main message is quite clear—sorrow (remembering that the Pāli word dukkha covers a far wider range of feeling than the English word with which we translate it) is inherent in ordinary life; it is due to craving for individual satisfaction; it can only be stopped by stopping that craving; and this can only be done by taking a middle course between self-indulgence and extreme asceticism and leading a moral and well-ordered life.

This very simple doctrine was developed in various rather pedantic forms, most important of which was the "Chain of Dependent Origination" (Paticca-samuppāda), a series of twelve terms, repeated in more than one passage of the Pāli scriptures, commented on again and again by ancient and modern scholars, and perhaps not fully understood by anybody. Out of Ignorance arises Imagination,

* "'He who has thus attained"—one of the titles of the Buddha.
thence Self-consciousness, thence Name and Form (i.e. corporeal existence), thence the Six Senses,* thence Contact, thence Feeling (or Emotion), thence Craving, thence Attachment, thence Becoming, thence Rebirth, and thence all the manifold ills that flesh is heir to.

The mechanics of this doctrine are indeed obscure, but it shows that the craving which, according to the Buddha’s first sermon, is at the bottom of human misery is ultimately due to ignorance—a sort of cosmic ignorance which leads to the delusion of selfhood. The ignorance primarily concerns the fundamental nature of the universe, which has three salient characteristics—it is full of sorrow (dukkha), it is transient (anicca), and it is soulless (anatta).

The universe is sorrowful. Buddhists would not claim that there is no happiness in the world, but that in some form or other sorrow is inevitable in every aspect of life. “As the ocean has only one flavour, the flavour of salt,” the Buddha is purported to have said, “so has my doctrine only one flavour—the flavour of emancipation [from sorrow].”39 In ordinary existence sorrow cannot be long avoided.

The universe is transient. There is no abiding entity anywhere. In this Buddhism has much in common with the teaching of Heraclitus. Every being or object, however stable and homogeneous it may appear, is in reality transient and composite. Man, who thinks himself to be eternal and individualized, is actually a compound of five psychosomatic elements—Body, Feelings, Perceptions, States of Mind, and Awareness. These five vary from minute to minute and there is no permanent substratum to them. The old man is evidently not the same person as the baby in arms of seventy years ago, and similarly he is not the same as the man of a moment ago. At every instant the old man vanishes, and a new man, caused by the first, comes into being, though a spurious continuity is given by the chain of cause and effect which links one with the other. Buddhism knows no being, but only becoming. Everything is resolved into momentary configurations of events.† The universe is in continuous flux, and all idea of permanence is part of the basic ignorance out of which sorrow springs.

Thus there is no immortal soul. The universe is soulless. In transmigration nothing passes over from one life to another—only a new life arises as part of the chain of events which includes the old. Even the gods are soulless and the World Soul of the Upaniṣads is an illusion. The Buddhism of the Lesser Vehicle is therefore a

* The sixth being thought.
† Called dharmas, the term here used in a special sense.
religion without souls and without God. No Buddhist teacher was rash enough to deny the existence of the gods outright, but they were thought of as beings in no way supernatural or different from man except in their greater happiness and power. In his search for salvation the true Buddhist by-passed them, for they could neither help nor hinder him greatly, and they would in any case do what they were able to assist him if he kept to the Middle Way.

On these premisses the machinery of transmigration—a doctrine which was taken over by Buddhism from the general beliefs of the time—is hard to explain. If nothing passes from life to life the newborn being cannot be thought of as in any way connected with the being who has died, and whose actions have conditioned his present state. Yet the new being suffers as a result of the actions of the old one. This objection was often raised by the opponents of Buddhism, and was countered by the analogy of the flame of a lamp, which might kindle a flame in another lamp and then be extinguished. If this simile was unconvincing, it was pointed out that the old man, though not, on ultimate analysis, the same person as the young one, suffered illness as a result of the excesses of his youth, and so one being might suffer as a result of the evil done by an earlier being who was part of the chain of cause and effect leading up to his present existence. Terms like "individual", "person", and so on were merely convenient labels for a series of separate momentary events which continued indefinitely, just as "chariot" was a convenient label for a collection of pieces of wood and metal put together in a certain manner.

The only stable entity in Sthaviravāda Buddhism was Nirvāṇa (in Pāli, Nibbāna), the state of bliss reached by the Buddhas and Arhants, or perfected beings. Nirvāṇa is difficult to understand for one who has not experienced it, and some early Western scholars believed that it implied complete annihilation. A statement attributed to the Buddha: "I have not said that the Arhat exists after death, and I have not said that he does not exist... because... this is not edifying, neither does it tend to supreme wisdom"40 would suggest that Nirvāṇa was believed to be a state neither of being nor of annihilation. The Aristotelian Law of the Excluded Middle was never strictly applied in Indian thought, and a third state, transcending both being and not-being, would not be considered an impossibility. If the whole world was in a state of flux and Nirvāṇa was a state of rest this too did not present an insuperable paradox, for Nirvāṇa was outside the universe; it underlay it, but was not part of it.

Such a concept is not very different from that of the World Soul of
the Upaniṣads, and, far from being looked on as a state of annihilation, Nirvāṇa was sometimes described in brilliantly colourful language—“a glorious city, stainless and undefiled, pure and white, unaging, deathless, secure and calm and happy”. 41 Nirvāṇa has no definite location, but it may be realized anywhere and at any time, while still in the flesh. The man who finds it never again loses it, and when he dies he passes to this state for ever, in his parinirvāṇa, his “Final Blowing Out”.

The doctrines which we have described are those of the Sthāvira-vādins sect of the Lesser Vehicle, which is the only surviving sect of that branch of Buddhism, and is today dominant in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Other sects of the Lesser Vehicle have now quite disappeared, though they survived longer in India itself than the Sthāvira-vādins. Chief among these was the sect of the Sarvāstivādins (They who say “All is”), who had a canon in Sanskrit, and who differed from the Sthāvira-vādins in their view that the constituents of phenomena (dharma) are not wholly momentary, but exist for ever in a latent form. Another important sect was that of the Sautrāntikas, who maintained that our knowledge of the outside world is only a feasible inference, and who were well on the way to the idealism of some schools of the Great Vehicle. A fourth sect, the Sammitiyas, even went so far as to reject the doctrine of soullessness and to postulate a sort of soul in the pudgala or person, which passes from life to life. These early sects of Buddhism probably gave much encouragement to the evolution of Indian philosophy, as distinct from mystical thought.

Though the Buddha is said to have disapproved of speculation on the origin and end of the world, Buddhists of the Lesser Vehicle devised a cosmological scheme, based largely on prevalent Indian ideas, which accounted for the existence of the world without the intervention of a creator.

As in all Indian cosmologies the universe is cyclic. Over an enormous period of time (mahākalpa) it goes through a process of evolution and decline, only to evolve once more. The cycle is divided into four great periods (asūkhṛṣye). In the first man declines, and at last everything is destroyed except the highest heaven; the good go to this heaven, and the sinners to the hells of other universes, which may at that time be passing through different stages. The second period is one of quiescence. In the third period evolution again begins. The good karma of the beings in the highest heaven begins to fail, and the “World of Form”, a lower heaven, evolves. A great being dies in the highest heaven and is reborn in the World of Form as the god Brahmā. As he is the only living thing therein he is
lonely. But other beings follow him from the highest heaven to the lower. As Brahmā was the first to be born in the World of Form, and their birth agrees with his wishes, he imagines that he is the creator of the other gods, and of all the world, which actually comes into existence through cosmic law. Meanwhile the earth develops, as well as other earths. The first men are fairy-like beings, but gradually they degenerate and become earthbound (p. 83). The fourth period is one of continuation, marked only by a regular pattern of comparative advance and decline, forming a series of lesser cycles within the greater one. This process is repeated for all eternity, but one great cycle is not exactly like the next. There are “Buddha cycles” and “empty cycles”, and we are fortunate that we live in a Buddha cycle, in which four Buddhas (Krākućchanda, Kanakamuni, Kaśyapa, and Śākyamuni *) have taught and a fifth (Maitreya) is yet to come.

The Evolution of the Great Vehicle

It is nowhere claimed in the Pāli scriptures that the Buddha was in any way supernatural. His supreme insight was gained by his own efforts, after many ages of striving in many different births. But his birth, enlightenment and death were cosmic events of the highest importance, and his greatness was such that he was revered even by the mighty gods Brahmā and Śakra (an epithet of Indra commonly used by the Buddhists), not to speak of the myriads of lesser deities inhabiting earth and heaven. He is reported to have said that whoever had faith in him and love for him was assured of a rebirth in heaven, a prospect which, as we know from Aśoka’s inscriptions, was much more intelligible and desirable to the ordinary man than the rarefied and indescribable Nirvāṇa.

When the Buddha died, according to orthodox theory, the chain of his existence was broken. He finally entered the Nirvāṇa which he had realized at his enlightenment, and ceased to be an individual, or to affect the universe in any way. Just before his death he had told his disciples to rely on the Doctrine for leadership. But soon after his death, if not before, his followers evolved the “Three Jewels”, which form the basic profession of faith of Buddhism, and which every Buddhist, both monastic and lay, repeats to this day: “I go for refuge to the Buddha; I go for refuge to the Doctrine (Dharma); I go for refuge to the Order (Saṅgha).” Though the theorists might explain away the first of the Three Jewels, on the obvious interpretation “going for refuge to the Buddha” implied that

* “The Sage of the Śākyas”, a title of Gautama Buddha.
the Master, as distinct from his teaching, was in some way still present and able to help his followers.

The Buddha himself probably taught that he was the last of a long succession of earlier Buddhas, who had lived before him. According to tradition these former Buddhas were revered even in the historical Buddha’s lifetime. By Mauryan times their cult was widespread, and was patronized by Asoka. In the end the orthodox Staviravādin school counted no less than twenty-five Buddhas, not to speak of a large number of pratyeka-buddhas, who had found the truth for themselves without guidance, but had not taught it to the world.

The carvings of the stūpas of Bhārhati and Sānci, executed in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., depict crowds of adoring worshippers reverencing the symbols of the Buddha. A little later sculptors began to carve images of the Buddha himself, and within a few generations all Buddhist sects took to worshipping images. Buddhism kept up with the times, and by the Middle Ages, even in the shrines of the Lesser Vehicle, the Buddha was worshipped just as a Hindu god, with flowers, incense, waving lamps, and deep devotion.

Among the doctrines of Zoroastrianism, which has strongly influenced other religions both East and West, is that of the Saviour (Šaōryant), who at the end of the world will lead the forces of good and light against those of evil and darkness. Under the invading rulers of N.-W. India Zoroastrianism and Buddhism came in contact, and it was probably through this that the idea of the future Buddha became part of orthodox belief. If there had been Buddhas before Gautama there would be Buddhas after him. By the time of the “Questions of Menander”, around the beginning of the Christian era, the cult of the future Buddha, Maitreya, was widespread among all Buddhist sects.

According to the older conceptions the Buddha wrought many deeds of kindness and mercy in a long series of transmigrations as a Bodhisattva, before achieving his final birth as the Sage of the Śākyas; but, since Maitreya and other unnamed Buddhas after him are yet to come, there must be Bodhisattvas existing at present in the universe, who are working continuously for the welfare of all things living. The Jātaka stories show that Bodhisattvas can be incarnated as men, or even as animals; but the more advanced Bodhisattvas, who have the greatest power for good, must be divine beings in the heavens.

Though neither omniscient nor almighty these celestial Bodhisattvas might be adored and prayed to without any misgiving, for it was part of their mission to answer prayer. The Bodhisattva doctrine, a logical development from the older Buddhism, thus peopled the heavens with mighty forces of goodness, and presented
Buddhism with a new mythology. It was this which formed the hallmark of the Mahāyāna, the Great Vehicle.

The Great Vehicle

According to the older doctrine the Bodhisattva works in wisdom and love through many lives so that he may become a Buddha, and ordinary believers are encouraged to follow his example and win Nirvāṇa as quickly as possible. Yet, since the Bodhisattva is a being of immeasurable charity and compassion, surely while one suffering individual remains in the toils of transmigration he will not leave him without help and enter Nirvāṇa, where he can be of no further service to the world. So, quite logically, in the schools of the Great Vehicle the Bodhisattva was thought of not as a being who was soon to become a Buddha, but as one who would bide his time until even the smallest insect had reached the highest goal. The old ideal of the Arhat, the "Worthy" who achieved Nirvāṇa and would be reborn no more, began to be looked on as rather selfish. Instead of striving to become Arhants men should aim at becoming Bodhisattvas, and by the spiritual merit which they gained assist all living beings on the way to perfection.

The idea of transference of merit is a special feature of the teaching of the Great Vehicle. According to the Lesser Vehicle a man can only help another on the Way by example and advice. Each being must be a lamp unto himself, and work out his own salvation. But the belief in transference of merit spread very widely, even affecting the sects of the Lesser Vehicle. The numerous Buddhist dedicatory inscriptions throughout India often contain some such phrase as: "May it be for the welfare of [the donor's] mother and father and of all living beings."

Moreover, the Bodhisattva was thought of as a spirit not only of compassion but also of suffering. In more than one source we read the vow or resolve of the Bodhisattva, which is sometimes expressed in almost Christian terms:

"I take upon myself... the deeds of all beings, even of those in the hells, in other worlds, in the realms of punishment... I take their suffering upon me... I bear it, I do not draw back from it, I do not tremble at it,... I have no fear of it,... I do not lose heart,... I must bear the burden of all beings, for I have vowed to save all things living, to bring them safe through the forest of birth, age, disease, death and rebirth. I think not of my own salvation, but strive to bestow on all beings the royalty of supreme wisdom. So I take upon myself all the sorrows of all beings. I resolve to bear every torment in every purgatory of the universe. For it is better
that I alone suffer than the multitude of living beings. I give myself in exchange. I redeem the universe from the forest of purgatory, from the womb of flesh, from the realm of death. I agree to suffer as a ransom for all beings, for the sake of all beings. Truly I will not abandon them. For I have resolved to gain supreme wisdom for the sake of all that lives, to save the world."25

The idea of the Suffering Saviour may have existed in some form in the Middle East before Christianity, but features like this are not attested in Buddhism until after the beginning of the Christian era. The Suffering Bodhisattva so closely resembles the Christian conception of the God who gives his life as a ransom for many that we cannot dismiss the possibility that the doctrine was borrowed by Buddhism from Christianity, which was vigorous in Persia from the 3rd century A.D. onwards.

The universe of the Great Vehicle contains numerous Bodhisattvas, chief of whom, from the earthly point of view, is Avalokiteśvara ("The Lord who Looks Down"), also called Padmapāni ("The Lotus-Bearer") (pl. XLIV). His special attribute is compassion, and his helping hand reaches even to Āvīcī, the deepest and most unpleasant of the Buddhist purgatories. Another important Bodhisattva is Maitreya, whose special activity is to stimulate the understanding, and who is depicted with a naked sword in one hand, to destroy error and falsehood, and a book in the other, describing the ten pāramitās, or great spiritual perfections, which are the cardinal virtues developed by Bodhisattvas.* Vajrapāni, a sterner Bodhisattva, is the foe of sin and evil, and like the god Indra bears a thunderbolt in his hand. The gentle Maitreya, the future Buddha, is worshipped as a Bodhisattva. Also worthy of mention is Kṣitigarbhā, the guardian of the purgatories, who is thought of not as a fierce torturer but rather as the governor of a model prison, doing his best to make life tolerable for his charges, and helping them to earn remission of sentence. Though the Great Vehicle agrees in theory with the Lesser that the world is full of sorrow, it is fundamentally optimistic. The world contains much good as well as evil, and there is help for all who ask. Every living thing, from the humblest worm upwards, is in a sense a Bodhisattva, for most schools of the Great Vehicle maintain implicitly or explicitly that ultimately all beings will attain Nirvāṇa and become Buddha.

The Great Vehicle was not content with creating this pantheon of

* Charity (δάνα), good conduct (καλα), forbearance (क्याति), courage (वृत्ति), meditation (ध्यान), insight (प्रज्ञा). "skill in knowing what means to take" (to help beings to achieve salvation) (सत्यात्मको), resolution (प्रज्ञाध्यय), power (कौशल), and knowledge (ज्ञान). In some lists only the first six are mentioned. Much mysticism surrounded the idea of the Prajñāpāramitā, especially in the Vajrayāna School.
noble and beneficial Bodhisattvas. Probably developing from the old heresy of the Mahāsāṃghika school (p. 263) the idea arose that Gautama Buddha had not been a mere man, but the earthly expression of a mighty spiritual being. This being has three bodies; a Body of Essence (Dharmakāya), a Body of Bliss (Sambhogakāya), and a Created Body (Nirmāṇakāya), and of these only the last was seen on earth. The Body of Essence eternally penetrates and permeates the universe; it is the ultimate Buddha, of which the other two bodies are emanations, more or less unreal. The Body of Bliss exists in the heavens, and will continue until the final resolution of all things in the Body of Essence. The Created Body was a mere emanation of the Body of Bliss. This reminds us of the Docetic heresy in Christianity, and it is possible that Docetism and the doctrine of the Three Bodies owe much to a common gnostic source in the Middle East.

The Buddha’s Body of Bliss is the presiding deity of the most important Mahāyāna heaven, Sukhāvatī, the “Happy Land”, where the blessed are reborn in the buds of lotuses, which rise from a lovely lake before the Buddha’s throne. This divine Buddha is usually called Amitābha (Immeasurable Glory) or Amitāyus (Immeasurable Age). He too shares the compassion of the Bodhisattva, for, though he enjoys endless and infinite bliss, he maintains an interest in his world, and especially in his heaven. At his touch the lotuses open to give birth to the blessed, who are nourished and grow through the food of his word. According to some Chinese and Japanese sects whoever calls on his name, however sinful he may have been, is assured of rebirth in his heaven. Amitābha is, in fact, a Father in Heaven. He, the historical Gautama Buddha, and the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara are closely associated, and play a bigger part in Mahāyānist thought than do other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, because they are chiefly concerned with this region of the universe and this period of cosmic time, but there are many other heavenly Buddhas, presiding over other heavens and other universes. All are emanations of the primal Body of Essence, which is no other than the Brahman, the World Soul or Absolute of the Upaniṣads, in different guise. The Body of Essence is sometimes referred to in later Buddhist writings as Ādi Buddha, “the Primeval Buddha”, and is also described as “the Void” (Śūnya), “the True” (Tattva), “Wisdom” (Bodhi), or “the Womb of those who Attain the Goal” (Tathāgataagarbha). Moreover it is Nirvāṇa. The final state, which the Sthaviravādin school found so difficult to describe in words, was for most sects of the Great Vehicle not really different from the mystical union with the absolute Brahman of the Upaniṣads. The wheel turned full circle, and the
mystical monism which early Buddhism so strongly opposed found its way into later Buddhism, but with a new terminology.

Most Buddhist sects of both Vehicles had their own versions of the Piṭakas, but, with the exception of the Pāli Piṭakas of the Sthaviravādins, these have not survived in entirety, and in the schools of the Great Vehicle their place was largely taken by later texts, mostly written in the early centuries of the Christian era. These are in Sanskrit, which became the official language of the Great Vehicle in India, though in other parts of Asia it tended to prefer the local tongue. Many of these texts are ostensibly sermons of the Buddha, but of much greater length than those of the Sutta Piṭaka; hence they were known as Vaipulya Sūtras ("Expanded Sermons").

Among the earliest Mahāyāna texts is the Lalitavistara, a florid narrative of the life of the Buddha, containing much more of the supernatural and the marvellous than the Pāli account; this text was utilized by Sir Edwin Arnold for The Light of Asia, a lengthy poem on the Buddha’s life which enjoyed much popularity at the end of the last century, and is still readable, though its style has somewhat dated. Other important scriptures are the Saddharmapundarika ("The Lotus of the Good Law"), a long series of dialogues of considerable literary merit; the Vajracchedika ("Diamond Cutter"), containing very subtle metaphysical writing; the Sukhāvatīvyūha, describing the glories of Amitābha and his paradise; the Karanḍavyūha, glorifying Avalokiteśvara; and the Aṣṭasahasrikaprajñāpāramitā, a work describing the spiritual perfections of the Bodhisattvas (p. 278, n). Literature on this latter subject was considerable. As well as these sacred texts the Great Vehicle produced much religious poetry and a great deal of sectarian philosophical literature, some of very high merit.

The Sthaviravādin commentators were perhaps hampered by the Buddha’s injunctions against unnecessary speculation, and, though they could on occasion argue very logically, they produced comparatively few works of systematic philosophy. The Great Vehicle, on the other hand, produced many. It had two chief philosophical schools, the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra.

The Mādhyamika ("Intermediate") School, so called because it took a line midway between the uncompromising realism of the Sarvāstivādins and the idealism of the Yogācāra, looked back to one of India’s greatest philosophers, Nāgarjuna, who according to tradition was a contemporary of Kaniṣṭha, and whose Mādhyamika Karikā formed the basic text of the school. We have seen that in almost all Buddhist sects the universe was believed to be a flux of momentary
but interdependent events (dharma). Nāgārjuna showed by very subtle arguments that on final analysis the cosmic flux was unreal, as was the consciousness which perceived it and which was itself part of the flux. Therefore Sāṃsāra, the immeasurably long process of transmigration, did not really exist. If the world of change was unreal, its contrary, Nirvāṇa, was also unreal. There was therefore no difference between Sāṃsāra and Nirvāṇa, which were one and the same in their common nonentity. In fact if all things were equally unreal, they were on ultimate analysis one and the same. The One Thing which alone had real existence could have no predicate; it was therefore called by Nāgārjuna “Emptiness”, or “the Void” (Śūnyatā).

This philosophical nihilism did not lead Nāgārjuna and his followers to scepticism or agnosticism. Though nothing but the Void was wholly real, the world and all that it contained, from Amiśṭāḥḥa downwards, had a qualified practical reality; and the great Void underlying all the universe was, in fact, the Body of Essence itself, the Primeval Buddha, Nirvāṇa. Final immeasurable bliss was here and now for all who would perceive it—not something remote and cold, but the very breath of life, nearer and more real than one’s own heart. “The life of the world is the same as Nirvāṇa...”, said the Mādhyamikas, “and really there is no difference between them at all”.

The Yogācāra (“Way of Union”) or Vijñānavāda School completely rejected the realism of the Lesser Vehicle, and maintained a thorough-going idealism, not even allowing the qualified realism of the Mādhyamikas. The world was built by the consciousness, and had no more reality than a dream. The only reality was “Suchness” (Tathātā), also called Dharmadhātu (freely translated “the Raw Material of Phenomena”), which was equivalent to Nāgārjuna’s Void. The Yogācāra school, though perhaps less influential than the Mādhyamika, produced many important philosophers and logicians. Chief of these were Asaṅga, a monk of Peshāwar of the 4th or 5th century, whose Sūtraśāntakāra is the earliest text of the school, Vasubandhu, the younger brother of Asaṅga, and the great logicians Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Among the most important writings of Yogācāra is the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, a lengthy text of great subtlety.

The Vehicle of the Thunderbolt

Quite early in the history of the Great Vehicle feminine divinities found their way into the pantheon. One such was Prajñāpāramitā, the Perfection of Insight, the personification of the qualities of the Bodhisattva. Later the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who were
thought of as male, were, like the gods of Hinduism, endowed with wives who were the active aspect, the “force” or “potency” (śakti) of their husbands. The god was believed to be transcendent and aloof, while the goddess was active in the world; thus the god might be best approached through the goddess. The productive activity of the divine was thought of in terms of sexual union, an idea as old as the Rg Veda. With the spread of these ideas sexual symbolism, and even sexual intercourse as a religious rite, were incorporated into the teachings of some schools of both Hinduism and Buddhism.

With these ideas was combined a new magical mysticism. The Lesser Vehicle taught that release was obtained by the gradual loss of individuality through self-discipline and meditation; the Great Vehicle added that the grace and help of the heaverly Buddhas and Bodhisattvas assisted the process. The followers of the new teachings taught that it could be best attained by acquiring magical power, which they called vajra (“thunderbolt”, or “diamond”). Hence the new school of Buddhism was called Vajrayāna, “the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt”.

Even the Sthaviravādins taught that the monk who reached a high stage of detachment and mental training acquired supernatural powers. At all times there were free-lance Buddhist monks, who did not live regularly in monasteries under orthodox discipline, and who attempted feats of sorcery and necromancy, such as the Buddha is said to have condemned. It was perhaps among these free-lances that the ideas of the new Vehicle developed, to be codified and given dignity under the Pāla kings of Bengal and Bihār. Even in the 7th century Hsian Tsang found certain monasteries permeated with magical practices.

The chief divinities of the new sect were the “Saviouresses” (Tārās), the spouses of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. There were also a host of lesser divinities, many called by the names of demons, such as “outcaste women” (mārgāṅgis), “demonesses” (pītācīs), “sorceresses” (yoginis), and “she-ghouls” (jākinīs). The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with their Tārās were approximated to the less amiable members of the Hindu pantheon, and were often depicted with many arms in ferocious poses.

As in the days of the Brāhmaṇas, it was thought that these deities should be compelled rather than persuaded. The textbooks outlining the means (śādhanā) of doing this were called Tantras, and hence the new cult is often referred to as tantric. By pronouncing the right formula (mantra) in the correct manner, or by drawing the correct magical symbol (yantra), one might force the gods to bestow
magical power on the worshipper and lead him to the highest bliss. Among the many formulae of tantric Buddhism one is specially famous—the "Six Syllables" (Śaḍaśaras), Ōm maṇi padme hūm, still written and repeated thousands of times daily in Tibet. This phrase: "Ah! the jewel is indeed in the lotus!", may be sexual in its original significance, mystically repeating the divine coitus of the heavenly Buddha and Prajñāpāramitā, and of Avalokiteśvara and his Tārā.

Tantric Buddhism did not neglect the techniques of mental training which were part of all the chief religions of India, but their direction was altered. Their primary purpose now was to obtain supernormal power. The meditations of the Vajrayāna were often positively psychopathic. The practitioner of the system might so hypnotize himself as to imagine that he was reborn from the womb of a Tārā, to kill his father the Buddha and take his place. In sexual union with a female devotee he and his partner would become Buddha and Tārā, or he himself might become Tārā. In the sexual rites of tantric Buddhism all taboos were lifted. Even incest was permitted, for what was sin to the ignorant was virtue to the initiate, and so as well as ritual copulation meat and alcohol were indulged in at the tantric covens. These things were, however, done under strict control, and only by initiates at sacred ceremonies. Like the Bengali tantricist of later times the Vajrayāna initiate might in his ordinary life be a normal man, whose occasional religious debauchery served as a catharsis to his evil psychological propensities and was of real help to him in leading the good life as he understood it.

The Buddhist Order

Membership of the Buddhist Order was not restricted by caste, but slaves, soldiers, debtors, and other persons under obligation or in tutelage might not enter it without the permission of their superior. Novices might be admitted from the age of eight upwards, but they could only qualify for full membership of the Order after a long course of study, at the minimum age of twenty. The rites of admission were simple, involving putting on the three yellow or orange robes of the Order, ceremonially shaving the head, and pronouncing the Three Jewels (p. 275) and the "Ten Precepts". The latter form a sort of Buddhist decalogue:

1. "I accept the precept to refrain from harming living beings.
2. I accept the precept to refrain from taking what is not given.
3. ... from evil behaviour in passion.
4. ... from false speech.
(5) "... from surā, meraya and majā (alcoholic drinks), which cause carelessness.
(6) "... from eating at forbidden times (i.e. after midday).
(7) "... from dancing, singing, music and dramatic performances.
(8) "... from the use of garlands, perfumes, unguents and jewellery.
(9) "... from the use of a high or broad bed.
(10) "... from receiving gold and silver."

These precepts were not lifelong vows, but earnest resolves. They were repeated regularly, and if any monk felt that he could no longer honestly maintain them he might leave the Order quite freely, though public opinion tended to frown on the backslider. The vows were often taken for a definite duration only, as is still done in Burma, where boys on leaving school often spend some months in a monastery in preparation for adult life. In this the Buddhist Order sharply contrasts with Christian monasticism.

Of the ten vows the first did not originally involve complete vegetarianism, though it came to do so in many Buddhist communities. A monk might eat meat if the animal providing it was not specially killed for his benefit. The third vow, for the monk, meant absolute celibacy. The fifth was generally taken to mean abstinence from all intoxicants. By the sixth, a monk might eat no solid food after midday; this, in a warm climate and for a man not engaged in strenuous work, was no very great hardship, especially as the monk might take sweetened beverages at any time. In colder climates, such as that of Tibet, monks often take an evening meal, which is looked on as medicine. The seventh rule was not taken to include singing and music for liturgical or other religious purposes. The tenth was interpreted very liberally in many monasteries. Strictly a monk might own only eight "requisites"—three robes, a waist-cloth, an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle, and a cloth to strain his drinking-water in order to save the lives of any animalculae it might contain. In fact he often owned much more than this by the convenient fiction, not unknown in some Christian religious communities, that his property belonged to the Order, from which he had it on loan.

The monk had to beg his food from door to door every morning, taking it back to his monastery for his midday meal. As the monasteries became wealthy, however, the begging round was often reduced to a mere formality, or dropped altogether.

While the Buddhist monk resembled his Christian counterpart in his vows of chastity and poverty, he took no vow of obedience. Each novice or junior monk had his preceptor, and was expected to treat him with great respect, but the monk was essentially a free member of a community of free men. There was no central authority to
regulate the many monasteries and enforce uniformity; each was a law unto itself, guided only by the precepts of the Master as it had received them and as it interpreted them. The constitution of the monastery had elements of democracy about it. The chief monk or abbot was not appointed from above or nominated by his predecessor, but held office by the suffrage of all the monks in the monastic parish. The day-to-day business of the monastery was managed by a committee of elder monks, and significant decisions, such as the admission or expulsion of members, could only be made by the committee and not by the chief. Important business was discussed at meetings of the whole monastery in chapter (p. 98).

The monks assembled every fortnight on the evenings of the full and new moons for upavasatha (in Pāli, uposatha), an act of general confession. The long list of monastic rules (Prātimokṣa, in Pāli Pātimokkha) from the Vinaya Piṭaka was read, and each monk confessed any breaches of which he had been guilty during the preceding fortnight. If his fault was serious his case was referred to a committee of elders, which might impose penance or expel him from the Order. The ceremony concluded with the preaching of sermons, to which the pious layfolk of the vicinity listened.

The daily life of the monk was chiefly spent in study and religious exercises, but he was expected to take his share in the work of the monastery, cleaning his cell, and sweeping the courtyard and the monastic buildings, while the elder monks devoted much of their time to teaching the novices. Among the most important of the monk’s spiritual exercises were the Four Sublime Moods (Brahmavihāra), in which, sitting quietly cross-legged, he endeavoured to fill his mind with the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism—love, pity, joy, and serenity—and to consider all living beings in the light of these virtues. A fifth mood was that of impurity, in which he considered all the vileness and horror of the world and of the life of the flesh. For those more advanced in sanctity there were more exalted meditations, which brought the monk very near to the realization of Nirvāṇa.

One aspect of the monk’s mental discipline which deserves mention is the seventh element of the “Noble Eightfold Path” (p. 271)—“Right Recollection”. He was taught to train himself to be continually aware of what he was doing, observing himself, as it were, all the time. It was taught that every act must be fully conscious, and distraction, carelessness and lack of consideration were serious faults. When he ate, the monk should be aware of the nature of the act, its purpose, and the transience of the body which he fed, and similarly with every act throughout the day. No doubt few but the most
advanced monks were able to keep up this state of “Right Recollection” continuously.

At one time India possessed numerous Buddhist nunneries, though now monastic life in Buddhism is largely confined to men, except in Tibet. The nuns wore yellow robes and shaved their heads like the monks, and their discipline was very similar. Though strict rules were laid down for preserving the respectability of the two branches of the Order, which often dwelt in adjoining establishments, accusations of immorality were sometimes levelled against them by their religious opponents, and these accusations may have had some foundation. The sexual activity of tantric Buddhism, of course, did not constitute a breach of the vows when performed in accordance with the rites of the sect.

Buddhist Ethics and Morality

Buddhism inculcates a high system of ethics. The Noble Eightfold Path, whereby a man attains Nirvāṇa, is not merely a matter of belief or knowledge, but also one of conduct, and the Four Cardinal Virtues of Buddhism (p. 285) are more positive in character than the non-violence and abstinence of the Upaniṣads.

The chief of these virtues, love (Pāli, mettā, Sanskrit, maitrī), is somewhat less tinged with emotion than the comparable virtue in Christianity. The term is derived from the word mitra, “a friend”, and might be translated “friendliness”, “good will” or “benevolence”. Nevertheless the Buddhist scriptures contain passages which describe mettā with a passion which recalls the famous words of St. Paul on the virtue of charity.

“May every living being, weak or strong, large or small, seen or unseen, near or far, born or yet unborn—may every living thing be full of joy.

“May none deceive another, or think ill of him in any way whatever, or in anger or ill-will desire evil for another.

“Just as a mother, as long as she lives, cares for her only child, so should a man feel all-embracing love to all living beings.

“He should feel boundless love for all the world, above below and across, unrestrained, without enmity. Standing, walking, sitting or lying down, ... he should be firm in the mindfulness of love. For this is what men call the Sublime Mood.”

In this connexion the following extract is interesting, for it recalls a well-known verse of the Sermon on the Mount.

“A man buries a treasure in a deep pit, thinking: ‘It will be useful in time of need, or if the king is displeased with me, or if I am robbed or fall into debt, or if food is scarce, or if bad luck befalls me.’
"But all this treasure may not profit the owner at all, for he may forget where he hid it, or goblins may steal it, or his enemies or even his kinsmen may take it when he is not on his guard.

"But by charity, goodness, restraint and self-control man and woman alike can store up a well-hidden treasure—a treasure which cannot be given to others,* and which robbers cannot steal. A wise man should do good—that is the treasure which will not leave him." 46

Though the passages quoted above cannot be dated with precision they are certainly pre-Christian, and there is no possibility of Christian influence.

The vow of the Bodhisattva, which we have already quoted (p. 277f), gives sufficient indication of the ethics of the Great Vehicle, which teaches an impassioned altruism scarcely to be found elsewhere in the literature of the non-Christian world.

Though the Buddhist virtue of mettā seems often rather a state of mind than a spur to benevolent action, the view that faith without works is dead is sometimes expressed, notably in the story of the Buddha and the sick monk. As the Master was going on a round of inspection, visiting the monks in their cells, he found one who was sick with dysentery, and who had fallen from his bed and lay in his own ordure. With his own hands the Buddha washed the sick man from head to foot, laid him comfortably on his bed, and gave a new rule to the Order:

"Brethren, you have no mother or father to care for you. If you do not care for one another who else will do so? Brethren, he who would care for me should care for the sick." 47

Though this precept applies primarily to the Order of monks, it was no doubt under the influence of such teachings that Asoka established free dispensaries, and that Buddhist monks have at all times studied medical lore, and treated laymen as well as their own fellows.

The Buddhist scriptures were chiefly written for and addressed to the monks and nuns of the order, but a number of passages gave special instruction to the layman, and the first five of the "Ten Precepts" (p. 285f) were binding on the lay community. According to the first of these no Buddhist could follow the profession of hunter or butcher. The resolve not to take life was generally interpreted as permitting lawful warfare and the sentencing of criminals to death, and did not preclude Buddhists from eating meat, if provided by

* The doctrine of the Sthaviravādin School. In the Great Vehicle merit can be transferred (p. 277).
non-Buddhist butchers. But Buddhism tended to encourage mildness and vegetarianism, and somewhat discouraged the militarism which prevailed at most periods in ancient India (p. 129f). The second precept, not to take what is not given, included abstention not only from theft, but also from sharp practice in business.

For the laymen the third precept did not, of course, involve absolute celibacy, but permitted lawful marriage. It was usually interpreted as forbidding unnatural sexuality and extra-marital relations. Buddhism laid down no hard and fast rules on the questions of marriage and divorce, and at the present day in Buddhist countries marital laws are largely influenced by local custom. The fourth precept, forbidding false speech, was taken to include lying, perjury and slander, while the fifth forbade alcoholic drinks. Modern Buddhists often put a rather liberal interpretation on this rule, and the same may have been done in ancient days, for in one sermon the Buddha is said to have classed only the first four sins as “vices of action”, and to have included drinking among the six less reprehensible “openings for the swallowing up of wealth”, the others being roaming the streets at unseasonable hours, frequenting festivals, gambling, keeping bad company and idling.

This sermon, the most important Buddhist text on lay morality, is the “Address to Sigāla”,48 in which the Buddha gives instruction to a young layman on his relations with his fellow men, and on the duties of parents and children, teachers and pupils, husbands and wives, and friends. It breathes a spirit of warm affection and fellowship, not raised to an exalted spiritual level but of an everyday practical type. The text is too long to quote, and we can only summarize some of its instructions.

Husbands should respect their wives, and comply as far as possible with their requests. They should not commit adultery. They should give their wives full charge of the home, and supply them with fine clothes and jewellery as far as their means permit. Wives should be thorough in their duties, gentle and kind to the whole household, chaste, and careful in housekeeping, and they should carry out their work with skill and enthusiasm.

A man should be generous to his friends, speak kindly of them, act in their interests in every way possible, treat them as his equals, and keep his word to them. They in turn should watch over his interests and property, take care of him when he is “off his guard” (i.e. intoxicated, infatuated, or otherwise liable to commit rash and careless actions), stand by him and help him in time of trouble, and respect other members of his family.

Employers should treat their servants and workpeople decently. They should not be given tasks beyond their strength. They should receive adequate food and wages, be cared for in time of sickness and infirmity, and
be given regular holidays and bonuses in times of prosperity. They should rise early and go to bed late in the service of their master, be content with their just wages, work thoroughly, and maintain their master’s reputation.

Precepts such as these, which are implicit in the teaching of other religions, are nowhere else so clearly and unequivocally expressed. Specially noteworthy are the duties of husbands to wives and of masters to servants, which seem to anticipate twentieth century ideas on the rights of women and employees.

Among the most important vehicles of Buddhist ethical teaching are the Jātaka stories. These are mostly of secular origin, and many merely inculcate shrewdness and caution in everyday life, as do Æsop’s fables (e.g. that given in full on p. 466f). Others teach generosity and self-abnegation in morbidity exaggerated forms, for instance the tale of King Śivi (known also in Hinduism), who ransomed a pigeon from a famished hawk with flesh cut from his own thigh. Many modern readers may well find the very popular story of Prince Viśvāntara (Pāli, Vessantara) distasteful. This prince gave away so much of his royal father’s treasure that he was banished with his wife and children in a carriage drawn by four horses. As he left, he gave away the carriage and horses for the asking, and settled in a hut in the forest with his family. Soon he gave his children to a wandering ascetic who needed them to do his begging for him, and finally he disposed of his wife in similar manner. But all ended happily, for those who had asked him for his most precious possessions were gods in disguise who had decided to test his generosity, and he was at last restored to his family and his patrimony (pl. XIX). But many old Buddhist stories are of the highest ethical quality, such as that of the monkey who saved the lives of his fellows from the king’s archers at the risk of his own by making himself a living bridge over the Gangā, or that of the noble parrot who laid down his life for his friends in a futile attempt to quench a forest fire by drops of water scattered from his wings.

(III) Jainism and Other Unorthodox Sects

Jainism

Among the many unorthodox teachers who were contemporary with the Buddha was Vardhamāna, known to his followers as Mahā-vīra (“the Great Hero”). Jainism, the “Religion of the Conquerors” (jīnas), which he founded, had a history very different from that of Buddhism. It succeeded in establishing itself firmly, and in
some places became very influential, but it never spread beyond India. Unlike Buddhism, there were no fundamental changes and developments in Jaina doctrine. But though the history of Jainism is less interesting than that of Buddhism, and though it was never so important, it survived in the land of its birth, where it still has some two million adherents, mostly well-to-do merchants.

The legends of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra are less attractive than those of the Buddha and are even more formalized and unreliable, but as he is referred to in the Buddhist scriptures as one of the Buddha’s chief opponents his historicity is beyond doubt. He was born about 540 B.C. and was the son of Siddhārtha, a chief of the clan of Jātrikas, the associates of the Licchavis of Vaiśāli; his mother, Trisalā, was the sister of the Licchavi chief Ceṣāka, and thus, like the Buddha, he was wholly the product of the oligarchic martial clans which were a powerful political force at the time. Though he was educated as a prince, and married and had a daughter, his real interest lay in the quest for salvation. At the age of thirty, when his parents were dead, he left his home for a life of asceticism. At first he followed the practices of an ascetic group called the Nirgranthas (“Free from Bonds”), which had been founded some 200 years earlier by a certain Pārśva. The term Nirgrantha was later used for the members of the order which Mahāvīra founded, and Pārśva was remembered as the twenty-third of the twenty-four great teachers or Tirthaṅkaras (“Ford-makers”) of the Jaina faith.

For over twelve years Vardhamāna wandered from place to place, begging his food, meditating, disputing, and subjecting his body to austerities of all kinds. At first he wore a single garment which he never changed, but after thirteen months he laid this encumbrance aside, and the rest of his life was spent in complete nudity. For some six years his hardships were shared by another ascetic, Gośāla Maskariputra, but ultimately the two quarrelled, and Gośāla left Vardhamāna to found the sect of Ajīvikas.

In the thirteenth year of his asceticism Vardhamāna found full enlightenment and Nirvāṇa; he became a “Worthy” (Arhant), a “Conqueror” (Jina), a “Ford-maker”. He soon gained a great reputation and a large band of followers, and for thirty years he taught in the Gangetic kingdoms, patronized by the very kings who also patronized the Buddha. He survived the death of his chief rival, Gośāla, and probably also that of the Buddha, and died of self-starvation at the age of seventy-two in the little town of Pāvā, near the Magadhan capital Rājaagrha. There are conflicting traditions about the date of his death, which was probably in 468 B.C.

For some two centuries the Jainas remained a small community of
monks and lay followers, less important than the rival sect of the Ājīvikas. According to a strongly held Jaina tradition Candragupta Maurya joined their order as a monk on his abdication, and it seems certain that there was an accession of strength in Maurya times. A serious famine at the end of Candragupta’s reign led to a great exodus of Jaina monks from the Gangā Valley to the Deccan, where they established important centres of their faith.

Out of this migration arose the great schism of Jainism, on a point of monastic discipline. Bhadrabāhu, the elder of the community, who led the emigrants, insisted on the retention of the rule of nudity which Mahāvīra had established. Sthūlabhadra, the leader of the monks who remained in the North, allowed his followers to wear white garments, owing to the hardships and confusions of the famine. Hence arose the two sects of the Jainas, the Digambaras ("Space-clad", i.e. naked), and the Śvetāmbaras ("White-clad"). The schism did not become final until the 1st century A.D., and there were never any fundamental doctrinal differences; later most monks of the naked sect took to wearing robes in public, but the division has persisted down to the present day.

According to tradition an oral sacred literature had been passed down from the days of Mahāvīra, but Bhadrabāhu was the last person to know it perfectly. On his death Sthūlabhadra called a great council at Pāṭaliputra, and the canon was reconstructed as best possible in twelve Aṅgas, or sections, which replaced the fourteen "former texts" (Pūrvas). This canon was accepted only by the Śvetāmbaras; the Digambaras claimed that the old canon was hopelessly lost, and proceeded to devise new scriptures for themselves, some of which are still unpublished. The texts of the Śvetāmbara canon were finally settled and reduced to writing at a council at Valabhi in Gujarāt in the 5th century A.D. By this time the texts had become very corrupt and one of the Aṅgas had been completely lost, while new material had been added to the original canon in the form of the twelve Upāṅgas, or minor sections, and various lesser works. In the Middle Ages a great body of commentarial literature was written both in Prākrit and Sanskrit, and there were many able philosopher monks, who interpreted the scriptures of the sect. Some monks turned their attention to secular literature and other branches of learning, apparently without losing their piety. One of the last great poets in Sanskrit, Nayacandra, of the 14th century (p. 435f), was a Jaina monk, as was Mallinātha, the author of the standard commentary on the poems of Kālidāsa. We owe much to the Jaina monks’ love of literature. To copy a manuscript, even a secular one, was considered a work of great religious merit, and thus the old Jaina monasteries of
Western India have preserved many rare and otherwise unknown texts, some of which have still to be published and many of which are of non-Jaina origin.

In the period between the Mauryas and the Guptas Jainism can be traced from Orissā in the East to Mathurā in the West, but in later times it was chiefly concentrated in two regions—Gujarāt and parts of Rājasthān, where the Śvetāmbara sect prevailed, and the central part of the Peninsula, the modern Mysore, where the Digambaras were dominant. The Gangā Valley, the original home of Jainism, was little affected by it.

The Śvetāmbaras found much support among the chiefs of Western India, and gained a position of great prominence during the reign of the Caulukya king Kumārapāla, who ruled Gujarāt in the 12th century. Under the guidance of a great Jaina scholar, Hema- candra, Kumārapāla is said to have instituted a Jaina reformation; but on his death the sect lost much of its influence, and though it still flourished it never again became so important. Similarly in the South the Digambaras had great influence in the early Middle Ages, thanks to the patronage of kings, but this influence gradually diminished as that of devotional Śaivism and Vaishnavism grew. There are traditions, which some have doubted but which we believe to have a basis of fact, that the Jainas were sometimes severely persecuted. But although Jainism declined it never disappeared.

Though the Jaina scriptures are comparatively late in their final form, there is little divergence in fundamentals between the two great Jaina sects; thus it seems that the basic teachings of both are very ancient indeed, and are essentially those of Mahāvīra himself. Jainism, like Buddhism, is fundamentally atheistic in that, while not denying the existence of the gods, it rejects them any important part in the universal scheme. The world, for the Jaina, is not created, maintained or destroyed by a personal deity, but functions only according to universal law.

The universe is eternal. Its existence is divided into an infinite number of cycles, each consisting of a period of improvement (uitsarpini), and one of decline (avasarppini). Each period is to all intents and purposes like the last, containing twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras, twelve Universal Emperors (Cakravartins), both classes being included in the total of sixty-three Great Men (Śāluka-puruṣas), who live at regular intervals in the cycle. At the peak period men are of enormous size and reach a tremendous age. They have no need of laws or property, for wishing-trees (kalpa-vṛkṣa) give them all they need for the asking. At present the world is rapidly declining. The last Tīrthaṅkara of this age has passed to final Nirvāṇa, and gradually
true religion will be lost—Mahāvīra in his omniscience even gave his followers the name and address of the last Jaina of this æon. The process of decline will continue for 40,000 years, when men will be dwarfs in stature, with a life of only twenty years, and will dwell in caves, having forgotten all culture, even to the use of fire. Then the tide will turn, and they will begin to improve again, only to decline once more, and so on for all eternity. Unlike the cosmology of the Buddhists and Hindus, that of the Jainas involves no cataclysms of universal destruction.

The universe functions through the interaction of living souls (jīvas, literally "lives"), and five categories of non-living entities (ajīva): "ether" (ākāśa), the means or condition of movement (dharma), the means or condition of rest (adharma),* time (kāla), and matter (pudgala). Souls are not only the property of animal and plant life, but also of entities such as stones, rocks, running water, and many other natural objects not looked on as living by other sects.

The soul is naturally bright, all-knowing and blissful. There are an infinite number of souls in the universe, all fundamentally equal, but differing owing to the adherence of matter in a fine atomic form. This subtle matter, quite invisible to the human eye, is karma, the immaterial entity of other systems interpreted materialistically. The naturally bright soul becomes dulled and clouded over by karmic matter and thus acquires first a spiritual and then a material body. The obsfuscation of the soul is compared to the gradual clouding of a bright oily surface by motes of dust. Karma adheres to the soul as a result of activity. Any and every activity induces karma of some kind, but deeds of a cruel and selfish nature induce more, and more durable, karma than others. The karma already acquired leads to the acquisition of further karma, and thus the cycle of transmigration continues indefinitely.

On these premises transmigration can only be escaped by dispelling the karma already adhering to the soul and by ensuring that no more is acquired. This is a slow and difficult process and it is believed that many souls will never succeed in accomplishing it, but will continue to transmigrate for all eternity. The annihilation (nirjara) of karma comes about through penance, and the prevention (samvara) of the influx (āśrava) and fixation (bandha)+ of karma in the soul is ensured by carefully disciplined conduct, as a result of which it does not

* Like the Buddhists the Jainas gave to these familiar terms very special connotations, the full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this work. Dharma is a sort of secondary space which permits movement, as water permits a fish to swim; adharma is a tertiary space which permits rest.

† We quote these four Sanskrit terms as, with jīva (souls), ajīva (the five categories mentioned earlier), and salvation (mokṣa), they constitute the seven fundamental categories (lakṣaṇa) of Jainism.