Caste—Professor Ghose’s Suggestion

THE views set out in the preceding pages receive striking confirmation from the studies of Professor Ghose of Dacca University,¹ and this chapter will be devoted to summarizing his arguments. The trail of research into the ancient history of India was blazed by European scholars, and their prestige among Orientalists has perhaps obscured the important work which is being and has recently been done by Indian scholars themselves. The modern tendency to scepticism and rationalism has caused such scholars to take an objective view of the literature and to lay what might once have been called sacrilegious hands upon the revealed scriptures, a result natural enough when we consider the growth of the scientific spirit in India. Professor Ghose has put forward his opinions after a great deal of intensive study of the Indo-Aryan literature. The conclusions at which he has arrived are certainly surprising and, to judge by a hint or two he has let drop, they have surprised himself. For Professor Ghose is certainly a Hindu, and his natural predilection would be to support the Aryan theory and to uphold the Brahmanical view of life. One has a preconceived idea, born perhaps of a slight snobbishness to which most of us are, however unconsciously, prone, that the Hindu is proud of his Aryan ancestry and his Aryan culture, and would resent being told convincingly or otherwise that his real ancestors were not this blue-blooded folk but the black-skinned inhabitants whom they dispossessed. And here we have a learned scholar who not only asserts that the Indian culture was three parts or more due to the primeval inhabitants, but rarely misses an opportunity of pouring scorn on Brahmanical wiles and Brahmanical pretensions. One cannot, however, forget that whatever else he may be he is a Bengali, and that his

¹ Nagendranath Ghose: *Indo-Aryan Literature and Culture (Origins).*
whole argument centres round the idea that the whole culture was founded or at least profoundly modified by an Eastern Empire which consisted of Magadha, Videha, Panchala, and Anga, that is, all that part of the Ganges valley which lies between Allahabad and Calcutta. This Eastern Empire was non-Aryan or Vratya, that is to say, to use the words of Professor Washburn Hopkins, "entirely outcast persons with whom one may not even have intercourse unless they perform special rites." Professor Ghose is, moreover, a convert, and he approaches his subject with all the notorious enthusiasm of a convert. He shows a certain impatience with those who still cling to the "Aryan" theory with all its incongruities, and far from admitting that the Aryans were superior in civilization, he contends that the boot is on the other foot, that it was the Eastern, i.e. Bengali, Kingdom or Empire which showed all the signs of development and organization while the Aryans were still undeveloped and unorganized. It may be unfair to attribute such prejudice to a work which is professedly scientific and which shows continually every desire to approach the problem objectively; it is, however, only natural that a certain bias should appear which would claim for Bengal the honour of having called the Indian tune and which does to some extent also exhibit the impatience of the convert towards orthodoxy. For all that Professor Ghose's argument deserves serious study and cannot be brushed aside as the mere vapourings of prejudice. His book is evidently written for the initiated; it is full of Sanskrit words and extracts printed in Nagari character and left untranslated without even a hint of what interpretation he would put upon them, and he assumes a certain familiarity with abstruse Hindu terms of which only students of ancient India have ever heard.

It is admitted that if the Vratyas are outcast (or, more properly, excommunicate) they can be received into the Aryan community by the performance of certain rites. Professor Washburn Hopkins speaks of "admission into the Brahmanical fold," thereby suggesting that by these rites they became full participants of the system, complete.
with caste, sacrifice, doctrine, and ceremonies. Professor Ghose does not endorse this view. In the Atharva Veda is described the ceremony of Vratyastoma, by which the non-Aryan was "converted" into the Aryan, and this, Professor Ghose holds, was really a ceremony of mass conversion, in principle, though not in detail, not unlike the mass conversion of the Saxons in A.D. 777. The Anupadesa, the non-Aryan Vratya country, was a very long way from the Punjab, the home of the first Aryan settlers, and it is reasonable to suppose that the "conquest" of the country was made rather by peaceful penetration than by direct invasion. Either because of internecine feuds or from the love of adventure and enterprise, some of the Aryans found their way into the non-Aryan country in the Ganges valley, and discovered there a people, religiously less advanced than themselves since the popular religion was largely a hocus-pocus of magic, spells, and incantations, but politically far more developed. Whereas the Aryan settlements were at best only a loose confederation, in which Brahman and Kshatriya contended for domination (on the basis of class, not of caste), the Vratya-land was a well-knit empire under an autocratic ruler who held it together by his own authority. It was peopled by a somewhat heterogeneous collection of tribes and castes, which, whatever may have been their religion and their customs, owned the sway of the Vratya Emperor and were thus in some sense a political unit. The castes are more or less formed on the basis of occupation; the customs and even the gods may differ, but the Brahmans, who are in the main court poets and household priests, differ greatly from the Aryan Brahmins, and the priests of the popular religion are concerned with spells and incantations and exorcisms. The Emperor and his nobles, however, take very little interest in popular religion and belong rather to the school of philosophic speculation which they treat as a close preserve. It is out of these speculations that the Upanishads spring, though doubtless after the penetration of Aryan influence they gradually become moulded to the Aryan pattern. The Rajanyas (or Kshatriyias) were originally foreigners who imposed themselves
upon the land by conquest and stood to the rest of the people in much the same relation as the Normans did to the Saxons soon after the Conquest of England.

The immigrant Brahmins obtain access to the King or Emperor, who holds conversation with them on the subject of politics and religion. The political side of the question appeals to these Brahmins; they appreciate the law and order which they see around them, as well as the general prosperity of the country, and this is ascribed to the single sway of the autocratic Emperor. If the disjointed Aryan confederacy could be induced to accept the suzerainty of the Emperor, it would be an advantage to everyone concerned. But there was the religious difficulty. The Vratyas did not set much store by their religion, whether of the popular or of the more abstruse kind, but the Aryans did, and they would not accept the rule of an unbeliever with any better grace than a Mussulman of the earlier centuries accepted the rule of a Kafir. If, however, the Aryan religion was accepted with such modifications as would not shock the susceptibilities of the people, there was every chance that the empire might be extended so as to include the Aryan settlements. The idea was attractive—to the Emperor, the Great Vrata, who would thereby obtain a great accession of power and influence—to the Brahmins, who saw themselves rising to great positions in the new State. And so “the bargain is struck; the concordat is agreed to.” There must, however, be a great conversion ceremony, and this took shape as the Vratyastoma of the Atharva Veda. It must also include a Rajasuya rite, to consecrate the first monarch of the land, Aryan and Vratya alike. The conversion ceremony, it must be repeated, was not for individuals; that is where Professor Ghose joins issue with European scholars. Caste among the Aryans, at any rate, had not yet made its appearance. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas were still classes which contended for the mastery as kings and popes contended in Europe. Bloomfield, in the opinion of the author of this “romance,” is therefore wrong when he speaks of “one who has entered the Brahmanical community after having been converted from an Aryan but non-
Brahmanical tribe.” Bloomfield has no doubt that the connection between the Vrata book and the Vrata stoma is not to be questioned; he has no doubt that in Book xv of the Atharva Veda as well as elsewhere the conversion of the Vrata is referred to. But by this conversion the Vratyas did not “become Brahmans.” They were simply admitted into the Aryan fold and very probably became Vaisyas, which etymologically only means “members of the vis or clan.” It is in this etymological sense and not in the later caste sense that this term must be understood, for it is part of the argument of the author of this “romance” that the advantage to the Aryans in this supposed “concordat” was the acquisition of man-power, however obtained, to the Aryan vis. The author does not believe that the pure-blooded Aryans were in such numbers or were so unified that they could have conquered the country unaided, nor that they were particularly squeamish as to who was admitted to the Aryan community. The whole argument is, one may say, based on the theory that the Aryans were politically far inferior to the men of the Eastern Empire.

And so when the great Vrata stoma ceremony had been performed and the Eastern Empire had become, as the Roman Empire became Christian, Aryan in name, if not in fact, the Western Brahmans, the Aryan missionaries, gradually rose to power in the State and while they introduced the Aryan rites, modified to suit the popular taste, they and the king were engaged in abstruse metaphysical discussions out of which grew the doctrines of the Upanishads.

Such is the “romance” in which Professor Ghose has given the rein to his imagination. Yet it is not wholly a romance, for it is supported in many details by discussion of the various authorities and by the disentangling of much that is, it is claimed, otherwise inexplicable. Leaving the main body of the argument for the present, we may here touch on one of the most important points. What, if the romance is wholly romance, is the meaning of the Atharva Veda in general and of the xvth book in particular? The bulk of the Veda is taken up with spells and incantations and is quite different
in character, as in time, from the Trayi, the other three canonical Vedas. The Aryans were probably not free from these superstitions, but, if they had been so important a part of religion as they appear to be in the Atharva Veda, they would surely have been prominent in other writings admittedly Aryan. It seems incredible that these spells and this magic should not have their origin in the beliefs of the non-Aryan population. How, then, came they to be incorporated in the Hindu canon? It is difficult to accept the statement of Professor Dutt of the Hooghly College, Calcutta, that "tribal and cultural divisions of society could not be shaken off by the natives even after their conquest by the Aryans, and, under the changed circumstances, they became hardened into caste divisions." To this he ascribes "the curious fact that the caste rules are more rigid among the Dravidians of the South." But we may endorse his opinion that "the practice of the conquered aborigines contributed as much to the development of caste as the racial and class prejudices of the Aryan conquerors" with the reservation that it was the practice of the aborigines, whether "conquered" or not, which was the real basis of the caste system. Professor Dutt, therefore, adopts the rather lame conclusion that for the time being we shall have to remain satisfied with the view that the varna division of society was mainly Aryan in character though accentuated by the peculiar conditions of the Aryan conquerors in India "because we have no data about the pre-Dravidian influence upon the Aryans." But that is surely to ignore the inferential value of customs and practices which we know do exist even now. In the absence of direct evidence we have to fall back upon inference from known facts, if that method is likely to lead us nearer the truth. We cannot rely entirely upon the literature written either by Brahmans or under Brahman influence. We need not be satisfied, even for the time being, with a theory that does not fit the facts and is so manifestly defective at so many points, any more than our ancestors were obliged to be satisfied that an eclipse of the moon was due to a dragon, or that the world would
come to an end on a given date. No doubt, whatever theory may now be advanced may have to be modified in the light of fuller knowledge, especially as disclosed by archaeological efforts, but that need not prevent us from accepting a theory “for the time being” which does fit the facts; and it has all along been the contention that such a theory is to be found in the aboriginal basis of caste which was modified by Aryan influence and not the other way about.

The Atharva Veda was not, in the view we have been considering, an Aryan compilation at all. It was a Vratya collection, put together for the edification and guidance of the priestly class which had come into existence through the medium of the proselytizing Aryan Brahmans and is therefore founded upon the superstitions current in the land, duly leavened with an admixture of the Vedic religion. Among minor indications which support this view mention may be made of the place given to the tiger. It is remarkable that in early Indian literature—in the Panchatantra, for example, which is a collection of fables of unknown date but which seem to have been current long before they were so collected—it is the lion, not the tiger, as we might have expected, who is the king of the jungle, and Professor Berriedale Keith remarks that “the tiger, a native of the swampy jungles of Bengal, is not mentioned in the Rig-Veda, which gives the place of honour among wild beasts to the lion, then doubtless common in the vast deserts to the east of the lower Sutlej and the Indus.” In the Atharva Veda, on the other hand, not only does “the tiger [the most distinctive inhabitant of the Anupadesa] . . . compete with the lion and even prevail over him as a familiar literary figure but it is on his skin . . . and on it only that the consecration of the king can take place. (A. V. iv. 8. 2.).”

When, therefore, this rite of Rajasuya is adopted with due “rishification” by the Brahman priesthood, they do it, tiger’s skin and all. We may be tempted to ignore such indications as this of the true home of the Atharva Veda, but in discussing the very vexed question of the original home of the Aryans, Dr. Giles lays considerable stress on the question of the fauna and flora mentioned in the older
literature, and he specially mentions the tiger. "The wolf and the bear were known, but not the lion or the tiger." If to-day we should find an ancient document in which a prominent place was given to 'the kangaroo, we should certainly not be inclined to assign it to Europe or Asia.

We are not bound to accept every detail of this romance, even if we are led to accept its main conclusions. It is extremely probable that the Aryan invasion of Vrata land was in fact accomplished through the peaceful penetration of Aryan immigrants, and it is quite unlikely that the Vratajas were regarded as outcasts in the sense in which Professor Keith uses the word. According to the same authority "the description of the Vratajas well suits nomadic tribes; they are declared not to practise agriculture, to go about in rough wagons, to wear turbans, to carry goads and a peculiar king of bow, while their garments are of a special kind." It is not easy to see why, with one exception, this description suits nomadic tribes in particular, for the use of rough wagons and particular kinds of weapons and dress need show nothing more than the observation of strangers who had come across unaccustomed things. That they did not practise agriculture does, however, suggest that they had not passed the nomadic or pastoral stage, if we can be quite sure what is meant by practising agriculture. To this day there are in India aboriginal tribes whose idea of agriculture is to burn down patches of jungle, sow grain, and more or less let Nature do the rest, moving on to a second patch when the first is exhausted. In the fertile valley of the Ganges little or no agriculture would be needed to produce some kind of a crop, and in the delta of the Godavari I have seen fields which were sown after they had simply been trodden by bulls or buffaloes when the river silt had been allowed to do its work. Professor Ghose himself seems, however, to admit this lack of agriculture when he says of Vrata-land that it was "the earth of the prthi- or prthu-Vaniya of both the Puranas and Atharva Veda, he who taught his subjects the art of agriculture [indicating, no doubt, thereby, the staple industry of the Eastern Empire]."
The chief difficulty here, as elsewhere, is to fix chronology with any approach to accuracy. The description of the Vratyas is taken from the Panchavimsa Brahmana of the Sama-Veda and the Sutras of that Veda and the period ascribed to these is 8th–6th b.c. Late as this is, it does not fix at all the period to which the description relates, and the Veda legend to which Professor Ghose pays so much attention and which ascribes to Brahman magic the two sons who became respectively the ancestors of the Niladars or aboriginal tribes* and of the more settled Vratyas, does not help us to any sort of a decision. It seems far more likely, however, that even if the Vratya stoma was a rite of mass conversion of the people, it was not the work of a handful of Aryan immigrants who worked upon the ambitions of the Emperor but that it was brought about only after long preparation and propaganda by a more numerous immigration of Aryans—and especially of Aryan Brahmans—into the East. Though the Emperor and his Court may have been indifferent to the superstitions of the people and have been willing to accept the new ideas in exchange for political advantage, it is not likely that the mass of the people who would have been quite indifferent to politics and who were by hypothesis wholly ignorant, would have abandoned their own faith so easily, especially as they lived in a world “beset all round by demons and evil spirits who have to be constantly kept appeased or outwitted by the necromancer’s art.” There are limits to autocratic power and even the history of ancient India itself shows that the ruler could not afford to fly in the face of prejudices strongly felt. No doubt the newcomers did their best to soothe the popular susceptibilities by introducing and incorporating charms and spells and even by adopting some of the older non-Aryan gods, but this could hardly have been enough to overcome the opposition of the orthodox, and where men feel strongly about religion there are sure to be many orthodox. The Australian aborigines, for all that their religion may be of a very low order, have certain practices which they esteem sacred and inviolable. There must surely have been a very long period of penetration,
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during which the new ideas filtered down from the philosophic Court to the more intelligent of the population. It was not a question of conversion at the point of the sword; the whole hypothesis rests on the assumption that the "concordat" was made with the willing consent of an obedient people and was not a hole-in-the-corner arrangement between the Emperor and a few stranger priests.

We may now return to the details of Professor Ghose's argument. Who were the Suta and the Mágadha? The Suta has been described as a "bard-herald," and his primary occupation seems to have been to sing the praises and to "act as the repository of the annals and chronicles of the imperial house" but that was by no means his only calling. He might also be (and apparently was) a soldier, a driver of horses, elephants, and chariots, and even a sort of doctor. Professor Keith in the list of the Court entourage calls him the "charioteer." Washburn Hopkins notes that while he was a bard he was also a charioteer. "They made a special sub-caste and lived at Court." Professor Ghose, however, maintains that his inviolability did not depend, as Professor Keith suggests, on his character as herald. "The writers of the Note on Suta (Keith-Macdonell)," he asserts dogmatically, "have gone wrong in tracing his inviolability to his heraldic functions" because it was not the Suta but the Duta who was the herald in the European sense. He was "inviolable" not because he was bard-herald but bard-priest. In a society such as that of the Vratyas, the man who kept the records, maintained the traditions, and chanted the king's praises was obviously a very important person and was even treated as on an equality with a Brahman. This is borne out by the legend that when Lomahárśana, who was certainly a Suta, was killed by Baladeva, the latter had to do penance for brahmanhatya or the killing of a Brahman. The fact was that "when caste entered into the Aryan scheme of things, the Suta started (along with the Mágadha) as a Brahman and standing on exactly the same level as the Aryan Brahmans." They were the bard-priests of Vratya-land and officiated as priests both at the Rajakarmani ceremonies of the king as well as at
the domestic rites of the people and would therefore after
the conversion of the people when the Aryanized religion
became the official faith, take rank as priests with the later
importations.

The Mágadha, on the other hand, seems to have been
a sort of Court jester or buffoon whose duties, however, were
similar to those of the Suta in his capacity of bard-priest.
There seems to be some confusion of thought about this
person owing to the similarity of the name Mágadha with
the country Magadha. Professor Keith speaks of the “man
of Magadha who is brought into close connection with the
Vratya in a mystical hymn of the Atharva Veda which
celebrates the Vratya as a type of the supreme power
in the universe.” This is significant. For if the Vratya was
merely “regarded as an outcast” it is certainly strange
that he should also have been celebrated as a type of supreme
power in the universe. Professor Ghose suggests an answer
to the puzzle. The Mágadha, who may perhaps have got
his name from Magadha, was not merely a “man of that
country” but a well-defined official at the Court—“the
Court buffoon, and ministers perhaps to the vices of the
king, the lewd associates of gamblers, singers, and harlots,
all the riff-raff parasite crew that is usually to be found in
the entourage of an Eastern king or nobleman who happens
also to be a man of pleasure.” All authorities seem to be
agreed that both Mágadhás and Sutas were Vratyas or
non-Aryans. The words “man of that country” seem to refer
to the description of the Mágadha as Mágadha desiyaya
Brahmabandhu, which Professor Dutt translates “of the country
of Magadha”; but Professor Ghose disputes this. He points
out that the word is Mágadha not Magadha, and argues
that desiyaya cannot therefore refer to country but signifies
“like but not completely.” The interpretation “is intended
to confute Weber’s conjecture that the expression “is only
explicable if we assume that Buddhism with its anti-Brah-
manical tendencies was at the time flourishing in Magadha.”
The term, it is argued, has no reference to country but only
to community and is intended to include “the Sutas and the
Videhas or such of them at least as were still sticking on

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to priestly work of sorts.” Professor Ghose gives the word in Sanskrit; Professor Dutt prints it in Roman but without any diacritical sign; exactly what difference the long “a” would make must be left to philologists.

But if the empire of the East—in, Vratya-land—were at once the most powerful and the best organized that the Aryans had yet encountered, the hymn of the Atharva Veda would be explained. The ruler of Vratya-land would seem to them to be the type of supreme power just as to some people the Roman Empire*dominated the world at a time when it really dominated very little beyond the littoral of the Mediterranean. The Mágadha, however, became brahmabandhu an opprobrious term signifying a “spurious or degraded Brahman”; he was, therefore (with the Suta), received into the Brahman (not Brahmanical) fold, though from the description given above he cannot have been regarded as a reputable character, and this accounts for the term brahmabandhu. Manu says that the Mágadha is the offspring of a Vaisya by a woman of the Kshatriya or Brahman caste. But Baudhyayana makes the Mágadha the offspring of a Sudra man and a Vaisya woman. This seems to imply a certain fluctuation, as if the status or rather the composition of the Mágadha was not exactly defined. “The mixture of castes is produced by adultery on the part of the pure castes and by marrying those who ought not to be married and by men deserting their respective occupations,” and among those of mixed origin we find the Mágadha. Manu, however, is obviously no guide in this case, for the compilation which we have is ascribed to a date some centuries after Christ, reckoned by Dr. Burnell at not earlier than A.D. 500. Clearly, then, between the time of which we are now speaking and this date of Manu there elapsed some thirteen centuries, which in British history would take us back to very early Saxon times; many changes would have taken place and the Vratya Empire would have become completely Aryanized. For chronology is all-important in these discussions and it is much to be deplored that our knowledge, of the accurate chronology is so imperfect. We are dealing throughout with movements which advance
almost imperceptibly—movements in which for a century, perhaps, there is no appreciable progress. The importance of chronology is not always recognized. The “rise” of caste, the “emergence” of untouchability, the introduction of this custom or that are sometimes spoken of as one might speak of M. Blériot’s flight across the Channel, or the early experiments with railway trains. It is far more likely that such things grew insensibly and that those who lived in such times would not have noticed the growth. It is a truism to say that by looking back we can obtain a truer perspective than by looking around us; it is equally true that when we look back we are apt to telescope the movements of centuries into the course of a few years. It cannot be too often repeated that the growth of caste from the first germs to its full stature was a matter of centuries, perhaps of ten, perhaps of more, and it is difficult for anyone to grasp what ten centuries may mean in the course of progress.

The conclusion reached is that both the Suta and the Mágadha were officers of the Court to whom were to some extent entrusted the functions of priests and that, as the country became Brahmanized, they were received into the Brahman caste, though regarded as “spurious” or at least degraded types of Brahmans. The important points in this view of the case are (1) that the Suta and Mágadha were in no sense Aryan; they were not “degraded” because they were the offspring of mixed marriages, but were true Vratyas absorbed into the Aryan communion by virtue of the Vratya stoma, (2) that these were not individual conversions but conversions of well-recognized communities, and (3) that they were communities of some importance and influence in Court affairs and therefore with the Vratya Emperor. I do not subscribe to Professor Ghose’s view that it was the Aryan Kshatriyas who were absorbed in the Eastern Rajanyas and that the Suta and the Mágadha Brahmans absorbed the Brahman immigrants, for that would have retarded and possibly even prevented the eventual Aryanization of the country. His view is, however, possible, though the point is of no very great importance.

But what is to be said of the varna-ashrama-dharma, the core
and the distinctive tenet of Hinduism which we comprehensively call caste. Professor Ghose claims to have shown that, far from caste having been invented by the Aryans, they found it in full flower in the Eastern Vratya Kingdom. It is remarkable that the Brahmans, to whom have been attributed so much self-glorification and so much pride in the origins of their system, have nothing to say of the origin of this cardinal tenet. In the very early stages of the history of a people struggling for existence and competing with others in like case, it is natural that they should have regarded the warrior as their leader and that the military caste should have been predominant. When they settled down to a more corporate tribal life and began to consider the unseen forces which—at any rate to their imagination—peopled the air, the priest became the more important, as the mediator between man and the Invisible, whether god or devil. This has been the almost invariable rule; it is evident in the history of mediaeval Europe and it is conspicuous in the history of Israel. All the leaders—from Joshua, if not from Moses, to Eli—were warriors who had no pretensions to any priestly functions and the appearance of Eli may be said to mark a change in the attitude of the people. Nor did the warrior caste yield its supremacy without a struggle. In Europe the Empire contended with the Papacy; in Israel the king was rebuked for daring to sacrifice because the priest was late. That, it would seem, is exactly what happened in the Eastern Vratya Empire. The rulers were of the Rajanya, i.e. the Kshatriya caste, though no doubt at first it was little more than a class and only gradually gave way to the priests. And in Aryanland too the warriors contended for the supremacy with the priests. All this, however, proves nothing. It is based upon the hypothesis necessary to the theory under discussion that the Eastern Vratya Empire had advanced beyond the stage of a loose tribal confederation and was, by comparison with the Aryan organization, a well-knit, coherent whole. It had, in fact, reached the stage at which the king’s word was law and could not be overruled by priestly privileges or pretensions.
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Varna in this view was a non-Aryan conception but what was asrama? In its complete Brahmanized form the life of man consisted of four asramas—the bramhachari, the grihasta the vanaprasta, and the sanyasi. But we must be careful to note that this structure grew up gradually. It is entirely inconsistent with what we may reasonably assume to have been the state of Aryan culture. There is, indeed, something ludicrous in the idea of these Aryans, who, if they were not exactly nomadic, must have been constantly on the move in their march eastwards, retiring from the world to the solitude of the forests to meditate as hermits living on what Nature could provide and afterwards begging their bread, as we must suppose, from the despised conquered tribes. Professor Ghose, who frankly admits a bias in favour of a Brahman origin of the varna-asrama-dharma, is driven to the conclusion that neither varna nor asrama was of Brahman origin, but were non-Aryan and Eastern Vratya institutions. The bramhachari was in this view only the period of pupilage which should fit the youth for the status of grihasta, the stage of householder and family man, beyond which few ever went. For the grihasta never did; he “passed over” to an existence in the pitri-loka where he was dependent on others for his sustenance, conceived in terms of this world, so that it became incumbent on him to beget a son, not merely for the sake of having male offspring but also and chiefly for the oblations which male descendants were alone competent to offer. The vanaprasta and the sanyasi had no place in such a scheme, for, by hypothesis, they renounced the world and with it all that appertained to it, including sons. The asrama was a resting-place or a stepping-stone from one state to the next, the final goal being the attainment of Brahman, and this final goal could in the subsequent Upanishadic teaching only be attained by passing through the allotted stages. “The whole asrama idea,” it is argued, “is foreign, indeed antagonistic, to all Vedic notions.” It is Upanishadic and the Upanishads were the outcome of the non-Aryan culture of the East.

This view certainly seems to explain certain contradictions in the Hindu system. It is one thing to obtain salvation
by reaching the loka of Indra or some other heavenly abode where individuality remains intact, and quite another to obtain the same salvation by absorption into the Brahman or Para-Atman of the Upanishads. Or, again, it is said that marriage is a sacrament which can never be dissolved, not only in this world, but in others. It is binding for all time and beyond it, so that a woman who is once the wife of a man can never be the wife of any other man. This explains what seems to our material mind the barbarous custom of becoming sati or pure, for the wife, having merged her identity in the male, the more important partner, could only be certain of remaining pure by joining the man in the world beyond. There was thus a deeper meaning in the practice than is apparent on the surface, and horrible as is the idea of self-sacrifice of the body in this manner, cruel as may have been the means of enforcing it, there would not unnaturally be a repugnance to abandon it amongst those to whom the body meant very little, while the unity of the man and wife was paramount. For the same reason we may see in the repugnance to the remarriage of widows the principle that a woman being already married by an indissoluble tie cannot marry again without loss of chastity. But neither of these things is compatible with a belief in the absorption into the Universal Soul by which individuality is extinguished. It may please subtle brains to argue that the drop of water merged in an ocean (a favourite image) remains, nevertheless, an individual drop of water, though not perceptible to human senses, but that is a refinement which satisfies no one. Nor can it be said that the true belief in Upanishadic doctrine can justify the intense desire for a son as the offerer of oblations to the ancestor, unless it be on the principle of rebirth, which itself hardly fits in with any excessive reverence for the ancestor, since it is only those not fit for absorption that are reborn, and as no one seems to know when the rebirth has taken place, and consequently when the oblations can safely be discontinued, they must be continued indefinitely. It is apparently because the idea of loka or Heaven cannot be reconciled with the doctrine of the Para-Atman that Professor Ghose
declares that the whole notion of Karma and of the asramas is non-Aryan and comes from Vrata-land.

But these contradictions, or at least these irreconcilable doctrines, suggest something more. They suggest that two different systems were blended with great ingenuity, no doubt, but not so perfectly that the original elements cannot be detected. And it is in just these fundamental doctrines that the difference would naturally appear. For though it might be possible to rewrite, or at any rate to refurbish, the ancient doctrine in such a way as to make it more in conformity with Brahman ideas, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, so to rewrite it as to substitute an entirely new system of belief while apparently upholding the existing system. If anyone tried to reconstruct the Christian system it might be possible to disguise or even repudiate apostolical succession; it would not be so easy to repudiate the doctrine of immortality or the Fatherhood of God. Now it will be observed that the heaven of Indra and similar conceptions are entirely Vedic, that is beyond doubt. But the idea of absorption into the Para-Atman is Upanishadic. It is difficult to conceive how a homogeneous system could have a place for both these conceptions and how the one could have grown out of the other. Upon this reasoning the abhorrence of widow remarriage and the ancestor worship would have to be referred to that part of the system which remains individualistic, for it would hardly be reasonable to bind a mortal woman for all eternity to a spark which had become indistinguishable from the Eternal Fire, nor would there be any point in offering food to a spirit who had become one with the Universal Spirit. The doctrine of Karma would, however, remain unaffected by such considerations. A man is what he is by virtue of his conduct in a previous existence. But Karma ceases to operate when he reaches the stage of immortal bliss. As long, therefore, as transmigration continues, that is, until the man has reached perfection, the question of individuality does not arise. For the man has simply become another mortal, has taken upon himself some other mortal and phenomenal shape, and as long as this process lasts (though it is not, as some seem to think,
endless) it does not matter whether the soul is individual or absorbed. These refinements are too difficult for the common folk, who are certainly influenced by the doctrine of Karma, nor are they ordinarily worked out to their logical conclusion by the more educated, because, man being by nature imperfect, it may be assumed by any one generation that the ancestors have not yet attained salvation and the consequence is that oblations must be offered upon that supposition. The argument, therefore, amounts to this. The Hindu system contains elements which are incompatible and must be incompatible because they are fundamental. An attempt was made to blend these warring elements but not so successfully that the differences cannot be seen. One of these elements was the old Vedic Aryan religion which can easily be identified by reference to the Vedas, especially the Rig. The other main stream cannot therefore be traced to this Aryan source, and it is reasonable, therefore, to trace it to a non-Aryan one. The burning of widows, the institution of child-marriage, the dislike of widow remarriage, and similar developments came much later on when the two streams had coalesced and flowed on without regard of the votaries to possible discrepancies.

Professor Ghose’s main argument is that both caste and the Upanishadic doctrine have their roots in the Eastern Vrata-land and that neither the one nor the other can be ascribed to the Aryans. Caste, he contends, was already there when the Aryans penetrated into the basin of the Ganges; they did not explain origins because there was nothing to explain. But this, of course, only puts the problem a step further back. If caste was already there, we are still not enlightened as to how it got there. But if it was a non-Aryan institution, adopted and adapted to Aryan usages, there is at least a great probability that it began amongst those primitive peoples who preceded the Eastern Vratayas and practised it in a manner not, indeed, coincident with but similar to totemism, with all its tabus and ideas of pollution, and especially with its notions of endogamy and exogamy.
Untouchability

OF all Indian institutions, since the practice of becoming Sati was made illegal, none has attracted more attention or is more repugnant to the Western mind than that which condemns human beings to social ostracism, so that they cannot even be touched, and in parts (too often confounded with the whole) that their very shadow pollutes and they are forced to declare themselves unclean, like lepers. Nor are those disabilities confined to sentiment alone, to the degradation of mind and spirit which brings these unfortunates to acquiesce in a total loss of self-respect. They have distinct economic disadvantages. In a country which lives in villages and where Government is expected to supply the usual social facilities, they entail the digging of two wells for drinking water, where one would suffice, and the establishment of two schools, one of which may be, and probably is, poorly attended, to the evident loss of man power. The practice in Madras of segregating the pariahs in outlying hamlets, perhaps half a mile from the main village, causes inconvenience to those who want to call up labour, yet may not approach nearer than the outskirts, and the reluctance of caste Indian officials to enter these hamlets for purposes of inspection leads to all sorts of sanitary abomination which may end in a widespread epidemic of disease. It is not necessary to enlarge further on a topic which has been the subject of denunciation not only by missionaries but by the more advanced section of Indians. There are only two things which can be said in favour of the custom, and neither can be said to be anything more than a pale shadow of controversial argument. The institution rests upon tradition and authority, and orthodox Indians revere tradition and authority to a degree that recalls the intolerance of the Scotch Covenanters.
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One great difference (says Sir Sivaswami Aiyar) between Greek and modern thought on the one hand and Hindu thought on the other is that the Hindu is satisfied with tracing the origin of rules to some text of Scripture or some authoritative tradition, and does not press home the question as to rational basis of the rule. He is satisfied with an appeal to authority, and does not believe that mere unfettered intellectual reasoning can furnish guidance in matters of morality.

That, no doubt, might be said of other countries, including England. We do certain things because they are customary; we cling to certain beliefs because they are traditional. The difference is perhaps rather of degree than of kind. But in some sense the passage does explain why a custom which seems to have nothing to recommend it, a custom which in cultured eyes is callous, barbarous, and cruel, survives in all its intensity among the unlettered folk and is still frequently found among even the educated. For the modern European mind which has only recently shaken off the superstition that it was little short of blasphemy to doubt the literal truth of such legends as Adam and Eve in the Garden and of Noah’s Flood, finds it now difficult to be patient with a simple blind appeal to authority in the face of all that reason and humanity and generosity can say against it. In this fundamental difference lies to a large extent the difficulty of a mutual understanding; in this fundamental difference too lies many an undiscerning accusation on the one side and on the other many an injured susceptibility.

If this argument can be counted less as a defence than an excuse, the second affords some slight palliation of the lot of the pariahs. Though they are untouchable they do not—until the recent agitation of Gandhi and others brought to them more clearly a sense of their own degradation—appear to feel any humiliation in so regarding themselves. As a French Catholic missionary has put it in a recent book, “Il est Paria; il le sait . . . Ils se considèrent comme soumis fatalement à une irrévocablable destinée.” Untouchability is to them simply a social convention, no more to be disputed than the man who touches his hat to you disputes your right

to his respect. Does that sound a startling proposition? Yet the pariah would be as surprised if a Brahman were to take him by the arm as would the waiter be if you asked him to sit down and share the dish he was handing. Moreover, the very fact that they are thus segregated is to some extent a defence against oppression. They are left to themselves for the simple reason that no one wishes to interfere; the pains of pollution are too high a price to pay. This, however, does not go very far to alleviate their material disabilities, such as obtaining water in a drought when their own wells (if they have any) run dry, nor even, if they so acquiesced in the social convention, are they enabled to rise above the settled sense of hopeless inferiority and to claim what the West would call the ordinary rights of manhood. If any such attempt is made, there are ways and means—often atrocious—of putting them in their place, and to the bigoted followers of orthodoxy, they, like many other atrocious things done in the name of religion, and not in India alone, are justified by the claim that they are intended to uphold a divinely given ordinance. For all that, the pariah in the field sings at his work; you would not think to listen to him that his lot is an unhappy one, and as the French author just quoted says “he is not at all envious of the lot of other castes.”

The origin of the custom is obscure. Most European writers are inclined to record the custom with varying degrees of disapprobation and to leave it at that. Others who have attempted an explanation conjecture that it arose from a natural disinclination of the better classes to mix with those who were engaged in disgusting pursuits and who thereby acquired insanitary habits. Thus Dr. Slater says:

Untouchability in some cases is a natural result of occupation; thus the sanctity of the cow causes the flaying of cattle, and even working up of leather, to be regarded as occupations of a somewhat sinful character; hence the Chandalas and Chakiliyans, leather-working castes, are untouchable. It is not so easy to see why the great rice-cultivating castes of Paraiyans, Pallans, and Cherumas are also untouchable; but it may be noted that it is only where the geographical conditions make it possible
to impose all or nearly all strenuous labour on a depressed caste, and at the same time intensify the desire to escape such labour, that agricultural labourers are untouchable. Untouchability, once established, tends to justify itself; the Paraiyan, being untouchable, does not scruple to eat mutton and drink toddy, and neglects various niceties of behaviour regarded as essential in higher castes.¹

This theory is manifestly open to many objections. In so far as it rests upon the sanctity of the cow, we have first to show that this sanctity preceded the practice of untouchability, for until the cow became sacred there could have been no sin attaching to the occupation of leather making. There is no evidence of this precedence; on the contrary, as I shall try to show, the sanctity of the cow, as a universal practice, was of slow growth and was not fully established until comparatively late. There do not seem to be any data for assigning the practice of untouchability to any given period, but it is probable that it was established much earlier. Assuming, however, that the veneration of the cow came first, we are still no nearer an explanation why the flayers of cattle and the workers in leather should be visited with so dire a penalty as untouchability, because it is only the living animal that is sacred; the cow may not be killed by violence, but a cow that dies in the ordinary course of nature is treated like any other dead animal. It is left to rot in the sun, to be devoured by kites and vultures, or to become the food of hyaenas. Had the carcase been still sacred, one would suppose that it would have been reverently buried or otherwise disposed of; it would have become a pious duty to see that the sacred animal was not thus left to be torn in pieces by birds or beasts of prey. It may be retorted that the caste Indian shuns the use of leather and looks with some disgust upon the trade of leather tanning, which involves the flaying of cattle. This, however, is to put the cart before the horse. Leather tanning and the flaying of animals—not only of cattle—are somewhat unpleasant trades which, having been left to the outcastes, have become identified with them.

¹ Slater: The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture, pp. 156–7.
HINDU CUSTOMS AND THEIR ORIGINS

Leather has, therefore, become polluted because it has been handled by polluting men and not because it is in itself polluting nor because it is in any way sinful to work in it. The water which a pariah hands to a Brahman, the food which a pariah cooks—these things are not polluting in themselves but only by reason of the pariah’s touch, for the same food cooked by a Brahman and the same water handed by a Brahman would be accepted without demur. Leather, by hypothesis and in the absence of evidence to the contrary, must have passed through the pariah’s hands; it is his polluting qualities that make it polluting. The flaying of cattle and of animals generally is the necessary process for obtaining the raw material out of which leather is made; obviously, the men who want the raw material will take steps to get it, and, leather making being relegated to this mean estimation, no one is likely to undertake the supply of the raw material, except those who propose to work it up or those who are even lower in the social scale.

Next, it is argued that untouchability is the natural result of some occupations. The only instance given is that of the flayers and leather workers and it is difficult to see why any other occupation should make a man untouchable. There are, no doubt, certain occupations—a butcher, for example, a fishmonger, a chimney-sweep, or a coal-heaver—which entail at times some physical pollution; one does not want to shake hands with a butcher when his hands are covered with blood, but no one minds tapping him on the shoulder. The toddy drawer who usually caters for the very lowly, and whose occupation has a certain stigma, is not untouchable; neither is the fisherman whose job entails the handling of dead fish. It is a far cry from becoming untouchable at a time when you are physically dirty to being untouchable at all times and everywhere. For to the orthodox a pariah remains untouchable not only when he is pursuing his daily avocations but even when by reason of education or otherwise he has left one calling for another. No doubt in such cases some laxity has been allowed in these later days; a pariah pleader may sit in court with his caste fellows, because the English Government will not tolerate nice
UTouchability

distinctions in its courts, but the orthodox would no doubt prefer that he should at least be given a seat apart. A certain man of the untouchable community was educated at the cost of Baroda State, which has a system of such education on condition of service. It was commonly said that he was forced to resign his post because his position became intolerable by reason of his caste. The heterogeneous collection of people who travel by train must put up with some proximity to an untouchable; Mrs. Sharpe, who evidently knows Gujarat and at least a part of Rajputana, tells how on one occasion a Sadhu friend travelled in company with a sweeper alone in a third class carriage because no one else would get in; and again, how her own sweeper had to miss three trains before he could find an empty compartment.¹

We then come to what is perhaps the most formidable criticism of all. A very large number of these outcastes are “ploughmen, formerly ascripti glebae.” “Strictly speaking,” says the Encyclopaedia Britannica, “the Paraiyans are the agricultural labourer caste of the Tamil country in Madras and are by no means the lowest of the low,” and in Tanjore, the home of Brahman orthodoxy, these labourers are called pirakudi—kudi being a general suffix and pira meaning to be born: in other words, the children of the soil. Why should such folk, following a highly respectable and honourable calling, be regarded as untouchable? Dr. Slater is puzzled; he solves his difficulty by suggesting that the natural desire to escape strenuous labour in a hot climate has relegated the field work to the outcastes, who, being outcastes, infect one another with nasty habits and with customs abhorrent to higher castes. The explanation will not serve. It is not by any means every agricultural labourer who is an outcaste; thousands of others cultivate their own lands and yet preserve their caste. Many others “eat mutton and drink toddy” without sacrificing caste, and it can hardly be said that some of the lowest castes “preserve” the niceties of behaviour regarded as essential in higher castes. If it be argued that those who are now agricultural labourers

¹ Thorpe: The India that is India, p. 94.
were in the distant past engaged in unpleasant callings, and that caste is a fixed, immutable thing, so that once an outcaste a man can never be anything else, that is surely to make an unwarrantable assumption, for there is nothing to show that these outcastes never practised any but the most degraded occupations. The argument, therefore, amounts only to this. Some occupations are degraded or disgusting—notably, in Hindu eyes, working in leather and flaying of cattle; contact with those engaged in them is therefore prohibited. Some others are not, but as some—only some—who are engaged in them have become identified with the others and have sunk to their level, they have incurred the same disabilities. And this result was the direct consequence of their own self-degradation.

Nor can we safely attribute this custom to our old friends, the Aryans. For even upon the accepted hypothesis that the Aryans, having established caste for the preservation of the superior stock, reserved the three highest orders—the twice born castes—to themselves and relegated the despised and conquered “aborigines” contemptuously to the Sudra caste, there is still no place for the casteless. Why should this lordly people who had already attained their object by sifting the grain from the chaff take the trouble to go further and sift the chaff itself into higher and lower kinds, and why should they have gone further still and decreed that as between these higher and lower kinds there should exist such a drastic bar as untouchability? If it be said that this was not the doing of the Aryans but of the Sudras themselves, inasmuch as the Aryans only introduced the four main castes which have since split up into innumerable sub-castes, to become full-fledged ones in their turn—if it be said that in so splitting up the castes the peoples of India, Aryan and aboriginal alike, were only following the normal lines of evolution and that the lower ones imitated their betters, why did these lower ones introduce something quite alien to the letter as well as the spirit of caste by establishing this very definite line of cleavage? The outcastes, it is true, have established castes among themselves, so that in the West the Dhed considers himself the superior
of the Bhangi, and in the Telugu country the Mala is of higher social rank than the Madiga. This shows an imitation that might have been expected, but it serves rather to emphasize than to explain the anomaly of untouchability. There was, in short, left in India a certain class which for no apparent reason was not only not admitted into the caste system but was definitely excluded from it. The word "outcaste" is misleading; it suggests something that has been thrust out of a system in which they once held a place. But these people are casteless; they never had a caste, even though some may for dignity's sake call themselves Panchamas, the fifth caste, and, as just now remarked, they may have chosen to make social distinctions among themselves.

The existence of these no-caste people forms, therefore, one of the strongest arguments against the theory that the Aryans were the authors of caste for their own purposes, and it is strange that in the discussions on the subject the no-caste man is rarely, if ever, mentioned. For if the case be strong that the origins of caste must be looked for in India itself, it is stronger still that there must be found the beginnings of the no-caste. The two are intimately connected; a discussion of the one is not complete without a discussion of the other. A scientific theory must stand or fall by its own completeness and the story of caste is not complete if the no-caste is not taken into account. It is plain that the explanation is not to be found in the Aryan writings. Nor is there anything which suggests that it might have been imported from abroad. And yet so widespread and so deeply rooted a custom cannot have sprung up in a day, nor could it have lasted so long if its origins were not to be sought in the dim centuries of long ago. "Outcastes," says Sir Sivashwami Aiyar, "seem to have always existed in society and to have been regarded as untouchable. . . . The Chinese traveller Hieun-Tsang," who, however, does not carry us back beyond the seventh century A.D., "noticed the segregation of the outcastes outside towns and villages," so that by that time the custom appears to have been well established. If, then, an ancient custom was not introduced by the Aryans, and if it was not imported, it is more than
probable that the origin of it is to be sought in pre-Aryan India.

As in the case of caste, the custom is more strictly observed in the South than in the North, and it is on the Malabar coast that it reaches its extreme limit. Missionaries and other writers are fond of dwelling upon the pollution of an outcaste's shadow and on the rigid degrees by which he is enjoined to keep his distance, but these extreme regulations are not observed everywhere. It is, however, true that in the South the paracheri or hamlet assigned to the no-caste people is usually entirely separated from the village proper, while in Bombay, the Dheds' quarter, though inhabited only by Dheds, is a part of the village itself, and it is some commentary on the idea of physical pollution that these quarters are sometimes admitted to be the best kept and the cleanest in the village. Ceremonial is allowed even by Indian writers to be a leading part of everyday Hinduism, and has been described as crushing the life out of the religion by its excessive observance. We must, therefore, accept the position that since the custom was not derived from the Aryans it probably arose in the South among the Dravidians or aboriginal population.

Now the word "pariah," which has been adopted by the English language as the generic name for an outcaste and has been given the meaning of a man who has no place in society, is usually derived from the Tamil word parai, a drum. It is certainly the case that drums are beaten outside the temples and more especially at the head of wedding processions by these outcastes or no-caste people. And Kalhana, the twelfth-century bard-chronicler of Kashmir, mentions drums as the peculiar property of the outcastes of his day. Whatever else these people may do, whether they cultivate the fields or work in leather, this occupation of beating drums on ceremonial occasions may fairly be called hereditary. The very name, then, of Paraiyan suggests that when caste became occupational these people took, or were given, the distinctive title of their hereditary occupation. They were the class who performed the most humble ministrations to the gods, and the connection of drum-
beating with evil spirits (for it is supposed that those maddening sounds, incessantly repeated, will drown inauspicious noises) suggests further that their original functions were connected with magic. But how did they acquire those functions? Now the helots of ancient Sparta were "probably the aborigines of Laconia who had been enslaved by the Achaeans before the Dorian conquest." They were "State slaves bound to the soil—ascopti glebae—and assigned to individual Spartiates to till their holdings." And again in ancient Rome we find that the slaves were employed in various artisan services, or as cooks or ploughmen, or even as petty traders, such occupations being thought to be beneath the dignity of a Roman. Bearing these analogies in mind—for of course the evidential value of societies far removed from India in time and place is very slight—there is a strong probability that the outcastes were the survivors of the conquered peoples, who, as caste tended to coincide with occupation, became the drum-beating, leather-working, and farm-labouring classes to which as serfs they had been relegated from early times. They were not the races conquered by the Aryans; the Paraiyans belonged to the aborigines who were conquered by the Dravidians and being of a different race they were not admitted to the totem or similar clans with which marriage is always intimately connected, since that would have led to free intercourse and the gradual degradation of the race. But this prohibition cannot have been absolute; there are always exceptions. In the course of the centuries—some forty or more—the inevitable miscegenation may very well have obliterated the racial distinctions between aboriginal and early Dravidian. These people have been admitted to a sort of lowly participation in the Hindu system in the atmosphere of which they have lived for so long, for Hinduism is at once the most tolerant and intolerant of creeds. It does not proselytize; you cannot become a Hindu as you can become a Mussulman, and those within the fold are liable to the most rigid restrictions. But it has always been ready to embrace aboriginal tribes who are willing to submit to its laws, though it may assign to them a very lowly place
and they have always been kept at a distance and have been excluded from the temples. It would seem, therefore, that anthropological arguments are in any case not conclusive when we consider these factors which must have profoundly modified the original racial characteristics and must have changed their outlook.

Thus the Dravidians applied to the Paraiyans the same test which the Aryans are assumed to have applied to the conquered inhabitants. They reduced them to the position of serfs and assigned to them those duties which it was thought beneath their own dignity to perform. Nor was marriage the only consideration. The disabilities of the Paraiyans were due also—and to an even greater degree—to the mystical qualities inherent in Tabu. To admit such a man to the totem family was not only contrary to the social order; it would bring upon the clan the anger of their particular god. But to admit him to the worship of the god within the sacred precincts of a temple was to call down authentic fire from Heaven, whereby they would be consigned. It would be a sacrilege of the same kind as the offering of unconsecrated or unorthodox fire by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. But though debarred from taking an active part in worship, the Paraiyans might yet do the menial services connected with it, provided that they did not entail the pollution of the sacred building. In Christian terminology, the Paraiyan, although he could neither officiate at the altar, nor preach a sermon, nor even be one of the congregation, might still ring the bell—on one condition. He could not regard himself as of the communion; he was, in fact, excommunicate. And, as such, he was ceremonially unclean. No washing with water, no cleansing ceremony, could remove that stain which was indelibly fixed by the operation of tabu. To touch him, to have any dealings with him, save, as it were, at arm’s length, was by a sort of contagious magic a defilement. You could employ him to till your fields because that entailed no contact of any kind; beyond giving an order, you need have no further communication with him. The seal of pollution was set in his forehead; it was inherent in him as surely as the blood in his veins.
UNTUCHABILITY

And so from being the vile, degraded fellow which Indian opinion had made him, he became viler and more degraded from the kinds of occupation left open to him. As the mediaeval knights of Europe disdained the calling of a trader, as indeed down to our own day to keep a shop is not the occupation of a gentleman, so Hindu society disdained certain occupations. And since caste was determined by birth, that meant that by the accident of birth you were excluded from certain callings and were in effect restricted to only a few. The casteless man was of no account. Nobody cared what became of him; no one was interested in teaching him to live better; and his acute and constant poverty, combined with a sort of fatalistic acquiescence in things as they are, prevented him from rising above the squalor in which he was accustomed to live. To that extent the lot of the casteless man has been determined by environment and occupation, but it is difficult to believe that the custom of untouchability had its origin in them.

The impurity which thus debarred him from intercourse with those above him in the social scale and which denied to him any real participation in the external worship of the gods—at any rate, of any communion with the castes—did not extend to spiritual things. A holy life raised the pariah, as it raised others, above his fellows. A pariah might be physically untouchable; he might be excluded from visible worship but by a virtuous and holy life, he might attain to sainthood. The ethical system of the Hindus no more excluded him from beatification than the teaching of Christ excluded the publicans and sinners. It was, no doubt, difficult for a people so greatly debarred from self-expression to attain to such rarefied heights, but, though difficult, it was not impossible. The law of Karma works both upwards and downwards; upon the theory of transmigration the pariah might hope to be born into a higher state or in cases of intense virtue might hope with his betters to achieve immediate salvation (Moksha) without that interminable succession of rebirths which is the lot of the less endowed, and which has given to Hinduism its character for pessimism.

Upon this theory we get a rational explanation of the
existence of these people all over the country and of their
preponderance in the South. For if the Aryans found a
civilized people with civilized customs, as our later knowledge
leads us to believe, it would surely be natural for them to
continue those customs or such of them as were suitable;
and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the custom
remained most vigorous amongst those people with whom
it originated, and especially with those who were least
exposed to modifications due to the irruptions of foreigners.
Nor need we suppose the custom to have been either bar-
barous or cruel in the eyes of those who invented it or
found it established; for ceremonial purity frequently
involves the avoidance of contact with the unhallowed;
ceremonial defilement is frequently conveyed by food and
water. It is true that the levitical defilements were only
temporary and for a specific reason, but it is not difficult
to imagine a society in which a whole class was looked upon
as permanently without the pale, especially in the conditions,
as far as we know them, of ancient India.
The Brahmans

ACCORDING to Hindu tradition, there were originally four castes—the Brahman, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra—representing respectively the priests, the warriors, the artisans, and cultivators, and (according to the usually accepted theory) the remaining inhabitants conquered by the Aryan invaders. These four correspond to the Iranian divisions of ancient Persia, where they appear as “priests, warriors, cultivators, and artisans,” the Sudra class being unrepresented because there were no conquered aborigines in Persia. There is a great temptation to assume that the caste system—or something like it—was part of the stock-in-trade of the Aryan race before they split up into their various divisions. It has, however, been pointed out that, if that had been the case, we should certainly have had some more obvious references to castes other than the Purusha-Sukta of the tenth book of the Rig-Veda, and the conjecture that the invaders had forgotten the old Iranian ideas and then recalled them later on has been scouted as too absurd and fanciful for serious criticism. If, however, we assume that caste was inherent in the Aryan scheme of life, it is not altogether so absurd. For the Aryan folk, when they arrived in India and under the conditions of the invasion, might well have discarded these divisions, and have revived them as the conquest proceeded and society began to develop. After all, the division is not unnatural and, indeed, is just what might have been expected in such a society. But the more important criticism is that there is nothing to show how or why the main features of caste arose—the endogamous and exogamous divisions, the tabus on eating and drinking, the idea of untouchability. If the germ of the idea did come from Persia, why did it develop upon such very peculiar lines?

But given the idea of a classification upon the lines of
Hindu Customs and Their Origins

caste, there is nothing remarkable in the orders represented. When an invading host is still engaged in the conquest of a country, it is natural that special honour should be paid to the warriors and the military leaders. This pre-eminent will continue until the country has settled down and become amenable to the common law. Then when the warrior class is no longer required, at any rate to the same extent, the learned men become more prominent as lawgivers, as priests, as the repositories of the sacred Law. Meanwhile, the ordinary business of life goes on; the common people engaged in trades and crafts, or, in early times, more particularly in agriculture, are classed together because they follow callings which may be called similar or which at least admit of a single classification. They are dependent on the soldier class for their protection and upon the priestly class for religious instruction, including regulations for marriage, for death and burial, and for birth, as well as for the laws that govern their lives. This classification of the orders is well known in many countries; it is not peculiar either to India or to Persia. The High Priest was specially honoured in Sumeria, as he was in England and France and Germany, and the pretensions of the popes to dispose of empires and to give commands to kings and emperors are a commonplace of European history. This being so, it is surely superfluous to speculate upon the origin of the Brahman caste as the offspring of the bringers of the heliolithic cult who “mingled their blood with the Dravidians.” This is the surmise of Dr. Slater supported by Professor Elliot Smith. His main reasons for his contention, which he does not claim to have proved but only to have harmonized with the facts, are:

(1) that the Brahmans have a tradition of descent from an ancestry different from that of the commonalty. “In the South of India they interpret this tradition as indicating that they are of Aryan descent and other castes of Dravidian descent.” It is not clear what weight Dr. Slater attaches to this tradition, for he entirely rejects the interpreted claim to Aryan descent.

1 Slater: The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture, p. 157 sq.
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(2) The carrier of the heliolithic culture claimed divinity, and it is the traditional theory that every Brahman is a god. This is hardly correct. It may be that every Brahman is looked upon as the representative of divinity and even as containing more than his proportionate share of the divine spark, but it is hardly true to say that he is a god. Moreover, it is not stated how and when this tradition of divinity arose and there is nothing to show that he was so treated when caste first began or first developed into a regular system.

These two reasons need mean no more than that the priestly caste, when they rose to the full height of their power, claimed to be distinguished from the mass of the people by the aristocracy of descent and, having made good the claim by the general acquiescence of the people, laid further claim to divine or semi-divine honours, which they found the people ready to ascribe to them. Inordinate claims by the priesthood are not unknown in the history of Europe down at least to the Middle Ages, and there are clear indications of them in the history of Israel, especially in the career of Samuel, most reactionary of all the priests or prophets of whom we have a record. Once this undisputed supremacy is granted, there seems to be no reason why the priesthood, who in India claimed to be in close communion with the gods through ritual and sacrifice, as in Europe they claimed to be the mediators between God and the people, should not have gone a step further and accepted the divine honours which the people gave them, thereby establishing a tradition that they were demi-gods.

(3) The carriers of the heliolithic culture combined the worship of the Sun and the Serpent. As the Nambudris of Malabar worship cobras in the shrines of Nayar households, their connection with Serpent worship is obvious. And if Brahma is a solar deity (which is not improbable) "the whole Brahman caste" is even more closely associated with Sun worship. But if we start with the postulate that Sun and Serpent worship were closely connected, it is surely a long step from a particular sect of Brahmans, even if it is "the most venerated and most conservative of all Brahman castes" who worship cobras for the special benefit of a
particular non-Brahman caste in a limited area in India to the generalization of the whole Brahman caste. It is not certain that the word Brahman is directly derived from Brahma. The Brahman of the Upanishads is quite a different conception from the world-creator.

(4) The carriers of the heliolithic culture brought from Egypt a knowledge of the arts of spinning and weaving as well as of agriculture. The sacred thread of the Brahman should be of cotton. "This appears to be a very clear indication that Brahman ascendancy has one of its roots in the descent of Brahmans from foreigners who earned the gratitude and homage of the population of India by teaching them to spin and weave." Dr. Slater wrote before the excavations in the Indus valley had produced any results, and we now know that a people existed there, built houses, wore jewellery, and were adepts in the carving of seals, at least one thousand years before the earliest date assigned to the Aryan incursions. They were roughly contemporary with the people of Ur. And in Ur have been found many examples of textiles which show not only that spinning and weaving were known but also that the arts had already attained a high degree of excellence. Although the sacred thread of a Brahman should be made of cotton, that of a Vaisya should be made of wool (though it seldom is). It would be necessary to show that there was a special connection between wool and the Vaisya before we can safely draw conclusions from the cotton thread of the Brahman. No doubt the Vaisya was originally a cultivator, but cotton cannot be excluded from agriculture, even if we suppose the raw material to have been tree cotton. The connection of the sheep with agriculture, which might well have embraced the keeping of flocks, does not seem close enough to enable us to draw any conclusions of this kind from it.

This certainly seems rather a flimsy foundation on which to build a theory or even to found a serious suggestion. For even if the Brahman caste was evolved in a manner different from the evolution of all other castes, which there seems no sufficient reason for thinking, we are still faced
by the fact that while we have records of civilization back to about 3000 B.C., the earliest record we have of caste is certainly not earlier, and is probably later than 1500 B.C. The military class became, in popular language, a caste in all the conquering nations. The profession of the soldier ranked high, because it at least gave the opportunity for power and glory, if not for wealth also. But the power of the priesthood, which was supposed to have special relations with the Deity and which could blast by curses and excommunications, was always prominent, and in most cases became predominant. The institution of caste, as was suggested earlier, was evolved slowly, perhaps very slowly, and if it had its roots in totemism and tabu, it might well have taken on the rigid form which we know. If we combine these two factors, the insistence on ceremonial purity with the power of the priesthood, we need hardly look any further for the beginnings of the Brahman caste.

Professor Dutt of the Hooghly College, Bengal, aptly compares and contrasts the rise of the sacerdotal power in Europe and in India. While on the one hand the celibacy of the European clergy prevented them from having an hereditary vested interest in the position of the Church, on the other the purely sacerdotal function of the Brahmin avoided those clashes of temporal interests which were so conspicuous in the struggle between the Empire and the Papacy. The Italian Church (to use a convenient expression) was not hampered by the acquisition of fiefs; it "could build up its spiritual domination unhindered by the necessity of mixing and jostling with the ruling class for everyday existence." There was thus not the same struggle for temporal power, though there seem to have been disputes. "The temporal rulers in ancient India did not differ much in their pride and ambition from their brethren in other parts of the world, and as elsewhere they resented the claims and pretensions of the priesthood, not because of any territorial greed but rather because the priests claimed to be superior by reason of their priesthood, and because such claims did, in fact, clash with the undoubted right of the

1 Dutt: *Origin and Growth of Caste in India*, vol. i, pp. 50-55.
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Kshatriya to govern.” We can see that the same thing happened in early Israel in the story of Saul and Samuel. It is quite evident that though Samuel bent before what we should now call “public opinion,” he had no intention of allowing Saul a free hand, and he was determined that, if he was to be kept in leading-strings, the hand which held them should be his own. And so, when Saul showed signs of becoming refractory, Samuel promptly intrigued against him and set up a new king in the person of David, a most unlikely choice which he perhaps thought would arouse no suspicions. But Samuel died before Saul and left no successor, so that David, being a strong king, had no particular difficulty with priests. There was, however, in all this no question of territorial power; it was the spiritual power claiming to interfere with the Government, a claim which was the more insistent because Samuel had himself held despotic power before the elders demanded a revision of the constitution. That, or something like it, must have been the real contest between the Brahmans and Kshatriyas of ancient India. There was, however, no regular opposition such as that of Gregory VII to the Hohenstaufen Emperors, and this was the more difficult to meet, because while Gregory was succeeded by a series of nonentities, the Brahman priesthood, being a loose confederacy without an acknowledged head, carried on their claims as a corporate body.

If, then, it be admitted that the Brahmans, at least in the earlier stages, became the superior caste by reason of their priestly office and all that is thereby implied, it is not unnatural that they should have made use of their position to glorify themselves, as the priesthood has shown itself apt to do in other countries. That they did this in extravagant fashion, claiming privileges unheard of elsewhere and even arrogating to themselves the position of divinities, may be admitted. But it may be said, as a general proposition, that men can only go as far as they are allowed to go, either by law or by popular opinion, and the Brahman was no exception to the rule. It is, however, certainly indisputable that they were allowed to go much further in India than in any other
country, and that this was so was due to a variety of causes. First, by the time the Brahman pretensions reached their height, the caste system had been fully developed and the prestige of it was such that the priesthood, now firmly established at the head, had no difficulty in making good their extravagant claims. Secondly, there had been a stage when the ritual sacrifices counted for more than the gods themselves, and the efficacy of these was made to depend on the exact observance of minute detail. The least deviation was apt to make them of no effect. These minute details were known only to the Brahman priests; the sacrifices were supposed to compel the deities to all sorts of benefits to the worshipper. It was therefore obvious that those who held the secrets of the ritual held the material prosperity of the people in their hands. But the most important cause of Brahman supremacy was the fact that they held the monopoly of learning. Not only were they learned in the rituals and in the Vedas, but they were able to put their own interpretations upon the texts and this they very naturally did in their own favour. They were able to do even more. For, as the literature grew, they were also able to lay down laws for the main castes, and, since there was no one to say them nay, the laws were in practically every instance favourable to the Brahman caste. These laws, by similar manipulation, were eventually invested with the character of sacred books, so that the prerogative of the Brahmans became in the end a part of the religious dogma. Many of these things were, no doubt, trivial and, to our thinking, puerile; but some—and amongst them those that related to the criminal law—were of the highest importance. A Brahman, for example, was exempt from capital punishment, and in almost all cases was subject to a lighter penalty, because of his caste, than were the other castes. Conversely, wrong done to a Brahman was more severely punished than wrong done to other men; the murder of a Brahman was the worst crime it was possible to commit. When, therefore, we read of “Brahman redactions,” “Brahman manipulations of text,” “Brahman pretensions,” and so forth; it is only fair to remember that with the enormous
power they wielded and the enormous temptation to which they were exposed, it would have been almost superhuman if they had acted otherwise. In all probability Gregory or Innocent or any other of those popes who sought so strenuously to exalt the sacerdotal order at the expense even of the kingly would have done much the same thing, stopping only at a claim to divinity, which would not have been in conformity with Christian doctrine.

The Brahmans did not, however, attain this position of superiority without a struggle, especially with the Kshatriyas, or, at least, without arousing a jealousy of their privileges which has remained more or less ever since. During the course of their history, moreover, they largely abandoned the priestly functions and took to many other occupations. We hear of them as soldiers, physicians, cultivators, tradesmen, shepherds, carpenters, hunters, and many other things. No doubt this multiplicity of occupation, though at first it may have been held as a degradation of the priestly caste, ended by a general levelling up. The Brahman carpenter would still receive respect as a Brahman, but as a carpenter he would to some extent—to the extent, that is, that there was growing competition—find the competitive level and by degrees it would come to be seen that a Brahman carpenter was no better than any other carpenter, and certainly not by reason of his birth. It must be remembered, however, that this attitude towards the caste did not take shape till after the pretensions of the caste, as a caste, had been admitted. The Brahman, therefore, always carried with him a kind of halo, nor has he ever quite lost it—at any rate in the eyes of the people. Though in these days the sacerdotal functions are for the most part confined to men of little learning—men who know enough to recite mantras at wedding and other festivals, without knowing or even caring to inquire what the inner significance is of what they do—and the bulk of the Brahman caste or the educated part of it is engaged in modern pursuits—in the service of Government, in the law, in journalism, in education—it still remains true that the Brahmans have, not indeed the monopoly, but at least the lion’s share
of what modern education has to give. Bishop Whitehead has committed himself to the statement that in a certain school there was hardly any difference as regards ability and intellectual development between 'Brahmans and outcaste Christians, so far as was revealed by the results of a scholastic examination. This may very well be true within the limits laid down, for the passing of examinations may depend on little more than application, perseverance, and a fair share of brains, and no one will claim that the Brahman has a monopoly of these. But if it be extended into the wider sphere of the affairs of life, it is certainly not true. Blood tells; the centuries which have left their mark upon the Brahman features have developed an intellectual ability generally unequalled by other castes. That is why the Brahman has so largely monopolized the service of Government and why Government is, in accordance with modern ideas, so anxious to hold the scales even that they will even promote inferior men, rather than give too great weight to the caste.

There is, however, another class of Brahman which trades upon its prerogatives, is entirely ignorant equally of spiritual as of mundane affairs, and battens upon the generosity or credulity of the people. They are the worst kind of parasite, which will even go to the length of protesting violently, if what in their arrogance or their greed they consider to be their due is taken from them. In a certain Indian State where the Maharaja had set his face against useless extravagance of this kind and had determined that charities must be discriminate and deserved by the recipients, these parasite Brahmans had the impudence to appeal to the British Resident, from whom, of course, they got short shrift. But these so-called charities were a religious obligation in the eyes of some of the people as well as in those of the ladies of the Palace, and the Maharaja's task was not easy. Of such people little good can be said; their outlook is very narrow and seldom extends beyond their own stomachs or at least their own self-interest. Happily they do not represent the majority nor any large minority. Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa. But there are also many Brahmans
who use their ability to overreach others, to insinuate harsh things of other castes, to grasp at places for their own fellows or relatives. That is not to be denied; it must, however, be remembered that the ethics of the East differ from our own. For good or ill, the individualism of the West has not yet taken firm root, though the idea seems to be growing. The East has not yet assimilated the conception of the State as a corporate entity which demands service from each man and woman. The unit is the family and the larger unit is the clan or caste. This conception is cardinal; to lose sight of it is to misunderstand much that seems to be mere intrigue and self-seeking. If it is not so obvious in India as it is in China, that is probably because for 150 years India has had a Government to which Western ideas are second nature. There are to-day many Indians to whom the idea of public service to the State comes first, and to whom anything that savours of intrigue or corruption is abhorrent. But there are also many others, born and bred in the Hindu atmosphere, whatever college or school may have done for them, to whom caste and family are the predominant considerations. They may pay lip service to individualism and selection by merit, which latter is by no means always observed in the West, but they are still Indian at heart, and to them the primary duty is to the family not constituted as we know it but embracing all kinds of agnatic and cognatic relationships. It is thus not a question of repotism in the European sense but rather of the discharge of an obligatory duty, as important as was to us the rally to the colours in 1914. It is very difficult to appraise this attitude of mind. We ourselves have been accustomed all our lives to the principle that the call of public duty or of the country's needs outweighs considerations of family, and rather than incur the suspicion of jobbing a son or a nephew into a place a man in authority will deliberately choose the inferior. This principle has been stretched so far on the continent of Europe that in certain countries—notably in Germany and Russia—the individual hardly counts. The people belong to the State; they are there for the good of the State and for no other purpose. India goes to the opposite extreme and in so
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doing she has—perhaps, naturally—incurrd the condemnation of European observers.

It is, moreover, the Brahman who is looked upon as the chief opponent of British rule. That is an accident. It is an accident because by reason of his birth which has given him such unparalleled advantages he is better fitted than others to compete with the able men who compose the Government of India. For it is truer to say that the opponents of British rule belong rather to classes than to castes, and these classes are, of course, those who have most profited by British education. It is the lawyer, the journalist, the schoolmaster—all of whom are products of our own system and who before our advent were either unimportant or did not exist at all—who form the nucleus of the malcontent party. Mr. Gandhi is the most notable, but not the only, non-Brahman opponent of British rule. And these classes are, of course, for the reason given, mainly Brahman. It is sometimes said that when India has put into practice her new constitution, the Brahmans will seize the opportunity for the oppression of lower castes. That is not at all likely. What oppression, if any, there is, is in the villages and among the peasantry. It is there that caste reigns in all its rigidity; it is there that the low-caste man is jockeyed out of his land and that the lot of the no-caste man may become intolerable. Educated India has greatly changed its attitude; if the principles of the West have not yet grown to full stature, they have at least struck roots and are growing rapidly. The movements of the present day are nearly all in the direction of social service. The emancipation of women, the care of children, maternity problems, village improvement, are ideas which have no doubt been inspired by European conceptions, but are being enthusiastically adopted by Indians. This means that while the equality of man is not recognized (which is not to be wondered at, since it palpably does not exist) it is more and more coming to be seen that there are certain rights common to humanity and that respect for these makes in the end for national prosperity and welfare.

The Brahmans, in fact, like the Pharisees, have suffered
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from an inordinate emphasis upon their shortcomings and a certain indifference to, if we may not call it ignorance of, their origins or at least of the environment in which they have been brought up. The Pharisee, held up unfairly to everlasting scorn as hypocrite and viper, has become the very type of the sanctimonious ritualist whose utter contempt for humanity and his duty to his neighbour is only equalled by his punctilious observance of "the washing of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables." The popular conception of the Brahman is largely due to the influence of the missionaries, to whom he is the embodiment of arrogance and oppression. He has presumed to lay claim by reason of birth alone to a superiority which morally is spurious, because in fact there are many righteous men of inferior caste and even of no caste at all, since a high morality is the monopoly of nobody, and intellectually is only maintained and justified by the oppression of others and especially of the outcastes. That is, of course, true; but truer of the past than of the present. For the awakening of the lower castes and of the outcastes is such that the Brahman can never again attain to that point of discrimination—to say nothing of divinity—which he once claimed and which was granted to him by the acquiescence of the people. No doubt he has much to gain in the new order of things—not merely what are called the loaves and fishes of administration, but also in the respect and reverence (and therefore also in power) with which, in spite of much hostility, too often deserved by his traditional arrogance, he is still regarded by the mass of the people; but that respect and that reverence tend now and will tend more and more, as education advances and men become more awake to their rights as men, to diminish. Nevertheless, the prestige will remain as long as the caste system endures. For as the Pharisees were the guardians and interpreters of the Mosaic Law to the people, and as the written law was the most precious possession of the Jews, since it contained the revelations of the Most High, so the Brahmans are the guardians and interpreters of the scriptures which to the Hindu are equally the revelations of God. And it is characteristic of the Hindu that he pays
special reverence to tradition and the written word. Of course, in these days the scriptures which can be read in English and other tongues are no longer the close preserves they once were, but even so it requires a subtle and an educated brain to follow the reasonings of the commentators, and though the Brahmans have not now the monopoly of learning, custom, heredity, and tradition combine to leave such matters largely in their hands. The regular priests—the Brahmans who still follow the caste calling—are generally quite unlearned in all that pertains to the secular life and even in those things which to us make up religion. But occasions will arise when a man would ask: “What ought I to do in such and such circumstances?” and he may go to his priest for advice. In matters of ethics he is more likely to trust to his own conscience and his sense of right and wrong. All those points of ritual which seem of such vital importance seem to us unspeakably trivial. It might well be said of the Brahman, as it has been said of the Jew: “The Gentile would at once notice that the Jew did many special acts as a religious duty; that he made a point of doing things, in themselves apparently trivial, in a particular way and that he refrained from doing other things which to the Gentile seemed harmless or indifferent.”

The Brahman has, it seems to me, received less than justice from the majority of European writers. There is more than one reason for this. It is (somewhat grudgingly) allowed that the brains of the country reside for the most part in the Brahman caste, but that, it is said, is because for centuries the Brahman made a close preserve of learning, so that his own ability is made a cause of offence. On the other hand, by his arrogance and pretensions he has certainly earned a great deal of dislike from the less favoured, though here again one may suppose that there is a trace of envy of the privileges which society has given him. To the European he is the embodiment of arrogance and oppression and this, with the Anglo-Saxon sympathy with the underdog, is enough to condemn him, especially in the eyes of the missionaries, who, if they have better opportunities to observe the inner workings of Hindu social conditions, are at the same
time presented with *ex parte* statements by their own clients. But perhaps the chief offence is that, alone as a class among Indians, he has the brains to stand up to and to criticize the Englishman. The popular notion is that all Indians, of whatever caste or education, must by reason of their colour, or their birth as Asiatics, necessarily be inferior to the white man. This is, of course, the outcome of the European penetration into Asia, equipped with military weapons and discipline, as well as with the wealth and the organization of the West, which have established the superiority of the white man both in the military and the economic field, and that superiority has not been questioned, much less challenged, until very recently. The European had hitherto enjoyed the comfortable feeling of a kind of paternal patronage. To go into the villages as some Lord Bountiful, to be treated everywhere as the Ma-Bap, the Mother and Father, whose children the villagers are, gives a pleasant sense of power and even of integrity which flatters the national pride.\(^1\) Criticism, on the other hand, is not so pleasant; when it is just, it disturbs the complacent sense of superiority, and when it is unjust, it exasperates.

The Brahman, then, for all his faults is not so black as he is painted. In a country where religion was everything and where it still counts for so much and where to the onlooking Gentile “the only side which he can observe is that where his religion found its most characteristic expression in action,” it was natural that the Brahman should still be regarded as the lord of creation, which by reason of his knowledge of the ceremonies and sacrifices and of the magical properties inherent in them he actually was in primitive times. It was equally natural that since others so regarded him, he was not loath so to regard himself. If in later times he may justly be accused of intrigue or of playing for his own hand, that is partly because of his environment and partly because of the belief in the all-importance of the family unit. When English education was introduced, he was quick to see where his advantage lay and no one profited more than he by the

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\(^1\) I am told that this attitude of the villages is passing away, if it has not already passed.
new system. As his star waned in the sacerdotal, so it rose in the political firmament. And those who attain power in politics are seldom free from the suspicion and the accusation of intrigue.

It is the combination of these factors—the arrogance and pretensions, the occasional (but not universal) oppression and contempt of others, the power of criticism, and perhaps a certain faculty for intrigue—which has led to the popular belief that the Brahman caste as a whole is the sworn enemy of British rule and all that it stands for in India. Yet, on the whole, the Brahmans have gained more, and stand to lose more, than anyone else by the discontinuance of it. It is they who, as we have seen, chiefly profited by the introduction of English education; it is they who obtained thereby, if not a monopoly, at any rate a very large share of Government posts; it is they who have swelled the ranks of the lawyers. If this be so, why, it may be asked, have Brahmans so often been found as uncompromising critics or even open enemies of British rule? The answer is simple. Every thinking man knows quite well that India has travelled upon her present road too far to turn back. She has the example of Japan before her eyes and ever since the Russo-Japanese War there has been the latent feeling that what one Asiatic people can do, another can do. But Japan is what she is because she has abandoned the old seclusionist ideas and has adapted herself to the tendencies of the modern age. By her own effort she has become one of the foremost military powers of the world and is fast becoming one of the foremost economic powers also. It is quite apparent that unless India wishes to abandon herself to the state of the Middle Ages, she must keep pace with the modern world. She cannot now dispense with the material comforts of the age; she is too closely wedded to the legal system to want to scrap it for another; she professes unbounded enthusiasm for education, and that not of the old type which confined itself to the Sanskrit writings and to learning religious mysteries by rote, but more and more of the type which will give general knowledge and will fit boys and girls to become good citizens. If, therefore, the British power
were to disappear—as of course it cannot in a single year—if the British power were to disappear gradually, it is certain that these cardinal institutions would remain and the Brahman would have the same predominance in them as he has had all along. If, on the other hand, there should be a swing back to the older ideas, if the cry of "Back to the Vedas" should turn out to have more substance in it than is at all probable, the Brahman would still be the gainer; for he would recover that semi-divinity with which he was invested in olden times. But though these alternatives are probable they are not certain. It may be that the character of the administration will gradually change through the newly awakened consciousness of the inferior castes, who will become more insistent on obtaining their full share, or again it may be that in the altered circumstances of the modern world the Brahman can never recover his old ascendancy and that the lower castes will tend to assert themselves more rather than less. In any case, however, it is difficult to see how the Brahman can be a loser, even if he gains nothing, but it is mere cynicism to suggest that he has been actuated all along by nothing but self-interest, that the criticism and agitation in which he has so often been prominent have in them no traces of the natural desire to be of more importance in his country than he now is. In other words he is exhibiting the same sort of patriotism which we ourselves would clamorously approve if the positions were reversed, or which we should politely support if the struggle were between two nations and we ourselves were only interested spectators.
The Cult of the Cow

YEAR after year takes its toll of human victims in riots between Hindus and Mussulmans. On the Mussulman side these generally arise out of some real or imaginary insult to a mosque; on the Hindu side out of the killing of cattle. It is difficult to apportion blame, for both sides are often quite unreasonable in their demands: Mussulmans requiring Hindus to cease playing music when passing a mosque on all days and at all hours of the day, whether there is any one in the building or not and however urgent may be the Hindu necessity; Hindus, again, suddenly objecting to the slaughter of cattle which has been peacefully done by a Mussulman butcher for months together. With the Hindu music we are not here concerned, but may remark in passing that it is clearly a survival of a pre-Aryan cult, relating to demons and other evil spirits. But what is the origin of the extraordinary veneration of the cow, in which term is of course included the bull and the calf? It is quite unlike the affection which Anglo-Saxons have for the dog and the horse; the dog is valued for its fidelity, its companionship, and its intelligence; the horse largely for its utility, but also, no doubt, for its noble appearance and its endearing qualities. We may grieve over the death of a horse or a dog, we may deplore the necessity which compels us to destroy the animal, but we do not regard either with a veneration akin to (though not identical with) worship. There is in this veneration nothing of that humanist feeling which convinces us that it is better to put an animal out of pain than to let it linger on useless and in suffering. For though there is very little intentional cruelty, not perhaps more than in most other countries, compassion for the beast extends only to the taking of life. Not long ago a carter was driving his oxen to market across a river bed. Cart and bulls became engulfed in loose sand and could not be extricated. Eventually
the man got the cart free but not the bulls and they were left to their lingering fate while crows and kites pecked at their living eyes. This is an extreme instance, partly to be excused by the urge to reach the market on which the man’s own subsistence depended. But it is unlikely, to put it no higher, that the man would have solved the problem by deliberately killing the animals. In lesser ways we can observe the same sort of ignorant callousness to animal suffering. Fowls are carried head downwards, donkeys are overloaded to the permanent injury of their legs, bulls are driven with sore necks and with no attempt to save them from the chafing of the yoke. I once had occasion to plead the cause of veterinary science, not only in the interests of the animals but also in those of the peasantry, but a colleague argued that “they are only animals” and the economic plea was brushèd aside.

Yet in spite of what seems to us callousness to the suffering and indifference to the welfare of the animal creation, the very idea of killing a bull or cow is to the Hindu almost as repulsive as is infanticide to us. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that to commit this sacrilege is to him the mark of an inferior civilization. It is true that ahimsa, one form of which is an extreme reluctance to take any animal life, is a marked feature of Hinduism. Certain Jains, as is generally known, will cover their mouths, lest they should harm some small insect inadvertently, and will sleep in bug-infested beds to give the creatures a chance of a full meal. But while Hindus are averse from taking animal life, it is only in the case of cattle that we find a shuddering repugnance. To kill a cow is a crime, and what is worse, a sacrilege.

What is the explanation? It has been suggested that the cow, as the giver of milk and its products, and the bull, which is used as a pack or draught or plough animal, were so pre-dominantly useful to ancient India that they were invested with almost divine qualities. Some expositors have gone even further and conjectured that, while the buffalo was well enough known, the bull was an imported beast and was therefore rare. Omne ignotum pro magnifico. It was looked upon with the awe of the primitive people as a novelty;
its obvious advantages were quickly recognized, and so it became invested with a divine halo. To kill it was a thing that was not done. There was something uncanny about its rarity, and it was far too valuable as the staff of existence. Religion then stepped in. What had been a custom for utilitarian reasons became a religious tenet. To kill a bull or cow was declared to be only one degree more venial than to kill a man; indeed, it was worse than killing most men, for homicide was at most murder, whereas bovicide was both murder and sacrilege. Tradition persisted, as it has a habit of doing, until the killing of kine was regarded with the same kind of horror with which a bishop of the Church of England would regard the insolent misuse of the consecrated elements.

This explanation fails to satisfy. Generally speaking, it is unsafe to refer ancient customs of this kind to utilitarian conceptions which savour too much of the European and the modern not to be regarded without suspicion. For even if we add the religious sanction there was nothing to be gained by it. We, to whom the horse was (until the age of mechanism) so invaluable, do not kill horses, unless they have become too old for life to be more than a burden, or have been so crippled or diseased that, according to our notions, it is more merciful to destroy them. No one wants to destroy valuable property so long as it is valuable, but if that was the origin of the veneration and the immunity of kine in India, the religious sanction went far beyond it. Miserable cows with staring coats and bones sticking out, useless for any purposes of milk-giving—bulls too weak to draw a plough or a cart, perhaps with only three legs; are to be seen anywhere in India and at any time. Yet they are as sacred as the others. It seems incredible that, making such allowances as we will for the strength of tradition, and admitting as we may that kine were pre-eminently useful, the custom should have gone to such lengths or that religious feeling should have expressed itself so strongly. For the goat is also a useful animal; it has been called the "poor man’s cow." Yet goats are often sacrificed. Moreover, the rustic Hindu, who would shudder at the thought of killing
a bull or a cow, has no great reluctance to sacrifice a buffalo on occasion, and Bishop Whitehead in his study of religious customs in Telugu villages frequently mentions rites in which the sacrificial buffalo plays a prominent part. And a buffalo, which is also a bovine animal, can be used for draught or the plough and for milk, and many a household has its buffaloes for these very purposes.

Who invented this custom? Sacrifice is, of course, known to almost all ancient peoples and the Rig-Veda mentions it frequently; it is perhaps significant that the offerings of milk and ghee and grain, and of the intoxicating liquor which the Aryans deified under the name of soma, take equal rank with the sacrifice of animal life. It suggests that in very early times there was dedicated to the gods all the best of what man had to offer; but, as time went on, the idea gained ground that a blood sacrifice was the worthiest, probably because it was more costly, just as in the book of Leviticus a turtle-dove was substituted for the prescribed lamb, if the woman could not afford the latter. And so, it would seem, greater stress is laid upon animal sacrifice in the Yajur Veda, which prescribes formulas for the priest and is conceived in the spirit of Leviticus. So important did the sacrifice become that in time it transcended the gods themselves and the old hymns of praise became the formulas of ritual. What was it that brought about the change? It is, of course, possible to argue that such a transition was simply the result of evolution. The change of climate and of habits, the influence of a more settled life, and the tendency of religion to develop into a system combined to give the priests a more dominant status and their sacrificial functions a certain factitious importance, just as in modern times the severity of certain forms of Christian worship is based upon the fear lest the accompaniments of ritual should obscure the deeper meaning of religion. It is, however, far more probable that the earlier Aryan religion in which there is very little trace of a dominant priesthood or of any settled system, beyond that of a general reverence for Nature personified in or presided over by the gods, not only became modified by contact with...
genous cults, but also adopted the organization of the priesthood with its elaborate system of ritual which it found already established. Thus, after the Yajur Veda, we have the Atharva, which is linked up with the Rig by embodying some of its hymns of praise but is mainly composed of incantations and charms and spells which are very far removed from the simple, if lofty, Nature worship of the Rig, and which must have been the results of a cult or cults to us inferior but to them attractive. There is nothing fanciful in this, especially if the Aryans were not, except in the West, the insolent conquering hordes they are generally represented to be, but only a tribe of warriors who, when they had firmly established themselves in the lands they wanted, sent out feelers into other lands, conquering them too, not by force of arms, but by peaceful penetration, by a greater religious zeal, and by a more flaming enthusiasm. In like manner did the Israelites debase the purer monotheism of Jahveh by adopting the cults of the tribes by whom they were surrounded, a practice which is so constantly denounced by the Hebrew prophets.

But though to-day blood flows freely in the sacrifices, the cow and her kind are notable exceptions. How came it that this extraordinary reverence for bull and cow arose and became so deeply rooted in Hinduism? Professor Berriedale Keith, after recording that the Aryans slaughtered oxen as "in some degree a sacrificial act" and in any case as an act of hospitality, is driven to point out that there is no inconsistency between the eating of flesh and the growing sanctity of the cow which bears already in the Rig-Veda the epithet aghnya, "not to be killed." But he adds significantly "if this interpretation of the term is correct," implying that there is some doubt about it. And he draws the conclusion that "it is merely a proof of the high value attached to that useful animal, the source of the milk which meant so much both for secular and sacred use to the Vedic Indian." That seems a very flimsy and casual explanation. Why, if the Aryans slaughtered oxen both for sacrificial and for hospitable purposes, should there be any "growing sanctity of the cow," whose qualities must have been long known and

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appreciated? What caused them thus to realize, if slowly, that the cow must be venerated almost to the point of deification?

Now the date of the Aryan irruption into India is conjectured by scholars to be about 2500 B.C., and the date of the Rig-Veda (which is a miscellaneous collection of hymns) to be between 1200 and 1000 B.C. It is not unlikely that these conjectural dates will have to be revised in the light of Egyptian and Chaldean discoveries, as well as of those in the Indus valley, for the state of Sumerian civilization, as disclosed, for example, by the excavations at Ur, has revolutionized ideas of the conditions of life of thirty centuries ago. Be this as it may, authorities are agreed that a very long period, which may have been 1000 years or more, elapsed between the first Aryan invasion and the earliest hymns of the Rig-Veda, and the Rig-Veda itself is spread over some two centuries. It is, therefore, quite possible that the word _aghnay_, which, doubtful though it be, seems to be the only authority for the immunity of the kine, occurred long—anything from ten to twelve centuries—after the invasion, and at a time when the Aryans had become familiar with and had been influenced by the indigenous or pre-Aryan cults which they found in the country. It seems to be quite certain that the Aryans did not bring with them or indeed adopt for centuries this idea of the sacredness of kine. That it grew very slowly with the Aryan tradition may be admitted, for Professor Washburn Hopkins says that later on, in the period of the Sutras and Epics, it is “an old rite of hospitality to kill a cow for a guest,” an offer which it was etiquette to refuse. It was, nevertheless, killed if the owner wished to kill it; the offer to the guest seems to have been a piece of formality, to be refused as formally, much as swords are offered and returned in India as a knightly and graceful ceremony to-day.

The argument is thus tending towards a solution of the problem in India itself. But as Max Müller has reminded us,¹ we must exclude the possibility of the custom having been brought from outside either by the Aryans, who for

¹ _Chips from a German Workshop_, vol. ii, p. 219.
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reasons of their own allowed it to lie dormant, or by others who found their way into India. The sacred bull Apis will naturally occur to everyone. Apis and Mnevis were two bulls who became sacred at the request of Isis, who “besought the priests to dedicate one of the animals of their country, whichever they chose, and to honour it in life as they had formerly honoured Osiris, and when it died to grant it obsequies like his.” It was therefore ordained “that they should be worshipped as gods in common by all the Egyptians, since these animals above all others had helped the discoverers of corn in sowing the seed and procuring the universal benefits of agriculture.” The priests therefore had a free hand and they chose the bull for a certain definite reason. But the bull thus chosen seems to have been an individual, for “although he was worshipped as a god” (and became identified with Osiris) “. . . he was not supposed to live beyond a certain length of time which was prescribed by the sacred books and on the expiry of which he was drowned in a holy spring.” 1 If, then, the Indian custom is in any way dependent on the Egyptian, it must have been radically altered in three respects. All cattle were not sacred in Egypt but only those which were dedicated to Osiris. Secondly, there was not only no objection to the killing of an animal but it was definitely prescribed, while in India the prohibition is absolute right up to the time of natural decease. Thirdly, though cattle in India are regarded as sacred animals and treated with veneration, they are not actually worshipped and the veneration stops short of deification. Except, therefore, for the fact that the Egyptian animals were bulls and were sacred, there is no analogy between the two cases, unless we are prepared to do violence to probability and to make unjustifiable assumptions.

The ceremonial connection of the ox with agriculture and especially with the harvest is a widespread custom and it seems to be prevalent in Northern Europe. Frazer gives instances from France, Germany, Switzerland, and Hungary. Here we apparently have the embodiment of the

1 Frazer: Golden Bough, p. 476.

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Corn-Spirit as a cow or bull and it might be suggested that it was an Aryan custom which took this form in the West, while in the East it became a veneration of kine as personifying that Spirit in each individual. Max Müller, however, drawing a distinction between traditional customs which spring from an instinct common to mankind and those which are merely national, deriving their origin from the original ancestral stock, warns us that unless we observe this distinction we may go very far astray. If it could be shown that this consecration* of the bull as a corn-spirit was only found in the races derived from the Aryan stock, that might be a point in its favour, though there are other objections. Unfortunately, however, this same custom, bull and all, has been found in Guinea and also in China, and since similar customs are connected with other animals all over the world, it would seem to be one of those referable to a primitive human instinct rather than to a national or racial institution. Moreover, in some of these cases the bull is killed and in some others it is represented by a man or an effigy, so that there seems to be very little in common with the sanctity of the cow in India.

But that is not all. If the custom of venerating animals had been one of the features of the early Aryan cult, we should have expected the choice to have fallen upon the horse rather than the bull, for the horse would have been more useful to a nomadic conquering people both for war and for hunting. And this apparently was so, for we find that the gods “drive through the air in cars drawn chiefly by horses but sometimes, by other animals.”¹ The horse was therefore cast for the highest part that an animal can be supposed to play, to draw the divine chariots. And later on it is the horse sacrifice, the *Aswamedha*, which is the emblem of Imperial claim and therefore to be performed very rarely and only by kings. This, of course, does not mean that the horse was worshipped or even treated with special veneration for its own sake; there is no hint of that in the *Rig-Veda*. It does, however, suggest that the Aryans appre-

¹ Macdonell: *Hymns from the Rig-Veda*, p. 11 (Heritage of India Series).
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ciated the horse and thought it worthy of the highest honour. Yet the horse in these days is not paid any special respect, neither does it enjoy any special immunities or privileges. It is prized for its market value, as we may prize an animal for what it will fetch, but no more. If, therefore, oxen took the place of horses on utilitarian grounds it must have been after agriculture and trade were more highly developed, when the bull and the cow were looked upon as prime necessities for a pastoral life. It might be fairly claimed that kine became sacred at a later period when the Aryans had settled down to a more peaceful life; there is no inconsistency in this supposition, and it would also explain the word agniva on which so much depends. On the other hand, there is equally no inconsistency in supposing that during the long interval between the first invasions and the collection of the Rig-Vedic hymns the Aryans must have come into contact with the earlier inhabitants, whether we call them aborigines or Dravidians, and absorbed certain of their customs and beliefs. It is on the contrary the most natural thing in the world. If, as Max Müller has remarked, the existence of similar folk tales may in certain circumstances be evidence of the historical contact of races, it is obvious that when the two races are fused they cannot but have an influence upon one another.

In the Rig-Veda cattle are almost always spoken of as valuable property; "actual direct worship of animals is hardly found there," as we might have expected, had ancient Egypt been our source. A typical hymn to Indra says:

Who slew the serpent, freed the seven rivers,
Who drove the cattle out of Vala's cavern,
A conqueror in fights; he, men, is Indra.1

Here no doubt the allusion is allegorical. Indra is the god of the rain; the clouds that hold the precious water back are "Vala's cavern," where the "cows," that is, that which is most profitable to man in a thirsty land, are held prisoners by a demon. Indra has therefore released the cows; the land is refreshed and yields her harvests. Anyone who

1 Rig-Veda, ii. 12.
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has watched for the rain in India, or who has seen the crops withering and blighted for want of it, can appreciate the Aryans' worship of Indra and his pre-eminence among the gods. But the "cattle" even in the metaphor are not sacred; they are the most valuable of the gods' gifts to men, or in modern parlance "they are worth their weight in gold."

Or again more clearly in a hymn to Usas, the Dawn:

Mete out to us, O Dawn, largesses; offspring,
Brave men, conspicuous wealth in cows and horses.¹

As the dawn drives away the darkness, brings the light by which men can work, and discloses the treasures of the earth, she is characteristically bountiful. She not only brings the worshipper wealth and children, but bestows protection and long life, fame and glory, on the benefactors. Here, as is usual in the Veda, cows, which it will be noted are classed with horses, simply mean wealth. Wherever there is any mention of kine it is either allegorical or simply indicative of wealth. There is no pre-eminence given to them nor is there any allusion to their sanctity. The comparison of gods to bulls of course proves nothing; Eastern literature is full of imagery and even we describe a man as "bold as a lion" or "sly as a fox."

If, then, the Aryan literature shows no trace of this custom of venerating the cow, if the Aryans ate beef and sacrificed bulls freely, and if such traces of bovine sanctity as we can find elsewhere are so dissimilar that we are not justified in linking up the two, we must look for the practice in India itself, but we cannot ascribe it to the Aryans, for it has already been shown that the mere fact that kine are specially useful is not enough to explain this excessive reverence. Dr. Slater, on the watch as usual for the economic origin, says:

"As remarked above the Indian domestic ox is pretty certainly derived from some non-Indian species of wild ox; and it is therefore natural to suppose that it was introduced by some invading pastoral tribes, by the Aryans in fact."²

¹ Rig-Veda, i. 92.
² Slater: The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture, p. 107.
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This is, however, at best, only a reasoned guess and it is demonstrably unfortunate. The excavations at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa take us back to 2800 B.C., or at least one thousand years before the date assigned to the Aryan irruptions. The excavations have not yet proceeded very far and admittedly have not told us very much about the social life of the people, but one of the things they have shown is that the bull was quite well known even to those early inhabitants, since it appears not infrequently on seals, as do other animals. There is, however, as yet no evidence that it was held in any particular veneration, though Sir John Marshall says that the bull was worshipped. But while the worship of the bull is not good evidence of the general sanctity of cattle, it shows that an animal that had risen to the height of deification must have been known and appreciated. Dr. Slater proceeds to argue that his supposition explains very naturally the prohibition of beef-eating, and especially of cow-killing which is so important a factor in Indian religion. “The newcomers, in order to protect their cattle, would naturally make the killing of them, and especially the killing of cows, a crime and a sin; and in order that the tabu might be effective they would make the prohibition apply to their own people as well as to the natives. Vishnu, as well as Siva, is associated with the bull, one of the names of Krishna being Rajagopal, the king-cowherd. Putting these indications together we reach the hypothetical conclusion that though the Dravidians in prehistoric times kept buffaloes and used them in the cultivation of their paddy fields and therefore associated them with the Goddess of Fertility, they did not in the proper sense breed them and never learned from them the biology of the birth of calves, but this knowledge came to them first by the observation of the more valued bull and cow.” This explanation, which follows closely the utilitarian theory, is open to serious, if not fatal, objections. It suggests that the Aryans when they arrived about 2500 B.C. brought with them these valuable cattle, which were placed under tabu, either then or not long afterwards, for a tabu could hardly have been effective otherwise. But the Rig-Veda is at least one thousand years
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later, according to accepted chronology, and as we have seen, the Aryans even then and for a long time afterwards freely ate beef and sacrificed oxen. Again Dr. Slater assumes that it was the Aryans who domesticated and introduced the bull, the Dravidians having been content with the buffalo, but there seems to be no ground whatever for this assumption, unless it be the very slender ground that buffaloes are freely used in South India to-day. The reference to the biology of birth is obscure; if it has any bearing on the subject, it must be remarked that there is no adequate reason for supposing that the Dravidians learned it from the bull and not from the buffalo; if they had no bulls or cows, the buffalo was to them as valuable as the cow afterwards became. The only explanation that fits in with the theory is that the Aryans, whether they introduced the bull or not, found as time went on that the supply of oxen was not equal to the demand, and in order to preserve them they invented the religious tabu, much as we in our modern way preserve game in districts which have been overshot. But an undiscriminating tabu would be a very drastic method of preserving the species; it would entail, as it does now, the finding of pasturage for useless beasts. The problem of adequate grazing grounds has long been acute owing to this very tabu. Strict preservation soon leads to a glut of animals and in the case of domestic animals, at any rate, to a degeneration of the species. Elephants in the Nilgiri Hills became at one time a positive nuisance and even the famous lions in the Gir Forests of Kathiawar showed signs of becoming a menace to surrounding villages. The Aryans would soon have found out the inconvenience of an absolute prohibition, if they are to be credited with so much economic sense. Nor is it easy to induce a whole people to give up a long-established practice, while the opposition of the priests to the discontinuance of the sacrifice would probably have been strenuous. Such reasoning is too like groping in the dark, a catching at straws to bolster up a preconceived theory.

The cow is every bit as sacred in the South as in the North, the more so perhaps because the South is pre-eminently
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the home of the Saiva cult and, as everyone knows, the bull is sacred to Siva. If, as Professor Rapson says, the Dravidians retain their own customs, it is difficult to see why they should have adopted this reverence for the cow unless in obedience to a law which became universal. But why was such a law made, if, as we have seen, the utilitarian argument fails to convince? Just as caste is more strictly observed in the South than in the North, so one might have expected that an Aryan custom would have been observed in the North with enthusiasm, in the South with indifference. If on this hypothesis the law or custom had been imposed upon an unwilling or indifferent people, it would naturally have fallen into disuse when the practical results were found to be inconvenient and Aryan pressure, never very great in the Peninsula, became relaxed with the gradual fusion of the race. One must not overlook the immense power of tradition, especially when it has arisen from a religious prohibition; the same tradition, however, exists in the case of caste, yet now the restrictions of caste are being relaxed in certain respects, and among certain classes who would still think it a sin to kill even a maimed and suffering cow and to whom the very thought of eating beef is horrible.

It is admitted that the Dravidian civilization, whatever it may have been worth, preceded the Aryan in North India, and it is in accordance with all theories and known facts of primitive races that after the nomadic and hunting stages were passed, the pastoral stage followed. It requires no great straining of argument to assume that the Dravidians followed the usual law, and, having driven the aborigines into the jungle where they still are, had settled down in the fertile plains of India when the Aryan invasion took place. Now pastoral peoples are inclined to worship deities of fertility, for it is a tendency of all early races to suppose some supernatural power to be in charge of the various departments of human welfare. The incarnation of the fertility spirit is found also in various parts of Europe and in other parts of the world in which it sometimes takes the form of the bull but also of many other animals. And
we know that the aboriginal tribes, whether we call them proto-Dravidian or by some other name, did, until quite recently, practise human sacrifice in order to ensure a good harvest, the best-known instance being the Meriah sacrifice of the Khonds of Orissa, where the poles to which the victims were bound were still to be seen forty years ago. A more civilized people would naturally object to human sacrifice.

There is more to commend this hypothesis than the more usually accepted utilitarian theory, especially because it relates a primitive sanction to a definitely religious idea. There are, however, two objections to it. First, these fertility ceremonies generally ended in the shedding of blood, either of the human being or of the animal. And secondly, the divine victim was usually a selected individual, not a whole species. I do not think, however, that it is possible to explain variations of custom in every detail, why certain savages abstain from women when going to war or on a hunting expedition, or why others practise different magical tabus or customs. It must be confessed that such an argument is not of itself a sufficient reply to the Utilitarian theory which obviously fits in with the protection of the whole species. We must, however, remember that other animals besides the bovines are also sacred and ought not to be killed, and that here no possible question of the preservation of the breed can arise, at any rate in countries and at periods when close times for game in the interests of the species were unknown or were disregarded. No one can by human device other than that of game laws preserve the breed of the wild monkey, the peacock, or the cobra. The monkeys are often a pest and some shooting would in parts conduce to human comfort, but no game laws would ever be required to protect them, unless indeed the European market demanded skins to satisfy a prevailing fashion. The cobra is a dangerous snake and snakes cause more loss of human life than all the dangerous beasts put together. The close connection of the monkey with the worship of Hanuman and of the cobra with that of Vishnu might perhaps account for the sanctity of these creatures, but there does not seem to be anything which relates the peacock to religion, except
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that according to Frazer "the Mori clan of the Bhils in Central India worship the peacock as their totem and make offerings of grain to it." It might, therefore, be that the peacock and the monkey were originally totems of savage tribes, and that together with the bull their special sanctity has survived because the eponymous tribe was more powerful or crushed others out of existence. The monkey, as we have seen, was probably the totem which suggested the fable of the monkey auxiliaries of Rama on the expedition to Ceylon, and the cobra, being at once sacred to Vishnu and also a dangerous reptile to be propitiated as such, would have an additional reason for keeping its sanctity.

We may, therefore, be not far astray if we ascribe the beginnings of the sanctity of animals to totemistic ideas. We have, however, made the assumption that the tribes to which these totems belonged had generally suppressed the others, and, of course, there is no evidence of this. Nevertheless, it is quite probable that a custom of this lasting and widespread influence did not follow a single line of development from a simple source but emerged from the blending of more than one idea. The bull, whatever rank it took as a totem, is obviously a beast of fertility, inasmuch as it ploughs the land and fertilizes it by its droppings, while the cow supplies the milk, butter, and ghee which are, besides the corn, all that are needed for sustenance. But that is not enough to class it as a divine Spirit of Fertility. Now the bull is sacred to Siva, who does not appear at all in the Vedic theocracy; he is identified with, and is still sometimes called by the name of Rudra, who is a minor Vedic deity. Rudra, however, had nothing to do with fertility or with kine in the literal sense; he was a Storm-god and was associated with the Maruts, the deities of wind and storm. Consequently, he was a terrible god, a god whose anger it was well to propitiate, though he had also milder qualities. Thus a hymn of the Rig-Veda says:

When mountains bow before your march,
And rivers, too, before your rule,
Before your mighty roaring blast.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Rig-Veda, viii. 7.
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And again:

From heaven Maruts bring to us
Abundant wealth, distilling joy
With plenteous food all nourishing. ¹

But though Rudra is "implored not to stay or injure in
his anger his worshippers and their belongings" he is also
invoked as the "best of physicians":

Where is that gracious hand of thine, O Rudra,
That is so full of remedies and coolness?²

There is no trace of a Fertility-god here nor any connection
with cattle. Vishnu too, who appears under his own name
as a minor Vedic deity, was clearly a Sun-god at that time;
he makes his three strides over earth, air, and heaven.
Later on, no doubt, in his transformed capacity of Preserver
and Reproducer, in which one can still detect a trace of
the Sun-god, there seems to be a more obvious connection
with vegetation, but the only outward symbol that connects
him with reproduction is the namam, or trident, which is said
to represent the union of the sexes. His animal companions
are the kite and the cobra, and neither of them suggests
reproduction in any form.

Siva, on the other hand, is usually called the Destroyer,
and as such he retains something of his Rudraic character
as Storm god. Otherwise his character seems to have changed
completely. There is nothing left of the Good Physician "full
of remedies and coolness," nor does he, except as Rudra,
inspire only fear. Mahadeva and the many variants of
Iswara may equally inspire awe, or reverence, or even love.
He has, therefore, become the destroyer of things evil,
the purifier of the world, and the regenerator. This trans-
formation, the disappearance of one side of his Vedic
character, and the substitution of another, together with
the change of name to Siva, the Auspicious (reminding us
of the Eumenides), as well as the symbols which surround
him, suggest that the Vedic god came into contact with
some other god already established who possessed similar

¹ Rig-Veda, viii. 7. ² Ibid., ii. 33.
attributes, and was, according to the custom of primitive peoples, a deity of fertility. The fusion of one god with another is not unknown and the case of Apis and Osiris may be mentioned; though the Egyptian culture may have been one and undivided, it is quite likely that the Vedic Aryans, after they had settled in the country, combined with Dravidians to form a distinct civilization. The fact that the original Vedic nature gods gradually vanished suggests that the Aryans had come into contact with new ideas which profoundly modified their metaphysical conceptions. This view of the transformed character of Siva as the destroyer of evil and the purifier and therefore the beneficent guardian of the human race is borne out by the legends, in one of which Siva, as Nilakanta, swallows the poison intended for the injury of mankind, and in the other, as Rudra, he quenches Kama, the personification of lust, with his fiery eye. No great stretch of imagination is needed to see how the attributes of Siva were gradually transferred from the physical to the moral sphere, from the destruction and regeneration of nature to the purification of the soul.

The principal emblem of the transformed Siva is the lingam and no words are needed to prove that this is a symbol of reproduction. His constant attendant is the bull, known as Nandi. But this bull is something more than the vehicle on which he rides. In South Indian villages the god Aiyanar, who may be called the Village Constable, has a number of rude clay horses arranged near the shrine, so that he can take his pick of the stables when he goes on his rounds. That is what they are there for, and they do not seem to be the symbol of anything. At Conjivaram during the Garuda festival the gods ride round the town on various steeds which are changed from day to day, but they are taken from the store-room of the temple, where during the rest of the year they are kept. Garuda, the kite-steed of Vishnu, may possibly have some connection with the avatar of Vamana, the dwarf who compassed heaven, the earth, and the underworld in three strides and who is reminiscent of the mighty striding Vishnu of the Veda. We may perhaps recall the eagle of Zeus as the royal bird which seems to
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dominate the sky and to search out the earth but there seems to be no other symbolism involved. Garuda is not found in conjunction with Vishnu in statues and reliefs nearly so often as the cobra who guards the god with outspread hood and who may, again as a mere conjecture and if Vishnu can be regarded as a god of vegetation, be analogous to the Greek dragon who guarded the apples of the Hesperides.

But the bull of Siva stands in a different category. It would be unsafe to generalize, to say that Siva is never represented in statues and sculptures with his bull; it is, however, true to say that in many, if not in most, such representations the bull is not to be found. On the other hand, the bull Nandi is generally to be found in Saiva temples, and in the same position. He stands outside the shrine facing it and in a recumbent posture. He is usually fashioned with much care and often with considerable artistic taste; the material used is hard stone. Unlike the clay horses of Aiyanar and the flimsy vahanams, which are easily replaced, and are merely the trappings and accompaniments of the god and his processions, this bull is evidently meant to last. He is part and parcel of the temple and his position and posture suggest that he is not considered as a mere riding animal, ready and alert if the god should choose to mount him, but the custodian and obedient servant of the god. Together with the lingam he becomes the symbol of Saiva worship, as in Christian churches the plain cross, which is nothing in itself, becomes the symbol of the deepest mysteries of the Christian faith. It is difficult to see how these symbols can represent anything but the worship of the principle of Fertility embodied in Siva the Destroyer and Reproducer.

In the development of this custom of venerating cattle to the point of refusing to kill them under any circumstances, it is not unlikely that the rise of Buddhism and Jainism played a considerable part. Gautama Buddha was born in 563 B.C.; the date of Mahavira, the reputed founder of the Jain sect, is not exactly known, but scholars are inclined to accept 468 B.C. The age of the Sutras is calculated to be 600-200 B.C., and it thus covers the rise of both sects. But the well-known doctrine of ahimsa, which, in the case of
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the Jains at any rate, extended to a prohibition against
the taking of any animal life, could not have been the origin
of the excessive veneration of cattle in particular, though
it may well have consolidated a feeling that was growing up
amongst the now mixed population. That the Aryans, as
reflected in the sacred books, had not yet got so far but had
in some measure accepted the idea seems to be clear. We
are told that “it is an old rite of hospitality to kill a cow for
a guest; and as a matter of form each honoured guest is
actually offered a cow. The host says to the guest, holding
the knife ready to slay the cow, that he has the cow for him,
but the guest is then directed to say ‘Mother of Rudras,
daughter of the Vasus, sister of the Adityas, navel of immor-
tality (is she). Do not kill the guiltless cow; she is (Earth
herself) Aditi the goddess. I speak to them that understand.’
He adds, ‘My sin has been killed and that of so-and-so;
let her go and eat grass.’ But if he really wants to have her
eaten, he says, ‘I kill my sin and the sin of so-and-so’ (in
killing her) ‘...’ 1 Evidently, then, cow killing was not
absolutely forbidden, but it had become so distasteful that
the guest’s refusal was couched in the set language of a
religious formula. The allusions to Rudra, to Aditi, and the
Adityas are significant.

Agriculture is practically universal in India, but it is
comparatively rare to find places where the breeding of
cattle is carried on systematically. The cow (or the bull)
would therefore be valued not as we value them, for their
intrinsic or their pedigree value, but because they—every
cow and every bull—embodied the Spirit of Fertility.
To destroy either and therefore the embodied spirit would
be to jeopardise the produce of the fields and perhaps the
results of a whole season’s labour. There is nothing in nature
perhaps more sacred in India than the rivers. It is not the
Ganges alone which has this character; the Godavari,
the Krishna, the Kaveri, all share this attribute of divinity,
though the Ganges may be pre-eminent among them.
And this deification of rivers is presumably testimony, if
any were needed, to the value of water as personified in

1 Cambridge History of India, vol. i, p. 232.
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the rivers. In other words, the rivers embody the Water-Spirit and to do reverence to them is to propitiate the Spirit by which alone the fields can yield their produce. I suggest that in very similar fashion the Fertility-Spirit was embodied in the cattle and that the epithet aghnya arose when the Aryan civilization, impinging upon the older cults and embodying some of the practices which they found already existing, took on the idea of the sanctity of cattle, just as it took on and absorbed the idea of exogamy in connection with caste. In this way we can account for the universality of the tabu. We cannot be content with any specialized spirit which would be inherent only in a given consecrated animal, for that would not explain why all cattle are sacred, neither would it satisfy the millions of acres, scattered about in thousands of villages, which might be injuriously affected by the death of the sacred bull either by accident or deliberately of which they might and would know nothing. Thus the slaughter of any individual cow would have a purely local effect; and this idea would be in entire conformity with that of Immanence which may well have been in operation before it was erected into a principle. Indeed, it is hard to account for the practice in any other way; for, as I have said, the extreme value put upon bovine life could, on the hypothesis of utility, hardly have been extended to animals which are manifestly useless.

We may now gather up the threads of the argument. The utilitarian theory is not satisfactory: (1) because it is too modern in conception, (2) because it would have caused a glut of animals in the then state of pasture and the inconvenience would soon have become glaringly apparent, and (3) because it does not account for the preservation of beasts which are clearly useless for any purpose whatsoever. The custom is not Aryan, since the Aryans not only sacrificed oxen but ate beef until a comparatively late period. We must also reject any idea that the practice was due to importation from foreign lands, because we have no evidence that there was any such general sanctification of the bovines and where bulls were considered sacred they were in the end slaughtered or otherwise done away with. The suggesti
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that the bull was imported by the Aryans and was made sacred partly because it was novel and partly because it was valuable is refuted by the occurrence of bulls in the finds of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.

On the other hand, the idea of totems was very widespread amongst the pre-Aryans and the totem is sacred to the extent of immunity from destruction. And as the tribes advanced from the earlier to the pastoral stage, they would follow the very usual custom of worshipping or at least venerating deities of fertility. One of these deities was Siva, a non-Vedic god, though identified in certain aspects with the minor Vedic deity called Rudra; and the bull is related to Siva in a very special sense, more closely than is any other animal with any other god. But as agriculture advanced, those two things which most contributed to the production of crops, water, and cattle, tended to be credited with divine attributes, so that the rivers which embodied the Water-Spirit and the cattle which embodied the Fertility-Spirit were looked upon as sacred. No one of course can injure the rivers but the Fertility-Spirit is inherent in every individual bull or cow, so that to kill these animals is to kill the spirit which they embody and hence to anger the Universal Spirit, a part of whose essence is to be found in each of them. The anger of this spirit may well lead to the ruin of the harvest, either by drought or by locusts or by disease or even by floods. The peculiar sanctity of the bull and cow would thus be related to primitive ideas in which the spirits of good and evil played, and still play, so important a part.
X

Some Maratha Customs

INDIA has advanced and is still advancing in many ways along the lines of Western civilization. Western thought and Western ideas permeate much of her political, industrial, and even social life in a way and to an extent that makes any return to mediaevalism practically impossible. The cry of "Back to the Vedas," can never, in any practical sense, be more than a slogan; for, as an American has put it: "Ascetics like Gandhi and Tagore can no more wean their people from Western comforts than Mrs. Partington could sweep back the incoming ocean with her broom." But Western influence goes deeper than mere material comforts. The emancipation of women, the attitude towards widows and the depressed classes, the gradual abandonment of the more irksome of caste restrictions, the rise of journalism and even the format of newspapers, the predominance of the legal profession—all these and many others are indications of the power of European influence; the growth may be slow and progress may seem to be almost imperceptible; the impulse comes mainly from above, but it is working all the time, and if its effects are most clearly seen among the educated, it is none the less to be found among the masses also. Those who can look back fifty years upon India, cannot but acknowledge how different are not only the material conditions, expressed by the oft-quoted railways and posts and telegraphs and by the later introduction of electric light in the towns and of mechanized transport, but also the general outlook and the attitude of mind to social questions. A cynic may label these things as veneer, something that is laid on and will rub off, if only you rub hard enough. Such a view is neither fair nor true; European influence is rather an organic growth, sometimes struggling to exist against adverse conditions, sometimes striking roots that
are neither deep nor lasting, but on the whole making headway in the country.

Yet behind all this much remains that is essentially Indian. England has wisely refused to interfere with religion and all that religion connotes; she has refused to force the pace in social legislation and has even been content to tolerate what she cannot approve rather than offend the susceptibilities of a highly sensitive people. Consequently, we find among the customs still prevailing some that are not only reminiscent of magic and tabu, but are the authentic expressions of them as contained in the sacred books, and especially in the Atharva Veda. In many cases they are no doubt simple survivals; they remain because they are ordained. The priests do not understand them and the people cannot explain them. If you ask "Why do you do so and so? What is the object of this or that? Why do you use such and such materials in your rites and no others?" the answer is invariably "I do not know. It is our custom."

There are various theories about the origin of the Marathas, the inhabitants of Maharashtra, which is defined as the region around the upper waters of the Godavari and the lands between it and the Krishna. Dr. Barnett considers that the population was of "more or less Dravidian blood upon which were superimposed successive strata of Aryan immigrants entering apparently from Vidarbha (Berar)." Ranade, who in some sort is the panegyrist of the Marathas, claims that the Aryan and Dravidian elements have been mixed "in due proportion" (whatever that vague term may mean) modified to some extent by the Scythian invaders from Bactria; but Professor Rapson thinks that the Scythians had had little or no influence on the make-up of the race, and he leaves us to gather that there was not very much of the Aryan to be found in Maharashtra. Edwardes, on the other hand, flouts the idea that the Marathas were of Scytho-Dravidian origin. On the strength of a Note by Mr. R. E. Enthoven, at the time in charge of the ethnographical survey of Bombay, he concludes that "the Marathas, whether of high or low status, are descended without any appreciable foreign admixture from the primeval tribes of the Deccan
and the Southern Maratha country.” From these varying theories we may perhaps take it that the main stream of Maratha blood is aboriginal, modified by Dravidian admixture and possibly by Scythian but with very little Aryan influence. Like the rest of India, however, they have adopted Aryan customs and religious ideas.

Now when we are dealing with a mixed race whose elements are chiefly Dravidian and aboriginal, it is natural to suppose that the cults of these peoples survived to some, if not to a large, extent. It may be objected that in Christian lands, Christianity has obliterated other forms of religion; that Druidism, for example, exists only in the ruins of Stonehenge and such places and in the Welsh Eisteddfod in name, if not in essence; and that Paganism has vanished from Europe. But in the first place it is common knowledge that Christianity has adopted and adapted some of the customs and ideas of Paganism. The very name of Lent, though now associated with fasting and mortification of the flesh, denotes a spring festival, and the form of the marriage service has traces of the old Roman civilization. In the second place, while Christianity has always been an intolerant religion, never allowing other cults to survive if they could be suppressed, Hinduism has always been a tolerant religion, ready to receive and incorporate other cults within itself and to make them part of itself. “From the Rishis of the Upanishads,” says Professor Radhakrishnan, “down to Tagore and Gandhi, the Hindu has acknowledged that truth bears vestures of many colours and speaks in strange tongues. . . . Hinduism developed an attitude of comprehensive clarity instead of a fanatical faith in an inflexible creed. It accepted the multiplicity of aboriginal gods and others which originated, most of them, outside the Aryan tradition and justified them all. . . . Many sects professing many different beliefs live within the Hindu fold.”

Hinduism has thus worked not by obliteration or suppression, but rather by absorption and assimilation. This flexibility, while it is largely responsible for the unregulated state of the system, which has thus been made to include at once the grossest superstition and the most subtle.meta-
physical speculation, suggesting on the one hand "the heathen" who "in his blindness bows down to wood and stone," and on the other intellect, keen enough to compete with, if not to surpass, anything that Europe can show, is also the main reason why Hinduism has been able to withstand the onslaughts of the various militant and proselytizing religions.

This being so, it is not astonishing to find much in the present-day rituals which is reminiscent of, and is clearly founded upon, ancient magic and aboriginal belief. Still less need we be surprised when the case is one of a people largely descended from aboriginal stock, even though it has been overlaid with some thin coating of Aryan veneer or been otherwise influenced by further admixture. We may add to this the quite exceptional value which the Hindu attaches to tradition and authority. That is why in the bustle and hurry of the modern world these things are done simply because they have to be done and very few pause to ask the reason why. European observers have noticed that even during the most solemn ceremonies such as marriage or the investiture with the sacred thread (corresponding in some sort with the Christian rite of confirmation) the assembly chatters and laughs together as if nothing unusual were happening and the priest's voice droning or chanting the sacred verses is drowned in the babel that is going on all round. It has often been said that the religion of the Hindu pervades his every action from the cradle to the grave, but one may go even further than this, for religious ceremonies begin before the child is born. The first of these is the garbha-dhana (the gift of the womb) and is intended to facilitate conception. The wife is dressed in new clothes and ornaments and is seated with her face to the east. The husband anoints himself with fragrant oils and after a bath takes his seat beside his wife. He then sips water and prays for purity in all that concerns the conception, and the couple then bow to the sun. In the evening they put on white clothes and enter the bedchamber. Everything is laid down in detail which might shock the modern—especially the European—mind, but which is really intended to leave
nothing undone to secure a child healthy in mind and body.

It must be remarked that the Hindu has not the same
qualms that we have in speaking about or even in repres-
senting the natural functions of the body, so that what
appears to us indecent or prurient seems to them only
the natural expression of the great mysteries of Nature.

There seems to be more of symbolism than of magic in
this ceremony, which, however, is falling into disuse. No
doubt since every detail is carefully laid down, each has its
meaning. The new clothes may perhaps suggest that the
woman is entering upon a new phase of life with the concep-
tion of a child, or—more probably, perhaps—it may be that
the new clothes, like the sipping of water and the evening
garments of white as well as the man’s bath, are symbolic
of the purity of mind and body which are always considered
so necessary to a solemn undertaking. It is a means of
directing the mind to concentration on which here as in
all ceremonies the greatest stress is laid. The only suggestion
of magic is in the position of the wife with her face to the
east. We shall have to return to this point later.

There are clearer indications of magic in the next ceremony
called Punsavana, which takes place in the third month of
the pregnancy for the purpose of ensuring that the child
shall be of the right sex. As everyone knows the Hindu is
specially anxious for male children who alone can ensure
the repose of his soul. For all that daughters are not always
unwelcome and in the South the birth of a first-born daughter
was called Lakshmi, opening the womb. “The right sex”
is, however, more often the male. In the first fortnight of
this month and with due regard to the auspices of the stars
and of the time, in other words, under the direction of the
astrologers, the man gives his wife a barley grain in her
right hand, and places two mustard seeds or two beans on
either side of the barley. He then pours a drop of curd
upon them and calls upon her to eat. This done, she takes
a sip of water, which she probably needs after the dry
mouthful, and the man touches her upon the womb with
the words “With my ten fingers I touch thee, that thou
mayest give birth to a child after ten months.” He then
pounds the last shoot of a certain tree, mixes the powder with ghee or a silkworm and with pap made of panic 
seeds (there seems to be no English equivalent) or a splinter of a sacrificial post which is taken from the north-easterly part of it and exposed to the fire; or he takes the ashes of a fire that has been kindled by attrition and inserts them into the right nostril of the woman, whose head rests upon the widespread root of an Udambara tree (Ficus Glomerata).

All this is a mass of symbolism with which is mingled some magic, though it is hardly possible to assign a meaning to every detail. It is quite inconsistent with Aryan ideas as set forth in the Rig-Veda, and it points unmistakably to the survival of an aboriginal custom among the Marathas. It is conceived in the spirit of the Atharva Veda, which, as we have seen, is a mixture of sublime hymns and of magical spells and incantations, and is, therefore, in all probability, the product of two intermingling civilizations. The symbolism of touching the womb with the ten fingers is obvious, even though the period of gestation has been conveniently stretched; it has been conjectured that the beans represent the male half of the principle of fertility; some evidence of this is to be found in three hymns of the Atharva Veda in which the throwing of beans accompanies charms to win a man’s love. These are clearly sexual hymns and, if the conjecture is right, the use of the beans would suggest that the offspring desired is a son. It is more than probable that the mustard seed and the curd are allied to, or are symbolic of, the same principle of fertility; the mustard seed being pungent may have been regarded as a stimulant. We must not forget, however, that Jesus used the same figure in one of his well-known parables. The grain of mustard seed is there the small beginning, destined to spread and to grow into a great tree. And as Jesus was wont to use homely metaphors which could be easily grasped by the uneducated, we may suppose that mustard would be recognized as an example of prolific nature. It is but a short step from that to its symbolism of conception in the human womb. As for the curd, there is, as we have seen, good ground for thinking that the cow embodied the Spirit of Fertility.
The curd, therefore, as a product of the cow would partake of the same essential quality. It must be noted, however, that the beans, the mustard seed, the barley, and the curd are to be eaten by the woman, and this suggests that magical qualities were attributed to them. In swallowing them the woman would take into her body some portion of the universal spirit of fertility. That primitive tribes see an intimate connection between the fertility of the earth and the reproduction of the human race is proved by the examples collected by Frazer from Africa and America, of the orgies of men and women practised at the time of sowing the seed, and he adds that "it would be unjust to treat these orgies as a mere outburst of unbridled passion; no doubt they are deliberately and solemnly organized as essential to the fertility of the earth and the welfare of man." Even more to our purpose, because it is a custom of an aboriginal tribe in India, is the festival of the marriage of the Earth to the Sun-god, celebrated by the Oraons of Bengal. "After the ceremony all eat and drink and make merry; they dance and sing obscene songs and finally indulge in the vilest orgies. The object is to move the mother earth to become fruitful... On the principle of homoeopathic magic, the people indulge in a licentious orgy." No doubt these examples prove the exact opposite of what we are now discussing; the union of the human sexes is supposed to increase the fertility of the earth, but there seems no good reason why, on the same principle, the opposite should not hold good and the fertility of nature be held to induce fertility in the woman. The use of ashes of a fire kindled by attrition may have some obscure reference to Agni and the Vedic worship of the Fire-god. For Frazer says that "in the ancient Vedic hymns of India the Fire-god Agni is spoken of as born in wood." Fire produced by friction or attrition seems to have something supernatural in it, as other tribes seem to have thought; the god, the divine spark, is in the wood itself. Fire produced by igniting phosphorus and applying a lighted match would not seem divine to anyone, however little they may understand the reason why.

1 Golden Bough, p. 708.
Lastly the barley. If it be accepted that Demeter is the Corn-Mother and that "of the two species of corn associated with her in Greek religion, namely barley and wheat, the barley has perhaps the better claim to be her original element,"¹ the connection between the barley grain and the spirit of fertility would seem to be established. We must note, too, that "there are grounds for believing that it is one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, cereal cultivated by the Aryan race." It may well be that barley was cultivated in India before the Aryans were heard of, but in any case the use of barley in such a ceremony suggests that the custom is a very ancient one. It cannot be pretended that these explanations rest upon any firmer foundation than plausible or probable conjecture; those who described the facts of the ceremony had no explanation to offer. If, however, they are anywhere near the truth, they do suggest an intermingling of Vedic ideas, as exemplified by the fire, with the older aboriginal cults.

Yet another ceremony takes place in the fourth month of the pregnancy. After the ceremonial bath and the donning of white clothes by the pair, the husband performs regular sacrificial rites which include a hymn to Varuna. He then seats his wife on the west of the fire, and standing in front of her, so as to face west, he parts her hair from the forehead backwards with a porcupine quill that has three white spots, at the same time holding a bunch of unripe fruit, and recites certain mantras for the protection of the womb. Here we have the three elements combined, of Vedic worship, of sacrifice as contained in the fire and the oblations, and of magic as seen in the mystic symbolism and the incantations. It looks as if there had been a deliberate attempt to fuse the old aboriginal worship with the more refined ideas of the Vedic Aryans. The parting of the hair with a porcupine quill seems to be analogous to similar parting with a thorn which is considered to be symbolical of ploughing and hence of reproduction. There seems also to be some special virtue in the quill of a porcupine but neither research nor ingenuity has availed to explain what it is. Fruit is

¹ Golden Bough, p. 399.
sometimes used as a substitute for a child; and a child placed in the lap of a bride is supposed to communicate fertility. The fruit is to be unripe and no doubt symbolizes the foetus in the womb which it will take another five months to bring to perfection and in the fourth month may well be regarded as unripe.

The first two of these ceremonies—the Garbhadana and the punsavana—have, however, fallen into disuse, probably because as society became more complex and there were greater demands on the working hours, most people have neither the time nor the inclination for any ceremonies save the really important ones, perhaps also because the Hindu world has grown more sceptical of the efficacy of such rituals. We may pass now to the first of the important ceremonies, that which celebrates the birth of the child. These ceremonies are divided into three parts, called Jatakarma or the physical birth, Medhajanana or the birth of intelligence, and Ayushta Vardhana or the boon of long life.

When the child is born, the father lays an axe on a stone and a piece of gold on the axe. He then turns these things upside down and holds the boy over them, at the same time repeating the mantra:

Be a stone, be an axe, be invincible gold. Thou art indeed the Veda called son; so live a hundred autumns. From limb by limb thou art produced; out of the heart thou art born. Thou art indeed the Self called Son; so live a hundred autumns.

The special interest of this prayer, beside the sympathetic magic implied in the materials used, is that it is taken from the Atharva Veda. The thirteenth hymn of the Second Book is described as a prayer for the welfare and long life of an infant:

Thou hast put about thee this garment in order to well being; thou hast become a protector of the people against imprecation; both do thou live a hundred numerous autumns and do thou gather about thee abundance of wealth. You stand on the stone; let thy body become a stone; let all the gods make thy lifetime a hundred autumns.
SOME MARATHA CUSTOMS

The actual words or something very closely akin to them are used on a later occasion, at the ceremony of the Upanayana, the investiture with the sacred thread which denotes the spiritual rebirth of the child. It would seem that the formula was transferred from the one ceremony to the other, or that much the same formula was used for both, since the two are so closely connected.

The Sutikagni, or Birth-fire, is then kindled and the father fumigates the new-born child with grain mixed with mustard seed. He throws them eleven times into the fire, praying for the protection of the child from demons and other evil spirits. It is difficult to explain the recurrence of the mustard seed; perhaps on the analogy suggested it may represent a charm designed to perpetuate the race by ensuring that the child will have offspring with the fecundity of the mustard. Fire, of course, is a common feature in all sacrificial rites, but in the thirty-second hymn of the Sixth Book of the Atharva Veda it is used as a special charm against demons, and having regard to the prayer and to the solemnity of the occasion that seems to be the special object here. The number eleven, too, has a tinge of magic or at least of symbolism, for it represents the Matas or Mothers to whom the child is committed. The man then washes his hand and touches the ground repeating these verses:

O thou whose hair is well parted! (that is to say, thou in whom the seed successfully sown has brought forth fruit). Thy heart dwells in heaven, in the Moon; of that immortality impart to us a portion! May I never have to weep for the distress caused to me by my sons.

I know thy heart, O Earth, that dwells in heaven, in the Moon. Thus may I, the Lord of immortality, never weep for the distress caused to me by my sons.

This is clearly an invocation to the Earth-goddess and it strengthens the suggestion that the parting of the hair is connected with the ploughing of the furrow. The verses with the typical refrain are in the style of the Atharva Veda though there does not seem to be any extant hymn which exactly corresponds.
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Upon this ceremony there follows the rite of the Medhajanana. The father gives the child some ghee with a golden spoon to which he has tied a piece of darbha grass. The child is held towards the east and the father, as it were, "baptizes" it in the names of the Rig-Veda, the Yajur, the Saman, the Atharvan, and the Angiras. The child is then bathed in lukewarm water with prayers for freedom from disease and for earthly bliss. The father then places the child in the mother's lap and addresses her thus:

May no demon do harm to thy son, no cow that rushes upon him. Mayst thou become the friend of treasures; mayst thou live in prosperity in thine own way.

Then he washes first the right and then the left breast with appropriate formulas and finally touches both the breasts, placing a water-pot near her head and asking the waters "to watch over his wife, the mother of a good son."

I cannot pretend to explain the details of this ceremony. No doubt some mystic meaning was attached to the golden spoon, and darbha grass often figures in sacred rites. We may, however, notice two points—the position of the child to the east and the use of the water-pot. In many of these ceremonies the position is most carefully described. Attention has already been invited to the "north-easterly" chip to be taken from the sacrificial pillar; then again the man must face west, the woman east, and so on. The east is of course the direction of the rising sun and if the woman, who is the more important participant in ceremonies of childbirth, faces east the man who faces her must turn towards the west. On the other hand, the south is always carefully avoided. The south is the abode of Death and the kingdom of Yama, and so there is a custom that a man should not lie down with his head to the north because he would then be facing south, with his feet ready to start on their last journey. But a corpse is laid out with its face to the south because that is the way the soul must go. The north, on the other hand, is an auspicious quarter. Wherever you are in India the Himalaya is to the north of you and the Himalaya is the abode of the gods; obviously if you want to propitiate
them, you must do so in an attitude of adoration, for they, like Jahveh, are jealous gods.

Water plays a considerable part in these ceremonies, and it is not confined to cleansing properties. The placing of a water-pot near the mother is evidently symbolical. It may well be that just as the sacrificial fire was, in some sense at any rate, an offering to Agni, the god of fire, so the water pot was meant to propitiate the water deities, especially Indra, though we need not suppose that the Aryan deities of the rain were the first of their kind. In a country like India, where after a long, hot drought a single shower will carpet the earth with green, and where so many things were thought to be obtainable by the exercise of charms and incantations, the primitive tribes could hardly have overlooked the value of water, which has been recognized in so many uncivilized parts of the earth. We are thus led once more to the cult of fertility in which so many of these ancient customs seem to have had their roots.

These ceremonies, though still practised, do not seem to be obligatory. Now, however, we come to a rite as universal as is the rite of baptism in Christian countries—the Nama-karana or naming of the child. It takes place on the 12th day after birth, when the mother is reckoned to be able to leave her bed, and being now ceremonially pure, is free to move about the house. The father lights the sacrificial fire called Alpasana and the Sutikagni is taken away. He offers twelve or thirteen oblations—the reason for the number is not apparent—and prays for health and wealth. He then gives the child a secret name—of an even number of syllables if it be a boy, of an uneven number if a girl, and this name is known only to the father and the mother. Another name is given to the child for common use, and it is by this latter name that the child is known to the world. It has been suggested that the possession of two names was in ancient days supposed to ensure success, but it is more likely that it is a species of tabu and is connected with magic. Thus Frazer says:

Amongst the tribes of Central Australia every man, woman, and child has, besides a personal name which is in common use,