



# RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN INDIA

ETHNOGRAPHIC AND PHILOSOPHIC EVIDENCES,  
1886–1936

Edited by  
Subhadra Mitra Channa and Lancy Lobo



# Religious Pluralism in India

This volume explores the inherent pluralism of Hinduism through ethnographic and philosophical evidence as presented in the *Journal of Anthropological Society of Bombay*. The essays dated 1886–1936 represent a period that marked the emergence of a European-educated native intelligentsia with a rationalist outlook.

The chapters cover a wide range of topics from Tree Worship in Mohenjo Daro, the origin of the Hindu Trimurti, interpretation of Avestic and Vedic Texts, to the second set of more localized chapters that cover the Muhammadan Castes of Bengal, the Tenets and Practices of a Certain Class of Faqirs in Bengal, the Theoretical History of the Goddess Yellamma, and much more. Written during a particular historical as well as intellectual period that reflected certain key patterns – a period just following the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century that ushered in the ideologies of a reformative Hinduism – this volume highlights how religions of all denominations have influenced each other and appear to have mingled beliefs and practices from multiple sources. It shows how tolerance and inclusiveness along with syncretism have been part of India’s religious and social history.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers of religions, history, anthropology, sociology, political science, and sociology of religion. It will also be useful to those interested in inter-religious dialogues and civil society.

**Subhadra Mitra Channa** is retired Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, India. Her research interests are in Gender Studies, Marginalization, Identity Studies, Urban Ethnography, Environment, Cosmology, and Religion and Caste Studies in India. She is the recipient of Charles Wallace Fellowship, the United Kingdom; Fulbright Lecturer, the United States, 2003 and 2008–2009; Visiting Professor to Maison D’Sciences De L’Homme, Paris; Visiting Scholar, University of Kentucky, the United States (2015); Visiting Professor University of Bahia, Brazil (2019); Fellow of the Society for Applied Anthropology, the United States; President of the Indian Anthropological Association (1997–2000); and S. C Roy Gold

Association (1997–2000); and S. C Roy Gold Medal (Asiatic Society). She was awarded the Distinguished Teacher Award Delhi University, in 2016, as the best teacher of the university.

She is the present Senior Vice-President of (IUAES) from 2018 and Chair of the Commission on Marginalization and Global Apartheid (2017–2021). Her publications were *Gender is South Asia; Life as a Dalit* (ed.), *The Inner and Outer Selves*; *Gender, Livelihood and Environment* (ed.) with Marilyn Porter, and *Anthropological Perspectives on Indian Tribes* (2019), more than 80 scholarly papers.

**Lancy Lobo** holds a master's degree in Anthropology and a doctoral degree in Sociology from the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, India. He has authored and co-authored 25 books and scores mimeographs based on research over 40 years. He has been a professor and the Director of Centre for Social Studies, based in Surat, an institute under the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Delhi. He was International Visiting Fellow at the Woodstock Centre, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, in the year 1999–2000. He is the founder director of Centre for Culture and Development, Vadodara, completing 20 years. Currently, he is Professor Emeritus at the Indian Social Institute, Delhi. Some of his recent publications include, with Jayesh Shah (eds.), *The Legacy of Nehru: Appraisal and Analysis* (2018), with A.M. Shah (eds.), *Essays on Suicide and Self-Immolation* (2018), with Kanchan Bharati (eds.), *Marriage and Divorce in India: Changing Concepts and Practices* (2019), with A.M. Shah (eds.), *An Ethnography of Parsees of India* (2022), and with A.M. Shah (eds.), *Indian Anthropology* (2022).

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and Lancy Lobo

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# Preface

This volume is part of a project undertaken earlier at the Centre for Culture and Development, Vadodara, to study the contributions of the Anthropological Society of Bombay and its journal that commenced in 1886. A.M. Shah has provided an overview of the Society and its journal in an essay, “Anthropology in Bombay, 1886–1936” (*Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2014, pp. 355–367).

Our plan was to bring out collections of essays on various themes taken from the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*. The first volume, *Essays on Suicide and Self-Immolation*, was published in 2018, and *Anthropological Explorations in East and South-East Asia (2021)* is the second volume, both by Primus Publications. The third, *An Ethnography of the Parsees of India (2022)*, and the fourth, *Indian Anthropology (2022)*, volumes were published by Routledge. Professor A.M. Shah passed away on 9 September 2021.

The current volume (fifth) by Subhadra Mitra Channa and Lancy Lobo, *Religious Pluralism in India: Ethnographic and Philosophic Evidences, 1886–1936*, is edited from the Indian Social Institute, Delhi, and hopefully more volumes may see the light of the day. The Archives of this book have been temporarily shifted to Indian Social Institute, Delhi. We thank Dr. James C. Dabhi, the director of the Centre for Culture and Development (CCD) for his cooperation, and Amba Gamit and her colleagues at CCD for scanning and copying the selected articles.

We are thankful to our previous publishers for permitting us to take up the following essays:

- 1 Totem Theories by R.E. Enthoven, pp. 123–125 in *Anthropology in India*, by Routledge 2022
- 2 Is the Retention of the Term “Animism” as a Main Religion Head in Our Census Tables Justified? By L.J. Sedgwick, pp. 126–134
- 3 One essay, “A Book-procession of the Tibetan Lamas, as seen at Darjeeling” by Jivanji Jamsheedji Modi, *Primus Publications*. pp. 157–162

We also thank Dr. Denzil Fernandes (Executive director), Dr. Tom Perumalil (Research Director), and the staff of Indian Social Institute, for facilitating our work at Indian Social Institute. It was a pleasure working with Shoma and her team at Routledge.

# Contributors

**R.C. Artal**, Rao Bahadur became a corresponding member of JASB on 30 January 1907 and District Deputy Collector, Belgaum. After retirement, he sincerely worked for the promotion of education and upliftment of the masses. He was one of the founders of the Lingayat Education Association, Dharwad. He also took an active part in social life. He raised funds for educational and other charitable institutions.

**Ruttenshaw Kershapji Dadachanji**, B.A., LL.B., died on 21 October 1939, is a member for 40 years, council member since 1906, vice-president in 1910, and honourable joint auditor for 29 years. One of his books is titled *The Origin of Unrevealed Religion*, in which he deals with the origins of Phallism, fetishism, symbol worship, and superstitions in general, and the principles of their growth and decline, and their influence on human civilization and progress.

**S.M. Edwardes**, B.A. (Oxon), Indian Civil Service, is President of Anthropological Society of Bombay, 1905–10.

**R.E. Enthoven**, CIE (1869–1952), was an administrator in the Indian Civil Service of the British Raj and an author of publications related to India, including the three volumes titled *The Tribes and Castes of Bombay* that formed a part of the Ethnographic Survey of India.

**H. Heras**, Member (10 January 1930), was a Spanish Jesuit priest, archaeologist, and historian in India. He was a proto-historian and archaeologist and taught at St. Xavier's College, Bombay. He attempted to read the Indus inscriptions and considered them to be classical Tamil. The Hera's Institute in the college is named after him.

**S.S. Mehta**, B.A., has contributed many articles on Hindu customary rites as well as those sanctioned by Scriptures.

**Sarat Chandra Mitra** is Pleader, Judges Court, Chapra, Saran, Bihar; Professor of Social Anthropology, Calcutta University, 1921–6; and Corresponding Member, Anthropological Society of Bombay.

**Jivanji Jamshedji Modi** was an eminent scholar of the time. Born as the son of a Parsee *panthaki* (diocese) priest of Bombay in 1854, he received religious education at a Parsee *madressa* school and secular primary education at a private school (see his biography by Bejan Desai, 1954). He went to Elphinstone High School and College and obtained B.A. from the University of Bombay in 1876. He then devoted himself to a life of scholarship. With a sound background of knowledge of classical Parsee literature, he contributed to the disciplines of indology, orientology, history, and linguistics and then branched out to anthropology. On account of his knowledge of classics, he often integrates textual and contextual views. He became a member of the ASB in 1886, worked as its secretary for 30 years (1902–1932), and as its president in 1914. He received many honours, including honorary doctorate from Heidelberg University, Shams-ul-Ulema and C.I.E. from the Government of India, and president of the Anthropology Section of Indian Science Congress.

**Watandar Patil** of Kasba Artal, Taluka Bankapur, Dharwar District. I.S.O. (No details available).

**Eedward Rehatsek** was born in Hungary in 1819. He studied at Budapest University and received the degree of Master of Civil Engineering in 1841. He left Hungary in 1842. He lived for a few months in France and for 4 years in the United States and migrated to Bombay in 1847, and died there as a Hindu in 1891. He worked for a while as a civil engineer with the Bombay Government and then devoted himself to a life of scholarship. He was professor of Latin and Mathematics at Wilson College, Bombay. He also knew Arabic, Persian, and French, and taught them to private pupils. Bombay University appointed him as examiner in these languages for many years. He was a prolific author, with the list of his books and articles running into 11 pages. Most of them were based on or were translations of Arabic, Persian, French, and Italian works. Bombay University elected him as an Honorary Fellow and Wilson Philological Lecturer. He was a member of many learned societies in India, Britain, France, and Germany.

**Satindra Narayan Roy**, M.A., B.L. (No details available).

**L.J. Sedgwick** (April 1883 to 27 June 1925) was an Indian civil servant who worked in the Bombay Presidency and collected and described plants as an amateur botanist. His collections are held in St Xavier's College, Bombay.

**Maulavi Abdul Wali** is Member of Asiatic Society of Bengal; Sailkupa, District Jessore, Bengal (Ranchi, Bengal).

# Introduction

*Subhadra Mitra Channa and Lancy Lobo*

The issues related to religious pluralism, best understood as the tolerance of various faiths and the possibility of their co-existence, are largely seen as a modernist phenomenon of religions in contact with an increasingly complex society (Banchoff 2008). Most theoretical and political discourses about religious plurality originate in the west, in the context of doctrinal religions such as Christianity and Islam. As far as Hindus are concerned, as pointed out by Chatterjee (1994: 4), plurality had never presented a problem. It is a condition which is easily resolved either by assimilation or by watertight closure, and examples of both abound in Indian society and culture. India shows an abundance of instances of assimilation of faiths which originated outside of it, like Islam and Christianity, which co-existed harmoniously with indigenous faiths such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. The initial conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism was partially resolved by accepting Buddha as one of the *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu, as also by the similarities between Hindu and Buddhist beliefs, as both are centred on the concept of “*karma*/rebirth based vast cosmology of human suffering” (Omvedt 2003: 13). Most Hindus revere the Buddha as well as his teachings. Moreover, all faiths originating in India, including Jainism and Sikhism, share the common belief regarding “unity that is characterized by their flexible and comprehensive view about the divine and the ultimate identity between the divine and the human soul” (Omvedt 2003: 15). Since Hindus have no fixed doctrines, there has been a tendency to absorb values and ideas from others, quite readily. Both Buddhism and Jainism introduced the doctrines of non-violence and tolerance among the Hindus, and this outlook has remained a part of Indian culture for centuries. The original opposition of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism towards Brahmanical dominance and the caste system was diluted by the Hindus themselves as they reacted strongly against the caste system and its imposed hierarchy. This led to radical anti-Brahmanical movements like the Bhakti movement and many other heterodox sects, several of which have been described in this volume.

Muslims, who came with a completely different ideology, were absorbed at the level of day-to-day interactions and economic and cultural practices. This could take place because *jati* system had the innate flexibility to treat them

as another “*jati*” that could exist side by side with the numerous other *jatis* of India. There are many Muslim artisans who specialize in making idols of Hindu gods and goddesses, and Muslim musicians play and sing Hindu devotional music and songs. A good example of this is the mellifluous classical rendering of *Hari Om Tat Sat* by Ustad Bare Gulam Ali Khan and numerous other Muslim classical singers who have sung *ragas* dedicated to many Hindu divinities. Interestingly, many Muslim musicians play devotional music for Hindu temples during festivals. Another interesting fact is that both Hindus and Muslims pray at the shrines of Sufi saints and observe common festivals. One could also consider that the notion of *karma* also leads to a tolerance, acceptance, and disregarding for the actions of others by the simple principle of “to each his/her own way and each will reap the consequences of their action”. At the same time, there is watertight compartmentalization in terms of avoidance of food and marriage with those not of one’s own kind (*jati*). While persons of other *jatis* (meaning of other religions, castes, and ethnicities) may be tolerated in public spaces, they are strictly forbidden in the inner spaces, such as the inner sanctum (*garbhagriha*) of the temples and the kitchens in the homes of upper-caste Hindus (Ananthamurthy 2000: 45). This kind of strict segregation serves to avoid conflict and confrontation. Chatterjee (1994: 5) compares the “commitment model in the Semitic group of religions” to the Hindu sense of multiple allegiances, where a Hindu finds no contradiction in visiting a Sufi shrine, praying at a Gurudwara and offering *puja* (worship) to an idol of Durga, with the same sense of devotion. One may seek the roots of such a way of thinking in the earliest known religious text of India, the Rig Veda that says “*Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadati*” (One truth known by sages by different names; Sharma 1987: 16). The notion of *svadharma* (one’s own dharma or path) as pointed out by Chatterjee (1994) in her comprehensive chapter discourages any critical examination of another’s point of view or action; the principle clearly is “to each her own”. Consequently, history has demonstrated that the Hindus or the people of this sub-continent have been among the most tolerant people. The ancient philosophy depicted in some verses of the Rig Veda, and developed fully in the Upanishads, indicates a degree of inclusiveness as well as universalism that is not easy to find in the later doctrinal religions that drew a boundary between what they identified as “believers” and “non-believers”.

To further examine the reasons for this innate tendency for the acceptance of diversity which is seen as an ethos of the Indian sub-continent, we need to understand what is Hinduism and also “who” can be called or “who” can claim to be a Hindu.

## **Hinduism and the culture of tolerance**

The soil of India has seen the persistence and continuity of some of the most ancient belief systems and age-old practices. What goes by the name of Hinduism or the beliefs of those who profess to be Hindus shows enough

diversity and divergence, to be representative of a multitude of faiths rather than a unified entity (Sen 1961: 15). “Hinduism” is an evolved way of life, the word Hindu denoting more of a geographical identity, derived from the river Sindhu (Indus) or the Hindu Kush Mountains (Sen 1961: 17) than a religious one. Unlike most doctrinal religions, Hinduism cannot trace its origin to a single founder or even any founder. It is based on an accumulated stream of wisdom spanning centuries, expressed in the two most authoritative works considered the key sacred texts of the Hindus, namely, the Rig Veda and the Bhagvat Gita. Both these works profess a transcendental and unreachable reality that does nothing to tie one down to specific actions. In a text written to teach students about Hinduism by the Trustees of the Central Hindu College, Benaras, in 1904, the concept of Nirguna Brahman as given in the Adaitva Vedanta, is, “Infinite, Absolute, Eternal, Changeless, the All is That, without attributes, without qualities, beyond name and form” who is only describable in the negative, “*neti, neti*” (not this, not this). Moreover, the classical period of Indian philosophy had six schools, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaishesika, Mimamsa, and Vedanta. While sharing some elements, they differ on core aspects or are concerned with different issues, like the Nyaya and Vaishesika, which deal with logical principles as to the nature of science, and Samkhya and Yoga, which is the control of mind and body, and Vedanta, which concerns the true philosophy of existence. The Vedanta deals with the notions of “Atman” and “Brahman”, which are the concepts in the Rig Veda and considered the final (*anta*) interpretation of the Vedas. Different schools of thought within this also differ essentially as to whether they consider the Atman and the Brahman as One or as separate entities (Sharma 1987: 24–29). Texts such as the Bhagavad Gita demonstrate the influence of several of these schools of thought like the Samkhya and Vedanta. But in spite of its internal diversity, there are some all-pervasive ideas that identify a “Hindu”. These comprise a belief in an eternal soul, rebirth, and an emphasis on retribution which presumes that one has to suffer the consequences of one’s deeds or actions (*karma*). Dharma is seen as one’s duties and appropriate action and is an integral part of the beliefs in *jati* and Varna (Channa 2018). Most of these core beliefs were developed around the period between 800 and 300 BCE (Sen 1961, Smart 1996b).

The earliest known civilization in India is evidenced from the archaeological remains of the Indus Valley Civilization and the cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The most prevalent and accepted theory is that these civilizations were founded by indigenous populations who practised agriculture and had a settled way of life. Basham (2004: 15) is clearly of the opinion that the Harappan civilization pertained to people who had “lived in the Indus valley for several centuries” and dates the civilization to “the first half, perhaps the middle of the 3rd millennium B.C.E”. Although indigenous, the Harappan people were not isolated and there are evidences of a flourishing trade with Mesopotamia as inferred by the abundance of Indus seals found in Mesopotamia, indicating as Basham (2004: 19) suggests that



there were strong trade links between the people of the Indus Valley Civilization and Mesopotamia. The main item of trade was cotton, grown in the Indus valley. Similarly, in this volume Edwardes has also pointed out to define evidences of very ancient maritime trade relations between India and the countries of Egypt and Mesopotamia, which also led to an interchange of religious beliefs and practices.

There are historical evidences of pastoral communities entering the sub-continent from the North-West side. These were people mainly from Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan in the 2nd century BCE. However, there are reasons to believe that there were migrations probably from earlier times, given the fact that the passes in the mountain ranges made movements possible. Moreover, there is some consensus that those speaking an Indo-European language came in around 2000 BCE (Wolpert 1997: 22) or even 1750 BCE (Habib 1997: 61), from the region between the Caspian and Black Seas (Smart 1996b: 49, Trautmann 1997: 13, Wolpert 1997: 22, Habib 1997: 61) and spread all over North and North-West India, even as the Harappan civilization (2300–1750 BCE) went into decline. The general assumption earlier was that the invading Aryans defeated the people of the Harappan civilization, pushing them towards the southern part of India. The invasion and conquest theory, however, found many detractors (Wolpert 1997: 22), who consider the highly evolved and heavily fortified cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa unlikely to have been invaded by pastoral nomads with much less technological sophistication. The city of Harappa had a 40-foot-thick wall and contained huge storage areas for food. Similarly, Mohenjo Daro, showing evidence of 10 cities one above the other, was an equally fortified area with huge granaries and was a Copper-Bronze civilization (Wolpert 1997: 15, Thapar 2014). The decline of the Indus Valley Civilization can more logically be attributed to the environmental factors such as the drying up or flooding of the rivers, such as the drying up of the Ghaggar-Hakra River in North India (Thapar 2002: xxi).

There were in later times also continuous incursions from the North-Western side of the Indian sub-continent by “the armies of Alexander of Macedon and more consistently with the Indo-Greeks, Parthians, Shakas, Kushanas, Hunas and Turks. The most regular movements were those of herders and trading caravans” (Thapar 2002: 40). In other words, there seem to have been immense possibilities of immigration from the passes of the Hindu Kush by people who brought in a medley of beliefs that originated in Pre-Islamic cultures of Central Asia and the Middle East. According to Basham (2004: 235), there was a time when the “ancestors of the Aryans, Iranians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Slavs and Celts had similar if not identical beliefs” but the Aryans brought to India a distinct set of deities and beliefs that seem to be their own.

Historians of religion (Sen 1961, Smart 1996a, 1996b) and those of ancient Indian history (Thapar 2002, Habib 1997) tend to believe that at least two differing streams may have influenced each other to produce the core philosophy as well as the kaleidoscope of divinities that constitute

and goes by the label of Hinduism. One of these evolved in the Harappan civilization, from where evidences of tree worship (see this volume) and the worship of a Siva like figure accompanied by a humped bull (Nandi), referred to by John Marshall as “proto-Siva” have been, were excavated. There were also elaborate “earth-mother” cults found in the Harappan civilization, which probably is the basis for the Shiva-Shakti worship (Wolpert 1997: 18) in later Hinduism. The chapter by Heras, on Mohenjo Daro, included in this volume gives some clue to the nature of religious beliefs in the Harappan civilization, and several others chapters in this volume trace the path of migration of pre-Islamic deities from the Middle East and Central Asia to India in that period. In particular, the studies by Artal and Patil (in this volume) also support the Aryan invasion theory and surmise that the Aryans must have come across a phallic worshipping culture already existing in the Indian soil. Although early Vedic sources reveal no evidence of such worship, it has now become ubiquitous among all Hindus.

The pastoral people entering India came with their own gods, of which Indra was the object of many rituals and who seems to have much in common with the Greek Zeus and the Germanic Thor (Basham 2004: 236). Varuna (along with Mitra), Agni, and Soma were the other main deities. Varuna was something akin to a supreme being, depicted as the maintainer of the moral order but seen as a distant/remote figure, and not worshipped much. He was the producer of the cosmic order Rta, and a benign figure unlike the mercurial Indra, who had many dimensions in his personality, both good and bad. Agni, the god of fire, presided over all the Vedic rituals, and as of now all Hindu marriages are solemnized in the presence of Agni as witness. Soma (the Iranian Haoma) was merged with the person of Varuna and also with the Moon, “It was the secret of heaven, the ambrosia which confers a form of immortality” (Smart 1996b: 57). The main tenets of philosophical Hinduism were established with the composition of the Upanishads wherein one finds a strong monotheistic tendency, with the exposition of the Brahman. However, unlike the rigid format of the Vedas, the Upanishads show variations in narratives that reflect the thoughts and interpretations of the various scholars who wrote them.

The Vedas can be dated between 1500 and 900 BCE (Smart 1996b: 51) or 1500 and 1400 BCE (Habib 1997: 61) and are the most ancient (oral) texts known in this part of the world. The Rig Veda espouses some of the core philosophies that have sustained an inclusive and generous worldview on this sub-continent, for example, the famous “Song of Creation”:

Then neither Being nor Not-Being was,  
 Nor atmosphere nor firmament, nor what is beyond,  
 What did it encompass? Where? In whose protection?  
 What was water, the deep unfathomable

(Smart 1996b: 58)

The Bhagavad Gita expounds that “[i]n whatever way living beings approach me, thus do I receive them. All paths, Arjuna, lead to me”. The Upanishads describe Brahman as a universal reality and if the “Brahman is the universal reality, might it not be possible to experience Brahman in the form of the ultimate realities posited by many traditions” (Long (2019: 14). Finally, such thoughts may have led to the people of this country to be more receptive to people who are different – with different customs and beliefs and have welcomed groups of non-Hindus like the Jews and Parsis on their soil. Even early Christian missionaries and Muslim *faqirs* have always been venerated.

The Sama, Yajur, and Athrava Vedas focus more on rituals and ceremonies, followed much later by the philosophical tenets of the Upanishad. While Western scholars like Max Mueller conceived of religion of the ancient people of the Vedic period as primarily of the instrumental kind, directed to solving the problems of this world and for appeasing sacred beings, the spiritual passages of the Rig Veda indicate otherwise. The writing of the last three Vedas also indicates a period of great expansion for the Aryans, who discovered the use of iron (they already had domesticated the horse) who could cut through the dense forests of the Indo-Gangetic plains and quickly move eastwards. “Archaeological evidence testifies to the presence of iron in the upper Ganga basin some time before 1000 BC or at any rate around 800 BC” (Habib 1997: 63). By the time the Upanishads were being written, the Aryans had gained more territory and had a complex civilization, with cities and settled modes of living but engaging equally in farming/cultivation including sugarcane cultivation.

An interesting aspect of Vedic hymns has been pointed out by Smart (1996b: 55) as what he calls as “kathenotheism”, the worship of one god at a time as supreme without denying the existence of other gods and including the tendency to make different gods supreme one after the other. Each hymn focuses on a single deity, who for that moment in time is treated as the supreme and only deity, thus indicating a tendency towards monotheism. In another perspective, this may indicate that the Vedic followers believed that the same divinity could manifest itself in various forms. Moor (1999: 1) describes the religion of the Hindus as “monotheism”, with specific reference to the belief in the One Brahm (Brahman). In the Upanishads (800 BCE), the holy cosmological power sustaining the world is defined as Brahman (Being) a unified entity beyond comprehension and description. All individual “Atman” are all part of the same Being and will ultimately merge with the ultimate divinity or Brahman. This Brahman is a *Nirguna* (having no qualities) entity and is not to be confused with any of the numerous gods and deities of Hinduism. As explained by Smart (1996b: 95), the three supreme gods usually identified as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva (Mahesh) cannot be called a trinity but they “form a threefold symbol of the one Being”. In metaphysical terms, one may translate Brahma as matter, Vishnu as spirit, and Siva as time or in other words as earth, water, and fire (Moor 1999: 2).

The ancient Vedas were oral texts that were passed down countless generations through a select group of scholars and restricted to them alone. As Doniger (2015: 33) points out, the rigour with which the Vedas have been passed down orally, over centuries with strict adherence to every syllable, has preserved the exactness and purity much more than one sees in later written texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, of which hundreds of versions exist (Ramanujan 1999). Although confined to the intellectual elite, these texts must have reached the common people, as those who spoke Sanskrit and knew the texts should have also known other local languages. It was necessary for them to converse with ordinary people, including their wives, as women were not allowed to learn Sanskrit, at least not most of them. With the use of local languages, sages, religious mendicants, and preachers in great likelihood passed down the core philosophies to the masses. It is obvious that people in general followed a variety of beliefs and practices that have endured over the years and incorporated into Hinduism. Studies by Sarat Chandra Mitra, C.M. Artal, and Watandar Patil (see this volume) describe its multifaceted and kaleidoscopic character. The ground-level practices of Hinduism, as depicted by Channa (1984), have numerous local variants and these have been subject to changes. New deities and modes of worship are continuously being incorporated, and many old ones are forgotten. In the medieval times, the sun god was deified and worshipped as indicated by the construction of the majestic sun temple at Konarak, but presently, sun worship has been reduced to a daily ritual to the sun and considered as a natural celestial body without any images in the temples. A new deity like Santoshi Maa entered the North Indian pantheon through the very popular Hindi film of the same name.

It is a recognized fact that all that was written or formed part of the ancient texts have probably never been deciphered properly, as is seen in the multiple interpretations that are still being given to specific words and utterances (Trautmann 2004). The inherent pluralism of Hinduism can be also linked to the lack of scriptural authority of the kind that lays down definitive rules or norms to be followed; in this way, a large number of people can and do identify as “Hindus” without having to follow too many prescriptions. Very ancient forms of beliefs, Hinduism being one, exist not as conceptual or doctrinal religions but as ontological truths, of which the most important or the core belief is in the sacredness or the superior power invested in an entity, in whatever form it exists. They do not develop an enclosed identity not being opposed to any other bounded form of belief. In an ethnography of a pastoral community in the upper Himalayas (Channa 2013), it is shown that the concept of a bounded religion is unknown to people who have not come in contact with complex bounded cultures. For these simple people, all beings that are considered sacred or powerful. They find no contradiction in considering the Ganga as sacred, and they extend the same “sacredness” to the Buddha and their local deities. For them, the Pandavas are not mythical characters but real members of their society and

live among them as “*kuldevta*” (Channa 2005). In Japan, where Shintoism survives as an ancient religion, one finds a similar boundary less concept of sacred and sacred beings. In this regard, there is a temple situated in a park in Kyoto, which is dedicated to a “god from India”. Japanese temples carry icons of various Hindu gods and goddesses, such as Lakshmi, Narayan, etc., and these deities are displayed prominently among various other deities.

It is certain that what crystallized as a “Hindu” identity is an oppositional identity, devoted more to understanding what a Hindu is not than what a Hindu is. It is highly probable that with the rise of doctrinal and defined religions like Buddhism and Jainism, some kind of differentiations may have emerged, although both these faiths are hardly distinguished as distinct from Hinduism by most Indians. The real push for a separate identity may have come with the Islamic invasion, especially as it was accompanied by military aggression and is probably at the roots of the historical fracturing of identity that has since continued. However, we can see from the wide-scale prevalence of heterodox devotional movements, such as Sufi and Bhakti, that there has been considerable convergence of the two opposed faiths. It is remarked that on the Indian soil, Hinduism and Islam have shown a great amount of syncretization. It is also interesting to note that the legal definition of being Hindu as promulgated by the Supreme Court of India follows the same logic of elimination rather than inclusion. While enacting the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), the court, in its wisdom, defined a Hindu

as someone who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew, but who is (a Sikh, Buddhist, or Jaina) one of a rather arbitrary selection of people whose marginality made the court nervous, “any person who is a Hindu by religion in any of its forms or developments, including a Virashaiva, a Lingyat or a follower of the Brahmo, Prarthana or Arya Samaj”.

(Doniger 2015: 27)

Smart (1996a: 58) considers the Hindu philosophy as basically a responsive one, and a successful one at that it being able to build up a Hindu nationalism just like Japanese nationalism based on Shintoism.

Logically, the inclusion of Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists within the category of “Hindu” follows the original geographical meaning of the term. If Hindus are all those who belong to the region beyond the Hindu Kush mountains or beyond the Sindhu (Indus) River, then all sects and faiths belonging to this soil are Hindus. Most Hindus, Jains, and Sikhs display equal regard and reverence for each other’s places of worship. The changing political climates may have sown the seeds of dissension among these faiths, but in reality, even today, many Punjabi families have at least one son who is brought up as a Sikh while the other may not be. Marriages between Sikhs and non-Sikhs were common and permissible. The Mahavira and the Buddha are as much revered as any other Hindu deity by most Indians.

The flexible and expansive beliefs of the Hindus (Biardeau 1994) have always provided space for critiquing even the most prevalent institutions such as the caste system and food norms such as vegetarianism. People on both ends of the social scale have found reasons to construct their own version or interpretation of Hinduism, such as some of the reformative sects that evolved among the elite during the colonial period and the heterodox sects that attracted the marginalized and the social outcasts of society, like the Bauls and Vaishnavs of Bengal, described by Abdul Wali in the two chapters of the present volume. The elite on the other hand went for social reformative sects like Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj. It is interesting to note that at both ends, the caste system was rejected and it stands as the most criticized institution of the Hindus and yet one that shows the most persistence which has intruded into those religions that had nothing to do with it before they arrived on the Indian soil. Again, there have been multiple readings and interpretations of the Hindu texts and belief systems (Ramanujan 1999). In fact, the possibilities of variation are internal to Hindu beliefs, where concepts such as *Yug* (temporal) *dharma* and *Des* (geographical) *dharma* are commonly prevalent. Therefore, as *dharma* refers to appropriate action, such actions are also contextualized in time and space. Multiple readings and interpretations even of textual Hinduism are possible, and these have been researched and studied. For example, Advaita Vedanta, which is one of the several forms of classical Hinduism, is opposed by a simple re-reading of the text. Smart (1996a: 59) points out that such philosophies as that of the Dvaitins may read a well-established text such as “*tat tvamasi*” (That art Thou) as “*atattvamasi*” (That thou art not) to take a stand opposite to that of the Advaitins; in other words, the same words can be interpreted differently to mean either that God and You are one or that You are a supplicant to God.

Classical Hinduism points to at least three paths to salvation, *gyan* (knowledge), *karma* (action), and *bhakti* (devotion). Of these, the last leaves open any course of action or performance, as found suitable by the devotee. It is this leeway, the multiple possibilities of direct experience that has given rise to several cults, as described in this volume by Artal and Patil, for instance, of the subaltern Siva worshippers and the Veera Shaiva by Artal and Patil, that skirt or otherwise negate most of the norms of conventional Hinduism or of society itself. The Veera Shaiva reinterpret the Purusa myth of the Rig Veda, accepted by most Hindus as the origin of the Varna system as a division of fire, water, air, and Earth and not as a division of living beings into categories, those of Brahmin, Ksatriya, Vaisya, and Shudra (for further details, see Channa 2018). Most significant is the collating of Earth with the Sudras in a positive sense. They say that the Sudra perform all necessary nourishing tasks that removes pain just as the Earth provides us with all subsistence and nurtures us to relieve our pains. It is to be noted that the Veerashaiva have among them many *jatis* that perform such services and are regarded as Sudra by upper-caste Hindus.

The word Hindu is in itself a construct that did not find wide prevalence till recent times, and almost a generation ago most people would refer to it as Sanatan Dharma or the “eternal dharma”, the word dharma not being synonymous with religion but with an appropriate course of action. As elaborated in the Gita, these courses of actions are subject to situational logic, ethics and principles that are both conditional and evolving.

### **The Indian Renaissance and the interpretation of religion**

The chapters that are included in this volume were all written during a particular historical and intellectual period that reflects some key patterns. Socially, this was a period just following the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century that ushered in the ideologies of Reformative Hinduism but which, although influenced significantly by Christianity and the notions of Universal Humanism derived from the West, was nevertheless rooted in the ancient Indian modes of thought. The Influence of Raja Rammohan Roy, Debendra Nath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen, and most importantly of Sri Ramakrishna Parmahansa (Romain Rolland 1930) and his famous disciple Swami Vivekananda instilled a sense of pride and national identity among the elite Hindus. They also propagated Hinduism as a universalistic and inclusive religion shorn of what they considered the superstitions and the beliefs and practices of the ignorant folk. Nationalists such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gandhi, and Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan reiterated that universalism and humanism were already a part of Indian thoughts and deeply entrenched in the soil of India (Long 2019: 7); hence, there was no need to look towards the west to borrow such ideals. In this way, academic enterprises were linked to nationalist goals, which was aimed at inculcating feelings of pride and self-respect among Indians. This was also at the peak of the colonial period when many Indians, especially the ones whose writings we have referred to within these pages, were fired by the zeal of so-called scientific analysis, which was seen mainly as a “civilizing influence” from the West. Artal (in this volume), in his analysis of the goddess Yellamma, gives an elaborate scientific interpretation of the myth of Renuka, using the symbolism of natural cycles of rain and of harvesting to give a rational, allegorical base to mythical narrations. Scholars like Dadachandji and S.S. Mehta also attempted to highlight their religion or way of life as equally “civilized” and acceptable within a broader humanistic and cosmopolitan worldview and deny or decry some of the more regressive practices and institutions. Like the British administrators, educated Indians like Sarat Chandra Mitra in this volume also considered it their mission to record all that they found “exotic” or worth recording.

The authors whose works have been presented in this volume comprise both Western scholars (not necessarily British) and Indian scholars who are highly regarded in their fields of specialization and research. Of particular interest is Rehatsek, a Hungarian civil engineer, who emigrated from Hungary, and after brief stints in France and the United States, came to Bombay, converted to Hinduism, and died as a Hindu in 1891. He was

like most scholars of his time proficient in many languages, Latin, Arabic, Persian, and French and gave up his civil engineering work to teach Latin and mathematics at Wilson College, Bombay. His work includes numerous translations from Arabic, Persian, French, and Italian. He was elected as the Honorary Fellow of the Bombay University and worked as a lecturer in Philology in Wilson College. Another European scholar was Heras, who was a Spanish Jesuit Priest, and an archaeologist and historian. He was greatly interested in the Harappan culture as the chapter included in this volume indicates. Orientalist scholars like these show completely different perspectives than those who were part of the British administration who were sent to rule the country. These scholars along with their Indian counterparts were mostly academics and teachers who had little political interest and were examining the evidences of Indian society that they had without any prejudices, although they did have the evolutionary and civilizational bias, produced by the evolutionary theory itself.

The theory of Unilineal progress as given by the classical evolutionary theory believed that all cultures are part of the same progressive evolutionary process, moving to higher and higher stages (Evans-Pritchard 1981). The problem lay in evaluation of what constitutes “progress” and what is the ultimate level of human civilization. The nineteenth-century evolutionists, all white males, considered their own civilization as epitome of human progress while all other cultures and civilizations were considered at various levels below it. The closer the resemblance to the west, the higher or more evolved that society was considered (Ingold 2016. Kuper 1988). It is perhaps this theoretical bias that created an attitude of prioritizing the Western civilization, which to a large extent was shared many Indians educated in the British system through the use of the English language. Some scholars like Jivanji Jamshedji Modi represented both classical and contemporary Western scholarship. Since Modi was the son of a Parsee priest, we see the prominence in his chapters about his knowledge of the Parsi religion; however, one can infer the sense of superiority that he feels about his own religion as compared to Hinduism. Others like Dadachanji were strong propagators of their own religion, but at the same time they were scholars of repute with critical insight. Sarat Chandra Mitra was a professor of anthropology at Calcutta University and was also a legal professional. British scholars in this volume are represented by Enthoven, who has famously authored “Tribes and Castes of Bombay”, which forms a part of the Ethnographic Survey of India. Edwardes like Sedgwick were also officers of the Indian Civil Service. There are also Indian authors who were independent scholars and members of the Asiatic Society of Bombay and regularly contributed to the journal.

### **How beliefs and practices mingled on Indian soil?**

This volume is organized into two sections: the first part has chapters with a broader global perspective and the second part brings together descriptions of some of the local cults, especially those of the marginalized.



In the first part, the focus is on the diffusion of ideas and beliefs, often with the migration of people who carried them but sometimes, simply of the ideas. These linkages are not confined to the Middle East and Central Asia alone but had spread to South America, Japan, Cambodia, and the Far East too. Anthropologically, this was a time when the main theoretical currents were focused on evolution and diffusion as processes that could throw light on existing patterns of culture and of existing social institutions. Consequently, there are chapters examining the diffusion of traits, both in and out of India. Some chapters reflect strong eurocentrism, especially those written by colonial administrators, which use terms liberally like “primitive”, “savage”, and “brute”, terms that will shock the present generation of scholars, sensitized by post-colonial scholarship on racism and discrimination. For instance, one may refer to the sentence from the article by Enthoven on Totemism, “*In primitive man, we should not look for either consistency or any orderly progress from cause to effect. Inconsistent and illogical notions should in reality be the hall-mark of primitive beliefs*” (emphasis is mine). The label “primitive” is liberally used by authors of this period. These articles are retained here only to reflect upon the intellectual trends of those times and certainly not for their appropriateness. It is worth noting that such comments were made by administrators rather than by Indological scholars like Heras or Rehatsek, who were more in line of those who admired Indian intellectual traditions.

To understand the genesis of these derogatory attitudes, one may refer to the work of Trautmann (2004), who has made the distinction between the two phases of Indomania and Indo-phobia. The first phase was initiated by no less a person as Sir William Jones, who came to Calcutta in 1783, and founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784; he was a judge and an avid Sanskrit scholar who admired Indian culture like Warren Hastings, the then Governor General of British India. Another scholar in employment of the Company was Charles Wilkins, who for the first time translated the Bhagavad Gita into English (Wilkins 1784) and then the Hitopadesa (Wilkins 1787). In 1789, Jones translated Kalidas’ “Sakuntala” (published 1792), followed by “Gita Govinda” (Jones 1799) and then the Laws of Manu (1794, which was published posthumously, Jones 1799). With these beginnings, an enormous amount of work was achieved by the Sanskrit scholars of Europe, as people in France, Germany, and other countries were attracted to the beautiful and aesthetic works in Sanskrit, and these were introduced them through translations to the rest of the world through translations. Interestingly, Indians too became familiar with their own classical texts through these translations, as the knowledge of Sanskrit was restricted by both caste and gender in India. Formal education in India being in English or other European languages created a class of Indians, such as those who wrote for this journal, who were cognitively more European than Indian. The “nationalism” or pride in their own religion and way of life that one sees reflected in the chapters published here by scholars such as Dadachanji

was also at least partly derivative of this Western influence. The second phase that of contempt for Indian culture and way of life seen as “superstition” and irrational came into play when India lost its sovereignty in 1857 to become a part of the British Empire. Two major authors of such Indo-phobia, as Traumann labels this phase, were Charles Grant and James Mill, the former an evangelist who found Hinduism to be reprehensible and urged all British administrators to try to convert Indians to Christianity and civilize them through the inculcation of British values or whatever that was seen to mean. Grant attributes the negative character of the Hindus to the trope of “Oriental Despotism”, propagated by Wittfogel (1957) and favoured by many European scholars as a key to understanding Asian societies. Like most British, he condemns the Islamic rule as especially despotic but does not spare the pre-Islamic Hindu kingdoms either (Trautmann 2004: 103). Grant also actively discouraged British men from marrying Indian women, a widely prevalent practice in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, however, the British were encouraged to bring their wives to India, and not marry local women. This transformed the presence of British in India and their society and interaction with the local people. Grant strongly influenced Macaulay’s famous education policy for India, aimed at making brown-skinned Englishmen out of Indians, a plan that almost succeeded. Several of the writers in this volume indicate such traits. Scholars like Sarat Chandra Mitra seem to look upon local rituals and practices with a jaundiced eye. Such intellectualism is illustrative of the distance that was created between the educated and westernized elite on the one hand and the ordinary people who lived in the towns and villages.

James Mill’s *History of British India* (1817) was one of the most influential sources of “Indo-phobia”. His book was prescribed as an essential reading and textbook for aspirants of the Indian Civil Service studying at Haileybury, even as it was strongly criticized by the Orientalists and Sanskrit scholars at the Asiatic Society of Calcutta and Bombay. The thought processes of Grant and Mills towards Indians in general were in turn reflected by the upper crust of Indians towards their lower caste/class brethren.

The stratification between the elite and ordinary Indians was not just one that was introduced from external sources but also one that was internal to society, thereby highlighting what the anthropologist Robert Redfield (1956) referred to as the Great and Little Traditions of any complex civilization: the former referring to the elite philosophies of the “reflective few” and the latter to the mundane everyday rituals and practices of the many. These concepts quite aptly describe the internal hierarchy found in most universal religions with followers from various classes, separating a higher esoteric philosophical and textual cosmology from the simple faith and beliefs of the common people. When one examines the faith of ordinary people, one finds that the belief in a higher being and universalism is found even among the local cults, such as the Veera Shaiva described in this volume by Rai Bahadur Artal.

The British had greater affinity with those of the upper castes and classes and often relied upon their wisdom and knowledge for creating their own resources of knowledge. In the chapters written by Abdul Wali (this volume), employed in service of the British administrators, he was assigned the task of recording a particular region's culture and social characters. We noticed that his approach and that of others in this volume have been strongly influenced by Western epistemology, using an objective and verifiable methodology and trying to adhere to the "scientific temperament". In retrospect, many of these so-called scientific efforts do not stand up to the norms or ethics of contemporary anthropology, and are certainly open to what we understand as the post-colonial critique.

The Aryan theory, mainly the narrative of the tall fair-skinned Aryans pushing out our the shorter, dark-skinned Dravidians or the indigenous settlers of the Harappan civilization, as we have already seen, is not corroborated by historians based on factual evidence. However, in this volume, the researchers/writers still subscribe to it, as they predate the works such as those of Wolpert and Thapar that have been quoted earlier. Heras, in this volume, has described the worship of trees in Harappa and linked it to tree worship followed in the south, but as we know well, tree worship is found all over India, and the tree worshipped in Mohenjo-Daro, namely, the Pipal, or *ficus religiosa* is still worshipped by all Hindus, everywhere. Moreover, Heras was deeply interested in the Harappan script that he linked to Tamil, thereby reinforcing the myth of the Dravidian association of the Harappan civilization. The association of the tree with the sun and with the fertility deity Pasupati or Siva has led most scholars to recognize Siva as one of the earliest deities of the Hindu pantheon and one with a pre-Vedic origin.

Some scholars have even identified an Egyptian origin for Hindu deities. Edwardes (this volume) presumes a possible derivation of the Hindu trinity, which incorporates an aboriginal deity, Siva of antiquity with the later Brahmanical Vishnu and Brahma (not worshipped but existing to give an anchor to the other two). In his writings, he claims that they have their roots in the Egyptian triad of Isis, Osiris, and Horus. The proliferation of triads across the world, like the Swedish triad of Odin, Freya, and Thor and of course the Christian triad, gives rise to the speculation that a threefold classification may have been a common human mode of organization of the world. In any case, Hinduism is not alone in having a triad and shares it, as we mentioned with several other religions, even if a derivation of one from the other is only in the realm of speculation. In fact, following the intellectual trend of evolutionism, many chapters show a speculative tendency, a methodological error that became central to the criticism of evolutionary theory by later anthropologists. Another chapter of this speculative genre is that by Sarat Chandra Mitra, a professor of anthropology, who is critical of the hypothesis of some Western archaeologists who say that the elephant-headed Ganesa had travelled from Maya in Southern America. He is rather of the opinion that if at all there is a connection between the Mayan deity and Ganesa, the migration

must have been in the opposite direction as Hinduism definitely travelled eastward as is evinced in many Hindu temples and cultures still existing in countries from Cambodia, Thailand, Java, and Japan. It is possible that some ship or traveller from East Asia may have touched the shore of Yucatan and carried the elephant-headed god with them. Although the surmises of the author are speculative, the point of interest is the intellectual trend of those times to look far and wide for origins. This is unlike the present trend of trying to find an indigenous origin for everything.

Dadachanji, a Parsi scholar greatly interested in the origin of religions and author of a book, *Origins of Unrevealed Religions*, is firmly of the opinion that early connection in the form of migrations with or without war was the origin of the Vedas. The Vedas were composed by a pastoral and horse-riding people who came into India, thereby corroborating the Aryan thesis as given by historians and scholars of religion and archaeology, many of whom have already been cited in an earlier part of this chapter. He professes his faith in anthropological methods that he considers as objective and scientific and able to establish the true antecedents of all human civilizations and according to which application it can be established without doubt that all major religions come from the same root. At this point, one may mention that Sir William Jones was of the opinion that “Persians, Indians, Romans, Greeks, Goths, and ancient Egyptians or Ethiopians spoke the same language, and professed the same popular religion” (Trautmann 2004: 50). In those times, the influence of Jones on these scholars was considerable. Undoubtedly, Jones is committed to what has now come to be known as the thoroughly criticized “classical evolutionist theory”. Dadachandji, in his chapter, sets out to prove the following:

- (1) that the primitive Paleolithic Iranian spoken of herein was the ancestor of the Vedic Aryans before they migrated to India and (2) that Avestic Iran was the common home of both the Iranians and the ancestors of the Vedic Aryans before the latter separated and emigrated to India.

At the same time, he attempts to establish the superiority of the Parsis and their ancestors, over the followers of other religions despite his claims of a common ancestry. The author in the second part of this chapter also makes extensive references to the works of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a renowned scholar of the Vedas and of the Avestic texts,

Mr. Tilak has so ably shown in his valuable work on “The Arctic Home in the Vedas” that the Vedic sages reproduced in the Vedas the traditions treasured by them of the pre-Indian life of their ancestors in their Iranian fatherland.

Following similar reasoning is a chapter on the near universal worship of light and fire, written by Mehta, prolific commentator on religious matters.

Mehta indicates that the worship of heavenly objects such as the sun and the moon and other natural phenomena such as fire and lightening are found among many indigenous cultures and ancient religions of the world. However, the specific connection between the ancient Iranian deities and their counterparts among the Vedic Hindus indicates very clearly a kinship that cannot be just due to independent evolution. The Vedic Indians worshipped Ushas, the Dawn as their primary goddess.

This Ushas is considered to be the Eos of the Greeks and the Aurora of the Latins. Philologists hold that Arjuni is the Greek Argynoris, Brisaya is Briseis and Dahanâ is Daphne. Saramâ is phonetically equivalent to the Greek Helena, Saranyu, the mother of Yama and of the Aśvins, is the Greek Erinys and Ahanâ is the renowned goddess Athena' (Mehta this volume).

Also we are told that Uranus is Varuna or the sky and Prometheus is the Vedic Pramantha, the fire. In many places, Varuna, the most presiding deity of the Vedic people, is compared to the Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians. Even to the present day, every morning most Hindus pay homage to the sun. Fire is the deity to which all sacrifices are made and weddings are solemnized with fire as the witness. Dadachanji is critical of the opinion of some scholars that there has been no contact between the East and the West in the past. Contrarily, he is of the opinion that the Orient and the Occident have similar roots in the past. Elucidating on the Aryan theory, he states that those people who lived to the south of Asia were the Aryan people and those who were to the north of Asia were the non-Aryans, both with evolving civilizations. But these two separate streams converged as is evident by the rise of the Mithra cult in Europe, a cult that had originated in Iran and had established itself in Rome and in the adjoining areas. One may recall that the Iranian "Mithra" is also seen as synonymous to the Vedic god Mitra, who along with Varuna are mentioned as primary deities in the Rig Veda.

The tolerance and respect shown to the Parsis in India, where they have remained as an economically dominant, but politically marginal community is partly due to the works of scholars such as Tilak, and other orientalist, who have claimed an affinity between the pre-Islamic Zoroastrian religion and Hinduism. The Parsis have integrated within Indian society, without losing their identity or their traditions (Shah and Lobo 2022). Their small numbers also make them less of a threat in the vast Indian democracy compared to numerous other non-Hindus, especially the Muslims. At another level, a brief chapter by Modi describes the similarity between the exorcism rites of a tribe of central India with that of ancient Iran. Jamshedji Modi, in a chapter, while emphasizing the connection between the early Iranians and the so-called Aryans of early India, refutes the existence of caste among the Parsis. Although it is known that the early Iranians, who under various rulers and law givers, did divide society into four hierarchical divisions, which

are similar to the four Varna of the Hindus. Here too the highest status is given to the priestly class, followed by warriors and rulers, then the traders and agriculturalists, and lastly the artisans and menial workers. However, the caste-like separations between these classes were much less. The three primary characters of the Hindu caste society were hereditary occupations, with restrictions imposed on inter-dining and intermarriage, among the Iranians. Even when these showed signs of appearing in society, they were actively discouraged by the law givers. The author further emphasizes that such divisions no longer exist among the Parsis who lived in the Bombay region at that period of time. So we find that while the Parsi authors were not averse to acknowledging the ancient bond between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, they considered the Hindu caste system derogatory and took pains to emphasize the fact that such classifications did not exist among contemporary Parsis and also among the pre-Islamic Iranians.

Contrarily to the previous writings, Maulavi Abdul Wali's chapter written in the early part of the century mentions caste-like divisions among the Muslims in Bengal and Bihar (Ranchi) which was probably under the Bengal Presidency. His detailed and meticulous descriptions take into account the various factors that may have created caste-like divisions among the followers of a religion that originally did not have them. The internal division of the Muslims, real or putative, derived from their ancestry, their aristocracy in terms of their closeness to the Prophet, their origin in different regions, and their class divisions is another factor. Yet another is the persistence of the pre-existing caste divisions among the converts, who often carry on the original caste occupations and maintain similar endogamy within the profession. It is likely that some such divisions existed among the Arabs in their country especially for demarcating the working classes like the weavers. The author rightly mentions that many people take on certain titles like Sheikh originally meant for the higher classes but may be appropriated with impunity by converting from a Hindu lower caste. A person may lay claim to a higher honorific title if he holds an important official position.

Later writers have written and confirmed the existence of caste among the Indian Muslims, like Bhatta (2016), who is writing more than a century after the aforementioned author, writes "*Zaat or jaati* played an important role in social relationships among Indian Muslims" (Bhatta 2016: 32). She mentions the sharp caste divisions in Northern India among the Ashraf and the non-Ashraf or the Kameen. The former is made up of four sub-divisions, namely, Sayyads at the apex, who stake their claim to direct descent from the Prophet; the Sheikhs, who are known as the descendants of the four Caliphs of the Prophet; the Mughals, who descended from the Mughal rulers who were considered to be of Turkish origin; and the Pathans from Afghanistan, forming the majority of the local rulers of that time. While the Saiyyads and Sheikhs both inter-dined and intermarried, the last two could eat with but not marry into the higher categories. The Kameens were the local Hindu converts, identified on the basis of their traditional caste-based

occupations. The latter, although they adopted some Islamic practices like performing “*nikah*” and celebrating Eid, preserved most of their caste-based practices. She further makes a distinction between the *qasbati* and *sheheri*, the former the rural and the latter the urban division of the Muslims. The rural Muslim landlords also followed Jajmani norms like their Hindu counterparts. Untouchability and avoidance were practised by the upper castes of the Muslims from both Hindu and Muslims on lower castes. Similarly, untouchability was also practised by some Christian converts of India. In other words, most religions that did not have any caste-like characters soon adopted them on the Indian soil indicating what social thinkers like Durkheim (1915) have postulated that there is a close affinity between society and religion.

Another religion that sprang on the Indian soil and has been accepted as a close kin of Hinduism is Buddhism. The magnanimous gesture of the Indian Government to give shelter to the young Dalai Lama, who fled Tibet along with his followers in 1962, fleeing persecution by the Chinese, and the later absorption of the Tibetans within India, is part of the tradition of inclusiveness that has existed in India, since ancient times. Sarat Chandra Mitra, the anthropologist, has tried to draw an affinity between ancient Egypt and Buddhists in India, through the historical spread of Buddhism to Khotan in Central Asia (a historical incidence proven by the researches of M. Aurel-Stein, 1904). The similarity of the worship of a rat-faced deity or the reverence shown to rats in a Buddhist temple dedicated to the goddess of pestilence and death is shown by the author to have independent origins. This is based on the frequency of association of rats with death and pestilence in many ancient cultures as well as a common myth of destruction of an enemy army by pestilence. This chapter does not actually draw any affinities between ancient Egypt and Buddhism, but what it points to is a common human tendency to have parallel symbolism for similar phenomena, after evolutionist’s hypothesis of a “psychic unity of mankind” (Evans-Pritchard 1981).

Although Buddhism was practically eliminated from peninsular India, the Buddha remained a venerated deity for all Hindus. The Buddha was equally revered as the other deities in Hindu temples, and he is often regarded as the ninth of the ten Avatars (incarnations) of the supreme deity, Vishnu, on earth. Buddhist monasteries have survived in many parts of India, and a kind of village Buddhism is commonly found among the people inhabiting the Himalayan borderlands (Channa 2013). Jamshadji Modi has described a sacred book procession of the Buddhists in Darjeeling, in the year 1919, which was organized and attended by the local Bhutia community, who have been described by several authors (Furer-Haimendorf 1975, Channa 2013) to have an affinity with the Tibetans on the border and whose religious beliefs are strongly influenced by Buddhism, although of a folk variety. At a more comparative level, this chapter also talks about the worship of sacred books in most religious communities.

The chapter by Sedgwick deals with an issue which is currently very relevant and at the epicenter of a huge contemporary political debate, that is, whether the tribes of India are considered as Hindus? This chapter is very apt as it comes from an administrator in the service of the British Empire although an employee of the East India Company. This would have been a question of practical interest to him and not merely of academic interest. This question of course does not arise in the case of those who had already converted into other religions like Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam. It is meant for those, especially in the plains of peninsular India, who have had a long historical relationship with the Hindus and where a lot of exchange of beliefs and practices have taken place. These were later called by anthropologists as Hinduization or Tribalization, Sanskritization, and Parochialization. But the important political question remains, whether the tribes themselves wish to be enumerated as Hindus or as having their own tribal religion. This chapter, written in the early nineteenth century, points to the administrative shortcomings by which “by the stroke of a pen” any number of tribes could be counted in the census as “Hindus” or as “Animists”, in other words to the lack of agency of the people themselves to determine their own identity. This chapter also rightly argues that at the level of the village, there is little difference between the practices and beliefs of a tribe (like the Bhils) and their Hindu counterparts in the same region, and they also show many caste-like divisions. The author also argues that the Bhils should be considered as Hindus and given the same respect. The intention of the author is to show kindness towards the Bhils and not to stir any controversy, for at that time in history, the term “aboriginal” had a “primitive” status. In contemporary times, such issues of identity have become linked with that of positive discrimination and political mileage but at that point of time these entailed only social status. He points out that at the ground level, it is not only Hindus but even Christians and Muslims tended to follow similar beliefs like ancestor worship, spirits, and worship of various natural objects. Perhaps the author was trying to establish equality and therefore emphasize the similarities rather than the distinctions between different people and religions; this is a commendable position, especially coming from an administrator. For those people who lived at subsistence levels and were not formally educated, their beliefs are embedded in spirits, fairies, ghosts, and other supernatural beings. Importantly, the presence of these beings provides the naïve the means and agency to resolve their recurrent daily problems.

Rehatsek describes the practices and belief systems of the people of Goa, under the heading of superstitions, as they were transmitted from the Portuguese to the local people. He calls them superstitious probably as they were contrary to Christian religious beliefs. Many of these were even endorsed by the parish priests who helped the people perform rituals for remedies. Written in the later part of the nineteenth century, this chapter describes the



existence of local sorcerers, who at that time were present in every village. These were not Christians by practice but who were called by the author as “lower-level Christians”. This indicates the influence of the gradations explicit in evolutionary theory and its use by the then anthropologists. Here, a mention needs to be made that Goa was a Portuguese territory till the 1960s, much after the British had left India. Portuguese cultural influence is very much prevalent in this part of the country. The Portuguese had landed on both the coasts of India for trade purposes, and a strong Portuguese influence is also seen in the language and cuisine of Bengal, on the East coast of India, and this has added the synthetic nature of what today goes by the name of either Indian or Hindu culture.

### **What does it mean to be a Hindu?**

This Introduction has highlighted the mingling of beliefs and practices on the Indian soil, a process historically connected to the migration of various peoples from different regions of the world. These influences have worked across cultures and boundaries, and many elements of Hinduism and Buddhism have spread far and wide across continents in both East and West directions. This section will describe the internal variations of those sects and beliefs and practices that are localized and may have arisen indigenously. They also refer to the chapters that have been included in the second half of this volume that describes local cults and regional beliefs.

A short chapter by Enthoven has been included in this volume. This chapter describes the existence of totemic beliefs and talks about the cult of ancestor worship which he refers to as totems (probably only ancestors) by people he refers to as Kanara (Karnataka). However, these do not confirm to the anthropological description of totems as the non-human ancestors of human clans (Durkheim 1915). Nevertheless, what this chapter confirms is the evolutionary perspective held by the author as well as the variation in beliefs and practices of the Hindus, referred also as the Little Tradition (Redfield 1956). However, ancestor worship in the form of the tributes paid to the ancestors at certain ritual occasions, including at the time of marriage and during the Navratri (9 days of worship of goddess Durga), in northern India, is common among all Hindus. Acknowledging one’s debt to the ancestors is prescribed in the Vedic rituals as well and is part of the *dharma* of the “householder”.

The chapter on the worship of “Rahu” by the Dusadhs, a marginal caste group of Central India, was written from an anthropological perspective by Sarat Chandra Mitra; it is an interesting account of the rites and rituals of the marginal communities of India. It importantly refers also to the way barren women ask for a boon, not only from “Rahu” but also from a variety of Muslim Pirs and Faqirs. It is notable that when faced with a pressing problem such as childlessness, people look for a solution from multiple sources, which is also a form of religious pluralism.

The popularity of Muslim *faqirs* and *pirs*, whose resting places (*mazars*) dot across large parts of India, is ubiquitous among both Hindus and Muslims. For instance, some like the *dargah* (sanctuary) of the Sufi saint Garib Nawaz, in Ajmer, draws very large crowds of people from all religions while cutting across caste and class divisions. Both the *Bhakti* path and the *Sufi* path preached similar doctrines that urge the devotee to have a direct communion with the divinity, which is conceptualized as a beloved to be attained by pure devotion and adoration. Maulavi Abdul Wali, in his chapter on the various outlying districts of Bengal like Nadiya and the 24 Paraganas, mentions the sects of *faqirs* or *dervish*, who practise a heterodox way of life, not adhering to most existing social norms and living unorthodox lives. They are proficient in music and dance and often use these skills to beg for alms. Similarly, there are other sects mainly minstrels known as Bauls, Auls, and by other names. Those who take to them belong to the lower sections of society and are often social outcasts, such as widows, discarded women, low-caste men, or social dropouts from among both Hindus and Muslims. They do not believe in castes, religions, or gender differences, nor do they believe in institutions like marriage. They live in their own organized communes, outside of and shunned by society. Some like the famous Baul, Lalan Faqir (Pramanik 2021) of the late nineteenth century attained great fame for his mystic poetry and songs that are still very popular in Bengal. Followers of these sects shun the Brahmin, idol worship, and the common rituals of the Hindus, if they are Hindus, and similarly of Islam, if they are Muslims.

Among most Hindus, there is always the possibility that one person may establish an idiosyncratic personal cult, which may have its own specific character. Sometimes, such cults may take root and spread far and wide and endure forever because of the personal charisma and spiritual power, like Sri Chaitanya or Ramakrishna Paramhansa. But at times, these cults remain only local and fleeting, enduring for the lifetime of the person establishing them, and then die out. Sarat Chandra Mitra has written briefly about one such cult that came up in Bihar and which did not endure for a long time nor did it spread very wide. This cult is based on the worship of Radha, recognized as the consort of Krishna and his Shakti. The followers of this cult recognize that the Feminine Principle is the real force of the universe and often dress as women to show their devotion to the female deity. It must be mentioned here that Radha is worshipped not only normally by all Hindus but only along with Krishna as Radha Krishna or Radha Madhav (another name for Krishna). However, she is not considered as a devi or a mother goddess, to be worshipped for herself, except by followers of such special cults. However, most Hindus are tolerant of such variations and cult followers as long as the followers do not become too aggressive. Following the brief report on the cult of Radha, there is a longer chapter on the mother goddess Yellamma, by Rai Bahadur Artal, a social worker and philanthropist, who also wrote detailed academic chapters. Yellamma is worshipped in the southern part of India and is synonymous with Renuka.

The myth is attached to Renuka, the wife of the sage Jamdagni and mother of Parashurama, reputed to have killed almost all the Ksatriyas on earth. The myth narrates that Parashurama was angered by one Ksatriya King who had killed his father, a Brahmin sage, for no fault of his own. Some Indologists are of the opinion that this myth symbolizes the struggle for power between the Brahmins and the Ksatriyas in the early days of the consolidation of the caste system. However, in the worship of Yellamma, one perceives the environmental symbolism of the union of sky and earth and the falling of rain that is ritually celebrated. Renuka is the earth, Jamdagni the sky, and rain the restorer of the earth's beauty as the widowed Renuka (compared to the parched earth) is revived with the resurrection of her husband, and once again regain her happiness and splendour as a married woman and seems to typify an agricultural community. This myth and its adjunct rituals also provide an example of how the same goddess may be associated in different regions with different myths and worshipped in a variety of ways.

The worship of Siva, in the month of Chaitra, the last month of the Indian lunar year, is celebrated in a particular manner in the Eastern part of India, especially in the states of Bengal and Orissa. The rituals follow a heterodox pattern, where participants, coming mostly from the marginal castes and classes, form a community of temporary sacred specialists, becoming their own priests, and following their own mode of worship. Some of these, by their presumed laxity of transgression of norms, are looked down upon by the upper castes and classes. Yet this ritual has great popularity and at times the upper classes pay a person of the lower class to perform it on their behalf. Paradoxically, such rituals that are strong critiques of Brahmanical Hinduism also find acceptance within the Hindu community, indicating the wide range of beliefs and practices that are tolerated by Hindus. The performers, even if they come from the marginal sections, are elevated to a sacred status, even if temporarily, indicating the inherent equality that is intrinsic to Hindu philosophy – of the larger being that encompasses everything.

Several reformative sects of the Hindus have tried time and again to bring back the pantheistic and egalitarian aspects one finds in the early Vedic texts. The chapter on the Veera Shaiva sect, by R.C. Artal, is a long and detailed account that had to be edited in order to be included in this volume. It describes a class of Brahmins who subscribe to the Adiatva philosophy of the Jivatman being part of the Paramatman. They shun the ritual/processual aspects of the Vedas, accepting only the abstractions. They do not worship Siva in the form of established lingams in temples and shrines and shun idol worship in general. They wear the *lingam* as *atmalingam* (self) on their bodies with the belief that since *jivatman* and *paramatman* are the same, one should worship the self. The present-day Lingyats are considered by some to be Sudras as they do not believe in the caste system and do not perform conventional Brahmanical rituals. The existence of such sects has been widespread from ancient times.

Most have questioned the Varna hierarchy and the authority of the conventional Brahmins indicating the presence of an internal critical discourse within the Hindu community. There has always been a strong tendency towards a formless monotheism, a rejection of rituals, and idol worship as well as rejection of the social restrictions of *jati* and *Varna* systems. The chapter by S.S. Mehta on the Swastika describes just such an abstract symbol that enables the conceptualization of the formless and abstract divinity at the heart of Vedic Hinduism. It is a geometrical figure that represents the goddess Laxmi or in general, prosperity and well-being. It is made before almost every Hindu ritual and as shown in this chapter it can take several forms. Looking at its frequency and the universalism of its occurrence, the Swastika may be seen to be a Key Symbol (Ortner 1973) that symbolizes the core of Hinduism. From the Vedic times, sacrificial altars were made in its shape. This chapter was obviously written before the Nazis took up the reverse swastika as their symbol, converting it from a symbol of well-being into one of death and destruction. Hindus continue to revere the Swastika, and it is found depicted during all rituals and even inside houses and temples.

### Religious pluralism

The Indian sub-continent has seen the amalgamation of many kinds of people and various systems of beliefs that have originated on its soil, co-existed, come in conflict, and also syncretized. But the kind of emerging nationalism based on a single religion, being propagated as Indian heritage, is something that is a very recent invention, and not something that is intrinsic either to the Indian polity or to the Indian way of life. Many historians have demonstrated that co-existence of various faiths was quite the norm in the country where political entities such as kingdoms and empires were constantly shifting and held on precariously to power. Walsh (2011: 47) points out that as late as the eighth century CE, any king who desired to have the title of “*chakravartin*” (great) had to patronize Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain institutions, in equal measures. The early Vedic culture and its language of Sanskrit had spread wide, towards both the North and the East; the term Hindu was not in use then. The spread of both Vedic culture and Buddhism has been described in the chapter of this volume as also the various strains that were absorbed within what came to be known as the Santana Dharma in the later period of the Gupta Dynasty.

A brief historical survey of early India indicates multiple influences during the historical period, from the early centuries of the CE. These include extensive long-distance trade with the early civilizations of Rome and also South-East Asia. Such trade links were also found in the Harappan civilization, and excavations have shown the presence of coins and objects from Mesopotamia and the reciprocal presence of Indian objects in that region. The famous Buddhist king Meander (known in India as Millinda) was of Indo-Greek origin, and other rulers of similar origins ruled Northern India

during the second to first century BCE. After Alexander's invasion, there was a fair representation of Greek settlers on the Indian soil, as many of the persons accompanying the Greek army stayed back. Thapar and other historians also mention that idol worship and the construction of temples were not part of the early Vedic period, and such practices are seen only during the reign of the Guptas, which was around 400 CE. Many of the later sects of Hinduism as published in this volume indicate an effort of the communities to go back to that period of Vedic practices and philosophies, rejecting the polytheism and idol worship of later Hinduism and professing the existence of an all-pervasive and non-describable supreme entity encompassing all other entities of the universe. This Vedic philosophy that is all inclusive and gives the same character to all souls (*atman*) has remained as the very basis of every sect that criticized the rule of patriarchal Brahmanism and the hierarchical caste system. The so-called Indo-Aryan culture, with the Brahmins at the apex deriving sanctions from Sanskrit texts such as the Laws of Manu, became established only by the seventh century CE, and by the eighth century the first Arab traders stepped on the Indian soil. Once in India, the mystic traditions of Islam, that is, Sufism, found much scope for expansion and between the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries spread throughout Northern India (Panjabi 2011). At many places, much like among the *faqirs* and *bauls* of Eastern India, it merged with the Bhakti tradition and obliterated the distinctions between the Hindus and Muslims in order to seek out a personalized divinity through the path of love and devotion. These sects shunned the conservative elements of both religions, seeking out a path that took them away from all social conventions.

Christianity too made an early footfall in India (Kerala) in 52 AD and later when missionaries began to arrive by the sixteenth century. The body of St. Francis Xavier is still preserved in Goa that was under Portuguese rule till 1962. Many Christian converts too retained their pre-Christian caste characters and practices and like Muslims, Indian Christians also exhibit a very Indian way of practicing their faith. Thus, the various faiths, monotheistic, and egalitarian, nevertheless, became strongly influenced by the Indian way of life, largely because the social differentiations practised in India had so permeated the identity of Indians that they continued to follow those conventions, even after they converted into other egalitarian religions.

There were several philosophical schools of thought in ancient India. These indicate the high level of abstraction and reflective thinking that were attained by the sages of that time. Their versatility also led to vastly generalized and inclusive conception of the sacred, antithetical to the exclusionary, and doctrinal faith that is now being passed as Hinduism. Even the *jati* system had its virtues that it allowed people of different faiths to be absorbed into the Indian society, as simply different *jatis*. Thus, the Muslim traders were considered as different *jatis* as were the aboriginals of the forests. But they were never treated as outside of humanity or of society. As Bhatta (2016: 32) writes, "*Zaat* or *jaati*, played an important role in social relationships

among Indian Muslims”. She further explicates how the Indian Muslims were always quite different from the Muslims in the Islamic world, having their own homespun system of social differentiation. Muslims have always participated in Indian festivals, and some of them have had important roles as ritual or temple functionaries. The lineage of *shehnai* players of Benaras, for example, to which the legendary Ustad Bismillah Khan belongs, have the tradition of playing to the deity of Kashi Vishwanath, sitting outside on the banks of the river Ganga, even if they are denied entry into the temple itself. Many Muslim craftpersons are likewise involved in the making and decoration of Hindu deities as their age-old caste-based occupations.

Although a great deal of controversy is now being raised about the origins of what goes as Hinduism, there is enough evidence to indicate, as indicated in the works of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Dr. Radhakrishnan, and the works of many of the scholars reproduced here, that the early Vedic deities and philosophies were deeply influenced by the pre-Islamic Avestic scriptures and beliefs of the early Iranians. The nature deities mingled with the fertility cults of the agricultural Harappan people to form the Hindu pantheon, the mix of nature gods such as the sun and wind and the mother goddesses and Siva, the fertility god. Most pastoral people worship the elements and cultivators worship the earth, and Hindu deities are a mix of both. Tilak (1893: 102) has referred to the Parsis, Greeks, and Indians as the three sections of the Aryan race, and identified similarities in myths and the astronomical calculations used by them.

Till the nineteenth century, the Hindu identity had not consolidated, and when it did, it was always more of a nationalist and political identity than a religious one. Religious functionaries still refer to the Sanatana Dharma when they are engaging in a religious discourse.

The most central text of Santana Dharma that is recognized by all Hindus and non-Hindus is the Bhagvat Gita, which is in the form of a series of lessons given by Krishna (the divine incarnation of Vishnu) to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. According to the epic,

The Self is all the Devas, all reside in the Self. He who thus seeth (sees) the Self in all beings by his own Self, he realiseth (realises) the equality of all and attaineth (attains) to the Supreme State of Brahman.

(Santana Dharma 1904: 146)

The Vedic, Advaitic, and Sankhya philosophies among others root the vision of realization in recognition of the Self, as against any external reality. This gives to the Indian mystic a scope for being effortlessly pluralistic. In Western scholarship, the concept of religious pluralism as a theoretical construct is rather a late entry, although Christianity and even early philosophers carried some elements of it, either in the concept of a benevolent and omnipresent God, who would be merciful even if people did not overtly recognize Him, or in a rejection of God *per se*. Hicks (1989) is one of the most

recognized scholars to preach religious pluralism in contemporary times, and he repeats that all religions are different cognitive responses to the same Ultimate reality. One finds this illustrated in the same way that secularism is interpreted in the West and in India. In the former, to be secular is to deny religion as all religions are viewed as exclusionary and to some extent contrary to the notion of universal humanism. In India, on the other hand, secularism has meant respect and tolerance for all religions, something that comes naturally from the ancient teachings found on her soil.

The intellectual traditions we find so far have also welcomed and nurtured the reality of a way of life, the Santana Dharma, to be composed of the union of many streams of thought originating from a variety of sources. These concepts have been taken up and also examined in the chapters published in this volume. Globally, we find that there is a movement towards syncretization and harmony in the New Age Movements that also make use of modern technology to assimilate ideas from multiple sources. Towards the end of the twentieth century, new religions have emerged that critique the divisiveness of existing world religions, showing “a remarkable tolerance for diversity, emphasis on community, emphasis on personal religious experience and self-knowledge, inner harmony and self-realization” (Morris 2006: 274). Such ideas and sentiments are not new to us as we have already found self-realization in many of the ancient texts.

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# Part I



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# 1 Note on the origin of the Hindu Trimurti

*S.M. Edwardes*

While reading a few days ago a new edition of “Hinduism and Christianity” by the Reverend John Robson, D.D, I came across the following passage, containing a statement that strikes me as open to comment: “There has often”, writes the worthy author,

been an analogy drawn between the Hindu and Christian Trinity. But, except in the number 3, there is no resemblance whatever. The conception of the Hindu Trinity is that of three Gods and one Person; that of the Christian, three Persons and one God, The Hindu Trinity is a mere external mechanical union; the Christian Trinity is a union springing out of the essential conception of God, in his relation to man. In the Vedantic Trinity there is a much closer analogy. All that can be said is that the popular Hindu Trinity may possibly have been suggested by the Christian one. There is a chapter in the early history of Hinduism that requires still to be investigated; that is the influence of early Christianity on it.

Such is the passage, which a few lines further on concludes with this sentence: “The first notice we have of any attempt to get up the Trimurti was in Bijayanagar, in the XVth century”.<sup>1</sup>

I will first briefly deal with this latter sentence. We of Bombay, who live within sailing distance of the Elephanta Caves and the sparse ruins of the Mauryan Puri, cannot quietly accept a statement which must mean that the Trimurti was not recognized till at the earliest 1400 AD. One of the most remarkable sculptures in the Great Cave is the Colossal Trimurti which looms gigantic from the south wall; and we know from the writings of archaeologists like Fergusson and Burgess that these caves with their titanic sculptures must have been hewn out of the living rock about the eighth or ninth century AD. Surely, this triple representation of Shiv as Creator, Destroyer or Reproducer, and Preserver, which must have received the worship of thousands in the days of Puri’s greatness, is alone sufficient to prove that Dr. Robson has erred. But I will go further and quote from the works of another missionary in India, the late Dr. Murray Mitchell. In a work titled “The great religions of India”, he writes as follows about the Trimurti:

There is said to be a triad of Gods-Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. This conception does not appear at an early date, probably not till two centuries after Christ. The remarkable point is that the triad is after all a unity- Vishnu and Shiva almost including all the three deities.

Now here we have an opinion, at least as trustworthy as Dr. Robson's, which fixes the rise and therefore the recognition and worship of the Hindu Triad as early as 300 AD. I am not in a position to exactly define the date when the conception of the Triad first arose; but I fancy that of the two views Dr. Murray Mitchell's is the more worthy of credence, and that the union of Shiv, the terrific and blood-loving deity of the Dravidian races, with a Brahmanic Creator and Vishnu may be connected with the Brahmanic revolt against Buddhism which occurred after the decline of Asoka's Empire and which discovered in the absorption of aboriginal deities into its own system, one of its greatest aids to proselytism.

The second point upon which Dr. Robson has laid himself open to criticism is his suggestion that the Hindu trinity may have originated in the enterprise of early Christian missionaries and their preaching of the doctrine of the Christian trinity in Unity. Dr. Robson admits that there is as yet no evidence to back his theory; and my object is to show that there are certain grounds for suspecting, I do not say believing that the Hindu Triad originated either spontaneously or failing that in a far older religious system than that of the Christians, namely, the religion of ancient Egypt. In regard to the possibility, of a spontaneous origin, I will ask you to permit me to quote a passage from "The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology" by Mr. Payne Knight. "This triform division", he writes,

of the personified attributes or modes of action of one first, cause, seems to have been the first departure from simple theism, and the foundation religious mythology in every part of the earth. To trace its origin to patriarchal traditions or seek for it in the philosophy of any particular people; will only lead to frivolous conjecture. Its real source is in the human mind itself, whose feeble and inadequate attempts to form an idea of one universal first cause would naturally end in generalizing and classing the particular ideas derived from the senses, and in thus forming distinct, though indefinite, notions of certain attributes or modes of action, of which the generic divisions are universally three, such as "goodness, wisdom; and power"; "creation, preservation, and destruction"; "potential; instrumental, and efficient", etc. Hence, almost every nation of the world that has deviated from the rude simplicity of primitive theism has had its Trinity in Unity, which, when not limited and ascertained by Divine Revelation, branched out, by the natural sub-division of collective and indefinite ideas, into the: endless and intricate personifications of particular subordinate attributes, which have afforded such abundant materials for the elegant fictions both of poetry and art.

As an example of the universality of the conception upon which he lays stress, I may bring to your notice the representation of the Syrian goddess at Hierapolis. The Roman author Lucian describes the statue of the goddess as placed beside a statue of the corresponding male personification, while between them was a third figure, variously supposed by the Syrians to be Dionysus, Deucalion, or Semiramis, but which probably signified the plastic emanation which proceeded from both and was consubstantial with both. Again, in Samothrace, the conception of the trinity appeared in three celebrated statues called Venus or Aphrodite, Pothos, and Phæthon, or Nature, Attraction, and Light; while equally symbolical were the three great figures at Upsal in Sweden, called Odin, Freya, and Thor. Mr. P. Knight must be my authority for the statement that a similar union of attributes was expressed in the Scandinavian goddess, Isa or Disa, who was held to have dominion over generation, vegetation, and destruction; and lastly, that in the remote islands of the Pacific Ocean, which appear to have been peopled from the Malay shores, the supreme deities are, or at any rate were, till a recent date, God the Father, God the Son, and the Bird or Spirit, subordinate to whom are an endless tribe of local deities and genii attending to every individual.

Thus, it is possible that, as in Syria or Scandinavia so in India, people may have separately evolved the conception of the Trimurti from their own blind yearnings to read the riddle of existence. But I think it is equally possible, on the other hand, that their idea of the Triad was borrowed from Egypt, and I base this suggestion, first, upon the communication for trade purposes which existed between Egypt and Indian prehistoric ages, and second, upon the probable meaning of the symbols which, particularly in the sculptures at Elephanta, are severally connected with Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Before touching on the subject of trade communication, I would bring to your notice certain features of the ancient Egyptian worship, to which the author aforementioned refers.

According to Plutarch, the Egyptians in their hymns to Osiris invoked that god as the being who dwelt concealed in the embraces of the sun; and several ancient Greek writers speak of the great luminary itself as the generator or nourisher of all things. Both people in fact regarded the sun as the centre or body from which the pervading Spirit, the original producer of fertility and organization, continued to emanate and preserve the mighty structure which it had raised. This primitive pervading Spirit, or Osiris, was regarded by the Egyptians as the active principle of generation in contradistinction to Isis or the passive principle, while to these two they added a third, Horus, to personify the result of the cooperation of the two first principles, or in other words, to symbolize the fructification of inert matter by the movement of the vital spirit over the face of the waters. This divine Triad, we are told, was signified by a Triangle, the perpendicular side being compared to Osiris as the Beginning, the base to Isis as the Medium, and the hypotenuse to Horus as the Accomplishing. Further, they were accustomed to symbolize the attributes of Osiris by different animals. The hawk, as Plutarch relates,

denoted his power, just as the bull, Apis, denoted his generative attributes; while over the porticoes of the temples appeared the winged disk of the sun, supported by two-hooded serpents denoting motion and life: the statue of Horus at Koptos bore a generative symbol, and Isis was almost invariably represented as crowned with the bell or seed vessel of the Lotus or as holding in one hand the stem of this plant surmounted by its seed vessel.

Such being some of the features of Egyptian worship, it remains to be seen whether there is any evidence of traffic between Egypt and India sufficient to support the suggestion that the Hindus borrowed the Triad in more or less altered form from Egypt. The late Sir James Campbell has stated in one of the volumes of the *Bombay Gazetteer* that,

from B.C. 2500 to B.C. 500 there, are signs of trade between Western India and Egypt, Phoenicia and Babylon; and as far back as record remains, for courage and enterprise, as traders, settlers and travellers both by land and sea, the Hindus hold a high place among the dwellers on the shores of the Indian Ocean.

In volume XX of the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Mr. J. F. Hewitt quotes Dr. Sayee's statement in the Hibbert Lectures for 1887 that commerce between India and Babylon must have been carried on as early as 3000 B.C. when Ur Bagas, the first king of United Babylonia, ruled in Ur of the Chaldees, This is proved by the finding of Indian teak in the ruins of Ur; while in a very ancient, Babylonian list of clothes, muslin is mentioned under the name "Sindhu".

In BC 1600, according to Wilkinson, the Egyptians were making use of purely Indian articles, such as agates, indigo, cardamoms, ginger, cinnamon, and muslin. There is a distinct statement in the *Periplus* that trade between India, Africa, and Arabia was far older than the time of the Greeks; and the colonization by Hindus of such places as Socotra (Su-Khatara) has been placed beyond doubt, by Lassen Hindu seers were living in Persia and Palestine in 700 BC. Between BC 606 and 561, Nebuchadnezzar sent wool, linen, pottery, glass, and ointment to India and brought back thence wood, spices, ivory, ebony, cochineal, pearls, and gold. Xerxes enlisted Hindus in his army about 480 BC; and Hindu elephant drivers were serving in the Carthaginian host in 300 BC. Later, under Asoka, the west coast of India was enriched by the opening of direct sea trade with Egypt, the ships of which started from Berenike, passed by Mocha and Aden, crossed the mouth of the Persian Gulf to Karachi, and thence sailed down our coast. Under the Romans, about 25 BC, the direct trade between India and Egypt gained importance which it never had under the Ptolemies; in Pliny's time, AD 77, many Indians were resident in Egypt; and in AD 135, 150 Ptolemy conversed with several Hindus in Alexandria. Evidence on the point call doubtless be multiplied, but that which I have just quoted will probably suffice to prove the continuous and close connection of Egypt with India from prehistoric times and

therefore to justify the suggestion that the Indian trader may have brought back to his home, together with the articles of merchandise, some acquaintance with the cult of ancient Egypt and a shadowy notion of the conception of a Triune God.

Finally, let us consider for a moment the symbols which the Trimurti bears, and see whether the symbols of the Egyptian Triad do not give us a clue to their meaning. In the well-known sculpture at Elephanta, the central figure of Shiv, as Brahma, wears two earrings, the one tiger-shaped, the other curved, into the likeness of some monster of the waters (the Makara). Surely, the tiger signifies either power, just as the hawk signified the power of Osiris, or signifies perhaps the destroying attribute of the supreme deity, just like the lion of Bacchus and Hercules it being universally held by the ancients that destruction is coordinate with, and preparatory to, reproduction, and is merely a phase of regeneration. It is, I think, obvious that the character of the animals symbolizing power would vary naturally in different regions. In Scandinavia, the boar was the fiercest creature known, and consequently figured largely in the allegories of Freya's death: in Africa, the lion held the foremost place; and the Hindus would naturally turn to the tiger in illustration of the attribute of power or destruction. The likeness of an aquatic monster in the second earring would seem to have much the same mystic significance as the dolphin upon old Greek coins, or as Derceto, the Fishgoddess of Phoenicia, which were undoubtedly connected, with the Egyptian belief that water was the element containing the passive productive power of the universe, and that Osiris was the fertilizing spirit of the waters. The earrings of Brahma at Elephanta, in fact, seem to symbolize the belief of ancient Egypt in an inviolable connection between the active and passive attributes of one primitive, infinite, all-pervading and creative Cause. Second, does not the cobra coiled round the wrist of Shiva as Rudra, recall to us the serpents which were sculptured upon the panels of the temples of ancient Egypt? They signified "Life" as did also the serpents upon the banners of the Scythians and Parthians, and the serpents upon the coins of Phoenicia and Carthage. The necklace of skulls is clearly symbolical of death, and to my mind is a relic of the worship of the aboriginal Shiva, the blood-loving King of Terrors. When Brahmanism accepted Shiv and Kali, the primordial gods of the wild tribes, into their own religious system, they did not divest them of all their fearful attributes, but they added other attributes, which were the outcome of deeper religious thought and possibly of acquaintance with other forms of worship. Thus, they left the necklace of skulls emblematical of Death and human sacrifice; but added the serpent as a symbol of Life and Immortality, being taught by the influence of Egyptian mysteries that Death is but the threshold of Life, and that through destruction the generative power of the supreme deity effects new creation. Again, may there not be more than a fortuitous connection between Apisor Mnevis, the bull of Osiris, and Nandi, the "Vahan" of Shiva? Both probably symbolized the generative power of the Supreme deity, like the Epaphus and the "Bull-begotten" Dionysus of the



Argives. Third, we see the placid, almost feminine, features of the Preserver, whose symbol is the Lotus: and turning once more to Egypt, we find this same flower crowning the head of Isis, who represented the female or passive principle, and in particular the passive reproductive Power of the waters. The Lotus, as Mr. Payne Knight points out, is self-reproductive and of a viviparous nature among aquatic plants, and was therefore unusually suitable as a symbol of the passive principle of creation. It is not surprising that the Egyptian placed it in the hand of Isis, and that the Hindu likewise connected it with Vishnu who, as Narayana, the emanation, or spirit of the Supreme God, moves upon the face of the waters, Brahma enthroned upon the Lotus is but an alternative symbol of the harmonious cooperation of the two first principles, whereby life is evolved from void and amorphous darkness.

In conclusion, then, I may say that whereas there is at present no evidence to prove that the conception of the Hindu Triad had its origin in the Christian trinity, there is a very distant similarity between the symbols connected with the persons of the Hindu Trimurti and the symbols belonging to the individual figures of the Egyptian Triad, while the supposition that the Egyptian and Hindu conceptions of a Triune God may be connected finds support in the undeniable trade connections which existed between Egypt and India from prehistoric times and which must necessarily have led to an interchange of religious ideas at a period considerably anterior to the rise of Christianity and to the activity of the Christian apostles who sought to spread their message through the world.

## Note

1 Reprinted from *JASB* VII (4), 1905: 293–300.

## 2 The supposed Maya origin of the Elephocephalous deity Ganesha

*Sarat Chandra Mitra*

The attention of Orientalists has been recently drawn to the study of the origin of the worship of the Hindu Elephocephalous deity Ganesha and of the ceremonies performed in Western India in connection there with, in a paper read before the Anthropological Society of Bombay, on 30 August 1905, and published at pp. 479–491 of its Journal, Vol. VII, No. 7. In this paper, the author Mr. Ranganath Sadasiva Jayakar has tried to prove (and, I think, he has succeeded in doing so) that the cult of the deity Ganesha has been known to the Hindus since a long time anterior to the period of the redaction of the Vedas, which is computed by competent Vedic scholars to have ranged from BC 2000 to BC 1400. He has further shown therein that, in the Vedas, there are two Suktas, namely, the Bramhanaspati and the Vinayak Sukta, that one of the hymns of the Rigveda opens with the words गणानारबागणपति (i.e. Ganpati is the pati or master of host or things which exist) and that, in the Rigveda, the name of Ganpati or Ganesha is not so prominent as that of Bramhanaspati, the two being identical. In fact, the whole trend of the author's argument therein is to the effect that the cult of Ganesha is originated in India in pre-Vedic times.<sup>1</sup>

But, as if by way of counterblast to the aforementioned argument about the Indian origin of Ganesha worship, a startling theory was propounded about 13 years ago to the effect that the cult of the elephocephalous deity Ganesha originated among the Mayas<sup>2</sup> of Yucatan in Central America and that it was introduced into India from thence. The author of this theory is the eminent American explorer and archaeologist, Dr. Augustus le Plongeon, who spent some 12 years of his life in exploring the wondrous antiquarian remains of Yucatan in Central America, and in deciphering the inscriptions carved on the walls of those ancient buildings. A popular and fascinating account of these researches of Dr. Plongeon and of his accomplished wife, Madame le Plongeon, who shared with him, the hardships and perils of that long period of exploration in the wild and obscure recesses of Yucatan, was published by his friend, Mr. D. R. O'Sullivan, H.B.M. Vice-Consul at Pemba, under the title "A Fairy Tale of Central American Travel" in the Review of Reviews (English) for September 1895, pp. 271–281. In the course of this paper, Mr. O'Sullivan has set forth, inter alia, Dr. Plongeon's conclusions

(based on his discovery and decipherment of the Yucatan inscriptions) to the effect that Egypt was colonized from Yucatan; that the legend about Cain and Abel (given in the Book of Genesis) had its birthplace in the latter country; that the Sphinx was a monument erected by his sorrowing spouse to the memory of her slain lord Abel; that the ancient Egyptian mysteries were transplanted wholesale from Yucatan; and that the Greek alphabet is simply a Yucatanese version of the destruction of the lost Atlantis.

Among the other bold speculations of Dr. Plongeon, of which an extremely interesting account has been given in the aforementioned paper, is the theory, referred to previous, that the cult of the elephocephalous deity did not originate in India but that it had its inception among the Mayas of Yucatan and was introduced by them into India, and that King Can deified, who was figured as a human being with the head of a mastodon, was the ante type of the Hindu elephant-headed god Ganesha. This bold conclusion is sought to be supported with the arguments that (1) because the deity Ganesha is painted red, which is the peculiar colour of the American race, (2) as the practice of children being carried by their mothers astride their hips, and (3) the custom of imprinting the figure of a hand dipped in a red liquid prevail both in Yucatan and in India, the introduction into India of the cult of the elephocephalous deity by Maya colonists from Yucatan becomes all the more plausible. Dr. Plongeon's reasoning will be best set forth in his own words as contained in the following extract from the aforesaid paper:

Dr. le Plongeon's researches also give a clue to the probable origin of elephant-worship in India. The Hindus, as is well known, represent Ganesha, the god of wisdom, as a human body, coloured red, and surmounted with the head of an elephant. This is the most popular of all their images, and it is sculptured or painted over the door of every house as a protection against evil. The legends, purporting to account for this form of worship, are so numerous and so contradictory that it may safely be assumed that the true origin is not known. Turning to Yucatan, we find in the Troano MS. that the "Master of the Land," King Can deified, is therein depicted under the guise of a human form with the head of a mastodon. Presumably the Mayas adopted that animal as the symbol of their great ruler, from the fact of its being the largest and strongest creature with which they were acquainted, and as such would naturally be for them symbolical of strength and power. On the façade of the building at Chichin-Itza, called by the natives "Kuna" (the house of God), – the same building to which Stevens gives the name of Iglesia, – there is a sculptured tableau representing the worship of that great pachyderm, the head of which with the trunk constitutes the principal decoration of the temples and palaces which were built by members of the family of King Can. Here, then, is another most curious "coincidence." May not the truth be, as Dr. le Plongeon suggests, that the worship of the elephant was introduced into India by colonists: from

Maya, where the worship of the mastodon was so general? The fact of the body of Ganesha being invariably painted red, which is the characteristic colour of the American race, lends additional probability to this view. Certain characteristic customs, moreover, which obtain in India, such for example, as the habit of mothers carrying the child astride on the hip, and of worshippers impressing upon the walls of "the temples the imprint of the hand dipped in a red liquid, serve to strengthen the theory of a Mayan immigration, since the red imprint of a human hand is commonly met with on the walls of the temples in Yucatan, and the women of that country still carry their children astride on the hips".

In refutation of the aforesaid theory, it may be asserted that the customs, from the simultaneous prevalence whereof in Yucatan and India, the inference about a Mayan immigration into the latter country has been drawn, are of so insignificant a character that it is not safe to rely on them at all. First, the practice of depicting the symbol of the outstretched hand, in red colour, on temples and houses, is not confined to Yucatan and India only, but it prevails in other countries also. Mr. S.M. Edwardes, I.C.S., in his very interesting presidential address, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Anthropological Society of Bombay, on 26 February 1907, referred to this custom and, after describing the various forms in which it is practised in India, "Observed as follows"<sup>3</sup>:

But India is not the only country that acknowledges and reveres the Mystic Hand. The aborigines of Australia place it on their caves and shelters, coloured white to ward off death by incantation, and red to protect against the evil eye; and they even preserve the severed hand of a dead chieftain as a tribal protective charm. It appears on the Alhambra Palace in Spain, a relic perchance of Moslem sovereignty during the days of the Khalifs: carved out of red coral, it hangs round the necks of the children of Italy: it was an oft-repeated image upon the ex-voto of ancient Carthage, and is figured at the present day upon houses in Morocco and Palestine, to ward off evil from the dwellers therein. Among the Semitic races, it appears to have typified Divine Might. The celebrated pyramid of Borsippa was called "The temple of the right hand;" one of the names of Babylon was "the city of the celestial hand;" while the hand emerging from a pyramidal base, stamped on a Chaldean cylinder, has served as the prototype of our modern Hand of Justice. And if we turn to Christian countries and Christian symbolism we again find the Hand, emerging from a cloud or encircling a cross, used as a simulacrum of Providence in its highest conception. Remark also how the mystic power of the Hand gives rise in succeeding ages to the mudras of Hinduism, the indigitamenta of Ancient Rome, the imposition of hands in the Christian Scriptures: let us recall the primitive red hand emblem of the Phœnicians and the lam dergerinnor red hand of

Ireland; and we shall realize that even, in this one small matter of the symbolic Hand there is a link, albeit perhaps a broken one, between peoples of widely differing nationality.

This being so, are we justified in arguing that, because the custom of depicting the red imprint of a human hand, which prevails in Yucatan, is also in vogue in such far-off lands as Australia, Spain, Carthage, Morocco, Palestine, and other countries, a band of Maya colonists must have emigrated from Yucatan and introduced the aforementioned custom into the latter regions? My answer to this query is an emphatic No! It is my humble opinion that it would be foolish on our part if we argue in this strain, because there is not extant any evidence at all from which it can be proved that there was ever any communication between the inhabitants of the former and those of the latter countries during any period of time of which we have got record.

Secondly, the practice of women carrying children astride the hips is not confined to any particular race of people. On the contrary, it is prevalent among many races of people and in many lands. Is it, therefore, consistent with reason to argue that, because the practice of carrying the children astride the hips, which is in vogue in Yucatan, is also prevalent among the womenfolk of other lands, the same must have been introduced thither by Maya colonists? There is no proof whatever of any intercourse having existed, at any time of which we have record, between the women folk of Yucatan and those of the latter countries. Consequently, this argument, too, of Dr. Augustus le Plongeon in Support of his theory of the Maya origin of the elaphocephalous deity Ganesha also falls to the ground.

Third, Dr. Augustus le Plongeon argues that, because the characteristic colour of the American people is red, and because the elaphocephalous deity Ganesha is also invariably painted red, ergo the Mayas at Yucatan in Central America must have introduced the cult of the said divinity into India. But we find that red is the characteristic colour of British heraldry, as it is the chief colour of the very valiant and courageous nation of Spain. A writer in the *Globe* (of London), discussing the interesting subject of the symbolism of colour, says: "Red has always been the badge of courage". In heraldry, it has the added significance of magnanimity. Therefore, have not Britons done well to make it their own for, do they not pride themselves on never hitting a man who is down? Moreover, it is the chief colour of that very valiant and very courteous nation or Spain. Christian symbolism calls red the bloodshed for the faith, and employs it on the days sacred to martyrs. Red is the colour of magic, and the pointed caps of the Good People have never varied from the hue which lies under the influence of the ruby planet Mars.<sup>4</sup> Are we, therefore, warranted in coming to the conclusion that, because red is the peculiar colour of the American race, and because red is also the characteristic colour of British heraldry and the chief colour of the Spaniards, the Mayas of Yucatan must have emigrated to England and introduced the red

colour into the latter country? There is ample historical evidence to prove that, in remote antiquity, maritime and commercial intercourse existed between the ancient Britons and those “Pedlars of the Ancient World” – the Phœnicians, the Ancient Romans and many other nations and races of by-gone ages. But, for aught we know, there is not a tittle of evidence to show that any communication ever existed between the Mayas of Yucatan on the one hand, and the ancient Britons on the other. Nor has the search light of modern research been able to discover in English culture and civilization the least trace whatever of Mayan or Aztec influence. Thus, the third argument of Dr. Augustus le Plongeon also fails.

On the other hand, there is extant evidence of a somewhat satisfactory character which shows that, before the arrival of the Spaniards in the New World, there existed communication between the people of Central America and East Asia, and most likely through East Asia with India. Now, there is extraordinary coincidence between the chronological and astronomical systems of the Nahuatl or ancient Mexicans and the Eastern Asiatics. The system of reckoning cycles of years in vogue among the ancient Mexicans bears a striking resemblance to that found in use in different parts of Asia. But both the aforesaid systems are so artificial in their construction and so troublesome in practice that it is very unlikely that they were evolved independently in the two continents. Moreover, the ancient Mexicans correctly oriented the sides of their pyramidal temples towards the different quarters of the heavens and had also ancient myths and traditions of the four ages or four epochs of destruction of the world, and the dispersion of mankind after a great flood of waters. From these striking resemblances, the celebrated German savant, Baron von Humboldt, sought to prove that the ancient Mexicans originally came from Asia, as will appear from his following arguments:

I inferred the probability of the western nations of the new continent having had communication with the east of Asia long before the arrival of the Spaniards from a comparison of the Mexican and Tibeto-Japanese calendars, – from the correct orientation of the steps of the pyramidal elevations towards the different quarters of the heavens, and from the ancient myths and traditions of the four ages or four epochs of destruction of the world, and the dispersion of mankind after a great flood of waters.<sup>5</sup>

But another scholar the late Mr. Thomas Belt, F. G. S., the author of that charming book of travels and natural history observations titled “The Naturalist in Nicaragua”, who has studied the aforesaid question, is of opinion that the extraordinary coincidences between the chronological and astronomical systems of the Nahuatl or ancient Mexicans and of the Eastern Asiatics might have been brought about by some of the latter having been stranded on the shores of America – a fact, which he says, is very probable,

considering that there is perfectly reliable evidence extant of a Japanese ship with its crew having been stranded on the coast of California. The evidence referred to earlier is contained in Kotzebue's narrative of his voyage round the world and is as follows:

Looking over Adams' diary, I found the following notice – “Brig For-ester, March 24, 1815, at sea, upon the coast of California, latitude 32° 45' N. longitude 133° 03' W. We saw this morning, at a short distance, a ship, the confused state of whose sails showed that they wanted assistance. We bent our course towards her, and made out the distressed vessel to be Japanese, which had lost both mast and helm. Only three dying Japanese, the captain and two sailors, were found in the vessel. We took these unfortunate people on board our brig, and, after four months' nursing, they entirely recovered. We learned from these people that they had sailed from the harbour of Osaka, in Japan, bound for another seaport, but were overtaken by a storm, in which they lost the helm and mast. Till that day their ship had been drifting about, a mere butt for the winds and waves, during seventeen months; and of thirty-five men only three remained, all the others having died of hunger”.

Relying on the aforesaid evidence, Mr. Belt argues:

Is it not likely that in ancient times such accidents may have occurred again and again and that information of the astronomical and chronological systems of Eastern Asia may thus have been brought to the Nahuatl, who, from the ease with which they embraced the religion of the Spaniards, are shown to have been open to receive foreign ideas?

The three arguments on which Humboldt principally relied to prove that a communication had existed between the east of Asia and the Mexicans, may be explained without adopting his theory that the Nahuatl had travelled round from the old world. The remarkable resemblance of the Mexican and Tibeto-Japanese calendars might result from the accidental stranding of a Japanese or Chinese vessel on their shores bringing to them some man learned in the astronomy of the Old World. The correct orientation of the sides of their pyramidal temples was but the result of their great astronomical knowledge and of the worship of the sun. And the resemblance of their traditions of four epochs of destruction and of the dispersion of mankind after a great flood of waters arose from the fact that the great catastrophes that befell the human race at the melting of the ice of the glacial period were universal over the world.<sup>6</sup>

Weighing the evidence adduced in support of the theory of the emigration of the Nahuatl or ancient Mexicans from Eastern Asia, against that brought forward to prove the hypothesis of the accidental stranding, on the shores

of Central America, of a Japanese or Chinese vessel which brought to their country some man learned in all the wisdom and lore of Eastern Asia, I am humbly of opinion that the evidence preponderates in favour of the latter theory which appears to be a more plausible one. This being so, we may conclude that some learned man from Eastern Asia communicated to the ancient inhabitants of Mexico, and, for the matter of that, of Central America the knowledge of astronomy and kindred subjects.

Now, Yucatan is adjacent to Mexico. If it be possible for a learned man from East Asia to have communicated to the ancient inhabitants of Mexico the knowledge of all the wisdom and lore of Eastern Asia, is it not possible for the same man to have communicated knowledge of the religious ideas of Eastern Asia to the ancient people of Yucatan which is so closely adjacent to Mexico? I humbly think that such an event is possible.

Now it may be asked: "Is there any evidence extant from which it can be shown that Hindu religion and civilization had ever been transplanted to Eastern Asia?" In reply to this query, it may be stated that there is ample testimony, and that of a very convincing character, to prove that, at an early period of history, the culture of the Hindus flourished in all its vigour in East Asia and that Hindu missionaries propagated in the Far East the doctrines of Hindu religion. The discovery of extensive Hindu architectural remains and Sanskrit inscriptions have shown that the Hindus had established a powerful kingdom in Cambodia in the Far East. It is mentioned as Champâ in the classical writings of the Hindus and is also alluded to by the Chinese annalists and the celebrated Venetian traveller of the Middle Ages – Marco Polo, The French Orientalists, M. M. Barth and Bergaigne, have deciphered the aforesaid inscriptions in Sanskrit; and their researches into these epigraphic records have shown that, as early as the seventh century AD, the whole religious and philosophical systems of classical India and all its rhetoric and literary habits were naturalized in far-off Cambodia on the outskirts of China; that Saivas, Vaishnavas, and Buddhists lived side by side; that the Ramayana and the Mahabharat were considered sacred on the borderlands of distant Laos; and that King Somasar-man presented a temple with copies of the two aforementioned epic poems and of the Puranas and had them recited every day.<sup>7</sup>

We have further historical evidence to show that several Indian princes ruled in Upper Burma and Siam. As far back as 105 AD, an Indian king named Samuda reigned in Upper Burma, whereas in 322 AD, a prince of Cambod in North-West India established a kingdom in Siam.<sup>8</sup>

In some remote period of antiquity, the Hindus established their supremacy in Java also, where they appear to have disseminated the tenets of their religion most successfully, as is testified to by the numerous remains of great temples and beautifully carved sculptures of Hindu deities which exist there even at the present day. The Hindu religion flourished there till about 1478 AD when it was supplanted by Islam. The ruins or the great temple at Borobodo and those at Brambanam and



Gunong Prau still attest to the civilized world to what pitch of greatness the Hindu religion had attained at not a very remote period of history. The Hindu goddess Durga, called in Java, Lora Jonggrang (the Exalted Virgin) was the favourite deity of the old Javanese; and her image (a bas-relief representing her being figured in Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago*) is often found in the ruined temples which abound in the eastern part of the island.<sup>8</sup> Various other deities of the Hindu pantheon were also worshipped there; and their images too exist there even at the present day – facts which can be ascertained by any one visiting the Archeological Galleries or the Indian Museum at Calcutta, wherein various sculptured figures of Hindu gods brought from Java are exhibited in the ground floor halls to the right of the entrance-vestibule.

Among these are two images of the elephocephalous deity Ganesha, in an excellent state of preservation, to which the attention or the visitor is particularly drawn and which have been described as follows<sup>9</sup>:

- 1 A fine figure or Bitāra Gāna or Ganesa seated on a lotus throne. The figure has a richly foliated coronal mukuṭa with a human skull in front of it. Two long ringlets hang down on each shoulder, and the Brahman's thread is over the left shoulder. Only one hand of the four arms remains, and it holds a rosary. There are the usual ornaments on the arms and round the neck, but the waist is girt with an ornamented belt or sābuk, which holds up the richly figured sārōngor jārit that reaches down to the chubby feet of the statue. A Ganesa similar to this has been figured by Sir Stamford Raffles.<sup>10</sup>
- 2 A figure of Ganesa The figure, as in the previous one, is seated cross-legged, with the soles of the club feet opposed. He has four arms, and, in his right upper hand is a rosary, and in the other right hand a lotus flower, while his up-raised left hand holds an axe, and the lower left hand a bowl in which he inserts his trunk. The head-dress is much the same as in Ja.,<sup>11</sup> and, like it, bears a human skull in front. There is a nimbus behind the head sculptured on the plain back slab. The ears are thrown outwards as in the previous figure of Ganesa, and the ornaments are much the same as in it. Figures similar to it are figured by Sir Stamford Raffles.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, India exercised a powerful religious influence over Japan in the past. Mr. J. N. Farquhar, M.A., a gentleman well known in Calcutta for his evangelistic labours in connection with the Theistic Mission, went to Japan some time ago. In the course of his sojourn there, he found there many images of Buddhist deities which are extremely Hindu in appearance. He writes that a large number of deities of the Hindu pantheon have found their way to the Land of the Rising Sun that, in some of the shrines there, he actually came across the images of Indra and Brahma and that Yama, the Hindu

god of death, is one of those deities whose carved representations are commonly found in Japanese temples. The cult of the Tantras as also the doctrines of Pantheism and Avatars also appear to have exercised a potent sway over the Japanese mind. Shintoism, the state religion of Japan, is only the doctrine of Avatars adapted to the spiritual requirements of the Japanese. Architecture and sculpture were also introduced into Japan from India. The Japanese shrines and the images installed therein display, in a striking way, the influence of Indian art and thought so much so that Mr. Farquhar says that “no one who knows India can walk through Japan today without being strikingly impressed with the many Indian features which still remain visible after so many centuries”. Another noteworthy fact is that, just as in India all the sacred hymns and formula of the Hindus are composed in Sanskrit – their sacred language, the rituals in the Buddhist temples of Japan are, in the same way, still chanted in the Sanskrit language. The religious books of the Japanese are written in Sanskrit language but in Chinese characters. During the last half century or thereabouts, a goodly number of ancient Sanskrit MSS and inscriptions have been discovered in Japan. All these facts prove, beyond the shadow of doubt, that Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Hindus, was studied extensively in the Land of the Rising Sun in the remote periods of antiquity, and that, by means of this medium, the Japanese must have acquired an intimate knowledge of the religious system and lore of the ancient Hindus. To put the whole matter in a nutshell, it may be stated that India is the fountainhead, the fons et origo of Japanese culture. It is with a good deal of truth that Mr. Farquhar says that the same good offices, which India performed towards Japan, she also did, in varying measure, for China, Mongolia, Tibet, Annam, Siam, Java, Burma, not to mention Ceylon. “All the peoples of the East”, he adds,

leaned from Hindustan; all were proud to acknowledge her supremacy and to drink from the flowing fountain. For a thousand years, counting from Asoka, India continued to give out of the riches of her store-house to the nations of the East; but after 750 years after Christ, this spontaneity gradually ceased. But though India no longer continued to give forth as before, yet the influence of Buddhism in the East was neither short-lived nor superficial. It moulded the life and character of these peoples to an extraordinary degree; and the results have lasted down into our days.<sup>13</sup>

By the evidence adduced in the preceding paragraphs, it has been proved to the very hilt that the religious and philosophical systems and lore, the whole body of religious customs and rituals, nay, the whole culture of the ancient Hindus had been transplanted into the countries of the Far East, where the same flourished in all their strength and vigour till a late period of history. This being so, is it not possible for a man, learned in all the religious lore of the ancient Hindus, to have been stranded on the shores of Central

America in some remote period of antiquity, and to have communicated to the ancient inhabitants of Yucatan the knowledge of the various gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, including that of the elephocephalous deity Ganesha? If we rely on the late Mr. Belt's arguments *supra* which are based on a substratum of fact, we think we are justified in concluding that this is possible, and that, at least, the theory about the knowledge of the Hindu elephocephalous deity Ganesha having been communicated from India to the ancient inhabitants of Yucatan is a more plausible one than the counter-hypothesis, propounded by Dr. Augustus le Plongeon, of a body of Maya colonists having emigrated from Yucatan to India and introduced into the latter country the cult of the mastodon-headed King Can which ultimately took the shape of the elephant-headed deity Ganesha.

The net results or the foregoing discussion may be stated as follows:

- (1) The theory or the cult or the mastodon-headed King Can having been introduced from Yucatan in Central America to India by a body of Maya colonists is not borne out even by a single fact.
- (2) On the contrary, there is reliable evidence to show that the Japanese have occasionally been stranded on the shores of America.
- (3) It is possible that some learned man from the Far East of Asia might, in the same way as the aforementioned Japanese were, have been stranded on the shores of Central America and disseminated among the ancient inhabitants of the latter country, a knowledge of the culture of Far-Eastern Asia.
- (4) There is overwhelming evidence to show that the ancient Hindus had transplanted their religion into some of the countries of Far-Eastern Asia, not excepting Japan where images of several Hindu deities exist even at the present day.
- (5) It is possible that some Eastern Asiatic, learned in all the religious lore or the ancient Hindus, might in the same way as the aforementioned Japanese were, have been stranded on the shores of Central America and propagated in Yucatan the cult of the Hindu elephocephalous deity Ganesha which took the shape there of the mastodon-headed King Can.

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*, VIII (7), 1909: 531–547.
- 2 Squiers, who has more than any other traveller, studied the different faces of America, has proposed the term Nahuatls for the people of Mexico and Central America. The southern branch of the Nahuatls was known as the Aztecs who occupied Mexico and were subjugated by the Spaniards. The Mayas were another branch of the Nahuatls, who occupied Yucatan and were very nearly affiliated with the Aztecs of Mexico.
- 3 *Vide*, the *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* Vol. VIII, pp. 24–25.
- 4 Quoted in the *Hindu Patriot* (daily) of Friday, 21 April 1899.
- 5 Humboldt's "Aspects of Nature" Vol. II, p. 174.

- 6 For a fuller discussion of this subject, *vide* The Naturalist in Nicaragua by Thomas Belt, F.G.S., 2nd Edition, London: Edward Bumpus 1888, pp. 370–373.
- 7 For a fuller account of this subject, see the late Mr. E. Rehatsek's excellent article on Hindu Civilization in the Far East which appeared in Vol. I., pp. 505–532, of the Bombay Anthropological Society's Journal; as also a review of M. Barth's Inscription Sanskrites Du Cambodge in the Indian Antiquary Vol. XVII, for 1888, pp. 31–32.
- 8 A History of Assam, By E. A. Gait, I. C. S. Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co., 1906, p. 14.
- 9 For a fuller account of the Hindu architectural remains and of the sculptures of Hindu deities, see A. R. Wallace's The Malay Archipelago (Colonial Edition, 1892), pp. 77–81.
- 10 Catalogue and Handbook of the Archeological Collections in the Indian Museum. By J. Anderson, M. D., Part II, Calcutta: Printed by Order of the Trustees 1883, pp. 358–359; 361–362.
- 11 Raffles's History of Java (1817) Vol. II, p. 13.
- 12 Catalogue and Handbook of the Archæological Collections in the Indian Museum. By J. Anderson, M. D., Part II, Calcutta: Printed by Order of the Trustees 1883, pp. 358–359; 361–2.
- 13 *Vide* an article titled "India's Influences upon Japan in the past" in The Maha-Bodhi and the United Buddhist World (published from Colombo Ceylon) for June 1908, pp. 85–87.

# 3 The anthropological method of interpretation of Avestic and Vedic texts, ideas, and usages

## Part I

*R.K. Dadachanji*

Anthropology is the only rational and logical basis for exact philosophy, metaphysics, and sociology, the science of religion, and particularly for the history of and science of humanity. It establishes the unity in their primitive origin of all the religions, civilizations, and cultures of the world of the past and present times as well as of all philosophies, literatures, sciences, and arts; not in the way as shown by Spengler in his “Decline of the West” or by Vico in his “Scienza Nuova” or “New Science of Humanity” or by H. G. Wells in his “The Outline of History”.<sup>1,2</sup>

Anthropology does not present disconnected or distorted unnatural pictures of the progress of civilized humanity in different ages and countries especially in the East as Wells’ great work has done, and does not treat human history as having begun with the epochs of ancient Egyptian or Greek and Roman history as the other great works have done. Human civilization, which is the product of the human civilized mind, is an organism like a tree and has its roots, trunks, and branches together with the grafts that attached themselves to the branches in different ages and times owing to differences of geographical, social, political, and psychological environment. And anthropology starting from the accessible beginnings of human civilization in palaeolithic ages and producing tangible and proveable data can point out the original roots and trunk of all human civilization to which all its diverse and apparently irreconcilable ramifications could be positively traced. It can establish that all the great religions of the world like Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Hebrewism (Judaism), Christianity, and Islam are traceable to one and the same source from which they have emerged along definite though divergent lines. Anthropology unifies all human knowledge and civilizations and can define the laws by which they have grown up.

Mons. P. Masson-Oursell’s following observations in his work on “Comparative Philosophy” (1926) are very pertinent:

Knowledge of humanity bound up as it is with knowledge of the environment in which it finds itself requires an explanation as extensive as possible, a systematic clearing of the ground and a constant delving into

the past that the past may illuminate the present. In respect of certain epochs and certain environments we are, as it were, overwhelmed by over documentation whereas in respect of others, but not necessarily the most distant from our own times information is lacking.

It is anthropology alone that can supply all necessary information of a reliable character about epochs and environments necessarily the remotest from our own times and carrying us to the very dawn of civilization thousands or millions of years back and produce a connected and systematic history as well as a science of human civilization from its very start with the aid of strictly logical analysis, synthesis, and induction. This chapter constitutes the third step towards the construction of what may be called the Anthropological science of human civilization and progress from palaeolithic times.

On 27 July 1905, this writer read before a meeting of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society a paper on "A Comparison of the Avestic Doctrines of the Fravashees with the Platonic Doctrines of the Ideas and other Doctrines" which has been published at page 122 of Volume XXII of the *Journal of the Society*. The Avesta lays it down that there are Fravashees or spiritual beings representing what Plato has called Ideas or prototypes of "the living men, the dead and those to be born and other pious creations", and that they can be always invoked for the benefit of the living but that when invoked in a certain month corresponding to the Vedic or Hindu month of Manes, and if offerings be tendered to them they would descend to the earth for 10 days of the particular month. Even Parsi scholars still confound the Fravashees with the names of the dead which the Fravashees of "the living and those to be born" can never be. All scholars, European and Indian, seem to have passed over the Avestic doctrines of the Fravashees as unintelligible or even possibly absurd. But this chapter will show how easily intelligible they are if looked at from the anthropological viewpoint to be presented.

This chapter will try to explain how the ideas of spiritual beings existing independently of the terrestrial world but relating to those born or dead or to be born arose.

To come to the subject matter of this chapter, its main conclusions may be summarized as follows:

- 1 That the ancient Iranian palaeolithic hunter and sun worshipper, the ancestor of the Vedic and all other Aryan nations of the world including the so-called white Semitics, was at first a hunter in the chase-a hero. He was a sun worshipper by day but a rough-and-ready astronomer both at night and in the days of glacial darkness, and consequently soon became a poet and scientist and afterwards a philosopher. At first, he believed that the sun which moved about in the skies and appeared and disappeared must be like him a human being, but a celestial being, and must have and had a celestial cave for his abode. Later on, he came to believe

that the sun had in the skies celestial counterparts of the Iranian's best terrestrial belongings, namely, cows and bulls and milk and afterwards haoma or Soma juice, and as a poet designated the former by the names which he had given to the latter.

- 2 That the worship of the visible far-away sun was affected as it is still affected by his descendants the Parsis without the offer of any animal or other sacrifice at all, burnt or otherwise to him as manifestly he could not possibly descend to the earth and taste or smell it. In later times, the poetic Iranian found that the sun was well provided with celestial cows and milk, and still later on with the celestial Haoma or Soma juice, and did not need as sacrifices any terrestrial milk or food or Haoma juice. The sacrifices offered to the fire believed to be and worshipped at first as will be shown hereafter as the celestial son of the sun but, without a celestial mother, were and have never been of the blood of animals or their flesh raw or burnt or blood but only of dry wood or incense to keep it alive and aglow.
- 3 That as the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian for ages worshipped and his descendants the Parsis worship till now the visible sun and the fire neither he nor his descendants have ever thought of putting up idols to represent them.
- 4 That celestial beings like the celestial cow, bull, dog, river, etc., being visible and worshipped as such, the Iranian felt no need to create and never created idols or images to represent any spiritual objects, animals, or beings at all, as their terrestrial counterparts, namely, the terrestrial cow, bull, dog, river, etc., were before his eyes, and he worshipped and revered these living or moving objects alone. However, in pre-Zoroastrian times, the idea and practice of dedicating stone images to invisible gods and goddesses arose and were condemned by Zoroaster who insisted upon invisible spiritual beings being worshipped in spirit and not by means of tangible visible idols.
- 5 That the Iranian sacrifice was composed as Darmesteter points out of two elements, namely, (a) spells or prayers or recitals of Avestic texts, and (b) offerings which consisted of libations of holy water (*Zaotbra*) and holy meat (*Myazda*, a piece of meat placed on the draona, which in later times was commuted and still remains today commuted to fruits now called "Mez", just as the Vedic and the Hebrew priests commuted human sacrifices) and Haoma (afterwards commuted and still remains commuted to milk and wine); that these objective offerings were and are intended really as offerings to Fravashees of dead Mazdayasnians.
- 6 That afterwards as a philosopher, the palaeolithic Iranian generalized that whatever was in the heavens had its counterparts on the earth; that whatever was on the earth of pious creations had their celestial counterparts in heavens, that is, the numberless stars, which, he called the Fravashees, being of the nature of Biblical prototypes and the Platonic ideas; that therefore the terrestrial counterparts of celestial objects must

have and had the same virtues and must be invested with the same sanctity and receive the same reverence as the celestial objects; for instance, that as the rainwater which was the celestial Gomez of the celestial bull, namely, the rain clouds, had the power of destroying disease and death when fallen on the earth and purifying the body and soul, the terrestrial river in which the rainwater was collected and which was the counterpart of the celestial river, the Milky Way, must have the same virtue, and in later times was believed by other Aryan nations to wash off or remit by a bath or baptism, therein all sins from, the inner soul and purify it; but that the terrestrial Gomez of the terrestrial bull has continued till now in the belief of the primitive Iranian's and his descendants the Parsis to possess the same efficacy as the celestial Gomez and to be in use for religious ceremonies even now.

- 7 That in the case of a celestial object corresponding to which there was no corresponding terrestrial object already in existence, for example, the celestial girdle of the Milky Way or, as Mr. Tilak puts it, the girdle of the Orion, or the sun's celestial robe of sunlight, the Iranian made terrestrial objects in imitation, for example, the Kusti and the Sudreh, and made the same use of them and wore them, in the same fashion in which the sun was believed to wear his celestial girdle and sudreh; that thus the primitive Iranian reproduced on earth the sun's belongings and he himself lived on earth the life as he believed of the sun and attributed to his own earthly valued belongings all the virtues which he attributed to their celestial counterparts, but stopped short at treating or worshipping himself or any human being or any other object as the sun or the deity; that it took his descendants long ages before finding the grammatical difference between primary and secondary meanings and turning the celestial objects into spirits but never into idols. In investing the terrestrial counterparts of celestial objects with the virtues of the celestial objects and in always believing in those virtues and constantly hoping to be benefited by them, the primitive Iranian originated the scientific system of the late M. Cowé of auto-suggestion, namely, that whatever good or evil is suggested by one to one's self in matters affecting one's health and behaviour and course of life, comes to pass. The primitive Iranian thus started the practice of auto-suggestion and earned the title of the first practical psychologist. That the religious practices inaugurated by the primitive Iranian bear a valuable psychological and psycho-analytical efficacy according to the standards and principles of the present-day science will be demonstrated on another occasion.
- 8 That still later on as a raw metaphysician he believed that he, the master of all the terrestrial world, was in one sense a worshipper and follower of the sun, but that in another sense his soul or spirit after death at first hoped to stand and thereafter stood on the same celestial level as the sun and associated with its divine spirit in the celestial paradise.



- 9 That still further on afterwards as an advanced metaphysician when he learnt to make a distinction between those who deserved to go to heavens and those who deserved to go to hell, he created a celestial paradise for himself and a hell for his enemies like the Neanderthal man at first and afterwards for the wicked who refused to obey or broke the Mazdayasnian laws; that thus the Milky Way became a sacred celestial river marking the boundary between the celestial heaven and hell and that therefore its counterpart on earth, namely, every big river became as previously explained also sacred.
- 10 That the palaeolithic Iranian and his descendants till today have as stated not only never offered any animal or human sacrifice whatever to propitiate the spiritual beings believed in by him or put up idols to represent them but also have never for thousands if not millions of years resorted to dancing and music to propitiate and please the divine as human beings in their system of religious worship or in their social customs and usages, though the Iranians have never desired to go dry and have always drunk freely though with the utmost moderation wine, which according to tradition was first discovered in the times of King Jamshed; that so astute and severe has been the Iranian mentality and morality that it has never as a rule been attracted by music and dancing.
- 11 That the absence of music and dancing and even lyric and dramatic poetry from the Iranian religious and social institutions and literature has developed to the highest degree the practical unsentimental, logical, and scientific turn of the Iranian mind as well as the noblest traits of humanity in the Iranian character, namely, liberality, generosity, gentleness, honesty, fairness, kindness to all men and animals and even to plants, the practice of all peaceful arts and a desire for progress in education, science, devotion to religion and piety, as is proved by the history of the Parsis after their migration into India and by the most striking tribute paid recently to them in London by Lord Winterton, the present Under Secretary of State for India, a distinguished British statesman who eulogized the record of the Parsi community in all forms of social activity and philanthropy as well as commerce and finance, and said that "he knew of no community which in proportion to its numbers had done so much in the world".
- 12 That the descendants of the palaeolithic Iranian have always been characterized by the previous qualities without losing the conquering and imperialistic heroism of their palaeolithic progenitor which had enabled them to establish the Iranian Empire over the whole of the then known civilized world twice – the first before the conquest by Alexander the Great and the last under the Sassanians, which was lost not by deterioration of their physical, intellectual, or moral fibre but by reason of the fatal weakness of their political and military system, a subject, which will be dealt with on a future occasion.

That the palaeolithic Iranian was born though a raw astronomer is proved by the passages from the Rig Veda noted by Mr. Tilak in his learned work, "The Orion", especially Rig. X-85-1-3, where the Nakshetras and the motions of the moon and the sun as causing the seasons are spoken of generally. Mr. Tilak also refers to the Vedic system of reckoning the commencement of the year with the winter solstice. According to Alberuni, the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian kings, who were also prophets, fixed and re-fixed the Iranian calendar from time to time and were experts in the astronomy of their age. That this astronomical tendency remained with the Vedic Aryans in India is further testified to by the Manu-Smriti which rules that "the Brahman learned in the Veda (IV-93) shall stand during the morning twilight muttering for a long time (the Gayatri) and at the proper time (he must similarly perform) the evening (devotions)". In the rules for studentship, the institutes of Manu explain the "twilight devotions" in great detail: "Let him (the student) stand during the morning twilight muttering the Savitri until the sun appears, but (let him recite it) seated in the evening until the constellations can be seen distinctly" (B. II-101). It must be noted that the palaeolithic Iranian did not and, his descendants the Parsis do not, observe any "twilight devotions" in the morning or in the evening; but that their devotions begin after sunrise facing the sun and thereafter facing the sun on the side on which it might be riding in the heavens, and after sunset before the lighted lamp or fire but neither in the twilight nor until the constellations appear.

That the palaeolithic Iranian astronomer believed naturally and in the true scientific spirit of the modern times in worshipping and believing the sun as the Creator of the world. This pre-Avestic cult of sun worship and star worship has been one of the foundations, if not the foundation of modern science, especially astronomy, are facts which are surprisingly confirmed by the belief of one of the greatest astronomers of modern times, the father of modern astronomy, Kepler. Prof. N. Burti, the learned author of the work on "The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science", published in 1925 in the International Library of Psychology, Philosophy and Scientific Method, observes very pertinently on the subject as follows:

The sun, according to Kepler, is God the Father, the sphere of the fixed stars is God the Son, the intervening ethereal medium, through which the power of the sun is communicated to impel the planets around their orbits, is the Holy Ghost. . . . To pronounce this allegorical trapping is not to suggest of course that Kepler's Christian theology is at all insincere; it is rather that he had discovered *an illuminating natural proof and interpretation of it*, and the whole attitude with its animism and allegorical naturalistic approach is quite typical of much thinking of the day. Kepler's contemporary, Jacob Boehme, is the most characteristic representative of this type of philosophy. . . . The connection between Kepler, the sun-worshipper, and Kepler, the seeker of exact mathematical knowledge of astronomical nature, is very close. It was primarily by

such consideration as the deification of the sun and its proper placing at the centre of the universe that Kepler in the years of his adolescent fervour and warm imagination was induced to accept the new astronomy.

But the palaeolithic Iranian astronomer and sun worshipper was in the infancy of his “fervour and imagination” and of the culture of all human thought when he began the construction of his pre-Avestic system.

Again, since the function of science is to observe and explain the phenomena of nature, and since the palaeolithic Iranian performed both these functions, though his primitive explanations of his elementary astronomical observations were rather poetic, he is entitled to being regarded as the first scientist as also the pioneer in civilization, culture, and ethics and afterwards in religion and metaphysics. His age was the age of science or inquiry though then in an embryo state and not of religion or belief which was to be formed or was being yet formed by his poetic speculations for the scientific and afterwards philosophical explanation of the natural phenomena observed by him and their correlation.

Again, that the palaeolithic Iranian in locating spiritual beings in the heavens acted, though unconsciously, in accordance with the doctrines of up-to-date science appears from its following teachings:

- 1 That the earth was at one time a mass of molten material or even glowing gas in which life was impossible;
- 2 That living things have appeared on this earth at a later stage of its geological history;
- 3 That as Sir Oliver Lodge puts it, life is due to the interaction of something which is not matter but utilizes matter for its manifestation;
- 4 That life could not come into being without an antecedent life of understanding and design.

The Primitive Iranian was therefore correct in looking for the powers which gave him life and brought the earth into existence, not to the earth itself but to the heavens where also the everlasting “antecedent life” in Sir Oliver Lodge’s phraseology could be found and to which alone if man have an immortal soul or spirit it must ascend. Though the Iranian was wrong from the modern point of view in investing the sun and the moon and the stars with life, yet he was right in his fundamental idea about roots of life on the earth being celestial and not terrestrial. And in any case his ideas and ideals were all lofty and literally elevating to his heart, mind, and spirit.

The palaeolithic Iranian and his descendants have always lived and not merely “played with”, but literally associated themselves in thought and sentiment with gods and tried to rise to their level by means of incessant religious ceremonies and constantly developing their spirit, mind, and morals. They invested themselves with the attributes of gods and never invested gods with the attributes of man – and thus followed a mental process – which was

the reverse of anthropomorphism and for which a suitable new expression, namely, homodeification may be coined. It may be defined as the doctrine that a man should desire and strive to ascend high to the level of the gods as conceived by him; that he should so live, dress, eat and drink – as well as think and act like gods and that after death his soul should become associated with the spirits of the gods. The “homodeifier”, to coin another expression, does not, like the anthropomorphist, drag down the gods to his own human level and attribute to them his own human attributes or appetites, but regards them as objects of constant spiritual worship. It is this belief in homodeification, which taught Iranian kings to dress and live amid surroundings of the greatest pomp and ceremony like gods, and to use lustrous articles like gold and jewellery for themselves, but never in the simple fire temple. The primitive Iranian and his Parsi descendants still believe in a rich, yet pious religious life till death and have never looked upon poverty and asceticism as an ideal to be lived for-as believed in by their Hindu cousins. The kings of certain ancient nations over-looked the insuperable distinction between man and the gods, which the Iranian kings and the Iranians never forgot, and learnt to treat themselves as divinities. But the modern European nations, especially the Protestants and the great American nation, believe in and follow the social ideals of the primitive Iranian though not following his religion.

At the outset it must be stated that in this chapter it will be assumed, though on another occasion it will be proved, (1) that the primitive palaeolithic Iranian spoken of herein was the ancestor of the Vedic Aryans before they migrated to India and (2) that Avestic Iran was the common home of both the Iranians and the ancestors of the Vedic Aryans before the latter separated and emigrated to India.

To come to the subject of the interpretation of the Avestic and Vedic texts, as Darmesteter points out, there were two methods or systems of interpretation observed by European scholars to whom the Parsis owe the deepest debt of gratitude for almost resuscitating by their laborious and learned translations the letter, if not the true spirit, of their religious texts which had been buried under the sands of political, religious, and social revolutions. One of these methods relied chiefly or exclusively on tradition and was followed by the traditional school of Avestic scholars, while the other relied on comparison with the Vedas and was followed by the Vedic school of Avestic scholars. The third method suggested by Darmesteter is a mixed method being a blend of both the previous methods. He asserts “Tradition gives the materials, and comparison puts them in order. It is not possible either to know the Avesta without the former or to understand it without the latter”. But the three schools and the Pehalvi writers all resort to an imaginary symbolism having no foundation in fact for realizing and understanding the true meaning of the Avestic texts. The view against the traditional school, as stated by Darmesteter, was that “translating the Avesta in accordance with the Pehalvi was not translating the Avesta but only translating the Pehalvi

version which whenever deciphered had been found to wander strongly from the true meaning of the original text". "Tradition must either understand or not understand at all the great changes undergone by the Avestic ideas up to the time of the composition of the Pehalvi versions". "Tradition is always new sense or nonsense". The Vedic school of Avestic scholars therefore asserted that the "key to the Avesta was not the Pehalvi but the Vedas, which was both the best lexicon and the best commentary to it". Similarly, the great oriental scholar, Mr. B. G. Tilak, to whose brilliant, original scholarship in spite of politics a hearty tribute of admiration and gratitude for the Parsi community must be paid, has shown in his memorable works, "The Orion" and "The Arctic Home in the Vedas", so much admired by Prof. Max Muller, that the Vedas must also for the true construction of their real inner meaning be interpreted with the help of the Avesta.

Against the traditional system of Interpretation, it may be further urged that – as laid down by Prof. Heras in his interesting booklet on "The Writing of History" – "Tradition is generally contained in popular songs and poems". It is the popularity of such songs and poems, that is, the fact of their being commonly known and sung to or by a people for generations that would be the best criterion of their being literally traditional. Prof. Heras further observes that "only written tradition can be trustworthy; since oral tradition suffers continual alteration"; and that "written tradition is found almost in the epic poems". But the so-called Pehalvi traditional versions of the Avesta relied upon by the traditional school of Avesta scholars are not based on any "popular songs or poems" or "epic poetry", but rest upon statements by Pehalvi writers made centuries after the Avestic religion and the Persian Empire were overthrown by the Mahomedan invasion. Before these Pehalvi versions came into existence, the Persian Empire had undergone two drastic political revolutions – the first upon the conquest of Alexander the Great, and the second under the Mahomedan conquest. The religion had also in the meantime come under the powerful cultural influence of two non-Aryan Semitic religions, namely, the Hebrew and the Christian religions. Worst of all, the great Iranian Library, the greatest and the only and the first library in the world, the parent of the Alexandrian Library and of all libraries in the modern civilized world, was destroyed, as we know, by Alexander the Great in his fit of drunken frenzy. It is more than possible that numbers of Iranian works of science and mathematics plundered from this monumental library formed the nucleus of the Alexandrian Library destroyed as by a Nemesis of the Fates by the Mahomedans later as well as constituted the basis of the progress in mathematics and science made by the Alexandrian University. The wonderful scientific knowledge and learning acquired by the primitive Iranians and their capacity for writing books on scientific and mathematical subjects in remote ages is testified to by the following remarkable passage in Alberuni's "Chronicles of the Nations", to which the attention of the Parsi community as well as the enlightened and progressive Government of His Imperial Majesty Shah-an-Shah Pehalvi and all European, American and

Parsi scholars and research-makers is especially drawn so that excavations may be made at and around the spot indicated by Alberuni from his own personal knowledge and not from mere hearsay or from so-called traditions of which his book so far as it bears upon Zoroastrianism is mostly full:

Tehmurasp (a primitive Iranian king) ordered all scientific books to be buried. In favour of that report we may state that in our time in Jay, the city of Isfahan, there have been discovered hills which on being excavated disclosed houses filled with many loads of that tree-bark with which arrows and shields are covered which is called "Tuz", bearing inscriptions of which no one was able to say what they are and what they meant.

This passage, which is trustworthy, as supported by the personal testimony and knowledge of one of the greatest scholars, mathematicians, and astronomers of the eleventh century AD, disposes of the noteworthy suggestion made by the accomplished Buddhist scholar, Mrs. Rhys Davis, that the only materials for writing known to the ancients were clay in vogue in Mid-Asia, Papyrus in Egypt, and palm leaves in India and Ceylon. But the principal material for writing known to the ancient Iranian was, according to Alberuni, the bark "Tuz". To return to the subject of the methods, of construction, it is the Pehalvi versions translated with such zeal by the traditional school of Oriental scholars that caused Mr. (afterwards Sir) W. M. Jones to condemn their translation by Anquetil Duperron as "being full of silly tales, of laws and rules so absurd, of descriptions of gods and demons so grotesque" that they could not be looked upon as "the work of a sage like Zoroaster or the code of a religion so much celebrated for its simplicity, wisdom and purity". The method of interpretation adopted by the Vedic school of Avestic scholars is also objectionable; as the Vedic and Avestic expressions are construed either in their literal sense as will appear hereafter or in the light of an imaginary symbolism without any reference to the ideas existing before and at the different times when the Avestic and Vedic texts which are evidently compositions of different bards framed at different times were composed. Thus, the two methods of interpretation followed by the Vedic and Traditional schools of European scholars and the blend suggested by Darmesteter are not correct guides for the true interpretation of the inner meaning of the Avestic and the Vedic texts. But the anthropological method of interpretation is the only guide for their true interpretation.

The anthropological method of interpretation consists of the following three processes or principles:

- 1 To ascertain the pre-Avestic and pre-Vedic ideas and practices which afterwards took the forms crystallized in the Avesta and the Vedas.
- 2 To determine and formulate the psychological principles or laws upon which the pre-Avestic and pre-Vedic ideas and practices were formed.

- 3 To read and interpret the Avestic and Vedic texts in the light of the pre-Avestic and pre-Vedic ideas and practices and the intellectual and moral characteristics produced by such ideas and practices with the help of the psychological principles by which those ideas and practices were created.

By the application of this anthropological method of interpretation, the Avesta and the Vedas are made intelligible and rational and converted into an organic logical whole and cease to be unintelligible or objects of ridicule and unbelief not merely to the European but also to the Parsi and Hindu educated mind.

The first step therefore in the anthropological interpretation is the determination of the pre-Avestic history of the palaeolithic Iranian and the cults of sun worship and fire worship founded by him and observed in their spiritualized forms till this date by his descendants the Parsis. This preliminary work is attempted by this writer to be done in his two chapters read before this learned Society in March and April last, respectively. The evidence which has been recorded in those chapters need not be repeated here.

The psychological laws by which the pre-Avestic religious ideas and practices and the mental and moral characteristics and ideals of the palaeolithic Iranian produced by them were formed are as follows:

- 1 That the Iranian's then sole Deity, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, the Sun, whose luminosity is still retained by the Avesta as one of the attributes of the spiritual invisible Ahuramazda, is still daily worshipped and addressed by orthodox, Parsis as "Khoremand Rayomand", "full of light and brilliance", must like himself, the Iranian, possess celestial belongings corresponding to and being the counterparts of the most valued terrestrial belongings, which the Iranian possessed, namely, celestial dogs to guard his celestial cave, and celestial cows and celestial bulls and celestial milk for his drink and a celestial river, namely, the Milky Way, as a celestial boundary between Sun's celestial abode and the celestial hell.
- 2 That the sun must have a dress and drink the best drinks, namely, milk and haoma, and therefore must have a celestial dress with a star-bespangled girdle and have celestial milk and haoma available to him; that the Iranian must imitate the sun's celestial dress, the white robe with its celestial girdle, and dress himself in its terrestrial counterpart, namely, the Sudreh, the sacred shirt, with the Kasti, sacred girdle, around it.
- 3 That just as there were celestial counterparts in the heavens of the chief terrestrial objects pertaining to the Iranian, there must similarly be celestial counterparts of all the pious creations on the earth; that the innumerable stars in the firmament cannot have existence without a purpose and without a function, and must therefore function as the celestial

counterparts, called the Fravashees of all pious creations on the earth, including Fravashees of man living and to be born and dead; that as the sun was the celestial counterpart in the heavens of the Deity, there must be celestial counterparts of the spiritual beings worshipped by the Iranian among the countless stars in addition to those enumerated earlier.

- 4 That just as the terrestrial bulls and cows passed Gomez or urine, so must the celestial bulls, namely, the storm clouds, must pass Gomez, namely, the beneficent rains, and that the Gomez of the terrestrial bulls and cows must have the same attributes and efficiency as the celestial Gomez of the celestial bulls, namely, destruction of death and disease and gift of increase.
- 5 That the rainwater collected in terrestrial great rivers must retain and have attributes and efficacy of its original character as the celestial Gomez of the celestial bulls, namely, destruction of death and disease and blessing of increase.
- 6 That the fire was as a scientific fact (of even today) the celestial son or offspring of the sun as born of the celestial lightning and electric fireballs descended from the heavens but without having any celestial mother and without the sun having any celestial wife.
- 7 That none of the celestial sacred beings could have any celestial wives or mothers like their terrestrial counterparts; that though there were celestial bulls and cows and milk, yet that they had no celestial calves; that there were two female Iranian deities but without celestial husbands or children or even celestial parents.
- 8 That the celestial beings could have no sexual appetite; or multiply as men and animals and plants did; that except the sun, whose unwearied travels made him thirsty and who therefore had celestial milk for his drink in the heavens and the starry Fravashees of the dead whose souls had tasted food and drunk milk and haoma when on this earth and the fire which only fed on dried wood and incense, no other celestial beings could need any food or drink; that therefore no sacrifices whatever could be offered except of cooked food and milk and haoma or wine to the Fravashees of the dead.
- 9 That as all the celestial objects of worship were visible in the skies, they must be bodily worshipped in their respective celestial places; that as none of these celestial objects could resemble any human being, they could not be represented in stone or clay images in the human form.

## Notes

1 Reprinted from *JASB*. August 1927 XIII (8), 833–853.

2 Editor's Note: This paper has been abridged a little from the original.



# 4 The anthropological method of interpretation of Avestic and Vedic texts, ideas, and usages

## Part II

*R.K. Dadachanji*

Before writing the second part of his third paper for the current year, this writer desires to draw the attention of the Society to the fact that the June 1927 Number of the Contemporary Review has published an article headed "Spengler and the Anthropologists" by Messrs. Stephen Chant and Michael Joyce which proceed mostly on the lines of the observations made about Spengler and Anthropology by this writer 3 months previously in the first of the said papers, read in March last. This shows that our Society tries to keep itself up-to-date in knowledge bearing upon anthropology and is even ahead of contemporary anthropological thought in such a far advanced country as England. This writer has to add that he has a great deal more to observe about the theories of Spengler as also about those of H. G. Wells to whom also as in the said paper a reference is made by the article, and that this writer does not, as explained in his said first paper subscribe to the theory supported by the said article that the key word to anthropology is diffusion. The article goes on to note that

the main thesis of Spengler is that history does not record continuous development but that in 6,000 years there have been 8 cultures . . . that each passes through a similar succession of morning, noon and night, that there is no absolute upward trend but only a rhythmical rise and fall that the mean level is a dead level.

But as shown by this writer in his last three chapters, the Iranian culture has been characterized by continuous development in prehistoric times and has had "an absolute upward trend", marking not a dead but a constantly rising level. He has also explained to a small extent and will hereafter explain at length the causes why after the Iranian culture came to its highest level and reached its zenith, it sank not wholly, but to some extent though in its essence it survives till today among the remnants of the descendants of the Iranians – the Parsis of India – mostly gathered in the City of Bombay, and among all the different civilized nations of the world in changed forms. Iranian culture has never had its night though it has had its dawn and noon and has leavened and is still leavening the civilization and culture of the whole civilized world.<sup>1</sup>

The tendency of civilized Christian nations in these times in Europe and America is to “find a religion which will satisfy both their conscience and their intelligence”, as profoundly observed by Dean Inge. The same tendency must and does appear among the educated classes of Parsis and Hindus in India. Dean Inge denounces as “absurdities of barbarians” such interpretations as that the text “Worship the Lord with clean lips” condemns the use of the tobacco; and he advocates the interpretation of the Gospel by the “testimony of the Holy Spirit within us”. But in the case of Avestic and Vedic texts, the primary meaning itself of the language used therein apart from its secondary or derivative meaning requires in the first instance to be prehistorically interpreted. It is impossible that “the conscience” and “the intelligence” of an educated Parsi or Hindu in these days could be satisfied in respect of the religion believed in by his forebears for thousands of generations if there be any thing in it ridiculous or absurd, anything which is inconsistent not only with the modern standards of right and wrong but also with the universal principles thereof. The anthropological interpretation of the sacred literature of the Parsis and the Hindus as illustrated by this chapter will remove from it the ridiculous elements which are only artificially and erroneously created and read into it by translators of the religious texts and will thereby make the study of the primitive religions of the East worthy of high reverence to the modern scientific educated mind whether of the East or the West.

As H. W. Household the learned author of “Hellas, the Fore runner” well remarks “history for all but the scholar is overloaded with facts that have little significance and for all purposes . . . are irrelevant”. They prevent the sight of the wood for the trees – the survey of the prospect and its interpretation as a whole. But as will appear herein anthropology as pre-history is not overloaded with facts. On the contrary, it has to proceed upon certain broad outstanding relevant anthropological facts relating to a particular primitive prehistorical period and reproduce the main outlines of its history therefrom.

The following observations on the prevailing interpretation of the Vedas and its method made by Mr. B. G. Tilak in “The Arctic Home in the Vedas” (1903) are very important:

(P. 5): – “The Vedas themselves which admittedly form the oldest records of the Aryan race, are as yet imperfectly understood. They had already grown unintelligible to a certain extent in the days of the Brahmanas several centuries before Christ and had it not been for the labors of Indian Etymologists and Grammarians they would have remained a sealed book upto the present time. The Western scholars have indeed developed to a certain extent these native methods of interpretation with the aid of facts brought to light by comparative psychology and mythology. But no etymological or psychological analysis can help us in thoroughly understanding a passage which contains ideas and sentiments foreign to us”.

The anthropological method tries to ascertain these “ideas and sentiments foreign to us”, that is, the environment in which the ancient texts were composed to enable us to understand them in their true language and spirit as far as possible. Mr. Tilak proceeds to remark that “some Vedic texts are yet unintelligible and therefore untranslatable” and that the only duty of the present scholars is to “reduce the untranslatable, portion to a narrower and narrower limit”. He cites Max Muller’s opinion that “a translation of the Rig. Veda is a task for the next century”. But the Pahlavi commentators of the Avesta who had apparently neither the learning nor the industry of the great Indian Etymologists and Grammarians spoken of by Mr. Tilak and wrote in times far more remote than the latter made a show of understanding and interpreting the Avesta. It is impossible that if the Vedas had become unintelligible to a certain extent even in the times of the Brahmanas and be still in places unintelligible to great scholars like Max Müller and Tilak, the Avestic texts should be intelligible in Pahlavi times without presenting any difficulty and in these times to scholars like Darmesteter, though their translations are admittedly marked by absurdities.

To get rid of absurdities, they resort to a fanciful and grotesque system of symbolism, resting upon no material foundations for the purpose of making passages, otherwise unintelligible, “yield a sense, intelligible”. The incongruities of their interpretations will be brought out herein. The conclusion arrived at by the Anthropological method of interpretation has been exceedingly well summarized by an ancient Greek author quoted by Kennedy in his “Hindu Mythology” as follows:

The first and most ancient of men neither constructed temples nor erected images as they were unacquainted with painting, carving and sculpture and even architecture as it might be easily proved. . . . the stars of heavens alone were considered and adored as gods.

But Kennedy is puzzled to find out “the cause which led men to adopt this form of idolatry” as he calls it, though it is impossible to designate as idols stars worshipped as such in their respective places in the heavens and not in images in clay or stone on the earth. But the Anthropological method of interpretation as applied in this writer’s three chapters clearly explains the causes of this form of worship which so much mystified the learned and gallant Col. Kennedy. Again Mr. B. G. Tilak says in his classical work “THE AECTIC HOME IN THE VEDAS” (p. 64):

The Rig-Veda or we might even say the whole Vedic literature is not arranged into different strata according to their chronological order. . . . The Rig-Veda is a book in which old things of different periods are so mixed up that we have to work long and patiently before we are able to separate and classify its contents in chronological order.

The same is true of Avestic literature and its contents. The different epochs in their chronological order have to be ascertained with great labour, care, and patience, Mr. Tilak goes on (p. 75) to remark that “the Fravashees corresponded with the Pitris in the Vedic literature”. But we have shown that such is not the fact.

To return to the subject matter of this chapter:

The following principal Avestic and Vedic conceptions are further subjected at length to the anthropological method of interpretation in the words of Mr. Tilak (applied to another Avestic subject) “to determine their true meaning and clear, the mist of misinterpretation that has followed round them”:

The Great Rivers-the Cow-the Milk-the Bull-the Gomez; the celestial heaven and hell, the Chinvad Bridge and the Dogs posted near it, the Haoma or Soma Juice – The Parsi and Brahmanical sacred girdle or thread – the Parsi sacred shirt.

The conception of the Great Rivers as sacred by both the Avesta and the Vedas was at first unknown to the Paleolithic Iranian mountaineer as there could be no great river visible to him and no river at or near or not far away from its source is such as to win the respect much less the reverence and awe of primitive man, however poetic.

It was the Milky Way that first gave primitive Iranian the idea of a great celestial stream or river and he and his descendants afterwards by way of analogy which was the first principle, of Iranian primitive logic transferred their reverence for the celestial river to every big terrestrial river that they came across whether in the valley of the Nile, the Indus, the Ganges, the Jumna, the Narbudda (Narmada), and the Krishna not at its source but at the places where it appeared in strength. The river Ardivisur Anahita of the Avestic Yesht could never have been conceived as a terrestrial river though Pahlavi and European scholars and naturally Parsi scholars following them have not, only thought otherwise, but have been ingenious enough to identify Ardivisur Anahita with the great terrestrial river, the Oxus. But the anthropological method of interpretation shows this interpretation to be utterly incorrect. The passage in the Avan Ardivisur Yesht describes Ahura Mazda himself, about the time when Zoroaster was about to be born, as offering a sacrifice to Ardivisur Anahita. It says

He the Maker, Ahura Mazda, he offered up the Haoma, the Myazda, the Bursam, the Holy words, saying vouchsafe me that boon O High, Mighty Undeified Goddess, that I may bring about the son of Paurushasp the holy Zarathushtra to think according to the law, to speak according to the law, to work according to the law.

It would be “nonsensical” in Darmesteter’s phrase and monstrous to explain this passage as referring to a terrestrial river like Oxus. It is inconceivable that the spiritual Iranian could for a moment believe that the Almighty

Creator would descend to the earth and worship the terrestrial river with which Ardivisur is identified by Avestic scholars, European and Parsi, though the Iranian had located and fixed immovably in the heavens the celestial dogs of the sun and his celestial cows, and had never believed that these celestial dogs and cows ever condescended to descend to (what was to him compared with the heavens) the contemptible earth. It has already been noted that nowhere do the Avestic texts refer to the Avestic spiritual beings except the fire and the Fravashees as ever descending to the earth but always allude to them as not being on the earth and as being in the skies. The previously quoted passage would convey a rational meaning and cease to be absurd only if Ardivisur Anahita be treated as it must be treated as a celestial river and the Milky Way could be the only celestial river meant. It is impossible that in the absence of association with a celestial river the Great Rivers on the earth should have been held in such deep reverence in ancient times as they are still held in India or as the river or the sea is held by the Parsi descendants of the ancient Iranians even now.

According to Mr. Tilak's memorable work "ORION", the Milky Way is in the later Hindu works actually called the "celestial river". He reproduces (at page 122) a description, to be found in the Mahimma Stotra, of the Ganges lying on the head of the celestial form of Shiva as the "stream of waters having the" beauty of its foamy appearance enhanced by a number of stars".

The Milky Way has, as already stated, been likened to different terrestrial objects at different stages of the evolution of the pre-Avestic ideas thereof, showing, as already stated, that the Avestic texts were composed, like the Vedic Texts, at different times by different Avestic bards, of whom each chose to take his own poetic view of every celestial object selected by him for a hymn of his own composition consistently with the prevailing ideas of his times. Even the Bible expresses reverence for the great river, the river Euphrates (17, 18) while "in the river Jordan all of the land of Judah and they of Jerusalem were baptized of him, John the Baptist, confessing their sins" (St. Mark I: 5). On a future occasion, it will be shown at length that the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins by a bath in the river Jordan has the same anthropological meaning as the bathing by Hindus till now in holy rivers like the Ganges, though the Iranians and their descendants have never believed in baptism by a bath or wash in a river which they have always believed is polluted by a bath or a wash. It will also be shown that the sacred character of the Jewish and Christian baptism is anthropologically derived from the same idea only and that the water which in primitive times would only be rainwater collected in a stream or a river bore the same terrestrial virtues as the celestial Gomez of the celestial bull or as the celestial water of the celestial river, namely, the Milky Way, bore.

The Avestic Gahs, Niyashes, and Yashts are all, it may be repeated, poetic hymns composed at different times by Avestic bards who necessarily in their primitive times applied terrestrial phraseology and imagery in describing

celestial objects. The Milky Way is in the previous passage in *Avan Yashta* treated as a female deity, because the two stars – the Canis Major and the Canis Minor – or other stars may have been imagined by the Avestic poet to be female appendages symbolical of the feminine sex. A later Avestic poem, namely, the *Ashishavang Yasht*, turned the same celestial object, the Milky Way, into another female deity, namely, *Ashishavang* whose feminine appendages are expressly referred to, but must be interpreted as consisting of only celestial objects, namely, stars. That these feminine celestial divinities were poetically imagined and described as representing celestial womanhood only in form and never in the human female sex or as connected with the human male sex is manifest from the fact that no marriage or husband or children of these two feminine divinities were ever dreamt of or referred to anywhere in the *Avesta*. And it is natural that *Ahura Mazda* should in pre-Zoroastrian times be imagined to have sacrificed to the celestial *Ardivisur Anahita* just about the time when *Zoroaster* was on the point of being born, the giving birth being an absolutely feminine function over which the female celestial deity would be naturally imagined to preside. And the celestial *Ardivisur Anahita* granted that boon in response to *Ahura Mazda*'s offering of libations, sacrifices and beseeching as observed by *Darmesteter* in a sarcastic tone. Of course the learned scholar would as a philologist read the description of the sacrifices and the prayer in a literal sense as if the Avestic bard who composed the *Yasht* was reporting in the *Yasht* what he or somebody else who was present at the very time when *Ahura Mazda* made his aforesaid supplications and had personally with his own ears heard those supplications. The clear prose paraphrase of the purely poetic flight of the imagination in the previous passage is that by looking not at the pre-birth period of *Zoroaster*'s life but at the period succeeding his birth and covering his actual life the Avestic poet found that *Zoroaster* had thought, spoken and acted according to the law of *Mazda*. The poet therefore asked himself the questions "How are these facts to be accounted for?" "How did *Zoroaster* come to think, speak and act according to the law of *Mazda*, as he had actually done during his life, unless something had supervened before his birth?" And in answer to the questions the poet's fancy felt that nothing short of *Mazda*'s prayers at the time of *Zoroaster*'s birth to the feminine celestial divinity could have attained the wonderful result.

But the real explanation of the supplication of *Ahura Mazda* to *Ardivisur Anahita* is furnished by the following passage in *Darmesteter*'s own translation of *Vendidad Fargard II. I-3*:

Unto Him, O *Zarathushtra*, I *Ahura Mazda* spoke, saying "Well, fair *Yima*, son of *Vivanghat*, be thou the preacher and the bearer of my law". And the fair *Yima*, O *Zarathushtra*, replied unto me saying, "I was not born, I was not taught to be the preacher and the bearer of thy law". As *Yima* disclaimed being "born as the preacher and the bearer of the law of *Ahura Mazda*", the Avestic bard who composed

the Avan Yasht created the poetic incident of Ahura Mazda supplicating Ardivisur Anahita before the birth of Zarathushtra so that he might be born the “preacher and the bearer of the law of Ahura Mazda” as he had proved himself by his life-long labors to be “the preacher and the bearer of the law”.

The second stage in the development of the Avestic poetic conception of the Milky Way was that it consisted of milk, and that therefore it must be the milk of the Sun’s cows which became in the Vedas the “cows of Indra”, as mentioned in the story about Sarama. The terrestrial cow came in course of time to be endowed by analogy with the sanctity of the sun’s celestial cows and in Vedic India with that of Indra’s celestial cows. And the celestial cows must have a celestial bull in a celestial sense so thought by analogy the pre-Avestic Iranian. According to the Vendidad Fargard XXI addressed to and invoking the celestial, not the terrestrial, bull, and also the rainwater as his Gomez along with the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, the celestial bull represents the clouds which pour down on the earth the rainwaters as his Gomez. As rain came from black clouds after thunder and as the terrestrial bull bellowed and threw up a cloud of dust on earth with its horns when aroused, the primitive Iranian found in the storm clouds the celestial bull for the sun’s celestial cows in the Milky Way. But the rains had to be accounted for and they became by analogy the celestial Gomez or the celestial urine of the celestial bull. It is to be noted that the bull is addressed in Vendidad Fargard XXI. I as follows:

Hail, holy bull, hail to thee! Beneficent bull, hail to thee who makest increase. Hail to thee who maketh growth.

(Darmesteter)

The celestial bull would make “growth” through the “rains” alone. Moreover, the terrestrial bull’s urine and the terrestrial cow’s urine and their excreta were in later times found by the Iranian to form manure for vegetation in order to “make growth”. That the primitive Iranian knew of the use of the dung of “flocks and herds” as useful for cultivation is manifest from Vendidad Fargard III., 6, where it is recorded that “the fifth place where the earth feels most happy is the place where flocks and herds yield most dung”. The terrestrial Gomez therefore must have come to be regarded out of its poetic relation to the celestial Gomez of the celestial bull as well as on account of its tried terrestrial value to the vegetation as “making increase”, that is, granting progeny to the Iranian and his herds and flocks and “making growth” or helping in growth of the human body and plants. It is given for the first time to the boy or the girl to be newly initiated into Zoroastrianism evidently to make increase and growth. As the celestial Gomez represented by the rainwaters is described in Vendidad Fargard XXI. 2 as come down on earth to “destroy sickness and death altogether”, so also the

earthly Gomez came to be believed in as having medicinal value as pointed out by the distinguished Iranian scholar, Shams-ul-ulma Dr. J. J. Mody, in his memorable work, "THE RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS AND CEREMONIES OF THE PARSIS" (1922).

This power of the celestial "Gomez" must have led to the idea of the terrestrial Gomez being equally effective for "destroying disease and death" and thus purifying the human body. The Avestic purification meant purification of the body, its "release" from and the driving away from it of the "drug" corresponding to the "germs of diseases" of the modern medical science and did not mean the purification of the soul for its final salvation which could only come from within-through "Ashoi" the highest mental purity and from good works inspired thereby and not from external or physical baptism whether of Gomez or water. The practical scientific Iranian cared as much for his worldly health and happiness as for his next world's bliss after death. On the subject of the identification of the celestial bull with the storm clouds and of the rains with his celestial urine Darmesteter has the following note:

The storm floods that cleanse the sky or the dark fiends in it were described in a class of myths as the urine of a gigantic animal in the heavens.

But as Vendidad Fargard XXI. 2 shows there are "no dark fiends in the sky" that are "cleansed" from or out of the sky by the storm floods, but it is "the invisible dark fiends", namely, "disease and death" that are destroyed by the "myriads of drops" that come down on earth from the clouds – an idea which modern medical science accepts. Darmesteter further observes, "As the floods from the bull above drive away the fiend from the god, so they do from man below". There is no room for this inference by such analogy, because Vendidad Fargard XXI. 2 distinctly declares that the rains when "they come down on the earth, destroy disease and death". Thus, even great scholars like Darmesteter owing to lack of anthropological knowledge allow themselves to follow simply their own literal translation without making any effort to grasp the spirit. Darmesteter further remarks that the stars "that have in them the seed of waters" which are invoked in Vendidad Fargard XXI. 13 to raise up and produce light for the world

have a reference to Tistrya the storm god that gives rain after it became a star. Tistrya was described in mythic tales sometimes as a boar with golden horns, sometimes as a horse with yellow ears, sometimes as a beautiful youth. He was compared to a shining star on account of the gleaming of lightning.

Darmesteter and all European scholars make the mistake which Mr. Tilak committed, namely, that they hold that heavenly bodies were at first revered



as terrestrial bodies but in later times came to be revered as celestial bodies. This view R.S shewn is quite wrong and causes gross misinterpretation of the Avesta and the Vedas. "The boar with golden horns" or "the horse with yellow ears" would be the original epithet for the celestial Tistrya itself as appearing to the primitive Iranian and not an imaginary, non-existent body, the identity of which needed to be hunted for first and then fixed. A terrestrial bull, being the counterpart of the celestial bull, the storm or the cloud, but with a sacredness far greater than the cow and with the title of a "Varasia" if of a spotless white colour and white hair all over the body and the tail is attached, it may be noted, to every Parsi fire temple even now and is regarded by the Parsis up to the present day with special sanctity. On its life, the religious validity of their most solemn religious ceremonies still depends. On its death, all such ceremonies come to a stand – still until a successor-in-office be found and installed in its, place, a task often of difficulty and trouble. The celestial bull and the Tistrya are thus not to be confounded with one another as they have been and are to be kept distinct.

The third stage in the development of the conception of the Milky Way was that it became the celestial river which divided the celestial heaven from the celestial hell when the fights with the hated Neanderthal man made the Iranian think of the place to which the enemy's soul should be consigned after his death and which of course could not be the same as that reserved for the adorable Iranian as he thought himself to be and his descendants have always so thought. But the following question arose to the primitive Iranian poet and philosopher: "If the celestial river, the Milky Way, was the boundary line between heaven and hell, how was the human soul bound for hell to cross it?"

The Iranian Paleolithic hunter who knew nothing of boats and crossing rivers in them pictured a crossing over the river which came to be designated in later times as the Chinvad Bridge, but which originally would be conceived as nothing but a piling of stones to cross a pool of water as is employed even in these days. The explanation in the Bundehish (XII-2) that the Chinvad Bridge extended from the height of Chikad-i-Daitak in the middle of the world to the summit of Arezur at the gate of the hell betrays the Semitic play of the imagination of the ignorant writer of the Pehalvi work who attributed first importance to the terrestrial world and could not imagine the accessibility of the celestial world except over the summit of the known highest terrestrial mountain, though the primitive Iranian believed every celestial being to be incapable of descending to the earth except the fire and the Fravashee, and attributed to his own soul after death the capacity of rising to the heaven. He never ascribed a human form to the soul; but the Pahlavi writer ignorant at the true celestial nature of the Chinvat Bridge misunderstand it to be a "terrestrial bridge" which therefore could be reached only by climbing the summit of the highest known mountain and thence reaching for the Chinvat Bridge. He had not the acumen to notice that the soul which made its way to the summit of the mountain apparently on mysterious and impossible feat

would still have to proceed further on its journey and traverse the intervening space between the Chinvad Bridge and the Mountain and that if it could do that without a bridge it could not want the mountain or the bridge at all. The soul as a celestial body could be imagined to be stopped at the celestial Chinvad Bridge but not if it were imagined to be climbing over the Aryan mountain as if it were an embodied terrestrial being, and then taking a leap to the Chinvad Bridge. However, the Greek myth about Charon pictures him as carrying the souls of the dead over the Stygean River in a boat which the ancient Aryan Greek who had emigrated from Iran had learnt to use before he settled in Greece. A similar idea is embodied in Rig-véda X-63-10 where “we are told” according to Mr. Tilak’s “The Orion” (p. 110) that the land of the blessed is to be reached by “the celestial ship with a good rudder” showing that the Vedic Aryan had on his way to India learnt the use of the ship. To the ship throughout the Avesta, there is no allusion showing that during the times of its composition the Avestic Iranians were still living on the mountains. But the Milky Way is further identified by the Avestic allusion to the two dogs near the Chinvad Bridge and by the reference in the Rigveda to the two dogs of Yama. The Avestic and the Vedic Dogs are as Mr. Tilak points out both four-eyed though they differ in colour and the Greeks have placed the two dog-stars Canis Major and Canis Minor near the constellation of Argos (Ship). Thus, it becomes certain that the Avestic and Vedic and Greek dogs are the two stars aforementioned and not terrestrial dogs; and they point to the Milky Way as the celestial river or waters to be crossed by the human soul, there being no other celestial objects which could be likened to a celestial river or to celestial waters.

The fourth stage in the growth of the Avestic poetic conception of the Milky Way was that when the primitive Iranian discovered the use of the Haoma Juice and found it invigorating and exhilarating, it occurred to him again by analogy that it was a celestial drink superior to milk fit for the sun as his Supreme Deity then. He therefore imagined the Milky Way to be filled with the White Haoma juice instead of with milk. It is well worthy of note that the substitute for Haoma as observed till now by the Parsis has been a bowl or wine glass of milk and another of wine; both milk and wine having the attributes of the original terrestrial white Haoma being invigorating and exhilarating.

At the fifth stage in the Avestic development, of the poetic idea of the Milky Way, its contents were converted from the celestial white Haoma Juice into Celestial waters. But at the very initial stage it had appeared to the Paleolithic Iranian as a girdle around the waist of the sun who was imagined by him after he learnt to clothe himself in the white sheep skin to have a robe of sunlight hanging down from his neck. These two conceptions gave the Iranian the ideas of the Kusti the sacred girdle still worn by the Parsis and Sudreh the sacred shirt, also still necessarily worn by them – the Parsi dead body being covered with both the Sudreh and the Kusti in the right style before and at the time of disposal.

Mr. Tilak deserves the great credit of being the first scholar to point out that the star-bespangled girdle or belt referred to in the 25th verse of the Haoma Yasht mentions the word Aivyaonghan which is a Zend word for the Kusti or the sacred thread of the Parsis but is translated in the Sacred Books of the East series Zend Avesta Part III p. 238 as a girdle or a belt and that the girdle or the belt refers to the belt of the ORION.

With Mr. Tilak's interpretation of the aforementioned expression as "Kusti", the translation of the said Avestic verse 26 would run as follows:

Forth has Mazda borne to thee (Haoma) the star-bespangled Kusti, the spirit-made, the ancient one (of) the Mazda Yasnian faith?

By this interpretation, Mr. Tilak apparently meant to suggest that the institution of the "Kusti" came into existence before the formation of the idea of the ORION having a belt or Kusti star-studded and that the idea of the celestial Kusti came into existence after that of the terrestrial Kusti. But the terrestrial Kusti being an artificial product, sacred and having a religious significance being "spirit-made" and "of the Mazda Yasnian Faith" it could have acquired its sanctity by analogy only to its being a copy of a celestial object. And but for its sanctity thus derived from its celestial counterpart, the terrestrial Kusti would not be still at this date treated as essentially required to be on the person of the orthodox Parsi day and night except during the bath time and even when his dead body lies in state and is deposited in its last resting place in the Tower of Silence.

As to the Upanayana ceremony Mr. Tilak says in the ORION (p. 146):

It appears that a cloth worn round the waist was the primitive form of Yajnopavita and that the idea of sacredness was introduced by the theory that it was to be a symbolic representation of Parajpati waist-cloth or belt. . . . It appears that in the oldest times the Brahmanas wore a piece of cloth or deer-skin and not a thread.

As Mr. Tilak suggests not the "Brahmanas" but the ancient Paleolithic Iranians who were the ancestors of the Brahmanas must have worn a piece of sheepskin and afterwards cloth at first instead of the thread used afterwards by the Iranians and the Brahmanas alike. The thread must have been introduced on the invention of the arts of spinning and weaving before the migration from Iran to India of the ancestors of the Brahmanas; and the deerskin must have been used as a reproduction of the old-time customs preserved by tradition in the memory of the Iranian ancestors of the Brahmanas before their settlement in India. This suggests the origin of the "*dhotur*" the loin-cloth so peculiar to India. Just as the Avestic Iranian prided himself on the wearing of the *sudreh*, his separated cousin in India prided himself on wearing the loin-cloth in imitation of the piece of sheepskin or the deerskin worn in pre-Indian times along with the sacred thread at a time when the true

origin of both must have been forgotten. In tropical India, the sacred shirt would be a nuisance especially during indoor life. The loincloth enlarged into a *dhotur* to suit the demands of social decency, and the thread would therefore remain on the pious Hindu's body when inside his house, symbolical of the remotest religious traditions of the times of his Iranian ancestors and mark him out from the followers of all other religions. Mr. Tilak has so ably shown in his valuable work on "The Arctic Home in the Vedas" that the Vedic sages reproduced in the Vedas the traditions treasured by them of the pre-Indian life of their ancestors in their Iranian fatherland.

Another great Oriental scholar Rao Bahadur Joshi states that in ancient times both boys and girls of the twice-born castes in India were invested with the sacred thread. To the Parsi mind, the investiture with *Kusti* and *Sudreh* is essential for initiating not only boys but also girls into Zoroastrianism and no valid Zoroastrian marriage rite can be celebrated between a Zoroastrian male and a non-Zoroastrian female unless the latter is also invested with the Parsi sacred thread and shirt. It would be exceedingly interesting to know when and why the practice of investing Hindu girls with the sacred thread fell into disuse. We know that the Semitic practice of circumcision was at first applied to both boys and girls and is even now so applied in certain Mahommedan countries.

## Note

1 Reprinted from *JASB*. November 1927, XIV (1), 06–22.

## 5 Deification of light among ancient nations, Eastern and Western

*S.S. Mehta*

The idea that light is deified by many nations struck me so vividly once long ago when I saw a Parsi lady reciting some holy words of prayer after lighting the lamp of her room that I could not help comparing it with the usual custom of Hindu ladies to render similar devotion to the same phenomenon in the evening. It is, again, not the evening time alone, but morning as well that is dedicated to the worship of light.<sup>1</sup>

(Apart from the figures of speech that are used to bring out expressions like “light is life” and so on, the phenomena of light and darkness must have been coeval with animal life; and human knowledge is closely connected with the light of nature. For a very long time, human beings in different places regarded light as a substance. The Australian myth, to begin with the remotest place of the West, in which direction the Solar disc droops down every evening to be ultimately drowned into the bowels of the Earth through oceanic waters, takes the Sun as the cause of light; but it is thought of as a fire or fiery substance. The belief of the Australian myth in sleep and idleness to be darkness and activity – knowledge to be light, has its self – evident reason. Many Australian tribes believe that long ago, darkness prevailed all over the world, until the sun was created – or rather, until the sun was released. It was an emu’s egg that was thrown up to the sky, which gave a great light. Some of these tribes hold that until the magpie props up the sky and sets free the sun, there is the reign of darkness. Again, in Oceania, it is maintained that heaven and earth are close together, and until they are separated, their offspring are in perpetual and universal night. Life and Light are represented by Tama Mirte-ra – the great son of day. A creation epic of these tribes gives a sort of description in the following words:

The word became fruitful,  
“It dwelt with the feeble glimmering,  
It brought forth night,  
The great night, the long night,  
The night to be touched, the night unseen,  
The night ending in death”.

Moreover, among the Eskimos, it is believed that men came out of the Earth lived in perpetual darkness and knew no death. Then, there came a flood which destroyed all but two old women, one of whom desired both light and death. Death came and with it, sun, moon, and stars. Many a myth can be discovered in some of the Miltonic poetry to show that as long as there was no motion, there was darkness, and also no creation or existence of life. A certain Eastern legend may be said to have held that darkness died and light was born – and with it all life. So, death came with light.)

Another widespread myth among the Eskimos is that of the brother, who, in the time when darkness covered the earth, ravished his sister. The sister, in her anger of the brutal conduct, pursued him to the sky with a brand. He became the moon, and she the sun, ever pursuing the moon except in winter, when she remains in her house and there is darkness. The stars are in this case, sparks from the brand. So much for the Eskimo.

(Now, let us turn to the Chinese Myth; it states: in the beginning, all was darkness. From a great mundane egg which divided into two, came Poon-koo-wong, who made the Sky out of the upper and the earth out of the lower half. He also made the sun and the moon. Chinese philosophy is known to be speaking about *T'aikih*, *the must ultimate*, which produced the cosmic souls Yang and Yin, male and female – warmth and cold or light and darkness. In Japan, an old myth in the Kojiki as I find in an authoritative book of reference, speaks of a time when heaven and earth were not separated and the In and Yo (Yin and Yang) not yet divided. All was chaos and in fact darkness.)

Next, in American Indian Myth, for example, among the Arunta, the sun is female, and the moon is male. In a similar way among the Andaman Islanders, the sun is called the wife of the moon. Again, in the Norse mythology, night and day are mother and son (i.e. the moon is the mother and the sun is the son) set in the sky by All Father, who gives each a horse and a chariot to drive around the earth. The sun, in fact, has a chariot. (Hindus have one of their legends to relate that the sun has a chariot equipped with but one wheel, and over his endless path of journey, his lame charioteer drives his seven horses yoked to the chariot. The sun is regarded as male and the moon too is described in the masculine gender, as a rule having no exception – Ushas – the dawn – the rosy coloured morn of the well-known English poet – is regarded as female, by Vedic seers; but with this part of the subject, I may deal in the sequel.)

As it presumably appears from the earlier, darkness in many places and among many nations was looked upon as intimately connected with death and evil powers. Light and life are allied to each other. Even lightning is worshipped in some quarters. It is well known that the goddess of lightning was adored by Buddhists; and she was appointed to accompany the God of thunder on his expeditions to prevent his making a mistake. Lastly, the God of fire is another of the gods connected with light. It may be noted, moreover, in passing that the Buddhists deify light in the Bodhi-Sattva as

Marichi-deva; and the Chinese represent her with eight arms – in two of her hands she holds up emblems of the sun and the moon. But in connection with this, it can be observed that fire – the God of fire – is described in the Vedas to have seven tongues – which came in later ages to be worshipped as goddesses – Kâli, Karâli, Vijayâ, Jayâ, Nava; Sulohini Chaiva Sudhûmra-varṇa Sphullîngini Vishvaruchirhi *devi*, lelahyamanaitisaptajivhâ.

कालीकरालीविजयाजयानवा, सुलोहिनी चैवसुधूम्रवर्णा।  
स्फुल्लिङ्गिनी विश्वरुचिर्ही देवीलेलाह्यामाना इतिसप्तजिव्हा ॥

During the Vedic period, only two goddesses have a marked individuality – Ushas the dawn and Sarasvati, the river goddess and latterly, the goddess of speech – Speech is always regarded as internal light flashing out.

The 11th verse of I, 123-states:

Radiant as a bride decorated by her mother, thou displays thy person to the View. Auspicious Ushas! Remove the investing darkness; no other dawns, but; thee will disperse it.

This Ushas is considered to be the Eos of the Greeks and the Aurora of Latins. Philologists hold that Arjuni is the Greek Argynoris, Brisaya is Briseis, and Dahanâ is Daphne. Saramâ is phonetically equivalent to the Greek Helena. Saranyu, the mother of Yama and of the Aśvins, is the Greek Erinys and Ahanâ is the renowned goddess Athena.

At this stage, it will not be amiss to cite the truth without citing these words:

It is related in a legend of the Rig Veda that Saranyu ran away from her husband, Vivasvat, and then gave birth to the twin gods, Asvins. A similar – or rather the same – legend is to be found among the Greeks who believed that Erinya Demeter ran away from her husband much in the same manner and gave birth to Areion and Despoina. The idea is common to both the legends; for, the dawn disappears – Ushas – as the day and night advance. The worship of Light and the form of light is pictured in a figurative manner but the whole sketch cannot be presented here. Suffice it to state here that as in this legend, in another place also in the Rig Veda, many allusions to the sun pursuing the dawn as a man pursues a woman are found and similarly, the Greek Apollo pursues the Greek Daphne, “until she is metamorphosed” – *i.e.*, the dawn disappears. Some verses quoted at this stage will not be deemed out of place: – “Far extending, many tinted, brilliant Ushas! We know not thy abode, whether it be nigh or remote – Daughter of the Sky! Accept these offerings, and perpetuate our welfare. She, the young, the white-robed daughter of the sky, the mistress of all earthly treasure, dawns upon us, dissipating darkness! Auspicious Ushas! Shine upon us to-day on this

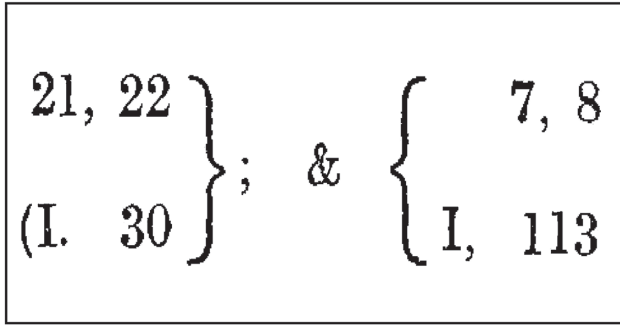


Figure 5.1 Verses from the Rigveda

spot. Following the path of mornings that have passed, to be followed by endless mornings to come, bright Ushas dispels darkness and awakens to life all beings unconscious like the dead in sleep”.

As Mr. M. Barth remarks, the Vedic gods are masters close at hand and require a due performance of duty by man. He must be sincere towards them for they cannot be deceived. There are no indications in the Rig Veda of any temples created by mortal hands and consecrated as places of worship. On the other hand, every householder, every patriarch of his family lighted the sacrificial fire in his own home, and poured libations of the soma juice, and prayed to the gods for happiness to the family.

Now, Uranus is Varuna or the sky and Prometheus is the Vedic Pramantha, the fire which is produced by friction. Fire is light transferred from the Sky to the Earth. Fire was considered an object of worship among all ancient nations, and in India, Persia, and some other places, fire was held in great and profound veneration. Among the Hindus sacrificial fire received the highest regard. In fact, no sacrifice could be performed without fire; and it was the god Agni that was known as the invoker of other gods. Muir in his Sanskrit Texts says, Agni is the god of fire, the Ignis of the Latins; and the Ogni of the Sclavanians. Cox in his Mythology of Aryan Nations remarks: “We have Promethens answering to Pramantha, Phoronus to Bharanya and the Latin Vulcanus to the Sanskrit Ulka. Thus, with the exception of Agni, all the names of the Fire and the Fire-gods were carried away by the Western Aryans”.

Agni or fire god is the form of light on the Earth and as such he was worshipped by all the Aryans. Yâska, the author of Nirukta, classifies all Vedic gods thus: “Agni, or fire as the God of the Earth; Indra, the God of the firmament; and the Sun the God of the Sky”. In the Reg Veda, Agni is worshipped not only as the terrestrial fire but also as the fire of the lightning and the sun, and his abode is the invisible heaven. I shall rest content with quoting



the following words: “The Bhrigus discovered-Agni in Heaven, Matariśvan brought him down and Atharvângiras, the first sacrificers, first installed him in this world as the protector of men”. In the Satapatha Brahmana, it is said: “Mâdhava the Videha carried Agni Vaiśvânara in his mouth. The sage Gotama Râhûgana was his family priest. When addressed by the latter he made no answer, fearing lest Agni might fall from his mouth”. Thus, it will be easy to see that light in some form or other was an object of worship among the ancient races in both the East and the West. Mitra and Varuna, the two gods almost inseparably associated by the Vedic Aryans at the time of prayer, are held to be representing the day and the night. Taittiriya Brahmana 1, 7, 10, 1 states: the day is Mitra’s and the night is Varuna’s. These two are invoked along with Agni: “I invoke first Agni for our welfare; I invoke also Mitra and Varuna for help; I invoke Night who gives rest to the world; I invoke the divine Savitri – the Sun to our assistance”. In the Rig Veda X, 123, 6, the sun is called the golden-winged messenger of Varuna; and just as the same luminary is said by Hesiod to be the eye of Jupiter, he is in the Rig Veda called the eye of Mitra and Varuna. In Rig Veda X, 11, 1 Agni is compared to Varuna in omniscience – which attribute Varuna possessed pre-eminently; and it will not be strange if the same idea finds a parallel in Psalm CXXXIX, 1–4; and also St. Matthew XVIII, 20. Now, at this stage, it is necessary to note that Mitra corresponds to the Mithra of the Zend Avesta. In fact, this god – day – was known to the Aryan race before the Iranian branch separated from the Indian Mithra was worshipped in Persia prior to the age of Herodotus, as noticed by Win-Discman, basing his argument on the common use of names like Mitradataes and Mitrobates. Herodotus, moreover, talks of Mitra as a goddess; and Plutarch and Xenophon describe the Persians as swearing by the god Mithra. Plutarch goes a step further and observes that Zoroaster conceived of Mithra as standing intermediate between the deities Oromazes – the representative of light – and Areimanivs – the representative of darkness and ignorance. The following is quoted from Max Müller’s Oxford Essays p. 41 as relating to Varuna who corresponds in name of Ouranos of the Greeks:

Uranos in the language of Hesiod is used as a name for the Sky; he is made or born that he should be a firm place for the blessed gods. It is said that Uranos covers everything and that when he brings the night, he is stretched out everywhere embracing the Earth. This sounds almost as if the Greek myth had still preserved a recollection of the etymological power of Uranos. For Uranos is the Sanskrit Varuna, and is derived from a root *varvri* to cover.

Varuna and Prithvi are as husband and wife; and so are Uranos and Gaia, in the theology of the Hesiod; and Varuna is the progenitor of Dyaus as Uranos is of Zeus. Thus, it will be clear to perceive that the Sky and the Earth or the Heaven and the Earth, Light and Darkness, are phenomena that are

the objects of apotheosis among the civilized ancient nations, who represent these phenomena in figurative language in a very admirable manner.

We next advert to certain festivals performed in worshipping fire, in both the East and the West. There is a practice which can be well designated as a reminiscence of ancient times, prevailing in Southern India, and it has its parallel in the fire customs of European countries. Pongol is a feast of people gathering when the sun enters the Tropic of Capricorn, and when every street, nay, every lane has a bonfire, which is an offering to the sun god through fire – his terrestrial representation. In the first place, this corresponds to the Holi festival of Northern and Western India in the early part of spring, as already pointed out in one of my previous chapters. The village priest is expected to pass through it, and the people generally leap over the ashes to avoid the trouble of disease and prevent it as well. This sort of vernal festival of fire is celebrated in China too, in the province of Fo-kien, particularly. The *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Liii Part I at page 60 and Mr. W. Crooke in his *Popular Religion and Folklore* state that this worship of fire is derived from an ancient custom and it is celebrated with a feast in honour of the sun who renews vegetation in the month of April. It is very interesting to read the details as described in certain places, but root-base in all of them is no other than a devoted worship of light, celestial or terrestrial, or both. The ceremony of passing the image of the deity across the fire is another essential feature that appears in many parts of India and has a parallel in the straw effigy of Kupalo across the midsummer bonfire of Russia. Inspired devotees pass through the fire both in India and Europe and China and Japan in Asia. In 1854, the Madras Government instituted an enquiry into this custom, but their finding ultimately was that it was not attended by danger. The fire walk is performed in Japan as a religious rite twice a year. As witnessed and described by the wife of an American Naval Officer in 1903, it is really very interesting and even inspiring; but the conclusion drawn goes to show that fire is regarded as the spirit of evil and so the Shintoists go through this fire walking as a kind of outward and visible sign of inward spiritual grace. The fire walk prevails in Fiji, Tahiti, Trinidad, and many places of America. The Hottentots have this custom prevalent among them, but it is accompanied by more elaborate rites. The Nandi and Zulus of British East Africa attach great importance to fire worship in this form by applying fire to sick cattle to get rid of their disease. Indians of Yucatan, like many other races, walk over hot embers to avert calamities.

Mr. Frazer, in his *Balder the Beautiful*, informs us that similar rites were performed in more places than one in classical antiquity. He says: "At Castabala, in Cappadocia, the priestesses of an Asian goddess, whom the Greeks called Artemis Perasia used to walk barefoot through a furnace of hot charcoal and take no harm". Again, in Italy there was a sanctuary of a goddess Feronia where the same rite was performed; and it was held in high reverence by Latins and Sabines; but according to Virgil and Pliny, the rite was performed in honour of Apollo. Even the lady of a pious household prays to

God through the medium of the lamp she herself lights. The man prays to God through the declining sun; and the woman does so in her vernacular:

દીવાદીવાદીપ્તકિર      Divâdivâdîptikâr  
કનેકુંડળમોતીહાર      Kânekundalamotihâra  
દીવાદેખીનમસ્કાર      Divâdekhinamaskâra

O lamplight, full of resplendence, with your ear adorned with a ringlet and a pearl decoration, may I bow to you at your sight?

The Parsi lady, however, prays in the following terms, which, seem to have phonetic similarity and probably similarity of sense also with the corresponding Sanskrit prayer:

અજહમાગુનાહપતેતપશોમાનુમ  
અજહરવસતીનદુશમતદુજુખતદુજવરશત  
મેમપગેતીમનીદઆએમઆએમજસત  
આએમકરદઆએમજસત  
આએમબુનબુદએસતેદ.

### Note

1 Reprinted from *JASB* XI (5), 1918: 413–422.

## 6 The migration of a form of Iranian religious ideas to ancient Rome and other countries of Europe, and the narrow escape of early Christianity in its conflict with them for the dominion of the world

*R.K. Dadachanji*

In one of his recent learned and interesting papers, titled “The Kashas of the Iranian Barashnum and the Boundary Lines of the Roman Lustrum” read by our indefatigable Honorary Secretary, Shams-ul-Ulma J. J. Mody, he called attention to a marked similarity observed by him between certain ancient Roman and Zoroastrian religious ceremonies. The criticism that such a comparison is likely to provoke at first sight is that the ancient Romans could never have borrowed any of their religious ideas from the ancient Persians; that the civilization and the religions of the West were and are independent of the civilization and the religions of the East; that therefore, if any resemblance were discerned between any ancient Roman and Iranian religious practices, it must be ascribed either to accident or to imagination.<sup>1</sup> But the author of this chapter has ventured to start the following theory and to adduce from time to time what he regards as reasonably sufficient proofs in its support:

- 1 All human civilization and progress of the Occident and the Orient combined have had a common origin and are the results of the evolution of thought from its simplest to the most complex forms step by step throughout all ages and among all the races of mankind, Aryan and non-Aryan. This single stream of human civilization and progress had originally two fountainheads, one in the north of Asia, the home of the Aryans, and the other in the south of Asia, the home of the non-Aryans. From both these heads, there issued the original currents of human civilization. These mingled their waters together and formed the later single stream of human civilization and progress, when the two great races – the Aryans and the non-Aryans – migrated from their respective homes and came into contact with each other. Since this union of waters, the river of civilization and progress has flowed and will flow on, though it has changed and will in future change its bed from time to time. This chapter aims at throwing further historical light on this theory.

- 2 It is also generally supposed that every new religion absolutely breaks up with the old order of ideas which it aims at supplanting. But as was shown in the authors' paper on the Fravashees, and as will also be shown to some extent in this chapter, a new religion has, necessarily, on the previous evolution theory, to absorb and adopt old religious ideas, and to adapt and improve upon them, so as to make them fit in with its main new conceptions.
- 3 As already stated, from a superficial point of view, it seems to be impossible that the ancient proud Romans could ever have subjected themselves to the sway of any Iranian religious ideas. But we know that the culture and literature of ancient Greece had made a conquest of its Roman conquerors; and that the Romans had no indigenous culture and literature of their own to start with; that in fact, they were not gifted with any genius for literature and arts, as the ancient Greeks were. And as we shall see, when ancient Rome was probably under the stress of changed political conditions moved by the spirit of religious reform, which breaks out from time to time as pointed out in the author's last paper but one, it did not scruple to borrow the main new conceptions of its proposed new religion from ancient Iranianism.
- 4 It seems that for 10 years M. Franz Cumont made a deep study of all the extant literature, texts, inscriptions, and monuments bearing upon Mithraism and published the results of his labours in a large work, which is described as a "monument of scholarship and industry". As an epitome of his larger work, M. Cumont has published a smaller work titled "Mysteries of Mithra" from which alone this chapter will hereafter make quotations.
- 5 On the power and influence which Mithraism attained to in Europe and the narrow escape which early Christianity had in its conflict with Mithraism, M. Cumont delivers himself as follows:

Never perhaps, not even in the epoch of the Mussalman invasion was Europe in the greater danger of being Asiatized than in the third century of our era. – Mithraism reached the apogee of its power towards the middle of the third century, and it appeared as if the world was about to become Mithraic. . . . The important thing to understand is how Mithraism lived and grew great and why it failed to win the empire of the world.

And in reviewing the aforementioned smaller work of M. Cumont, *the Mind* (new series for April 1904, p. 287) observes:

M. Renan declared that Mithraism but for Christianity would have been, the religion of the West. At the beginning of the Christian era Mithraism suddenly appeared in the valleys of the Danube and the Rhine and even in Italy; and while it is true, that it disappeared before Christianity, it is also correct to state, that it was succeeded by Manichæism. For a time, however, it seemed, as if Mithra would conquer.

And M. Cumont has annexed to his smaller work a valuable and instructive map, showing that Mithraism had spread over almost the whole of ancient Europe, and that Mithræums and monuments of undoubted Mithraic origin are still to be found in England, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and other countries of Europe.

- 6 The supplemental volumes of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* contain the following Dote on Mithraism:

The cult of Mithras is one of the most important cults which were introduced at Rome. From Iran his worship spread to Babylon and from there Mithras travelled to Pontus and Cappadocia and while little known to the Greeks was brought to Rome by soldiers and slaves. . . . First favoured by the lower class, the cult spread upwards. . . . The Christians regarded Mithraism as a dangerous rival of Christianity.

And M. Cumont thus describes the decline and fall of Mithraism at Rome:

The first invasions of the Barbarians and especially the definitive loss of Dacia (A.D. 275) soon followed by that of the Agri Decimates administered a terrible blow to the Masdeian seat. The conversion of Constantine shattered the hopes which the policy of his predecessors had held out to the worshippers of the sun. . . . His successors were outspokenly hostile. To latent defiance succeeded open persecution. . . . The proclamation of Julian Apostate (A.D. 331–363) suddenly inaugurated an unexpected turn in the affairs. Scarcely had he ascended the throne than he made haste to introduce the cult at Constantinople. But the Apostate met his death in the historic expedition against the Persians. Thus perished this spasmodic attempt at re-action and Christianity now definitively victor addressed itself to the task of extirpating the erroneous belief that had caused it so much anxiety.

- 7 Having satisfied ourselves that Mithraism had planted itself in ancient Rome and was on the point of ejecting Christianity from the West, we are naturally pressed by the following questions which suggest themselves to us:

- I What are the true conceptions of Mithra according to the Avesta?
- II What were the conceptions of according to Mithraism?
- III What were the doctrines and ceremonies inculcated by Mithraism?
- IV How did the Iranian religious ideas relating to Mithra happen to migrate to Rome and other countries of Europe?
- V What influence, if any, did Mithraism exercise on Christianity?

The object of this chapter is to consider and discuss as briefly as possible all these questions except the last which may be reserved for a later chapter.

- 8 We must first examine and correct some curious blunders which European writers beginning with Herodotus, and not excluding Cumont himself, have committed regarding the identity of the Avestan Mithra. Herodotus (I-131) says, "At a later period the Persians began the worship of Urania which they borrowed from the Arabians and Assyrians. Mylitta is the name by which the Assyrians knew this Goddess, whom the Arabians call the Alitta, and the Persians Mitra". As we shall see the Avestic Mithra is a male Yazata, and warrior, the patron of warriors and armies; and could not be compared to a goddess at all. In fact, the Avesta recognizes only two principal female Yazatas, Aredwisoor and Arshashang. They are described and addressed and referred to in the Yasbatus dedicated to them as females, while, on the other hand, Mithra is described and addressed in the Yasbatus sacred to him as a male Yazata.
- 9 Dr. Rawlinson, the learned translator and commentator of Herodotus, makes the following observations in a footnote to the previous passage:

The mistake of Herodotus does not appear to have been discovered by the Greeks before the time of Alexander. Xenophon mentions Mithras and also the Persian Sun-worship but does not in any way connect the two. Strabo is the first classical writer who distinctly lays it down, that the Persian Mithras is the sun god. After him Plutarch shows acquaintance with the fact which thence forth becomes generally recognized.

In the passage cited in para. 6 earlier, M. Cumont also designates the Mithraists as "worshippers of the sun". But we shall point out, and prove, that this opinion of the Avestan Mithra being the sun god, or sun Yazata is erroneous; that even the Mithraists' Mithra was not the sun; and that Mithra of both the Avests, and Mithraism is distinct from the sun. We shall also explain how and why Mithra comes to be confounded with the sun.

- 10 In the Khorshed Nyayesh and Yashta, the sun Hware is addressed as Yazata in his own name. The Khorshed Nyayesh gives pictures of the beneficent effects of the sun shining, and the evil consequences of the sun not shining. It says,

when the sun rises, purity is imparted to the earth, to the water in the running streams, to the ocean, to standing waters, and to all the pious creations . . . If the sun did not rise, all (the world) would be destroyed by the devas.

On the other hand, the Meher Yashta, sacred to Mithra, records a detailed description of his place of abode, his arms and weapons, his chariot and horses, his attributes, and powers, which all distinguish him indubitably from the sun Yazata. It proclaims

Ahuramazda (god) constructed a mansion for Mithra on the shining Alburz (mountain) round which numerous stars revolve, where there is neither night nor darkness nor bleak wind nor hot wind nor filth produced by the devas . . . This mansion was constructed by the sun Yazata and his companion Yazatas.

This passage proves that Mithra was distinct from the sun, Hvare; but the following passage places the distinction beyond all doubt: "Just as the moon shines, so does Mithra cause his body to shine". Again if Mitra were identical with the sun Hvare a special and separate Nyayesh, as well as Yashta would not have been assigned by the Avesta to Mithra alone as there are a Nyayesh and a Yashta assigned to Hvare, the sun alone.

- 11 Before proceeding further in the inquiry, we must note certain explanations in order to do justice to the pure doctrines of the Avesta and prevent their being confounded with the Mithraic doctrines. The teachings of Mithraism about Mithra, as a god, and his worship in the form of an idol and in temples and before altars are absolutely repugnant to the spirit and ordinances of Zoroastrianism. The sum and substance of Zoroastrian doctrines have been crystallized by Herodotus for all times in the following passage: "The Persians have no gods, no temples, nor altars and consider the use of them a sign of folly. This comes I think from their not believing the gods to have the nature of man". This formula of Herodotus strikes the keynote to the true interpretation of the Avestic texts. In order to reach the popular intelligence of those times, the Avesta had to describe all the Yazatas except Ahuramazda in terms of descriptions of human beings. But those descriptions are to be understood in the light of the previous formula of Herodotus and are to be taken only in their metaphorical sense. And the Vendidad and the rest of the Avesta and Zoroastrian usages and practices have been vehemently opposed to the worship of idols and devas.
- 12 As already stated, the Meher Yashta gives the fullest description of the Avestic Mithra. Most of the Yazatas have ascribed to each of them a Yashta. But the longest of all the Yashtas is the Meher Yashta consisting of 33 sections. The Yashtas next in point of length are the Frawardeen Yashta with 31, and the Aredwisoor Yashta with 30 sections. The rest of the Yashtas are comparatively much shorter. This fact proves that Mithra held the place of the most favoured Yashtas; and that the Frawashees and Aredwisoor occupied the next but still most highly favoured places in the estimation of the ancient Iranians. This demonstrates the author's theory that no new religion can wholly break up the religious ideas existing prior to its establishment. We have shown elsewhere that the Frawashees, as representing the primitive universal ghost worship, had a hold upon the Iranians, which Zoroastrianism could not



dissolve. And Aredwisoor personifying probably the river Oxus was also a favourite object of worship to the Iranian Zoroastrians, as it is still to their descendants, just as their brethren the Hindoos worshipped and still worship the great rivers in India. And Zoroastrianism adopted these and other pre-Zoroastrian divinities, and, as it were, spiritualized them. But Mithra must have held the premier place in pre-Zoroastrian worship, as the god of war, appealing most to a warlike people like the ancient Persians. And it is this popularity of Mithra that, as we shall see, brought about his migration to ancient Rome and other countries of Europe.

- 13 The Meher Yashta contains the following description of Mithra: He is Mathra-bodied, a strong-armed, puissant warrior, a valorous ruler. He is 10,000 times watchful, valorous, all-knowing, undeceivable. He has a chariot drawn by four horses of a spotless white colour, eating spiritual food and having the hooves of their fore-legs shod with gold shoes, and those of the hind legs with silver shoes. They are all tied to one pole. On the outside of his chariot Mithra carries 1,000 bows, 1,000 spears, 1,000 double-edged discs, 1,000 double-edged swords, 1,000 iron rods, and 1,000 maces – all as powerful and deadly as could be. But Mithra’s mace is particularly terrible. It has 100 knobs, and 100 edges, and is made of brass and is gilded with gold. His attributes are as follows: (1) he grants victory to whichever of two contending hosts first worship him; (2) he grants to those warriors who worship him and invoke his aid strength and health for their bodies, strength to smite their enemies, and strength for their chargers; (3) he who is protected by Mithra is proof against the well-pointed lance, and the swift-flying shaft; (4) he is stern, as well as most beneficent for countries, as well as men; (5) he grants to those who worship him among other things valour and strength to smite enemies; and (6) he is the bitterest and deadliest enemy and punisher of those who violate their promises. He is a terror to and a deadly enemy of devas. His function is to keep a watch on the world with his eight companions in his mansion on the Alburz mountain, and from there he constantly descends swiftly to the earth in his chariot to succour and protect those who deserve his aid and protection and to overwhelm those who offend him. The ceremonies for worshipping Mithra and winning his favour are as follows: (1) offering sacrifices of beasts, cattle, winged, and flying birds; (2) undergoing ablutions for 3 or 2 days and nights accompanied with 30 or 20 penances of the “upajans”.
- 14 But as bearing testimony to the true spirit of Zoroastrianism underlying all this anthropomorphic description of Mithra, and also as showing the wonderful contempt of the spirit of that religion for the mere forms and ritual of worship, as distinguished from rectitude of conduct and piety, we may reproduce the following most striking passage in the Meher Yashta:

It is not sufficient to perform religious ceremonies and spread out barcem and recite long Yejeshnes. If he who performs them be without piety, be immoral, do not control himself according to the commandments, he does not please Ahuramazda, nor the other Ameshaspandas nor Mithra.

- 15 As already shown, the worship of Mithra held the foremost rank in the Zoroastrian system of worship, especially among the Iranian military classes, who could not help invoking that patron Yazata of warriors. And, as shown elsewhere, the worship of the sun arose among the Aryans after the worship of the ghost and before the worship of other divinities, like Mithra. The worship of the sun would therefore hold the same premier place of honour with Mithra among the Iranians. And it does so still among their descendants in India. Parsi religious practices still require the morning prayers to be begun with prayers to the sun and Mithra at the same time, to the latter immediately after the former. Prayers are then offered to the other Yazatas, including Ahuramazda. This explains why the two Yazatas are confounded and by mistake held to be identical, though most clearly distinct. The fact of the pre-eminence achieved by the worship of Mithra among the Iranians proves that they themselves attributed their truly great achievements, as an imperial people, to that worship principally. And naturally non-Iranians would take the same view and attribute all the Iranian successes to the superhuman being principally worshipped by the Iranians especially when he happened to be, as it were, the god of war. Hence, it is easy to imagine that the ancient Romans, when they came into contact with the Iranians, learnt of and adopted in time this view. And there were points of contact between the two nations. The boundaries of their respective dominions touched each other in Asia.
- 16 The Encyclopædia Britannica says: "The worship of Mithras gained a footing in Rome under Domitian, was regularly established about 100 A.D., and by Commodus about 190. Finally the mysteries were prohibited". There is nothing to fix the exact date, when Mithraism was evolved in Rome. It is certain that the process of evolution must have gone on long before the recognition of the cult by Domitian. And the political and social conditions of ancient Rome about the beginning of the Christian era were quite favourable to the growth and expansion of the new religion. The Romans were a military people and had founded a large empire by conquests in both Europe and Asia. The Roman soldiers played a most important, if not the leading, part in the Roman government. Even the Emperors were elected by the senate and the soldiers both. The Romans were also susceptible to foreign influences. As Gibbon remarks: "It is a just but trite observation that victorious Rome was herself subdued by the arts of Greece". Further the Romans were a tolerant people. "Such was the mild spirit of antiquity", says Gibbon,

that the nations were less attentive to the difference than to the resemblance of their religious worship. The Greek, the Roman, and the Barbarians they met before their respective altars, easily persuaded themselves that under various names and with various ceremonies they adored the same deities.

And the Romans were not averse even to the continual deification of men.  
Says Gibbon:

The deification of the emperors is the only instance in which the Romans departed from their accustomed prudence and modesty. The Asiatic Greeks were the first inventors and the successors of Alexander the first objects of this servile and impious mode of adulation. It was easily transferred from the kings to the governors of Asia; and the Roman magistrates very frequently were adored as provincial deities, with the pomp of altars and temples, of festivals and sacrifices. . . . It was natural that the emperors should not refuse what the proconsuls had accepted . . . and the imperious spirit of the first Cæsar too easily consented to assume during his lifetime a place among the tutelar deities of Home.

It was therefore most easy for the warrior god Mithras and his cult to be accepted by a people like the Romans. Moreover, the fall of the republic and the growth of despotism under the empire must have induced the Romans to distrust their early gods who could no longer protect them and their political power in the state. Thus, the entry into Rome of Mithraism is easily intelligible. And from Rome as a centre Mithraism must have spread to the other countries of Europe, occupied by Home, being carried there direct by the Roman military classes; and the Asiatic auxiliary troops of the Romans would also convey the cult to the Roman provinces in Europe. And the propagation of Mithraism must have received a great impulse from the successes attending the Persian arms in the wars with the Romans of Artaxerxes and of Sapor, whose capture of the Emperor Valerian must have very considerably strengthened the worship of the Persian war-god Mithras. But it is certain that Mithraism received no countenance from the Iranians. Otherwise, the expedition of a professed Mithraist like Julian against them in which he perished would be inexplicable. And we have shown how antagonistic Mithraism is to the spirit of Zoroastrianism.

17 The *Encyclopædia Britannica* is of opinion, as already stated, that Mithraism spread upwards from the lower classes. On the contrary, the probability on the facts already set out is that by a reverse process it must have been disseminated among the Romans. And M. Cumont seems to favour this view. Referring to the measures for the suppression of Mithraism adopted at Rome after the death of Julian he observes: "The hope or restoration was especially tenacious at Rome, which

remained the capital of Paganism. The aristocracy still faithful to the traditions of their ancestors still supported the religion with their wealth and prestige". But it could not withstand for any long time the power of the Roman Empire and its established Christian religion when directed towards its extirpation.

- 18 Having briefly traced the history of Mithraism in Rome, we may examine its tenets and its ritual. At the outset what strikes us most about the cult is the resemblance it bears to Freemasonry to which probably it supplied a model, if nothing more. As M. Cumont observes:

It must not be supposed that Mithraism exhibited nothing more than the benignant phantasmagoria of a species of ancient Freemasonry. In the Roman towns the worship was performed in subterranean vaults. In these artificial grottos the scenes of initiation were calculated to produce on the neophyte a profound impression. . . . There were seven degrees of initiation the fifth of which was called Perses or Persian. . . . The Mystics were called brethren by one another, because the fellow initiates were expected to cherish mutual affection.

Thus, the Mithrai ceremonial performances came to be denominated mysteries. But the secrecy observed by Mithraism was derived from Zoroastrianism, which is the only religion in the world that zealously shields from the gaze of the non-Zoroastrians the celebration of its ritual. It imposes restrictions even on Zoroastrians and such of the Zoroastrian priesthood also who are not duly qualified, and prohibits their entry into certain places, marked out by the Kasha as explained by Mr. Mody in his aforementioned chapter. Again, Zoroastrianism also confers degrees but upon initiated priests only, while initiation is an Aryan ceremony, observed by both Iranians and Hindus. Another circumstance, which is peculiar to Mithraism, is that no female was initiated, M. Cumont notes: "Among hundreds of inscriptions that have come down to us not one mentions either a priestess, a woman initiate or even a donatress". Zoroastrianism has never admitted a female to the rank of a priestess. As regards the ceremony of initiation M. Cumont says:

"If we can believe a Christian writer of the 4th century, the eyes of the neophyte were bandaged, his hands were bound with the entrails of chickens, and he was compelled to leap over a ditch filled with water; finally a liberator approached with a sword, and sundered his loathsome bands. . . . It was the moral courage of the initiate that was tried". As we have seen, the worship of the Avestic Mithra enjoins ablutions attended with certain penances. The worship of the Roman Mithra imposed a similar rule, M. Cumont says: "The ritual required repeated lustration and ablutions. This catharsis or purification . . . conformed to the Mazdean traditions". Again Mithraism enjoined like Zoroastrianism reverence for fire and water, the sun and

the moon. M. Cumont says: – “Fire personified in the name of Vulcan was worshipped in all its manifestations. . . . In the deep recesses of the subterraneous crypts it burned perpetually on the altars; and its votaries were fearful to contaminate its purity by sacrilegious contact. . . . The Mithraists opined, that fire and water were brother and sister; and they entertained the same respect for the one as for the other. A perpetual spring bubbled in the vicinity of the temples and was the recipient of the homage and offerings of its visitors. . . . The votaries of Mithra like the ancient Persians adored the sun and the moon”. Zoroastrianism keeps the fire perpetually burning in certain places of worship and though it reveres water, it does not keep any perpetual spring running near any place of worship. Mithraism seems to have aimed at out-doing Zoroastrianism in this respect.

- 19 It would be natural to assume that if Mithraism borrowed ideas regarding Mithra, it would borrow other ideas also. But M. Cumont finds himself compelled to combat the contrary of this obvious view. He says:

The belief appears generally to prevail that Mithra was the only Iranian God that was introduced into the Occident and that everything in his religion that does not relate directly to him was adventitious and recent. This is a gratuitous and erroneous supposition. Mithra was accompanied in his migrations by a large representation from the Mazdean Pantheon and if he was in the eyes of his devotee the principal hero of the religion to which he gave his name, he was nevertheless not its Supreme God.

- 20 We shall now consider the question, whether Mithra was the sun, according to Mithraism. The answer seems to be in the negative; but M. Cumont appears to be in doubt as to the answer and to be inclined to the opinion, that the sun is the embodiment of Mithra. He says:

The double system of interpretation was particularly applied to the sun; conceived now as identical with Mithra and now as distinct from him. In reality there were two solar divinities in the mysteries, one Iranian and the heir of the Persian Hvare, the other Semitic, the substitute of the Babylonian Shamash identified with Mithra.

But the Mithraic legends about the birth and exploits of Mithra as given by M. Cumont himself conclusively prove that Mithra was not the sun. And we have seen that the Avestic Mithra is distinct from the sun Yazata.

- 21 The Mithraic cosmogony including the birth and adventures and functions of Mithra may be summarized as follows for the most part in M. Cumont’s own luminous language:

At the beginning of the divine hierarchy, and at the origin of things the Mithraic theology, the heir of the Zervanitic Magi placed Kronos, or

boundless, infinite time. He creates and destroys all things, he is the Lord and Master of the four elements, that compose the universe; he virtually unites in his person the powers of all the gods, whom he alone has begotten.

But we shall see that Mithra was not begotten by Kronos who begot Jupiter or Ormazd, the heavens, and his wife, Juno or Spenta-Armaiti the earth. From this couple, there sprang other deities including (a) Neptune or Apam Napat, the ocean; (b) Mars or Shahrivar, the god of metals; (c) Vulcan or Atar, the god of fire; (d) Bacchus or Haoma; (e) Silvanus or Dravaspā; (f) Anahitta, the goddess of the fecundating waters; (g) Vanaimiti or Nike; and (h) Arete or Asha, perfect virtue. "All these divinities were enthroned on mount Olympus" corresponding to the Avestic Alburz. We may note here that the Mithraic Mars is not the god of war but is the god of metals, thus leaving Mithra alone as the god of war. Pluto or Ahriman also born of Kronos, and his wife Hecate, and their progeny, the *daevas* or monsters (*daevas*) "occupied in the bowels of the earth a dark and dismal domain. The demons attempted to dethrone Jupiter but were repulsed. They then wandered about on earth to spread misery and corrupt the hearts of men". It was at this stage of the Mithraic history of the world that Mithra was born to save mankind from the evil machinations of the demons. He was, as already stated, not born of Kronos, or of Jupiter and Juno, but was, as it were, self-born, or self-created. He issued from a rock of which a standing image was worshipped in the temples, with a Phrygian cap on his head. In one of his hands, he held a knife and in the other a torch. We may observe that these two articles are significant. With the knife Mithra was to wage war; and with the torch to carry light and illumination into the world, as well as to detect the *daevas*. The torch was also emblematic of the fire. The Avestic Mithra carries as we have seen all weapons but no knife and relies principally on his formidable mace. Again no such birth is ascribed to the Avestic Mithra showing how the Avesta kept within due limits its metaphorical description of spiritual powers. Soon after his birth Mithra measured his strength with the sun who was forced to do homage to him; and on his so doing he was reinstated by Mithra in his former position, and the two gods remained friends afterwards, supporting each other in all their enterprises. This legend also leaves no doubt but that Mithra was distinct from the sun. The next adventure of Mithra is with a bull. He subdues and tames it, but eventually, under the command of the sun, he slays it. Out of the body of this bull there sprang all the useful herbs and plants that cover the earth with verdure. This was the first act performed by the Mithraic saviour of men for the benefit of humanity. His next act was to save mankind from the destruction persistently planned by the implacable enemy of man, namely, Ahriman, first through drought, then a deluge and finally a huge conflagration. From all these calamities, one after the other Mithra saved mankind and thus

carried out his first mission. After it was over, he partook of a last supper with the other gods and ascended with them to the Heavens from the earth, where he was all this time ever since his birth. “Borne by the sun on his radiant quadriga, Mithra crossed the ocean, which sought in vain to engulf him, and took up his habitation with the rest of the immortals”. The function of Mithra after his ascent to the Olympus was to sit in judgment over the souls of dead men and to protect the faithful ones that piously served him. “He is also the god of armies, who causes his protégés to triumph over their barbarous adversaries”. His future and final mission will be to re-descend to the earth after all men are dead; and to re-awaken them to life and then such of them as are just and righteous will be preserved. Thus, Mithraism inculcated a belief in the immortality of the soul, and also in resurrection and redemption. And we observe that Mithra of Mithraism is less of a god and more of a man, owes his birth wholly to the earth but is still superior to the gods. This accounts for his popularity. And the legends recounting his birth and exploits are all tainted by the mythology of the times.

- 22 We need not here go into further details as regards the doctrines of Mithraism. M. Cumont is of opinion that it “in fact satisfied alike both the intelligence of the educated and the hearts of the simple-minded”. And as regards the ethics of the Mithraists M. Cumont is certain that

it made no concession to the licence of the Babylonian and that it had still preserved the lofty character of the ethics of the ancient Persians. Perfect purity had remained for the Mithraists the cult towards which the life of the faithful was to tend.

- 23 Before concluding, we must examine a certain pro-position of M. Cumont. He says: “The sacred books of Mithraism which contain the prayers recited or chanted during the services, the ritual of the initiations and the ceremonials of the feasts have vanished and left scarce a trace behind”. But it is probable that there were no such books at all; and that the prayers, or at least the instructions regarding the ritual, were preserved only in memory and were never reduced to writing. And M. Cumont himself observes at another place: “The tradition of the occult ceremonial was scrupulously observed by a priesthood instructed in the divine science, and distinct from all classes of initiates”. This is in exact harmony with the practice of Zoroastrianism, which has never yet preserved any records of its ritual but has entrusted their preservation to priestly traditions alone.

## Note

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*. November 1909, VIII (8) 578–595.

# 7 Was there any institution in ancient Iran like that of caste in India?

*Jivanji Jamshedji Modi*

## Introduction

The word “caste”, as used at present in India, suggests at once the consideration of several questions such as purity of blood, profession, inter-dining, intermarriage, etc. The object of this chapter is to examine whether there was anything like a caste system in ancient Persia corresponding to that in India.<sup>1,2</sup>

## The grans division of the people in the Avesta

In the Avesta, the Iranians speak of their cradle or their mother country as Aeryana-vaêja<sup>3</sup> (आर्यविज or आर्यबिज), that is, the seed or primary seat of the Aryans. They speak of it as the very first (paoirîm)<sup>4</sup> country created by Ahura Mazda. God (Ahura Mazda) himself is spoken of as well-heard or famed (srûta)<sup>5</sup> in Airyana-vaêja. They offer their homage to their country under the same name (Nemo Airyênêvaêjahi).<sup>6</sup> Even Ahura Mazda himself is spoken of as praising (yazata)<sup>7</sup> his Ardviçura Anâhita and Ram Yazata,<sup>8</sup> in this his first-created country. Zoroaster also praises Ardviçura Anâhita in this first country.<sup>9</sup> The Iranians speak of all the countries belonging to, or under, the territorial jurisdiction of their mother country as the country of the Aryas (Airyabyôdanghubyô).<sup>10</sup> Again, the country gave its name to a kind of Glory or Halo spoken of as Airyana kharena,<sup>11</sup> that is, Iranian Glory or Iranian splendour, to possess which many a king tried his best. Its possession led one to be master of cattle, men, wealth, lustre, wisdom, and prosperity.<sup>12</sup> King Darius in his Inscription at Naqsh-i-Rustam speaks of himself as: “Adam Darayavahush . . . Parsa Parsahya putra Ariya Ariya chithra”.<sup>13</sup> That is, “I am Darius . . . a Persian, the son of a Persian, an Aryan of Aryan seed”.

With the love of their country as displayed in the previous references, the Iranians distinguished themselves and their country from the un-Aryan people and un-Aryan countries. Thus, the ancient Iranians divided the people of the world into two great divisions: (1) Airyas (آریس, آریس) and (2) the non-Airyas (انآریس, انآریس). Ordinarily the two words meant (1) the noble,



polite, etc., and (2) the not-polite, not-respectable, rude, vulgar. Then, the word un-airya came to mean “foreign”. For example, we find that in the Vendidâd (l. 18) the rule of Azi-Dahâka or Zohâk, who was a Babylonian Semite, is alluded to as non-Airyra. In the Astâd Yasht (Yt. XVIII. 2), countries other than that of Iran are spoken of as non-Aryan or foreign countries (an-airyâoDanghâvô). We find the same in the Jamyâd Yasht (Yt. XIX 68).

We thus find that the Iranians divided, at first, the people of the world into two grand divisions, the Aryans and the non-Aryans. This is, as it were, the first distinction known to them.

### The non-Airyra countries named in the Avesta

The non-Airyra countries, enumerated by the Avesta, are the following: (1) the Tuirya or the country of Turân; (2) Sairima, the country latterly spoken of as Sam, the country of Western Asia and Eastern Europe; (3) the Sâini or the country of China; and (4) the country of the Dahæ, a people of Central Asia. In this grand division, we find India included in the Airya countries. In the enumeration of the 16 regions of the Aryans, given in the first chapter of the Vendidâd, India, being on the further East, stands as the fifteenth.

### The division of the Aryans according to profession

Then coming to a division or distinction among themselves, we find from the Avesta that the Airyas of Iran divided themselves according to their professions. At first, they divided themselves into three classes and then into four classes. The threefold division was that of the Âthravans or priests, the Rathaêshtâr or the warriors, and the Vâstrya or the agriculturists. Then, latterly, there was the fourth class of the Huiti or the artisans.

- 1 The Âthravans were the priestly class. The word corresponds to the Indian word अथर्वन् and literally means “one who takes care of Fire” from âtar fire and van (वन्) Lat. ven-erare, vénérer to venerate, to honour).
- 2 The Rathaêshtâr were the warriors or the military class. The word literally means one who stands in the chariot, from ratha (रथ)(sans. रथ Lat. rota) a chariot and stâ (स्त) lat. sta-re) to stand. The word points to the times of the ancient warfare when people fought standing in their chariots.
- 3 The Vâçtrya were the agriculturists. The word comes from vâshra (वश्र)pasture, from the root *vangh* Sans. वृश् to cover (the ground). Literally, the word means one who covers the ground with vegetation.
- 4 The Huiti were the artisan class. The word literally seems to mean “one who prepares (things)”, from “hu” to prepare.

All these four professions are mentioned together only once in the Avesta, and that, in the nineteenth chapter of the Yasna which is known as the commentary of the sacred prayer formula of Yathâ-Ahu-Vairyô or the Ahunavar (Ahunavairyâ), which literally means “the Will of the Lord”. The sacred formula of Ahunavar seems to correspond with the Word of the Christdans.<sup>14</sup> We read that Ahura Mazda created or uttered Ahunavar before creating Heaven and other objects of Nature. One good recital of this Ahunavar is equal to 100 recitals of the Gathas. Even when not well-recited, it is worth 10 recitals of the Gathas. Its proper recital leads to a safe crossing of the Chin vat bridge which leads to Heaven. Ahunavar is the best of all prayers ever taught by Ahura Mazda in the past and even likely to be taught in future. It saves a man from death. It is intended to be learnt by all men. He who utters Ahunavairyâ acknowledges God as the all-supreme, Ahura Mazda uttered the Ahunavar, and there came the creation into existence. Ahura Mazda announced that the Ahunavar consisted of all three measures, namely, good thoughts, good words, and good actions. Then, it is spoken of as belonging to four professions (chathru pishtrem 𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬀𐬎𐬀). These four professions, here spoken of are, as said earlier, the following: (1) Âthraavan, (2) Rathaêshtar, (3) Vâstrya, and (4) Huiti.

The fact that the word Huiti is found only once in the Avesta, and that again in a chapter of the Yasna, spoken of as a commentary of the Ahunavar, and therefore a later writing, shows that this fourth class was added much later.

Among these professional classes, the priestly class was held to be superior and it seemed to have some special privileges. For example, a medical man treating an Âthraavan or priest is asked not to charge his sacerdotal patient any fee. He is to treat him in return of his (the priest's) blessings or prayers on his behalf (âthraavanem baeshazyât dahmayât parôafritôit, Vend. VII. 41). The same is the case for the Yaozdâthregar or the purifier, who purifies those who have come into some contact with a dead body. He is to charge no fees but is to purify the priest in return of his blessings (âthraavanemyaozdathôdahmayâtparôâfritôit, Vend. IX. 37). Then, there is a sliding scale of fees, both for the medical man and for the purifier, according to the social position and status of the patient. The fee is in kind, to be paid in small or large cattle.

### The four classes according to Firdousi

According to Firdousi, it was Jamshed (the Yima Khshaêta of the Avesta) who first divided the people into the previous four professional classes. Firdousi gives the names of these four classes as Kâtuziân,<sup>15</sup> Nisaryân, Nasudi, and Ahnukhushi. The seat of the people of the first class, the priests, was in the mountains (پروستند را جاينگر كود كوة)<sup>16</sup> that is, they led a life of retirement and seclusion.

### Ardeshir Babegan's Regulations

It seems that this division according to professions continued even during the Greek rule over Persia of Ardeshir Babegan's Regulations. Alexander and his successors and during the Parthian rule. But there seems to have grown up some relaxation in the pursuit of the professions, that is to say, a member of one profession could leave off his profession and take up another. So, Ardeshir Babegan, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty and the real strong founder of the Iranian Renaissance which was partly begun by some Parthian kings after the dark ages of the Greek and early Parthian periods, made some changes in the division of classes, and restored the original strictness, forbidding the people of one profession to take up another profession without the permission of the State. The King of Tabaristan, in his letter to Dastur Tansar, the Minister of Ardeshir, protests against this severity and Tansar justifies Ardeshir's regulations on the ground that this division was good for the preservation of order among people.<sup>17</sup>

In this division of Ardeshir Babegan, we find the ancient class of the agriculturists mentioned among workers or labourers and the class of writers and lawyers and secretaries put in its place. By the time of the foundation of the Sassanian dynasty, Iran was changed much from its former condition. So, Ardeshir seems to have made another division.

The four classes of Ardeshir Babegan are named as follows in the later Persian version of Tansar's letter:

- 1 The Ashâb-i din (اصحاب دین) lit. the Masters of Religion, that is, those versed in religion. This class included:
  - (a) The Hakâm (حکام), that is, the Judges. This class is, as pointed out by Darmesteter, the dâtobars or dâvars of the Pahlavi Yasna. This was a higher class of priests corresponding to that of Dasturs.
  - (b) The Zohâds (زهداد) lit. the pious. They corresponded to the Pahlavi Maghopats or Mobads.
  - (c) The Sadane (سدان) who were the keepers of temples. They were the priests in charge of fire temples.
  - (d) The Mu'alliman (معلمان), that is, the preceptors or teachers.
- 2 The Muqâtils (مقاتل) lit. the fighters, that is, the soldiers. They were divided into cavalry and infantry.
- 3 The Kuttâbs (کتب) that is, the writers, learned men. These included writers, accountants, writers of opinions, diplomas and contracts, biographers, doctors, poets, and astrologers.
- 4 The Mohné (مکنه) lit. those who do works of mehnat (مکنات) or labour; this class included traders, cultivators, merchants, and all other handicrafts.

However, we find no trace of any prohibition to interdine or intermarry. The men of different professions interdined and intermarried. The only

restriction in the matter of marriage referred to in the Avesta is that the righteous are not to marry with the unrighteous. But we find that latterly, in India, there seems to have arisen some prohibition in the matter of inter-marriages and inter-dining between the clergy and the laity. A member of the priestly class could marry a girl of the laity but not give his daughter in marriage to a person of the layman class. In the last century, this prohibition led to differences between the members of the priestly class and those of the laity. The differences having grown acute, the attention of Government was drawn to it and the Government appointed a special committee to look into the question and the committee decided the question in favour of the laity.<sup>18</sup> But the prohibition in the matter of intermarriage is dead. That in the matter of inter-dining existed, not in the case of all clergy but in that of those only who officiated in the inner liturgical services. It also is dying off, especially in Bombay.

From all these facts, we see that there never was an institution in ancient Iran like that of “caste” among the Hindus and also that there never was such an institution among the Parsees of India.

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*. February 1927, XIII (8), 816–822.
- 2 Editors: This Paper was read before the Anthropological Section of the Science Congress, which met in January 1923, at Lucknow.
- 3 Vendidad I. 3; II 21.
- 4 Ibid. I 3.
- 5 Ibid. II 21.
- 6 Ahrmazda Yasht 21.
- 7 Abân Yasht 17.
- 8 Râm Tasht 2.
- 9 Abân Yasht 104.
- 10 Tir Yasht 9, 56, 61; Aban Yasht 42, Farvardin Yasht 10; Behram Yasht 53; Vendidad XIX 39.
- 11 Astad Yasht 1.
- 12 Astad Yasht 1.
- 13 For the Transliterated Text, *vide* Tolman, p. 79, 1.9; for translation, p. 146.
- 14 The Christian Scriptures are figuratively spoken of as “the word of God” (Epistle to the Romans IX. 6). It is taken in the sense of “the word of Faith” (Ibid X. 8) or “the word of Salvation” (The Acts XIII 26) or “the word of Righteousness” (Epistle to the Hebrews V. 13).
- 15 Mohl’s Paris Text gives the name as Amuziân.
- 16 Vuller’s Text Vol. I, p. 24.
- 17 *Vide* Tansar’s letter in the *Journal Asiatique* of Mars-Avril 1894. *Vide* p. 214 for the text, p. 518 for French translation. *Vide* my work *ઇરન-ના-વિદ્યાર્થિ-વિદ્યા-વિદ્યા-વિદ્યા* (Iranian Essays, Part III, pp. 127–170).
- 18 *Vide* my paper on the Parsis, In “*The Tribes and Castes of Bombay*” by Mr. R. E. Enthoven (1922) Vol. III, pp. 202–203.

## 8 An ancient Egyptian legend in Buddhist guise

*Sarat Chandra Mitra*

The ancient Egyptians had, as I have shown in a previous chapter, a fair amount of literature of fiction, which dated from 4000 BC circ., and that it included fables, two of which, at least, are well known to us, at the present day, under the names of the “*The Lion and the Mouse*” and “*The Stomach and the Members*”, and the authorship of which two had hitherto been erroneously ascribed to classical writers – that of the former to the Greek fabulist Æsop and that of the latter to Menoetius Agrippa. I have already stated, in that chapter, that the ancient Egyptian tale titled “*Anpu and Bata*” embodies the earliest rudiments of the latter-day novel. Judging from the results of recent Egyptological researches, we have reason to believe that further explorations in the Land of the Pharaohs may yet bring to light the fact that many of the *motifs* and incidents of modern novels and folktales were known to that wonderful people – the ancient Egyptians. In the present chapter, I intend to show that the origin of certain ancient Buddhist legends may be traced to Egypt, or that, at least, the prototype of one ancient Buddhist tradition was current in the Land of the Pharaohs. It is now one of the commonplaces of Indian antiquarian science that Buddhist religion and culture gradually spread from the seat of their origin in the Gangetic valley in Northern India into other parts of Hindustan and onwards far into Takshashila, the Taxila of the Greeks, in the extreme North-Western Frontiers of India. Now there is an old tradition recorded by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsiang and also in old Tibetan books to the effect that the territory of Khotan in Central Asia was conquered and colonized, about two centuries before the Christian Era, by a considerable body of Indian, Buddhist immigrants from Takshashila. The accuracy of this tradition was hitherto doubted by a good many scholars. But the researches of Dr. M. A. Stein, amid the sand-buried ruins of Khotan, have not only verified the accuracy of the aforementioned tradition but also proved, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that these Buddhist immigrants took with them into Khotan – the land of their adoption – not only their religion but also all their culture and arts.<sup>1</sup>

The famous Buddhist pilgrim and traveller Hiuen-Tsiang, who came to India about 630 AD, and passed about 15 years in this country, has left it on record that, while passing through the Western, border of that barbarian

“Western Kingdom”—now known as the Khotan territory—he came across, some 30 miles before reaching the capital (Khotan), in the midst of the straight road passing through a great sandy desert, a succession of small hills, which were believed to have been formed by the earth thrown up by rats burrowing into the ground. These rats, says that saintly “Master of the Law”, Hiuen-Tsiang, our Indian Pausanias, were worshipped with offerings by the local people under the belief that these small rodents had, in the olden times, saved the country from an invasion by a great army of marauding Hiung-nu or Huns. The King of Khotan had despaired of saving his territories from the ravages of these marauders, and, as a last resort, prayed for succour, when, in response to his prayer, myriads of rats under the leadership of a rat-king were sent to aid him. This huge army of rats gnawed through and destroyed the leather of the harness and armour of the invading Huns, who were thus easily repelled by the Khotanese.

Hiuen-Tsiang’s statements about this legend of Khotan have been, curiously enough, confirmed by the recent discovery of reliable archaeological evidence in the shape of two antique wooden panels having depicted thereon, the figure of a rat-headed personage seated between two attendants, who are in the attitude of worshipping him. Dr. M. A. Stein, while exploring the sand-buried ruins of an ancient Buddhist shrine at Khotan, came across the aforesaid wooden panels, which were found buried amid the *debris* of the quadrangular passage enclosing the cella of that sanctuary. The circumstances, under which the discovery was made, and the paintings on these antique finds, will be best described as follows in Dr. Stein’s own words:

In the western part of the quadrangular passage that enclosed the cella, we found two painted panels of wood, showing, on both sides, representations of sacred personages and undoubtedly the votive offerings of some pious worshipper. On the larger and better preserved of these panels, which measures 18 by 4 inches, there appears seated between two attendants, a half-length human figure with the head of a rat, and wearing a diadem. It was only long afterwards, when the little painting had been cleaned of its adhering layer of sand in the British Museum and examined by the trained eye of my friend Mr. F. H. Andrews, that I realised the peculiar shape of the figure and its true significance. It is manifestly meant to represent the king of those holy rats which, according to the local legend related by Hiuen-Tsiang and already referred to in connection with the Kaptar-Mazar, were worshipped at the western border of the Khotan oasis for having saved the kingdom from a barbarian invasion. The sacred character of the rat-headed figure is sufficiently marked by the semi-elliptical vesica or halo, which encloses it, and by the worshipping attitude of the attendant figure on the left, which carries in one hand a long-stemmed, leaf-shaped fan or *punkah*.<sup>2</sup>

Though “the rats as big as hedgehogs, their hair of a gold and silver colour”, which, as Hiuen-Tsiang was informed, inhabited this desert tract, are no longer to be seen by the eyes of the pious, their place has been taken, says Dr. Stein, by the sacred pigeons of a Mahommedan shrine named “Kaptar-Mazar”. These pigeons are propitiated with offerings of food by all piously disposed people, and, like the sacred rats described by Hiuen-Tsiang, commemorate a great victory. The situation of the “Pigeon-shrine” corresponds, according to that learned savant, to the locality described by the saintly “Master of the Law”, as having been inhabited by the sacred rats and the cult of the pigeons is a distinct survival of the old Buddhist legend about the destruction of the Hun army by those sacred rodents.

Now the student of comparative folklore will ask: “Was there any legend, similar to this, current among any other nation of the ancient world? If so, among whom?” Readers of Herodotus, the Father of History, will readily remember that there was current in ancient Egypt a legend very similar to this. When Sennacherib, King of the Assyrians, invaded Egypt, Sethos ruled over the latter country. Now having incurred the displeasure of the military class, the Egyptian King was unable to summon to his standard any army to repel the Assyrian invasion. As, according to the custom of those ancient times, the royal and priestly functions were combined in one and the same person, Sethos was also priest of Hephæstus (Ptah). While Sethos was sleeping in the temple of his god, that deity appeared to him in a dream and promised him that he would deliver the country from the hated invaders. It then came to pass that, on the night preceding the day of battle, a swarm of mice was sent into the Assyrians’ camp, which destroyed by gnawing the leathern quivers, shield straps, and the bowstrings of the enemy. The Assyrians were, thereby, virtually disarmed and were routed with great slaughter. The great Greek traveller and historian Herodotus says: “And now there standeth a stone image of this king in the temple of Hephæstus, and in the hand of the image a mouse, and there is this inscription; ‘Let whoso looketh on me be pious’”.

Prof. Sayce says that, though there was no such person as Sethos, but that the legend “is evidently Egyptian, not Greek, and the name of Sennacherib as well as the fact of the Assyrian attack, is correct”. He further says that, though the legend was Egyptian, it was but “an echo of the Biblical account of the destruction of the Assyrian”, which account does not mention the mice at all. Mr. Andrew Lang says that the same legend of the rats gnawing bowstrings was to be found among the Greeks (*Vide* Brinton’s *Migration Legend of the Greeks*. Philadelphia. 1884).

Now the most remarkable feature of the Egyptian and the Central Asian Buddhist legends is their complete similarity in almost all respects. This gives rise to the question: “Whether the Egyptian legend was carried to Central Asia or whether the legend was independently evolved in the two countries?”

There is one school of English folklorists, of whom Mr. Andrew Lang is the leading exponent, and who account for the similarity of many legends

and folktales by the migration theory, namely, that in times gone by, when slavery and women-stealing prevailed, slaves and women, carried off from their houses, took with them the stories and fables of their motherland, into their captivity. Merchants and shipwrecked men also, Jews and Gypsies, conveyed the stories and legends from one place to another. But, as there is no historical evidence extant to show that slaves and women were ever captured in Egypt and carried into Central Asia, or that merchants and shipwrecked men of Egypt ever found their way to such a far-off inland country as Khotan, we may take it as almost conclusively proved that the identity of the Egyptian and Central Asian versions of the legend cannot be explained by the migration theory. We must, then, account for as to how the two versions came to be evolved.

Now the leading idea underlying the two versions of the legend is that the army of some powerful invader was suddenly decimated by some such catastrophe as the outbreak of plague or pestilence. That this explanation is plausible enough is borne out by the fact that the rat was in the East the emblem of the plague boil, while there are other examples in Scripture of the Destroying Angel, or "Angel of Yahveh", being the bearer of pestilence. It is mentioned in First Samuel, V and VI, that the Philistines, smitten with plague-boils for detaining the Ark in their midst, sent it back with a guilt-offering according to the word of their priests and diviners: Five "golden tumors and five golden mice . . . ye shall make images of your tumors and images of your mice that mar the land". In Second, XXIV, 15-17, a pestilence sent upon Israel, on account of which 70,000 people died, is thus described: "And, *when the angel stretched out his hand towards Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people: 'It is enough; now stay thy hand'*". And David spoke unto the Lord *when he saw the angel that smote the people*, and said, Lo, I have sinned.

Similarly, among the ancient Trojans, the rat was believed to be a constant attendant of Apollo who showered the darts of pestilence among the Greeks. In fact, his priest invokes him in the *Iliad* under the name of Smintheus which may be interpreted into "Mouse Apollo" or "Apollo, Lord of Mice". This association of the death-dealing Apollo with the rat has been thought by some scholars to symbolize the fact that the rat is a diffusive agent of the plague. A similar belief may also be current among the Tibetans. Dr. L. A. Waddell, while visiting the chapel of the Tibetan She-Devil (the goddess of disease, battle and death) at Lhasa, found tame mice running unmolested over the floor, feeding on the cake and grain offerings under the altar, and among the dress of the image, and up and down the bodies of the monks. These mice were believed to be transmigrated nuns and monks. The learned Doctor, however, thinks that the fact of these mice being in attendance upon the Tibetan disease-giving goddess, may, in some manner, signify, like the rodent attendant of Apollo Smintheus, the idea that the rat is a diffusive agent of the plague.<sup>3</sup>



The fact of the rat being regarded in Oriental countries as the symbol of plague and pestilence is based on the physical fact, that rats and mice are most susceptible to plague than any other animal, and that the death of rats, in considerable numbers, in a certain locality, indicates in no uncertain manner, as is now well known to the people of India, the outbreak of plague in that place. We may, therefore, take it for certain that the gnawing of the harness and of the bowstrings of the soldiers and the consequent destruction of the army, as mentioned in the Egyptian and Central Asian Buddhist legends, is nothing but a figurative description of the destruction of the army by the sudden outbreak of plague. It seems to me, therefore, that the two aforesaid versions of the legend, as being reminiscent of the destruction, by plague, of an invading army, were independently evolved in the two countries.

Now the Egyptian and Central Asian legends may be explained in another way. The mouse is the symbol of death in the folklore of almost all countries; and the gnawing of a mouse or of a rat is regarded by the superstitious as an omen of death. This belief occurs in the folklore of Ancient Rome. The mouse is depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics as the symbol of destruction. In the Middle Ages, the mouse was invariably associated with death. On the wall behind the altar in St. Mary's Church at Lübeck (in Germany), a mouse is depicted as sitting on the root of a tree, thereby expressing symbolically that Lübeck will not be destroyed by plague or pestilence, considering that the mouse does not gnaw the trunk of the tree. The legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin or Hameln, best known to English readers from Robert Browning's version thereof, has been interpreted to be a description of the death of the Hameln children from some pestilential disease, as they were not buried in the city churchyard, but in one common grave in the Kuppenberg, outside the city. Those who died of plague were frequently buried in the outskirts of cities; and it is well known that, during the years 1282–84, Central and Northern Europe were visited by frightful plagues, Dr. R. Salinger, who has recently published a study of the legend of the Pied Piper of Hameln in the German periodical *Velhagen* for February 1906, accounts for the origin thereof by saying that the legend is partly based on actual facts and partly on myth. It is just possible, says he, that Hameln became infested by rats, that a rat catcher, in some extraordinary manner, contrived to expel the rats into the sea, and that the Mayor of the city might have declined to pay the man the reward promised him for his services. The mythical portion of the story is stated by that scholar to be that wherein the rat catcher is represented as having piped such magic tunes as to attract the children, that the parents should have allowed them to follow him, and that the whole procession should have vanished inside a hill or mountain in the outskirts of the city. Dr. Salinger explains the mythical part by suggesting that the rat catcher represents Death. The "Dance of Death" was a favourite subject of painting in those days. One of the best examples of paintings of this class was a glass painting (of about 1312) in St. Mary's Church at Lübeck (in Germany). In this picture, Death was represented as a dancing skeleton

with a pipe in its hand, while the Pope, the King and the members of all classes, including children, were following his example. Dr. Salinger considers that the painting must have been a votive picture depicting the exodus of the children under the leadership of the piper, a “dance of death” picture to commemorate the death of the children. But the question to be solved is: “How did the Pied Piper come to be represented as a rat catcher?” The learned Doctor thinks that probably rats and mice were both painted in the picture; and the people might have come to regard the piper as a catcher of mice as well as of rats.<sup>4</sup>

Now the results of the foregoing discussion about the origin of the two versions of the legend may be formulated thus:

- (1) The two legends appear to have been independently evolved in Egypt and Central Asia, but the Egyptian version appears to be the earlier of the two.
- (2) They commemorate, in symbolical language, the destruction of an invading army by plague or some other kind of pestilence.
- (3) The rat is a diffusive agent of the plague; and the appearance of myriads of rats signifies the outbreak of plague of a virulent type.
- (4) The gnawing by the rats of the harness and bowstrings is a symbolical description of the decimation of the army by plague.

## Notes

1 Reprinted from *JASB*. April. 1907, VIII (1) 48–55.

2 *Sand-buried Ruins of Khotan*. By M.A. Stein. London: T. Fisher Unwin. 1903, pp. 307–8.

3 *Lhasa and Its Mysteries*. By L.A. Waddell, LL.D., C.B. (2nd Edition). London: J. Murray, 1905, pp. 370–1.

4 For a summary of Dr. Salinger’s article, see the *Review of Reviews* (English) for March 1906, p. 289.

## 9 Is the retention of the term “Animism” as a main religion head in our census tables justified?

*L.J. Sedgwick*

The following chapter is an extract from the Census Report, now in draft form. As the subject dealt with in the extract is a question in Comparative Religion, I thought that the Anthropological Society would perhaps care to hear the extract and discuss the views stated therein. This chapter is enriched by a contribution from the pen of the Rev. Enok Hedberg, D. Litt, of Dhanora, West Khandesh, who has probably a more intimate knowledge of the Bhils than any other European now in India.<sup>1</sup>

### **Extract from draft of Census Report**

The term Animism was invented by Tylor as a general term suitable to the primitive religions of all savage peoples and was chosen on the assumption that (in the words of a later writer) all such peoples believed in “the presence on earth of a shadowy crowd of powerful and malevolent beings, who usually have a local habitation in a hill, stream, or patch of primeval forest and who interest themselves in the affairs of men”.<sup>2</sup> Since the time of Tylor much research has been done among savage and primitive peoples, it has been found that belief in spirits or entities dwelling in natural objects is by no means the most primitive of beliefs. The most primitive savage does not distinguish between spirit and matter. The danger from the tree is no danger from the tree spirit, but simply from the tree itself, which, as an object that sways about and makes a noise, is necessarily possessed of a vague potency, a “mana” (to use a Polynesian word which has become the technical term among Anthropologists for the primitive idea outlined earlier). Nor does he distinguish natural from artificial objects. The attitude of such peoples is that of the child, who, when it knocks its leg against a chair, exclaims “naughty chair!” and kicks it. When we hang up over our door a horseshoe to bring luck, we are unconsciously reverting to the most primitive savage beliefs. The belief in “mana” of natural and artificial objects has been called by some writers “Animatism”, though this word is perhaps not generally accepted. This “Animatism” can and does, in the case of some people, continue to exist side by side with a belief in spirits and even Gods. The extent to which it exists among the jungle tribes of this Presidency, either by itself

or in combination with Animism or other forms of primitive religion, is possibly not fully known. A description of some of the beliefs and practices of the Bhils was given by Mr. Enthoven on pp. 63–65 of the Report of 1901.

The condition of the religious mentality of the Bhils as presented by Mr. Enthoven reveals a stage of religious development considerably beyond Animatism. Thus, "They worship female deities known as *Mátás*, represented by symbols rather than images, by wooden posts, earthen pots, toy horses, wicker baskets and winnowing fans". Originally perhaps the wicker basket was an animated and potent object, possessed of "mana". Now it has become the symbol of one of the Earth Mothers, a form of worship common to many and various peoples, and particularly a feature of Dravidian cults. Ancestor worship also plays a conspicuous part; and various large and formidable objects, such as the tiger, big trees, large, and irregular shaped stones, are treated as godlings.

Now it will be noticed that whereas in almost all other returns the enumerator is bound to accept the reply of the individual, except in so far that he may explain to him what is wanted, should he think that the question has been misunderstood, in the case of Animism the enumerator is left to decide whether any member of a jungle tribe is a Hindu or an Animist. It is necessarily a matter of doubt whether a Bhil is "accepted as a Hindu by the villagers", and it would be quite impossible for any enumerator to call the villagers together and question them as to the religious status of every Bhil. Consequently, it is almost a matter of luck what the numbers returned as Animists will be. To the chance of being returned or not returned as such by an enumerator is to be added the chance of being classified or not classified as such on the ground of caste by the head of the Abstraction office. In 1911, Mr. Gait, the Census Commissioner when visiting this Presidency on tour, converted 70,000 Bhils in Reva Kantha from Hindus to Animists by a stroke of the pen. At this Census, it was my intention that the Schedules themselves should decide, that is to say, that the caprice of the enumerator should not be further complicated by idiosyncrasies of the Abstraction officers. But this was not always fully understood by the latter, and in some cases classification was carried out irrespective of what was entered on the schedules.

But even if we eliminate the opinion of the Abstraction officer and rely on the opinions of the enumerators alone, there is little hope of consistency, Census to Census, in our statistics. Mr. Enthoven well pointed out that when the Bhil worships a big tree or a stone, he is only doing what the Hindu of the plains does, when he girds the *pipal* tree with the sacred thread or paints red lead on a *Zingam* stone. Moreover, Hinduism of today is not the Vedic religion, or is it the Puranic religion, or is it the philosophical pantheism of the highly educated Brahman. It is a vast mixture, in which the Vedic worship of the great forces of nature, the Puranic *avatars*, the philosophical doctrine of *karma*, and – be it noted – the pre-Aryan's reverence of trees, stones, animals, and tribal *totems* are inextricably intermingled. Consequently, most enumerators would regard the Bhil, whose personal objects of worship are his ancestors, a particular tree, a particular stone,

the boundary god, the small-pox mother and a winnowing fan, as no less a Hindu than the kunbi (a Hindu Caste Group) of his own village, who worships his ancestors, the *pipal* tree, the circle of stones known as *Vetala* the boundary deity, the small-pox mother, and a plough, even though the latter may be told *puranic* stories a few times a year by his *guru*, have some vague ideas of the doctrine of *karma*, and employ a Brahman to perform his ceremonies. The old question “What is a Hindu?” is one which has been discussed in full many times, and the reader is referred in particular to Mr. Gait’s discussion on pp. 115–117 of the Indian Census report of 1911. The latest definition is given by Mr. Farquhar,<sup>3</sup> who makes Hinduism depend on “birth and conformity”. By birth he means birth into one of the recognized Hindu castes. But if some Bhils are Hindus, then Bhil is a recognized Hindu caste. It is particularly to be noted that a Bhil does not enter any new caste when he gradually passes into a Hindu and worships puranic gods.

In pointing out, as has been hinted earlier, that the Hinduism of the highly educated Brahman is something totally distinct from the Hinduism of the lower strata of Hindu society, it is not intended to imply that this variation is confined to this one religion. The Christianity, and especially the eschatology, of a Browning is equally far removed from the Christianity of a devout old agricultural labourer; and the reverence paid to the Virgin by a high class French lady is equally far removed from the Mariolatry of the Marseilles fish woman. In some parts of the world, and particularly in South America, there are Christian cults which are only by the laxest use of the term classifiable as Christian at all. This being so, and the Jungle tribes being as it were, non-Sanskritic Hindus (one cannot use the term “primitive Hindus”, since Hinduism is not derived from the pre-Aryan cults but has absorbed them), no justification for continuing to treat Animism as a distinct religion exists, *unless we can obtain figures which show rational changes from Census to Census*. How far this is from being the case is shown in Table 9.1, in which are shown the numbers recorded as Animists from the chief Animistic tracts during four successive Censuses.

Table 9.1 Recorded numbers of Animists in certain areas – 1891 to 1921

<i>Area</i>	1891	1901	1911	1921	
Broach	17,805	25,294	38,860	2,432	
Panch Mahals	11,086	26,523	22,475	9,793	
Surat District	...	6,394	4,051	34,397	
Khandesh East	86,688	11,600	92,535	66,962	† Including “Khandesh Agency” of past Censuses
† Khandesh West					
Nasik	12,612	32	1,486	22	
† Sind	78,621	...	9,224	8,022	† Including Khairpur State
Mahi Kantha	...	6,367	4,211	4,341	
Reva Kantha	64,856	18,148	143,653	51,605	
† Surat Agency	11,402	...	70	8,901	† Sachin, Bansda, Dharampur, and the Dangs

But the previous figures do not tell us all that we require to know. Throughout the whole discussion, I have referred exclusively to Bhils. That is because the Animist figures are mainly composed of that caste. It is important, however, for a full consideration of the question to know exactly what other castes are included and to what extent. Table 9.2 shows the castes included.

One of the interesting points brought out by the previous table is the great divergence between different districts in the variety of castes brought under

Table 9.2 Animists by castes – 1921

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Number of Animists returned</i>	<i>Region</i>
<b>Bhils</b>		
Bhil	148,809	West Khandesh (65,846), Reva Kantha (47,570), Panch Mahals (7,961), Surat District (5,372) Surat Agency (8,882), Mahi Kantha (4,341), Thar and Parkar (3,895), Broach (2,389), and similar numbers from other districts
Marwari Bhil	35	Ahmedabad. These should have been included in Bhil
Vasava	899	Surat. These are probably Bhils. See note on Vasava in the Glossary of obscure language names in the Census Report
Dhanka	139	Reva Kantha (except 1 from Surat). This is probably a tribal name of Bhils. See the glossary of obscure language names in the Census Report
Vagadia	16	Panch Mahals. Probably a name for Bhils from further west
Dhori	53	Reva Kantha. Probably a tribal name of Bhils. See glossary of obscure language names in the Census Report
Jamrala	36	Reva Kantha. Probably another tribal name of Bhils
<b>Caste Allied to Bhils</b>		
Chodhra	23,462	Surat
Naikada	5,583	Reva Kantha, Panch Mahals, and Surat
Gamit	4,251	Surat
Dhodia	202	Surat and Panch Mahals
Kokna	24	Surat
Dubla	40	Surat
Talavia	90	Kaira and Broach. These are considered by the Ethnographic Survey to be identical with Dublas
Kotvalia and Vitolia	528	Surat District with a few from the Surat Agency and Reva Kantha. These people have a tradition of Khandesh origin, and are probably racially Bhil
Vaghri	96	Larkana (67) and the rest from Gujarat

(Continued)

Table 9.2 (Continued)

<i>Caste</i>	<i>Number of Animists returned</i>	<i>Region</i>
<b>Konkan Aboriginal Tribals</b>		
Katkari	2	Kolaba
Varli	3	Surat Agency
<b>Wandering Tribes</b>		
Phanse Parshi	6	Satara
Vaidu	4	Satara
Waddar	10	Poona
Charan	836	East Khandesh (except 2 from Nasik)
<b>Wandering Mendicants and Musicians</b>		
Turi	6	Palanpur Agency
Nandivale	7	Satara
Dankin	8	Savantvadi. Probably an occupational name of some wandering musicians
Pingle Joshi	9	Satara
Trimali	9	Satara
Bajania	120	Palanpur Agency (105), Reva Kantha (15)
Vadi	17	Reva Kantha
<b>Recognized Castes</b>		
Koli	435	Cutch (377), Reva Kantha (56), Surat (2)
Bhoi	7	Reva Kantha
Chambhar	13	Panch Mahals and Surat Agency
Gowli	11	Satara District and Agency
Raval	26	Reva Kantha and Panch Mahals
Me	638	Cutch
Menghwar	3,406	Thar and Parkar (2,183), and the rest in small numbers from other Sind Districts
Chamtha	2	Panch Mahals
Ravat	5	Panch Mahals
<b>Obscure Names</b>		
Valuda	13	Surat. Nothing known of this
Mayala	7	Cutch. Possibly a misspelling for Miana
Dongri	1	Thana, The word means simply the hills
Naga	2	Panch Mahals
Caste not returned	9	Kathiawar

the term Animist. Thus, Reva Kantha and the Panch Mahals between them return Animists under 19 different castes, Surat and Surat Agency 14, Satara 7, Cutch 4, Palanpur and Broach 3 each, and no other district more than 2. In the case of 19 names from the Panch Mahals and Reva Kantha, only 3 are common to each. Seven districts and a number of States returned no Animists at all.

Another point is the trivial number of persons classed as Animists out of certain castes. The occurrence of an Animist entry at all would often seem attributable to a single energetic enumerator of pronounced views. Table 9.3 gives the numbers of each caste as compared with the number of Animists returned. Where possible, the 1921 figures are given, and failing

Table 9.3 Comparison of the number of Animists returned in certain castes with the strength of that caste in the presidency

Caste	Number returned as Animists 1921	Strength of the caste	
		1921	1901
Bajania	120	10,085	...
Bhil	148,809	786,726	...
Bhoi	7	64,131	...
Chambhar	13	282,324	...
Chamtha	2	...	190
Charan	836	31,537	...
Chodhra	23,462	43,277	...
Dhodia	202	108,966	...
Dubla and Talavia	130	132,539	...
Gamit	4,251	12,599	...
Gavli	11	38,967	...
Katkari	2	80,830	...
Kokna	24	71,077	...
Koli	435	1,617,044	...
Me	638	31,842	...
Menghwar	3,406	...	3,526 <sup>a</sup>
Naikada	5,583	84,969	...
Nandivale	7	...	218
Phanse Paradhi	6	12,240 <sup>b</sup>	...
Pingle Joshi	9	...	23,671 <sup>c</sup>
Raval	266	51,707	...
Ravat	5	...	360
Trimali	9	...	2,126
Turi	6	...	3,195
Vaddar	10	98,940 <sup>d</sup>	...
Vadi	17	...	734
Vaghri	96	86,114	...
Vaidu	4	...	1,103
Varli	3	177,391	...
Vitolia and Kotvalia	528	...	502

a The 1911 figure. The approximation of the number of Animist Menghwar to the total strength of the caste is due to the fact that classification in this case was done in the Abstraction Office.

b Including Pardhi, Shikari, Haranshikari, Advichinchar, and Chigarigar.

c Under the name Gidbidki or Pungle. The number seems impossibly high and suggests that persons returning the occupational term Joshi instead of a true caste name were taken to this caste.

d Including Od.

that the 1901 figures. A few of the caste names in the previous table are not known, and are therefore not entered.

It may be argued that there are castes or tribes more primitive than the Bhils, and that, even though the latter are classed in future as Hindus, other castes should be kept under Animists. This argument is not without force.

It will be seem that after the Bhils the Chodras contribute most, to the Animist figures. An account of their religion will be found on p. 292 of the



“Tribes and Castes of the Bombay Presidency” by Mr. R.E. Enthoven C.I.E. From that passage, it seems that they worship Nature deities as well as the usual Boundary Gods and ancestors: It is stated that they do not worship the regular Hindu deities. This is at variance with the Bombay District Gazetteer, Vol. IX, Part I. Gujarat Population-Hindus, where it is stated that they worship Rama.

Of the Naikadas, who contribute largely to the Animist figures, the Draft Monograph of the Ethnographic Survey states that they follow the Hindu law of inheritance<sup>4</sup> and are Animists by religion. The two statements are somewhat contradictory. The District Gazetteer (loc. cit. p. 327) says, “except that they sometimes pour oil over Hanuman, and, though they are not allowed to enter her temple, worship the mother or *mala* on Pavghadh Hill, and at other local fairs their objects of worship are spirits and ghosts”.

Gamta or Gamit is not given in the “Tribes and Castes of Bombay”. The District Gazetteer (loc. cit. p. 319) simply says, “They worship Vagh Dev, Samla Dev and Devli Mata”.

No other castes contribute large numbers to the figures. The Kolis are certainly Hindus. The Meo are followers of a mixed Hindu-Musalman cult, like several other castes in West Gujarat (for which see later).

Of all the tribes the Katkaris<sup>5</sup> are probably the least Hinduized. Reports from Jesuit Missionaries who work among them near Khandala speak of a state of religious mentality exceedingly primitive. But it would not be justifiable to retain a main religion head for the Katkaris alone.

In short, I suggest that our returns of Animists are *absolutely worthless*. They represent nothing and are entirely a matter of chance. The vast decrease between 1891 and 1901 and the vast increase between 1901 and 1911 cannot be attributed to losses by and recovery from famine. Any such idea is completely disproved by the regional figures. The Bhils, who contribute most to the figures, are practically Hindus. I have therefore no hesitation in saying that Animism as a religion should be entirely abandoned and that all those hitherto classed as Animists should be grouped with Hindus at the next Census, Hinduism being defined as including the religious or semi-religious beliefs of those jungle tribes who have not definitely embraced Islam or Christianity. In saying this, I am of course to be taken as discussing the conditions of this Presidency only. There may be regions such as Chota Nagpur where the boundary between Hinduism and Animism is clear and definite.

### The Bhils – are they Hindus or Animists?

*(A contribution referred to in the paper of Mr. Sedgwick by the Rev. Enok Hedberg, D. Litt.)*

In trying to give a correct answer to this question, another question presents itself to my mind. And it is, what is a Hindu? If I were to give a definition of that term I would say – “Anyone who professes himself to be a Hindu and conforms to the, main points in Hinduism is a Hindu”. If this definition is

a correct one, as I believe it is, how does it work when applied to the Bhils. Let us see.

All Bhils, even the most wild and backward, with the exception of a small number which has turned Muhammedans or Christians, declare themselves to be Hindus. And as such they are accepted by native Christians, Muslims, and Hindus alike. In a tract, where there are Christian or Muhammedan converts from among the Bhils, those who stick to their ancestral religion are everywhere and by everyone called Hindu-Bhils. This is the case, to give only one instance, even among the very wild Bhils of the Akrani. And to tell them that they are not Hindus would be an insult.

As to their conformity to the main points in Hinduism, it is sufficient to mention:

- 1 That they observe caste,
- 2 Celebrate the Hindu festivals, and
- 3 Worship Hindu gods and goddesses.

It is true that their caste feelings on the whole are not so strong as among the Hindus in general. But caste is there; and its spirit manifests itself strongly enough at certain occasions. The Mahars, Chamars, Mangs, Holars, and other low-caste Hindus are looked down upon by all respectable Bhils to whatever tribe or class they may belong. They would never take food from their hands or accept them by marriage into their caste. Even to touch them is defiling.<sup>6</sup>

The religious festivals or holy days kept by the Bhils are the same as those kept by the Hindus – Holi, Dasara, and Diwali. Even the petty Hindu festivals are more and more being observed by them.

The Hindu Pantheon of gods, goddesses, avatars, apotheosis, etc., has been taken over by the Bhils. They bring them their sacrifices and worship them. Admittedly they have their tribal or local deities too. But so have other Hindus all over India. A good deal of Animism and even Animatism is still practised among them. This is, however, more or less the case not only in the lower strata of Hinduism but to a great extent among Buddhists, Jews, and even Muslims, not to speak of such Christians as uneducated Copts and Russian farmers.

There may still in most cases be noted a difference between a common Bhil and an ordinary Hindu. But the difference is more of a racial or ethnological nature than a religious one and is rapidly disappearing.

Lastly, I have collected a good deal of Bhil-Folklore which I hope to be able to publish someday. It will, it is believed, throw light on this question and prove what has been contained in this note.

To conclude, the Bhils should in this respect be accorded the same rights as are given to other Indians and professors of other religions the whole world over-to be taken at their word in religious matters. They are as good Hindus as many other low class people of this country. When they profess themselves to be Hindus, they ought to be classified as such.

## Notes

- \* This chapter is reproduced as it was from *Indian Anthropology: Anthropological Discourse in Bombay, 1886–1936*, pp. 126–134, with permission from the publisher, Routledge 2022.
- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*. January 1922. XII (4): 389–402.
- 2 E. A. Gait, *Indian Census Report 1911*, p. 129.
- 3 *A Primer of Hinduism*, Oxford-1919.
- 4 No authority cited.
- 5 This is copied but misquoted by the Draft Monograph of the Ethnographic Survey. The passage may be corrected in the final work that volume not being yet received.
- 6 This, unfortunately, is no proof. Mahomedans also regard the untouchable Hindu Castes as defiling, and Hindus sometimes regard Foreign Christians as defiling, both instances being diametrically opposed to Mahomedan and Hindu religious tenets. L. J. S.

# 10 Totem theories

*R.E. Enthoven*

The literature on the subject of the origin and nature of totems grows apace. Tylor, Crawley, Lang, and McLennan, to mention only a few of the well-known writers who have dealt with this subject, have given us theories; Spencer and Gillen have compiled an immense mass of materials illustrating present-day practices in Australia; and lately we have had four volumes from the pen of Professor J.G. Frazer, dealing exhaustively with the whole subject. Professor Frazer has held several theories from time to time regarding the probable nature and origin of totem worship, all of which he has now discarded in favour of a new explanation, which is described and criticized by the writer of an article in a recent number of the *Quarterly Review*.<sup>1,2</sup>

In my Presidential Address for 1909, I referred<sup>3</sup> to an interesting belief discovered by a German Missionary, Herr Strehlow, among the women of the Arunta tribe in Australia that the totem, as a spirit power, is the real father of the spirit that is born of the body. Further enquiries by Messrs. Spencer and Gillen appear to have borne out the correctness of this observation, Professor Frazer bases his latest theory on this fact; according to him, primitive men and women have no conception of the connection between sexual union and pregnancy. When the woman becomes conscious of her condition, she assumes the entry of the totem spirit residing in the locality where she first becomes consciously pregnant. The child, when born, is therefore, held to be of the totem concerned. At this stage, the totem of the offspring would not, except by mere coincidence, be the same as that of either parent; and the children of the same mother would have different totems.

I propose to discuss briefly how far our knowledge of totems in the Bombay Presidency will tend to show that Professor Frazer's theory is also of local application. I have described, in my article previously referred to, the totem divisions of certain tribes and castes in North Kanara. My notes have been recently amplified by the results of Mr. J. A. Saldanha's research.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the stage of belief attained by these tribes and castes is considerably in advance of that which forms the basis of Professor Frazer's conclusions. In Kanara, the children take their totem either from their mother or their father or from either. There is not much in this practice to suggest that the offspring was originally attributed to the totem, though it is of course quite conceivable

that such a belief developed into a knowledge of the reality of motherhood and later to the recognition of paternity. Sir James Campbell, who in his notes on the Spirit Basis of Belief and Custom classes the Mārathā *devaks* with the *balis* of Kanara, considered that these were both guardian spirits, commonly regarded as the ancestor or head of the house. The inclusion of such articles as gold, lime, and the common axe, among totems, seems to make the ancestor theory somewhat improbable, though not impossible. It must, however, be admitted in its favour that it closely follows the conclusions of Herbert Spencer in his Principles of Sociology. A distinction must be drawn between the description of a *devaks* as an ancestor, meaning, as Campbell certainly meant, the disembodied spirit of a member of the family, and the most recent explanation of a totem as a spirit which becomes incarnate as the offspring of a pregnant woman. The process connecting human lives with totems seems strangely enough to have become inverted in the two cases. The Campbell-Spencer explanation starts with human being who on death becomes a disembodied spirit and a “guardian”, in spirit form, of the descendants whom he, or maybe she, leaves behind. On the other hand, Professor Frazer’s totem is in the first instance a disembodied spirit, or at least a spirit animating some animal, plant, etc., and subsequently, by passing into the woman at pregnancy, becomes the cause of a new life, that is, the totem of the infant. If we are careful in dealing with the processes of primitive thought, we should be prepared to admit that both ideas might well be held simultaneously.

In primitive man, we should not look for either consistency or any orderly progress from cause to effect. Inconsistent and illogical notions should in reality be the hallmark of primitive beliefs. It is at the same time a striking fact that a totem has been explained by one school of students to be a disembodied ancestor or spirit guardian, and by another and later body of investigators to be the cause of life in the embryo. Turning once more to the results of our local investigations into totems, in the shape of *balis* and *devaks*, it is noteworthy that the object which constitutes the *bali* or *devak*, be it a tree, plant, animal, or other object, has a special significance, apart from its connection with marriage as illustrated by the prohibition of unions between those owning a common *devak*. I have referred in my Presidential address of 1909<sup>5</sup> to the fact that the totem is worshipped at the time of a wedding celebration and on entering a new dwelling house for the first time. The evidence on this point is convincing. It seems reasonable to infer from this practice that our Bombay tribes and castes look on the totem primarily as a guardian spirit, as suggested by Campbell. Further, since totems regulate marriage, there is much reason for holding them to stand in the relation of ancestors to their respective worshippers. Certainly, where totem worship is found in full vigour in Bombay, it is invariably connected with a system of exogamy based thereon. In its decay, as I have endeavoured to show, the connection with marriage becomes less marked, and the five-membered “group-totem” supersedes the individual totem, to be itself replaced in due course by a human ancestor as the regulator of marriage unions.

There are two points connected with totems in this Presidency that would probably richly repay further investigation. In certain parts of North Kanara, the white ant heap or cathedral-shaped earthen structure is worshipped by the village people, who have erected temples over these ant heaps, and make them regular offerings. The temples and mode of worship resemble those found in connection with well-known *balis*, such as that of the elk or *kadve* near Karwar. It would be of great interest if careful enquiries disclosed evidence that the white ant heap is a common *bali* in North Kanara, as seems probable from the information already forthcoming.

Again, it has been reported from South Kanara that members of different local tribes and castes who worship the same *bali* consider that a close connection exists between them. This is *primâ facie* an entirely new feature of the *bali* or totem system, and its full significance cannot be gauged without further detailed investigation.

I would sum up these remarks in the statement that research into the totem systems of the Bombay Presidency has hitherto revealed no indication that totems are due to ignorance of the part played by sexual union in childbearing. On the contrary, the totem seems to partake more of the nature of an ancestor or guardian spirit, as supposed by Campbell, than to be the source of life in the human embryo. Much scope for enquiry and research undoubtedly remains; and it would be imprudent to hold any theory disproved on the results of our investigations up to the present. But clearly there is so far no confirmation forthcoming, in the field open to local investigations, of the theory which Professor Frazer would now adopt as an explanation of the origin of totems and totem worship.

## Notes

\* This chapter is reproduced as it was from *Indian Anthropology: Anthropological Discourse in Bombay, 1886–1936*, pp. 123–125, with permission from the publisher, Routledge 2022.

1 Reprinted from *JASB*, SJ, August 1911: 63–66.

2 Primitive Man by Cloud. *Quarterly Review*, July 1911.

3 *Journal of the Anthropol. Society of Bombay* Vol. viii, No.6, p. 440.

4 *Journal of the Anthropol. Society of Bombay* Vol. viii, No.5, p. 382.

5 *Journal of the Anthropol. Society of Bombay* Vol. viii, Part 6, p. 442.



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## Part II





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# 11 Tree worship in Mohenjo Daro

*H. Heras*

In his chapter on the religion of Mohenjo Daro, Sir John Marshall has a few paragraphs on tree worship as far as it could be ascertained from the study of the figures on terracotta amulets and steatite seals found during the excavations. Unfortunately, Sir John could not substantiate his statements with any text, for with the deciphering of all those inscriptions we shall be able to define this cult as practised in Mohenjo Daro with much more certainty than the late Director-General of Archæology was able to do.<sup>1</sup>

That tree worship should have existed at Mohenjo Daro is not at all strange. It is well known how this cult is much propagated among the South Indian people, who are the genuine representatives of the pre-Āryan inhabitants of India.

This cult is a very ancient sort of worship very often mentioned in the Mohenjo Daro inscriptions. The trees thus venerated were called holy.<sup>2</sup> There was at least one sacred tree in every city or village.<sup>3</sup> One of the inscriptions of Mohenjo Daro speaks of the holy tree of the cave.<sup>4</sup> This cave may be the cave inhabited by some learned Mīnas,<sup>5</sup> who probably were ascetics devoted to a life of study and contemplation. Some of these trees belonged to private persons. One is said to be the property of three persons of the village.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is evident that there were some trees famous throughout the country. Three of them are mentioned as belonging to three political unions of two countries. One is called “the holy tree of the canalized united countries of the Mīnas”.<sup>7</sup> (The country of the Mīnas was united with the country of the Bilavas.)<sup>8</sup> The other tree is said to belong to the canalized united countries of the Kalakilas.<sup>9</sup> (The other country united with the Kalakilas was the country of the Kāvāls.)<sup>10</sup> The third tree is said to belong to the union, called *Pagalkalakūr*<sup>11</sup> which we have not been able to identify up to now.

In some cases, some holy trees seem to have had properties the revenue of which was used for the maintenance of the cult, just as temples and images had, also. Thus, an inscription mentions “five houses of the tree of the village of the prosperous Minas”.<sup>12</sup>

What kinds of trees were thus considered to be sacred? Sir John Marshall rightly maintains that one of the trees mostly venerated by the Mohenjo

Darians was the Pipal tree (*Ficus Religiosa*).<sup>13</sup> In one of the seals, the leaf of the pipal tree is clearly depicted.<sup>14</sup> In another from Chanhu Daro, the leaves are not so skilfully treated but may still be recognized as pipal leaves.<sup>15</sup> The inscriptions confirm the surmise of Sir John. One of them among all other trees refers to the pipal tree of the garden.<sup>16</sup> Another refers to the pipal tree that is in the *nāivel*.<sup>17</sup> The *nāivel* is a plant now called *Flacourtia Sapida*, but in those days it had to be a creeper; otherwise, it could not be said that the pipal tree was in it. This epigraph shows that the pipal tree was actually surrounded by the creeper, so that the tree was as it were in the centre of the *nāivel*. A third inscription refers to the noise produced by the leaves of two pipal trees.<sup>18</sup> Evidently, there was some popular belief about this noise.

Another inscription mentions an acacia as if it were a sacred tree. The inscription is very short, and it reads as follows: *patir or vel*,<sup>19</sup> “one acacia of the citizens”. This way of mentioning the trees seems to be always used in connection with those which are considered sacred.

No doubt there were other trees also worshipped by these early people. Actually, a few trees or shrubs are mentioned in the inscriptions, like the white *siris*, *velvel*,<sup>20</sup> and the acacias several times, but in most of the cases one cannot be sure whether such trees were venerated. Only once an acacia is mentioned which seems actually to have been worshipped.<sup>21</sup>

Judges were often passing their judgement when setting litigations under a tree. In one inscription, it is said that a tree will not become the judge tree;<sup>22</sup> another tree is called “the judgement tree which is in the country”.<sup>23</sup> A third epigraph refers to another tree of this kind in the following way.

*Uril ire taḷir Mīnan mīn nandil ulavant tīr maram*<sup>24</sup> which translated into English means:

“The judging tree of the shining farmer of the Crab  
of the prosperous Mīnas who is in the country”.

This tree is said to be “the judging tree of the Farmer of the Crab”. Now since the Farmer of the Crab was the title of the King of Nandūr (Mohenjo Daro),<sup>25</sup> this tree seems to be the tree under which the king of the Minas of Nandūr used to pass his judgement in cases brought to his notice. It is not clear whether mere judging trees were considered sacred also.

Very often the tree cult was accidentally or essentially connected with other objects of worship. In one case, a *linga* apparently was being worshipped



Figure 11.1 This inscription reads from right to left

under a pipal tree.<sup>26</sup> To connect the cult of trees with the cult of the sun seems to be more frequent. Once several trees are said to be in the high sun,<sup>27</sup> which cryptic expression must be, according to the Mohenjo Daro system, understood in the opposite way, namely, that the high sun is in the trees, or above the trees. Another epigraph only mentions “the tree of one sun”.<sup>28</sup> (This is an evident allusion to the sect of the two suns, which is one of the greatest puzzles in the subject of the Mohenjo Daro religion.) There was undoubtedly a natural relation between the sun and the trees, perhaps due to the fact that in spring when the rays of the sun grow warmer the trees are covered with new and luxuriant foliage. In any case, as the second inscription mentioned earlier seems to suggest one of the times when feasts in honour of trees were celebrated was when the sun was passing above the holy trees.

The connection between the holy trees and the Fish (one of the zodiacal constellations and accordingly one of the forms of God) is still more evident. “The tree of the Fish”, says one of the inscriptions<sup>29</sup>; and another: “The holy tree of the dark beginning of the Fish”.<sup>30</sup> (This last expression means that the sun in that year entered the Fish at the beginning of the waxing moon.) The Fish in Mohenjo Daro is an emblem of fertility.<sup>31</sup> Hence, it was supposed to be the cause of the luxuriant growth of the tree.

What were the different rites in vogue for worshipping the trees? According to the inscriptions, to see the tree was supposed to be an act of worship and<sup>32</sup> meditating on the tree, probably under the tree itself (as Buddha did before his enlightenment) was also common. Thus, an inscription says that “the Minas meditate on the three holy trees”.<sup>33</sup> What was the subject of such meditation? One inscription mentions one of these subjects, but evidently this was not the only one. The inscription in question is as follows:

*Ilil ūrveḷi pēr mūn eṇ mūn arior paṭi maram adu*<sup>34</sup>

In English:

That (is) the tree of the village of the three noblemen [under which tree] the Great Fish who is in the house outside (beyond) the country was being meditated upon.

After the study of these inscriptions, one may easily realize that the spirit of the tree is not the object worshipped when worshipping the tree. Spirits



Figure 11.2 Which reads

are mentioned in the Mohenjo Daro inscriptions,<sup>35</sup> but they are never mentioned in connection with the trees. This idea seems to have originated at a later period. At the time of the period under study, trees apparently were being worshipped, as an effect of the fertility of God, produced through the sun and symbolized by the Fish.

Thus, the explanation of the seal reproduced in Vol. I, Pl. XII, No. 16, by Sir John Marshall,<sup>36</sup> should be revised. The deity whose epiphany is represented upon the tree is not the spirit of the tree, and much less a female spirit. It is the same Aṅ, the Supreme Being, seen on seal No. 17 of the same Plate surrounded by the totems of the Mohenjo Daro tribes – representation which has been called the Pasupati. This identification may be proved: first, by the trident placed over the head of these two figures (Sir John Marshall thinks that they are horns). It is the *vēl*, the trident, the most common symbol of Aṅ mentioned in the inscriptions. This trident from the four points of the compass, as may be clearly seen in a standing copper statue discovered at Khafage in Sumer in 1930–31<sup>37</sup>; second, the long lock of hair represented hanging behind the head of the deity appearing on the tree is also represented once in the case of the pictograph of the Supreme Being in the inscriptions. This lock of hair is also shown behind the head of the Supreme Being – here certainly shown as a man – in the *yoga* pose similar to that of the previous seal, which appears in a fragmentary seal discovered at Mohenjo Daro after the publication of Sir John Marshall's work.<sup>38</sup> Later, this detail of the hair is suppressed from the pictograph. Again the copper statue of Khafage has two long locks of hair hanging on each side of the head. Long hair in any way seems to have a natural connection with the Supreme Being, perhaps as a sign of physical power and strength.<sup>39</sup>

There is another inscription which establishes another rite in connection with the cult of the tree. It is thus as follows.

*Mīn ēl s̄a kaḍavuḷ kaṅ īr maram*<sup>40</sup>

The English translation runs as follows:

The two trees [under which] the seven shining persons saw the god of death.



Figure 11.3 The inscription reads

Another inscription simply states: “the tree of the death of the three counted Mīnas who were in the country”.<sup>41</sup> While another one says: “two trees seen by the seven dead men of the Fish”.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, I have established the fact that in Mohenjo Daro there were human sacrifices,<sup>43</sup> a rite that has continued among the Dravidian people of India till very late in the historic period. Apparently, a number of these sacrifices, if not all, took place under one or more sacred trees. These sacrifices were not made to the tree but to God, though they selected the shade of the trees as a spot already consecrated by awe and religion. The expression that those seven persons saw the God of death under the two trees, evidently is equivalent to dying under the two trees.

What was the origin of this cult? In the course of this chapter, we have seen that the idea of the spirit inhabiting the tree did not exist at that early period. It is a later superstition. But how was this tree worship born among the proto-Dravidian people? An inscription refers to “the tree of the god of the Kalakilas”.<sup>44</sup> This expression is very significant for strange religious ideas and cults sprang up from among the Kāvāls and their friends the Kalakilas. The cult of the *linga* was theirs before it was introduced among the Mīnas.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, there was among them a sect worshipping two suns,<sup>46</sup> and another venerating three suns.<sup>47</sup> On account of all these innovations and owing to the repugnance shown by the Mīnas to the phallic cult, I suggested that these tribes apparently belonged to the Kolarian stock.<sup>48</sup> There is no mention of any opposition made against the cult of the trees, but the fact that one of these trees is said to be “of the god of the Kalakilas” seems to point to the same origin. In point of fact the purity, of the religion of the Mohenjo Daro people and specially the knowledge of the self-subsistence of God which they possessed,<sup>49</sup> evidently suggests that the worship of creatures was an excrescence most likely introduced from outside.

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*, GJ, October 1932: 31–39.
- 2 Marshall, M.D., No. 423; Pl. CXIII, Nos. 418 and 420.
- 3 *Ibid.*, H., No. 16 and *passim*.
- 4 *Ibid.*, M.D., No. 423.
- 5 *Ibid.*, M.D., No. 21.
- 6 *Ibid.*, Pl. CXVI, No. 9.
- 7 *Ibid.*, Pl. CXVII, No.9; *Ibid.*, M.D., Nos., 409 and 403.
- 8 Cf. Heras, Mohenjo Daro, the People and the Land, Indian Culture III, p. 710.
- 9 Photo, M.D., 1929–30, Dk, 3696. This and similar footnotes refer to photos of inscriptions not yet published kindly supplied by the Archæological Survey of India.
- 10 Cf. Heras, *op. cit.*, p. 713.
- 11 Photo, M.D., 1929–30, Dk, 3850.
- 12 Marshall, M.D., Pl. CXVI, No. 15.
- 13 *Ibid.*, I, p. 64.

- 14 *Ibid.*, M.D., No. 387.
- 15 Mazumdar, *Explorations in Sind*, Pl. XVII, No. 34.
- 16 Marshall, M.D., No. 133.
- 17 *Ibid.*, M.D., No. 150.
- 18 Mazumdar, *op. cit.*, Pl. XVII, No. Cf. Heras, *Two Proto-Indian Inscriptions From Chānhu Daro*, *J.B.O.R.S.*, XXII, pp. 316–319.
- 19 Marshall, M.D., Pl. CXVI, No. 15.
- 20 *Ibid.*, H., No. 99.
- 21 Photo, M.D., 1929–30, No. 6229.
- 22 Marshall, *op. cit.*, Pl. CXIII, No. 448.
- 23 *Ibid.*, No. 541.
- 24 *Ibid.*, H., No. 38.
- 25 Cf. Heras, The Religion of Mohenjo Daro People according to the Inscriptions, *Journal of the University of Bombay*, V, p. 25.
- 26 Photo, M.D., 1928–9, No. 6753.
- 27 *Ibid.*, No. 6091.
- 28 Marshall, M.D., No. 55.
- 29 Photo, M.D., 1930–1, No. 12551.
- 30 Photos, M.D., 1929–30, Dk, 792.
- 31 Cf. Heras, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- 32 Marshall, M.D., Nos. 410, 428.
- 33 *Ibid.*, M.D., No. 425.
- 34 *Ibid.*, No. 429.
- 35 Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 312.
- 36 Marshall, *op. cit.*, I, Pl. XII, No. 18.
- 37 Fronkfort, *Tell Asmar and Khafage*, 1930–31, figs. 32 and 33 (Chicago, 1232).
- 38 Photo, M. D., 1930–31, No. 7997.
- 39 Cf. *Book of Judges*, XVI 17.
- 40 Marshall, M.D., No. 494.
- 41 *Ibid.*, H., No. 494.
- 42 Photo, M.D., 1929–30, Dk, 3697.
- 43 Cf. Heras, The Religion of the Mohenjo Daro People, *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23.
- 44 Photo, M.D., 1929–30, Dk, 3696.
- 45 Cf. Heras, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- 46 A.S. of I. Report, 1929–30, Pl. XXVIII, (e).
- 47 Cf. Heras, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- 48 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 49 Cf. Heras, The Religion of the Mohenjo Daro People, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

# 12 Exorcism of spirit in India and exorcism of physical impurity in Persia

A parallel with respect  
to the various parts of the body  
treated in the exorcism

*Jivanji Jamshedji Modi*

## I

This brief chapter is suggested by an interesting paper titled “Exorcism in Chota Nagpur” by Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy in the March 1923 number of the Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society. Our author says: “Nothing gives a clear view of the conception of a spirit formed by the man of lower culture than, the various processes followed and spells or *mantrams* used by him in exorcising spells in cases of supposed spirit-possession”. He then describes the method of exorcism followed and the mantrams used by the Chota Nagpur spirit doctor known as a *deonra*, *sokha*, or *mali*. In his description, Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy gives a few specimens of songs of invocation to local and other deities recited during the course of exorcism, which songs seem to serve the purpose of a *mantra*. In one of the songs of the mantra, various parts of the body from head downwards up to the toe of the foot are mentioned in succession, in the order of which the spirit, possessed by the patient, passes from the head down to the ground. The object of this brief chapter is to describe, on the authority of the Avesta, a part of the process of removing or exorcising the Daruj-i-Nasush, that is, the Demon of Impurity from a person infected by coming into contact with a dead body, wherein the various parts of the body are similarly spoken of, as those down which the Nasu passes from the head downward.<sup>1</sup>

## II

Among the successive processes of exorcism referred to by Rai Bahadur Sarat Chandra Roy, it is the sixth process with which we have to deal to draw our parallel. It is spoken of as “Rasni Utârnâ”. In this Hindi phrase, the word *rasni* is said to mean “exhilaration”. It seems to correspond, to a certain extent, to Sanskrit रसः (*rasa*) meaning, “emotion, sentiment”, to Gujarati *rac*, (રસ), meaning “a passion or sentiment, an affection or emotion



of the mind”.<sup>2</sup> The word *utârnâ* is Gujarati *utârvûn* (ઉત્તરવું) to bring down. The Gujarati word ઉત્તર (*utâr*) means “exorcism”. It is generally used for “a medicine that counter-works another, a charm to overcome”.<sup>3</sup>

Our author gives a song which is sung in chorus by the spirit doctor and his disciples to force the spirit of the body of the patient, generally a woman, and thus sums up its contents:

Thus is the spirit conducted from the hair of the patient to the head, from the head to the forehead, from the forehead to the eyes, from the eyes to the nose, from the nose to the mouth, from the mouth to the teeth, from the teeth to the tongue, from the tongue to the lips, from the lips to the neck, from the neck to the shoulders, from the shoulders to the chest, from the chest to the waist, from the waist to the thigh, from the thigh to the leg, from the leg to the ankles, from the ankles to the heels, from the heels to the soles of the feet, from the soles to the toes, and finally from the toes through the toe-nails into the earth.

Similarly, as if to make sure that no portion of the spirit substance may be left behind in any part of the body, the same process is repeated in another direction, namely, from the head and face to the neck and shoulders, from the shoulders to the armpits, from the armpits along the elbows and wrist down to the palms of the hand and thence out through the nails into the earth below. Thus is the spirit sent down into the earth underneath which is its proper habitation.

### *The Indian order of exorcism for various parts of the body*

The order described earlier in which the spirit doctor Chota Nagpur conducts the spirit that had entered into the body of the patient, from one part of the body to another, runs as follows:

- 1 Hair of the head (*kesha*).
- 2 Head (*munḍa*).
- 3 Forehead (*kapâl*).
- 4 Eyes (*ankhi*).
- 5 Nose (*nâka*).
- 6 Mouth (*muha*).
- 7 Teeth (*danta*).
- 8 Tongue (*jihâ*).
- 9 Lips (*lâtoa*).
- 10 Neck (*ghetu*).
- 11 Shoulders (*gheehâ*).
- 12 Chest (*chhâti*).
- 13 Waist (*dândâ*).
- 14 Thigh (*jangâ*).

- 15 Leg (*theonâ*).
- 16 Ankles (*ghâtu*).
- 17 Heels (*neri*).
- 18 Souls of the feet (*târoâ* Guj.𑀓𑀕𑀲𑀺).
- 19 Toes (*angri*).
- 20 Toe-nails (*nao*), and thence down into the earth (*dharti*).
- 21 Armpits.<sup>4</sup>
- 22 Elbows.
- 23 Wrist.
- 24 Palms of the hand.
- 25 Nails, and thence to the earth below.

### III

#### *The Iranian process*

Now, we come to the Old Iranian process of the exorcism or removal of the Druj-i-Nasush from a person. The Druj-i-Nasush of the Avesta of the Iranians is

the evil influence of Decomposition or Destruction (of a dead body). It is considered that to touch the (dead) body then is dangerous for the living, lest they should catch contagion and spread disease. . . . If somebody . . . touches the (dead) body, he has to go through a process of purification or a sacred bath taken under the direction of a priest.<sup>5</sup>

Now, if the flesh of the body of the dead person has been eaten off by a flesh-devouring bird or animal, then there is less chance of any infection from the flesh-less corpse. So, the purification requires no special treatment. It is simple. The person may purify his body with cow's urine and water (*gêushmaêsmanaapâcha*). But, if the flesh of the body is not eaten off by birds or animals, then it would decompose and likely to spread some disease. So, the person coming into contact with such a dead body has run the risk of contamination and of being in a position to spread that contamination among others. So, he has to pass through a higher kind of purification, a purification with some necessary religious ritual. The purifier is spoken of as *yaozdâthrya*. He is to ask the patient to sit in a less-frequented place and give him a bath there. He is to pour water for purification on the head of the patient or contaminated person, and the water is represented as passing down from the head in a particular way purifying his body in the process. The order of process is as follows: Vendidad, VIII, 41–72.

Then, we read that in the end, when washed away with water from its last resort, the sole of the feet, the impurity runs away to the northern regions (*apâkhedhaêibyonaêmaêibyô*), the North being the seat of all impurities and evil things. We see that most of the parts of the body in both the

Table 12.1 Vendidad, VIII, 41–72

1 <i>Vaghdhana</i>	Head
2 Antarâtnamât bravatbyam <sup>6</sup>	The portion between the two eyebrows, that is, the forehead
3 Pascha hêvaghghanem	Behind the forehead
4 Paitish-kharêna	Cheeks or the face
5 Dashinemgaosha	Right ear
6 Hôimgaosha	Left ear
7 Dashinem suptîm <sup>7</sup>	Right shoulder
8 Hôyâmsuptîm	Left shoulder
9 Dashinem kashem <sup>8</sup>	Right armpit
10 Hôimkashem	Left armpit
11 Paiti-varem <sup>9</sup>	Upper breast or chest
12 Parshti <sup>10</sup>	Back
13 Dashina-fshtâna	Right breast or nipple
14 Hôim-fshtâna <sup>11</sup>	Left breast
15 Dashinempesâum	Right rib
16 Hôim pesesâum <sup>12</sup>	Left rib
17 Dashina sraonîm <sup>13</sup>	Right buttock
18 Hôyâmsraonîm	Left buttock
19 Hakhti <sup>14</sup>	Abdomen
20 Dashinemrâna	Right thigh
21 Hôimrâna	Left thigh
22 Dashinem znûm <sup>15</sup>	Right knee
23 Hôimznûm	Left knee
24 Dashinemaschûm	Right calf of the leg
25 Hôimaschûm	Left calf of the leg
26 Dashinem zangem <sup>16</sup>	Right ankle
27 Hôimzangem	Left ankle
28 Dashinem frabdem <sup>17</sup>	Right instep
29 Hôimfrabdem	Left instep
30 Dashinemhakhem	(Below) the sole of the right foot [The Nasush or the impurity of the dead matter is represented as hiding (nivôiryêiti) itself in the form of the wing of a fly (makhshyâoparênem) under the sole of the feet]
31 Hôimhakhem	The sole of the left foot
32 Dashinaangushta	Toe of the right foot
33 Hôyâangushta	Toe of the left foot

previous lists are common. The Vendidad purifier, the *yaozdathrya*, leaves aside the arms and makes the physical impurity pass, as it were, in one line down below. But the Indian spirit doctor attends to these side portions also. Again, in the Vendidad the right and the left parts of the body are mostly treated separately. The Vendidad lets the impurity pass to the North which was according to the Iranians the seat of all evils. The Chota Nagpur is let the spirit pass in the end to the Earth “which is its (spirit’s) proper habitation”. Just as after the *rasni*, the Indian patient comes to “her normal state of *mind*”, after the purification of the Bareshnûm – so called from the fact

of the purification beginning from the head (*bareshnu*) – the Iranian patient comes to his normal state of health. In India, the process was accompanied by the singing of a song. In ancient Persia, the process was followed by the recital of the *mâthra* (S. mantra) of Yathâ&c (Vend. VIII, 72).

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*, XIII (5) 1926: 403–409.
- 2 Mr. Shapurji Edalji's Gujarati and English Dictionary (1863).
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 As Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy has not given the text of the song referring to arms &c., I am not in a position to give the Hindi equivalents.
- 5 *Vide* my "Religious Ceremonies and Customs of the Parsees". p. 45 *Vide* *Ibid.* pp. 56, 65, 104, etc. for the *Druj-i-Nasush*.
- 6 *Bravat*, Sans. *bhru*, Pers. *abru*, Eng. *Brow*, Lat, *frons*, Fr. *Front*.
- 7 *Supti*, Sans. *shupti*, Pers. *suft*, Eng. *Shoulder*.
- 8 *Kash*, Sans. कष, Pers. کاش, Guj. કાશ
- 9 *Vara*, Sans. उरस, Per. بر
- 10 *Parшти*, Sans. पृष्ट, Pers. پشت, Guj. પીઠ
- 11 *Fshtana*, Sans. स्तन, Guj. શીત, Pers. پستان.
- 12 *Peresu*, Sans. पृश्, Pers. پړه
- 13 *Sraoni*, Sans. श्राणि, Pers. سراین, Lat. *Clunis*.
- 14 *Hakhti*, Sans. सक्थि. Darmesteter translates this word as "sexual parts". From the fact that a different kind of washing, for men and women, is enjoined, this meaning seems to have been meant.
- 15 *Znu*, Sans. जानु, Pers. زانو, Lat. *Genu*; Fr. *genou*. Ger. *knie*, English *knee*.
- 16 *Zanga*, Sans. जङ्घा *ankle-bone*, bone of the leg.
- 17 *Frabda* (*fra-pâdha*), Sans. प्रपद, the instep of the foot.  
[Editors: This paper was read before the Anthropological Section of the Indian Science Congress held at Bangalore in, January 1924].

# 13 Ethnographical notes on the Muhammadan castes of Bengal

*Maulavi Abdul Wali*

As I have been at Ranchi for a very short period, my experience of the Muhammadans of Chota Nagpur is limited. I cannot; therefore, be expected to offer any special remarks as regards the Musalmans of the place. Nor, if any systematic investigation be made, will it be of any practical use for the simple reason that the Muhammadans of this District are not the original inhabitants of it, but have come and are still coming from Bihar Districts and other places. So the information that will be obtained from the Muhammadans of Ranchi will be generally inaccurate and incomplete. If anything approaching finality be the aim of these investigations, they should be carried on in their original homes.<sup>1,2</sup>

The time within which I have been required to submit this information is limited; and leisure from official duties at my disposal during the present season is so little, that I beg to note down a few observations regarding the so-called castes of the Muhammadans of Bengal. My notes will be very incomplete for want of books of reference and on account of my being away from learned societies.

I think, in order to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion regarding the various castes that constitute the Muhammadan society, the following facts should be carefully investigated:

- 1 The Arab society at the time of our Prophet Muhammad and after his death.
- 2 The Arab colonies that were established in the countries of Ajam (Irān and Turān) and the condition of Kufr, <sup>كفر</sup> that the lawyers imposed upon the society composed of the conquerors and the conquered.
- 3 The religious and political differences that divided the Muslims and the schisms that sprang up in process of time, helping and sometimes abetting in the formation of new sects and castes, contrary to the spirit of Islam.
- 4 The condition of the society of the people among whom the Musalmans established their sovereignty first Iraq and Asia Minor, next in Iran and later on in Hindustan.

I regret that for want of leisure and materials; I am at present unable to say anything on the above heads. I may, however, mention that the Arabs, in the Days of Ignorance, were divided into several clans. Of these the Quraish were the most influential and liable. The Kâbâ (or the Temple of Mecca) was in the custody of the several branches of the Quraish. To them and to other Arabs, there was no such thing as "Shaikh" or "Saiyid". Then, as now, one Arab would address another one thus: Mahazaya *Saiyidi*, what is this a *Saiyid* (sir, or master); *Qulyāaiyohash-Saikhmatahaza*, say, yon Shaikh (leader or sir), what is this? The words Saikh and Saiyid were used indifferently in the same sense, and applied to eminent and learned men leaders of the society, and to old men, irrespective of any family distinction.

When the Arabs conquered Persia the non-Arab element, too, used the Arab title of Shaikh and Saiyid. Mir is another word generally (if not always) used for Saiyid, the Saiyids of Oman, the Amir of Bokhara, and the Nizam of Hyderabad (Deccan) are called Saiyid and Mir. The first is an Arab, who is not descended from the Prophet, or a Quraish; the second is a Turk, and the third is a descendant of the first Khalif, Abu Bakr-as-Siddiq. So these titles are not universally used in the same sense, and they should never be made the test or criterion of any scientific ethnographical enquiry.

It is, I believe, in Persia generally, and in India more particularly, that the descendants of the family of the prophet (Al-i-Rasul) are called "Saiyid" or "Mir", and those of the other Arab chiefs – the Mahajarin and Ansar – as well as the descendants of other Arabs are called "Shaikh". It will thus be seen that originally the distinction between the titles – Shaikh, Saiyid, or Mir – was very slight, as the difference among the descendants of the Prophet and his fellow-tribesmen was still so. The Quraishites were always the leaders of the Arab nation, and as such entitled to be addressed as Saiyid or Shaikh by the people. Of the Quraish, the family of the Prophet, in whose custody was the *Temple of Mecca*, was supposed to be the noblest.

Again a Quraish for the purpose of marriage is *kufv* of another Quraish. One Arab tribe is similarly *kufv* (or equal) for another Arab tribe. In Arab, among those who were descended from non-Arab parents, the family profession or trade and local custom were followed. A family who had accepted Islam for two generations was *kufv* for one who had similarly accepted Islam for the same length of time. A weaver should marry a weaver's daughter, and a Hajjâm (barber) a Hajjâm's daughter. In the case of non-Arabs, the law of endogamy was tacitly recognized.

This law was, I think, for those who had no very fixed custom to govern them. Among such people as Mughuls and Pathans, the tribal law of marriage prevalent among them is not antagonistic to the tenets of Islam, was observed. But this law of *kufv*, enacted on social and political rather than on religious considerations, and was very frequently disturbed. The polygamus and *muta* sexual intercourse, especially among certain sections of Muslims, gave rise to new social distinctions and new customs. The Fatemite, Khalifs of Egypt, it

is supposed, were not Saiyids (Al-i-Rasul) at all, but they claimed to be such. The death and martyrdom of Imams-Hasan and Husain (which, in the opinion of the learned, was but a repetition of the old tribal feud between two rival factions of the Quraish, Bani Hashim, and BaniUmaiya) – and the fight for the Khilafat and the imaginary claims of rival claimants divided Islam into more than one rival camp. The adherents of Ahl-i-bait were against other Muslims. The difference was at first between the adherents of Bani Hashim and Bani Urnaiya. But when the Abbasides became the leaders of the Faithful, the Alites became their rivals. This one question of Khilafat, not only gave rise to rival claims, false traditions, and incorrect interpretation to the Quranic passages but also it aided in giving birth to false Sadat. It was on account of these rivalries that the old Arab social law could not be observed and enforced, especially in Mesopotamia, Persia, and Trans-Oxania.

When India was subdued, and one after another of the Turanian dynasties ruled in various parts of it, they were followed by the Muhammadans of Arabia, Persia, Turkestan and Afghanistan. To the Indians they were Saiyid, Shaikhs, Mughuls and Pathans, but very often they were not what they professed to be. The adherents of Ali were generally called the Saiyids. Hence, the terms *Saiyid-i-Sallihun-Nasab*, the Saiyid whose pedigree was proved, or Shaikh-i-Quraishi (i.e. Siddiqi, Faruqi, Khalidi) were used.

There are many Mirs and Saiyids who can hardly be so. Again, every Muhammadan under the influence of certain reformers is now using Muslim titles instead of pure Indian ones, for example Mandal and Biswas. Away from his original home he feels it his privilege to call himself a Shaikh. I have seen Kalals, Jolahas, and even Mehtars calling themselves “Shaikh”. As no Brahman concerns himself about the controversies between Baidyas and Kayosthas, so no Ashraf Muhammadan of India cares what the majority of Muslims are called. To them they are only wine vendors or weavers, with all their pretensions. Some of the writers go so far as to say that they are not truly Musalmans but for political and other reasons it is well that they should be called Muslims. An Arab traveller, on his return from Europe, wrote a book in which he called the Prince Minister of England “their Shaikh”. The leader of the Arab robbers is termed “Shaikh-ul-Harami”. The leader of Liverpool Musalmans is called “Shaikh Abdullah Quilliam”.

So if any accurate figures are to be compiled, then enquiry should be made on the spot and when the census is being taken and definite instructions should be issued. What was done during the last census? I was present, and every Musalman according to the instruction of the Hindu Sub-inspector of Police, who was in charge of the circle, was returned as “Shaikh”, no matter whether he was an Ashraf or Atraf, an Arab Shaikh or an Indian convert. At Jheneda (Jessore) under the instruction of a Hindu pleader, the Jolahas (weavers) were returned as “Shaikhs”. At Salkopa, certain Hajjâms were entered as Shaikhs, but the mistake was corrected on my pointing it out. Several Muhammadans wanted to be returned as *Ashrafs* and *Atrafs*. But, no, this was not to be. If one was not a Jolaha or a Kulu or a member of an

endogamous caste, he was ordered to be returned either as Shaikh or Saiyid, This was, indeed, a very defective procedure that was adopted, since these figures are now being used as the basis of the ethnographical researches. As there are so very few Muhammadans in Bengal who have any right to be reckoned as the "Ashraf" (including the Arab, the Mongolian, and the Pathan emigrants), I am sure that if clear instructions be issued correct figures will be obtained.

The Muhammadan gentlemen of Bengal, according to my observation, consist of the following elements:

- (1) The conquerors and their followers.
- (2) The Ulema, the ecclesiastics, and the preachers.
- (3) "Others" including the travellers, poets, beggars (sails), and hangers-on.

These men – high and low – were entitled to call themselves Ashraf as they were Vilayat-za (born in Vilayat, i.e. Persia, Turkestan and Afghanistan). But most of them contracted marriages contrary to the law of *Kufu* with Indian converts, whom Colonel Dalton calls Hinduised aborigines. Their offspring deriving their *nasab* from the father's side were called also Shaikh, Saiyid, Khan, Mirza and Malik. But they were looked down upon by the blue-blooded Ashraf in the same way as the Europeans of our day look upon the Eurasians and *Firingis* (Urdu word for foreigner). The causes of the formation of Muhammadan races are *mutates mutandi* the same as those of the Christian races.

They say that the vast multitude who profess the Muhammadan religion, if analysed, would be seen, for the most part, to be composed of aborigines. I have no hesitation in admitting the justice of this observation. But I beg to humbly differ, when these critics go so far as to assert that they were forced to embrace Islam.

Islam like Christianity is a proselytizing religion, and no Muslim should be ashamed of the fact if he or his ancestors were Hindus or aboriginal Hindus. But it is no wonder if, among the ignorant and upstarts, a few should try to conceal their true origin under the cloak of a "Shaikh" or a "Mir". The fact is that most of them do not know the fact. Among coolies that are recruited and sent to the colonies, few know the names of their fathers, if the latter died when the former were young. None know the names of their grandfather. Mr. Gait says that from enquiries made after the census, it was found that, in the Dacca District alone, 14 out of 63 persons who had described themselves as Europeans were in reality Eurasians. If such a thing be possible among a handful of Anglo-Indian population in one district, how much is it then probable that among a vast number of ignorant and so-called Musalmans this feeling should after all predominate?

In the chapter, which I have recently contributed to the Bengal Asiatic Society, I have incidentally stated how the lower order of people in Bengal came to be called Musalmans. It is, in my opinion, a bootless task to discuss the



question here. Islam was never preached by paid or State-aided missionaries in India. It had no support from the kings or Ulema. Muhammadanism is still spreading in parts of Africa, and it is not stationary in India. No one can say that Islam is being forcibly propagated in Africa at the present moment. Whatever may be the motive or the agency by which it was propagated, it is certain that force was nowhere to be met with. The Padshas and Nawabs and Subahdars (various categories of landlords and rulers) in Bengal and India were too much absorbed in their petty quarrels and dynastic disputes to think of converting the aboriginal and Brahmanical Hindus, as before an aspirant to the throne was crowned, his whole thought would be absorbed in what way he should become king. No sooner would he become a king, than he would think how to curb or conciliate the possible rivals to the throne. If successful in this, his next thought would be turned to his own successor. In fact, this unfortunate man's whole thought and the resources of his kingdom would be spent on this one question of succession. Most of these rulers and dynasties were so short-lived that the poet Amir Khusrau of Delhi actually lived and sang during the reigns of seven kings. Makhdum Shah Sharfuddin of Behar lived during the reigns of 11 sovereigns of the Slave, Khilji, and Tughluq dynasties. Again the natives of the country were often employed to fight out the tribal battles. Under these circumstances, may I ask how could these sovereigns, themselves not very good Muhammadans, force the subject races to adopt Islam. Time and self-interest were against this.

A learned Moulavi has proved that no university or college was ever established or endowed in India. It was the Ulema, who, of their own free will, used to teach pupils in their private houses or on the floors of the Masjids. Of course, they were often supported with *wozifa* (scholarship) and *Jaijir* (endowment). Such were the kings and his nobles and such were the Ulema. If the aborigines might become Hindu, believing in Aryan and Dravidian gods and deities, certainly without any preaching and compulsion how much is it possible that the same people in the course of centuries became drifted to Muhammadanism without compulsion or persuasion, and came to believe in undefined *Panch-Pirs* (family deities worshipped in Bengal by both Hindus and Muslims), and scores of other non-Islamic dogmas. These people can no more understand the Hindu Triad, the Christian trinity, or the Muslim unity. Mr. Gait has very properly quoted Colonel Dalton's opinion regarding the conversion into Christianity of certain aborigines, such as Oraons (Oraons). He was able to discern the influence of their pagan doctrines and superstitions in the motives that led them to become catechumen (*vide* page 165 of Mr. Gait's Census Report).

It would indeed be a very interesting study if some antiquarian with a love of anthropology should make a tour round Bengal and gather the materials for the necessary investigation of this most interesting and all-absorbing question.

I beg to subjoin later a few notes on certain facts and figures discussed by the Census Superintendent (Chapters 4 and 11).

Neither Pir Ali nor Shah Jalal ever forced anyone for conversion. The facts stated by Babu Gour Das Basak and others only show that according to the Pundits the Pir Alis lost caste by smelling certain forbidden food. The cause is so silly that no one can believe it. The Hindu religion and social law belie it. The real facts are never stated but in whispers. It is stated by Bishop Heber and reproduced by Mr. Furrel in his "The Tagore Family, a Memoir". I am not aware if Pir Ali was a Brahman apostate. If so, he was the leader of other Pir Alis. In other words, his followers were known by the name of their leader. I have seen thousands of pilgrims visiting his tomb. Mr. Gait says (p. 170): "It does not appear, however, that the Afghan rulers of Bengal often used force to propagate their faith, and the only organised prosecution of the Hindus is that of Jalaluddin". Dr. Wise, who has mentioned this fact, "conjectures that there were more converts to Islam during the seventeen years of this crusade, than in the next three hundred". This may be Dr. Wise's opinion; it is based on no facts. Jalaluddin's life and time are well known. He was a *sufi*, and of all men, Sufis are never known to use force or wage crusade in order to convert people. According to well-established opinion, the Sufi saints follow the doctrines of the Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean schools and those of the Upanishad. Of all tolerant religions, theirs is the most tolerant. To them, in fact, there is no caste or creed; in this sense, some of their ways are at variance with Islam. It is reasonable to suppose that by the pomp and ceremony and miracles these saints converted: many, who only outwardly, but not inwardly, became Muhammadans. Was such conversion Islamic? But whatever it might be it was not a forcible conversion.

A word about Dr. Wise's opinions. He, according to Mr. Risley's "Tribes and Castes in Bengal" (Vol. I., p. 348, 14), thinks that the Jolahas belonged to a despised Hindu caste, who in a body became converts to Muhammadanism. On this Mr. Risley writes, "It would seem, however, that the formation of a weaving caste within the ranks of the Muhammadans may be accounted for, without supposing that any compact group was converted in masse". May I add to this: Are the Hindu weavers a despised caste? Look to the Basaks, Sils, and Tantis. They have been from time immemorial as prosperous as respected. Did all the weavers from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas become converts? Are the Arab and Persian *massages* (weavers) too Hindu converts? Again, "the customs of the Jolahas are essentially Shiah" (Ibid., p. 348.). On the contrary, the most bigoted Sunnis and Wahhabis (the followers of Titu Miyan and Dudhn Miyan, of Moulvi Ismail, and others) are to be found among the weavers. There may be Shiahs too among the Dacca Jolahas. The learned Doctor's opinion of one district cannot be applicable to all the places. Similarly he writes, "The Hindustani distiller (*ketlal*) only manufactures spirits, and will not vend it—an occupation carried on by Kurmis or Baniyas" (Ibid., p. 279). I would suggest that the Excise Commissioner and District Officers may be asked as to the truth of this assertion. The learned Doctor was highly prejudiced against the Musalmans, as his

writings show this abundantly. “The Saukhari women”, says he, are very “shy, but the fact that in former days their good looks exposed them to the insults and outrages of the licentious Muhammadan officials is a sufficient excuse for their timidity” (Ibid., Vol. II, p. 221). Then he goes on to prove his assertion and names two persons as guilty of the offence one a *zamindar*, Abdul Razzaq, and another Raja Ram Das, son of Raja Raj Ballabh, Dewan of Bengal, during the time of Lord Clive and Warren Hastings. Were both of them Musalmans? If not, why alone the poor Muhammadan officials are singled out? What Dr. Wise wrote was certainly not in good taste and was rather an incident that happened during the early English rule in Bengal.

I believe I have shown the value of Dr. Wise’s opinion. No Impartial jury will convict the Musalmans on the evidences such as these. His opinions are the outcome of his local knowledge, but this is not always very accurate. He mentions the names of certain Muhammadan zamindars of East Bengal, whom he includes among the Barah Bhaiyas (or 12 rulers). The persons of these rulers are as true as those of the *Ponchpirs*, Colonel Dalton gives a more probable version. He says:

I have noticed that a dynasty called BarahBhaiya once ruled in the province of Assam, and the country to the north of Brahmaputra, from one end of the valley to the other, is full of great works ascribed to this people, etc.

Although Indian history tells very little, but there must be some reason for this. Mr. Gait says that the names of certain kings are known to me from the inscriptions of their coins. This is quite true. It only shows that during the anarchy and misrule that invariably followed the death of certain kings, there arose rival claimants for the *gadi* (throne). It was only the successful ones or those who retained the sceptre long were mentioned by these chroniclers. I am not aware if there were many writers of Bengal history.

The distinction between the Sunnis and the Shiahs is not accurately stated, “The Sunnis observe the Ramazan strictly as the Shiahs” (para. 312, P: 173). I cannot understand what the writer means by the previous statement. The schism was at first political; it then became mixed up with social and religious questions. At present, the Shiahs profess the doctrines of Islam as preached and understood by the 12 Imams. The Sunnis, on the other hand, believe it as deduced: first from the Quran, second from the Hadis, third by *Ijma*, and fourth by *Qiyas*. The doctrines of the Shiahs and Sunnis are so well known to the learned of Europe that it is superfluous to dilate on the subject. Sir John Malcolm (History of Persia) gives a very amusing narrative regarding the minor differences of these two sects.

The Sunnis generally follow one of the four schools – Hanafi, Shaffi, Maliki, and Hambali. They do not differ in *asal* (principle) but in *furu* (minor points or rituals).

Abdul Wahhab was not in fact the founder of any new doctrine but was certainly very intolerant, as were his disciples and followers. What he wanted was that all Musalmans should follow the Quran and the Hadis, and should not follow the different schools.

Para. 315; p. 174 – The sect nomenclature given is according to Dr. Wish, which can be understood only by the lower classes of East Bengal. But to educated Muhammadans of other parts the terms are either unintelligible or un-grammatical.

Page 439 – Ajlaf and Arzal are, respectively, plurals of Jalaand Razil, and are both Arabic. They are contemptuous terms similar to nigger. No particular class or section of the community are Arzal or Ajlaf, but to one highly placed the lower classes are known by these terms. Jolaha or Jolah is a Persian or Turanian word, and is not derived from Johala (plural of Jabil), which is an Arabic word.

Para. 844, p. 446 – Dhobi and Dhoba (like Chasi and Chasa) are two different forms of the same word. The former is used by the Hindustani-speaking and the latter by the Bengali-speaking men. Several Hindustani Dhobis have settled at Rampur Boalia, the headquarters of the Rajshahi District, and speak Bengali as their mother speech. They call themselves Dhobas and Dhobis as they speak in Bengali or Urdu.

Para, 867, p. 448 – Mirdha means the head of the ten (Mir=head+dah=ten). The matchlock bearers and others were given this title, *vide* Ain-i-Akbari. Blochman's translation Mirza like Mr signifies any gentleman or clerk when it is prefixed to a name. But when it is used as a suffix it means a prince. The late and present Shah of Persia used to be called before they became kings as Nasiruddin Mirza and Muzaffaruddin Mirza (*vide* Persia and the Persian Question by Lord Curzon).

Since the predominance of English manners and customs and the abandonment by the leaders of some of the old traditional ways of living, the lower class Musalmans too are following many occupations which some 30 or 40 years ago were considered to be not their own. A *Chasi* is a Mulla, a *Jolaha* is a Moulvi, and so on. The influence of the "Musalman reformers" can be indirectly discerned in this. But except well-to-do *Chasis* or those who till the soil in Bengal are familiarly called *Musalmans*, none can intermarry with that section called *Ailhra* for gentlemen.

In parts of Nadia, Jessore, Backergunj, Dacca, and Farridpore, lower classes, sometimes, would marry to better class families on account of the prosperity of the former and the poverty of the other. When these unequal or *qhairkufu* marriages take place, the lower classes would assume such titles as Munshi, Mulla, Biswas, Jawardar, and Miyan, and give up handling plough. These men, I have seen, are sometimes called *Atraf Bhalamanusor* "an *Atraf* made a gentleman". To speak candidly, at the present moment, the Muhammadan community of Bengal may be classified into the following divisions:

- (a) The Muhammadans whose ancestors were originally aborigines or Hinduised aborigines.
- (b) The Muhammadans whose forefathers were generally non-Arabs and who immigrated into Bengal and contracted marriages with the previous class. They are, in fact, the persons of mixed descent.
- (c) The descendants of the previous two classes who, during a period of 40 or 60 years, have succeeded in contracting marriages with the daughters of the genuine Ashraf (from father's side their children are Chasis or Atraf).
- (d) The Ashraf who have contracted marriages with the daughters of the members of the previous classes (their children are tainted Ashraf).
- (e) The genuine Ashraf, descendants of Arabs (Sadat and Mashaikh), or Ajairn (Mughuls and Pathans or the people of Central Asia) who have unlike class (d) not hitherto contracted marriages with any other classes.

At the present time, most of the Muhammadan employed in Bengal are drawn from (c) and (d) classes and are destined to rise in education and material prosperity. One section is imitating the Wahhabi learning and exclusiveness; the other section is aping the modern culture and European habits.

The members of the last-named class (e) have become so small numerically and so impoverished by their backwardness in modern education that their future is certainly very uncertain. But the community, as a whole, cannot yet forget the position which the Sahih-un – nasab Asraf Muhammadans have hitherto enjoyed. Behar is more fortunate than, and far ahead of, Bengal proper in this respect. Their number is far larger, and as they are qualifying themselves by getting modern education, for the State patronage, they have a brighter future than their brethren in Bengal. If any ancient culture and civilization are to be sought among the Musalmans, they should be certainly sought among the members of this class. The other classes may become very prosperous, but such higher qualities as uprightness, independence, honesty, and implicit reliance on God (Islam) can hardly be expected from them, and must be sought among the members of the genuine Arab families.

According to the Arab and Muslim laws, the children are considered to inherit the status and position of their fathers. So at the present day a Saiyid or a Shaikh may be the sons of a Nadia-Jowardar, a Jessore Biswas, a Dinajpuri Nasya, or it may be a pure totemistic Bagdi or Buna, Pali, or Mali woman. A Government servant is either a Moulvi or a Munshi according to the gazetted or non-gazetted post he may hold.

I have spoken very little about the Ajam element of the Bengal Muhammadans. They are "Khau", "Beg", "Mirza", or "Malik". At the present time, I have enquired that their descendants have become very impoverished. The reason is that, at the beginning of the British rule and before it, they lived chiefly as soldiers or guards. At the present day, these posts are given rarely to Bengal Pathans: moreover, they cannot expect, for want of

necessary education, to get better posts. The descendants of former Jaigirdars and soldiers of fortune are always to be met within the districts of East Bengal. The Bengal Pathans are Sur, Suryani, Lodhi, or Lohani; her tribes are very few.

From this list, I have excluded those Mughals and Pathans who live in Calcutta, Hugli, Dacca, Murshidabad, and such other towns.

Now a word how to distinguish the various sub-divisions into which I have divided the Musalmans of Bengal proper. If you meet three Musalman lads and ask them what they are, one will say he is a Karigar (Jolaha), the other a Dai, and the third a Musalman. This is very curious and may mean that the Musalman is one who follows no endogamous profession, or one whose ancestors came with the conquerors. In my opinion, some of the castes could never be originally Musalmans, for their profession belie it. The drummer, the wine vendor, and the Mirasi professions are against the tenets of Islam. It is also quite probable that several retainers who came with Muhammadan noble families to Bengal adopted certain professions. It is stated by an eminent Muhammadan, and it is also not contrary to my own knowledge, that certain Jolahas are not the converts but came from Central Asia and adopted the profession of weaving.

Mr. Gait and before him Mr. Risley have excluded language entirely from the test of race. It may not be a very sure and absolute test, but it is certainly one of the tests by which the races may be distinguished. When a family settles in a foreign tract amid a different people, their descendants after a short time forget the original speech of the race and adopt the language of the surrounding people. This cannot be the case with those who emigrate in considerable numbers or with a leader of strong individuality. A proud people like, the Arabs, or Turks will retain much of their original speech and habit. I have studied the home language of some of the Muhammadan families in Bengal and the mode of preparing some of the dishes, and was struck that they still use words and expressions that are prevalent, in *Mawaraun-Nahr* or Transoxania.

The opinions expressed and the conclusions arrived at by Khan Bahadur Fazli Rabbi, Dewan to the Nawab Bahadur of Murshidabad, in his book "Haqiqati-Musalmanan-i-Bengala" and its English version "The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal", are based on facts deduced from well-authenticated sources. Some of his misapprehensions are now removed by the explanation furnished by the Census Superintendent in his last Census Report. In the Urdu version, the author writes that the majority of the Musalmans of North Bengal and some other parts are local converts. His other facts derived from the "Akbarnama" and also the fact that certain illustrious families were banished from Delhi and other parts have not been controverted by the learned Superintendent.

It is said that a certain Abbasi de Khalifa of Bagdad who was well disposed towards the Bani Hashim ordered that a register be opened of the Saiyids of the said house and a stipend be periodically given to each member.

A census was taken and the names and origin of all the Saiyids entered in the register. The Saiyids became very suspicious on account of this unusual enquiry by a Sunni Khalif and apprehended danger. What some of them did was very strange. They kept themselves aloof and instead of their own names had those of their slaves and servants entered in the register. So, according to the author of the "Rauzatus-Safa" (for, that is, I believe, the historian who mentions the fact), there are many Saiyids who are no Saiyids at all. And there are many Shaikhs who are really the Sadat.

Maulana Abdur Rahman, "Jami" poet and grammarian, of Herat, states in the *Silsilaties Zahab* that in his time (three centuries ago) there were many persons who had no title to be called Saiyids. Hajjaj-bin-Yusuf, a tyrannical Governor of Kufa, used to kill Saiyids of his time in order to help the Umayyads, Recollecting this fact, Jami, in the previous work, invokes God thus: "God Almighty send again to earth Hajjaj who was sent to hell for his killing the true Saiyids, so that he may atone for his former sins by killing the present day false Saiyids and get heaven as his reward".

He writes about the Saiyids of his time thus:

مادرش لولئي و پدر لالا  
او زند دعوي از علي و زهرا

His mother a base hireling (*luli*), his father a slave (*lala*),  
He claims his descent from Ali and Fatima.

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB* VII (2), 1903: 98–112.
- 2 This paper was written at the special request of the Deputy Commissioner of Ranchi (Chota Nagpur Division of Bengal) and submitted to him on 23 February 1903, in reply to the enquiries made by Mr. E.A. Gait, I. C. S., Superintendent of Ethnography, Bengal, with reference to the Muhammadan Castes. Mr. Gait sent certain papers, including Chapters 4, 7, and 11 of Bengal Census Report for 1901, requesting that they should be carefully read and all new facts bearing on the discussions, omissions or mistakes should be communicated to him. He also requested for information on special points referred to by Mr. Risley and colonel Dalton.

# 14 A book procession of the Tibetan Lamas, as seen at Darjeeling

*Jivanji Jamshedji Modi\**

## Introduction

The subject of this chapter is suggested by the Tibetan Oxylograph, which I produce here for inspection. It was kindly presented to me about 2 years ago by my friend Mr. Framroz Merwanji Mehta, M.A., LL.B., Solicitor, of our High Court. I have presented it to the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. Nobody in Bombay could then tell me what it was. Fortunately, Prof. Sylvain Levi, who was among us at the end of 1922, on its being shown to him, kindly wrote a Note on it at my request. The Note has been published in the original French with my translation in the second number of the Journal of the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute. The object of this chapter is to describe a Book procession, which I had the pleasure of seeing, in connection with a *gumpa* or monastery near Darjeeling, wherein a number of such oxylographs were carried round the village.<sup>1</sup>

## Processions common to all ages and all people

In my chapter, read before this Society on 24 June 1914, on “A Devil-driving Procession of the Tibetans, as seen at Darjeeling, and a few thoughts suggested by it”,<sup>2</sup> I have spoken at some length on the subject of the part played by processions in the religious and social life of a people. The State, the Church, and the School, the three great institutions of a country or nation, which influence the life of that country or nation, have their own processions. I have seen, and not only seen, but have taken part in many processions. But out of all the religious processions I have seen, I remember with pleasure, rather vividly, two. The one was that, seen on 20 November 1889, at Constantinople in connection with a Greek Church there and in honour of St. George. The other is a Tibetan book procession which forms the subject of this chapter and which I saw in connection with a Tibetan *gumpa* near Darjeeling, on 4 June 1919.

## Pious thoughts associated with sacred books

Among many people, pious thoughts are associated with their scriptures. Some attribute, at times, miraculous influences to their possession on certain occasions. We see many people touching their eyes and foreheads



with their sacred books out of reverence for them. Their book of Scriptures is their book of books and is spoken of as *the* book. (a) For example, the English word for Christian scriptures is Bible, in which word comes from *biblia*, a book in Latin. They are so named because they believed to form “the Book, *par excellence*”. In Daniel (IX. 2), in the account of the Captivity, the word “books” is meant for the holy books. (b) The word *ketâb* (کتاب), that is, a book, is similarly used among the Mahomedans for Scriptures. For example, the Christians, Jews, and the Magusis (Magians, Parsees) are spoken of as the Ahl-i Ketâb, that is, the people who possess scriptures. (c) Then take *granth* (ग्रन्थ) the Sanskrit word for a book. It is used by the Sikhs for their Sacred Scriptures which they call “*granth*”. They speak of this *granth* respectfully as *Granth Saheb*. (d) The Mahrathi-speaking people similarly use the word *pothi* (पोथी), which means a book, for their sacred books. They speak of the *pothi* to be read at a gathering and mean thereby, the *kathas* of their Puranas. (e) Nask (ناسک) (Pah. *ناسک* or *ناسک* P. *ناسک*), the Avesta word for book, is specially applied to the Avesta Scriptures. Again, take the word for Mahomedan scriptures. It is Qur’ân (قرآن), which from qarâ (قرأ) reading, at first simply means reading. Then, it is “Reading par eminence”, the Reading of the Scripture. We thus see that processions and books singly have a kind of significant connection with religion. That being the case, sacred books, when carried in a procession have, as it were, a double signification of efficiency and religious merit.

### The Tibetan book procession

Having said a few words about processions and books, I will now describe the book procession which I had the pleasure of seeing, not only of seeing but also of taking part in, on 4 June 1913. My frequent visits to the *gumpâ* at Labang and my inquisitiveness about their religious services seemed to have favourably impressed the head Lama and we had become friends. So, I could take the liberty of accompanying the procession and even walk in the front with the head Lama, a position from which I could observe all that happened during the progress of the procession.

The month of June is one, in which, according to the Tibetans, some events connected with the life of Buddha occurred; so, they celebrate the occasion for 3 days. The third of June 1913 was the day for their Devil-driving procession and 4 June was one for the book procession. Having driven away the devils and demons from the town on the preceding day, they had, on 4 June, the procession of taking their religious books round about in the streets of the village, with a view that the religious books may usher in blessings upon the people during the next year. The book procession was longer than the Devil-driving procession of the preceding day. It started from the Gumpâ near Lebang, known as the *gumpâ* of Bhutia-basti, at about 8 a.m., in the morning. The *gumpâ* possessed 110 books.

## **Tibetan Scriptures**

Tile Tibetan Buddhist Scriptures are said to be of two classes: (1) the Kahgyur and (2) the Tangyur. The former are scriptures proper and consist of about 125 volumes. They are said to be the Tibetan translations of Rome, old Sanskrit books, the translation having been made about 1,000 years ago when Buddhism entered into Tibet. The latter, that is, the Tangyur, consist of about 250 volumes, and they are generally the commentaries of the scriptures by learned Lamas. According to Dr. Waddell, some of the large volumes weigh as much as 10 to 30 pounds. They are about 2 to 2½ feet in length and about ½ to ¾ feet in breadth. Some of these volumes contain about 400 pages or even more. As we see from the Oxylograph produced here, these books are not like our modern books. They consist of loose leaves or folios. When both pages or sides of a leaf are read, they place the leaf apart and take up the next leaf. The book, so formed, of loose pages is placed between two boards of wood, which are very tightly fastened. The volumes are covered by pieces of beautifully coloured cloth. We like to keep in our library books well or beautifully bound. They like to cover their books with beautifully ornamented pieces of cloth. There are pigeonholed shelves on both sides of the idol of Buddha on the altar. It is each of these pigeon holes that contains a volume covered by beautifully coloured pieces of cloth. The Tibetans have two large libraries, the one in the palace of Dalai Lama at Lhasa and the other in the palace of Tashi Lama.

## **The procession proper**

Now, it is these books of the monasteries that are carried out and taken round the village once a year in a procession. They are preceded by a number of Lamas who play upon a variety of musical instruments, all producing the loudest possible noise. Some of the long blowing instruments are about 8 feet in length. For such a long instrument, there is always a carrier, who, walking in front of the player supports it. The head Lama of the Gumpa was dressed in a majestic looking dress and was walking in a dignified way, next, after the hand of the players of music. He was followed by a person, who carried in a tray a small idol of Buddha, seven small cups, a lamp, three moulded, forms of flour, burning fragrant allie wood sticks. All these were followed by a long row of women who carried the books of the monastery, each woman generally carrying one volume. The Bhutiâ-basti (residential cluster of the Bhutia) at Darjeeling is situated on the slope of a hill, and the procession was a sight worth seeing, when watched from an elevated place. The villagers went to each of the women carrying the books and placed their heads under the volumes, thus invoking, as it were, the blessing of the sacred volumes upon himself or herself. They did the same thing with the tray. After doing so, they bowed and paid their homage to these sacred things with both their hands. A man walked near the Lama with a vessel containing some sacred water. The Lama carried in his hand a fan-like bunch of peacock feathers. He dipped this

fan in the sacred water now and then sprinkled the water on the heads of the villagers, and this was taken to be an act of blessing. Some villagers tried to have some water in the hollows of their hands and drank it. The head Lama sprinkled the water at the entrance and at the end of each street, and at some principal places in the streets. I noticed, that, at one time, the sacred water in the kettle-like vessel, having been well-nigh exhausted, the head Lama stopped at a water pipe on the road and filled up the vessel again. The few remaining drops of the sacred water in the vessel were believed to purify or consecrate all the new water.<sup>3</sup> The procession stopped at the *chaitya* of a deceased pious man and recited a prayer and rested for a few minutes. A person earned in a vessel their favourite drink, *marwâ* which, in both look and effect, is like our Indian toddy. It is a very mild intoxicant. The head Lama and others refreshed themselves with it.

In several places, the villagers gave a holy welcome to the procession, by burning, at the entrance of their street, a fragrant plant which grows in abundance here and which is dried for the purpose. The Lama, occasionally, especially near a *chaitya*, met with on the road, snapped his middle finger with the thumb, a symbolic expression of driving away an evil.<sup>4</sup> This was a signal for the players on musical instruments to blow their instruments and shells with double the ordinary force.

The procession, having gone round all the streets of the village returned to the monastery and the head Lama took his seat on a chair in an elevated place. The women who carried the books on their shoulders went round the monastery three times and then entering into the monastery placed the books there. Then there stood by the side of the head Lama two women, one carrying a religious flag in one hand and a dish of flour with a burning incense stick in the other hand. The other woman had with her, three large vessels full of their favourite *marwâ* drink which the Lama had consecrated. This drink was distributed freely among the people in cups by means of a wooden ladle.

### Some special tracts of the procession

There were two things that drew my special attention at this gathering and at other ceremonial gatherings of the Tibetans. (a) The first was their ceremonial saluting in the *gumpas*. It reminded me of masonic salutes. Another thing, that drew my attention, was, that, at the end of the ceremonial all threw some flour upon one another as a symbol of mutual congratulation.

(b) Then one man, ascending an elevated place, read the names of all persons, great or small, who had contributed to the expenses of the book procession. Most of the subscriptions being of 8 annas (was equivalent of half-a-rupee, a rupee being 16 annas). This was considered to be a necessary function, which, as it were, gave to the subscribers a kind of religious consolation of having the meritoriousness of their religious act publicly announced. I was told that this practice helped the subscriptions on such occasions.

## The announcement of subscriptions in Buddhist Japan

This practice reminds me of a somewhat similar announcement which I saw in Buddhist Japan, and that in a more substantial way than that of a mere oral announcement. There, in many a religious place which I visited, I saw huge boards of wood with a large number of names written on them. On inquiry, I was told that these were the names of the subscribers with the sums subscribed by them. A prominent board placed in a prominent place announced large donations, and other boards announced donations as small as our sums of Rs. 5. I was told, that it was this practice that was believed to bring real religious meritoriousness to the subscribers. Unannounced subscriptions were believed to be, as it were, without their religious merit. We have here an illustration of the proverb that འཕེལ་བྱུང་པའི་ལྟུང་།, that is, what is written down, could only be read. Something like this was here believed to be true. From this point of view, I was surprised to see that pious pilgrims, like those to the sacred hill of Chuzenzi near Necco, always took care to write down, or get written down, their names somewhere on the sacred hill, if not on any prominent place, at least on a part of the tea house, where they rested and ate. It was the writing down of their names at such sacred places that stamped the pilgrimages with some kind of meritoriousness.

The modern practice or craze of visitors writing down their names on places they visit, sometimes going to the length of a kind of vandalism, seems to be, as it were, a step from a visit of pilgrimage to an ordinary visit. The solicitude or care, with which some visitors write their names in the visitor's books of places visited, seems to be the next step. In some cases, such pilgrims' or visitors' books seem to have unwittingly taken, as it were, a kind of historical form. I have seen in the possession of some of the Pandit guides of the celebrated ruins of the temple of Martand in Cashmere, such pilgrims' or visitors' books, bearing the signature with dates, of many a great man of India, who had visited the ruins of the temple about 75 years ago. For example, you see there the signature of the late Lord Hoberts, in three capacities as Lieutenant, General, and Commander-in-Chief.

## Notes

\* This chapter is reproduced as it was from *Anthropological Explorations in East and South-East Asia*, pp. 157-162, with permission from the publisher, Delhi: Primus Publications 2021.

1 Reprinted from *JASB*. August. 1924 XIII (2) 146-153.

2 *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*. Vol. X, pp. 209-229. *Vide* my "Anthropological Papers" Part II, pp. 124-45. *Vide* the Jamei-Jamshed of 8 July 1913.

3 Cf. the practice and belief among the Parsee priests that a drop (འཕེལ་བྱུང་པའི་ལྟུང་། qatreh) of consecrated water or gaomez dropped in a vessel-ful consecrated the whole.

4 Cf. the Parsee practices of *tachâkri* (འཕེལ་བྱུང་པའི་ལྟུང་།) made during prayers, when the name of Âhriman or an evil power has to be mentioned.

# 15 On superstitions of the Goa people from Portuguese sources

*E. Rehatsek*

Credulity is a disease of the human mind and has given rise to numerous superstitions, chiefly among the uneducated classes in all countries; in this respect, the people of Goa are distinguished by indulging not only in some of the popular superstitions in vogue among Hindus but also in those imported by the early Portuguese conquerors in the sixteenth century and inherited by later generations.<sup>1</sup>

One of the oldest and most powerful beliefs, dating in all countries from immemorial times, is the belief in fairies and in the devil. In the Portuguese territory of Goa, the belief in the existence of a demon called ventorium is general. He hovers by the side of the good angel over the heads of men, induces them to commit criminal acts, becomes sometimes visible by assuming a human or animal form, exacts homage, subjugates persons in such a manner that they lose their senses, and causes them to endure the greatest troubles, which torment them, but whose source is only in their imaginations. Tradition points out certain localities as the abodes of the ventorium, of which they are in such dread that they avoid them not only in the night but even in full daylight as the resorts of demons. Such places are deserted crossways, spots where corpses are buried, or animals slain; in such places, the demons assume the forms of corpses momentarily resuscitated, of herds of animals suddenly arising from the ground and again disappearing. Even the branches of trees shaken by the wind as well as the rustling of leaves startle the credulous wayfarer who retraces his steps and narrates the apparitions he has met with in the family circle, whence they are propagated further with additional details, which by degrees gain credence as well attested facts.

According to tradition, certain persons who had fallen under the power of the devil were taken up by him from the road on which they walked or the house where they sat and transported to unknown places, passing over frightful deserts, soaring across mountains, rivers and cities, until they happened by the decree of their fate to be deposited on the tops of trees or on high rocks, whence they were taken down by travellers who broke the spell of the demon. It is also said that the mere sight or the slightest contact with the devil induces demoniac possession in a man, by which he can perform the most astonishing miracles.

In a certain house, various persons possessed by demons spoke in tongues unknown to them before and replied in them to the Padres who exorcised the evil spirits. They also spoke about past and future events, and performed many wonderful tricks, till at last the demons, overcome by the prayers of the church abandoned the bodies of those persons and went in search of other victims.

When some persons awake from sleep during the still hours of the night, all nature seems at rest, complete tranquillity reigns in the abodes of men, and they listen only to the gentle rustling of the foliage on the trees yielding to the breeze. On such occasions they hear also a distant thumping sound dying away in repeated echoes, which come neither from trees nor from men, nor from the air, but seem to proceed from the banks of rivers, where the water, silvered by the bright moon, laves bald cliffs and bathes wild herbage. You would think that the laborious washer man has forestalled the early morning and has in the middle of the night commenced to beat his clothes; guided by the sound, you endeavour to approach him, but the more you hasten, the more it recedes, you find nothing but the bare rocks, and hear the mysterious sound at a greater distance. The existence of this sound is believed to be undeniable, and the phenomenon is explained by the solicitude of the invisible protector of washer men, who thus inaugurates the labours which they are to begin at the early hours of the morning. The weary traveller, fatigued by a long journey, and anxious to meet some companion to cheer him up, when only the stars are visible and the earth is wrapped in darkness, is often decoyed by this sound, the origin of which he wishes to discover, but is always disappointed.

Sometimes, unseen hands throw stones upon the roofs of houses, without, however, destroying tiles, breaking windows, or striking persons. The reason is because the souls of persons formerly living in such houses enjoy no rest, and solicit in this manner the aid of the church; accordingly, alms are distributed, and Mass is celebrated to relieve the deceased from their sufferings. Such intimations are, however, given not only by means of stones but also by the sudden appearance of a light in a house when the people are sleeping, and by voices which admonish them that the sins of certain persons who have cast off this earthly tabernacle but are afflicted in the other world can be expiated with celebration of mass in the church. The belief that the souls of the departed revisit their abodes explains the dread of the people to pass near cemeteries in the night, and their terror of the phosphorescent lights occasionally seen by them which they believe to be ghosts. On the anniversary of the death of relatives, a dinner is prepared and taken to a solitary locality where the invisible guests smell the food and learn that they are still fondly remembered. This usage of remembering the dead is also practised in another manner, namely, by giving the dinner to beggars, who are considered to represent them.

The lower order of Christians entertains great respect for sorcerers, who are such by hereditary right or have been acknowledged by their disciples.

Venerated as they are in every way, being the mediators between the visible and the invisible world, they have crowds of followers, they subsist by the offerings made to them, on the fees they receive for their services, and by the obsequiousness of their customers, who give them the first fruits or profits of everything. A sorcerer may become a kind of headman or chief who is obeyed in the affairs of life and regulates even the agricultural operations. He is the minister of a supernatural power, a physician, lawyer, protector of the afflicted, and the judge of his disciples, by whom he is worshipped as holding the keys of the destinies of men in his hands.

Formerly every village had its own sorcerer, and at present many still support one. He is distinguished by his haughty and domineering behaviour, by his fantastic attire, and by his voice, which is solemn but has become chronically hoarse in the discharge of his functions, which demand perpetual shouting and invocations. Imagine a rudely proud man, studiously intent to look upon everybody with cynic indifference, hirsute and muscular, with dishevelled hair, the eyes lively like those of a hangman who spies a victim, trinkets in the ears and on the breast, a silver bracelet on the arm, a piece of cloth wrapped round the head like a turban, a patched blue jacket with gilt buttons negligently hanging from the shoulders, coarse sandals on the feet and a stick in the hand; imagine such a man, and you have before you a sorcerer such as domineers over the cultivators in the Goa territory. The site where he exercises his office may be either on the top of a bare rock or in a den excavated in a solitary place, where this cow-dunged lair contains no other furniture than a stone for a seat, a water jug, and fire-place. The ceremony begins with the slaughter of some animal, and while the fire is burning on the hearth, the sorcerer invokes the invisible spirit with shrieks, wonderful contortions of his body, extraordinary grimaces, and at last falls down exhausted. This is the moment of inspiration, during which the interview of the sorcerer with the demon takes place, the future is unveiled, secrets are revealed, and means by which desires can be realized are imparted. The moment of prostration having elapsed, the sorcerer recovers his consciousness, gives audience to his adepts, satisfies all their queries, and extends his hand for payment.

The sorcerer is sometimes consulted about the success of an undertaking, sometimes about the cure of a disease, sometimes about revenge on a foe, in fact about everything that can be done in this world, and the sorcerer has remedies for everything, he foresees everything. Their precepts are scrupulously obeyed mandates. When an undertaking of importance is to be begun, the person interested in it puts his hands to the work according to the rules of the sortilege and is confident of success. If some unhappy man falls a victim to a disease, it is the sorcerer who undertakes to cure it, but often sacrifices by his knavery and presumption a life which might have been saved by proper medical treatment. It happens that a woman in an interesting condition cannot be delivered although the ordinary time for parturition has elapsed; then the sorcerer ransacks his imagination for a remedy, and

amuses those who demand it by offering him presents; this remedy is sometimes innocent, but at others dangerous and kills those who use it.

In former times, many children were immolated by superstitious fishermen, who also mutilated them and then threw them into the sea, because the sorcerers having been consulted on the best means of propitiating the sea for casting into it the first nets after the termination of the stormy season had recommended the perpetration of this crime. Even now fishermen are the sincerest admirers of the knavery of the sorcerers, at whose feet they prostrate themselves when the sea is either too boisterous or too calm for their trade, and the desired effect cannot be produced without shedding the blood of some animal. We know from our own experience also that in the British possessions a panic breaks out, and people conceal their children when a bridge, a railway, or dock is to be opened for the public, because an impression prevails that in order to ensure success, the Government will immolate a few children. We have also once seen fishermen sacrificing a cock after the rainy season, when they were about again to put their boats into the sea and to resume their trade.

Tradition says that in past times the Inquisition hunted sorcerers and their adepts, burning at a slow fire those offenders against religion, who had brought so much scandal upon the nascent Christianity of this country. According to tradition, fishermen were in former times considered to be anthropophagi, from whose clutches it was necessary to shelter young children when the fishing season began, just as birds put their young ones under their wings for fear of vultures.

Our own times have witnessed fishermen walking about with sacks on their shoulders near lonely habitations searching for little children, whose blood, when sprinkled on the sea, appeases it and facilitates fishing.<sup>2</sup> The authorities were vigilant enough to impede the commission of such crimes by dispatching armed forces to the seashore, and thus showing the ignorant people that the machinations of those miserable sorcerers could be foiled, and that their maleficent trade must gradually cease.

We translate the following account which appeared in the newspaper called *Ultramar* on 18 September 1862:

It is an old belief that fishermen offer human sacrifices at the end of the rainy season, and many instances are narrated. In spite of the light of religion all the barbarous superstitions of the lower classes have not yet been completely extinguished, as the greater portion of the people consult sorcerers and sorceresses in most of their affairs. In this month of September, fishermen cast their nets in the open sea, and in order to propitiate it, they usually begin their fishing operations by the sacrifice of a cock or other animal instead of the human blood which they offered during their state of paganism in former times. For this reason fishermen are no longer dreaded, as they appear to be more civilized and Neptune contents himself with a cock.



The sorcerer labours more zealously and perhaps also more successfully among the Gentiles, chiefly in the district of the *Novas Conquistas*, where such men are also considered to be saints in possession of all the sciences and all the arts. Venerated soothsayers reveal the most carefully guarded secrets; being in possession of medical knowledge they prescribe remedies which would generally shorten the lives of their patients instead of prolonging them, if the *vis medicatrix* natures did not neutralize the effects of their drugs when they are not too heroic. Being considered superior to Christian sorcerers, they receive homage not only from their own co-religionists but also from many brutalized members of the Catholic community, who have recourse to them in extraordinary cases, convinced as they are that all adversities which befall men, must be spells, removable only by the counter-spells of other sorcerers.

The superstitious remedies used by Christians are as follows: the so-called milk of the Virgin Mary, earth in which saints are buried, relics of saints and martyrs, prayers of the saints written on paper and nailed to the door or worn on the neck; also the water in which the aforementioned papers have been dipped, or in which images of saints, crucifixes, amulets, or the flowers used on the Holy Sepulchre have been washed; also the cloths in which images had been wrapped, ribbons of the length of the Holy Sepulchre, or of the body of some saint, and many other objects are considered efficacious remedies against rebellious ills and against witchcraft. The blessing (namely, the sprinkling with holy water) of oars, sails, and of bells is considered to be a preventive against thunderbolts.

The following appears to be an importation of Spanish origin: it is believed that coals dug out from the earth on St. Lawrence's day, are a powerful remedy against thunderbolts, and also that on the said day much coal is produced in the bowels of the earth to symbolize the coal of the fire place on which that saint gained the crown of martyrdom. Devout persons walk carefully with pickaxes on their shoulders on the festival of St. Lawrence, like miners in search of gold, and when the festival is over, the illusional coals are also believed to disappear in the ground.

There is also a belief that the rose of Jericho placed in water facilitates parturition; this superstition has no doubt been imported from Portugal and thus obtained credence in Goa. This rose is neither a flower nor from Jericho, but a kind of plant brought from the deserts of Arabia to India by the ancient missionaries; its branches, eager for humidity, spread themselves in the shape of a flower, and open themselves out the moment they come in contact with water.

A person injured by the influence of the evil eye is cured when the hairs or shreds of cloth of the person who has thrown the evil glance are burnt without his having any knowledge of the operation, near the afflicted patient. A distorted part of the body is cured by passing over it the foot of an individual who had been born with his feet foremost. Pains in the abdomen and stomach are cured by an operation which seems to ignorant persons to be

miraculous; a cup is filled with water, and then a thin-necked bottle is taken, the air of which has been previously rarefied by burning some straw under it. This bottle being placed upon the water it will rush into it. After a while, the water again flows back into the cup, but the distemper of the patient, who has during the operation kept the cup on his abdomen, is cured.

It is no wonder that uneducated persons readily accepted all kinds of superstitions when even the priests of the seventeenth century countenanced them. Thus, we find that a Jesuit father, Fr. Francisco DeSousa, believed in the miraculous cure of persons stung by serpents or other reptiles, and expresses himself to that effect as follows<sup>3</sup>:

The most efficacious remedy against the stings of these serpents (*cobras de capello*) and against any other poisonous animals, is the grace of a family of idolaters called *Mandreccaris*, whose descendants draw a little water with their own hands from some well or spring, of which they give the bitten individual a little to drink, and sprinkle a little on his head, whereon he infallibly recovers his health. This prerogative is enjoyed by all the male members of that family, and even by the females as long as they are maidens. They can take nothing for the cure, and if perchance they accept some money, the remedy loses all its efficacy. If a man of this class is called upon to cure a bitten person and is unable to go in person, it suffices to send some water which he has drawn with his own hands; nor is it necessary for him to touch the water; he must only have drawn it in some vessel. Not many years ago, a man of this class was converted at Margao, and retained this power also after his baptism. He was the interpreter of the church, and on seeing him perform these cures so easily and so admirably, I had the curiosity to examine him about the principle and origin of so singular a prerogative, but he could say nothing except that this was a grace enjoyed by his family from immemorial times. After becoming a Christian this man had a son, whom I baptized, and who at present performs without uttering a word the cures formerly effected by his father. It is quite possible that the apostle St. Thomas, or some other holy man, granted them this privilege, as a reward for some exquisite benefit or as a testimony that the baptismal water sprinkled upon the head may cure the soul of the original venom with which the serpent of paradise had infested mankind.

There are various means by which secrets are infallibly revealed. If an individual is suspected of guilt, it suffices to anoint his body with the oil known by the name of *oleo de S. Aleixo*, which will produce wounds if he is not innocent. The flat basket called *sup* in the vernacular, and used for winnowing rice, is placed and balanced on a fulcrum; then the names of suspected persons are mentioned, and the *sup* remains immovable when the names of innocent individuals are uttered, but turns as soon as that of the guilty man is pronounced. A cock placed in an iron pot will crow when a

guilty man's hand touches it but will remain quiet when an innocent person places his hand on the pot. The demise of a clergyman is a sign that within one year from that date, two more will die.

The assassin who has slain an innocent man and concealed himself to escape from the rigour of the law, and from the condemnation of men, is betrayed when he passes near the corpse of his victim, which perspires blood when the murderer approaches it. The victim does not fail after a shorter or longer time to denounce, by means of certain signs, the delinquent who is hiding from the punishment which will overtake him.

Among the Gentiles the best way of ascertaining future events is the *porsado*, or reply which God vouchsafes through soothsayers. Being perfectly informed on the affair to be taken in hand, by the persons who wish to consult the *porsado* the soothsayers have recourse to their astrological tables, and stick some *Tulsi* flowers<sup>4</sup> by means of holy water to a column, or to the idol of the temple, considering two of these flowers to be fatidical, one of them having a favourable and the other an unfavourable meaning. If the favourable flower detaches itself first, the reply is likewise so, and in the contrary case the result will be unfavourable.

Prognostics from things met with or seen are taken as favourable or unfavourable omens. Thus, we were one day surprised even in Bombay to see a Hindu staggered because a cat had crossed the street along which he was walking; he bethought himself, and counteracted this bad sign by stepping out of his shoes, exchanging that of the left to the right foot, putting the latter into the left slipper, and then continued his way as if nothing had happened. Relating this case to a person from Southern India, now living in Bombay, and asking what the proper remedy in such a case might be, we were told that a man must return home if his house be near, and start from it again; but if distant, the walk or business connected with it must be postponed to some other day.

It is of bad augury to see (even in a dream) a widow, a faggot of wood, or a piece of coal; to hear lamentations for the dead, or the croaking of crows, or the chirping of a lizard; to encounter a man with his head uncovered or three Brahmans with two Sudras; to behold a dog trying to go on the roof of a house or to enter it. The words "no" or "yes" accidentally heard even from a distance when transacting business, or an odd number of sneezes, is also of evil import. For all these and many other things, a true believer in these superstitions must look out, before he can safely venture to leave the threshold of his house.

On the other hand, it is a good sign to meet a married woman who is the mother of a numerous offspring, a marriage procession, a young and comely widow, a burning torch, a cow with heifers, a Sudra, a Chamar (tanner), a Mahar (also low-caste), and two Brahmans, one of whom is carrying flowers.

The howling of a dog, the croaking of a crow, or the wailing of an owl in the vicinity of a dangerously sick man indicate that the hour of

his death is near at hand, which is known to these animals, because they scent bodies that will soon be corpses in the same way as vultures smell carrion from afar.

It is believed that when milk gets spilled and trodden upon the ground, the source whence it comes will dry up; and that tamarind-bark thrown upon fire will make the tree barren, but if placed oil the road and trodden upon by wayfarers, the tree will become more fruitful.

The people believe that an evil spirit attacks infants on the sixth day after their birth and sucks their blood. Hence, the ceremony called *sati*, when the parents utter shouts and watch during the whole night near the infant by the light of lamps, and with weapons in their hands. With this superstition, another is connected, namely, that the evil spirit may again pass into the child from other persons; accordingly, not even the nearest relations can be admitted until the critical period has elapsed. The Gentiles remove from the vicinity of the place where the *sati* is to be held such women as have been recently delivered, or are soon to give birth to children, because they imagine that the women are kept at a distance from the goddess of parturition, who comes on the sixth day to read upon the head of the child the sentence of its destiny. The same Gentiles also believe that evil spirits are always roving about in this world, and that the best means for eluding their persecutions is to paint the body with a certain liquid called *cucumo*, while Christians of the lowest order maintain that it is dangerous to eat or to drink without propitiating the evil spirit, and that the best means to satisfy or to repel him is to throw a small portion of whatever they eat or drink, before doing anything else, to the devil to exorcise him.

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB* II (1) March 1889: 22–35. (However, this is an abridged version by editors).
- 2 *Quadros Historicos de Goa.*, Por. J.C.B. Miranda. Cadernata 3a.p. 64.
- 3 Oriente Conquistado, J.I. Cong. II. Div. I. § 16. *Quadros Historicos de Goa.* 3a Cad. p. 69.
- 4 *Ocimum sanctum*.

# 16 A note on the worship of the Demon Rahu by the Dusadhs of South Bihar

*Sarat Chandra Mitra*

It is generally believed by the Hindus that the solar and the lunar eclipses are caused by the demon Rāhu's devouring the two great luminaries – the sun and the moon. Rāhu is also regarded as being one of the nine planets recognized in Hindu mythology. In any case, however, Rahu is looked upon as a very malevolent being who is ever ready to inflict illness and misfortune, in fact, all sorts of troubles upon mankind. It is for this reason that the higher caste Hindus are always anxious to propitiate this eclipse demon by the presentation of offerings. In my own family at Calcutta, I have seen *puja* being done to this demon for the purpose of propitiating him.<sup>1</sup>

The low castes also worship this eclipse demon. For instance, the Dusadhs of Patna District in South Bihar also worship him at stated periods. These Dusadhs are low-caste men, who work as cultivators and practically monopolize the duties of road and village watchmen, *goraits* (cattle herders) and *chaukidars* (watchmen). The godlings worshipped by them are Rāhu, Salais, Sokha, and Goraiya. The worship of Rāhu takes place twice every year, namely, on Pus Sunkranti day (about the middle of January) and on Chait Satwani day (about the middle of April), and is also performed with great ceremony on the occasion of marriages. Two bamboo posts are created with two swords placed edge upwards across them, thus forming a small ladder. The Dusadh who officiates and is called the Bhagat, stands on the rungs formed by the swords, chanting some incantations and holding two canes bent in the form of a bow, while some balls of flour are boiled in milk close by; these, when ready, are offered to Rāhu. The next ceremony consists of three persons walking over the red-hot embers of a fire burnt in a shallow pit, namely, a Brahman, the Bhagat, and the man on whose behalf the ceremony takes place; when they have walked over the burning charcoal, sterile women snatch away small pieces of it in the belief that this will bring them children.<sup>2</sup>

In the district of Gaya in South Bihar, however, the worship of Rahu is performed with some slight differences, as will appear from the following account thereof:

Like the Dusadhs and Dhangars of Northern India, they observe a curious ceremony in honour of Rāhu, the demon of eclipse. A long shallow

trench is dug outside the village, and the officiating Dosādhs, called the Bhagat, sleeps in a hut close by on the night before the ceremony. Near the trench two long bamboo poles are erected with two swords fastened, edge downwards, across them. The trench is filled with mango wood, over which *ghi* (clarified butter) is sprinkled and the wood is then burnt. When the flames have burnt down, the Bhagat passes over the live embers followed by the assembled people. This passing through the fire is regarded as a kind of exorcism; only those who are possessed by an evil spirit are affected by the fire, and any burn is a sign of the deliverance from demoniacal possession. Near the trench is a pot full of *khir* (rice boiled in milk), which when boiling must be stirred by the bare hand of the Bhagat. The latter mounts the swords and sacrifices a boar and a pig, the flesh of which is then devoured by the worshippers together with the *khir*. The remnant, if any, is burned before the next sunrise. This ceremony is generally performed in Māgh (January-February); but it is not necessarily periodical, as it is resorted to in order to obtain deliverance from any illness or trouble.<sup>3</sup>

On a careful examination of the ceremonies performed in connection with foregoing worship, I find that:

- (1) In the district of Patna, the actual worship is performed by offering the balls of flour cooked in milk to the demon Rāhu, while in the district of Gaya it is performed by the Bhagats sacrificing a boar and a pig and offering the sacrificed swine's flesh and the *khir* to the deity, and thus, by this act of commensality placing themselves in union with the godling.
- (2) It is well known that whenever a *pūjā* or *hom* takes place malevolent spirits come to destroy the same. It is for this purpose that, in the district of Patna the exorcist or Bhagat recites incantations to drive these evil spirits away, and in case they would not go away he threatens to shoot them with arrows shot from the two imaginary bows in his two hands and to cut them with two swords on which he is standing. In the district of Gaya, the exorcist only takes his hands upon the swords and thereby seems to threaten to cut the evil spirits with these weapons.
- (3) The fire walking ceremony is symbolical. In the Patna district a Brahman, the exorcist and the person on whose behalf the ceremony is performed walk through the fire. This they are enabled to do unharmed because, most likely, they are believed to be obsessed by the spirit of Rāhu. In the Patna district, the ceremony is most likely believed to bring welfare to the family of the person on whose behalf it is performed. But in the Gaya district the Bhagat alone passes through the fire. After he has passed over it, the people assembled there pass through it. This, I think, brings welfare to the whole community. This is similar to the fire walking ceremony of the Badagas of the Nilgiri Hills. There it is

performed so that it may bring welfare to the Badaga community and their crops. It is reported that the Badagas were, at first, afraid of passing through the fire. But in a Siva's temple close by, there was a stone serpent represented thereupon. Seeing the plight of the Badagas, the serpent became alive and passed through the fire unharmed and became changed into stone again. Seeing this the Badagas became devoid of fear and walked over the fire. This is also similar to the fire sitting ceremony which is performed in honour of the mountain spirit Airi. The worshippers sit in the fire which is lit up in his honour. Those who are not burnt by the fire are believed to be possessed by the spirit of Airi, while those who are burnt are considered to be mere pretenders to divine frenzy.<sup>4</sup>

- (4) In the Gaya district, the trench is filled with mango wood which is burnt. This seems to show that this kind of wood possesses some magical powers. But the kind of wood burnt in the pit in the Patna district is not mentioned.
- (5) In the Patna district, barren women snatch small pieces of the burning charcoal under the belief that its possession will enable them to become mothers. But no such thing is done in Gaya district.

This is similar to the devices adopted by barren women in the district of Guya for getting rid of their sterility. At Miranpur in the same district, there is the tomb of a saintly Pir to which barren women go and tie up shreds of clothes to a neighbouring tree in the hope of becoming mothers. Then again at Kāko there is the tomb of Kamalo Bibi which also possesses the attribute of conferring maternity upon barren women. To this shrine sterile, women constantly go with small offerings in order to obtain offspring and tie up strips from their dress at the door of the tomb.<sup>5</sup>

This practice of tearing shreds from the women's dress and tying them on to the door of the tomb is based on sympathetic magic. Even after being torn from the wearer's dresses, the former are believed to maintain an imaginary connection with the wearers. After being tied to the door of the tomb or to the tree, these shreds become imbued with the afflatus of the pīr or the saint which is communicated to the wearers by the imaginary connection mentioned earlier. This afflatus enables the barren women to conceive children in their wombs.

- (6) In the Gaya form of the ceremony, the fire walking rite is regarded as a kind of exorcism. Only those who are possessed by the evil spirits are singed by the fire; any burn is a sign of their deliverance from the demoniacal possession.

In this case, I am inclined to believe that the more powerful and superior spirits of Rāhu drives out the inferior evil spirits which have taken possession of the votaries. Similarly, at Sihuji near Rafiganj in the district of Gaya there is the tomb of a *pir* named Sāiyid Sialkoti who has the power of casting out evil

spirits. Both Hindus and Muhammadans suffering from demoniacal possession go to this shrine for cure and offer cocks by the way of sacrifice.<sup>6</sup>

Then again in the district of Patna a fair is annually held in honour of a Muhammadan martyr named Ghazi Mian at Maner near Dinapore. On this occasion, a mock marriage procession is held, and eunuchs perform the duties devolving on the parents of the bridegroom and the bride. At a shrine which is situated on the bank of the tank to which this procession proceeds, women and girls possessed by evil spirits go and prostrate themselves before it. Then, they excite themselves into a fit and thereafter burnt incense is applied to their nostrils. This is supposed to cure them of the demoniacal possession.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*, XV, (6) 1935-6: 537-542.
- 2 *Vide* Gazetteer of the Patna District. By L. S. S. O'Malley. Revised by J. F. W. James. Patna; Superintendent, Bihar and Orissa Government Printing, 1924, pp. 54-55.
- 3 *Vide* Gazetteer of the Gaya District, by L.S.S. O'Malley, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1906, pp. 94-95.
- 4 *Vide*: Crooke's "An Introduction to the popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India" (Allahabad Edition of 1894), p. 154.
- 5 *Vide* O'Malley's Gazetteer of Gaya . . . p. 79.
- 6 *Op. cit.*, p. 79.
- 7 *Vide*: Gazetteer of Patna (Revised edition of 1924), Patna: Superintendent, Bihar and Orissa Government Printing, p. 67.



# 17 On curious tenets and practices of a certain class of Faqirs in Bengal\*

*Maulavi Abdul Wali*

## Preliminary

In the districts of the 24-Parganas Nadiya, Jessore and Khulna, and probably in some others of Bengal, a class of mendicants is to be seen who are called by different names, and whose unorthodox habits, unshaven hair, and unconventional manners are as much a curiosity to a stranger, as the rigid secrecy they maintain with regard to their tenets and practices. What these men believe and practice are only known to the members of the “mystic cult” but never to others, even to those intimately connected with them. My attention to them was attracted first in this way. I had in my employment a servant aged apparently 22, who had been suffering from *intestinal colic*, which had reduced him to a mere skeleton. He tried several medicines while in my employment, and even after he left it, with no effect. Those who are acquainted with the disease can testify that it is very hard to cure and baffles the skill of physicians. For a time did not see the young man. Inquiry revealed that a Faqir-commonly called Nara’s Faqir had cured him of the malady. When I next saw him, I found him a new man – hale, hearty, and robust. I tried my best to have a talk with the Faqir, and to procure from all other sources information regarding the mode of the treatment, and the medicines used. But beyond the fact that they can cure all diseases that flesh is heir to, I could gather no useful information. Several persons had seceded from the tenets of Faqirs, and also some of their disciples were approached through a man, which gave me for the first time a glimpse into their secret life. But the information, though correct, was of a fragmentary nature, and required further investigation and confirmation. The Faqirs would in no case meet me. The books and tracts written by them were all composed in their own “mystic language”, and the refutations of some of them were written by men without any knowledge and insight to their character. Such being the case, I despaired of adding to my scanty knowledge as to their distinctive character and habits. The songs of Lalan Shah, Siraj Shah, and other, Faqirs, sung by boat men and others, were very good in their own way, but did not solve the mystery.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, I then met with a Bengali work titled “The Manaranjan Ucit Katha”.<sup>2</sup> The author Qazi Karamat-u-llah of 24-Parganas District mentions, in chapter 2 of his book he first became the disciple of a renowned Faqir, and how through him came to know the secrets of this class of men. At first he would not disclose anything, but the author continuing to visit him, day after day, was only able, after a vow of secrecy to learn from him the outward signs of the “cult”. But persisting for long years, and after being subjected to various unpleasant trials, he became possessed of the “secret of the so-called holy men”, including the mystic formulae. He learnt from nine other Faqirs various other details. The beliefs and practices, stated by the enthusiastic Qāzi, are substantially the same that were disclosed to me by my informants. The author has, it is to be regretted, huddled together all his information, and out of religious zeal, destroyed the harmony of description by adding his own reflections. Some of his statements are vague and lacking clearness. But our thanks are due to a man, who in this prosaic age, and malarious Bengal, should try to add to our knowledge of a sect whose beliefs and practices are a sealed book to all those who are outside their pale, and who, though recruited from the lower order of society – comprising Hindus, Musalmans, and others – are only known by their healing art, delightful songs, distinctive habits, and periodical festivities. The learned author of the “Dabastan-i-Mazahib”, Mirza Muhsin-i-Fani, some 250 years ago, endeavoured to learn the beliefs and practices of various sects by enlisting himself as such, but he was a Punjab Muhammadan, while the author of the *Ucit Katha* is a plain Bengal Musalman of our own times.

I do not think myself qualified to discuss here the origin of these so-called holy persons. They may be a sect of Caktas and Baisnavas, as most of the beliefs and practices of the sect mentioned in the Dabastan-i-Masahib, and other works in Sanskrit are identical with the beliefs and practices of these classes of devotees.

In north Jessore, and the greater part of Nadiya, these devotees are called Naras,<sup>3</sup> Kalas,<sup>4</sup> or simply Darvishes. In the district of the 24-Parganas, their beliefs are called “Faqiri Mat”.

The real Faqirs, they say, are Aul, Baul, Darvish, and Sain.

“Āule Faqir Allah, Baule Muhammad.

Darvish Ādam Safi ei tak had.

Tin mat ek sat kariya je Ali.

Prakac, Kariya dilo Sainmat bali”.

It is not clear what is meant by the words, Āul,<sup>5</sup> Baul,<sup>6</sup> and Sain.<sup>7</sup> But the previous verse signifies that God, Muhammad, and Adam are, respectively, Aul, Baul, and Darvish. Āli founded the fourth sect – Sain – out of the first three. There are several other sub-divisions, for example, Carva-tyagi, Mlecha, Ghospara’r *mat*, Pagaler-*mat*, Karta-bhaja, Satighar’er-Madari, and others (*mat* means a way of belief).

There are diverse opinions and practices prevalent among these mendicants. But they allege that although they differ in many things, the mode and manner of their attaining the end are the same. There is only one belief and different kinds of *Jajan* (practice), all aiming at the same end.

The illiterate, lowly Hindus and Muhammadans are the classes from among whom these, Faqirs and mendicants are generally recruited, although Brahmans and others are sometimes found among their votaries.<sup>8</sup>

Music in which they excel, and which they much practice, is one of their chief instruments of winning the hearts. Women – generally widowed, out-casted, and fallen of any persuasion – are their next instrument.<sup>9</sup> They are expert medicine men and are generally seen curing those maladies which generally baffle the ingenuity of ordinary doctors of medicine. Through their healing art they gain disciples! For example, a man who happens to be the disciple of a Faqir encounters a man suffering from a severe disease. He gives him his secret advice, and perhaps *pills*, and teaches him how to sing and pray. As soon as the patient feels better, his devotion and belief increase. Then the Guru, or the principal Faqir, is invited, a *Sadhu Seba* (feasting of mendicants) given, and a few men are entertained according to the means of the patient. In this way, and through the instrumentality of the previous three things, disciples are gained.

So far as I am aware, these beliefs were formerly confined to a class of Hindu *Tantiris* and Bairagis of the Baule order, but since a period of 30 or 40 years men of other castes, for example, Musalmans of the lower order, are believing in their beliefs. Inwardly and outwardly they are the same – Hindu and Muhammadan prayer words are used in their worship.

There is a common bond of fraternity and sympathy among them, although to different castes or creeds they might have originally belonged.

It is curious that those Faqirs who would call themselves outwardly Musalmans do not say their prayers according to the Islamic tenets. If a Maulavi happens to go to them, they would talk as if they were true believers. They deny having belonged to the sect of Nara or Kala and similar other sects. They say, they belong to the Muhammadan creed-of Shari'at Tariqat, Haqiqat, and M'arfat. From these have sprung up seven other classes, for example, Nara, Kala, Chedi, Maye (Woman), and others. A beginner, they say, has to conform to the outward practices of the religion (Shari'at), but gradually as he improves, he abandons his former beliefs, and learns to be a true devotee (Ma'rfati Faqir). Some say their originators were Ali and Fatima. They do not beget children, as they consider themselves dead men – the dead have no children.

Curiously enough these Faqirs trace their spiritual succession to the recognized Muhammadan orders of Cishtiya, Qadiriya, Naqshbandiya, and Mujaddadiya. I daresay, to beguile the unwary, or perhaps, as they like, to include themselves in their orders.<sup>10</sup> These devotees cite as their guides Christ, Moses, Abraham, Muhammad, Krisna, and others and interpret their actions and beliefs according to their own, and often, invent things never said or done by them.

As will be explained hereafter, the chief and only means of their attaining the end are through woman, who is the middle of the earth, the mother of mankind. A woman is at once a wife, a sister, and a mother. With the aid of Yoga and *yugal*, *gaaja* (cannabis) and *bhang* (opium), eating and drinking, music and their special services and prayers, they try to get their material god, attain superhuman power, and acquire spiritualism. According to them, all the current opinions, religious, moral, social, and individual, are radically defective and wrong.

They argue thus, whatever that is in the universe is in the human body. So it is necessary to make love with the human body. The Murshid, Guru, or Spiritual guide is to be found in it. He can only be found through woman. The temple of God is said to be in the middle of the earth, but, in fact, that temple is in the centre of the human body. God is present everywhere, and in everything. So to sanctify one thing, and to abuse the other, to eat some as clean, and to reject others as unholy, are not proper. Nay, the very things rejected as unholy and unclean ought to be partaken of in reference to the other things, because man's body is unholy, and, unless unholy is mixed with unholy, man does not attain spiritualism. When a fan is used in winnowing the rice, the real thing may be thrown away with the refuse. Nothing that comes forth from the human body should be thrown away or looked down upon, for example, a big net is as much necessary to catch big fish as small nets to secure small ones, so one thing is as much necessary as the other. Nothing is superfluous, and nothing should be rejected. Man's mind is the "scripture", which should be cultivated, and through which only the where about of the Murshid may be traced.

To know oneself is the Faqiri. In the unwritten scripture of the mind, we have faith and not in the written text. It is of no use to pray or to fast without knowing the secrets of the life. So we sing *deho-tatva* (on the secrets of the life). We make the milk sour, in order to convert it into *ghi* (clarified butter). We pursue a different course from the ordinary religions to arrive at the desired end. The prayers and fasting prescribed by the ordinary religions are not the means to the end. If one can prostrate once only and fast a day in appropriate time, it will suffice in one's life. That time is known to the devotees, who have no faith in outward prayer. If one's mind is fixed, there is no necessity to pray and fast.

Water, fire (sun), earth, and wind are man's common property – they give benefit to all, irrespective of caste, creed, and colour. So the devotees never distinguish between man and man as well as between men of different persuasions. If the believer be a true devotee, although outwardly a Hindu, or a Muhammadan, or a Christian, he will shape his course according to his cardinal beliefs and not to the outward garments.

They periodically give feasts, in which a large number of the devotees are invited. The host and hostess receive every guest with due reverence. Their feet are washed as they arrive, and they are then conducted to their seats on the arms of the host or hostess or their friends according to the sex of the arrivals.

Fish, vegetables, and sweets are consumed; ganja and bhang freely smoked; mystic songs sung; and musical instruments, such as Saringi (a stringed instrument), Dugdugi (Kettle drums), and Khunjuri (Cymbals) are struck and played upon. In this Mahatsab – or Sadhu – Seba as it is called the devotees, in their mystic language, discusses their secret actions as to how much each of them may have acquired spiritualism or sanctity. Men and women of this class never eat meat and refrain from the food touched, or plates and cooking utensils used by someone else.

As I have said these sectaries guard their beliefs and practices with rigid secrecy, and so avoid meeting with men of culture, education, and birth.

The first and preliminary injunctions they give to the would-be disciple are to doff the ordinary dress, to don *gerua basan*, *kapni*,<sup>11</sup> or *khilka*,<sup>12</sup> to wear iron *bala* (bracelet) on the wrist, not to shave and let the hair grow, not to put on shoes made of leather, to provide himself with a rosary, and a long smoking pipe, a *cimta* or pair of pincers for taking fire, to drink water out of *karwaor kisti*, to give up prayer, to use narcotic drugs, *bhang* and *ganja*, and to recite or repeat their mystic formulae many times as an act of worship.

### Certain terms and practices explained

The following facts and technical terms are worth recollecting in order to fully understanding some of their secret and other acts.

The *sun* means father; and the *moon* mother. In a week, 4 days – Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday – are sacred to the sun; and 3 days – Monday, Wednesday, and Friday – are sacred to the moon. The day is to be reckoned from the night, that is, day follows night. From both the nostrils, the sun's and the moon's rays pass (flow) regularly – from the right hole pass the sun's rays and from the left hole, the moon's rays. On sun's days, the sun's rays, and on moon's days, the moon's rays arc to be secured (by arresting the breath of the right or left nostril, as the case may be), and the appropriate mystic formulae repeated.

*Bhajan* means mystic formulae, or to enchant, or repeat them, to pray; *Sadhan* is to eat or drink, and also to worship. *Bhajan* increases *bhakti* or devotion; *Sadhan* strength. One can never become a devotee unless one gives up rank, family distinction, and fear, or practices *bhajan sadhan*.

The devotees meet on Saturday night at a place (*akhra*) with musical instruments, bhang, ganja, and liquor. Men and women in the midst of narcotics and music commence reciting the mystic formulae many times. Thus, by the commingling of many minds *bhajan* is accomplished.

They say that the mind cannot be fixed without narcotics and intoxicating liquor; and no *bhajan* (devotional singing) is of any efficacy without the mind being steady or fixed. Religious men do not allow these things, but the people by fixing their mind may tread the right path.

The Muhammadan devotees (those who outwardly profess Muhammadanism), I am told; repeat in prayer (*bhajan*) the Muhammadan recognized formulae.

They offer prayer in the evening, middle of the night, or end of it, either seated or walking. The evening prayer, if offered seated, is called *daira*, and if offered walking *dairacalti*. Similarly, the nocturnal prayers that are offered in the middle or end of the night are called, respectively, *daira* and *paira-calti*, as they are offered seated or walking.

Six kinds of prayer words are known to the author of the Ucit Katha. They are repeated in the way the devotees are seen to, that is, the words are recited with long accents, while the body is rocking to and fro, the head moving, and the locks of the head violently struck on the ground. Every day each word should be repeated not less than a hundred times.

### *Healing congregation*

For the advent of the spirit, the devotees place upon a *piri* (stool) a small jar of water covered with a piece of cloth, along with betel leaf, betel nut, paddy, durva grass (*Panicum dactybon*) mango twig, sweetmeat and an *asan* (seat). This done, the head mendicant stands facing the previous articles with a piece of cloth round his neck (a sign of supplication), prostrates himself and strikes his forehead on the ground, while repeating the following eight names mentally “Ma-khaki, Baba-Brahma, Bisnu, Mahadeva, Bhagavati, Ma-Kali, Ma-Barkat, Baba-Paighambar”. Then holding his breath, and with folded hands he looks towards the light and repeats mentally the following verse, each time prefixing these four names, “Ma-khaki, Mahadeva, Ma-Bhagavati, Ma-Kali”.

The congregation of devotees also sings various mystic melodies, for example,

*Guru deo dekha dina-hine.  
Ami parechi go tufane  
Kripa kari ei nihare.  
Baso ese hridasane.  
Se je akul pathar  
Ami kemane habo par  
Tomar nija-gune daya kare  
Guru par kare nyao adhine.  
Cankate parechi ami.  
Kripa dristi kara tumi.  
Tumi na tarale ami.  
Par haibo kemane.  
Hae tabo smranagato.  
Dakitechhi avirato.  
Duhkha kena deogo eto.  
Achi pare Sricarane.<sup>13</sup>*

*Translation:* Guru! Show yourself to this humble individual; I am in the midst of a tempest. Kindly at this juncture come and sit on my breast. It is

a wide ocean, how shall I be able to pass over it? Kindly through your own amiable disposition, O Guru! Take my humble self over the ocean. I am placed in a critical position, look to me with compassion; unless you save me, how shall I be able to get over (the ocean)? Being devoted to you, I am calling you continually. Why do you afflict me so much, I am ever at your feet.

At this stage lo! The spirit with his hosts arrives. The congregation of devotees at the height of ecstasy, and at their instance, the patient and his relatives, continue making them low obeisance. Seeing the spirit, the devotees consider themselves very holy and believe the spirit to be-God Himself. The head, mendicant then tells the patient, “Look, thou art cured, what dost thou want to eat?” The patient then recovers health and gets to eat whatever he likes.

For the recovery of the patient, all classes of devotees hold congregations; only the secret words are different with each class. Having furnished the *asan* (or seat) if the *bhajan* be enchanted while looking steadfastly towards the flames of the burning lamp all sorts of illness will go. If the patient be suffering from delirium, a new earthen pitcher should be procured, and filled up with water, and the same *bhajan* blown with the mouth into it. The patient will see his own image in the water. The more do they indulge in tobacco, *ganja*, *bhang*, and paan, the speedier will be the recovery. Here are some of the secret words.

According to the tenets of that class of the mendicants known as “pagal” (deranged) – and who believe in,

*Murshid satya, Mursider bakya satya, Apanar bhajanar katha, Kabio na jatha tatha, Apanar apani hushiar.*

The following words (*bhajan*) should be repeated both by male and female devotees, for unless both be of the same mind, no good will come out of it – and blown with the mouth on the water, and given to the patient to drink, the patient will be cured of his disease.

*Udai Brahma, Fatima, Hakdin, Qudrat sain toma bai ar dhyan nai, Murshid satya, Murshid satya.*

Also during night after smoking *ganja* and *bhang* when the mind becomes light (*nirmal* or transparent), both the eyes should be shut, the figure of the Murshid meditated upon, and the previous *bhajan* repeated, then the figure of the Murshid will be visible. This is the *mawakkil* who will tell everything, and through him one will be aware of what right and what is wrong. When the mind would become vacant, and wandering through the influence of narcotics, the devotee should pronounce in mind, “*Ya-rab ghani, Ya-rab ghani*”, mediate the spiritual guide, and sing mystic songs (*bhajan bakya*). By this means is man saved in this world, and the world to come.

This is a mystic verse.  
Murshid deo dekha nijgune.  
Ami pare achi Sricarane.  
Hae sakha, deogo dekha.  
O go paine keno Sadhane.  
Bhabanadi karte par.  
Toma bine naiko ar.  
Daya karo Murshid amar.  
Ami achi base sadhane.  
Bhaba nadir tufanbhari.  
Dubitese debo tari.  
Par karogo O Kandari. Dublo tari tufan'e.

*Translation:* Murshid (guide) give me a visit through your amiable disposition, I am lying at your feet. Show yourself to me as a friend. Oh! Why do I not get you, although I worship you. There are none but you to ferry me across the river of life, Have mercy on me, my Guide. I am (ever) in your contemplation. The hurricane of the river of life is severe, the corporal boat is sinking; carry me across it. O ye Pilot! The boat is about to go down.

The devotees allege that there is only one belief, but different sorts of yajan; one practices one kind of *bhajan*, the other a different kind, but all aiming at the same end.

### *Khak-Sadhan*

Whenever the devotees happen to go to any place or congregate into a new spot, they worship (*Sadhan*) or propitiate the earth, so that no evil may happen, by reciting the following formula:

Bismillah, Bismillah, ma Basamata,<sup>14</sup>  
Tumi amar ma, ami tomar beta,  
Jaha.karo ma basta basamata.

*Translation:* In the name of God, in the name of God, Mother Earth! You are my mother, I am your son. Whatever you may do, Mother! You are really *basamata*.

### *Appendix*

There are several renowned devotees and Faqirs who are considered to be good and pious men. They possess some sort of learning. Their poetical stanzas are not only melodious but expressive of their own secret beliefs. They are chanted accompanied by musical instruments, or without them, by male and female devotees. They are sung too by others – often without musical instruments.



The author of the “Ucit Katha” mentions several Faqirs. One is Shah Shir Ali – probably of the 24-Parganas District – who has written the following works: “Shah Shir Ali”, “Qaulil Arifin”, “Ramuzul Arifan”, and “Najatul Shar”, all in Bengali.

Budhu Shah – probably of the same locality – is the author of “Maula-i-Maula”, “Jalsa Namah”, “Didar-i-Ilahi”, and “Bidaril Ashiqin”. In the first-named work is mentioned the story of Krisna and his gopis (milk maids). He writes, “Strike and seize, eat and take, and banish the world away”.

Who among you are going to catch the full-moon. Look well to the north and south of the *tribini* (meeting of three rivers) the sun and the moon are on (its) either sides. The sun’s rays are in the abode of the father, (while) the mother can be met with in the abode of the moon. If thou couldst see (? them) thou wouldst be good-natured. Dear children so try to know (? them). What is sugar to it; one becomes satiated (the stomach becomes full) with half a letter (of it). If thou art willing to catch the “moon of Ruhini”, set the snare in the abode of heart (*brid-aipur*), in the *bridaipur* belonging to Shah Shir Ali. Why art thou in the abode of the sleep, O look with thine eyes of love.

Another renowned and the most melodious versifier, whose “*dhuyas*” are the rage of the lower classes, and sung by boatmen and others, was the far famed “Lalan Shah”.<sup>15</sup> He was a disciple of “Siraj Shah”, and both were born at the village *Harispur*, sub-division Jhenedah, District Jessore. Having travelled long and made pilgrimages to Jagannath and other shrines, and met with all sorts of devotees, he at last settled at Mauza Siuriya, near the sub-divisional headquarter of Kushtiya (Nadiya). Here, he lived, feasted, sang, and worshipped and was known as a Kayastha, and where he died some 10 years ago (from the time of writing of this chapter). His disciples are many, and his songs are numerous.

It is to be regretted that both the author of the “Ucit Katha” and myself have got our information through men who outwardly profess Muhammadanism. Hence, most of the songs and phrases used are Muhammadan rather than Hindu.

## Notes

\* This lengthy chapter has been shortened by the editors. The chapter has been purged of all controversial content but is otherwise important as it demonstratively indicates that the Bauls have had and still have a strong presence in Bengal and have influenced Bengali religious beliefs historically.

1 Reprinted from *JASB* V (4), 1900: 203–218.

2 Printed at the Nababebhakar press, Calcutta, 1296 B. S.

3 The etymology of Nara is uncertain. There are Naras both among the so-called Muhammadan Faqirs and Hindu Bairagis. Some say the founder of the order used to place *nara* (stubble) in his wallet, which (*nara*) he used to move and upon which he used to sit. Another version derives the word from Natya = to dance.

- 4 Kala is said to be derived from Kala, the founder of the order.
- 5 Aul may mean first or beginning (Arabic *awwal*).
- 6 Baul is a madman, or one who shouts or proclaims the name of a god. The Bairagis are either Gaure, who lead the life of a Grihastha or ordinary householder, or Baule, who lead the life of a mendicant. Both, however. Keep women.
- 7 Indian Faqirs are generally called *Sain*, the word is applied to God a Hindu devotee or Bhahman is called *Gasa'n*.
- 8 A middle-aged man, of good position, often leaves the world, and becomes a holy Baisnava. There is no marriage, but if the woman be the member of a family which do not allow her to be abducted, a kind of formal marriage ceremony is gone into, for fear of the Indian Penal Code.
- 9 There is no marriage, but if the woman be the member of a family which do not allow her to be abducted, a kind of formal marriage ceremony is gone into, for fear of the Indian Penal Code.
- 10 Every Muhammadan Faqir is supposed to be a member of one of the previous orders, so that he may say to the inquirer that he belongs to such and such an order.
- 11 *Kapni* – a small piece of cloth used instead of breaches by devotees and labouring people.
- 12 *Khilka* (or to use the correct Arabic word *Khirqah*) is a sleeveless long coat used (it is said by the devotees) in imitation of the loose garment of the dead, with which the body is interred. Khika can be used by any devotee, but not so the *kapni* and *gerua basan*, which are used by wandering mendicants only.
- 13 Editor's Note: This particular verse is similar to the one composed by Swami Vivekananda for his guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, and is regularly sung by Bengali Hindus and Guru Vandana.
- 14 The correct word is basamati earth.
- 15 Lalan Faqir is still widely followed and revered in Bengal, and his songs are a part of the repertoire of modern folk singers and popular songs.

## 18 A note on the rise of a new Hindu sect in Bihar

*Sarat Chandra Mitra*

Sakhibhāvakas constitute a peculiar sect of the Vaishṇavas and are devotees of the cult of Rādhā, the spouse of Krishna. They adore her under the belief that she is the incarnation of Krishna's *sakti* or energy and, in order to give an adequate expression to their belief that they constitute her friends and followers, rig themselves out in the attire of members of the softer sex. About this sect, a recent author has written as follows<sup>1</sup>: –

About the middle of the present (19th) century, this curious sect (the sakhibhāvakas) obtained sonic notoriety in and about Calcutta. The Vaishṇavas of this sect express their devotion to Rādhā, the personification of the *sakti* of Krishna in a ridiculous and rather disgusting manner. In order to convey the idea of being, as it were, her followers and friends, a character obviously incompatible with the difference of sex, they assume the female garb, and adopt not only the dress and ornaments, but the manners and occupations of women.<sup>2</sup> The only place where they are met with in any number is Jaypur. There are many Sakhibhāvakas who do not marry, as marriage would be inconsistent with their assumed female character.<sup>3</sup>

A cult, very similar to the previous, has been recently propounded in Bihar by a retired Deputy Inspector of Schools, named Bābu Bhagbānprasād, who is now known throughout Bihar as रूपकला भगवानप्रसाद. He is a follower of Rāmānanda – the great worshipper of Vishṇu and preacher of his favourite cult. The keynote of this new cult is the worship of Rādhākriṣṇa, Lakshminārāyaṇa or Sītārām.

Now श्री चैतन्य चरितामृत – the Bible of Vaishṇavism – mentions the following four ways of worshipping the aforementioned deities:

दास्य सख्य बातसल्यशृंगार चारी रस ।  
चारी भावे भक्त यत कृष्ण तार बश ॥

The worshipper, in the capacity of a servant, may surrender his own self to the service of God. Or he may look upon the deity in the light of a friend, a

parent, or a lover or sweetheart and worship him in these capacities. Now Bhagbānprasād worships Sītārām in the capacity of a lover or husband (that is to say, in the मधुर, शृंगार or कान्तभाव which is said to be the best way of worshipping a deity in). He has, therefore, assumed the feminine name Rūpakalā (रूपकला) and dresses himself in the garb of a female, as will appear from his annexed photo (*vide* the accompanying plate). The fact of his having assumed the previous feminine cognomen is recorded in the following couplet occurring in one of his works:

तुमही मातु पितु परम हित, तुम मम गुरु भगवान् ।  
“रूपकला” सिय किडकरी बिनवति श्रीहनुमान् ॥

Just as a woman, who is in love, devotes her whole life, youth and charms to the service of her beloved, so Bhagbānprasād has consecrated his whole life to the service of his beloved deity Sītārām. His attitude towards his beloved deity may be described as something approaching that of the milkmaids of Brindaban towards their beloved and adored Srī Krishṇa, which whole-hearted devotion is very aptly expressed in the following words of the Vaishṇava poet:

बंध तुमि से यामार प्राण ।  
पिरीति रसेते, ढाली तनुमन, दियाछि तोमार पाय ।  
तुमि मोर पति, तुमि मोर गति मम नाहि मान ताय ॥

“O my beloved! You are my life”.

“Overflowing with the milk of human love, I have poured my whole body and mind at your feet”.

“You are my husband; you are my source of salvation; I have nobody else”.

This way of looking upon the deity as a beloved lover is not confined to India, only.

The famous Persian poet Hafiz also looked upon the “great sun-coloured being beyond this darkness” as a friend or lover, for he says in one well-known passage:

“Do not bring a lamp into my audience-hall to-day.

To-night, that full moon my Friend is shining here”.

It is also a creed among the Roman Catholics, for Cardinal Newman says: “If thy soul is to go on into higher spiritual blessedness, it must become a woman, yes, however manly you may be among men”.

I have elsewhere given a succinct biographical sketch of the founder of this sect – Rūpakalā Bhagbānprasād.<sup>4</sup> From his very boyhood, he was of a religious turn of mind. In 1858, he was fully initiated into spiritual manhood by Swāmī Rāmcharaṇ Dās at Godnā to the west of Chapra. After initiating him, his spiritual preceptor dubbed him with the religious title of “Sītārām

*Saraṇ*". After his retirement from service on 31 October 1893, he endowed his property, by a deed of endowment, for the worship of his tutelary deity Sītārām, and, cutting off all connection with worldly affairs, went to Ajodhya where he has attired himself in the narrow waist cloth called *lengtā*, and a scarf named *āṅchlā*, and equipped himself with the begging – bowl called *kamaṇḍalu*. There, he has taken up his quarters at the premises No. 108 named "*Pramodvana*" – "The Grove of Delight" – a big cottage belonging to Saint Rāmcharaṇ Dās. In this secluded retreat, like Parnell's *Hermit*,

"Remote from man, with God he spends his days,  
Prayer all his business, all his pleasure praise".

Since his retirement to Ajodhya, Rūpakalā Bhagbānprasād's saintly character has become fully developed; and his reputation for sanctity has spread far and wide throughout Northern India. On the occasions of the Rāmnavamī festival in the month of *Chaitra* (March–April) and of the bathing festival on the full-moon day in the month of *Kārtik*: (October–November), a large number of pilgrims from all parts of Northern India foregather at Ajodhya and repair to the "*Rūpakalājkuṅja*" to have a look at the saintly Sītārāmsaraṇ Rūpakalū Bhagbānprasād. On Sundays, many pleaders, judicial officers, zamindars, clerks, and other persons of every walk of life from the neighbouring places assemble at his residence to have interview and religious conversation with him.

This "wonderful mixture of God and man" – Rūpakalā Bhagbānprasād – exercises a great influence for good on the moral well-being of Bihar. That well-known modern saint of Bengal, Srī Rāmkrishṇa, very aptly said: "When the rose is blown, and sheds its fragrance all around, the bees come of themselves. The bees seek the full-blown rose, and not the rose the bees". The truth of this saying of his Bengali brother in God has been strikingly illustrated in Rūpakalā Bhagbānprasād's life. Numbers of educated Biharis have flocked to him and become his disciples. Among these, two are Munsifs, three are Vakils, and four are Deputy Inspectors of Schools, besides many others. The breadth and catholicity of the religious principles inculcated by him will appear from the fact that he counts among his disciples a retired Mahomedan Sub-Inspector of Police.

It has been shown earlier that the followers of the Sakhībāvaka sect are devotees of the cult of Srīkrishṇa's spouse Rādhā whom they look upon in the light of an incarnation of Krīshṇa's *sakti* or energy and dress themselves in female attire, adorn their persons with feminine ornaments, and even adopt womanly manners and occupations. This has been stated to be ridiculous and disgusting. But the followers of the sect (which we may call the Sītārāmi Sect), founded by Rūpakalā Bhagbānprasād, do not give expression to their religious beliefs and doctrines in a ridiculous and disgusting manner. No doubt, the keynote of the cult preached by Rūpakalā is the worship of the deity Sītārām in the capacity of a lover or husband. In order to make his *role* compatible with his mode of worship, Bhagbānprasād has, no doubt,

assumed the female garb (as will appear from his portrait in the annexed plate) and adopted the feminine name of “*Rūpakalā*” or “The Effulgence of Beauty”. But so far as my information goes, his followers have not adopted this feminine guise. Two of his followers are residents of Chapra; I know them personally. But I have never seen them in feminine garb. It may be that, after their retirement from worldly life, they may assume the same garb. Be that as it may, this much is certain that the religious doctrines inculcated by *Rūpakalā* are pure and simple and characterized by breadth and catholicity.



*Figure 18.1* Rupakala Bhagban Prasad

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB* XI (1), 1917: 48–52.
- 2 H. Wilson's *Religious Sects of the Hindus* (Edition of 1861), p. 178.
- 3 *A History of Hindu Civilization during British Rule*. By Pramatha Nath Bose, B. Sc., F.G.S., M.R.A.S. In Four Volumes. Calcutta: W. Newman & Co. 1894. Vol. I, pp. 112–113.
- 4 *Vide* my article titled *A Modern Saini of Northern India* in *The Hindustan Review* (Allahabad) for October–November 1916, pp. 299–204.

# 19 A theoretical history of the Goddess Yellamma

*Rao Bahadur Rudragauda  
Chanvirgauda Artal*

- 1 Just as people propitiate the Goddess of Earth, imagining for her a specific form and giving her the name of Dyámavvá, so do they also propitiate that self-same goddess in another form under the name of Yellamma and or Yellavvá. The name Yellavvá conveys the comprehensive idea of the “mother of all people”. Yellavvá goes by the denominations of Lôkavvá, Jagadavvá, Réṇukâ, and others. The name Yellavvá denotes existence in all parts of the universe, while the names Lôkavvá and Jagadavvá denote one liked and loved by the whole world, and suggest the idea that the whole world is protected by this presiding deity. Lôkavvá, the mother of Loka (=the world), and Jagadavvá, the mother of Jagat (=the universe), merely suggest the greatness of the Goddess of Earth. As the mother busies herself with the protection of children, as she is at the head of all kith and kin, protecting them and doing them all good, so is the Goddess of Earth the world’s mother, worthy of reverence in that she protects her children, namely, the inhabitants of the world, and grants them happiness. As the mother forgives the numerous faults of her children and affectionately shields them from harm, so there is none that can pardon the people for their faults and cherish them except the Earth – a view which has been crystallized in the Kanarese proverb (*Kshamayâdharitri*, i.e. the Earth [shines] by her forgiveness).<sup>1</sup>
- 2 The chief agent in the task of the protection of the world is indeed the Earth. The food grains, garments, etc., required for sustenance of life, and all things necessary for one’s own decoration are obtainable from the Earth alone. Considering that the Earth herself is the prime creative power in this terrestrial world, men dowered her with the honorific names of Yellavvá, Lôkavvâ, and Réṇukâ. Considering this point in the light of scientific research, every substance in the universe will be found to have been formed by the combination of atoms and molecules aided by the forces of chemical affinity and molecular attraction. A molecule (*Réṇu*) is a small combination of atoms (*Kana*). This Earth has been formed of nothing else than innumerable atoms and molecules; and as the combination of these molecules alone has been instrumental in dowering the Earth Goddess with her vast bulk, men set about worshipping her under the designation of Réṇuka.



- 3 The following is a summary of the legendary story of Yellavá of Puranic fame: Yellavá was the daughter of King Réñuká. Her name was also Réñuká. Her husband was the sage (Rishi) Jamadagni. They had five sons. The youngest of them was Parashuráma. Jamadagni possessed the cow of plenty (Kámadhénu = the celestial cow yielding all desires). One day, Réñuká went out with a jar to fetch water, making a coil of Shesha to place on her head as a support for the Jar. (Shesha is the celebrated serpent with 1,000 heads and is represented as supporting the entire world and as forming the couch or bed of Vishnu.) At that time an emperor by name Kártavîrya-Arjuna (according to some, a Gandharva by name Chitraratha) possessed of immense riches and valorous in the might of his 1,000 arms, came to the river (the Malaprabhá) in great pomp, accompanied by the ladies of his harem, and began sporting and playing in the water in company with his wives. There Réñuká, observing their pleasures and merry-making, said to herself:

Oh how lucky are these ladies! Vain is the life of her who cannot enjoy pleasures with a person possessed of such good fortune and grandeur. Blessed indeed are these ladies who are the wives of such an emperor. Such beauty and such good fortune can never be mine, owing to my father's having married me to a poor sage.

Revolving these unworthy thoughts she stood in the river for a while, enjoying the sight, and delaying her homeward return. Jamadagni, engaged in worship, became aware of Réñuká's thoughts through his great mental consciousness, and asked her why she returned home late. She put forth a lame excuse at which the sage got enraged and seeing her deprived of the lustre of sanctity, furiously scolded her, sentenced her to contract leukoderma (white leprosy), and finally commanded his sons to cut off her head. The first four sons shrank from executing this cruel order and Parashuráma alone, feeling that a father's command could not be transgressed, struck off her head with his axe (*parashu*). This pacified Jamadagni, who, in approval of Parashuráma's act, desired him to ask a boon. The kind-hearted Parashuráma begged that his mother might be restored to life, which the father readily granted; and seeing that Jamadagni had been utterly overcome by wrath in the matter of Réñuká's shame, he further begged, him to renounce anger forever, on the ground that such mad wrath ill-became him and was likely to prove the source of his destruction. There upon Jamadagni expelled Anger from his body – when, it stood incarnate before him and begged him not to reject it as it was capable of achieving difficult tasks, and as there were several matters yet to be accomplished with its aid. But Jamadagni paid no heed, and discarding it forever, was completely purged of all wrath.

Sometime after this, King Kártavîrya, accompanied by the whole of his retinue, set out for sport and encamped on the banks of a river in the vicinity of Jamadagni's hermitage. Thereupon Jamadagni treated Kártavîrya and his retinue to a feast, and, gratified them with all manner of food and royal

dainties procured for them with the help of Kámadhénu (Cow of Plenty). King Kártavîrya, not understanding how poor a sage was endowed with such abundance of riches, enquired of others who told him that the sage possessed the Kámadhénu which provided him with what he wanted. Thereupon, resolving to deprive him of it, the King approached the hermitage and commenced to carry off the Kámadhénu by force. Bereft of anger, Jamadagni could not withstand the power of Kártavîrya, who cut off his head, after inflicting 21 wounds upon it, and commenced to lead away the Cow of Plenty. But on a sudden it escaped from his grasp and was sent heavenwards to Indra, who had originally presented it to the sage Jamadagni.

About this time Parashuráma had gone to Kailása to learn archery. The moment Réñuká recalled him to mind, he appeared before her and in a furious burst of anger, cut off the 1,000 arms of Kártavîrya, and beheaded him; and maddened by the remembrance that Kártavîrya had killed his father without cause, resolved to exterminate the whole Kshatriya race. He therefore turned his father's head into a stringed instrument, collected the pieces of his body in a vessel, and, in token of the 21 wounds on his father's head, circumambulated the earth 21 times and cleared it of all Kshatriyas. But he had to spare the life of Dasharatha of the Solar race who had prepared himself for a marriage ceremony and that of Janaka of the Lunar race who had consecrated himself for the performance of a sacrifice. For it is an ordinance of the Kshatriya tribe that they should not kill a person initiated for a sacrifice. Thus, only these two Kshatriya families survived the slaughter. Réñuká had her husband restored to her by the grace of the Supreme Being, and again attained the condition of a married woman. The story is a long one; and for fuller details reference should be made to the Réñuká-Máhátmya in Sanskrit.

- 4 Now the story of Réñuká or Yellavvá is an allegory of the earth and the rain. It seems to have been very ingeniously manufactured, regard being had to the condition and changes of the earth at various seasons, the rain, heat, and cold. A little consideration will show that this allegory deals with and describes almost all the annual occupations or operations of the earth. For this allegory, Yellavvá represents the "earth", Jimûta means and represents the "cloud", and Agni represents the "lightning". When fire is given forth by the clouds, we speak of the "thunderbolt", where thunder and the thunderbolt are both produced the rainfall commences. The word Jamadagni is probably merely a corruption of Jimutâgni. As a husband is necessary to a woman, so Jimutâgni itself may be taken to be the husband of the woman in the form of earth. Just as the lotus face of a wife blossoms at the sight of her husband, so does the earth open as a flower the moment rain falls on it. The life of a wife without her husband is miserable. Likewise the earth without rain is useless.
- 5 The seed in the form of rain having dropped into the womb of the woman in the form of earth from her husband in the form of Jimutâgni, the earth conceives and brings forth issue in the form of fruit and crops. As any kind of crop can be reaped with the help of rain, rain may well

be taken to be the prime source of all riches and may hence be said to be the Kámadhénu itself. The word (*go*) in Sanskrit has the meaning of “water”. Hence, Kámadhénu may easily be taken to mean the “water that fulfils all desires”, that is, “rain”. The Kámadhénu then which resides with Jamadagni is rain itself. As Indra is the lord of “clouds”, it easily follows that the Kámadhénu in the form of rain is given by Indra to Jîmutâgni, the husband of Réṇuká (the earth). The legend that Jamadagni was of wrathful or passionate temper merely symbolizes the constant disturbance of clouds and their thunder. That Kártavîrya made 21 cuts on the head of Jamadagni, only means that he destroyed, or put a stop to, all rain. For the 21st rain is the rain that falls on the 21st lunar asterism, namely, Uttarâshádhá (उत्तराषाढा). This rain generally falls in the month of Pausha, that is, about the end of December, or beginning of January. It is usual to predict future rains from an observation of the signs of Pushya rain; and as this rain spoils the stacks or sheaves of paddy and other crops then reaped, and the heaps of grain piled in the threshing-floor, the cultivators call it “the stack or sheaf-destroyer”. After the month of Pausha no rain falls. Rainfall in large quantities ceases after the month of Kârtika, when the autumn wanes, but it continues in fine showers like a man slowly pining away, till the lunar asterism of Uttarâshádhá, after which it ceases completely. Therefore, Jîmutâgni (Jamadagn) vanished away, as it were, in the month of Mârgashirsha. For this reason, Yellavvá becomes a widow by the Hostala-Huṇṇivé. The story that Kártavîrya did not obtain the Kámadhénu after all, simply means that when the month of Kârtika came, rain ceased to fall. The Kámadhénu’s flight to heaven means the disappearance of clouds in the sky. The belief that Jamadagni had relinquished all anger by the time of Kártavîryá’s arrival means that the rain had become weak and powerless, and that the fury of the lightning and thunder had waned before the commencement of the month of Kârtika. The word “Arjuna” also means “white”. The sky in the month of Kârtika is all pure owing to the disappearance of clouds. The sovereign ruler of winter may fairly be said to have flogged and driven away the ascetic (*Yógi*) of autumn. Also, the light of the winter moon is very white. Kártavîryárjuna’s valour merely symbolizes the severity of the cold of the month of Kârtika. The “black” autumn was, so to speak, expelled by the strokes of the severe cold of “white” winter.

- 6 When rain ceases, the crops become ready for the sickle. As the death of her spouse (the rain) consigns the wife (the earth) to widowhood, men cut off her tresses (the crops). The earth is fair to look upon during the rains, even as a wife is in the lifetime of her husband. All crops are cut down in the months of Kârtika and Mârgashirsha. Once the crops are reaped, the beauty of the earth vanishes and she looks pale like a widow. The Goddess of Earth can then be said to have been deprived of her marriage badge and tonsured.

- 7 Formerly, the implements for cutting crops were not the scythe, the sickle, etc., as they are now; as metals like iron were not then available, people made axe-like implements of rib bones and marble and cut their crops with them. An axe is called *Parashu* in Sanskrit. As axes were produced from the earth, Parashuráma must be taken to be the son of Yelavvá. (The word “Ráma” also means “charming”. Hence, Parashuráma may be said in a way to convey the sense of a “sharp axe” or a “sharp edged weapon”. Consequently, Parashuráma himself may be said to have been the cause of his mother’s decapitation or shaving.)
- 8 By Hostála-Hunṇivé the 15th day of the bright half of Márgashirsha, Yellavvá becomes a widow. Hence, it is the practice to call this Purnimá day the widow’s Purnimá (*rande-hunnivé*). In the belief that Yellavvá became a widow, it is customary to testify to this fact by the removal from her image of the marriage badge and by breaking her bangles. Also, at Dyámavvá’s fair, the moment the buffalo is slain, it is the practice, in the belief that her husband is dead, to tear away her marriage badge and break the bangles on her hands. Just as women who have lost their husbands remain hidden for some days from the sight of the people, so is Dyámavvá confined for 3 days, in her temple with the doors closed, the moment her fair is over.
- 9 The whole splendour of the fertile month of Kártika having vanished, the Earth became wholly void of Kshatriyas, through Parashurámá having cut off the whole race of Kártavîrya. But the crops of “sugarcane” and “cotton”, which were yet in the course of growth, happened to survive, just as the Solar and Lunar races of Kshatriyás are related to have survived Parashurámá’s slaughter, owing to their representatives having then been consecrated for marital and sacrificial rites. The sugarcane is in Sanskrit called *Ikshu*. The word *Ikshwáku*, which bears a similarity to the word *Ikshu*, is clearly the name of the first monarch of the Solar race. Owing to its property of heat, the sugarcane crop is to be taken as represented by the Solar race. And the cotton crop, owing to its resemblance to the moon in colour and charm, is to be taken as represented by the Lunar race.
- 10 Again, even as Réṇuká regained her deceased husband and once more became a married woman (*muttaidé*), it is universally held that Yellavvá becomes a married woman again on the setting in of the first or early rain of the next year, and therefore her fair is held on the fifteenth day of the bright half of Chaitra, which is hence called *muttaidé-hunnivé* () or the married woman’s Purnima.
- 11 It has been mentioned earlier that Jamadagni cursed Réṇuká and caused her to contract leucoderma. When the rain has ceased and the crops are reaped, the earth assumes a pale whitish appearance. This is precisely the meaning conveyed by Réṇuká’s contracting leucoderma. To be cured of this disease, Yellavvá is said to have worshipped two ascetics, namely, Eknáth and Jognáth, who assured her that by bathing herself in the well-called “Jogula bhávi” she would get rid of her disease. Yellavvá took the

bath and was cured of her leprosy by the grace of the two ascetics. Yellavvá's bath means the wetting of the whole earth with rainwater. Eknáth represents the plough, and Jognáth represents the pair of bullocks yoked to it; and the favour of the two yogîs means simply the driving of the plough. The earth gets soaked by the rain, and when the plough is driven into it, it loses its paleness and assumes a verdant aspect. In a word, the Earth is no longer a leper. The "Jogula" well simply represents rainwater. As the Goddess (Yellavvá) bathed in that well, it was styled a "Tirtha" (holy place); and even at the present day the people, who assemble at Yellavvá's fair, bathe devoutly in that well and become sanctified, and then visit the goddess. As Yellavvá invoked Eknáth and Jognáth by hymns, her devotees repeatedly pronounce in chorus the expression "Ekkaldé Jogavá" at their bath, at her fair, and while wandering about begging for alms.

- 12 Even as Parashurámá circumambulated the earth with a view to the extermination of the whole Kshatriya race, made stringed instruments of his father's and mother's heads and collected the pieces of his father's body in a vessel, the male and female devotees (Jogappas and Jogatis) of Yellavvá roam about, begging for alms and carrying instruments of music designed to represent Jamadagni's and Réñuká's heads. One of these two instruments is called the male "*chavadike*" and is a single-stringed guitar formed by a small barrel or wooden vessel closed at one end and covered with a thin skin and wire at the other. The second instrument is the female "*chavadike*" called Tuñituni, which is formed of a similar barrel similarly closed at one end, with a projecting stick at the other end, to which singles string is attached lengthwise. The male "*chavadike*" represents Jamadagni's head, and the female "*chavadike*" the head of Yellavvá.
- 13 Some of Yellavvá's devotees who are eunuchs disguise themselves as females, that is, they wear the female garment (*siré*) and put on the bodice (*kuppasa*). They wear all the ornaments of females. They let the hair grow and be up, the top-knot, and get tattooed. Their disposition is distinctly feminine. They always associate with women. Of the female devotees, those who are hermaphrodites conceal their feminine form and appear in the guise of males, that is, they wear the coat, the *dhoti* and the turban and shave their moustaches and beards. These male and female devotees of Yellavvá, appearing in the garb of the opposite sex, eulogize her, singing, dancing, and playing on musical instruments. The reason for this is to be found in the metamorphoses of the earth itself. Thus, the cloud is in the form of "Purusha" (=soul). The earth is in the form of "Prakriti" (=nature). When the cloud in the form of Purusha unites with the earth in the form of Prakriti, the former merges into the latter, and the combination has naturally the form of "Prakriti", that is, the form of a female. Just as women, subject to man's authority and control, adorn themselves and betray love, modesty, fear, and reverence and the feminine virtues of kindness and bashfulness, so does the earth, with whom its husband, the cloud, has associated or combined, make an ostentatious display of its fruit, crops, flowers, creepers, trees, etc.

The male portion of the combination of the earth and cloud becomes invisible after the combination, a natural fact which is represented by the impotent man assuming, the guise of a woman.

- 14 When the rain and crops disappear, the Goddess of Earth may be described as stripped of all her decorations. The pith or essence of her beauty and her skill in fascination are all gone. After winter, the earth yields no kind of crop. The earth is, as it were, widowed. As a woman stripped of her ornaments approximates in appearance to the male, so does the earth too appear to assume a masculine form from the day the crops are reaped and harvested. The earth thus loses her loveliness and softness and becomes as hard as stone. Hardness is an emblem of "Purusha". The earth therefore becomes void of "Prakriti" and assumes as it were the form of "Purusha". Hence, female hermaphrodites assume the guise of men. Thus, Yellavvá's male and female devotees assume female and male guise in conformity with the phenomena the earth undergoes. Just as no sign of manhood can be visible in the earth which by its very nature is a female, so can we find no manhood in the male devotee assuming the guise of a woman. He is but a eunuch. When the earth has assumed a masculine form, it possesses no womanhood, and has hence no power to bear fruit, that is, to grow any crop. In the same way, the woman who has put on the guise of a man, being unfit to beget, possesses no womanhood, which is essential to reproduction. She is but a hermaphrodite.
- 15 Finally, the earth is symbolized as the female of generation. As the earth itself is the fittest place for the sowing of seed, as the soil or surface of the earth is the origin of all things created, and as the earth is the abode of all fortune, the word *bhaga* happens to have the twofold meaning of "the female generative organ" and "prosperity". The large basket (*jaga*) carried on the head by Jogtis, who are Yellavvá's representatives, is round like the earth. This *jaga* is either a corruption of the word (*bhaga*) or a word meaning the earth itself.
- 16 In this way, the people of old propitiated the Goddess Earth with reverence and fear, designating her as Yellavváor Dyamavvá. They regarded the Goddess Yellavvá as the presiding deity of the whole world, while Dyamavvá was established to hold sway within the boundaries of individual villages. The conception of these two goddesses was in truth based on our ancestors ancient and long-established practice of first conceiving a deity and then connecting it with some rule concerning the earth to be observed by the people, and lastly of impressing the force of that rule upon the ignorant, not in the ordinary and simple fashion, but in such an exoteric and allegorical way as would give rise to devotion and belief in the individual. It seems there was a time when such allegories were framed and launched forth. The sole object of our ancestors in introducing such allegories was to create in the people a reverential regard for the rules whose observance was considered desirable; as an instance may be mentioned the rule of our elders that no one should sit on the threshold, for fear of loss of wealth. The threshold is also

worshipped. As the threshold lies across the path of ingress or egress, one who sits on it becomes an obstacle to people going into or out of the house. At times, both men and cattle are prone to run hurriedly into or out of the house. On such occasions, those who sit on the threshold are likely to meet with some accident. Injury thus caused is tantamount to loss of fortune. With these notions in their mind, our ancestors conceived the threshold to be a goddess and ordained that people should never sit on it; and that should they do so, they would be liable to incur loss of fortune. Several ordinances based on similar conceptions can be found in the household ritual of the Hindus.

- 17 As the earth is the protector of the whole world, our ancestors ordained that it should be worshipped by all with great devotion. To represent the earth idols of goddesses incarnate, bearing the names of Yellavvá, Dyamavvá, etc., were conceived and offered for worship to the people. At the festivals or fairs held in honour of these deities, it is the practice to cover the naked body with *Nimb* twigs and leaves, and sandal paste. These practices have found their way among us from the non-Aryans. In the Shākte Purāna, it has been ordained that he who worships the Goddess Shakti should be naked at the time of worship. The Shāktas, therefore, are naked when they worship Goddess Shakti. The devotees of Yellavvá are called Yogappas or Jogappas, and Yogasatis or Jogatis. As in Dyamavvá's fair, so also in Yellavvá's, the Mátangi (a Chándála woman) remains foremost. People assembled at the fair first visit the Mátangi and offer her rice and bread, and then visit the deity Yellavvá, and Mahars are required at both Yellavvá's and Dyamavvá's fairs. Sheep and buffaloes are, however, not slaughtered at Yellavvá's fair. The worshippers of this deity are Virashaivas (Lingayats) who, believing that Yellavvá bears the Ishtā-Linga, have apparently excluded from the ceremonies this item of slaughter which is abominable to their caste. Hence, the proverb goes: (What has the Mulla [a Mahomedan theologian] to do with Yellavvá's fair?)
- 18 In conclusion, then we may say that Dyamavvá and Yellavvá are representations in different forms of one and the same presiding goddess, who indeed is the Earth herself; and from what has been stated earlier, it seems reasonable to bold that the rain is her husband. There may be some minor inaccuracies in the legendary account given in para. 3, but it is scarcely open to doubt that Yellavvá's fair, based as it is on the Puranic legend, is a theatrical representation of those changes of Nature which present themselves with peculiar force to the eyes of an agricultural people.

## Note

- 1 Reprinted from *JASB*, VII (8) September 1906: 591–602.

## 20 The festivities in honour of Siva in the month of Chaitra

*Satindra Narayan Roy*

Chaitra is the month dedicated to the special worship of Siva. We shall describe the rituals as far as possible with reference to their prevalence in North Balasore. On the first Monday of the month, a “*patabhakta*” or head devotee is appointed by the daily worshipper of Siva. He is to be the master of the ceremonies. He immediately sees to the enrolment of the full number of *bhaktas* (devotees), which ranges up to 11 or more, there being no limit to the number. The enrolment is complete within a week. Then, the worshipper makes a “*sankalpa*” or formal declaration for setting up a “*ghat*” or earthen pot. On a Tuesday or a Saturday at midnight, the *ghat* is taken by the *bhaktas* and the worshipper to the nearest river or tank, and there it is immersed and the *ghat* full of water is taken to the temple on the shoulder of a devotee. Here, the evil-minded *gunia* or “exorcist” attempts to wreck the *ghat* by the force of his incantations. It either becomes too heavy for its bearer or the *gunia* tries to throw it off by his incantations from a distance. The attendant *gunia* protects the *ghat* by uttering counter incantations and sees it safe to the temple.<sup>1</sup>

The *ghat* is the symbolical representation of Durga, and it is worshipped every day as such for the rest of the month. The object of the festivities is to worship Durga, symbolically re-presented by a *ghat* in the temple of Siva. The *patabhakta* on whom the burden of the ceremonies rests has to observe very strict rules of conduct. He lives on fruits and roots. The other devotees take a little fried rice in the morning and a few grubs of half-boiled “*atapchal*” or rice made of paddy without boiling towards evening. They do not smoke tobacco, neither do they shave their beards. They do not anoint their bodies with oil at the time of taking their baths. They also do not sleep in their homes. They form a brotherhood, as it were, exclusively devoted to the special worship of Siva. Their penances cease on “Charak-Sankranti”, the closing day of the month. They rise early at dawn every day and gather flowers for Siva. They put on a piece of cloth smeared with ochre after the fashion of the *sanyasis* (ascetics) and carry canes in their hands. They also put on the sacred thread and carry flags when they go out for their devotional dance. At midday they go out for *hakanda* or bath in the nearest river or tank. After bath they fall into a line and orders are



given by the *patabhakta* for their devotional drill. They raise their left hand and look toward the sun standing in arrow. They then recite a verse in the vernacular that all *bhaktas* have come to tender their *seva* (devotional service) to Mahakal Ghat on the bank of the river Kansakeshi, and invoke the blessings of the Lord. They raise the right hand standing in the same posture and say that the “*chattris pathaks*” or the 36 working classes of Orissa have come to the aforesaid ghat to tender their *seva* and invoke the blessing of the Lord. The left foot thrown forward, and it said aloud that devotees from Anga, Banga, Kalinga, and other places have come to Mahakal Ghat on the bank of the Kansakeshi River to worship Siva. The devotee’s then place their right leg on the left and look as usual to the sun and recite a verse to the effect that all “*tirthas*” (pilgrim spots) including Gaya, Ganga, Boutaitarini, etc., have come to Mahakal Ghat to worship Siva and ask for blessing. The posture is reversed, and the left leg is placed on the right and this time the famous hills of India, namely, Hemagiri, Somagiri, Seetalgiri, and Kalingagiri are supposed to have come to worship Siva. The left hand is lowered to the left leg, and the right ear is held by the right hand, and this time all the “*puras*” or important towns like Guapura, Ratnapura, Harichandanapura, and Gopapura are supposed to have come to worship Siva. The posture is reversed, and the right hand is lowered to the right leg and the left ear is held by the left hand and the *bhaktas* recite that all the great “*dwipas*” (islands) or sub-continent like Jambudwipa (India) have come to Mahakal Ghat to tender their *seva*. In four succeeding postures, the four ages beginning with Satya Yuga are supposed to have sent their devotees to Mahakal Ghat on the Kansakeshi River to tender their *seva* to Siva. In the next three postures, the *bhaktas* assume that the Bidyadharas (the wise men), the maids and the Rajas (kings) of the Saptaswargas (the seven heavens), the Patala (below the earth), and the Ocean have come, respectively, to tender their *seva*. Last of all the *bhutas* and the *pretas* (the ghosts and the demons), Nandi and Bhringi (these are two demons said to be close companions of Siva) are said to have come to join in the worship of Siva at Mahakal Ghat. The drill then breaks up, and every *bhakta* takes a *heritage* (myrobalan) and makes an offering to the Sun. They then go to the temple and in front of it the devotional drill is again repeated. This continues every day till the close of the festivities. The object of the devotional drill is to make the worship as comprehensive as possible and to give the *bhaktas* the feeling of symbolically representing the various devotees of Siva throughout the ages. Every day after bath, the *bhaktas* gather round the temple and dance frantically shaking their long canes in the air.

Every day in the evening the *bhaktas* in a body go to the house of a rich man of the village. There the banner of Siva is placed on a seat and two arena nuts are placed under it symbolically representing Siva and Pārbati, and they are worshipped as such by the worshipper of the temple in a summary way. The *bhaktas* then begin their frantic dance with the beating of tom-toms. At each pause lasting for 10 or 15 minutes at the most some

anecdotes of Siva and Pārbati, as when they came to the earth in the guise of ordinary mortals and began cultivation or went for fishing, are related aloud by the *patabhakta*. The dance lasts for two or three hours and at the close the worshipper of Siva calls on the devotees to offer blessings on each individual member of the family and when this is done, they march off to the temple, taking an honorarium according to the means of the family. Their frantic dance in the evening by torch light creates a very funny impression on children, who enjoy the sight very much. The verses recited in the pauses of the dance are known as Siver Gajan or anecdotes of Siva. The devotees make it a point to cluster round the temple in the day and to live near it in the night. The villagers pay their respect to them during the period of their special devotion. The festivities draw to their culmination on Chait-Sankranti day and the day preceding. Both the days are set apart for special penances. Mortification of the flesh is taken to be the best way of showing devotion.

The day preceding Charak-Sankranti is called Nilday and on it the *bhatkas* roll themselves on beds of thorn, the thorny branches of *bainch* (*Falcourtia Ramontchi*) being specially used for the purpose. Some of them stretch themselves on the mouth of a big cavity perforated with small holes. Burning charcoal is placed in the cavity, and resin dust is thrown into the fire to make it burn brightly for a moment so that its tongues come out through the holes. Some walk on burning charcoal placed in small trenches, dipping their feet in water both before and after walking over fire. As soon as the last day of the festivity dawns, the village is roused up by the beating of tom-toms. The day is specially set apart for festivities. Previously, the *bhaktas* used to perforate their backs and swing on hooks attached to a tree set up for the purpose. But now the practice of hook swinging has been discontinued at the instance of the Government. It still prevails in the Feudatory States of Orissa. The *bhaktas* shout in chorus the praises of Siva from the morning of the day. Towards afternoon, they perform their baths with their devotional drill and form a procession which moves languidly with the sounding of drums and tom-toms through crowded village roads. Some of them are carried on mock chariots by the villagers. Some dance in the crowd with an iron cross pierced in their bodies ending in a small pan where oiled cloth is flaring into a flame. By evening, the crowd disperses and the *bhaktas* reach the temple where they offer their devotion to their God. They then tear off their sacred thread and break their vow and fall back to the work-a-day life of ordinary cultivators. Their lent is not followed by any carnival, and the whole festivities from the start to the finish are conducted with solemn gravity, befitting the worship of Siva whose life is a life of model renunciation. The *haritakes* with which the *bhaktas* made their daily offering to the Sun are carefully preserved by the worshipper of Siva. They are thrown into the *ghat* which is closed up and buried under earth. It is unearthed the next year on the day a fresh *ghat* is to be dipped in the river. Its water is said to have very valuable medicinal properties. The *bhaktas* go through their

penances in the belief that Siva would be pleased with them and would grant them long life, health, and prosperity. Some for special reasons enrol themselves as *bhaktas*. They are known as *manasik bhaktas*, meaning those with a purpose on their minds. If anybody in the household is seriously ill, then his parents or guardian offers puja to Siva and promise to offer a *bhakta* to Him in the month of Chaitra if the disease be cured through the grace of the God. Poor people offer themselves as *bhaktas* on such occasions, while rich people get a *bhakta* vicariously enrolled on payment of money.

### Note

1 Reprinted from *JASB*, XIV (2) August 1928: 181–185.

# 21 Short account of the reformed Shaiva or Veerashaiva faith

*R.C. Artal and Watandar Patil*

As there prevailed a strange and deplorable misunderstanding about the origin of the Veerashaiva faith in all official and non-official circles all over India, owing to want of a historical research, the necessity of a critical study of the subject had been long felt by me, and I, therefore, collected information with a view to ascertain the origin of the faith. In the meantime, I was selected as a correspondent of the Ethnographical Survey, by Mr. R.E. Enthoven. I. C. S., Superintendent of the Bombay Ethnographical Survey, and my attempts were directed towards answering the ethnographical questions put by him. This led to the present short account being written by me.<sup>1,2</sup>

The views expressed, and the inferences drawn, by me, in this account, are based partly on my own observations of the manners and customs prevailing among the Lingáyats of all the Kanarese Districts in the Southern Division, and in the Madras Presidency, the Mysore, and the Nizam's territories, and partly upon the sacred writings of the Hindus. I do not profess to have mastered the subject. I am neither a Pandit nor a Shástri, but a layman; and the views expressed by me may be taken for what they are worth.

My sincere thanks are due to Mr. A. M. T. Jackson, M. A. (Oxon) I. C. S. and Barat-law, the Collector of Belgaum, for the valuable assistance rendered by him.

## Part I

### *The origin of Śiva or Phallic worship*

It appears to me that the primary meaning of the word "Śiva" is phallus (a male generative organ), and the shape of the Linga (male organ) itself supports the interpretation put on the word, and, in course of time, it came to mean god Śiva himself, apparently under the notion that even an organ of god was as sacred as his whole body. A primitive man in a primitive age must have thought seriously about the creation of the world, especially about the human species which inhabit the earth. There can be no doubt that at a very early period the mystic operations of nature must have excited

नयातव॑इन्द्र॒जुजुवु॑र्नो॒नवन्द॑नाशविष्टवेद्याभिः ।  
 सश॑र्धद॒र्योविषु॑णस्यज॒न्तोर्माशि॑श्चदे॒वाअपि॑गु॒र्कृतं॑नः ॥ ५ ॥  
 ऋग्वेद मं० ७ अ० २ सू० २१ ऋक् ५.

Figure 21.1 Vol. V, p. 147

सवा॑जुंयाताप॒दुष्पदा॑यन्त्स्व॒र्षाता॑परिषदत्सनिष्यन् ।  
 अ॒न॒र्वाय॑च्छ॒तदु॑रस्यवे॒दोन्न॑च्छिश्चदे॒वाँअ॒भिव॑र्षसा॒भूत् ॥ ३ ॥  
 ऋग्वेद मं० १० अ०८० सू०९९ ऋक् ३.

Figure 21.2 Vol. VIII, p. 354

the attention and reverence of mankind, and that primitive man, on reflection, came to the conclusion that the generative organs (Linga and Yoni) were the only causes of the origin of the human species, and the result was the worship of the phallus. There are no materials at present to show when and by whom this form of worship was started first in India. The worship of phallus which formerly prevailed in Egypt, and of Mylitta in Babylon, as mentioned by Herodotus, the famous Greek historian, seems, no doubt, to correspond with the “Linga” and “Yoni-pûjá”, of the present Hindus. It also appears from both the Védic and non-Védic literature on the subject of Śiva or Linga worship, that this form of worship was in vogue, especially in Peninsular India, at any rate anterior to, or simultaneously with, the composition of the hymns in the Rig-véda, as will be seen from the following two hymns from the sacred book.

From the previous hymns, it is clear that the Áryans who invaded Southern India came in contact with the Kolárians, Nágas, Dravidians, as well as the aboriginal tribes, who evidently worshipped the “Linga” and “Yoni”. The Aryan invaders who were accustomed to worship elemental gods such as the sun, fire, air, and rain were apparently disgusted with the worship of the generative organs, and they, therefore, looked upon this form of worship as most immoral and degrading, and styled the people who practised it as unholy and immoral, and as such unfit to approach their sacrificial fires.

Now, according to the latest researches made by both European and native scholars, it appears that there were two invasions of India by the Áryans – one of which was earlier and the other later. It is plain from the two hymns quoted earlier that the early Áryan invaders who came from the North-East of India were brought into close contact with the

aboriginal tribes in Southern India. It was but natural that the new comers, as conquerors who had not apparently brought women with them, should have intermarried freely with the women of the aboriginal tribes, and consequently adopted many of their customs and manners, among which, I think, was the worship of the “Linga” and “Yoni”.

In the matter of language, too, they must have necessarily borrowed a large portion of the vocabulary of the aboriginal tribes, because we find that many original Dravidian words are still in use in the Sanskrit language without any change in their original forms (*vide* preface to the Kannada-English Dictionary, by Rev. F. Kittel, 1894). Probably, the word Shiva (Phallic) is a word which had been already coined by the Dravidians or aboriginals, and was in use before the invasion of Southern India by the Áryans.

The word “Shiva” was probably borrowed from the Dravidians before the composition of the hymns of the Rig-véda, because it seems highly improbable that the Aryans who were undoubtedly disgusted with the phallic worship should have themselves coined the word “Shiva” and used it in the sense of male generative, organ. This fact, I suggest, almost conclusively proves that the word “Shiva” is a Dravidian word, which evidently came to be used by the Áryans, when the latter admitted the God Shiva into the pantheon of their own Gods. It seems highly probable that among the Áryan invaders of Southern India Agastya (in the 7th or 6th century BC) and Kaṇva Rishis, the patron saints of Southern India, were the most learned and highly respected saints, and as such they fully sympathized with the aboriginal tribes and adopted their customs and manners without reserve.

A legendary story given at the end of the “Veerashaiva Siddhânta Shikhâmaṇi”, a work on Shakti-Vishishtâdwaita Philosophy, says that Râvaṇa, the king of Lankâ (the present Ceylon), was a staunch Shaiva, and that he had made a vow to establish nine crores of Lingas. He accordingly established six crores of Lingas during his lifetime. Unfortunately, he could not fulfil his vow completely as he was killed by Râma, the hero of the Râmâyana. It is said that Râvaṇa, before he breathed his last, sent for his brother Vibhîshaṇa, whom Rama had appointed as his (Râvaṇa’s) successor and requested him (Vibhîshaṇa) to fulfil completely the vow already made by him by establishing the remaining three crores of Lingas.

It is also stated in the said work on the Veerashaiva philosophy that Agastya, the great Shaiva saint, met Rêṇukâchârya somewhere in Southern India, when the latter is said to have fully explained to the former the principles of the “Veerashaiva Siddhânta” or “Shaktivishisht âdwaita” Philosophy. This legend supports the theory that Agastya Rishi had embraced the Shaiva faith and was then even known as a Shaiva saint. That the Linga and Yoni worship is held in great reverence and respect till now is evident from the long-established customs of the Hindus of the present day, and that both the mother and the father are looked upon as gods, or even better than gods.

Of the parents, the mother is held in greater respect and gratitude than the father, as even a great Sanyâsi is obliged to make a bow to his mother,

whereas the father of a Sanyási on the contrary makes a bow to the son who has become a Sanyási, and this social rule is still observed even by the successive pontiffs of Shrimat Shankarâchârya's line. In this connection, it may not be out of place to mention here that in ancient times it appears to have been the practice to pay honours first to ladies and then to their husbands or other gentlemen, and this view is favoured by the use of the marginally noted compound words, where the first member consists invariably of the names of the consorts of gods and other distinguished persons. It would also be interesting to note here that a similar custom at present prevails in almost all the present European countries.

It would, I think, be interesting to note here that several of the 63 Shaiva saints were low-caste men. The first was a Bédar by caste, the second a Chândâla by caste, and the third and last a washerman, and (Punitavati) a Vaishya woman (Mahelêshwari), a Kshatriya woman, are also mentioned among the 63 saints. This surely indicates that saints were above all caste distinctions, and that in those days women were allowed to study the Védas and Védânta. There are female saints among the Veerashaivas even now. The female teacher Gârgi Vâchaknavi is famous in the Brahad-Âranyaka of the Śatâpatha Brâhmana: Maitréyi, the wife of Yâjnavalkya, and Lopâmudrâ, the wife of Agastya, are also instances in point.

It appears to me that Southern India was the birthplace of Indian phallic worship long before the Rig-véda was composed, and that, after some compromise, the later Áryan invaders too, who had settled in the north of India, adopted this form of worship. But, unfortunately, there are no materials at present available to determine exactly when phallic worship was started in India, and by whom and when the Áryan invaders adopted this form of worship, from the aboriginals of Peninsular India. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the Court of Chandragupta (300 BC), found the worship of Shiva fully developed especially among the hill tribes, but it is not certain that it took a phallic form. He also found a grave and polished society in which philosophy and science were successfully cultivated and held in honour. It seems also certain that this form of worship eventually spread, from Ceylon and Cape Comorin in the south, to the Himâlaya Mountains in the north, and exists at the present time throughout the whole length and breadth of India.

The annotations on the sacred writings of the Hindu's by Edward Sellon, printed in 1902 for private circulation, show that the phallic worship was also in vogue in many of the present Christian countries long before the establishment of the Christian faith. Phallic worship, it would be interesting to note here, even up to the present time, has not lost its hold on the present Vaishnava Brahmins, the followers of Vishṇu (who were undoubtedly formerly Shaiva Brahmins) many of whom still visit Benares and other sacred places, and worship there some of the 12 famous Lingas called Jyotirlingas.

These are, no doubt, Sthâvara Lingas, and the present Veerashaivas visit these sacred places at great expense and trouble, and worship them in spite

of two of the 63 Commandments which direct a Veerashaiva should not worship “Sthávara Lingas”.

There are 63 commandments or practices to be observed or obeyed by the Veerashaivas.

*Remarks:* – A copy of this list of the 63 Commandments<sup>3</sup> was obtained by me from Mr. Gadigaya Puránik – a Lingáyat priest of Bail-Hongal, Taluka Sampgaon, Belgaum District, and I could not get any other copy of the same anywhere else. So I am not prepared to say that this list is quite free from clerical or other mistake. At any rate it is an epitome of the principles of the Reformed Shaivism or Veerashaivism. It, is an admitted fact that the influence of Western education and ideas has done away with many superstitions among all classes of Hindus, and India at present is in a state of transition as regards reforms, and that consequently a small minority of the Veerashaivas strictly observe all these Commandments.

### *Reformed Shaiva or Veerashaiva faith*

In course of time as the intellectual capacity of mankind developed more and more, some of the more intelligent people were naturally disgusted with the lower forms of worship, such as stones, stocks, trees, Linga (Phallus), Purusha, Yoni (Delta), Prakriti, Siva, Sakti, etc., and it appears that some of the Shaiva Brahmins then began to reflect seriously as to who was and where was that Supreme Being who was described as Paramâtmâor Paraméshwaraor Para Śivain their sacred writings, and eventually they must have come to the conclusion that the Supreme Being was nothing more than oneself which they maintained was part and parcel of Paramâtmâhence the famous philosophical proverb “*Tannabiṭṭu dewarilla, manṇubiṭṭu madikilla*” (“There is no God other than oneself and no earthen chatties can be prepared without earth”).

It is interesting to note here that the Maháwákya (sacred utterance) which is immediately followed by the passage, which directs that the idolatry should be done away with, lays down that one should worship oneself.

Thus, the Âtma-Pûjá has a Vedic origin. This conclusion must have led to the worship of oneself as Paramâtmâ because the present Veerushaivas worship the self in the form of a Linga which consists of three parts, Shaktiat the base, Jeewâtmâin the middle, and Paramâtmâat the top. At the time of tying the Lingato, a newly born child what the Jangam or priest does is first of all to invoke the Âdi Shakti, that is, the material body. When he imagines she has come and taken her seat, he next invokes Jívâtmâthat is to say, infuses life into it, and last of all he invokes the Paramâtmâand imagines that he has taken his seat at the top of the Linga. These three parts correspond to Guru Linga and Jangama (material, spiritual, and casual bodies).



When a Veerashaiva breathes his last, it is believed that the spiritual body called *Jīvātmā* separates itself from the material body called *Shakti* and then unites itself with *Paramātmā*. This separation of the *Jīvātmā* from *Shakti* the material body, and its subsequent union with *Paramātmā* is what is philosophically called “*Moksha*” or “*Lingaikya*” and colloquially “*Mrityu*” or “*marāṇa*” or and this theory of Philosophy is styled and known as “*Shakti-Vishishtādwaita*” Philosophy.

Evidently, this advanced step in thought led the five great Reformers and their followers to arrive at the conclusion that the rituals, prescribed in the work parts of the *Védas*, were useless and inefficacious to obtain true knowledge and thereby salvation of the soul, and accordingly they in introducing reforms entirely rejected the work parts and accepted only the knowledge parts of the *Védas*, firmly believing that knowledge was the surer and speediest way of obtaining salvation of the soul.

The *Adi Sankaracharya* is said to have declared boldly “Not all the *Vedas* together were more useful to one who had obtained true knowledge than was a small tank of water in a country flooded with water”.

The allusion to one of the five great Reformers, namely, “*Rēṇukārādhyā*” in the *Veerashaiva Siddhānta Shikhāmaṇiat* any rate, indicates that the reformation was believed to have taken place sometime before the invasion of *Lankā* (Ceylon) by *Rāma*, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, one of the two celebrated epic poems of the Hindus. That the Reformation had taken place very long before the great *Shankarāchārya* is conclusively proved by the fact that a controversy which is said to have taken place between the great Philosopher on the one hand and the *Jangamas* of the *Veerashaiva* sect on the other hand.

The true gist of the Reformed Shaiva or *Veerashaiva* faith, as most emphatically asserted up to the present time, is that those who wear “*Ishta-linga*” always on their bodies are once for all absolved from the duality of death and rebirth, and obtain *moksha* during one life or generation, and consequently those who did not wear “*Ishta-Linga*” on their bodies were those who were subject to the ocean of rebirths and re-deaths. It seems also certain that these reformers drew most, though not all of their tenets, from some of the 28 celebrated Shaiva *Agamas*, among which it appears that the principal ones enjoined upon the followers of this new faith that a *Veerashaiva*, with a view to obtain speedier release from rebirths and re-deaths, should wear an “*Ishta-Linga*” always on his body.

It appears that mainly owing to the difference of opinion as to the wearing of *Ishta-Linga* and to the doing away with the several ritual ceremonies prescribed by the work parts of the *Védas*, a complete schism took place between the Shaiva Brahmins and the reformed party called *Veerashaivas* at a very remote time, and under these circumstances I am inclined to hold that the words *Veerashaiva* must have been coined simultaneously with, or immediately after, the Reformation. Those Shaiva Brahmins who adhered to the old school and regarded the work parts of the *Vedas*

and the rules prescribed therein as of the utmost importance were styled (Prâkrita Brahmins), and the followers of the Reformers who rejected the work parts of the Védas as entirely useless to obtain true knowledge were styled (Aprâkrita Brahmins). In all these cases, a man merely changes his opinion as regards philosophy only and cannot, therefore, lose his caste or social status. There can be no doubt that religion and philosophy are inseparably connected with each other, and experience shows that a change of philosophy introduces necessarily a change in the form of worship, in the religion, and hence some of the sub-sections in different communities owe their origin mainly to the changes due to thought. Thus, a Shaiva Brâhmin changes his opinion and becomes a Veerashaiva Lingi Brâhmin, and therefore the former is not deprived of his caste or social status, simply because there is a change in thought and form of worship. There seems to be little doubt that in consequence of the entire rejection of the work parts of the Védas by the Reformed party, the word (Aprâkrita) was newly coined, to be used with reference to those Brâhmins who had rejected the work parts of the Védas, and the Veerashaivas were therefore called (Aprâkrita Brâhmaṇaru), and this view derives its support from the following legendary story:

Once upon a time the God Shiva questioned Brahma and Panchavakra-Gaṇâdhîshvararu as to whether or not it was possible to create a world out of pure knowledge without matter called (Prakriti) which means the combination of three qualities called (Satwa, Raja, Tamas). Brahmâ thereupon is said to have replied that it, could not be done, whereas the (Gaṇâdhîshvararu) said and maintained that the world could be created without (Prakriti) and out of pure knowledge. This legend, no doubt, refers to the acceptance of the work-parts of the Védas by “Shaiva” or “Alingi” Brâhmins, and the rejection of the same parts by the Reformed party or Veerashaivas, and nothing more. Hence, the Shaiva Brahmins who advocated a materialistic origin of the Universe came to be known as Prâkrita Brâhmins and those reformed Shaivas who held the contrary opinion were styled and known as Aprâkrita Brâhmaṇaru.

The Reformers also did away with the idolatry which then prevailed, and still prevails, among the Shaiva Brahmins. They also seem highly probable, did away with all caste distinctions which had been mainly based upon tribal, local and occupational or functional influences. I say so, because the present fourfold division of castes, which rests upon a functional basis only, cannot have any religious origin, and it seems to me that apparently with a view to give divine or Védic authority to the classification, the Smriti writers evidently twisted the primary meaning of the hymn which finds place in the group of hymns called “Purusha – Sûkta” in the Rig-véda and interpreted the words therein used to mean the present four castes, namely, Brâhmaṇa, Kshatriya, Vâisya, and Śûdra.

The interpretation put upon these words appears to me to be wrong and inconsistent with the qualities ascribed to the Para-Brahma or Para-Shiva, who is said to be formless or shapeless or invisible or untainted, etc. If we accept the interpretation of the hymn or verse put upon it by Sâyañâcharya, then the Virâta-Purusha or Supreme Being would be anthropomorphic and, as such, he would have had mouth, arms, thighs, and feet like an ordinary man, which is quite opposed to the qualities attributed to him, with one voice, by all the Hindu philosophers. To me, it appears that the primary meaning of the hymn or verse has been twisted and applied to the fourfold division of the human race in India on the analogical and functional basis, and my reasons for holding this view are as follows:

It is evident that in the Védic period the word Brahmaña meant the celestial fire called Divyâgni, the word Râjan meant Indra or rain, and the words Vish and Sûdra, both combined meant earth, and I am of opinion that the Virâta-Purusha or Para-Brahma were supposed to be the illuminated space between the ether (the uppermost part or the head) and the earth (the lowest part or the feet of this Purusha). Now, according to the Chhândôgyòpanishad (*vide* pp. 330–333 of the Ânandâshrama Sanskrit Series, No. 14), the celestial fire (Divyagni) emanated first from the Supreme Being, from this fire the water, and from water the earth which we inhabit at present (combining three things, i.e. fire, water and earth). Now, let us see what the functions of each of these three elements are. Fire is said to be the God of destruction, and our Hindu Philosophers identify this element with knowledge which destroys or dispels “*avidyâ*” or nescience. This celestial fire was, therefore, supposed to have been born from the mouth of the Supreme Being, and the Gods of the sky were supposed to be residing in this region of celestial fire, and they were therefore called Brâhmaņas. Next comes the rain or water (the word *Ksatri* means water) whose function is to protect every one (both animal and vegetable kingdoms), and the Gods who were supposed or imagined to reside in the watery region were called Kshatriyas. The word Viśa is derived from the Sanskrit root, namely, *vish* to enter into, to penetrate or pervade, and this region was supposed to be the residential quarters of the group of Gods called Vasus, Rudraś, Âdityaś, Vishvédévas, and Maruts (be it noted here that these gods are known as group – Gods (*gana*) as they are supposed to live in groups). These gods, or their rays penetrated into the earth (as we all know by experience they do so), and by combination with the earth they produce riches or wealth (*vasu* means riches or wealth). The gods residing in this region were known as gods of the earth or mid-air, and they were, therefore, called Vaiśyas, and the earth itself was supposed to be Sûdra. This word is derived from the Sanskrit root “*śuch*” which means to grieve for, to mourn, to bewail, and the function of Sûdra is to drive away or destroy pain by attending to the wants of everyone, and this function is performed by the earth by supplying the wants of everyone on its surface. The word *śûdra* also means *pûshéyam* to nourish, to increase or grow, because we all know by experience that the earth nourishes every one by producing food grains and other articles required for

the consumption of both the animal and vegetable worlds, and as such it relieves everyone of pain (wants) by supplying wants. In other words, it is useful to everyone. The hymn 13, which immediately follows the hymn 12 of the Purusha Sûkta, goes, I think, a great way to support my interpretation that the latter hymn refers to three elements, namely, fire, rain or water, and earth, because it is plain from the hymn No. 13 that the moon was born out of the mind, the sun out of the eyes, Indra or the rain-god and fire out of the mouth, and the air out of the life of this so-called Virâta-Purusha. It is therefore evident that the author of this Sûkta was thus dealing more with natural phenomena than with human races. And it seems hardly necessary to prove that the human species came into existence long after the creation of the five great elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air, and ether.

It is evident, from the previous, that the words Bráhmana, Kshatriya, Vaiśya, and Śûdra meant fire, water, and earth. It is thus clear that the Hindu Holy trinity is nothing more than the combination of the three element, namely, earth, water, and fire; and the advocates of the other school supposed or maintained that the Supreme Being had five faces corresponding to the five elements (instead of saying five organs) as the Shaivas, Veerashaivas, and many others have done. Hence, we have Pancha-Mukha-Paraméshwara.

To me, it appears that there were no caste distinctions in ancient times, at any rate before the Upanishad period (from about 700 BC), because it is said that the great Rishi Vishvâmitre was a *mocha* (leatherworker) by caste; the famous Vyasa was the son of a *kabbilger* woman; Valmîki, a son of a *bedar* by caste; and Bhâradwâja a son of a carpenter; and all these Rishis are the acknowledged writers on Hindu philosophy, and other kindred subjects. The Supreme Being in whose eyes all men are equal, could not have thought of making such invidious distinctions in the social scale of mankind, in-as-much as such a distinction would be quite inconsistent with the qualities ascribed to Him and also to the spirit of the Védânta Philosophy, which, as stated elsewhere, makes no distinction between man and man.

I understand that some European and native scholars hold that the famous Purusha Sûkta, including the verse or hymn now under discussion, was composed subsequently and inserted in the body of the Rigvéda, apparently with a view to give Védic or divine authority to the so-called four divisions of castes by Smriti writers, and I think, there is much force in this view.

I believe, the present Veerashaivas were formerly Shaiva Brahmins, and my grounds for holding this view are as follows:

- (a) Both the ordinary Brahmins and the Veerashaivas up to the present time repeat *mantras* from the Védas, Ágamas, Purâṇas, and other sacred works, when they are engaged in performing *puja* (worship) of Lingas and Gods, and the difference is only in their philosophy.
- (b) The sacred cows, their urine (*gomûtra*), milk, excreta, *bhasma* (sacred ashes), Rudrakshi, the leaves of the sacred "Bilwa" tree, are equally held as sacred by both sects.

The causes which led to the complete schism between the ordinary Brahmins and the reformed Shaivas, it appears to me, were the adherence of the Shaiva Brahmins to the work parts of the Védas, and also to the rules therein laid down, and the entire rejection of the same by the reformed Shaivas and mainly the tying of an *Ishṭa-linga*, worshipping Jangamas and the using, as holy water, of the water called *pâdodaka*, in which a Jangama's feet have been washed, and also the abolition of the worship of Sthâvara Lingas (Lingas that are established in one place). Linga Shaivas did not like to abandon at once the old custom in favour of widow marriages. There is also a social rule still observed that the daughter of a Jangama cannot be married to a Panchamasâli, but a Jangama can marry the daughter of a Panchamasâli. This rule seems to me to have been originally founded upon educational qualifications, that is to say, a Panchamasâli who is not a *Brahma-jnânî* cannot marry the daughter of a Jangama who is a *Brahma-jnânî*, as the priestly class as usual wanted to display their superiority in the eyes of the masses and to show that they were the civilized and the learned class. The members of some of the sub-sections of the Veerashaiva community do not practise widow marriage, and they say with pride that they have no such custom. They are, no doubt, influenced in this matter by the custom prevailing among their more influential neighbours, namely, the Brahmins.

The word Jangama has a Védic origin. The word Jangama is identified with the Supreme Being (Para-Brahms, Paramâtmá, and Para-Shiva). It is thus dear that the reformed Shaiva or Veerashaiva faith has a Védic origin.

It can be safely presumed that the Smriti writers treated the Veerashaivas as Sûdras and classified them as such. But the work parts of the Védas and also the "Orion or Researches into the antiquity of the Védas" by Bâḷ Gangâdhar Tīlak of Poona (Orion with his belt) show that some of the ritual ceremonies prescribed in the Smritis are of the Védic or even pre-Védic periods, and, among these, the Munja ceremony was one of the most important (similar ceremonies occur among primitive races in all parts of the world). Under these circumstances, it can, I think, be safely inferred that many of the ceremonies that were observed by Áryans long before the composition of the several Smritis, were merely arranged and codified by Smriti writers. Hence, my argument that the Veerashaivas did away with Munja and other ceremonies prescribed in the present Smritis holds good. For instance, according to the Manu-Smriti, all the Brahmins of different denominations are grouped under the main head "Brahmins", and with certain local variations, all the rules laid down in the Smritis are binding equally upon all of them. It seems to me that no one can deny that the Védas, Ágamas, Smritis, Purâṇas, Shaḍdarshnas, or six systems of Indian Philosophy are the common property of all Hindus including the Veerashaivas or (Lingi Brahmins). As the Veerashaivas entirely rejected the work parts of the Védas, there was a complete schism between them and the ordinary Shaiva Brahmins. It seems also highly probable that the Veerashaivas were obliged to adopt many customs and manners prevailing among different communities who embraced the new faith, and as some of the customs, adopted corresponded to the customs and manners at present

prevailing among “Shûdras” the Bombay High Court was, no doubt, led to conclude that the Lingáyats were “Shûdras”, basing their decision mainly upon the similarity of customs, prevailing among the Veerashaivâs and the Shûdras, and this result has been due in a great measure to the want of an authentic account of the origin of the Veerashaivas.

Members of all Hindu communities who take food and water at the hands of Brahmins also take food from the Veerashaivas (or Lingáyats). Only the Brahmins and the Lingáyats do not interdine with each other. The reason for this prohibition in the case of the former (Brahmins) is that the latter (Lingáyats) have entirely given up the work parts of the Védas and done away with the sacred thread and the tuft of hair and do not observe the Panch-Sûtakas and other rituals. The reason for this prohibition in the case of, the latter (Veerashaivas) is that the former (Brahmins) do not wear the “Ishṭa-Linga” and stick to the work parts of the Védas. This indicates that all other Hindu communities are treated as inferior, equally to the Brahmins and the (Lingáyats) Veerashaivas; and this is a very good piece of internal evidence to show that the Veerashaivas were originally Shaiva Brahmins.

### Part III

#### *The Veerashaivas as at present exist*

It appears that in course of time many persons from different communities, from a Brahmin down, to a village Mhâr embraced the new faith by tying “Ishṭa Linga” to their bodies, and the doctrine of non-intercourse with (Bhavis) or non-Veerashaivas seems to have obtained such a stronghold upon the leaders of the new faith that contact with (Bhavis) was regarded by the followers of the Reformers as a pollution, and probably it is this idea that led to the formation of an independent and entirely exclusive sectarian community, complete in all respects.

Thus, persons following all sorts of pursuits or professions were, as a matter of necessity, admitted within the pale of Veerashaivism, and thus the present Veerashaiva community consists of cultivators, traders, grocers, carpenters, tailors, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, potters, dyers, washermen, gardeners, florists, sculptors, singers, drummers, builders, milkmen, cobblers, Mhârs, Mángs, even prostitutes called Basawis, and in fact there is no occupation which is not followed by the present Veerashaivas, except slaughtering animals, selling liquor, toddy, beef, meat, fish, etc.

In short, the Veerashaiva community represents almost all the occupations or professions that are necessary for its independent existence. The Veerashaiva community is, I think, the only Hindu sect that deserves to be called an independent community, complete in itself in all respects. The liberal and very elastic principles of the new faith gave considerable freedom of action and thought, just as Christianity or Islámism did in later times and the result was that the Veerashaivas of all sections who were relieved of the tedious religious vows, ceremonies, fasts, impurities, prescribed in the work parts

of the Védas, took to all sorts of occupations without any inconvenience, and thus, in course of time, they became enterprising cultivators and traders.

The rigidity with which the principle of non-intercourse with the (infidels) and the non-observance of Sûtakas, etc., was formerly observed, has now undergone a deviation and slackening, owing to the influences exercised by the other Hindu communities. The converts from various communities still retain some of the caste distinctions and social observances of their former castes, and this, I think, must have led to the gradual development of numerous sub-sections among the present Veerashaivas, as is the case with the present-day native Christian converts.

The saying goes that “caste distinctions come into play only when there is plenty to eat, and those of impurities when there is plenty of water to wash or bathe”. There are some Lingáyats Hatgârs (weavers) and Devânga Hatgârs (Non-Lingáyats) who intermarry with one another. The former wear both the Ishtalinga and the sacred thread. Again, among the Reddis, there are two classes named Lingáyat Reddis (converts) and Nâmada Reddis (Brahmanical Reddis), and they also intermarry with each other. But such instances are few and far between. I am also informed that there are some Shaiva Brahmins in Southern India who wear both the sacred thread and the Linga. But there is an exception to this rule in favour of Jangamas. The saying goes, “A Jangama has no caste and the water of the Ganges is free from pollution”. This rule is probably based upon the belief that a liberated soul (*Brahmajnyâni*) is above all caste distinctions, and this idea still prevails among all classes of Hindus, or it may be due to the belief which still prevails among the Veerashaivas that the feet of a Jangama are always holy.

As they have done away with the fourfold division of caste, it is not at all desirable that it should be revived now, as desired by some of the Mysore Lingáyats. Personally, I am against all such distinctions of sub-sections among the Veerashaivas, and there should be, I think, absolute and unqualified intercourse of the several sub-sections with one another, at first, at least with regard to food, and subsequently with regard to marriage, as such a step would cement the union of all sub-sections, and thereby make the community both socially and politically strong.

From the different forms of worship at present prevailing among the Veerashaivas, I am of opinion that the present Veerashaivas represent both the extremes, the lowest and the highest forms of worship – the lowest, in so far as it partakes of the nature of animism and fetishism in the worship of stocks, stones, animals, and trees; and the highest, in so far as it worships oneself in the form of (*Jivâtma*) as part and parcel of the Supreme Spirit, under the belief that it opens up a much speedier and easier way to attain salvation.

The Veerashaivas are now as class cultivators, traders and labourers, and, as such, most of them have neglected education for centuries together, and are, therefore, backward when compared with more advanced communities.

In conclusion, I may be permitted to say that I have arrived at the following conclusions, after consulting men, of the Veerashaiva Shâstris and

Pandits who had assembled at Dharwar and Bangalore at the first and second sessions of the Veerashaiva Mahásabhás.

- (a) That the present Veerashaiva faith comes out of the Shaiva faith.
- (b) That the Reformation spoken of in this account took place some centuries ago, and that the present. Veerashaivas belonging to the parent stocks were originally Shaiva Brahmins.
- (c) That their Shaktivishishtâdwaita philosophy which seeks to prove union of Jîwâtâmâ with Paramâtâmâ was known and studied and discussed long before Shankarâchârya, the founder of (Shudhâdwaita) Philosophy, and that the commentary written on Brahma-sûtras (Uttara-mimâmsâ), in support of Adaitva Philosophy by Neelakantha Shivâchârya is much older than the Shârîraka Bhâshya of Shankarâchârya.
- (d) That Basawaṇṇa, a Shaiva Brahmin by birth, who embraced the Veerashaiva faith, was not the founder of the Veerashaiva faith, or the Lingâyat sect, nor was he the founder of Shaktivishishtâdwaita Philosophy, as supposed or held by some of the European and Native scholars.

From the earlier, it would appear that Hindus, as a class, have not yet accepted the opinion of any of the four schools as a final conclusion after carrying on much searching and enthusiastic discussion for centuries together. The sacred writings of the Hindus on philosophic subjects, especially the Brahma-sûtras, are so vague and ambiguous, and as such capable of being interpreted, in different ways by different schools, that the object of "Sûtra" literature, it seems to me, was to leave wide room for different interpretations. But in these days of progress and hard struggle for existence, too much of spiritualistic idea would not do. I should not be misunderstood by these remarks to mean that no one should study any religion and its philosophy. As remarked by an eminent historian, to a man of faith all religions are true, to a politician all religions are useful subjects for a careful study, because a thorough knowledge of all different religions is essentially necessary for an efficient administration of a country, and to a philosopher all religions are false; but, to arrive at such a conclusion even, he, too, shall have to study them carefully. I may be permitted to say, that I am merely a layman and not a Pandit, I do not even profess to have mastered the subjects discussed in detail. What I have written is simply my personal opinion and it may be taken for what it is worth.

## Notes

- 1 Reprinted from, *JASB*, VIII (3), 1909: 171-262.
- 2 Editor's Note: This is an abridged version of a much longer essay. The parts that were thought to be of contemporary interest have been retained as also a large part of repetitions have been removed along with lengthy footnotes and vernacular words in parenthesis.
- 3 The list of these 63 commandments has been deleted in this chapter for sake of readability as they were long and elaborate.



## 22 Swastika

*S.S. Mehta*

Swastika is a symbol, no doubt. In one of the issues of the *Times of India*, during the first fortnight of December, under the heading of Swastika, the following words appear.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Swastika**

A correspondent writes to ask the origin of the Swastika that well-known sign of benevolence. He says that he knows Marwaris – those benevolent people – use the sign on their account books, and that he has been told that it is the sign of Laxmi. But how did it originate? In the first place, its origin is extremely remote. The Swastika is essentially a cross – a cross with feet on it – and the cross has been used as a symbol and an ornament since the beginning of man's civilization. Its use was almost universal in pre-Christian times, and often it was connected with some form of nature worship. Two of the commonest forms of cross were the Tau cross (or Egyptian cross) which was a simple upright with a cross-beam at the top, like the letter T, and the Swastika. The latter is known to have been a religious symbol in India and China ten centuries before Christ; it is found on Buddhist coins and inscriptions.

### **The Barhut mound**

Near the village of Bharahat, or Barhut, in Nagod, about 120 miles south-west of Allahabad, a burial mound was discovered by General Cunningham in 1873. At one time, it must have been one of the most imposing in India, but successive generations of villagers have removed the monument, piecemeal, for more secular building purposes. This huge mound was originally built in the form of a Swastika. The four entrances of the place were each guarded by an L-shaped railing of tall pillars connected by cross-bars, so that the plan of it was deliberately that of a Swastika. The age of the monument is fixed in the 3rd century BC. Lesser and older examples of the use of this symbol are almost universal – Bronze Age implements have been found in Denmark ornamented with something like the Swastika – and it has been suggested that it was the first of all designs with a definite symbolism.

Having borne so much in mind, we shall revert to the quotation hereafter. In the meantime, it is important to remember that the word itself connotes welfare-worldly, that is, worldly prosperity. It is ever an auspicious sign or symbol for denoting prosperity to the householder. In earlier days, that is, during the so-called Vedic age, the attention of the householder was concentrated upon the worship of Fire-Light which was the symbol of Supreme Godhead, and which was invoked on the vedi or altar. In short, then there was “no man without an altar in his house”; and it has been observed that in the kingdom of Asvapati “there was no thief, no miser, no drunkard, no ignorant person, no adulterer or adulteress”, because everyone without an exception had an altar in his house. This altar was the be-all and end-all of life; and the worldly welfare of the householder was concomitant with the worship of fire on the altar. The Brahmachari (ascetic student) who returned from his teacher or his Parishad (similar to a college) married in due time and then set up the sacrificial fires – Agniadhana.

An altar was built with scrupulous care by the Brahman priest. Geometry was highly developed and whatever figure was wanted was drawn out with a wonderful minuteness, so that the altar was built according to the required form, and shape and size and measure. To bear witness to this fact, it will not be out of place, without citing here at any great length from the highly learned and valuable paper of the late Dr. Thibaut, which has been printed in the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal of the year 1875, to state that the altar, as a general rule, could be classified into 16 different forms and measures. In fact, geometry was developed from the rules that described the construction of altars. The Black Yajur Veda, Baudhayana, and Apastamba as well as others have prescribed these rules; and among the 16 figures mentioned there, the chaturasra – syena, which is a falcon-shaped altar built of square bricks – is the most ancient of all other figures. Here, it is evident that the four-cornered (asra meaning corner) vedi gave a measure always from the centre from where two diagonals are drawn so as to cut each other there, in the way in which a square is treated in ordinary geometry.

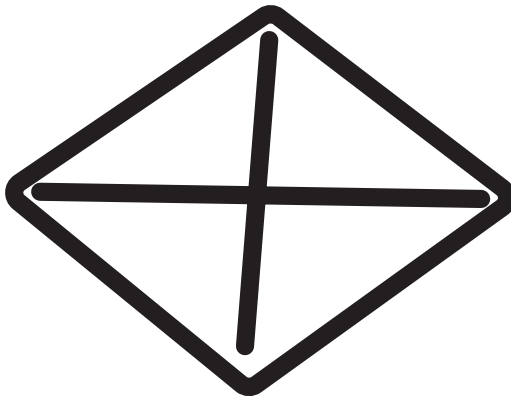


Figure 22.1 The centre that is the chief point of invocation

The centre was the chief point to think of, and the figure of the square was drawn and the centre was the principal spot in which all rites had to be done; and on which all worship was to be concentrated.

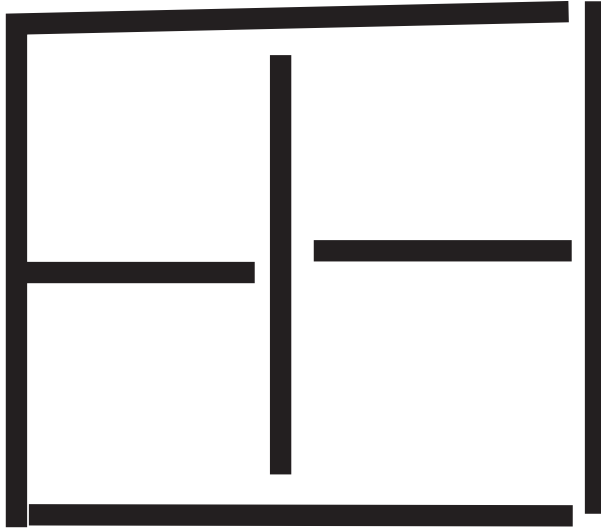


Figure 22.2 Chaturasra – Syena

Thus, the centre was the chief point of invocation and inspiration and a cross was produced, as enclosed by the four lines of a square at first like the following:

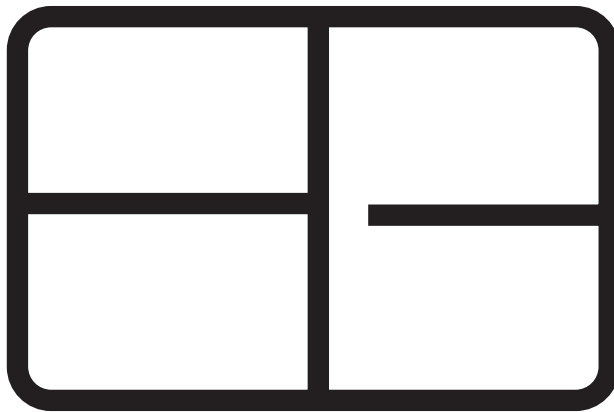


Figure 22.3 Two diagonals are drawn so as to cut each other in the way in which a square is treated in ordinary geometry

and then like the one drawn earlier.

Of course, it is also to be remembered that geometry is a lost science in India; and the majority of the people – as human beings we all are wont to do – naturally gave up or neglected abstruse geometry for comparatively more concrete algebra and arithmetic, in course of time. Altars were accurately constructed, and the Swastika was the favourite form among the primitive sages. It was a figure that, among other things, moreover, took a prominent place on ancient coins. For instance, in the Cambridge History of Ancient India, vol. I, plate V gives as figure 16 AR, Kuninda-Amoghahute, and it gives on the reverse side (as opposed to obverse) near a tree within railing, Swastika which is very neat and accurate.

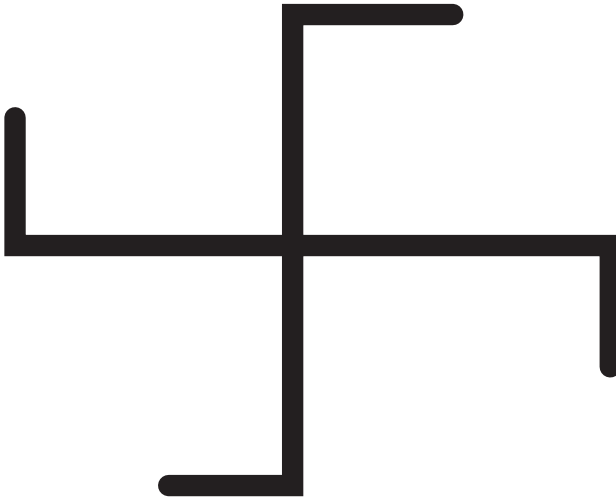


Figure 22.4 Swastika

There are, however, many forms in which a Swastika can be drawn. In some cases, we find in modern times six-petalled Swastika, to correspond to the six-petalled Lotus flower. This figure ✱ came into vogue during the Rationalistic period, when rituals were reduced in extent, but increased in intensity; and the altar in the external side was transferred to the internal. It was, in fact, transformed and the heart came to be the altar. Sages who saw by means of Yogic powers, such as introspection recognized the six-petalled heart as the altar on which all ceremonies were to be performed. The heart lotus was accurately drawn by the creator, and it was the Swastika – the welfare-producing place, on which all sacrifices of evil feelings, evil desires, and everything evil were to be made. In fine, Swastika was and is considered to be the form of best auspices and the evoker and invoker of all welfare. The extreme unction of Christians in which “God the Father, God the Son,

and God the Holy Ghost” are the words uttered and muttered thrice over is, as I understand, intended to invoke all welfare. Swastika is more or less, regarded as such at the start and all throughout, up to the finish in performing many rites.

At the present moment, all religion abiding Brahmans have to sacrifice their selfish interests and dedicate their services: absolutely to the presiding deities over the six petals which correspond to the “plexuses” of medical science, that is, physiology, and which are the six petals of the heart Svadhishthana Chakra, etc. Now, it would be tedious perhaps for the audience to enter deep, with my detailed and lengthy on, into the correspondence of the deities and physiological counterparts as well as analogues; but suffice it to say that the Swastika in the classical period came to assume another form, which pious Brahmans actually draw every day, during the Deva-Tarpana ceremony. That form is made up of two equilateral triangles with the apex of each set in the opposite direction.

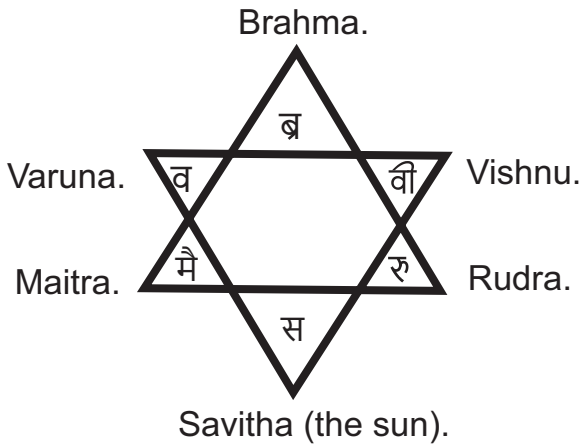


Figure 22.5 Svadhishthana Chakra

These are six petals over which the aforementioned six deities preside. The welfare of the Ego is to flow born the six places; and the Swastika is so drawn as to worship the six gods. These are calculated to bring welfare to the worshipper. Moreover, the same six petals represent Plexuses in the physical body and they are of the heart within. To these all evil is to be sacrificed; good thoughts, good desires, good deeds, and good words are to be entertained by the householder, after putting under control all evil propensities. Now, Swastika is the figure to be drawn in this connection to represent the six-petalled heart. Before taking food daily, the same figure is drawn with the same internal sense, namely, dedicating all evil, sacrificing all devoted service, and invoking all good, all welfare to the householder who performs the rites.

Coming next to the Swastika figure drawn at as well as on the threshold of every householder’s place of residence, daily, as in rare cases, and occasionally,

as in a majority of cases, it is to be remembered that the intent is the same invocation of welfare, and no other; but now-a-days many other facts have been lost sight of, and the Swastika is regarded as a mere decoration of the house by means of drawing and painting. The inner meaning rarely asserts itself.

During and after the Buddhistic period, it so happened that charms and incantations came into existence; and the root idea of producing one's own welfare, that is, serving one's selfish interests gained ground, so far so that by any means and invoking the help of any agency – divine or infernal one's own purpose was to be served. During those ages in which Black magic prevailed, there were some performances in which the third figure of Swastika was drawn as a material for worship and meditation, wishing welfare, for destroying fever and other illnesses. In such cases, therefore, the first two figures are not drawn, as a rule; since they are meant to invoke general welfare as opposed to any specific good of selfish interests.

Now, having traced the origin of Swastika, but confining attention to the East and the ancient writings of the Hindus, I may now be permitted to descend upon more modern times. At present, in account ॐ books, in some places, the first figure given earlier is drawn with ॐ saffron powder, and then written in all the four cavities as well as all the four extremities, with a view to invoke peace and prosperity and attract general welfare from the eight quarters of the world. This was an earlier practice but, at present as a rule, is not found so written. During the performance of marriage ceremony, the same first figure is drawn many times in many places, for example, from the very rite of setting up the auspicious post Mangala Stambharopana मंगल स्तंभारोपण, up to the rite of going round the holy sacrificial fire, many occasions arise when the Swastika is required to be drawn. Even in the "Chori", probably representing a small specimen of a cottage of earthen pots, everyday a new Swastika is drawn. It is, no doubt, Laxmi, the goddess of wealth or prosperity that presides over trade and that deserves to be worshipped that, in account books, the auspicious beginning is always made after drawing a Swastika "by means of saffron powder – 'Kumkum'".

So, it becomes clear now to see that it was "Nature worship" as understood by the West; and worship of the Almighty Power to invoke general blessings on all humanity and not on anyone individual. Everywhere and at all times, prosperity in the case of worldly life is what all human beings desire to possess; and not misery; but by righteous actions, by sacrificing selfish purposes, by dedicating individual life to universal life, this prosperity is sought; and Swastika is a figure that is used as a symbol to invoke it from all the eight directions on the heads of all human beings, nay all created beings of the world.

## Note

1 Reprinted from *JASB*, XIII (7), 1927: 703–709.

# Glossary

<i>Akhra</i>	<i>A place of congregation of the Baul Sect. It may also mean a place where wrestling takes place in a ritual manner</i>
<i>Anchla</i>	<i>Scarf to cover the upper part of the body</i>
<i>Anna</i>	<i>The sixteenth part of a Rupee</i>
<i>Asan</i>	<i>A seat or also a mat used for sitting</i>
<i>Asra</i>	<i>Corner</i>
<i>Avatar</i>	<i>Incarnation</i>
<i>Avesta</i>	<i>Sacred scriptures of Parsis</i>
<i>Avidya</i>	<i>Opposite form of Vidya (knowledge), may stand for negative or evil knowledge</i>
<i>Bala</i>	<i>Bracelet</i>
<i>Bhagat</i>	<i>Shaman</i>
<i>Bhajan</i>	<i>Devotional songs</i>
<i>Bhakta</i>	<i>Devotees</i>
<i>Bhang</i>	<i>Opium</i>
<i>Bhasma</i>	<i>Sacred ash</i>
<i>Chaitya</i>	<i>Shrine or place of worship</i>
<i>Chaukidars</i>	<i>Watchmen</i>
<i>Cimta</i>	<i>Pair of tongs</i>
<i>Dhotur</i>	<i>Loincloth</i>
<i>Dugdugi</i>	<i>Kettle drums</i>
<i>Ganja</i>	<i>Cannabis</i>
<i>Gana pati</i>	<i>Master of a host of things</i>
<i>Gerua Basan</i>	<i>Clothes of saffron colour</i>
<i>Ghat</i>	<i>Earthen pot</i>
<i>Ghi</i>	<i>Clarified butter</i>
<i>Goraitis</i>	<i>Cattle herders</i>
<i>Granth</i>	<i>Book in Sanskrit</i>
<i>Gumpa</i>	<i>Buddhist Shrine</i>
<i>Gunia</i>	<i>Evil witch doctor</i>
<i>Hajjam</i>	<i>Barbers</i>
<i>Haoma</i>	<i>Soma juice</i>
<i>Hom</i>	<i>Making ceremonial oblations to the Fire God</i>

<i>Ikshu</i>	<i>Sugar cane</i>
<i>Jaijir</i>	<i>Endowment</i>
<i>Jajan</i>	<i>Practice</i>
<i>Jolaha</i>	<i>Weavers</i>
<i>Kamandalu</i>	<i>Begging bowl</i>
<i>Kapni</i>	<i>Loincloth</i>
<i>Ketab</i>	<i>Book in Urdu</i>
<i>Khir</i>	<i>Rice and milk pudding</i>
<i>Khunjuri</i>	<i>Cymbals</i>
<i>Kufu</i>	<i>Equal social status, used mainly for marriage eligibility</i>
<i>Kusti</i>	<i>Sacred thread worn by a Parsi</i>
<i>Lengta</i>	<i>Loincloth</i>
<i>Linga</i>	<i>Male reproductive organ</i>
<i>Mantra</i>	<i>Spells</i>
<i>Maran</i>	<i>Death</i>
<i>Mat</i>	<i>A way of belief</i>
<i>Mrituya</i>	<i>Death</i>
<i>Munsif</i>	<i>Accountant</i>
<i>Murishid</i>	<i>Spiritual guide</i>
<i>Muta</i>	<i>Temporary marriage</i>
<i>Nasab</i>	<i>Blood Line</i>
<i>Nirmal</i>	<i>Pure and tranquil</i>
<i>Paan</i>	<i>To drink</i>
<i>Panch Pir</i>	<i>Five holy men (Panch-Five. Pir-Holy Men). These were worshipped in Bengal by both Hindus and Muslims</i>
<i>Parashu</i>	<i>Axe</i>
<i>Pasupati</i>	<i>Lord of the animals</i>
<i>Piri</i>	<i>A low stool</i>
<i>Pothi</i>	<i>Book in Marathi and Hindi</i>
<i>Pretas</i>	<i>Demons</i>
<i>Puja</i>	<i>The Hindu form of worship</i>
<i>Pura</i>	<i>Ghosts</i>
<i>Qatreh</i>	<i>A drop</i>
<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Emotion</i>
<i>Sadat</i>	<i>Social laws of Islam</i>
<i>Sadhu Seba</i>	<i>Giving a feast to the mendicants</i>
<i>Sarangi</i>	<i>Traditional stringed musical instrument of India</i>
<i>Seva</i>	<i>Devotional service</i>
<i>Sthavara</i>	<i>Static or situated in one place</i>
<i>Sudreh</i>	<i>Sacred shirt of Parsis</i>
<i>Sukta</i>	<i>Verses</i>
<i>Sup</i>	<i>A flat basket</i>
<i>Tirtha</i>	<i>Pilgrim place</i>
<i>Trimurti</i>	<i>Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh</i>
<i>Ulema</i>	<i>Islamic theologians</i>



<b>Upanayana</b>	Thread ceremony
<b><i>Utarna</i></b>	To bring down or to exorcise
<b>Vahan</b>	Vehicle
<b>Vakil</b>	Lawyer
<b>Vedi</b>	An altar
<b><i>Vendidad</i></b>	Part of Parsi scriptures (ecclesiastical code of conduct)
<b>Wajifa</b>	Scholarship

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