CHAPTER VI

We undertook the examination of the legends of Hinduism with a view to determine what there might be in them of the fundamental principles of Hinduism. What have we found?

We have seen that they afford in abundance illustrations of those fundamental principles, but do not contain within the principles themselves. We must seek for them elsewhere.

And from the legends let us look for them in what is intimately connected with the legends, and often furnishes the materials for their formation—and at the same time is looked upon, though quite erroneously, as the most pronounced characteristic of Hinduism. I refer to the Polytheism in Hinduism.

But before proceeding to treat of Hinduism, it may be necessary to say a few words in connection with what is generally considered to represent a prior stage in the growth of religions and which is supposed to be largely present in modern Hinduism. Fetishism is the name given in Europe to the worship of natural objects, not the powers of Nature, to the worship of stocks and stones, of rocks and rivers, of trees and serpents and other animals. It represents really a low form of religious thought, and is more or less largely characteristic of the creeds of savage nations. But it is by no means absent from India; the assailants of Hinduism equip with an apparently endless supply of arguments from this source. The European sojourner in India, under the shade of some umbrageous tree in the centre of a Hindu village, blocks of rough stone rendered hideous by copious incrustations of yellow ochre, receiving the homage of the simple residents, and sees in it a Hindu God. He sees great rivers like the Ganges held sacred, and even worshipped and sees in them a great Hindu fetish. The Tulasi plant, the Bilva tree, cows and monkeys, and even certain serpents receive a kind of homage, and lo! they are
the gods of the Hindus. The wrath of the missionary, and the contempt of his native disciple know no limit.

The worship of "stocks and stones"—of the rude blocks under the umbrageous trees besmeared with yellow ochre—Panchanandas, Manasa, Sitalas, Makals—and all the rest of the tribe may be dismissed with a single word. They do not belong to Hinduism. They have no connection whatever with Hinduism. They exist in India no doubt, but all that exists in India is not Hinduism. There is no warranty for them in the Hindu Scriptures. They are the mere remnants of non-Aryan worship, surviving among Hinduised non-Aryan peoples. They are not accepted by the Hindu-community at large. The local fetish of one village finds no votary outside the local limits of his worship. The better classes of Hindus wholly reject them. It is true that the lower and uncultured strata of Hindu society still cling to these survivals of non-Aryan cults, but that is as little a ground for holding the worship of stocks and stones to belong to Hinduism as the existence of similar practices in Christian countries implies that it is a part of Christianity. That stocks and stones have been and even still are worshipped in Christian countries, will appear from the following extract from a writer who commands the respect of all.

"There are accounts of formal Christian prohibitions of stone-worship in France and in England, reaching on into the early middle ages . . . . It is remarkable to what late times pure and genuine stone-worship has survived in Europe. In certain mountain districts of Norway, up to the end of the last century, the peasants used to preserve round stones, washed them every Thursday evening (which seems to show some connection with Thor) smeared them with butter before the fire, laid them in the seat of honor on fresh straw and at certain time of the year steeped them in ale, that they might bring luck and comfort in the house*. In an account dating from 1851, the islanders of Irish Sea off Mayo are declared to have a stone carefully wrapped

in flannel, which is brought out and worshipped at certain periods and when a storm rises it is supplicated to send a wreck on the coast.* No savage ever showed more clearly his treatment of a fetish as a personal being, than did these Norwegians and Irish men.*

These remarks, I trust, will suffice to dispose of the general question of the existence of stone-worship in Hinduism. There are two special cases which undoubtedly belong to modern Hinduism, and which apparently bear against the view here taken. I refer to the worship of the ammonite Salagram, and of the Phallic emblem of Siva. These in reality are [not] fetishes but idols. The word fetish is used by European writers in various senses, some, and principally Comte, giving to it a wider meaning than others. In any case, however, fetishism must be distinguished from Idolatry. I take the distinction between a fetish and an idol to be this, that while an idol is only an image or a symbol of a supernatural being who has an existence independent of the image or symbol, a fetish is itself an object embodying a supernatural being who has no existence apart from the object. In this sense, Hinduism accepts idolatry, but rejects Hinduism [correge: fetishism] and in this sense, Salagram and Phallic emblems are symbols, symbols of Narayana and Siva respectively, and not fetishes. At present we are not concerned with idolatry, but only with fetishism; the question of idolatry will be taken up in another chapter.

Nor will I deny that the homage paid to rivers, and specially to the Ganges, truly belongs to Hinduism. This river-worship is not a fetish-worship peculiar to the degraded Hinduism of modern times. It is as old as the Vedas. Listen to the 75th hymn in the Tenth Mandal of the Rig-Veda.

"Accept, O Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Sutudri, Parushni my praise. With the Asikni, listen O Marudvridha and with Vitasta, O Argikiya, listen with the Sushoma.*

---


† A translation of the whole hymn will be found in Prof. Max Muller’s Htibbert Lectures, p. 207. The extract given is from his translation.
The entire hymn is devoted to the invocation of rivers, which is by no means [peculiar] to this single hymn. This position taken by the great rivers of India in the physiolatry of the Vedas, shows the true character of the Hindu-river-worship. It is a part of the Hindu Nature-Worship. Rivers are worshipped, not as mere objects in nature, but as being among powers of nature. They take their place among Indra, Agni, Surya, Maruth, the Sky, the Fire, the Sun and the rest. If nature-worship is fetishism, Hinduism has a good deal of it, and so had the classic Paganism. But I fancy a limit must be set somewhere to this extension of the meaning of fetishism. A step further would enable us to include in it the Dualism of Zoroastrianism and of Christianity itself.

From inanimate objects let us [pass] on to the vegetable life. And at the outset we must distinguish between trees which are actually worshipped, and those which are only held sacred. The Manasha (Euphorbia . . .) may be taken as a type of the former; the Tulasi ( ) and the Vilva ( ) of the latter. Now it may be laid down definitely that the actual worship of trees, as that of Manasha do not belong to Hinduism. It is a relic, like the worship of stones of non-Aryan culture retained by non-Aryan tribes absorbed in Hindu community, and influencing by contact the lower strata of Hinduism. The sanctity of the Tulasi and Vilva does belong to Hinduism, but there is no worship in this sense of sanctity. The Tulasi is never worshipped nor the Vilva. They are merely appropriate offerings to the gods really worshipped—the Tulasi to Vishnu, the Vilva to Siva; and for this reason only, and to this extent only are they held sacred. They are not gods themselves.

Next, as to the worship of animals. Even Prof. Max Muller to whom Hinduism owes an immense debt, but whose want of acquaintance with modern India every one must regret, wits the modern Hindu with the worship of cows and monkey”. Let us take the cows first.

We must distinguish, as has been already suggested, between a god, that is an object of worship, and a thing only held sacred. A
church or a temple is held sacred but it is not a god, not itself an object of worship. A cow is held sacred by the Hindus, but I deny that she is worshipped. The cow is held sacred for reasons which are easily understood. The cow is an animal more useful to the inhabitant of the plains of India than any other animal to the people of any other country. Not the rein-deer in its icy home,—not the camel in arid sands of the torrid zone, is so useful as the cow in the plains of India. It is the cow who ploughs the soil. The cow is almost the sole beast of burden. She is also producer of the only articles of luxury which is permitted to the Hindus as food,—milk and its preparations. She is also the sole producer of that indispensable necessity of orthodox Hindu life—the Habish for the Homa. But over in addition to these, there is still another use to which the cow can be put she can be eaten. The example of our Anglo-Saxon cousins, and his Teutonic brotherhood is sufficient to convince that this is to the Aryan race perhaps the most tempting of all the forms in which the possession of the cow can be turned to account. It labours under the slight disadvantage that a cow, once eaten, can be put to no other use whatever, and any general disposition to yield to the temptation has a tendency to diminish the breed. It was necessary to protect an animal whose undiminished numbers were so serious a necessity in Hindu society by the interpolation of law, such law as then existed. So the life of the cow was declared sacred, and heavy penalties imposed upon its destruction. Nor were precepts enjoining a kind and even tender treatment of so useful an animal wanting. But there is no worship. The command here is one given by the law-givers, not the priest. Spiritual penalties are no doubt declared to be the lot of slayer of kine, but there is scarcely any temporal offence to which the ancient Hindu law does not attach some spiritual penalties. In spite of all that the cows’ position in Hinduism is only that of a sacred animal that is an animal which should never be eaten, and which should be treated with kindness,—and not that of an object of worship, not a god.

The wisdom of this attachment of sanctity to the life of the cow
has made itself clear in a strange way in these days of enlightenment. It has happened that within a hundred years or so few thousand Englishmen—with of course all the Anglo-Saxon love of beef in them, have made India their residence. The Teuton's appetite for beef is something different not only in degree but almost in kind, from that of the Mussalman to whom beef is a luxury to be enjoyed on special occasions only and is of course unfettered by the restrictions as to beef which operate so powerfully on the Hindu. The result is that already the supply of live-stock in the country is felt to be inadequate to its agricultural and other wants, the impoverished cultivator feels crushed under the pressure of the enormous price of plough cattle and pack-bullocks; the supply of milk and its products so limited and therefore so high-priced as to preclude the masses from their use. As a consequence the masses depend for their nutrition upon a poor and ill-assorted vegetable diet; and ill-fed and weakly-nourished fall an easy prey to epidemics which sweep away hundreds of thousands in a single year, and have converted flourishing provinces into a desert.

And for a wise provision which provided against so serious a social calamity, is the Hindu race to be taunted and reviled alike by ignorant missionaries like Mr. Max Muller and profound Christian scholars like Max Muller? And what shall I say of that weakest of human beings, the half-educated anglicised and brutalized Bengali Babu, who congratulates himself on his capacity to dine off a plate of beef as if this act of gluttony constituted in itself unimpeachable evidence of a perfectly cultivated intellect?

Many will meet with in Bengal, and I believe also in other provinces of India, a treatment of the cow, which the foreigner is likely to mistake for worship. Flowers and fruits are offered to the cow by Hindu females, on certain occasions; they are smeared with unguents and fanned, and invited to partake of fresh and tender grass. This is an expression of attachment, not worship. The bridegroom, the bride, a brother, an honoured guest; and others have, on occasions to be treated in the same manner. The Prince of Wales, when he visited Calcutta, was treated very much after the same fashion
by a Hindu family whom he condescended to visit. But the honour
done to the Prince has happily given rise to no theories that the Heir-
apparent to the throne is an object of worship to the Hindus.
Possibly such theories might have cropped up in abundance, if some
border district instead of the metropolis of India had been the
scene of the event. The case of John Nicholson is a case in point.

I am perfectly sure that there are many things in Sanskrit
literature which the Sanskrit Scholar may consider himself entitled
to urge against the views here put forward in regard to the position
of the Cow in Hinduism. My limits do not permit me to anticipate
these, and to discuss and interpret each text in detail. I cannot repeat
too often that an illiberal and obstinate adherence to literal
interpretation will never enable us to arrive at the real import of the
ancient Hindu writers, who love to shroud their meaning in allegory
or fable or mysticism. As an illustration I will dispose of only
one of the arguments, and one of the most telling, which my opponents
may urge.

The cow, I say, is in Hinduism, simply an animal, and animal
specially protected by law, on account of her eminent usefulness,
but still an animal and not a Divine Being. My opponent can at
once fling unto my face the legend of Kapila and her daughter
Nandini, the far-famed cause of the great dispute between Vasishtha
and Viswamitra. Here at least are two cows in whose Divine nature
Hinduism believes. The reply is obvious; this is a legend, and nothing
but a legend. Neither Kapila, nor Nandini ever receives any worship
from any Hindu, and have therefore no claim to be ranked as Hindu
god or goddesses. There is a legend, and it is only a legend, it has
to be interpreted in the spirit, in which, as I have already stated,
the legends of true Hinduism has to be interpreted.

The meaning of this particular legend lies on the face of it.
The Sanskrit “Go” is a name of the earth—the Greek “Gaia”.
“Go” however stands for Cow. A cow comes thus to represent or to
symbolise the earth in the writings of those who love to shroud their
meanings under the veil of ambiguous language. She is Kapila,
the brown. She is a Kamadhenu, a cow who yields milk whenever you may choose to milk her. It is descriptive of the easy productive powers of the Fertile Earth as known to the ancient Indians. Nandini, the Gladdener, is the produce of the soil—the offspring of Kapila. The produce of the soil, which is wealth, becomes the subject of contention between Vasistha and Viswamitra, between priest and King, just as she again was [between] the clergy and baron, between bishop and king in mediæval Europe. Nandini creates armies in her own defence—for she is the power of the purse. And the victory ultimately rests with the possessor of wealth—as it will in every social contest. The object of the legend is the glorification of agriculture, not of Zoolatry.

Next, as to monkeys. This is even a grosser mistake than the other. The monkey, as an animal is worshipped nowhere in India. The monkey is not even held sacred as the cow is.* There is a monkey-god in India—the well-known Hanuman, but he is worshipped not because he is a monkey but because he is regarded as a god or more properly a demi-god—in spite of his being a monkey. Those who accept him as a demi-god, accept him as the offspring of gods, and not because he is a monkey. He is fabled to be the son of the god Pavana, and of the goddess Anjana, and even to be an incarnation of Rudra himself.

And here again the spirit of literal interpretation has been the cause of much mischief. Rama, if he did conquer the aborigines of Southern India cannot really have done so with an army of monkeys. He must have conquered with the aid of human soldiers, though these, who are of the less cultured Dravidian races, would be contemptuously described by their haughty Aryan allies as monkeys. Hanuman was, if these views are correct, a man and a non-Aryan, and there must have been in him enough of the God-like to wrest from the haughty Aryans a recognition of the Divine in him.

* The repugnance to slay monkeys in certain cults of Vaishnavism proceeds from the reluctance to take the life of any animal whatever, not from any particular regard for monkeys. In Bengal, as elsewhere they are killed with as little repugnance as dogs or jackals.
CHAPTER VI

In spite of the reverence paid to Hanuman in certain parts of Upper India, he is by no means an object of general worship among Hindus. In Bengal, as in many other parts of India, his worship is unknown, except where some solitary emigrant from the upper provinces has erected a temple to his honour. He is therefore of no interest to us, who are in search of the general and fundamental principles of Hinduism. He is one of those excrescences upon Hinduism, which we have so often to meet with, but nevertheless whom we must resolutely discard. But what more concerns us at present is that he is neither a monkey-god nor is he worshipped by reason of his simian birth. His worship is not Zoolatry, but hero-worship. And whatever may be the character of the homage accorded to him, monkeys are not worshipped in India.

There is one other phase of Animal worship that has been the subject of special study. Serpent-worship has had a range in mythology and religion; and has been traced to exist among the savage nations of America and to have existed among the cultured nations of ancient Europe. In India, the researches of archaeologists and scholars have established the existence of ophiolatry in ancient times. The serpent-worshippers were however a distinct people bearing the same name as their tribal god or totem like the Snake Indians of America. The Puranas and Itihhasas contain frequent reference to these Nagas, who are now understood to be none other than these ancient serpent-worshippers. A Naga people still exists in Bengal, and are of non-Aryan stock. All this does not prove that there has been, or that there is now serpent-worship in modern Hinduism. To the non-Aryan worship of Manasa, I have already adverted. Though herself a plant, not a serpent, she is popularly believed to be the mother of serpents and has been indentified by her votaries with Jarat-Karee, the wife of Jarat-Karu, the progenitor of the serpent race. All this has failed to give her a place in the Hindu pantheon. She still remains outside its pale, an object of worship only in the lower strata of Hindu society in Bengal, where the non-Aryan element is larger than elsewhere. There are also in Bengal certain superstitions
connected with serpents, as there may be in other parts of India, as for instance that it is unlucky to kill a cobra which has long dwelt in the house. Such superstitions do not constitute worship.

But, as we found in place of the supposed worship of cows the legend of a Divine Cow who is not a cow but the earth, and in place of the supposed worship of monkeys a local monkey-god who is only a deified hero, so here too we find in place of serpent-worship a legend of a Divine Serpent who is not a serpent. He is as his very name An-anta implies, the Infinite. In the legend he is Vishnu’s coach. The All-pervading Universal Being rests on the Infinite in Space and Infinite in Time. It is surprising how so transparent a metaphor can have ever been mistaken for mythology.

I doubt whether I am bound to notice such stuff as the following. “In India, the woman adores the basket which seems to bring or to hold her necessaries and offers sacrifices to it; as well as the rice-mill and other implements that assist in her household labours. A carpenter does the like homage to his hatchet, to his adze and other tools and likewise offers sacrifices to them. A Brahmana does so to the style with which he is going to write; a soldier to the arms he is to use in the field; a mason to his trowel.” This passage is from Herbert Spencer’s Study of Sociology, (1. p. 309). The italics are mine. The passage serves to show to what nonsense even writers like Mr. Herbert Spencer will give currency on subjects with which they have no personal acquaintance. Take again a more competent authority. “Not only dotes the husbandman” says Sir Alfred Lyall, in his Religion of an Indian Province, “pray to his plough, the fisher to his net, the weaver to his loom, but the scribe adores his pen, and the banker his account books.” This reminds me of a Khidmutgar in the employ of one of Sir Alfred’s countrymen resident in India, who saw his master say grace before commencing his repast, and came to the conclusion that his master worshipped the food he ate. Professor Max Muller quotes both these passage in a note to his Hibbert Lectures, and very pertinently asks, “What is meant here by adoring?”
Enough has been said to show that Fetish-worship does not belong to Hinduism, and if the worship of stocks and stones is to be found among lower strata of Hindu society, it is the duty of the better educated Hindus resolutely to set his face against it, and to put it out of the pale of Hinduism. It is a relic of non-Aryan barbarism.
CHAPTER 1

POLYTHEISM—FIRST STAGE

I have denied that there is any fetish-worship in Hinduism, but I must admit that Polytheism is one of its distinguishing features. So strong are the prejudices of educated natives of India, derived from the still stronger prejudices of their Christian teachers that I can well imagine them hanging down their heads in shame and sorrow at this confession. Polytheism is with the Christian and therefore to his intellectual progeny in India a word of reproach—a sign of low culture and mental imbecility, the parent of all evil, and the cause of eternal damnation. The prejudice is originally Jewish, and handed down to Christianity with the Judaism which it has absorbed. The Jews were a fanatical [race] of low culture, and it is unfortunate that Judaic narrowness should still rule the world through its Christian teachers. And all this in spite of the fact, that Christianity, with its vaunted monotheism, is really a polytheistic religion with its Triple God, its hosts of angels, saints and Devils. A pure monotheism is not to be found among the most cultured nations of the earth. It did not exist in ancient Greece, and it does not exist in modern. If it is found at all, it will be found in spheres of lower culture, among Mohammmedans for instance.

And what is the higher ground which monotheism is believed to occupy with reference to Polytheism. Why is a pure monotheism, freed from all polytheism, a rational worship, and polytheism mere stupidity and folly? What evidence is there, that God is One and cannot be many? That the government of the Universe unlike that of society, is carried on by a single Personal Being, without the intervention of others? If you come to the question of evidence, evidence in the same sense, in which you require, evidence before
you can accept a physical truth as established, there is probably as little in favour of monotheism as of Polytheism. Everything, you say, points to a First Cause. Granted, but does the existence of a First Cause disprove the existence of Second Causes? You may point to the unity of Design apparent in nature, as indicative of a single Designer, if a designer there was. Will you infer from the unity of design apparent in a building that it was the work of a sole architect, who had no masons or labourers to co-operate with him? You may reply that He could not have been in need of assistance, as He is Omnipotent. Do you not see that you assume this attribute of Omnipotence? There is no evidence in Nature that its author was omnipotent.

All this however is beside our main purpose and is intended to meet the bigotry of those who shudder at the name of Polytheism. I do believe that there is one God, and Hinduism does not accept more than one God. Hinduism is a monotheistic religion, in spite of its polytheism and does not suppose the existence of a number of deities subordinate to or co-ordinate with the Great Author and Ruler of the Universe. What then is the Polytheism which is also to exist in Hinduism? Let us now enter into an examination of it. It will be a long and difficult task.

And, first of all, we must distinguish between the two phases of polytheism, which we find in Hinduism. One is the Vedic polytheism, the other later Pauranic Polytheism. The later is a superstructure upon the former. The Vedic Polytheism has been modified, and built upon, but nevertheless exists at the present by side with the later developments.

The Vedic polytheism has been thoroughly studied in Europe and is better understood there than anything else relating to Hinduism. Here at least the reader may accept the European interpretation, for there is no study which does not yield its secrets to the European scholar when he takes it up seriously and earnestly, divesting himself of his prejudices. There are good reasons why I should describe the Vedic Polytheism in the language of European scholars than in
my own. And first let the reader take the following somewhat superficial but practical summary of it by Mr. Monier Williams. "They (the Vedic Aryans) worshipped" says he, "those physical forces before which all nations, if guided solely by the light of nature, have in the early period of their life instinctively bowed down, and before which even the more civilized and enlightened have always been compelled to bend in awe and reverence, if not in adoration. Their religion was what may be called in one word physiolyatry." (Hinduism, p. 21)

Professor Max Muller's explanation of course goes deeper. He described the old Vedic Religion as being "a belief and worship of those single objects whether semi-tangible or intangible, in which man first suspected the presence of the invisible and the infinite, each of which was raised into something more than finite, more than natural, more than conceivable; and thus grew in the end to be an Asura (From As to breathe), or a living thing, a Deva (From Div to shine), or a bright being; an Amartya that is not a mortal, and at last as an immortal and eternal being;—in fact a god endowed with the highest qualities which the human intellect could conceive at the various stages of its own growth.

The natural history of such a religion is of uncommon interest as a scientific study but need not detain us. It is a growth peculiar to India. The powers of nature have been deified and worshipped wherever in the world a certain advance has been made in religious ideas. There have been, or are, a multitude of nations in various stages of culture who have worshipped a Sun God, or (the Sun as a god), a Moon God, and Earth Goddess, a Heaven God (Varuna), a Rain God or a Thunder God (Indra), a Fire God (Agni), a Wind God (Vayu), a Storm God (Maruths) and so on. It is sufficient for our purpose what the true significance of this Vedic Polytheism is. It is nature-worship, corresponding to the nature-worship in classic paganism. The Deities of the Vedic pantheon are not gods, but merely the powers and forces of nature conceived as such. Now what is the value of such a religion? Is it entitled to retain its place
in the religion of the nation, or should it not be discarded as false worship? For there is no question that Hinduism must be prepared to discard whatever is not true worship.

"The words Religion and Worship," says Professor Seeley, "are commonly and conveniently appropriated to the feelings with which we regard God. But those feelings, love, awe, admiration which together make up worship, are felt in various combinations for human beings, and even for inanimate objects. It is not exclusively but only par excellence that religion is directed towards God.

Now, it is surely not to be supposed that every higher form of religion ought to supersede and drive out the lower forms . . . . Feelings of admiration and devotion are of various degrees, and are excited by various objects."

Among these various objects are the mighty forces and great powers of nature. And why should the worship of God crush out the worship of that which as great and mighty and awful, is entitled to worship, though in a lower degree. Why do we worship God? Not that He, like some worldly despot, requires from us acknowledgment of his Power and Greatness. Worship is a means to Culture as an end, and we worship Him, because to worship Him is to promote our Culture. And is not the worship of the Grand and Beautiful in nature Culture also? If nature is god, the worship of nature is worship of god also. If God is apart from Nature, even then the adoration paid to his work is adoration paid to him.

I have said that Religion in its broadest and most legitimate sense is Culture. If this be true, the most perfect religion is that which supplies a basis for the most complete development of Culture. It follows from this that no religion which refuses to recognize the highest possible Ideal in a perfect personal Being, like the religion of Humanity, can be a perfect religion. Nor can a religion which does not comprehend in it a religion of Humanity, as both Christianity and Hinduism undoubtedly do, be a perfect religion, for the perfection of our moral feelings, depend in a large measure upon our conduct towards fellow men. For the same, a religion which excludes
nature worship is an imperfect religion. Experience has shown that the absence of this element from a religion, as in Christianity and Mohammedanism, serves to develop narrowness and bigotry, and to harden this sterner virtues into cruelty and fanaticism. Hinduism alone contains within it all these elements of worship,—Hinduism alone therefore is a perfect religion.

But in order that the worship of nature may have its legitimate effect on the culture of the feelings, it must always be kept in view that the worship is of the powers and forces of nature only, and not that of Supernatural Beings possessed of Intelligence and Will. That Hinduism in its days of corruption lost sight of this important truth, is unquestionable; and it is the duty of the cultivated modern Hindu to restore to its primitive purity. This is by no means a difficult work. Though recognised as gods, possessed of intelligence and will, the Vedic deities can hardly be said to be worshipped at the present day. With the exception of the Sun, they receive no sacrifices specially intended for them and rarely do we meet with modern temples erected to their honor. Even the worship of the Sun himself is fast dying out. What is wanted is, that the national mind should be educated to a perception of the true character of the Vedic Gods.

These remarks apply only to the earlier or Vedic Polytheism—or rather to so much of it as still survives in the popular religion. We have not yet referred to the later or Pauranic Polytheism, and before we can make an attempt to understand it, we must briefly notice the intermediate developments of Hinduism.
CHAPTER...

As culture advances polytheism must lose its ground. Experience discloses that the universe is governed by fixed, unchanging laws. Certain physical effects follow, it is seen, whenever certain physical antecedents are present. And if physical causes suffice for the invariable production of effects, there is no room for the supposition of a number of Supernatural Intelligences for the production of phenomena hushed to its furthest consequences, as the student of science has done in these days, the last conclusion from this conception of Law as sufficient for the production of all phenomena is the denial, or rather the non-affirmation of all Supernatural intelligence. Science while recognizing a vast and infinite energy pervading all Nature, refuses to recognise a personal God. This is the only conclusion which modern science will accept; it is however generally a vast stride for the earliest sceptical philosophy to achieve. Vast as the progress is the Hindu philosophers did achieve it, and that at a bound as we shall presently see, but they were unable to carry the people with them. And this was the cause, why the revolt against the Vedic polytheism, instead of forming the later religion into a simple and homogeneous monotheism like Mohammedanism led to the development of immense complicated system, embracing within it every variety of belief, monotheism, pantheism, even atheism, and ultimately to that highly elaborated eclectic religion which absorbed them, and which is modern Hinduism.

Now let us stop to see what were the conclusions to which the early scepticism, the first conception of Law, drive a polytheistic but highly gifted people.

How does the conception of Law dislodge the polytheistic deities from their place in the national worship? Let us take an illustration. There is the moon. It is found, that at intervals which are to the primitive observer uncertain or capricious, she is what is now known
as being "eclipsed." In accordance with the then prevalent mood of accounting for phenomena, the eclipse is attributed to an effort, an act of a pure supernatural Being. There are a couple of malignant Demons, Rahu and Ketu who make an attempt to devour the moon on account of an early grudge. Not only therefore is the moon—the measurer, an Intelligent Supernatural Being herself—that she was long ago as soon as according to the necessities of language she was named the "measurer," but her eclipses give rise to the existence of to other mythological beings. In course of time science ascertains that these eclipses are perfectly calculable and occur at periods which are governed by law and not by Demoniac Caprice. They are found to depend on the motions of the heavenly bodies and not on either the malignance or the gastronomic powers of fiends. Rahu and Ketu still retain their place as the ascending and descending nodes in Astronomy, but cease to be demons.

Now arises a vast question—at once the loftiest and the most insoluble problem which man has had to answer. The eclipses are due, it is seen, not to malevolent demons, but to the revolutions of the Heavenly bodies. But why should the Heavenly bodies be moving in this fashion? Do they move at their own pleasure revolve round and round because they choose to do so? No—this cannot be, for they too move, it is seen, not capriciously not at their own pleasure but according to fixed and unchanging Laws. How was it that they became subject to law? Who impose it on them? Who made these laws? Did some one make them, or are they self-existent?

This is the great problem which at the first birth of scepticism presses upon the enquirer for a solution. There may be three different answers:

(1) One is, that they cannot be self-existent. There is nothing which, according to our lights, is self-existent. Every effect has a cause. In the endless claim of cause and effect we never came across an effect which never had a cause. The Law of Causation endures through the whole province of human experience. And shall we
conclude that this vast universe alone is without a Cause? Has cause after cause sprung into existence without a First Cause? Everywhere we meet with the handiwork of a Great Authority of the Universe. Acknowledge him then as the Great Father and ruler of the Universe. This is monotheism, pure and simple. Modern science declares the reasoning neither conclusive, nor tenable.

(2) The second answer is that of Auguste Comte and his disciples. We know nothing of an Author of the Universe. We know that the universe exists, and that it is governed by laws. Beyond those laws we know nothing and can know nothing. Laws may be self-existent for aught we know. We do not know that they are otherwise. There is a modification of this line of thought which is fast losing its ground in the modern world, but which was formulated with wonderful power of logic by the author of the Sankhya Pravachana Sutras. Not only do we not know that God exists, but he cannot exist. This alone strictly speaking, is Atheism.

(3) The third answer seeks to reconcile the other two. It grants that there may be a first cause, and it admits Nature and her laws, of not exactly to be self-existent, but to what very nearly amounts to the same thing. Granted, there is a First Cause, but why should we seek it beyond Nature. Is it impossible that the cause of the universe should be in itself! God, it says, is in Nature; and all phenomena his manifestations. This is Pantheism.

In the early revolt of Hindu philosophy against the Vedic Polytheism, all these lines of thought expression led to some of the most momentous revolutions in the destiny of the human race. The greatest of these, the rise of Buddhism was the outcome of an Atheistic—a Religion of Humanity, which like the modern religion of Humanity, recognised no God. The Sankhya too, as originally propounded by its great founder, was atheistic. But in the hands of its later expounders it acknowledged a God, and then in its time, reached with remarkable force and power to the National conception of the Divine Being. But Atheism disappeared out of Hinduism.

Pantheism and if that conception of the great universal Principle
to which science alone is inclined to pay much respect occupies a large area in Hinduism. It is the earliest product of the revolt against polytheism. It is present in the Vedas themselves. It is the leading thought which finds expression in the Upanishads. It is by no means rare even in the hymns of the Rig-Veda. The celebrated Purush Sukta is a pantheistic hymn. It has attracted to itself the largest amount of literary talent and theological. The great Uttar Mimamsa School of philosophy is devoted to its exposition. One of the greatest figures in Indian philosophies—Sankaracharya developed it, embellished it, and preached it with an amount of learning and eloquence unrivalled in India. If there is any religious book in India, which to large numbers of worshippers, is what the Bible is to the Christian, is the Bhagabata Puran. If there is any philosophical poem in Sanskrit, which is worth more than the whole of the profess religious writing, it is the Bhagabata Gita. Both these great works—among the greatest in Indian literature—drive their philosophy in spite of their eclecticism mainly from the Vedanta. There is nothing in Europe equal in richness or in splendour to the pantheistic literature of India.

All this and much more has led scholars both European and native to believe that the higher Hinduism, if not the popular Hinduism also, is pantheistic. This is in a certain measure true, but such an opinion excludes from consideration the later and final developments of pantheism in India. The god of patheism is too abstract and philosophical a conception to form the basis of a popular creed; and when it does get mixed up with a popular creed, begins to exercise a controlling influence upon it and is finally accepted by it, as was undoubtedly the case with pantheism in India, it itself undergoes a remarkable transformation. The popular mind instinctively forms of the god in nature the only conception of such a Being which it finds within the reach of its powers, viz. that of Personal Being, who though pervading all Nature, has his own individuality, and therefore attributes which are distinct from those of the Nature which he pervades. Thus from the original pantheistic conception of Narayana, or God in Nature, arises that of Vishnu, the universal Pervader, who has his
individually apart from the universe. But the great question is why should their be such a transformation.

First, there is the ancient but somewhat unphilosophic explanation—anthropomorphism. In certain stages of culture the worshipper cannot form the object of his worship except after his own model. The Vedic dieties whom Projapati, Brahman (Creator), Atman had displaced, or were displaced, were all gods formed after the human pattern. The Hindu mind had been accustomed to conceive of all supernatural Beings—even Indra and Varuna, as possessing attributes the same in kind with theirs however vast their superiority in power and excellence. The more abstruse conception of a god in nature, when presented to the popular mind, naturally formed itself there in the same mould. From an impersonal Soul, of Nature, he became a person, the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer of nature.

The explanation is by no means worthless, and will often pass as sufficient. But Religion would be a thing of infinitely less value than I conceive it to be, if its development had nothing higher to disclose than the weakness of the Human Intellect. The highest excellence which the human faculties are capable of recognising is moral excellence. The highest Beauty which man can love or admire is moral Beauty. The highest form of existence is moral Existence. The most exalted worship is the worship of moral Perfection. The worship of the god of Pantheism—of pure Pantheism such as is known in Europe—is devoid of this element, the most exalted and vivifying element in Religion. In an Impersonal God who is simply the great Principle of Nature, we can recognise no moral attributes to which we can render worship. His worship is a barren and purely intellectual worship which crushes the heart by the unallowed sense of power and greatness which we contemplate, but which we can neither love nor set up as an Ideal from which to derive our own Rule of life. Pantheism therefore fails as a Religion. Moral attributes implies Personality. We must worship a Personal God in order that we may worship the highest form of Excellence—that our worship may not be a barren and crushing worship of Power and Pitilessness, but one
of Love and Hope, and an exalting influence leading man to the highest Ideal of life.

The belief in a Personal God is not only a moral, but when the belief in the existence of God is once accepted, also an intellectual necessity of human nature. "We believe in the existence of an Infinite God" says Mr. Mansel, "and we know also that we cannot conceive Him as Infinite. Our conception of the Deity is still bounded by the conditions which bound all human Knowledge, and therefore cannot represent the Deity as he is, but only as he appears to us." Our conception of God therefore casts itself into an anthropomorphistic mould and assumed a Personality in which alone he can be conceivable to us.

I can conceive that doubts will be cast by the learned on the existence of a personal Supreme God in Hinduism. It will readily be admitted that there is on the one hand the belief in a Pantheistic God—the God in Nature of Science and the Iswara of the Hindu systems of Philosophy, and there is on the other the mythological conception of a Trinity discharging, each in his own sphere, the several functions of a supreme Personal God, but neither of these beliefs is a belief in a Personal God. Such contention would beside the purpose, for all who are personally acquainted with popular Hinduism as professed by the people at large know that the belief in a Personal God is of the very essence of the creed of the Hindu peoples. The words "Iswara," "Parameswar," "Jadadiswar" are on the lips of every Hindu and are used by them to denote not the philosophic conception of a Pantheistic, but a Personal Ruler of the universe, and the Supreme Disposer of all things. Even in the systems of Philosophy specially in their later developments, Iswara, as the First Cause, gradually gathers around him attributes which are only the very attributes of a Personal Being. In those great store-houses of the traditional religion of the Hindus, the Itihasas and Puranas, this belief in a Personal God co-exists with that in Impersonal God co-extensive with the universe on the one side, and Tritheism and Polytheism on the other. Duryodhan in the Mahabharat . . .
DEVI CHOWDHURANI
DEVI CHOWDHURANI

On rushed the vessel in the dark, parting the gathering masses of foam at the prow. The wind roared, the clouds thundered, the lightning flashed, the rain fell in torrents and on rushed the vessel, steady as in the serenest weather.

Brajeswar and Ranga Raj now released the lieutenant.

"Be seated comfortably, sir," said Ranga Raj, "the Rani probably will do no harm. But you should not have boarded Debi Rani's vessel without her permission. Have you never heard that she is a goddess Incarnate? But how was it Sir, if I may put the question, that you neglected to cut down our masts and destroy our sails, when you saw the clouds gathering in the heaven."

"I never thought," replied the lieutenant, "that you would venture on such navigation as this. A sea-going vessel in the open seas may venture on such a course with impunity but to sail in the dark in these narrow rivers, abounding in shoals and sand-banks, and before such a fearful driving tempest—I have never seen or heard anything like it in the Bengal rivers. You are all in danger of your lives every moment."

"Not at all," replied Ranga Raj, "these rivers are so familiar to us that we can navigate them with our eyes closed. The man at the helm is the first steersman in these rivers."

The lieutenant paid little heed to Ranga Raj's conversation; he felt sorely vexed at having been outwitted by a woman. Ranga Raj finding him gloomy and taciturn, went out on the deck, and carefully watched the progress of the vessel. Brajeswar who wished to avoid
being accosted by his father had quietly glided away unobserved by him but instead of going out, like Rangaraj to the deck, he had glided into the next apartment, where he knew Prafulla was.

Haraballav’s condition at the time allowed him to bestow little attention on his son’s movements. The rushing of the storm while he was yet floating on the unstable element of water, had stupified him. Then when he actually found the vessel part its moorings, and reel before the heavy gusts of wind, he lost at once both physical and mental equilibrium and found himself stretched at length at Nisi’s feet. Not exactly comprehending whether he was on the surface of the Teesta or at its bottom, he was discussing within himself whether there was any further use in calling on Durga to save him. A suppressed laugh from Nisi convinced him that probably he was not at the bottom, as he had never heard of any one indulging in laughter in those regions. So he mustered courage, tried to sit up and found that there was nothing to prevent his doing so. Nisi now took him in hand. “Would you like to sleep sir?” said she.

“This is not the time for sleep”, said he.

“You will never find any other”, replied Nisi meaningly.

“What do you mean?” asked Haraballav timidly.

“You came here as a spy who was to deliver our Debi Rani to the English.”

“No—yes—you see—” stammered Haraballav.

“Do you know what the consequences would have been to Debi if you had succeeded?”

“You see—I do not know—that is—” again stammered the cowardly wretch.

“She would have been hanged. She had done you no harm. On the contrary, she did you an infinite deal of good—remember the fifty thousand rupees. And in grateful recognition of this service, you wanted to get her hanged. Do you know what punishment is meet for you?”

Haraballav had not the power to answer.

“Therefore, I say”, continued Nisi, mercilessly, “sleep now,
if you wish to sleep. For you will never see night again. Do you know where we are going?"

 Haraballav spoke not.

 "There is a melancholy burning ground" continued Nisi, "called the Witch's burning ground. Those whom we want to kill, we take there and kill. We are going there now. The Saheb will be hanged, so the Rani has ordered. Do you know what punishment is reserved for you? You will be impaled alive."

 Haraballav clasped his hands and cried like a child; "Save me, save me!" he called out.

 "Do not cry you coward" thundered the lieutenant—"you are old—why cannot you make up your mind to die?"

 The roaring tempest prevented the sound being carried to Brajeswar's ears or Nisi's plans might not have proceeded so smoothly.

 "Save me! Can no one save me" cried the coward still.

 "Who is so base as to interfere on behalf of a wretch like you? The Rani I know is merciful—but no one shall seek mercy for you."

 "I shall give you a lakh of rupees" said Haraballav, "if you can save me."

 "Is there no shame in you" continued the pitiless Nisi, "for half that sum, you have turned the basest informer. And dare you speak of lakhs?"

 "I will do whatever you may command me to do" groaned Haraballav piteously.

 "People like you can do nothing which is worth being done," replied Nisi contemptuously.

 "The meanest," groaned the wretch again, "may be of use. Command I beseech you—I will do your bidding. Do but save me."

 "And supposing you can be of service to me," said Nisi in reply, softening her tone a little, "what trust can I put in you? You have shown yourself a rogue, a coward, and ungrateful wretch, and an informer. Can I trust you?"

 "I will take any oath you prescribe" was the eager reply.
“Your oath!” ejaculated Nisi, contemptuously, “how will you swear?”

“By the Ganga Water, Copper and the Tulsi plant.”

“No” said Nisi, “can you swear by your son?”

For once Haraballav flashed up. “That I will not” said he with energy; “you are welcome to kill me in what way you like.”

“Let us dispense with oath then” said Nisi vanquished for once.

“They are not worth much from you, and as you are in our power they are unnecessary. Do you wish to live?”

“Yes—yes—save me!” was the piteous reply once more.

“Well then listen” said Nisi, “my father is a great Kulin. It is hard to find husband for daughters of our exalted line. We are restricted to only one clan, as you know, viz., that which you belong. I am married, but I have a sister who has not been—because none of your clan has been found willing to take her. The objection is that she is past the marriageable age. She is now twenty-five or so. Now if we cannot get her married to one of your clan, my father loses caste. Will you save us from the terrible fate?”

Haraballava felt overjoyed—felt restored to life from the most horrible of deaths. Only another marriage. That was a light affair for a Kulin Brahman. As to the bride’s age, even that was nothing very uncommon in the case of Kulin marriages. The reply he gave was exactly what Nisi had calculated upon.

“This is not a great matter. It is the duty of the Kulin to save other Kulins from such misfortune as you anticipate. As to the bride’s age, why I have seen brides given away at the hoary age of seventy. There is only one thing. I am myself too old to marry—will not my son suit you?”

“He may not be willing to marry” objected Nisi artfully.

“My will is his will—he has never yet disobeyed me,” said Haraballav.

“But I wonder how he came here tonight. Do you know?” asked he, quite at his ease now.
“He came here to seek you” said the inventive Nisi who never objected to smack jokes.

“Where is he now?” asked Haraballav.

“He is quite safe—you shall see him in the morning. Will you make him consent to the marriage? If so, we will let you depart in peace.”

“Most willingly” replied Haraballav. “Do go and obtain my pardon from Rani.”

“Look upon it as settled.” She then went to Debi, followed by Diva.

“Nisi has been carrying on a wispered conversation with your father-in-law,” said Diva maliciously to Prafulla.

“What about” enquired Prafulla of Nisi.

“Negotiating a marriage” answered Nisi, “would you like me to be your mother-in-law?”

“Krishna forgotten, I see” said Prafulla laughing, certain that Nisi has not been negotiating her own marriage.
CHAPTER...

The tempest subsided into a calm. Prafulla ordered her vessel to be unclosed. When morning broke, she gave her instructions for the disposal of prisoners.

"Let Rangaraj see them honourably dismissed. Let him provide my father-in-law with a conveyance to take him home; palki (a native conveyance borne by men) and bearers must be procurable in some adjoining village. Let the Saheb be provided with the expenses of his journey back to Rangpur. Tell him also that should any of his men have been wounded in yesterday's fray—he should instruct them to come to us; I will make them such compensation as money can give. Should any have died I shall make some atonement by providing for their children."

Nisi nodded assent, but unknown to Prafulla added some suggestion of her when communicating them to Ranga Raj. She then suggested to Haraballabh, that it was time for his morning ablutions and prayer, and he was at liberty to get on shore but he must go in charge of a Barkandaz. At the same time somewhat obtentatiously called on Ranga Raj to take the Saheb to the Witch's Burial ground, and there hang him by the neck.

It was therefore with a heavy heart and much misgiving that Haraballabh went down to the beach to say his prayers in charge of a fierce-looking Barkandaz. While engaged in performing his ablutions, he saw the lieutenant march passed him, accompanied by Rangaraj and a Barkandaz.

"Where is the Saheb going" asked Haraballabh of the escort timidly.

"To the gallows" replied Ranga Raj curtly.

Haraballabh trembled for himself. He forgot his prayers and hastened back to Nisi to ascertain the result of her interference
on his behalf. Rangaraj however did not lead lieutenant Brennan to the gallows. He accompanied him to the nearest village, purchased a horse for him with Debi’s money, provided him with funds for his journey, delivered him Debi’s message, and then courteously bade him farewell. The lieutenant doubted very much in his mind whether these were robbers at all.

Haraballabh on his return, found his reception somewhat different from what he had anticipated. A tempting repast consisting of fruits and sweets of various kinds, waited for him. Nisi pressed him to the refreshment with a courtesy and gentleness which contrasted strangely with pitiless scorn with which he had tormented him the previous night. She reminded him significantly of the promise he had given her the previous night, and said that Brajaeswar would be presently before him to receive his instruction. Brajeswar who had gone on shore for a stroll, shortly returned and found his father agreeably employed in trying the favour of sundry nuts, pomegranates and other fruits. On seeing Brajeswar Haraballabh who was certain that he was being watched spoke to him in guarded language.

“I have not learnt, Brajeswar, how it happened that you were here yesterday,” said he, “but this I can hear from you at leisure when we are at home. I understand that you came here to seek me, and I do not see that you are under any sort of restraint or in any troubles. Are you?”

“None whatever, Sir,” replied Brajeswar.

“That is good” resumed his father, “now I find myself hard- pressed on a matter in which I have not been able to give a refusal.”

Haraballabh then briefly explained to Brajeswar Nisi’s request, which certainly took him very much by surprise. “I have given her a sort of consent,” said he, “and should you find the family of good caste, and otherwise free from reproach I see no objection to the course proposed. It would be not only rescuing a family in distress, but would also go to meet your mother’s and my own wishes to a certain
extent as we have both been anxious to see you suitably married again. You can ascertain the further detail from the lady whose sister the bride is and if you find nothing to object, you can contract the marriage and bring the bride home. I will return home at once provided I can find a boat or other conveyance.”

“A palki and its bearers are waiting for you sir,” said Brajeswar.

This was true, Rangaraj had procured them for him under Debi’s orders. Haraballav lost no time in starting him, glad to get out of the reach of the women, who had threatened to put him to a very disagreeable end. That he should leave his son in their hand-made him somewhat uncomfortable, but consoled himself with the reflection that his son was young and handsome and evidently in good graces of the dreadful women. A handsome face thought he vanquishes the fiercest of them.

“What is the farce about, lady...?” asked Brajeswar of Nisi when his father was gone.

“Why, truly you are more stupid than the men generally are. Do you not see, you are to marry my sister and to take her to your father’s home?”

“Where is your sister, pray, and why am I to marry her?” asked Brajeswar.

“Here is my sister” replied Nisi, dragging Prafulla forward by the hand; “as to why you should marry her, is a question which you had better settled with her.”

They now all comprehended Nisi’s clever trick upon Haraballav but it did not produce the joyful effect she had anticipated. Both Prafulla and Brajeswar looked grave, while Diba began to whimper at the idea of being separated from Prafulla.

“Your plan will not answer lady...” answered Brajeswar. “I must not deceive my father. If I take Prafulla to my father’s house I must tell him who she really is.”

“Did I not say that you are more stupid than even the rest of your sex?” replied Nisi, sorely vexed, “what will your father
say when he learns that his new daughter-in-law is no other than the famous robber Debi Chowdhurani?"

"Let Debi's name be never mentioned among us again" said Prafulla earnestly—"I have done with that life for ever. Wherever I live now, I shall now live as Prafulla and die as Prafulla."

"Will Haraballav Ray, think you, be more tender towards Prafulla than towards Debi?" asked Debi with some bitterness.

"It is a matter," said Brajeswar, "which you had best leave me to settle, when I spoke to Prafulla last evening, I asked her to accompany me home. I make the same request again—I beg it of her. Should she consent, the rest is my business."

"Do not get angry, friend Brajeswar," said Nisi sweetly. "It is your business, but are you sure you will not mar it as you did ten years ago."

"Ten years make a great difference in a young man's life." said Brajeswar.

So it was settled. Brajeswar's plan of course was preferred to Nisi's. As Prafulla had just said, Debi was no more. She had disappeared from the theatre of the world for ever.
CHAPTER...

And now Prafulla began her preparation for the journey to Bhutnath. The first step was to break the matter to the faithful and devoted Ranga Raj. The task of explaining the matter fell upon Nisi. She performed it well and faithfully. Rangaraj wept at the thought of parting with his mistress and for a time insisted on misbelieving Nisi's story. Prafulla then herself addressed, in kind and affectionate language and exhorted him to follow her example. She commissioned him to disband her soldiers and the numerous attendants male and female, who generally as now, resided at her headquarters at Debigar. At this place which Ranga Raj had named after her, Bhavani Pathak had caused a magnificence palace to be erected for her to which Debi had added a magnificently. Though she rarely lived there, Debigar formed her headquarters—where was kept the bulk of her treasure, all that part of her moveable property which she did not keep in her boat, and where were collected the majority of her servants and retainers. All this, with certain reservations made in favour of Nisi and Diba, Prafulla gave away to Ranga Raj, on the condition that Ranga Raj was to devote all that remained after satisfying his necessities to the relief of distress. Then s-he addressed him as follows:

"Go and live there; may the gods preserve you! You will never be in want. Never touch the sword or the musket again. That which you and Bhavani Pathak consider to be doing good is really great and fearful brute forces. It is for God in heaven, and the King on earth to punish the wicked. No one has deligated to you or to me that duty. Do good by all means, but do it by means which the holy Sastras prescribe. Above all be faithful to God. Tell Bhavani Thakur that I shall die content if I ever hear that he has taken to the ways of peace."
Ranga Raj left her there with his Barkandaza. Nisi and Diba would not leave Prafulla still she reached Bhutnath, wither they all proceeded in the great big boat. That boat so wellknown as the residence of the Robber Princess was to be destroyed after it had reconveyed Nisi and Diba to Debigar. All the valuable properties it then contained—gold and jewels and other valuables in abundance, as the reader has seen—were to become thenceforth the joint property of Nisi and Diba, to be devoted by them to charitable purposes. So strictly was Prafulla bent in redeeming her pledge to Krishna that she was determined not to take with her to her husband’s house anything beyond the cloth she wore.

“And sister, you contemplate entering your husband’s house unadorned” asked Nisi.

“A wife by the side of her husband” replied Prafulla “stands in no need of ornaments.”

“Accept my last service then—on the last day we stand together,” said Nisi, “allow a sister to decorate a sister in her own humble way.”

So saying Nisi adorned Prafulla with the splendid set of jewels she had received as a present from the Raja, as the reader may remember. She had had no occasion to use them till now.

And now all serious business being done, the three ladies gave way to tears at the sorrow of parting. Diba of course set the example. The tears they shed were genuine; for as the reader has seen, they sincerely loved each other.

At length they reached Bhutnath. Prafulla took the dust of Nisi and Diba’s feet, and bade them farewell, with streaming eyes. The great big boat started for Debigar with Nisi and Diba in it. Being at Debigar they discharged the crew, and destroyed the vessel. They settled down into a quite life, worshipping Krishna in the great temple there.
CHAPTER...

Haraballav had on his return home informed his household that Brajeswar might soon be expected back with a new bride in his company. He had been obliged to add that the bride in this case is not a little child, but a fullgrown woman. The circumstance, though not absolutely rare, was not of frequent occurrence, and created considerable excitement not only within Haraballav’s household, but throughout the village.

No sooner therefore then Debi’s great big boat touched the land at Bhutnath, than the news ran like wild fire throughout the village that Brajeswar had brought a great big bride in a great big boat. The arrival of a newly married bride is always an event in a Bengal village. But the excitement on this occasion was extraordinary. Old and young, the maimed and the half-clad flew to Haraballav’s old and weather-beaten dwelling to see the bride and it was amidst an immense throng of curious spectators that Brajeswar’s mother stood out to receive the new daughter-in-law into her household. It is usual, at this stage, for the lady of the house to go through certain ceremonial forms indicative of affection towards the new daughter-in-law. One of them is called the Varana. During the Varána the bride stands veiled by the side of her husband. The lady of the house lifts the veil from the face to judge of the loveliness or otherwise of her face—for beauty is generally, in the eyes of the feminine portion of the Bengali population, the highest perfection which a bride can possess. With a thick veil drawn over her face Prafulla stood by her husband’s side, according to custom. The Ginny gently lifted up the veil to see her face; she slightly started as she saw that lovely face, and dropped the veil rather abruptly. “Lovely face!” said she, but she said nothing more. A tear stood in her eyes.
The assembled multitude of course clamoured for a sight of the lovely face, and many an old crone was prepared to lay violent hands on the bride and see what sort of a face it was that the thick veil covered. The Ginny's tact however speedily put them to flight.

"Mothers!" said she, "my son and his bride have had to make a long journey to come here. They must be weary, hungry and thirsty. Go home now. Come back when we shall be all more comfortable. My daughter-in-law of course will live in my house. You can come and see her as often as you like."

This speech was of course eminently repulsive without being rude, and the assembled neighbours, highly incensed at the Ginny's conduct, began to disperse. Many were the unfavourable remarks made on her conduct, not only on this, but on previous occasions. The bride was mercilessly criticised. She was of course a terribly big woman for any one to marry. It was surmised that her years were probably on the wrong side of fifty. It was agreed without a single dissentient voice that she was horribly ugly; that was, it was concluded, the cause of the Ginny's reluctance to disclose her features to the public gaze. Brajeswar came in for his share—he must have been utterly demented to marry such a fright. The bride, it was finally concluded, was probably a goblin or a Dakini, (a witch) who had bewitched him. No one offering seriously to contest these views, they gradually died out for want of opposition; and as darkness fell upon the village it peacefully went to sleep.

After the crowd had dispersed, and the clamour had subsided, at least within the household, the Ginny took Brajeswar aside. "Where did you get this bride, Brajeswar?" asked she.

"It is no new bride, mother" answered he.

"And where, my son" asked she with a tear in her eye, "did you find again the lost treasure?"

"He who gives all things has given her back to me," answered Brajeswar. "Do not speak about the matter to father just now. I intend seeing him when he is in private; and then I shall disclose every thing to him."
“Not you my son,” said she “leave it to me. Let the Pakasparsa be over. Till then let all this remain a secret between us.”

Brajeswar agreed. The Pakasparsa was celebrated without much eclat. And then the Ginny sought her lord at a fitting hour and spoke to him.

“This is no new bride” said she. “It is our first daughter-in-law.”

Haravallav started as if shot through by an arrow.

“No! who says so?” said he in great agitation. “I say so” said the Ginny, “I recognized her at once. Braja has also spoken to me. It is she.”

“She died ten years ago” retorted Haraballav contemptuously.

“She did not” replied his wife, “the dead do not return to life.”

“Where then were she all these ten years? What life had she led?” enquired Haraballav.

“I did not enquire” said the Ginny “and I do not mean to enquire. It is enough for me, and it ought to be enough for you that Braja has thought it proper to bring her home. He is not a boy; he is as good a judge of right and wrong as you or I; and it is him that this matter concerns more. We can rely on him.”

“I must enquire” said Haraballabh sullenly.

“No, do not,” said the Ginny with a firmness which Haraballabh had rarely witnessed in her, “Have nothing to say in the matter. You once had your way about her, and the result was, that I was about to lose my only child. Have nothing to say about her again. I shall take poison if you do.”

Haraballabh felt crushed. He had no answer to such an argument as this. There was no mistaking in the earnestness with which it was put forward. Brajeswar was Haraballabh’s only child, too, and he loved him better than he loved anything else. He gave in.

“Have your way in this matter,” said he, “but manage prudently.”

They never returned to the subject again. The Ginny in due time informed Brajeswar of the result of her conversation with her
husband, and Brajeswar communicated it to Prafulla. There the matter ended to the satisfaction of all parties.

The Ginny did well this time. Her triumph was due to her love for her son, and to the rectitude of her conduct.
CHAPTER . . .

Prafulla wished to see Sagar. She spoke to Brajeswar; Brajeswar spoke to Brahma Thakurani, and Brahma Thakurani to the Ginny. So messangers went to fetch Sagar.

Sagar learnt from them that her husband has married again—a big woman with radiant countenance, the like of which had never been seen. The description reminded her of Devi, but it never entered her mind that Devi Rani had come back home to live with her husband. Sagar felt a sort of contempt for her husband. "What can have happened to him that he should think of marrying a big woman?" thought she. She was angry with him. "Marry again? Twice he has gone though the ceremony—is that not enough? Are we not his wives?" She repined at her own lot. "Why, was I not born a poor man's daughter? I might then have lived always near him. He would never have married again, if I had lived near him."

It was in this frame of mind that Sagar reached her husband's home. She made straight for Nayan Bahu. She hated Nayan Tara and Nayan Tara hated her, each in her own way. But under this their common affliction, it was from her alone that she expected any sympathy. Now Nayan Tara had been roaring and hissing like a pent up Cobra ever since Prafulla set her foot in the house. Her husband had seen her but once since his return; he had beat a precipitate retreat before the smart fire of her tongue, and had never ventured again into her presence. Prafulla had come to her, hoping to make her a friend; she might as well have hoped to cultivate amiable relation with a hyæna or a bear. Even her attendants and friends thought proper to keep at a distance at this time of excitement. She had a number of children, who were the greatest sufferers of all. They found that the advent of the new step-mother had made an extraordinary addition to the daily allowance of slaps and blows which they were
accustomed to receive from their amiable mother as tokens of her affection.

Sagar approached the bear who sat sullen in her den.

"Come," said Nayan Tara on seeing, "why should you lag behind? Is there any one else who wants to torment Nayan Tara? Bring her too. The time is come for worrying her to death."

This speech did not hold out much promise of the sympathy which Sagar had hoped for. Nevertheless Sagar sought of her the information she was in need of.

"Then it is true that he has married again!"

"Married?" replied Nayan Tara contemptuously, "I cannot tell you if there has been a marriage. He has brought home a big woman. That is all I know!"

"Hush" said Sagar, tenderly sensitive on the subject of her husband's character, "do not speak in that strain."

"Can I speak in any other way of so big a bride?"

"How old is she?" asked Sagar wonderingly, "I presume as old as I, or even you."

"She may be of your mother's age." said Nayan Tara. "some say she is about fifty."

"Hair grey?" asked Sagar, delighted at this description of the new rival.

"Evidently" said Nayan Tara, "or she would not persistently keep her head covered. (With Hindu female this is a sign of modesty.)

"Teeth gone, I suppose?" suggested Sagar.

"The teeth go when the hairs grow grey—the thing is so plain, I wonder you ask!"

"She must be very much older than our husband?" said Sagar.

"Is she not?" replied Nayan Tara, "what have I been telling you all this while?"

"That cannot be" protested Sagar (according to the Hindu Sastras the wife ought to be younger than the husband).

"It often is the case in Kulin households" maintained her rival.
“She is very handsome, I hear.”

“Handsome truly!” exclaimed Nayan Tara with great indignation, “a pale bloated frightful thing.”

“And had you nothing to say to him who made this extraordinary choice?” asked Sagar.

“Say? You will see, if I can get hold of him” replied Nayan Tara.

“I must have a look at this specimen of youth and beauty,” said Sagar, fully prepared to see a most grotesque being.

Sagar found Prafulla on the steps leading to the tank situated within the premises. She found her seated on the steps, scouring some utensils of brass used in the kitchen. She was seated with her back towards the direction from which Sagar was coming. Somebody told Sagar that this was the new Bahu. Sagar approached and accosted her.

“Are you our new sister?” Prafulla turned round “Is it you sister Sagar?” said she.

Sagar was thunderstruck. The last person she expected to see in the new rival was the very person she saw.

“Devi Rani!” she exclaimed in amazement. “Hush” replied Devi Rani, “Devi Rani is dead. Come to my apartment and I will explain all. This is not the place.”

The two then left, each entwining the other’s neck with her arm. They conversed in private for a long while, till all was explained. Sagar was delighted. Sagar could never think of Debi as a rival. “But” said Sagar, “do you believe that this domestic life will suit you? After your throne of silver and diadem of gold, does this scoring of kitchen utensils suit you? Will the thorough adept in Yoga-Philosophy patiently listen to Brahma Thakurani’s lectures on the art of frying fish? Will the lady who commanded hosts submit to the dictation of foolish men and silly crones?”

“I have come here,” said Prafulla “because I think that this life will suit me better than the other. This is the woman’s proper sphere—woman was not made to reign. And this discipline—that which has to be acquired within the four walls of the family dwelling
house, is the highest and severest of all discipline. Here you have to deal every day with a number of illiterate, often selfish, generally ignorant people; and it has to be made your object that you shall to the best of your ability, promote their happiness and welfare, very often in spite of themselves. And you have to do it, when you yourself are a subordinate and not the ruler; when you have not the power to dispose of things in your own way—where you must expect every effort of yours for good opposed, thwarted and often overruled. And it is only by inexhaustible patience, unflinching self-sacrifice and only through passionate love of good that you can properly fulfil your destiny in the domestic life. It is much easier to rule a kingdom. It is much easier to give up the world, and to lead an ascetic life. True asceticism, true devotion to him who has commanded us to act only for others and not for ourselves can be found only here, the station most difficult fitly to occupy. The grandest life, or the loftiest sphere is not that in which there is the most show and ostentation, but that which calls for the exercise of your highest gifts. I am ambitious, sister, of the highest station woman can occupy—that of the wife and the mother, and therefore I am here."

"Let me see," said Sagar, "how you fulfil this lofty destiny."

It was the case of common sense striving to comprehend transcendent Genius.
CHAPTER...

As days, months and years passed by, Sagar found that Prafulla was gradually more and more successful in approaching the high ideal of Heroism which had so fascinated her. A change came gradually over the house since the day Prafulla had set her foot there. There was some one, an outside observer would have felt, some one watching, silent and unobserved, the interests of every one in the house; some one who did for others what the others should have done but omitted to do; some one who took care that the needy shall have food before asking for it, that the hard-worked should have rest before feeling weary, that the sick should have his medicine or his diet at the exact moment it was wanted; some who always lent a helping hand to the weak, had always a kind word for the sorrowful, always a word of sympathy for the wronged, always a word of encouragement for the honest and the good. Someone too, who always anticipated and prevented a jealous outbreak in the household, by providing that the cause of jealousy should not exist, some one who nipped the display of angry feelings in the bud, who caused quarrels to be made up as soon as they broke out; who promoted peace and love and good order among all. Nayan Tara’s children, hitherto always ill-cared for and neglected, first felt the effect of Prafulla’s presence. Prafulla made them her special charge, and soon converted them into a cleanly, healthy, peaceful and mutually loving set of little things. Nayan Tara herself ceased to growl, acknowledged the existence of a benevolent, a thoroughly loving spirit, which repel it as she might, was never weary of seeking her good, and acknowledged for; the first time in her life that she had a friend and then the influence of the master spirit under which she felt wrought a marvellous change in her. She now quarrelled less; her bursts of temper became less and less frequent, till they almost disappeared; she learnt even to be civil in her
speech; spoke to her husband with respect and affection; and submitted herself entirely to Prafulla’s guidance. Prafulla’s mother-in-law early discovered Prafulla’s patience, industry and tact, and gradually made over to her hands, as the one next to her in rank, the management of the household, and spent her own time either in caressing her grand children or, in the worship of gods. She found household affairs improve wonderfully under Prafulla’s superintendence. There was more abundance, but less expenditure; there was less waste while the poor was better fed; the dairy produce was richer than it ever had been; the children grew in health and beauty; the servants became cleanly, hardworking, orderly, and faithful, the cattle looked sleek and wellfed; every inch in the house was clean and neat; and all the while the drain on Haraballabh’s purse diminished sensibly. Haraballabh’s himself could not remain long insensible to the marvels wrought by his own despised daughter-in-law. He admired her and grew fond of her, and began to seek her counsel even in those graver matters which fell within his special province,—the management of his estates, his relations with those outside his household. He was always struck with the prudence and sagacity of her suggestions, and though often he stood aghast at the unflinching honesty of purpose which dictated them, he found that in the long run, her suggestions were also those which brought him the largest amount of revenue. There were now fewer disputes with other proprietors, less recurrency among the ryots; less fraud among the agents, and more punctual and abundant collection of the revenues. Haraballabh too followed the example of his wife and made over the management of his affair to Brajeswar. Brajeswar had caught the spirit of his wife, and under their joint management, Haraballabh gained in prosperity and affluence every year.

Extending now her influence beyond the narrow circle of her own home, Prafulla worked in the same style for all who lived within her reach. All felt her influence and willingly submitted to it. She was now universally felt to be the benefactor of all—the good and kind mother as all who knew her styled her.
Sagar, who had undertaken to watch her success, was so fascinated by it, that she now lived very frequently at her husband’s house, often disobeying the commands of her parents to come and live with them. Prafulla found in her a most useful assistant.

If Prafulla ever had a quarrel, it was with Brajeswar. She felt it to be wrong that he should give all his love to her, and should have nothing but courtesy and kindness for Sagar and Nayan Tara. “Unless you learn to love them as you love me, I will not admit that you love me fully. For I have learnt to feel that they and I form one and the same being. What is painful to them is painful to me.” These lectures however had little effect; everything else happened as she wished to happen—so marvellous was the influence of unswerving love for all, guided by high and serene intelligence; of the culture which the great Doctrine of ‘Niskam Dharma’ had imparted to her. Here was the abnegation of self—the asceticism which the Bhagabat Gita had taught her. She sought, not happiness, for that was what pertained to self—but work, which meant with her, work for others. And to the accomplishment of that work she brought an intelligence superb by nature, but improved by the highest culture. Bhavani Thakur had sought to fashion the true steel into a perfect weapon. A perfect weapon it now was—but alas for Bhavani Thakur! it did quite other and far nobler work than that for which he had intended it.

And of that great culture— theoretical and practical—none in Bhutnath ever knew. Few could ever divine that Prafulla could even read and write,—so little are the externals of knowledge necessary to the performance of our highest functions in life. True culture like solid gold, has no sound to give forth. Book-knowledge like hollow brass, resounds magnificently.

And now full of years, wealth and happiness Haraballabh breathed his last. The property devolved on Brajeswar of course. Sagar’s father too died in the course of time. His wife refused to survive him. This world she said would be to her an intolerable solitude now that he was taken away. She had no son; she declined to stand longer
in the way of Sagar’s happiness by keeping her separated from her husband; and she declined to live in dreary solitude of the sonless widow’s life. So she sacrificed herself on her husband’s funeral pyre. This brought Brajeswar an immense accession of property. Wealth rapidly multiplied itself under his careful management, guided by the genius of his wife, so much so that Prafulla now reminded her husband of the loan.

“What loan?” asked her husband in surprise.

“The fifty thousand rupees I lent you on board my vessel fifteen years ago. You can now afford to repay it. It is very small to you now?”

“Gladly” answered her husband. “But what do you want to do with the money?”

“It is not time,” said she, “it must be paid back to the owner.”

“Who I remember” said Brajeswar, “is Krishna himself. I remember too your advice how to remit to him.”

“The interest has to be paid,” suggested his wife.

“Say it has doubled the principal” answered Brajeswar.

“Krishna is not avaricious.” said his wife, “but surely seeing that he has given you so much wealth and prosperity—”.

“Krishna’s agents are very grasping, I see,” said Brajeswar laughingly, “will two hundred thousand content him?”

“I will be satisfied with it at present” said Prafulla. “Now how do you propose to remit the money?”

“In a rather convenient way” answered the husband, “I will found an asylum for the destitute, and endow it.”

“That will do,” answered the wife.

Brajeswar built an asylum for the destitute, endowed it, placed an image of the Goddess of Plenty there, and called it ‘Devi-Niketan’—that is, the abode of the goddess (Devi) of Plenty.

Devi had now many children whom she brought up with special care. To the boys she taught truth, manliness, courage—pretty much after the fashion Bhavani Pathak had followed in her case. To the girls she imparted the feminine culture which had been hers by nature
and which had been improved by the refining influence of her great love of the Pure and Holy.

And then full of years and happiness, at a ripe old age, Debi closed this life for a still nobler one—mourned by all as the “good and pious mother of all.”

I have only a word to add regarding Bhavani Pathak. Now that the British Government had settled the country and stamped out crime, Bhavani’s occupation was gone. He had no more wrongs to redress; the law had asserted itself and resumed its function. So he dispersed his men and betook to literature and philosophy. And pondering deeply on his past life in the seclusion and enforced idleness to which he found himself condemned, he found serious reasons to doubt whether he had moved in the right path. The doubts became stronger and stronger as he meditated on the purity of Him, whose nature the great system of philosophy of which he was such a master sought to expound. At last he was convinced. He had gone wrong. An atonement was needed to expiate his crimes. So he went and delivered himself up to the authorities. As no crime then capitaly punishable was proved against him he was sentenced to transportation; he sailed cheerfully across the Sea and ended his days in banishment.