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uneducated masses; they wanted something more concrete to which they could offer worship. In this they differed very little from other peoples. The Israelites found it hard to practise the worship of Jahweh, who was represented by nothing that their minds could grasp and was to them an abstraction. They fell away, not permanently but at least often, into the worship of the gods of those by whom they were surrounded. The agnostic theism of Buddha degenerated into the adoration of the man Gautama with his attendant satellites. Islam does not tolerate images and Mohammed is in no sense exalted to the position of a divinity; yet the Islamic world is extremely sensitive about the Prophet and any real or fancied insult to him, however unintentional, is apt to lead to riot and bloodshed. The icons of the Eastern Church and the images of the Roman have ever since the abortive attempt of Leo to abolish them betrayed the same tendency. It was, therefore, only to be expected that the abstractions of the Upanishads should in course of time give way to theistic conceptions in which Vishnu and Siva, Krishna and Rama could be worshipped in human form, and this movement, known as Bhakti or ecstatic adoration, was largely due to the teaching of Ramanuja, who lived in the eleventh century, and had as its High Priest the Bengali saint Chaitanya; it reached such heights that men began to believe that the way to salvation lay through the simple repetition of a name. On the way to Tirupati temple, a very sacred shrine barred to Europeans and situated on a hill seldom climbed by them, you can see the pilgrims in this state of exaltation, chanting ecstatically the name of “Govinda.” It means little to them beyond a name and an ecstasy.

It is, however, no part of my purpose to follow Hinduism through its developments to the present time. But how did this sublimated philosophy arise out of the primitive Nature worship of the Aryans? For whatever we may think of the primitive origins, there can be little doubt that as Aryanism progressed, the religion began to spread over the country, mixed no doubt with primitive superstitions and primitive beliefs and customs but still distinguishable as a separate
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system. Professor Ghose, as we have seen, argues that Upani-
shadic speculations arose separately from the popular
religion and in non-Aryan lands. His view is that the more
refined intellects worked out a philosophical system of their
own, leaving the masses to their grosser idolatries and super-
sitions. It is a possible view, though the author hardly
claims for it more than the position of a reasoned guess;
he calls it a "romance." We cannot therefore treat it as
proved and established fact. Yet though we may not go
all the way with him, it does seem that something of the
kind did happen, whether we treat the Upanishads as
Vratya or Aryan. In all ages and in most religions there have
arisen thinkers who have set themselves to inquire and have
produced theories, some of which have penetrated to the
general public and are often accepted by them as axioms
and some of which are above the heads of all but a select few.

The great gods of Nature: Indra, Agni, Savitar, and the
rest seemed to the eclectic band too departmental. They
seemed to act independently of one another and in certain
aspects to be even antagonistic; the Maruts, the deities of
the Storm, blotted out the beneficent Sun. If the Rain was
withheld, that might mean that Indra was offended, but it
might also mean that some other powerful god was standing
in the way, and, to use a homely, modern phrase, was over-
zealous for his own department. Yet there was a certain
cosmic unity which could not be denied. Day and Night
came round regularly; the Sun shone, went down, and gave
place to moon and stars, and this implied not the unco-ordin-
ated efforts of different divinities but the existence of a single
controlling spirit. Moreover, the Nature gods were busy only
with their own natural functions; these no doubt could not
but have an influence on the fortunes of the human race,
but they left on one side all that ethical side of human nature
which goes to make up a man. There was in such a system
no reason why man should not indulge his passions and
engage in an orgy of licentiousness of all kinds which was
only to be restrained by fear of angering this or that divinity
and might result in material calamity, if indeed the Nature
gods condescended to take note of the misdoings of an
individual. There was, however, some vague and probably not defined idea of individuality. The whole society was composed of individuals and the sin of any one of them contributed, as far as it went, to the aggregate of the whole. But that sin was only visited by some kind of material punishment, such as Job endured, the loss of cattle and wealth, the loss of children, the sufferings of disease. Such ideas could not satisfy. Even in the most primitive religions it was always recognized that a part of man must survive after the end of mortal life; there is nothing so universal as the belief in some kind of life after death. Clearly, then, that life must be something better than the present one and that, once the ethical ideas were grasped, could only be a progress towards perfection. But nothing more perfect could be imagined than the perfection of an all-controlling Spirit. Arguing, as they were forced to do, as everyone has been forced to do, from the analogy of human affairs and human conduct, the philosophers arrived at the conclusion that as God was embodied in the Universal Spirit and was manifested by the evident order of the Universe, the attainment of perfection could only be realized by approximation to that Spirit. And since they had also determined that this Spirit contained within itself the entire Order of Things, both material and spiritual; it followed that the spirit of man must be absorbed into that Spirit. This was pure monism. Later on there appeared schools which combated this conclusion and argued that man did not lose his individuality but existed in a state of perfection, as it were, side by side with the One Spirit. Thus arose the doctrine of Dualism, the Dvaita system, in opposition to the pure monism, the Advaita, the High Priest of which was Sankara.

At the same time it was recognized that man, being imperfect, could not hope to realize his object at a single stride. The allotted span of years, something under a hundred, was altogether too short to bridge the gulf between man and the Atman, between the Atman and the Paramatman. There must therefore be intermediate stages, and what was more natural than to suppose that man was born again in some other form, or possibly even in the same form, in
which he could continue upon his road? And what, too, was more natural if the idea of vicarious sacrifice and atone-
ment be excluded, than the conception that man himself
was the architect of his own destiny and that he was to be
judged by his own conduct? It was in some such way as
this that the doctrines of the Atman, of Samsara, and of
Karma took hold of intellectual India. The Upanishadic
philosophy superseded the more primitive Nature worship;
ethical ideas, once they were established, ousted the more
material conception of the Vedic gods; Vishnu and Siya
lost their Vedic attributes and became something cosmic
and transcendental, the Preserver of all that was good in the
world and the Destroyer of Evil and the Regenerator.

This transition was only gradual; men do not easily give
up that to which they are accustomed, neither will they
easily exchange for a somewhat frigid philosophy the ideas
of a warmer and more attractive religion. But if the Vedic
gods disappeared from the Pantheon or were transformed
into something else, the Vedas remained, and the Vedas
represented revealed religion. Not only were they divine,
but they contained in themselves all that a man could want
to regulate his conduct in this life. They are the rock founda-
tion upon which everything else is built; to question them
is like questioning the authority of the New Testament or the
Koran. Hence, even during the time when doctrinal philo-
sophy was at its zenith, there was still a reverence for the
Vedic gods, and this persists even now in the various cere-
monies at which propitiations are made of Indra and Agni,
customs are observed which are clearly traceable to Vedic
times and in which the incantations of the Atharva Veda
are used. Such observances are, however, except for a
minority, more a matter of ritual than of belief. The average
educated man does not believe in the gods, though he goes
through the prescribed ritual as a matter of course and
because there is a vague belief or at least suspicion that to
omit it or substantially to vary it might invalidate the
whole ceremony.

But side by side with these higher forms of religion per-
stanted the aboriginal cults and superstitions which are mainly
responsible for the branding of Hinduism with the name of idolatry—an accusation about as just as to judge Catholicism by the tawdry images in its churches. The persistence of these cults indicates that at no time did the Aryan religion—and still less the philosophical speculations—ever really capture the popular imagination. The blending of the races led inevitably to the blending of the religion. The great temples grew up, dedicated to the greater gods, Siva and Vishnu in their various forms, to their female counterparts and to the deified heroes, Rama and Krishna, incarnations of Vishnu. With the coming of the bhakti movement—at any rate in the eyes of the masses—the religion lost all or nearly all of its esoteric meaning in ecstatic and unreasoning adoration, while in the villages still continued the worship of the minor “village deities, the Grama-devatas, particularly of those malevolently inclined goddesses whose special care was the physical ills of mankind. These were and are often accompanied by blood sacrifice and it is perhaps significant that even in so enlightened a State as Baroda, after a procession through the city and prayers by the ruling family, a ram is slaughtered which may be seen at a certain point in the road kept in readiness for the auspicious moment. Some of these aboriginal gods, especially those who, like Hanuman, probably represent old totemistic ideas, have been incorporated into the Hindu system and others have been added as the sons or other progeny of the greater gods; and these wherever they exist are treated with the same honours as the major gods. This multiplicity of gods and godlings has given rise to the idea of polytheism, which, however, is foreign to the true esoteric Hinduism. Properly viewed in that light they are only the aspects of the One God. Even the Hindu Trinity—the Trimurti—is only the expression of the same idea. It contemplates Creation, Preservation, and Regeneration which combine the great principles of Nature and therefore of the Universe.

Thus when Hinduism is spoken of as idolatry, there is only a measure of truth in the accusation; nor is it enough to protest that the Hindu does not worship the idols but only the principles which they represent. That is an accusation
which applies equally to certain forms of Christianity, as anyone can testify who has seen the little dolls held out to be blessed by the Pope in the Vatican. It is true that these anthropomorphic conceptions are pressed to the extreme limit; the gods eat and sleep, are married and beget children. It is, moreover, difficult to believe that the villagers who are not representative of Hinduism but rather of the aboriginal cults with their demon worship and their village deities, are only worshipping the indwelling spirit when they cart some weird-looking puppet to the boundaries of a village, in order to get rid of the particular disease with which they are afflicted and in the hope that the goddess will transfer her attentions to their neighbours. It can hardly be denied that such practices are idolatry in its grossest form. But it is an entire misconception to suppose that the purer esoteric Hinduism has any part or lot in such worship. Most of what is seen is nothing but the shell; it may be affirmed that very few believe in it. Hinduism, properly so-called, appeals, unlike Judaism, less to the emotions than to the intellect. Its limitations are the limitations of man’s reasoning powers and the very difficulty which has so often been found in defining it is due to this cause. Its intellectualism—its insistence that knowledge is the way of Salvation and that ignorance is the cause of all backsliding—is indeed its weakness, for that is a state of mind that very few are either inclined or will seek to attain.
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