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a secret or sacred name which is bestowed by the older men upon him or her soon after birth, and which is known to none but the fully initiated members of the group. This secret name is never mentioned except upon the most solemn occasions; to utter it in the hearing of women or men of another group would be a most serious breach of tribal custom, as serious as the most flagrant case of sacrilege amongst ourselves. . . . The native thinks that a stranger knowing the secret name would have power to work him ill by means of magic. 1

Nor is the custom to be found only in Australia. Illustrations are given from ancient Egypt, the island of Nias in the Malay archipelago, The North American Indians, the upper Congo, and this particular instance of the Brahman is also mentioned. The custom has variations; in some cases a man's name may be communicated to strangers; in others the reply to the question "What is your name?" is given by a slave. It is said that "the superstition is current all over the East Indies without exception," and that if in the course of administrative or judicial business a native is asked his name, instead of replying he will look at his comrade to indicate that he is to answer for him, or he will say straight out "Ask him." I can only say that in the course of trying several hundred cases in Court and after many years' administrative experience in India, I never found any difficulty in getting a man to give his name. That may perhaps be because he is not afraid of speaking his common—or false—name and is only reluctant to give the true or secret one.

The penalties of revealing the name are as varied as the custom itself; they are all agreed on one point, that they are the work of demons or evil spirits or of the malice of ill-wishers. The young Maratha Brahman, however, who gave me most of the information regarding the customs of his people, did not seem to be greatly troubled by the fear of demons, for he told me what his secret name was. He did this in a somewhat shamefaced manner, as if he knew he was doing wrong, and in something of an undertone, as if he hoped the spirits might not hear. It is, of course, possible that there was little harm in telling the name to a foreigner, and that

1 Golden Bough, p. 245.
the low tone was to avoid being heard by prying Indian ears. It is more probable that in this more sophisticated age, he who had received a good education of the European type, looked upon the whole thing as so much hocus-pocus, and that he would have had no scruple in telling the name to anyone but was a little afraid of offending the orthodox if there should be any such about. The name, at any rate, was quite safe with me, for I forgot it by the next day and the only object I had in asking for it was for the purposes of this inquiry.

On the sixth night after the birth of a child the worship of the goddess Sashti (Sashti = sixth) is performed, for the removal of calamities, the attainment of long life and health for the new-born baby, its mother, and father. The father first worships Ganpati who is not a Vedic god and whose special function it is to remove obstacles. Ganpati seems to be a favourite god with the Marathas; in Baroda State, where the ruling house and many of the leading officials are Marathas, there is a special procession in his honour with elephants, horses, and troops, and to the drowning of the god, which takes place at the end of it, the Gaekwar family contribute a special image of their own. We are not here concerned with the meaning of this rite, but it may be remarked in passing that it is connected with agriculture. To return to the Sashti worship; the father then scatters mustard seed with the prayer:

Fly away, ye evil spirits and goblins that dwell on earth. May all the evil spirits that obstruct our life be destroyed at Shiva’s command.

Then he takes a jar of water, an emblem, as we have seen, of fertility, and worships Varuna. As Varuna is the kindly god of the sky, we may not be far wrong in supposing that the water-jar is also intended as an oblation. Next he sets up the image of the goddess and does obeisance to her. After that the goddess Durga is invoked with the “Sixteen Mothers” for the protection of the child; then the six Kritikas, Brahma, Siva, and Narayan (Vishnu), and Kartikeya, the son of Siva. We may pause here to note the extraordinary jumble
of different cults which indicate that the whole ceremony has grown, as it were, by accretion, and is in effect an example of the intermingling of the races and their religious ideas. Varuna is a purely Vedic god whose worship in the temples has completely disappeared and who is no more to the Hindu of to-day than Apollo or Athene to ourselves. Brahma, Siva, and Vishnu make up, of course, the post-Vedic Trimurti, and though Siva exists in Vedic literature as Rudra the Storm-god, and Vishnu also appears as a minor deity, not distinguished by avatars, the Trimurti as such is a conception of Upanishadic times, of those times when religious speculation and philosophy had taken the place of the earlier and simpler Nature worship of the Aryans. Finally, both Ganpati and Durga (Kali) appear to be importations from aboriginal cults grafted upon the Hindu system with that easy adaptability which is so characteristic of it. Nor, as far as one can judge, is there any discrimination or order of precedence; the worship of all is necessary to the ceremony; no one deity is honoured more than another. The intermingling of these cults in so solemn a rite as the "baptism" and naming of the child shows how difficult it is to separate the one from the other in the mosaic called Hinduism, how difficult it is to say with any certainty that the aboriginal cults have had only a secondary influence on the religion, and leads us a step nearer the conviction that the roots of Hinduism are to be found in those aboriginal cults rather than in the Nature worship of the Aryan invaders.

We next arrive at what appears to be pure symbolism. A sword, a bamboo mace, a conch shell, a churning stick, Vishnu, and a plough are invoked. These articles with the exception of Vishnu, who seems to be out of place in the collection, appear to indicate a choice of professions open to a boy to whom these elaborate ceremonies mainly apply. The first three indicate the profession of arms, for the conch shell was used as a trumpet in battle and may be the appropriate accompaniment of sword and mace. Alternatively, it may be that the conch which is used in temples is meant to symbolize the profession of a priest. The plough, of course, is for agriculture. The meaning of a churning stick is more
obscure. It may have some dim reference to the churning of the Ocean to discover the amrita (Greek ἀμώρφος) of immortality and may thus signify long life. This would, however, seem to be out of keeping with the rest, were it not that Vishnu seems to be worshipped in his character of protector and preserver rather than in his more general character of the second Person of the Trimurti. It might perhaps be symbolical of cattle, and cattle in early days meant wealth. The only other explanation seems to be that the boy may belong to no particular profession and is destined for a life of domesticity; but this is hardly likely. We have to bear in mind that these rites are ancient and were invented at a time when there was not much scope for a boy’s ambition but when every able-bodied male was expected to contribute something to the social community. War was the most honourable of all professions, hardly excepting the priesthood, and though war was the special prerogative of the Kshatriya caste, it is generally agreed that enlistment for the army was not, and could not be, confined to that caste. Wealth, especially wealth in cattle, was greatly desired and there are many prayers for this particular boon. And there always remained agriculture, then as now the most important of all Indian industries.

After a long prayer to the goddess Sashti for the protection of the baby, couched in the usual form of repetition, the child is “baptized”—that is to say, the father touches his eyes with water and another long prayer to each of many gods in turn is recited. Then the father takes eleven threads and makes eleven knots in them and the nurse or mother puts this composite cord round the child’s neck. The lying-in chamber is fumigated with mustard seed, salt, and the leaves of the nim tree (Melia Indica), which is thought to have special disinfectant properties. Further worship of numerous gods follows. The Brahmans are entertained as usual and finally the tilak or so-called caste mark is put upon the baby to symbolize his reception into the community.

It is a long and elaborate ceremony, full, no doubt, of symbolism and magic. The eleven knots are for the eleven Mothers already mentioned. The knots are clearly magical.
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The idea seems to be one of entanglement and the use of knots as a charm or amulet has been noted in various parts of the world. They may be used either to injure or to benefit the patient. You may either entangle your victim so as to make him an easy prey to the evil spirits or you may entangle the spirits themselves. Frazer gives many examples of both kinds, taken from ancient Rome, from the East Indies, where knots are thought to tie up a woman in childbirth, from England and Scotland, as well as from less civilized parts. "A net, from its affinity of knots, has always been considered in Russia very efficacious against sorcerers," and again, "often a Russian amulet is merely a knotted thread. A skein of wool wound about the arms and legs is thought to ward off agues and fevers." We may perhaps allude in passing to the belief that a bracelet of grass or straw will serve—at least temporarily—as an antidote to snake-bite, as I have myself seen in South India. In this type of the ceremony the knots are evidently of the beneficent type and are intended to ward off or entangle the evil spirits who have thus to contend not only with the knots, but also with the eleven Mothers.

In the sixth month occurs the rite called Annaprasana, which celebrates the first feeding of the child with solid food. It is a Vedic ceremony, since oblations are offered to Varuna, and in Vedic times it seems that not only was flesh offered to the baby but that different kinds of food had different virtues—goat for physical prowess, partridge for saintliness, boiled rice and ghee for splendour, fish for swiftness. The natural repugnance of the Hindu to the taking of animal life which received such great stimulus from the Jain and Buddhist doctrine of ahimsa seems to have resulted in the substitution of vegetable foods, so that the food now offered is curds, ghee, and honey. As, however, the ceremony is a religious one, prayers are offered that water and plants will be kind to the boy and do him no harm.

The last of the ceremonies which concerns the infant is the shaving of the head. At the age of one year, or, according to some authorities, two, the head of the child; whether
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boy or girl, is shaven, and in the case of the boy a mantra is recited:

The razor with which Savitri the knowing one has shaven the head (or beard) of King Soma and Varuna, with that, ye Brahmans, shave his head; cause vigour, wealth, and glory to be united in him. The razor with which Pushan has shaven the beard of Brihaspati, of Agni, of Indra, for the sake of long life with that I shave thy head.

This mantra, allowing for differences in translation, is almost identical with a hymn in the Atharva Veda (vi. 68):

Savitari (the Sun) hath come with razor; come, O Vayu (the Wind) with hot water; let the Adityas, the Rudras, the Vasus wet him in accordance; do ye forethoughtful shave (the Head of) King Soma. With what razor the knowing Savitari shaved the head of King Soma, of Varuna, therewith ye priests shave it now of this man; be he rich in kine, in horses, in progeny.

So far the rite appears to be purely Vedic. All the gods invoked are Vedic gods and the mention of Soma is specially significant. There seems to be nothing which in principle might not find a place in Christian worship. That is to say, there is nothing beyond invocation and prayer, nothing that suggests either magic or superstition or is in any way referable to aboriginal beliefs. But then follows something that takes it outside the circle of the Aryan system. Someone of a kindly nature gathers the hair and buries it—in a cow stable, or near an Udambara tree (Ficus glomerata)—or in a clump of the sacred darbha grass, commending it to the care of the Vedic gods.

This is a clear instance of the belief in witchcraft, for "the notion that a man may be bewitched by means of the clipping of his hair, the paring of his nails, or any other severed portion of his person is almost world-wide and attested by evidence too ample, too familiar, and too tedious in its uniformity to be analysed at length." Even the selection of places where the hair is to be concealed has its counterpart in other parts of the world, where, as here, there is generally some religious idea connected with the place chosen—a temple or a cemetery or a lucky (i.e. auspicious)
tree. One might have expected that the Indian tree would have been the pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) but the *Ficus glomerata* has evidently some religious significance to the Marathas, since, as we have already seen, the pregnant woman lies with her head on a root of it during one of the earlier ceremonies. It is possible that, since it is not always easy to find a tree of this kind or a clump of *darbha* grass, the cow stable became sacred, for almost every house in a village will have some kind of stable for cattle, at any rate amongst the large class who own land, however minute the holding. That there is some special sanctity attaching to hair is also seen in the top-knot or *kudimi*, which is carefully preserved in the South, when the head is otherwise shaved. The practice seems to have arisen from the idea that the soul must have some outlet, the idea which caused the Egyptians to paint an eye on the corner of a sarcophagus. Or it may be that strength and therefore virility resides in the hair, as in the Samson legend, and the power of begetting a son is all-important to the Hindu.

The great ceremony of initiation with the sacred thread which takes place on the eve of manhood may be compared with the rite of confirmation in Christian lands, but it also suggests some affinity with those rites which are so common, and are held so sacred, among savage tribes. It was the rite which introduced the initiate into the first period of a Brahman’s life. The status of *bramhachari*, which lasted for at least twelve years, was to be followed by that of *grihasta*, or householder, of *vanaprasta* when the mature man, having passed middle age, should return to meditation in the forest, subsisting there by what Nature provided, and lastly of Ascetic or Sannyasi when, having renounced the world, he was required to subsist on charity alone. There was in this a gradual relaxation of worldly ties; it was admitted that the man, having first acquired knowledge, should have the opportunity of procuring a son, both to carry on the family name and also to ensure a safe passage for the soul of his father to the other world. But after that the conception that this world was only *Maya*, a transitory illusion, was fully borne out by the injunction to separate
himself from the world and gradually to prepare himself for the next, the only real life. It was an attempt to live up to an ideal and like most such attempts it was only partially realized, for it was never strictly carried out, and in the fourth century B.C. at the time of the Maurya Empire it had practically been discarded under the pressure of worldly affairs.

Whatever may have been the composition of the rite in very early times, it was evidently modified as caste developed, for it is laid down in the Grihya Sutras that initiation should take place in the case of a Brahman in the eighth year, of a Kshatriya in the eleventh, of a Vaisya in the twelfth. The time may, however, be extended to the sixteenth, twentieth, and twenty-fourth respectively, but if the youth has not even then been initiated, he incurs the terrible penalty of excommunication and to be free again must perform expiatory sacrifices. It has been suggested that these ages were laid down on the assumption of varying degrees of precocity but, having regard to the practice of primitive peoples, it is more likely that they have some mystic significance, and Apastamba, who lived in the age of the Sutras, ascribed to 600–200 B.C., lays down that the age of eight is connected with long life, of eleven with splendour, and of twelve with prosperity. This is appropriate enough if we consider the callings allotted to the three castes, but we cannot resist the impression that Apastamba was arguing on a posteriori lines and that he associated with the castes those temporal benefits that seemed most appropriate. And this sort of differentiation persists in other respects. Thus the Brahman should be initiated in spring, the Kshatriya in summer, and the Vaisya in autumn. It is difficult to explain these seasons except on a somewhat fantastic hypothesis. The spring is the season of early vigour and might on that account be thought appropriate to the Brahman, who was obliged to bring to the study of metaphysics all the freshness and physical capacity of youth. The Kshatriya, the kingly and warrior caste, might well be represented by summer when the sun is most powerful, and autumn is the season of the garnering of the harvest,
which is pre-eminently the wealth and therefore the prosperity of an agricultural country and particularly of the Vaisya caste, whose original occupation was agriculture. On the other hand, the early Hindu mind has a noticeable predilection for categories; it is fond of arranging its ideas in sets of three or five or whatever number may seem convenient and this attribution of the seasons may be nothing more than a fanciful arrangement beginning with the highest caste and the earliest season. This, like the ages, seems to be a forced attempt at symmetry. For at the age of eight there can have been no serious study, nor could it have made much difference whether it was begun at eight or at eleven and a bright boy of eight would soon overtake a dull boy of eleven. But in order to obtain the requisite number—neither more nor less—the old sages seem at times to do violence to their own sense of logic, to introduce an unnecessary factor or to omit a necessary one.

If we are seeking a utilitarian explanation, and dislike the rather vague suggestion of a mysticism, the meaning of which we do not know, there seems to be some force in the suggestion that the ages correspond to the knowledge which each caste was expected to acquire. The Brahman, concerned with metaphysics and the non-phenomenal world, must begin his studies early; the Kshatriya, who had the difficult task of learning to rule and to lead armies, yet had what was accounted a less difficult task than the Brahman and could begin his education later, while the Vaisya, concerned mainly with agriculture and his private property, could put it off till even later. For education began with the initiation. Until a comparatively late time it was the custom "to consult the forest dwellers," that is, the Brahmans who had entered the third stage of life; "upon high political matters; and in the Law Courts the sacred law was stated by Brahman assessors," so that in this sense the Kshatriya relied upon the Brahman even in his own domain.

On the appointed day, which is determined by the astrologer, a social gathering is held and the initiate is feasted. His head is then shaved and he is bathed and clothed in a
garment which has been spun and woven in a single day to
the accompaniment of a mantra:

The goddesses who spun, who wove, who spread out and who
drew out the skirts on both sides, may those goddesses clothe
thee with long life. Blessed with life put on this garment. Dress
him, through this garment prolong his life to a hundred years;
Brihaspati has given this garment to King Soma to put on.
Mayst thou live to old age; put on the garment; be a protector
of humanity against imprecation. Live a hundred years full of
vigour; clothe thyself in the increase of wealth.

This part of the ceremony appears to have been transferred
from a rite of babyhood and the verses are those of the
Atharva Veda to which reference has already been made.
There follows the investiture with the girdle which, following
the differentiation principle, should be of kusa grass for
a Brahman, a bowstring for a Kshatriya, and a woollen
thread for a Vaisya. The choice of these materials is here
obvious, for kusa grass is commonly used in religious rites
and the other two explain themselves. The girdle is wound
thrice round the boy to signify that he must study the Sam-
hitas, the Brahmanas, and the Upanishads. The teacher
chants:

Here she has come to us who drives away sin, purifying our
guard and our protection: bringing us strength by the power
of the indrawing and expelling of the breath: the sister of the
gods, this blessed girdle.

The novice is then given a skin for an outer garment,
antelope for a Brahman, spotted deer for a Kshatriya, and
goat for a Vaisya. The antelope is supposed to bestow the
gift of memory and it has been suggested that the animal
has or is thought to have some special electric power. The
other animals probably have some mystic significance,
exactly what is not evident. The gift of memory is embodied
in the verse recited:

May Aditi gird thy loins, that thou mayst study the Veda for
the sake of wisdom and belief, remembering what thou hast
learned for the sake of holiness and holy lustre.
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The boy is then committed to the care of the gods with prayers which differ according to caste.

Next the boy is invested with a staff, the wood of which differs as usual with the caste, and it is said to symbolize a long sacrificial period. It should reach the tip of the nose for a Brahman, the forehead for a Kshatriya, and the crown of the head for a Vaisya. It is said that the length of the staff varies with what is supposed to be the stature of the boy, but it seems unlikely that the ancient sages would have assumed a stature in defiance of what was evidently the fact, that the Brahman boy was not always—nor perhaps even more often—the tallest, nor a Vaisya the shortest. If we consider the peculiar sanctity of the staff which is said to represent the control which a student should exercise over thoughts, words, and actions and also during a long sacrificial period, it seems more probable that the length of it was determined by something more mystical than mere physical stature.

Now the Hindu divides up the psychic part of man into three gunas or qualities, Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, or Truth (Reality), Passion, and Darkness (Ignorance), and the Brahman was held to have a larger share of the highest of these. And according to the law of Karma, coupled with the idea of transmigration, your deeds in the present existence will determine what your new existence shall be, whether you will be born again in a lower or a higher sphere. And the highest state you can attain is that of the Brahman, to whom, as we saw, are ascribed almost divine attributes. But since the staff symbolizes a sacrificial or, one may say, a disciplinary period, it is possible that is signifies the relative time which it should ideally take the three castes to attain to that state which will give the best chance of what we may call promotion in the next life. The Brahman being already endowed with a large share of Sattva would require less discipline than the Kshatriya, over whom Rajas holds sway, that is, passion in the larger sense in which St. Paul uses the word when he says "of like passions with ourselves," and the Vaisya would in the philosophical sense be more largely compounded of Tamas. If such an explanation sounds
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fantastic, one must remember that the ceremony is ancient, that the difference in the states is clearly symbolical, and that primitive man has many curious ways of symbolic representation. It may be objected that we have no right to import esoteric ideas into ancient practices; we have, however, unfortunately no means of dating either the ceremony itself or any modifications of it. It is at any rate clear that caste has taken definite shape and that the order had been determined, so that the outward and visible sign may well express the inward grace that is allotted to the several castes at some period when these ideas had become established.

The boy then receives a new name and is taught the duties of his new life:

Put fuel on the fire. Cleanse with water. Do service. Sleep not in the daytime.

In other words he must prepare himself for discipline during his studenthood by doing the menial duties of the house as a servant.

The next step is to inculcate the path of virtue and right living. The teacher touches the boy’s breast with his finger and repeats a prayer which is, in effect, that the boy may become one with himself. There is here more than a hint of primitive practices. We are told that among certain uncivilized or primitive tribes the teacher touches the breast of the novice and thereby transmits to him a portion of his own spirit. The practice seems to be more or less connected with what Frazer calls the doctrine of the “external soul,” which conceives that besides the soul which is part of himself a man has another soul which can be parted from him and can enter into another envelope, perhaps a bear or a wolf. The whole idea is not unconnected with totemism. One recalls the story in St. Luke. “Somebody,” said Jesus, “hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.”

And so with further prayers to Vedic gods the boy is prepared for the bestowal of the sacred thread which is the symbol of his adoption into the caste. This thread, which is worn over the left shoulder, is a typical example of what I have called a passion for symmetrical classification. It
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is composed of sets of three: three threads each three strands and so on. These signify various spiritual conceptions, the triple nature of the spirit, the triple nature of matter, the divine Trimurti (Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva), mind, speech, and body, and the triple control over them. The thread is, in fact, to remind the boy of all those things which concern right living; it is at once the badge of his caste and the guide of his actions. It may be compared to the cross which many Christian priests wear both as a reminder to themselves of their calling and as a profession of their faith to others.

It is at this ceremony that the initiate learns from his father the Gayatri, the most sacred of all mantras, and it is perhaps this part of the ceremony which most lingers in the memory of an eye-witness. The boy is seated upon his father’s knee and the two are covered with a cloth while the holy syllables are whispered into the child’s right ear, which thereby takes on a sacredness of its own. It is a piece of intimacy between father and son—or if there be no father, then of him who stands in loco parentis—which none may hear and none may witness though all the men—and probably all the women too—may know the verses by heart.

In the olden days the novice set out on his journey to Kashi (Benares) for the twelve years of his discipline as a Bramhachari. That is now performed symbolically. He goes round the company begging for alms and receiving their blessings, and goes down the street, which is appropriately marked to represent the rivers he will have to cross. The discipline he will have to undergo now is probably that of the High School or other modern institution, but it is expected of him that his whole life shall be lived in the atmosphere of self-discipline and virtue and in communion with the Supreme, which it is the object of the ceremony to inculcate.

I have dealt with this ceremony at some length, not only because it is the most important in a man’s life, seeing that it is the one which gives him personality and introduces him to the discipline of life, but also because of the various points of interest contained in it. There is no reason to doubt that the ceremony as we have it now is an Aryan rite. The
constant invocation of the Aryan gods would alone be sufficient to show that. But the continual differentiation of the castes shows that it must have been greatly modified at a time when the caste system had taken shape, and whatever may have been the primeval origin of caste, no one, so far as I am aware, disputes that the elaborate classification was in essence an Aryan work, or that the development of caste was largely due to Aryan influence. There are also traces of other factors. The inculcation of virtue and right living, and especially the recognition of the world as a transitory pilgrimage, are Upanishadic in character. No doubt the Upanishads are rather metaphysical than ethical, but the conception of the Universe which they contain leads naturally to the speculation of another world to which this present life is only a preliminary, and that again would suggest the means whereby man can obtain salvation. With all that, however, it is surely startling to find here and there distinct traces of the old aboriginal superstition. Apart from the references to the Atharva Veda, which, as we have seen, is a compound of aboriginal or at least Dravidian magic with the Aryan Nature worship, but which enters more intimately into the lives of the people than either of the other three, there are indications of superstitions which to-day are associated with primitive tribes, but which in times of which we are treating may well be compatible with some degree of material civilization. It is not suggested that the Aryans themselves were very highly civilized. We must get rid of the notion, if any such exists, that they had jumped straight into the developed civilization of, let us say, the Māurya Empire, and it is difficult to discard the idea that they were in much the same relation to the savage inhabitants as were Caesar’s Romans to the barbarians of Germany. They were, in fact, little, if at all, superior to the more advanced of the peoples whom they conquered or displaced. There would, therefore, be nothing surprising, if they, coming in contact with barbarian ideas and superstitions, accepted them and incorporated them into the system, and this is what in the case of the Atharva Veda they seem to have done. At the same time, we must remember
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that while it is not impossible but on the contrary quite probable that they were not unacquainted with magic and superstition, these things occupy little or no place in the system of which we have so much written evidence. And when we are dealing with a people in whose make-up there is so much of the pre-Aryan element, it is far more probable that these magical traces are due to the survival of the older cults than that they formed part of the Aryan ritual. It is hardly possible to trace the evolution of the ritual to its present form, because such matters as historical development did not appeal to Hindu writers. Development, however, there must have been, if only because of the frequent mention of caste, which must have hardened into its well-known form after the introduction of the rite.

What does all this prove? Not very much, perhaps, but in groping after proofs one must not disregard indications. There is first the fact that initiation ceremonies are common among very many, if not most, primitive peoples. Examples are superfluous, since the fact can be verified by so many works on fetishism, magic, totemism, and the like. And these ceremonies are confined to boys and usually take place at the time of puberty. Next we have the not uncommon idea that a man must be "born again": that is to say, he enters upon a phase of life so new and so different that it may be almost described as a physical rebirth. The first birth—the natural one—introduces the baby to the life of the world; the second, with its ceremonies of initiation, "seems to be meant to admit the youth into the life of the clan." Of course, as evolution proceeded some of these customs became sublimated, so that what was originally a crude rite dealing in blood and mutilation, became a symbolic rite in which, while the idea of magic remained, it was only hinted at rather than expressly performed. We have seen an indication of this in the symbolic journey to Kasi, with the intervening rivers represented by chalk lines in the road. We have further the fact that these initiation ceremonies still exist in India, and in their cruder form. "Amongst the Gonds, a non-Aryan race of central India . . . one of the ceremonies at their installation (i.e. of the Rajas) is the "touching of their
foreheads with a drop of blood, drawn from the body of a pure aborigine of the tribe they belong to.\footnote{1}"

Now if we consider the widespread belief in witchcraft and evil spirits which enters so largely into the every-day religion of the masses, surely it must be admitted that aboriginal beliefs have had more influence in building up the structure of popular Hinduism than has been generally allowed. Although it is—and may always be—impossible to prove that the foundations of these ancient customs are to be found in non-Aryan cults, these indications show that there is a very large degree of probability that such is the case. It may be that the Aryans too had their rites connected with infancy and puberty; what is suggested here is that they laid the superstructure upon something that they found there already, and that these initiatory rites, like caste, the sanctity of the cow and untouchability, are evolved from or built upon an archaic foundation peculiar to the country because invented by the aboriginal inhabitants or by their Dravidian successors. In this view the primitive elements are of primary, not of secondary, importance. Much, no doubt, of the original customs has disappeared, especially since the time when metaphysical speculation took the place of the old Nature worship and the ceremonies took on a deeper meaning, but much remained and it is a question whether in the popular view the invocations to Vedic gods and the charms and symbols intended to guard against evil spirits are not more important than the esoteric and philosophical side of the rites. In our own marriage service, though it is adapted to Christian usage, we still retain the Roman idea of the 
\textit{patria potestas}, so that the woman is expected to “obey the man” and is “given away” by a male relative, thereby indicating that she is in perpetual tutelage and passes from that of her father to that of her husband. The mere fact that she changes her name means that she renounces the family in which she was born to become a member of that into which she marries.

\footnote{1} Frazer: \textit{Totemism and Exogamy}, vol. i, p. 43.
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We may now conveniently pass to the marriage ceremony. Much has been heard of the evils of child-marriage in India, which is sometimes carried to extreme lengths and sometimes results in the physical deterioration of both parents. What lies at the root of this child-marriage is the almost excessive respect for female chastity. In India, as everywhere else, much more latitude is allowed to the man than to the woman; what is a mere peccadillo in him becomes in her a social crime. Hence it was very early regarded as sinful for a father to allow his daughter to attain puberty without being betrothed, for to attain to such a state was to expose her to unnecessary temptation. Betrothal is generally regarded as equivalent to marriage, though naturally consummation does not take place till both parties are of a fit age. But marriage itself is a sacrament; husband and wife are united, not "until death them do part" but afterwards also, and in this view we can see why widow remarriage is regarded with abhorrence by the orthodox. Nor is it only the men who object; "In the communities which prohibit widow marriage, widows themselves are unwilling to marry. In the event of their having children any suggestion for remarriage is taken as an insult."¹ For though a man may marry more than one wife (he does not often do so) a woman cannot marry more than one husband, unless she belongs to that very rare class which practises polyandry. The woman is still a wife, married to her dead husband, and he is none the less her husband because they have never lived together. Divorce was, until very recently, unknown, and if the feeling has to any extent broken down, it is under the influence of Western ideas and under the pressure of modern conditions.

The evils of child-marriage are universally recognized by Europe—and more and more by educated Indians. Why then does the custom persist, and why was there such strenuous opposition to the Sarda Act which raised the Age of Consent, an Act which has been described by a learned Mysore Brahman as "striking at the root of Hindu religion and the time-honoured usages."² Probably there

¹ Ananta Krishna Iyer: Mysore Tribes and Castes, p. 212.
² Ibid., p. 241.
are four main reasons. In the first place the custom has become so firmly rooted that it is very difficult to eradicate if from the minds of the masses; it is as though polygamy was suddenly to be allowed by English law. It may well be that polygamy is the natural law; never the less, not only would the Church oppose such a measure with all its strength, but there would be very few to take advantage of it, partly, no doubt, for financial reasons, but chiefly because the idea of a legalized plurality of wives would destroy a custom of centuries. Secondly, it is at all times and everywhere, but specially in the East, difficult to grasp the strength of a tradition. That the law was laid down centuries ago for a state of society, wholly unlike that of to-day makes no difference; there is the law, divinely given, and it is impious to dispute the authentic Word of God. That is a sentiment which is exemplified again and again in English practice. It is enough that the text is there and that it must be obeyed, and if two texts are contradictory, much ingenuity is spent on trying to reconcile them or to explain away the more inconvenient, instead of following the dictates of common sense and of conscience. Then there is the intense desire of the Hindu for a son; life is short and uncertain. If you marry an immature girl, you cannot hope for issue until at least a year after she has become mature and in that time much may happen. And if the child should be a girl, there is another period of weary waiting. But why not choose a girl who is already mature? If it be answered that mature girls are difficult to find it is also true that suitable boys are often not easily obtainable. And so we are led to our main reason for the practice. Physical considerations took a very subordinate place in the conceptions of early and especially of Upanishadic teaching. The doctrine of Maya, which taught that the whole world may be an illusion, suggested as a corollary that the whole duty of man was to apply himself to things of the spirit. That this phenomenal illusory world was there was not denied; the world was, in fact, very real and men must conduct themselves accordingly. There was, therefore, no inconsistency in praying for long life and material wealth in cattle and sons. The idea of
celibacy never appealed to the Hindu mind; it was in fact condemned on religious grounds. It was the plain duty of man to be fruitful and multiply and to replenish the earth, as the book of Genesis puts it. And so three out of the four periods into which human life was divided were given up to the learning of spiritual things or to the application of that knowledge with a view to the Hereafter. The Hindu is far more in accord with St. Paul's teaching than is the ordinary modern Christian. But woman was an inferior creature, as, until recently, she has always been in all countries and in all ages. She was hardly to be placed in the same category as man, and in spite of all that was said and done in the name of chivalry, in spite of such eulogies as we find in the Indian Epics, she was in a completely subordinate position. It did not, therefore, matter what happened to her, so long as she fulfilled her function of ministering to man's spiritual and material needs. The facts that early maternity was calculated to injure her health and that infant mortality was appallingly high were not impressive, for the woman could be used to produce more children, and if children died, that, in the existing state of affairs, was only to be expected.

This is neither to defend the custom nor to apologize for it. It is simply an attempt to explain why it should have become so ingrained a custom that any attempt to alter it meets with strong opposition. It is not unlikely that the practice of becoming Sati is based upon much the same foundations. The woman, being of so little account, had no real existence separate from the man. She was one with him, in a much more intimate sense than the Christian one. Being, as already explained, a wife not for time but for eternity, she unites soul to soul in a manner not contemplated by Western philosophy. This custom of child-marriage, then, has hardened into a tradition which, like many other traditions, has survived when the meaning and origin of them has been lost or forgotten. The epidemic of child marriages which took place after the passing of the Sarda Act and before it came into operation may have been partly due to the influence of the priests and other interested parties who feared
to lose their fees and perquisites, but it is a misreading of the Indian character not to attribute it in far larger measure to the break with the past and to what must have seemed an attack upon a long-cherished custom which had or appeared to have a religious sanction. The nearer the bone the sweeter the meat; the respite of six months must have seemed a golden opportunity not to be missed before the blow fell. There is no reason to suppose that the orthodox were not perfectly sincere in their opposition; the laws of Manu, which may be compared with what the Mosaic law means to the Jew, ordain that a man of thirty should marry a girl of twelve and a man of twenty-four a girl of eight. "One should give a girl in marriage according to rule to that (suitor) who is of (good) family, handsome and of like (caste) even though she has not reached (the age of puberty)." Other commentators even say that she should be given to her husband while she still runs about the house naked. But "twelve years seems to be the limit. If unmarried at that age the girl is disgraced and her father has sinned." That is the root of the matter. No appeal to humanity, to physiological cruelty, to the rights of women, to all that appeals to the cultured conscience is likely to make any but very slow headway, as long as it is believed that "her father has sinned."

The words, however, which are quoted from a Note of Dr. Burnell are not accurate. The idea of sin, as understood in Christian countries like the idea of atonement and vicarious redemption, is foreign to Hindu conceptions and is even abhorrent to them. The Christian idea of sin seems to have an element of the personal about it; to sin is to disobey the divine law, but the offence is less against the law than against the personal God who is the author of it. To the Hindu it is rather an offence against authority, which may have been divinely inspired but is not what we should call the authentic Voice of God. The Hindu naturally looks to his own sacred scriptures for guidance as we look to ours, and it is just because European writers on the subject fail to recognize the fact that they show an inability to appreciate the orthodox

*1 Burnell: The Laws of Manu, chap. ix, p. 88.
Indian point of view. Thus while Miss Eleanor Rathbone, who went to India for the special purpose of studying this and other social questions, quotes fifty-four authorities in support of her thesis, and though a fair proportion of these are Indian, she makes no reference anywhere to any texts or authorities, nor any attempt to refute them. So that what we really get is a statement of the case from the European standpoint supported by such Indian evidence as accepts it. Yet the whole case for the orthodox lies in these very texts. Do we not read that in the early days of Christianity “certain men came down from Judea” and said “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”? And this contention was thought so serious that “the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.” And there was a stormy meeting in Jerusalem. Can we not hear the modern critic say: “What nonsense! Circumcision has nothing to do with religion. It is simply a painful operation which may be necessary in a few cases but cannot be erected into a principle.” Such an argument would not have persuaded James and the others.

From this digression we may now return to the ceremonies. They are elaborate and consist of many parts but two only are essential, the invocation of the gods and the Seven Steps around the sacred fire. The family deities, the Lares and Penates, are solemnly invited; I have seen one of these curious cards of invitation couched in the same language as those directed to mortals—“Such and such gods are requested to attend the wedding of A, son of B, to C, daughter of D.” They are then worshipped; the contract is made and the exactly auspicious minute is fixed by the astrologer by an instrument of the same principle as the sandglass. When the ceremony begins the bride and bridegroom face each other on either side of a veil held up by the priests between them. Soon the dramatic moment arrives; the veil is dropped and husband and wife look upon one another for the first time. The bridegroom addresses the bride in terms of supplication, that she will look upon him as her lord, to bring him happiness and, still more important, to bear him sons.
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Then follows the Kanyadana, when the girl is given away by her father or other near male relative. The bridegroom promises to love, comfort, and honour her, and to keep her in sickness and in health. The bride makes no similar promise, probably because as she is simply the property of the bridegroom, made over to his care in place of her father’s, and, because she has been taught to look upon her husband as a kind of god, to be borne with in vice as well as in virtue, there is no necessity for such a promise. The pair then exchange garlands and the bridegroom ties the Mangala Sutra, a necklace of gold and glass beads, round the bride’s neck. This corresponds to the wedding ring and as long as it is worn proclaims that the man is still alive, for, when he dies, it is removed and the wife by its absence equally proclaims that she is a widow. The Vivah Homa or marital sacrifice comes next. The man prays to Agni, the god of fire, to protect him and his wife from all dangers and to grant them wealth and children, at the same time flinging oblations of fried rice into the fire. He then takes the bride’s hand and they walk round it while he says:

O my wife, thou art Rik, I am Saman (alluding to the Vedas); I am the sky and thou the Earth; I am the seed and thou the soil; we shall love each other and have both wealth and children. May we live long!

Near the sacred fire and to the north of it are placed seven heaps of rice and as the woman places her foot upon each heap in turn, the bridegroom chants the appropriate mantras—one for food, two for strength, three for wealth, four for happiness, five for children, six for pleasure. The seventh step is the irrevocable one; they are now man and wife for all time and beyond it. Professor Washburn Hopkins, apparently copying or basing himself upon Oldenberg, gives a rather different version—one for sap, two for juice, three for prosperity, four for comfort, five for cattle, six for the seasons. “Friend, be with seven steps mine.” Mrs. Stevenson, however, says that all the pandits whom she consulted reject this and give the version substantially as I have given it.
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The wedding proper is now over. But the couple leave the sacrificial fire to observe the constellation of the Sapta Rishis, which we call the Great Bear. There is in this some hint of astrology, in which, of course, most Hindus have implicit faith. There is usually a wedding season, beginning in Chaitra or April–May, and it is possible—though I have not been able to verify it—that weddings are fixed at a time of the year when with a practical certainty of a clear sky the constellation is almost certainly visible. But this observation is not an essential part of the marriage. It is presumably only for luck, and those who attach no importance to it are free to ignore it. There follows, or should follow, if the venue has not been changed to the bride’s house, the entry into the man’s house, where he sacrifices to Agni, evidently as the guardian of the domestic hearth. After this there is a very curious episode. A big basket of cane is placed on the head of the girl’s parents, while she sits on their lap. There is evidently some mystic significance in this basket, though what it is it is hard to discover. It is said to be for the long life of the race, but what connection there is between long life and a basket is not obvious. A basket is frequently used for grain, and in a country where the harvest is the chief source of wealth, the receptacle may perhaps symbolize prosperity. Or again, the idea of confining the soul or souls in some kind of vessel is not unknown among savage tribes, and it may be that the basket, a relic of an outworn superstition, is meant to contain the spirit of unborn generations within the compass of the newly married pair, but as the man takes part in the episode and as the basket is placed on the heads of the bride’s parents, though by sitting on their knees she may be thought to be within its influence, the suggestion would seem to be too far-fetched, even among others which are well authenticated and yet seem to be obscure. The whole ceremony ends with the renaming of the girl. There is no special significance in this. It only means that henceforward the girl has abandoned her own family and has been received into her husband’s.

There is in all this long ceremony a very genuine appreciation of the solemnity of the occasion and a very real devotion
to the Deity who watches over the destinies of mankind. There is very little in the ceremonies which can be ascribed to pre-Vedic superstition and the most anxious care is taken, so far as man can, to provide for the future. The object is to secure happiness, and if the result is much what it is in more sophisticated countries at least it can be said that the measure of happiness is neither less nor more than it is elsewhere.

The general word for funeral ceremonies is Shraddha, signifying an act of faith or of veneration in honour of the dead. Although there are strong indications in the Rig-Veda that in those early times the practice was to bury, it is now the universal custom to burn. A verse in the Rig-Veda says:

Open thy arms, O Earth, receive the dead;
With gentle pressure and with loving welcome
Enshroud him tenderly, even as a mother
Folds her soft vestment round the child she loves. ¹

This change of custom seems to have arisen from a change in the conception of the soul. So long as the soul is conceived as inseparable from the body, an idea which is implicit, if not explicit, in the teaching of St. Paul and in the book of Job, it was natural to think of soul and body lying together in the earth, until that day when both should be called to a resurrection. But as the idea of transmigration gained ground it was clear that there could be no such close affinity with the body. The soul was released by death, to be reborn in a new envelope. It was conceived, however, as an intermediate ethereal body until the time duly arrived for rebirth. The original body was thus like the chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged, an empty shell which has fulfilled its function and can now be cast away. It can and should be burnt for several practical reasons. It is hardly to be supposed that the modern notion of hygiene entered into the calculations of ancient peoples when they abandoned burial for burning, for it is only of late that Europe has discovered a fact which now appears to be self-evident. But many rivers are held to be sacred in India and it is a

¹ Rig-Veda, x. 18.
common practice to consign the dead to the holy waters. You could not convey a corpse long distances in a country like India, especially in the days of very slow transport, for the very swift decomposition makes it necessary that the funeral should follow the death as soon as possible. Moreover, it is not difficult to convey a handful of ashes over long distances and time is of no consequence. The ashes could be kept for a convenient season when a pilgrimage is made either to Kasi or to some other holy place such as Nasik in the West or Kanchi (Conjivaram) in the South. But there is little doubt that what really brought about the change was the change in religious thought and that practical advantages had but a slight, if any, influence. They were wholly secondary and subordinate—as it were accidental. Theosophists hold that the assumption of the new body varies with the dissolution of the old and that as it is important that the soul should have a local habitation as soon as possible, the sooner the old shell is dissolved the better. And given the theory of transmigration there is something to be said for the logic of this belief. For the soul is a spark of the Infinite—the Atman—and is seeking to attach itself and become absorbed into the Infinite. It ought not, therefore, to be left to wander about in space longer than need be. The idea that the assumption of the new body varies in time with the dissolution of the old recalls the ancient Egyptian notion that the soul co-exists with the body from which arose the practice of mumification and also of painting an eye on the sarcophagus as well as of leaving figurines in the tomb to represent the more corruptible flesh.

But whatever may have been the object of thus substituting burning for burial, the underlying conception of the Hindu funeral rites is ancestor worship which is prevalent all over the world. Every Indian administrator must have experienced the demand for a holiday “to celebrate my father’s (or mother’s) anniversary.” And nothing is more sedulously kept by a pious son than the yearly worship of the ancestral manes. Mr. William Crooke says that the idea of an intermediate body is a later fancy of more subtle intellects (it certainly has the flavour of Upanishadic mysticism), and
that the whole funeral rite, especially the offering of Pindas or cakes to the spirit of the departed, was based upon the practice, common among undeveloped peoples, of feeding the dead. "Like the habit of dressing the dead in his best clothes, it probably originated in the selfish but not unkindly desire to induce the perturbed spirit to rest in the grave and not come plaguing the living for food and raiment." ¹ Naturally Hinduism in the long course of its evolution has put a more subtle interpretation upon this crude idea but the custom remains not only among the uneducated but among the highest intellects of those who call themselves Hindus and the closeness of relationship to a deceased man is reckoned by his right to offer the pinda.

There are three kinds of Shraddhas—immediate, intermediate, and final. The first are intended, as I have said, to furnish a new body for the dead, or, more accurately, to find a new habitation for the soul; the second to raise him from this evil world, the abode of demons and evil spirits, to the ancestral regions where he joins the manes of departed ancestors. When the final stage is reached, the departed spirit, by the intercession and devotion of the survivors, reaches the abode of eternal bliss or is for ever freed from the woes, the misery, or the evils to which human nature is exposed. Considered objectively, there is here a distinct resemblance to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, with this notable difference—that there is no place in the Hindu system for an eternal hell. The soul passes from the present existence to a place of trial or Purgatory and eventually obtains release in Heaven.

Shraddhas may be offered to three ancestors together, in which case they are called Parvana, or to one only, when they go by the name of Ekodishta (in the sight of one). And again they may be Nitya (of obligation), or Naimittik (occasional), or Kamya (desire-accomplishing). The Nitya Shraddha is performed on fixed days—every day or at the new moon—Naimittik is for uncertain times, such as the birth of a son. Kamya is performed with a specific object or to gratify and fulfil a special desire. All these Shraddhas have

¹ Frazer: *Journal Anthropological Institute*, vol. xv, p. 74.
two features in common—the offering of food to the dead and the feeding of living Brahmins. There are elaborate rules laid down for the seasons at which they should be performed and for the kind of Brahmins to be invited and to be avoided. These may be roughly classified as on the one hand the devout, the pious, and those learned in religion, and on the other the physically deformed and the morally reprobate, including the younger brother who is married before his elder, on the ground, we may suppose, of spiritual pride. “To feed one learned Brahman is better than feeding a million men ignorant of the Veda,” but to invite those whom the Law prohibits is to divert the sacrifice intended for the manes of the departed to the jaws of demons and evil spirits. A Brahman should never refuse an invitation; if he fails to attend, his punishment is to be reborn as a hog. Great care too must be taken as to the seating of the guests; the place must slope to the South, for that is the abode of Yama, the god of the dead. The spirits are then invoked and food and water are offered, after which they are politely requested to withdraw, and the Brahmins, being fed, depart also.

All these various ceremonies are Vedic or post-Vedic; that much everyone would acknowledge. But they seem to go further back than that and many points are reminiscent of the ancient savage superstition which peopled the world with evil spirits and demons who were ever on the watch for an opportunity to injure the human race. In the course of time, and especially after the great change which converted the early Nature worship into metaphysical speculation, the cruder notions took on a new esoteric meaning, and, as the years went on, this meaning itself grew more and more indistinct, until now there are thousands, perhaps millions, of Indians who do these things and do not know why they do them, just as there are thousands who listen to the Bible every Sunday and have a very limited understanding of it. The blessed word Mesopotamia is not typical of the uninstructed Christian alone. It has been laid as a reproach against Hinduism that it is not ethical. That, as a Hindu has said, may be true in the sense that Hindu writers and thinkers
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have not discussed ethics in treatises after the manner of the Greeks. But these ceremonies, even if their meaning has been obscured and even if much of it seems to us meaningless mummery, are, rightly considered, the Hindu expression of a belief in the Providence of God and the Hindu method of inculeating right living, and right thinking, according to the faith that is in them.
Esoteric Hinduism

It is a rash adventure to attempt to describe within the limits of an essay the abstruse and complicated system of esoteric Hinduism. The subtle Brahman brain has evolved it after infinite labour and even now it is full of controversial matter. The "Six Systems" alone would require a separate volume to themselves. But Hinduism like most, if not all, religions worthy of the name is based upon certain fundamental dogmata, and if we confine ourselves to these we shall get a picture at least in outline of what it means to the educated Hindu and can see how it differs from other speculations of the kind. There are, of course, many books on the subject, but most of them are too long and too learned for the average reader and too many of them enter into such detail that bewilderment is the chief result. This learned Brahman has expended his life in refuting the arguments of his predecessor and in proving that he and he alone has found the true key to salvation. That missionary, who of English writers has naturally enough the greatest interest in matters of religion, is inclined to take the subjective view and to be influenced by an intelligible bias in favour of his own faith, and as he is writing for others similarly prejudiced he is accepted as a prophet. It is, in fact, very difficult to avoid such a bias, to put away all that one has been brought up to think and to view the subject objectively, both in its social and its religious aspect. If, however, the system is constantly compared with a system in which the writer has been born and bred, which governs his life and in which he ardently believes, it is not really possible to obtain the right perspective. For it is not only the missionary or the minister of another religion who is apt to show prejudice; it peeps out in other writings, either because the writer is making—perhaps unconscious—comparisons between East and West, without making the necessary allowances, or—and more frequently—
because he or she has been content with superficialities, and has not had the inclination to look below the surface.

The Hindu system of esoteric belief rests mainly on four or five fundamental conceptions. It postulates a Universal Soul, the Paramatman, corresponding to the Western conception of the Absolute or the Unknowable. The soul of man—the individual Atman—is immortal, and being an emanation from the Universal Self, is also eternal. But during its sojourn in this world, which itself is full of impurity, it takes upon it a portion of, or is sullied by, that impurity. And as long as the individual soul is tainted with that impurity, so long is it unfit to mingle with the absolutely pure. It is, therefore, the aim of every righteous soul to obtain deliverance (Moksha) by release from the cycle of transmigration (Samsara) and so eventually by reabsorption into the Universal Self. But Hinduism abhors as childish and illogical any such ideas as vicarious atonement, whereby salvation is obtained by faith in the original sufferer coupled with repentance for individual sin. It holds a man (which word stands for the human envelope and its Atman) responsible for his own deeds and according to these deeds his next incarnation will be determined. The Atman bears no actual relation to its vehicle beyond the condition just mentioned, that the envelope is predetermined by present conduct. Just as empirical man may be carried one day in a train, the next in a boat, and the day after in a motor-car without any visible effect upon him by the nature of the vehicle, so the soul may be carried in one incarnation by a Kshatriya body, and in the next by a Brahman, if the deeds have been good, or if evil, by a Sudra. The Hindu conception differs from other conceptions in thus dissociating the Atman entirely from the body. It is not a question of the soul being the spiritual half of the body from which it is released at death but rather of the immortal part of a man, seeking to find a new envelope in which to continue its upward striving towards perfection. The Atman may thus inhabit the body of an animal which, though in its phenomenal form it cannot itself attain Moksha, may yet serve as a temporary abode.
Thus the three main tenets of esoteric Hinduism are very closely related. Karma, or the doctrine that man is master of his fate and that whatsoever he sows that he shall reap, is the determinant factor of Samsara or transmigration, which, after much toil and tribulation, leads eventually to Moksha or Salvation. But this salvation can only be obtained through the purifying of the soul from all those impurities which are too apt to result from sojourn in this world. And this salvation can only be obtained through the operation of Karma. For Karma acts both forwards and backwards, and this is often overlooked by European writers; I am what I am because of my past deeds; and I shall be what I shall be because of my present deeds.

So closely, then, are these two doctrines connected that the one may be said to depend upon the other. As your deeds, thoughts, and general conduct have been in this life so will be determined your next existence. But that next existence is based, not as we might base it, upon class or wealth or material comfort; the dock labourer will not become a duke nor the unemployed pauper a leisured millionaire. The opportunities of virtue and of vice are to be found in caste, for caste is the touchstone of Hindu society. It is, therefore, quite operat to the pariah to be born again as a Brahman, just as it is possible for a vicious Brahman to be born again as a pariah. But this doctrine of transmigration is sometimes misunderstood and misrepresented. To those who have been brought up in the belief that “God created Man in his own image” there is something abhorrent in the idea that a man could become so degraded as to be born again as an animal; for the animals are in Western eyes a lower order of creation,¹ and it savours of insult to the idea of God, if not of sacrilege, to suppose that the “image of God” could be so born into a lower order. It is difficult to get rid of the notion that a man is a man, and cannot be anything else; and that if the image of God is to be found in the human shape, it cannot be found in the shape of a lower animal. We are reminded of folk-lore tales in which the Prince

¹ The Hindu does not admit this. To him there are no superior or inferior creatures, but only a vast variety, in which God reveals Himself.
masquerades as a frog or a cat or some other beast, until someone releases the spell. It is, however, very doubtful if a Hindu would look at the matter like that. However shocking it may seem to our ideas, it may well be that the Hindu would rather be born as a cow than as a pariah, for the cow is semi-divine while the pariah is (or was) only half-human. And if you can be born as a cow, the way is open to rebirth as any other animal. And here we get also a side glance at the doctrine of Maya or Illusion; for your incarnation as an animal is not a permanent degradation from the dignity of man. As you behave in the animal form, so will be determined your next incarnation. And that may be, according to your deserts, in the form of a man; if not as a Brahman, at any rate as one of the twice born castes. It is easy to sneer cheaply at the idea, to talk in the language of Malvolio of one’s ‘grandam’s soul inhabiting a bird.’ But in principle it is the same idea as we find in the Christian doctrine of Purgatory—with, of course, essential differences in detail. The Dean of St. Paul’s in a broadcast address has defined the meaning of Purgatory and has, perhaps in a qualified manner, declared his own belief in it:

Many Christians (he says) believe in Purgatory. I am afraid there is some confusion in many minds about what the doctrine of Purgatory has meant in Christian history. It is often supposed to be the belief that we have a second chance, that those who have made no spiritual progress in this life may have the opportunity of doing better hereafter. In fact, Purgatory has meant the belief that there is an intermediate state between death and heaven. Only the Saints are pure enough to enter into the presence of God; others who are in the way of salvation need a further purification and have to endure penalties for sin before they can enter the palace of the King. To me the idea of an intermediate state has great attractions. Of how many could we say, “There is no spark of good left in him”? and of how many, “There is no seed of evil”? Do we not feel of almost everyone we have known that he is too good to be cast on the scrap-heap of the Universe, and too far from perfection to be fitted for the full vision of God? So I believe that our opportunities of training and development continue after death, and that many who have little chance of going very far in this life of the spirit here will be given wider experience hereafter.
That is exactly the attitude of esoteric Hinduism. "Only the Saints are pure enough to enter into the Presence of God." It is undoubtedly true that Hinduism has considered the possibility that there are men, however rare they may be, who can attain Moksha, that is, Salvation, without going through the refining influences called transmigration. Of course it would not speak of "entering into the Presence of God" because such a phrase implies the personality of God and the Atman or Universal Spirit has no such personality. The Saint "enters into the Presence of God" as a drop of water enters into the ocean, to be lost in the waters though still retaining some individuality as a drop. It is perhaps difficult for us to seize the idea for we can only think of individuality as something that is separate or can be separated. The Indian mind, which loves subtleties and abstractions, finds no difficulty in the conception; no substance, it would argue, loses its identity by being merged in some other substance or by taking on a different "name and form." The steel which is used in a motor-car is none the less steel because it has been given the form of a vehicle; the oxygen and hydrogen that combine to make water remain oxygen and hydrogen, and by a certain process can once again be separated into the original elements. It is childish to suppose that what you cannot see or even conceive has for that reason no existence. If you can postulate the existence of a soul of which no one can have any knowledge, there should be no difficulty in postulating also the identity of the soul, whether it be merged in the Universal Soul or it retains a separate individuality.

Both Christianity and Hinduism have seen that man being by nature imperfect is not fit to appear immediately in the "Presence of God" or to become one with Him, regarded as the Universal Soul. The one has attempted to solve the problem by the device of Purgatory, the other by that of transmigration. But neither the one nor the other regards as hopeless the possibility of ultimate perfection. That is why it is completely wrong to say, as so many have said, that the Hindu system is an endless round of births and deaths. The idea of Purgatory presupposes a single life on earth.
Imperfect man then passes to an intermediate state the conditions of which are quite unknown and the duration of which is wholly indeterminate. Dr. Matthews explains that the underlying idea is one of purification and not that of giving imperfection a second chance. At first sight this last is just what the Hindu conception appears to be, but the true interpretation is the same as the Christian one. Transmigration is in theory a step towards perfection, but whereas the Christian hope is one of steady progress towards the goal, the Hindu idea is rather that of a slippery ascent of a mountain where at any given stage the climber may slide back further than he has climbed. This idea is based upon the Hindu conception of free will. Man is master of his fate. The notion of vicarious sacrifice and atonement seems to the Hindu to interfere with the action of free will, because salvation is made to depend not upon the effort of the individual but upon something over which the man has, and can have, no control. Or, to put it in more transcendental language:

The Self or Atman is equivalent to Brahman. The individual soul is placed exactly on the same level as the Universal Soul, the natural consequence of which is that the individual partakes of the character of the One of which he is part and parcel. . . . He becomes really free, as free as the Supreme Being himself. Correctly speaking, he does not carry out the order of a different being, he takes the initiative in all matters, for it is as Atman or Brahman, who shapes the entire universe. At every step he does what he has decided to do. . . . What he wills in the stage of the Brahman, he does in the stage of the individual.¹

The envelope which the Atman inhabits, though it is determined by what went before and will be determined by the present, is itself of small importance since it is necessarily very transitory. It is the hope of every good man to be born again into a state which brings him a step nearer his ultimate goal of Release. It is not really a question of rewards and punishments as they are understood in the West. The underlying conception is not the material advantage to be derived from social position, from wealth, or from the

¹ Chakravarti: The Philosophy of the Upanishads, p. 237.
opportunity of power. Nor does it suggest the hope of any immediate or definite spiritual reward; it is a step in progress, not the winning of a prize or the incurring of a penalty. For the doctrine of the three Gunas or Qualities here comes into play. The world is pervaded by Sattva (Light or Truth) by Rajas (Passion), and by Tamas (Darkness or Ignorance)

These three bind down
The changeless spirit in the changeful flesh,
Whereof sweet softfastness by purity
Living unsullied and enlightened, binds
The sinless soul to happiness and truth.
And Passion being akin to appetite;
And breeding impulse and propensity.
Binds the Embodied soul, O Kunti's son,
By tie of works. But Ignorance, begot
Of Darkness, blinding mortal men, binds down
Their souls to stupor, sloth and drowsiness.¹

These qualities are within the compass of every individual soul. In practice the more advanced were placed in a better position, and this perhaps led to the idea, now apparently discarded, that to be born again in a higher caste was an advantage. That, however, was a departure from the esoteric, philosophical standpoint, a concession as it were to popular comprehension. From the wider point of view every man has an equal opportunity but there is no promise of a continuous advance. The progress towards perfection is a difficult ascent and it is recognized that a virtuous man may yet be a backslider in a later incarnation which may, therefore, be something lower in the scale, and, having thrown away his advantage, he will have to recover his lost ground. On the same principle it is open even to the most vicious man, plunged though he be in Darkness and Ignorance, to attain to perfection by a super-saintly life; his previous imperfections have already been atoned for by his previous birth, and he starts again, with a handicap, no doubt, but with his past put away as it were with a clean slate.

While, therefore, it remains true that the envelope is of small importance, Hindu philosophy has not been able

¹ Bhagavad Gita, xiv (Edwin Arnold: The Song Celestial).
altogether to divorce the Atman from its temporary dwelling; it does allow that a life on earth is to some extent conditioned by the form it takes, but that form is neither a reward nor a punishment but an opportunity. Hence it is that the doctrine of Karma has a wider implication. For not only is it the determinant factor of a man’s life in the present and in the future, but it is also the Hindu way of accounting for the existence of evil in the world, that baffling problem that seems so inconsistent with an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving God. The earlier form of Hindu philosophy, as already explained, does not postulate a personal God, but an abstraction, an Atman, the only Reality, without form or substance, transcendent and immanent, without qualities or attributes, of whom nothing can be predicated but that “it is.” Hinduism seeks to solve the problem by the theory of Duality. Freedom does not necessarily imply perfection. The Universal Soul is indeed free from evil, but the individual Soul retains its individuality until it attains perfection and is fit to be merged in the Atman. Until that stage is reached man is necessarily imperfect, and whatever is imperfect must have in it something of evil. But imperfection and therefore evil is the result of a man’s own deeds and according to his deeds so is his Karma. He is free to compass his own destruction as he is free to achieve his own salvation, and as long as there is free will, so long will there be the possibility of evil. “Error,” says Professor Radhakrishnan, “is the denial by the ego of the supremacy of the whole.” Evil, therefore, does not depend upon any outside Principle, by whatever name it may be called, neither does it depend upon an unseen Force whose actions are inscrutable and who permits it for ends that pass man’s reasoning powers. It is inherent in man. It is what might be called “original sin,” not in the sense that man has derived his sinful nature from something which happened to some primeval ancestor but because every man is born imperfect and imperfection is Evil. For the root of imperfection is ignorance and every man must at birth be ignorant. It is only during the course of his life that he can attain by his own effort to the perfection which is Atman or to the perfect
knowledge of Atman which enables him to be purged of
imperfection. Man was left to make what he could of the
phenomenal world. What he made of it might be good or
evil, in so far as he could control it. He could not control the
elements, nor in those days the forces of Nature, and he never
supposed that he could.

But evil in the world was not brought about by natural
calamities. The conception of the Universal Soul superseded
the older idea of gods who presided over different depart-
ments and whose caprice or anger might be averted by
judicious sacrifices. Calamities such as flood or fire or storm
were to be regarded simply as incidents in a phenomenal
world and the phenomenal world under the doctrine of
Maya was of very small account. The evil in the world, the
evil that really mattered, was the "evil thoughts, murders,
adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies"
which not only defiled the man but in the aggregate
the whole world. These things determined the Karma of a
man—these and of course their opposites—and the sum
total of Karma became the measure of the world's progress
towards salvation.

The case of infants and young people, however, presents
a difficulty. No attempt is made to account for the inequality
of the duration of human life. It can hardly have escaped
notice that different spans of life are allotted to different
individuals, that some live but a few months and others many
years. That is a mystery which no one has ever solved.
The Christian speaks of the inscrutable Will of God; the
fatalist attributes it to some shadowy conception called
Fate, but makes no effort to explain how Fate works or
why. The Hindu simply accepts the fact and fits it into his
scheme as best he may. But there is no special presumption
of innocence of the infant on the ground that there has been
no time for the development of evil or vice. One is tempted
to say that the position is one of a neutral "non-proven." If
the baby or the boy dies he will be born again and though
he cannot have shaped his destiny by any actions in that
existence, there may be a carry-over from the previous one,
so that in any subsequent incarnation he is still able to make,
his way towards perfection or he may slide downhill to make up leeway in the following one. But that explanation does not satisfy the Hindu mind. It cannot credit an all-wise and purposive Spirit with the aimless creation of a life that leads nowhere, to be thrown on the scrap-heap as a photographer might throw away a spoiled negative. But if such a life has a purpose, what is that purpose? It is, like every other life, the outcome of Karma and Samsara. The span of such a life may be determined by past existence, particularly if, in accordance with the popular view, long life is to be considered a boon. But it cannot be called a probationary period for a new existence. According to one view, the infant expiates by its death the imperfections of its parents, much as the Christian might speak of the chastisement of God, not upon the baby but upon its parents. In that case the parents are working out their Karma by means of the child. The objection to this view is that Karma is a personal affair. I must work out my own Karma and you must work out yours. It cannot be transferred to someone else, because that would involve a vicarious sacrifice or atonement, to which, as we have seen, Hindu ideas are altogether opposed. To be consistent, therefore, Hinduism has fallen back on the explanation that the infant himself expiates by his death his own shortcomings in a previous existence. He is relieved of the burden which he carried and in his next existence he starts again with a clean slate; or, if that is too absolute a statement, his next existence will be purged to the extent that his death may have brought about an expiation. This doctrine, however, is not wholly consistent with the ideas inherent in Karma, because it deprives it of its forward influence. Nothing in a baby’s life can go to the shaping of the future. But the doctrine is not illogical. Put in mathematical terms it amounts to this. If the Karma to be expiated amounts to five and the infant by its death has cancelled the whole five or only three, he starts again with a burden of nothing or two, as the case may be, his own life having contributed nothing on either side, so that the Karma of it would be represented by a nought.

The cancellation of Karma by the mere act of dying
presupposes that life in itself is a boon—and a boon of the highest value. That is the Vedic view and it is also, as I have said, the popular one. Long life is the frequent burden of prayer because men prize life above everything. But it is not the view of the Upanishads. They lay no great stress on the value of human life; each existence is merely a stepping-stone in the path of probation in a transitory world. But the Paramatman being without qualities or attributes, an abstraction, cannot be said to have a will in the sense of controlling the life of an individual. On the other hand, life being an opportunity, the longer that life lasts the greater the chance not only of purging demerit but also of acquiring merit for the next step forward. For the "path that leads to salvation," says Professor Radhakrishnan, "is like the sharp edge of a razor, difficult to cross and hard to tread. . . . Suffering is the condition of progress. . . . It is the ransom that son of man has to pay if he would attain his crown."¹

Thus the attainment of that perfection which fits a man to become one with the Universal Soul is difficult—so difficult that for the ordinary man it necessitates many incarnations; but it is not impossible, and hence the journey is not endless. It is just because it is so difficult that critics have fallen into the error of describing it as a wheel set in perpetual motion. The way of progress is a mountain path with zigzags and has many obstacles, but it leads to the top in the end. It is hard to see why the religion should be called pessimistic, unless it be pessimistic to reach forward to an ideal which is certainly difficult, though not impossible of attainment. There is more than a hint in the Hindu idea of the "strait gate and the narrow way," the authority for which no Christian would be inclined or would dare to deny. The system has been branded with pessimism partly because of what seems to be the extinction of individuality but mainly owing to this misconception of the endless cycle of rebirths and deaths. It may be added that this misconception is not to be found in the works of learned and thoughtful Hindus, who after all are best qualified to know what their religion signifies.

¹ Philosophy of the Upanishads, pp. 119–20.
ESOTERIC HINDUISM

There is a further misconception of the doctrine called Maya, which is usually translated Illusion, but here it is due rather to the difficulty of expressing in one language the precise shade of meaning inherent in the other. “Illusion” is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a “deceptive appearance, statement, or belief.” But the Hindu, than whom no one has had a subtler brain, was not so foolish as to deny altogether the objective existence of the phenomenal world. To have done so would have involved him in all sorts of contradictions. For if the world were “such stuff as dreams are made on,” if it could be blown out like a candle, like Alice in the Red King’s dream, what man does or is in such conditions would be of little or no account. Of what use would it be to strive to live the virtuous life in order to attain perfection if that life had no more substance than a dream? For you cannot altogether dissociate life on earth from the phenomenal world. You cannot say that your conduct to your neighbour has no importance except in its reaction upon your own soul; you cannot pretend that your own existence is only “the baseless fabric of a vision,” for that makes nonsense of the whole theory of Samsara. For if a man is to be judged by his actions (Karma) and if those actions have no objective reality, what is the use of striving after an ideal when all your actions are no more than a puff of smoke? It may satisfy the abstract reasoning of philosophers to argue that a phantom ploughman ploughs a phantom earth and sows a phantom seed to produce a phantom crop, but the Hindu philosophers were above all things logical (and practical) and they would have seen that such ideas were too far divorced from reality to obtain acquiescence; they would have seen further that to postulate a visionary world was to knock the bottom out of their whole scheme of things.¹

The word “illusion” seems to have been used because there was no single English word which would convey the meaning of transitoriness and of relative unimportance inherent

¹ Cf. Schweitzer: Indian Thought and its Development. He carries the idea of Life and World Negation too far in assuming that Hinduism allows no objective existence to the phenomenal world.
in Maya. For the meaning of Maya is what the author of the Hebrews meant when he said that "here we have no continuing city." There is a hint of the same thing in St. Paul's outburst "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The whole passage suggests that in essence he is enunciating a law of Karma. "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law that when I would do good evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into the law of sin which is in my members." The Hindu aim is to control all desire and all passion and that is an admission of an inherent imperfection or weakness which must be eradicated. It is "the sin that dwelleth in me." Every good man wishes to live the virtuous life; what prevents him and what is the perpetual stumbling-block is the existence of desire and passion or what. St. Paul calls the "law of sin." The deliverance from the "body of this death," the moral death which is brought about by the law of sin, is equivalent to the Hindu conception of Release, and since the ideal can only be attained through the operation of Karma, the action which is the outward manifestation of a man's virtue or vice, the Hindu would answer St. Paul's question "who shall deliver me?" by saying that a man's destiny is in his own hands; it is he himself who must bring about his own deliverance. The Hindu recognizes that a man may be inherently and deliberately vicious; that there are men of whom it can be said that "they would not do good." But they are not without hope. In their next existence they will reap the consequences of their vice; but in that existence they can wipe away the stain, and, by practising virtue, they can advance a little on the road to perfection. There is no room in the system for such a conception as "everlasting fire"; no man is doomed to eternal damnation nor even, as Dr. Matthews has suggested, to extinction. It may no doubt be many centuries before such a one can attain to the ideal, but the Hindu mind, which cannot any more than any other grasp the conception
of eternity, has yet a lively notion of it and is possessed of infinite patience. His powers of reasoning tell him that a million years are a very long time, but he can to some extent appreciate that they are but little as compared with eternity.

On the other hand, his ethical ideas do not always correspond to ours. When we are speaking of the cardinal sins or the cardinal virtues there is no doubt not a great deal to choose, but to these are added the special offences against caste. It is—or perhaps was, for times have greatly changed—as great a sin to marry outside the caste or to defile oneself with a low-caste woman or in other ways to offend against caste custom, as to steal or to commit fraud; sometimes, perhaps, even murder itself was a lesser offence. Such things as these we, with our twentieth-century notions and our ethical system based upon the New Testament, would class with the "washing of cups and pots" and other purely formal or ritual observances, and there are doubtless many Hindus to-day who would do the same. It is difficult for us—and perhaps even for them—to appreciate the intense grasp which caste had over the minds of those who framed the system. Nowadays it appears merely as an institution much of which has a baneful effect on the country and especially upon its material progress. But to an Indian, particularly in early times, an offence against caste would have appeared as an offence against society; and that not in the sense that theft is such an offence but rather in the sense that it threatens to disturb the whole order of society and to introduce chaos. Whatever view be taken—whether we attribute the institution to the desire for racial purity or to occupation or to something inherent in the Aryan family (Senart) or to the survival of aboriginal customs—there is no doubt that caste was, and still is, the very foundation of the Indian social fabric. If, being a carpenter, you married a blacksmith woman or if, being a Brahman, you married a Sudra woman, there was no reason why your neighbour should not do the same, and it is obvious that such marriages indefinitely repeated would take away the whole meaning and intention of caste and would therefore produce an entirely different social structure. Caste, more-
HINDU CUSTOMS AND THEIR ORIGINS

over, was regarded as a divine institution so that a caste offence was a sin against God as well as against man. In judging these things, we should remember that the formal traditions against which Jesus inveighed were observed by the Pharisees and "all the Jews" and it took the Master Mind to see through them to the deeper things. Those who had the framing of the laws of caste, the priests, would very naturally interpret them to their own advantage and in doing so would probably be compelled by logic to continue the principle into other castes, so that a graduated scale would arise. It would be a more heinous offence to sin against the Brahman than against the Kshatriya, against the Kshatriya than against the Sudra, and so on, until you reached the stratum in which humanity was hardly thought to be human. Such conceptions were bound to lead to abuses; the priestly caste and the warriors claimed privileges that could not be justified and as they were also the dominant classes they could and did impose their claims upon a subservient people. The idea of caste had taken too firm a root; having accepted it, the sensitive people clung to it with an intense tenacity; nor until quite modern times does it ever seem to have occurred to them to dispute these extravagant claims. Though caste in its essentials is as strong—or nearly as strong—as ever, the attitude towards it has become modified partly by the long domination of the Mussulmans whose democratic ideas never took a really concrete shape but chiefly by contact with the West, with its wholly different ethical system, its ideas of social service, its conception of the inherent dignity of man, and its views upon equal opportunity for everyone.

It may, I think, without inaccuracy be said that the Six Systems of Philosophy were founded upon these main doctrines. It is true that they differ from one another, in various ways but they come back to a predisposing cause; the doctrines of Samsara and Karma are the means whereby man can attain perfection in a world which has a real existence—using the word in the ordinary sense—but which is relatively illusory when compared with ultimate Reality. But this kind of religion was altogether too difficult for the