

Hinduism

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Of all the world's great religions, Hinduism is the most difficult to define. It did not have any one founder. 'It grew gradually over a period of nearly five thousand years, absorbing and assimilating all the religious and cultural movements of India.'¹ It has many scriptures which are authoritative but none that is exclusively so. Hinduism is 'more like a tree that has *grown* gradually than like a building that has been *erected* by some great architect at some definite point in time'.²

Hindus call their religion *sanatana dharma* ('eternal religion'). The word *dharma* is sometimes used for the sacred law deposited in scripture, but more often for the religious assumptions of Hinduism. *Dharma* is more than religious belief; it is a total way of life and conduct, a national religious consciousness. As *sanatana*, it is eternal. It has neither beginning nor end, but is coeval with life itself. *Sanatana dharma* is therefore universal truth. It is not revealed by any act of personal God but is seen by those whose pure minds catch its reflection. The ancient seers or *rishis* transmitted this truth to humanity.

All particular religious truths are manifestations of the One Truth. Krishna, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*,³ declares; 'Howsoever men approach me, even so do I accept them; for on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine.'⁴ The knowledge of this truth is ultimately an inner mystical experience which the Hindu expresses

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¹ K. M. Sen, *Hinduism* (Penguin, Baltimore, 1962), p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ For the place of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in the Hindu scriptures, see p. 139.

⁴ *Bhagavad-Gita*, IV. 11.

in the familiar prayer: 'From delusion lead me to truth. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality.'⁵

As a way of life Hinduism is fundamentally eclectic and syncretistic. In other words, it selects elements from a variety of religious beliefs and customs and absorbs and adapts them. It looks for the fundamental truths behind all manifestations. There is no sharp distinction between religion and culture as has developed in the West since the Renaissance. Modern Hinduism seeks to absorb the ideals and ethics of Christianity and other religions and at the same time to adapt itself to the secular spirit and to evolutionary science.

Hinduism is not a credal religion as are Islam and Christianity. Hindus are born Hindus, and therefore are predominantly found in the land of India, where Hinduism originated, and in parts of the world to which Indians have migrated in large numbers, including Malaysia, Java, Borneo, Fiji and East Africa. The name 'Hindu' originally had geographical significance, being a corrupt form of 'Sindhu', a region watered by the river Indus. Traditionally Hinduism has not been a missionary faith, though within Hinduism a missionary spirit has by no means been lacking among sectarian movements. Some modern sectarian movements countenance conversion from among those born non-Hindus. In the West the Ramakrishna Mission, the Krishna Consciousness Society and the Divine Light Mission are well known for their missionary zeal. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, one of the many *gurus* or religious teachers, is winning many disciples through Transcendental Meditation.⁶

Hindu scriptures

In order to understand the basic tenets of Hinduism and to provide a framework for understanding its historical development, it will be helpful at this point to outline briefly the main Hindu scriptures. A more detailed discussion on the historical development of Hinduism will be found below.⁷

The voluminous scriptures, mainly written in Sanskrit over a period of more than 2,000 years, cover a very wide variety of religious beliefs and practices. At different periods in the history of Hinduism, different philosophical schools and religious movements have found in selected scriptures inspiration and authority for their beliefs and social behaviour.

The Hindu scriptures are divided into two classes — *Sruti* and *Smriti*. *Sruti*, or 'what is heard', refers to the eternal truths of religion which the *rishis* or seers saw or heard. They are independent of any god or man to whom they are communicated. They are the primary and final authority of religious truth. Using the analogy of the reflection of an image in a mirror or on the surface of a lake, the intellect of the ancient *rishis* was so pure and calm that it perfectly reflected

⁵ *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1.3.28.

⁶ See also p. 166.

⁷ See pp. 153ff.

the entirety of eternal truth. Their disciples recorded this truth and the record of it is known as the *Vedas*. *Smriti*, or 'what is remembered', possess a secondary authority, deriving their authority from the *Smriti* whose principles they seek to expand. As recollections they contain all the sacred texts other than the *Vedas*. These are generally understood to include the law books, the two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas* which are largely collections of myths, stories, legends and chronicles of great events. Also included are the *Agamas*, which are theological treatises and manuals of worship, and the *sutras*, or aphorisms, of the six systems of philosophy. There is also a vast treasury of vernacular literature largely of a *bhakti* or devotional type, which continues to inspire the masses of religious Hindus and which different sects accept as *Smriti*.

1. The Vedas

The word *Veda* means knowledge or wisdom and, when applied to scripture, signifies the book of wisdom. The *Vedas*, the earliest Hindu scriptures, are collections of hymns, prayers, rituals and magical formulae. There are four of them – the *Rig-Veda*, the *Sama-Veda*, the *Yajur-Veda* and the *Atharva-Veda*. Each consists of three parts: the *Mantras*, or hymns in praise of the gods; the *Brahmanas*, written in prose as guide-books for the performance of the sacrificial rites for the pleasing of the gods; and the *Upanishads*, which are the concluding portions of the *Vedas* and are speculations in philosophy and mystical discourses on spiritual truths. The most important *Upanishads* are variously numbered as being between ten and thirteen. Coming at the end of the *Vedas* the teaching based on them is called *Vedanta*.

The precise dates of the *Vedas* are uncertain, but they belonged to the period of the Aryan migrations into India, probably some time after 2000 BC. Some elements found in later Hinduism and now known to have belonged to pre-Aryan times are absent from them, suggesting that the *Vedas* belong to the period of up to approximately 600 BC. From these writings we glimpse a picture of the worship of a variety of gods by means of ritual sacrifices. Most of the gods are personifications of the powers of nature, such as the celestial bodies, fire, storm, air, water and rain. It is significant that the theological concepts of propitiation and expiation are most clearly and frequently emphasized in these early *Vedas*.

The *Upanishads* constitute the foundation of later Hinduism. Their teaching centres around the concepts of *Brahman* (that which is ultimately real, or 'Absolute Being') and *atman* (self). They search for the relationship or identity of *Brahman* and *atman* and man's realization or knowledge of his true self. The *Upanishads*, though based on the *Vedas*, reflect a movement away from the sacrifices and ritualism of polytheism to more man-centred philosophies and to the problems of ethical behaviour. Several Western philosophers, notably Schopenhauer, have found solace in the *Upanishads*.

2. The codes of law

Laws for detailed regulating of Hindu society were codified by law-givers from time to time. *Manu* is the oldest giver of law and perhaps the best known. As Hindu society changed, many of the old law became obsolete and were replaced by new ones. As *Smriti* the law codes carried less authority than the *Vedas*.

3. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata

The two great Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* expound the principles of the *Vedas* by interpreting the exploits of the great national heroes. Characters such as Rama and Sita depict the ideals of moral and social behaviour for the individual, the family and the nation. D. S. Sarma writes, 'Even today our domestic, social and national ideals are dominated by characters in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.'⁸ This is clearly seen in the traditional Hindu festivals which are performed each year, as well as in many modern dramas and films. The *Ramayana* relates the story of Rama, the ideal man, and shows how an individual should behave towards all other men and how a community should live in peace and harmony.

The *Mahabharata* is the story of the conflict between two branches of the same family. Through parables and dialogues the epic seeks to answer the moral, spiritual and metaphysical problems of the times. One such dialogue is the *Bhagavad-Gita* ('Song of the Lord') which consists of a conversation between Arjuna, the warrior-prince, and his charioteer Krishna, who is the disguised incarnation of Vishnu. The *Gita* is the best-known and best-loved scripture of modern Hindus. It calls for disinterested action in doing one's duty according to one's status in society. The dialogue is made an occasion to summarize the main strands of Hindu philosophy. For the first time in the development of Hindu spirituality the love of God for man and of man for God is introduced. R. C. Zaehner comments, 'The *Bhagavad-Gita* is thus the water-shed that separates the pantheistic monism of the *Upanishads* from the fervent theism of the later popular cults. Though not ranking as *smriti* it is nonetheless the focal point around which all later Hinduism was to revolve.'⁹

4. The Puranas

The *Puranas* rank next to the epics in their influence on religious Hindus. They seek to evoke religious devotion among the masses through myths, stories and legends, and events in national history, though they are more concerned with ideal truth than with historical truth. Stories about the several *avatars* or incarnations of Vishnu belong to this category. The most popular *Purana* is the *Bhagavata Purana* which relates the stories of the ten incarnations of Vishnu.

⁸ D. S. Sarma, *Essence of Hinduism* (International Publications Service, New York, 1971), p. 13.

⁹ R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism* (OUP, New York, 1966), p. 10.

of whom the last, Kalki, is still to come. The familiar picture in Hindu homes of Krishna, the most perfect and fully divine incarnation, playing the flute under a tree is derived from the *Bhagavata*. Legends from the *Puranas* are very popular with children and villagers and form the plots for films and stage productions. These stories, in which heroes display virtues such as honesty, chastity and self-sacrifice, have played a significant part in the formation of the Hindu moral code.

5. The Agamas

The three main branches of Hinduism, namely, Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism, each have their own theological treatises and manuals for worship. These are known as *Agamas*. Because of the strength of sectarian Hinduism these *Agamas* are very important for their adherents. Although there is great diversity among them, they share in a common Vedic spirit.

6. The Darsanas

While the *Agamas* appeal to the masses, the *Darsanas* are philosophical in character and are meant for the scholar. Each of the six main schools of Hindu philosophy has sought to systematize the Vedic literature and their own tenets in the form of short aphorisms, or *sutras*. The *Darsanas* consist in the collection of the *sutras* attributed to the founder of each school and in the authoritative commentaries on them that developed at a later date.

7. Popular literature

The Hindu scriptures were in the main written in Sanskrit, the language of the scholar. To write a religious or philosophical work in a popular language was thought to be sacrilegious. But in time protest movements arose and many hymns and devotional songs were composed in the regional languages. Tamil, Bengali, Marathi and Hindi devotional writings beginning in the medieval period (1200-1700 AD) are among the best known. Thus Hindu scriptures are rich in diversity and together reflect the complexity of the Hindu view of life.

Basic concepts in Hinduism

In order to understand the Hindu view of life it is essential to grasp the fundamental presuppositions which Hindus accept as self-evident truths and facts of existence.

1. Brahman, God and creation

The search for *Brahman*, Eternal Being or Reality, is the pre-occupation of the Hindu mind. To achieve this goal, Hindus are willing to renounce the world, give up family and all physical

comforts, undertake pilgrimages to sacred rivers and to the Himalayas, and to live alone in dense jungles. Having watched these pilgrims, men and women who risk their lives in the Himalayan snows in order to catch a glimpse of god in an ice cave or to have their sins washed away at the source of the Ganges, one is ashamed at the ease and superficiality of much of western religion.

'Who or what is *Brahman*?' is the fundamental question of Hinduism. Some Hindu philosophical schools, such as the *Vaisesika* for example, believe in a personal God. Others, notably the *Vedanta*, see *Brahman* as the one, abstract, all-pervading Reality. All reality in the *Upanishads*, including the self (*atman*), is an aspect of *Brahman*. The physical world with its apparent diversity is neither real nor unreal; it is mere illusion (*maya*).

In one of the *Upanishads*, for example, Svetaketu Aruneya is being taught sacred wisdom by his father. His father says to him:

'Place this salt in water and come to me tomorrow morning.' Svetaketu did as he was commanded, and in the morning his father said to him: 'Bring me the salt you put into the water last night.'

Svetaketu looked into the water, but could not find it, for it had dissolved.

His father then said: 'Taste the water from this side.

How is it?'

'It is salt.'

'Taste it from the middle. How is it?'

'It is salt.'

'Taste it from that side. How is it?'

'It is salt.'

'Look for the salt again and come again to me.'

The son did so, saying: 'I cannot see the salt. I only see water.'

His father then said: 'In the same way, O my son, you cannot see the spirit. But in truth he is there. An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. THOU ART THAT.'¹

Most Hindus, including those who believe in a variety of gods and goddesses, accept the notion of an all-pervading God. Sen comments:

'In the Hindu philosophy there is no contradiction between belief in an all-embracing, all-pervading, omnipresent God and the *puja* (worship) of a variety of gods and goddesses in the Hindu pantheon. In religious ceremonies the images of gods may help to focus devotion, but in theory they represent nothing more than imaginative pictures of the infinite aspects of one all-pervading God.'²

God, however defined in Hinduism, is never Creator of the universe

¹ *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI. 11ff.

² Sen, *Hinduism*, p. 35.

in the Hebrew and Christian sense. God always creates out of something or out of himself, never out of that which did not exist. Even in the later *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, where the idea of a personal God is developed, God always tends to be identified with the sum total of creation. Though he may transcend it, he is never entirely separated from it. The general teaching of the *Upanishads* is that the universe emanates from ultimate Reality as sparks emanate from fire or a spider's web flows from the spider itself. The world has neither beginning nor end, but is part of an evolutionary cyclic process, recreating itself from all eternity and dissolving back into the unmanifest condition. These periods of evolution are called 'the days and nights of *Brahman*'. Each day and each night of *Brahman* lasts 1,000 years of the gods and each year of the gods corresponds with 12,000 years of men. Each year of the gods is divided into four periods of varying length. We now live in the fourth period, the Kali age. During each cycle morals decline, only to emerge again from the womb of *Brahman* perfect.

In the early creation hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, creation is a transition from chaos to order which may or may not involve the Creator God. In some hymns creation is the result of the union of the primeval male and female or the birth of the Golden Seed. Again, in one of the creation hymns creation is the sacrificial act in which *purusha* (man), here thought of as primal Being, sacrifices himself in order to produce the phenomenal world from a part of his being. This primeval sacrifice becomes the proto-type of sacrifices representing the initiation and renewal of the creative act. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* God generates the world as the seed or egg fertilizing himself.³ Why God continues creating is never explained except as his play or sport (*lila*). The concepts contrast with the Jewish and Christian view of creation in which creation is uniquely distinct from God and has a moral purpose. Presuppositions on God and creation are theological watersheds which influence all other theological concepts and their consequent religious practices.

2. Karma, samsara, and moksha

Karma is 'action' or 'doing' and is a moral interpretation of the natural law of causation which states that any action is the effect of a cause and is in its turn the cause of an effect. The law of *karma* is the extension of this physical law to the realm of the spirit and to life, past, present and future. It is a principle of moral reaction applied to both good and evil actions. As a man sows, so shall he reap. Bad actions reap suffering and bondage to human existence. Good actions lead to freedom from this bondage. Just as the law of causation is unalterable in nature, so the law of *karma* is fixed in the spiritual realm. T. M. P. Mahadevan argues:

³ *Bhagavad-Gita*, VII. 10; IX. 18; X. 39; XIV. 3.

'The *karmic* law applies the principle of cause and conservation of energy to the moral world. There is conservation of moral values, just as there is conservation of physical energy. Nothing is lost which has been earned by work; and nothing comes in which is not deserved. Every action has a double effect; it produces its appropriate reward, and it also affects character.'⁴

Inextricably bound up with *karma* is the assumption of *samsara*, rebirth or transmigration of the soul. The soul, as eternal and, according to the *Upanishads*, in some sense identical with *Brahman*, is distinct from the empirical self which transmigrates from body to body, carrying its load of *karma* with it. The wheel of rebirth is a natural principle of the universe, involving man and animals.

According to *karmic* law a man may be reborn as a god, as a member of a higher or lower caste or as an animal, according to his every thought, word and act. Each man, therefore, carries with him his past; in fact he is his own past. Similarly the mental and moral tendencies of this life will work themselves out in the next. All creatures are involved in this cyclic time-process of *samsara*, the state of each creature in any particular life being dependent on the good or evil actions of preceding lives.

Modern exponents of the law of *karma* seek to emphasize both the element of freedom and of predetermination in human action. D. S. Sarma compares the soul to a farmer to whom a plot of land has been given. Its size, the nature of its soil and weather conditions are predetermined; but the farmer is at liberty either to till the ground and raise crops or to neglect it and allow it to run to waste.⁵ This duality is further illustrated in the words of Dr S. Radhakrishnan:

'The cards in the game of life are given to us. We do not select them. They are traced to our past *karma*, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we gain or lose. And there is freedom.'⁶

While modern Hindus reject the charge of fatalism, they all acknowledge that inequalities of birth and of mental and physical endowment operate according to the laws of *karma* and rebirth. Physical and moral suffering are explained on this basis and in a similar way the distinctions in the caste system are justified.

Karma operates as an inexorable law of retributive justice. It is an internal law of nature, independent of the decrees of God or the gods. *Karma* determines the acts appropriate to each caste. What may be right for one may be wrong for another, and thus the concepts of

⁴ T. M. P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Chetana, Bombay, 1960), p. 59.

⁵ Sarma, *Essence of Hinduism*, p. 55.

⁶ S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (Macmillan, New York, 1939), p. 75.

good and evil are determined by the structures of human society rather than by the moral attributes of a personal God.

The problem of the relationship of the impersonal principle of *karma* to the will of a personal God has long occupied the minds of Hindu theologians. The idea has been developed that the will of God and *karma* are synonymous; that just as his will is unchanging and perfectly just, so his guidance or control of *karma* assures its absolutely just operation. In this way the idea of a rewarding-punishing God is maintained without descending into the vivid heaven-hell mythology of popular Hinduism, so characteristic of much of village worship. In theistic Hinduism the concept of divine grace mitigates the effects of the *karmic* law, though even here the will of God is in accordance with the *karmic* process.

The aim of all Hindus is to escape from the wheel of *samsara* and from *karma* itself. *Moksha*, or *mukti*, is variously translated as escape, release, liberation or emancipation. Salvation in these categories is a fundamental presupposition of all Hindu thinking. Unless the chain of cause and effect is broken, the bondage of the soul to the process of birth, death and rebirth continues. The Hindu longs for release from life that never ends. *Moksha* is release from both righteousness and unrighteousness. It is deliverance from the body-soul bondage and from the universe of time and space, for both are governed by the law of *karma*. The Hindu assumption is that this release is ultimately possible for all.

3. Soul, sin and salvation

All religions are concerned with eternity and with existence beyond physical death. Hinduism is concerned with the eternal Being of the soul (*atman* or *purusha*) rather than with the soul's relationship to God or to other souls.

The soul is eternal and therefore shares the very essence of reality. It is not limited to mankind but is the true essence of all living things, plants, animals and man. The soul is imprisoned within the impurities of finite existence, but in itself it is detached from the personal experiences of the physical, empirical self. The soul does not act, and so is not the agent of sin. For this reason, Swami Vivekananda was consistent when he said, 'It is a sin to call a man a sinner.'

The body, or the empirical self of mind, consciousness and physical body, is, on the other hand, temporal and perishable. It is neither real nor unreal, but exists only in the world 'created' by *maya* (illusion). Personality belongs to the empirical self and is therefore also illusory. Hinduism interprets personhood as a level of reality lower than eternal Being or ultimate Reality, and therefore ideas of incarnation and reincarnation belong to the temporal and are ultimately a curse. The Hindu hope is the realization of the immortality of the soul, either in its individuality or in its absorption into *Brahman*. The body is the prison house of the soul and therefore

any idea of an eternal union of body and soul is an embarrassment and anathema. There is no place whatever for the idea of the resurrection of the body in the Hindu scheme of things. Thus in all forms of Hindu religion there is a type of dualism between the two worlds - one of eternal soul and the other of never-ending change and *maya*, the world of cyclic time, space and transient personality.⁷

Sin for the Hindu is, therefore, not the personal moral guilt that it is for the Christian and the Jew. It belongs to the realm of the metaphysical, being defined in terms of eternal principles rather than in relation to a personal and moral God. It is variously defined as *avidya*, or ignorance of truth, *maya*, attributing reality to empirical personhood, and *mala*, the feeling of individuality.

Good and evil are related to the degree of detachment or attachment of the soul to the individual self. When the soul reaches its true self, morality is transcended. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* the idea of *niskama karma*, or disinterested action, is developed. Action is no longer wrong but a virtue if it is performed without attachment to its consequences or fruit.⁸

On the other hand, the consequences of sin as an offence against God leading to a cry for forgiveness is frequently found in the earlier scriptures. In the *Rig-Veda*, the poet cries to Varuna, the guardian of cosmic order, law and truth, 'O bright and stainless Varuna, through want of strength I erred and went astray: have mercy, forgive me, good Lord.'⁹ This emphasis is virtually lost in the *Upanishads* but reappears in the *Gita* and in the later *bhakti* poets. Yet even here sin belongs to the empirical self. The true self neither is born nor dies, and therefore Krishna in the *Gita* is able to persuade Arjuna to do his caste duty of killing his relatives in war, for the indwelling soul neither kills nor is killed.¹ In God's presence salvation in Hinduism, as we have already seen, is primarily the separation of the eternal soul from the phenomenal world. It is release, *moksha* or *mukti*, from *samsara*, the wheel of rebirth, and from the bondage of *karma*, or action.

At the same time salvation is thought of in terms of the relationship of the soul to the Absolute Reality or to God. In the dualistic Samkhya school of thought the soul is released and returns to a state of pure consciousness of Self. *Purusha*, or eternal self, is emancipated from *prakriti*, or non-self. When the soul realizes its true distinction it is no longer bounded by the world of nature and the emancipated

⁷ Jews and Christians view the body and soul as a unity. Man is created in the "image of God" as a rational, moral and free person destined for an eternal I-Thou relationship. The Bible has little or no interest in the soul apart from the body. The Christian hope lies in the resurrection of the body rather than in the immortality of the soul.

⁸ *Bhagavad-Gita*, V. 10.

⁹ *Rig-Veda*, VII. 89.

¹ *Bhagavad-Gita*, II. 17-22.

soul is eternally freed from rebirth. Salvation is the soul realizing its own immortality.²

On the other hand, in the monistic Advaita Vedanta school as systematized by the famous expositor Sankara, the emancipated soul is identified with the ultimate Reality, *Brahman*. The soul enters into mystical union with *Brahman* described as 'dreamless sleep'. The consciousness of the empirical self is completely transcended. The soul, or *atman*, realizes its true knowledge as metaphysically one with *Brahman*. This identification of *atman* with *Brahman* is expressed in the *Mahavakyas* or great sayings of Upanishadic literature: *Aham Brahma asmi* (I am Brahma),³ *Tat tvam asi* (Thou art that),⁴ and *Ekam evatvityam* (Being is one without a second).⁵ When the enlightened Hindu says 'I am God' he has no thought of blasphemy but is testifying to this monistic view of salvation.

Against these more philosophic views of salvation in which the idea of a personal God plays little part, the majority of Hindus are theistic, worshipping divine incarnations and numerous local deities. For them the highest path of salvation is *bhakti* or devotion to personal God. There are traditionally three *margas* or methods of obtaining spiritual perfection. Each is valid, though some schools of thought and sects consider one way more excellent than the others. None is exclusively held as the only way.

Karma marga is the path of selfless or disinterested action. It is the path of religious duty. *Karma* or action motivated from the desire for its fruits binds the soul to the wheel of existence. Action done without any attachment to its consequences, however, leads to spiritual perfection. We have already noted that the doctrine of *niskama karma*, first found in the *Gita*, is regarded as worship in which the worshipper offers his actions and their results as offerings to the Lord.

The second path to salvation is *bhakti marga*, the path of exclusive devotion to God. For the theist this is the highest path. It is the way of love. *Bhakti* may depend on external aids, such as ritualistic worship, or it may be on the higher level of direct communion with God. Devotion to God may assume many forms reflecting the variety of human relationships. It may be the attitude of servant to master (of which the god Hanuman is the ideal), or it may be the love of a man for his friend. A higher form of devotion is the love of parent for child. The love of wife for her husband is typified in the relationship of Sita and Rama, while the deepest love is that of the lover and the beloved as in the case of Radha and Krishna. A distinction is often made between *bhakti*, or devotion, and *prapatti*, or absolute

² Jungian psychology is based in part on the Principles of the Samkhya School.

³ *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad*, I. 4. 10.

⁴ *Chandogya Upanishad*, VI. 8. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, VI. 2. 11.

surrender to God. The path of the former requires certain qualifications, such as knowledge, good deeds, and high caste; but the latter is open to all.

The third way to salvation is *jnana marga*, the path of higher knowledge or spiritual insight. It is for the intellectual few. It leads to *moksha* (release) from the bondage of ignorance and to complete union with *Brahman*. In the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara it is the highest way of salvation, while for others it is preparatory to the supreme path of *bhakti*.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* accepts all three ways as valid paths to spiritual bliss, though in the final chapter *bhakti* is the favoured way. Krishna, God incarnate, says to Arjuna, 'In him (the Lord) alone seek refuge with all thy being, Bharata; by his grace shalt thou win to peace supreme, the eternal resting place . . . With mind on me devoutly worship me, to me do sacrifice, to me do reverence; to me shalt thou come; true is my promise to thee; thou art dear to me'.⁶ Here *bhakti* is the steady concentration of devotion to God. The climax comes in the following verse known as the *charama sloka* (final verse) advocating absolute surrender to God. 'Abandoning every duty, come to me alone for refuge; I will release thee from all sin; sorrow not!'⁷

The place of divine grace in the scheme of salvation deserves special mention. Some have erroneously equated *bhakti* with the Christian concept of grace. *Bhakti* is devotion for its own sake rather than for the glory of God. It has value in itself; it is a method to merit the grace of God. Grace operates within the framework of the law of *karma* and *dharma* (duty). It does not cancel it. In Christianity grace cancels the works of the law; but in Hinduism it hastens the process of deliverance from bondage to *karma* and the wheel of rebirth. The god Siva who is always associated with grace never annuls *dharma*, but guides the soul more quickly through it.

The concept of grace is most clearly seen in those Hindu schools of thought that advocate *prapatti* or absolute surrender to God. We have seen a glimpse of this in the *charama sloka* of the *Gita*. However, the clearest expression of grace is found in the southern school of Vaishnavism, in the worship of Vishnu (sometimes called Hari), as manifest in his two human incarnations as Rama and Krishna and in Krishna's consort Lakshmi. The leader of this school, Pillai Lokachari (1264-1327), took his stand on the *charama sloka* of the *Gita*, teaching salvation by grace alone. Reliance on grace, he said, is like the mother's milk for an infant; reliance on one's own efforts is like milk bought in the market place. Lokachari, though a devotee of Krishna, rejected *bhakti marga* as being an enemy of grace. Even *prapatti* or surrender to God is not a method of winning God's favour. The grace of God is freely given, thus defying the *karmic* law.

⁶ *Bhagavad-Gita*, XVIII. 62, 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, XVIII. 66.

While this school comes closer to the Christian concept of grace than any other, it differs from the biblical concept of God as holy and righteous. The Krishna of Lokachari is an indulgent god. The doctrine of the cross, as the necessary ground for the Christian view of grace, has no necessity here or elsewhere in Hinduism. There is no need for a 'once and for all' atonement. Krishna forgives at will.

4. Yoga

The concept of *yoga* is a fundamental method for achieving Hindu spirituality and deserves special attention. The term may be used for the physiological and psychological technique by which all bodily and psychic energy is controlled in order to achieve spiritual perfection, or the term may be used for the metaphysical enquiry associated with the two related classical philosophical schools jointly called Samkhya-Yoga. The word *yoga*, derived from the root *yug*, meaning 'to unite' or 'to yoke', originally meant the joining together of man's total energies in concentration to achieve the spiritual goal. Later *bhakti yogis* used the term for uniting man to God in devotion.

The aim of *yoga* is to produce a radical alteration in the mode of human consciousness through the control of body and mind, so that the *yogin* experiences a state of being which transcends space and time. The practice of *yoga* probably preceded the Aryan invasion of India; figurines of deities sitting in *yoga* positions have been discovered in the early Indus Valley civilization. *Yoga* has come to be universally practised by the religious sects of Hinduism, however much the metaphysical interpretations may vary. In the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita* the *yoga* technique is emphasized but the basic text of classical *yoga* is the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali of about the fifth century AD. The system of *yoga* centres on the stopping of the mind as the stream of conscious reflection of the soul. When the mind is stilled and emptied it returns to its original state and reflection stops. Thus the soul escapes the bondage of *prakriti* (nature) from which mind has come. It is the mind that causes *purusha* (soul) to act, to enjoy and to suffer. Through long and arduous practice of *yoga* the soul is freed from these attachments.

The practice of *yoga* involves eight stages or steps, the first two representing inner preparation. The last three steps mark different stages of concentration and constitute *yoga* proper. The steps are as follows:

a. Restraint. This consists of five rules; non-injury, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, disregarding of possessions.

b. Observances. These include purity, contentment, austerity, study and devotion to God. These ethical principles are the 'Ten Commandments' of *yoga* and are necessary preparation for *yoga*.

c. Posture. The body assumes an erect but relaxed position conducive to the control of the mind.

d. The regulation of breath by which slow and controlled breathing aids concentration.

e. The withdrawing of the senses from their respective objects, bringing the mind under control.

f. Concentration, in fixing the mind on a particular spot or object. In classical *yoga* the object is of little importance, though for *bhakti* worshippers, God (*Iswara*) becomes the object of concentration.

g. Meditation, or the continuous and undisturbed concentration on the object.

h. Samadhi or trance, where all mental activity stops and the mind is completely stilled. There are two levels of *samadhi*, the lower in which objective consciousness remains as the mind is completely absorbed in the contemplation of the particular object, and the higher in which objective consciousness disappears and the soul either experiences its won immortality or is absorbed into the Absolute. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is perhaps the greatest experimenter in *samadhi* in modern times.

The psychic technique of *yoga* has been pressed into the service of many religious sects in India. Primitive Buddhism and Jainism made use of it. Within orthodox Hinduism it came to be closely associated with the dualistic Samkhya philosophy in which soul (*purusha*) and nature (*prakriti*) are eternal verities. Salvation, or emancipation, is the self-knowledge of the soul as distinct from the empirical world. This is achieved through *yoga*.

In the *yoga* philosophy proper, however, a personal God is introduced into the system, not as Creator but as the perfect soul unaffected by *prakriti* (nature). Here salvation comes to mean to become like God in his timeless perfection. The emancipated soul realizes its own immortality. This *samadhi* (trance) experience of pure self-consciousness is the ultimate mystical experience of Hindu spirituality.

Yoga also came to be used by those who adhered to the monistic Advaita Vedanta school associated with the name of Sankara, and by neo-Vedantins such as the Ramakrishna Mission. Modern interpretations of *yoga*, such as those of S. Radhakrishnan and Aurobindo Ghosh, have sought to make it a technique for enhancing spiritual vitality rather than withdrawing from the phenomenal world. The technique of Transcendental Meditation developed by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, consisting of meditation on a secret *mantra* for a few minutes every day, has been described by his critics as 'instant Nirvana'. Though popular in the West it is largely rejected by orthodox Hinduism.⁸

5. Caste

One of the strongest distinguishing characteristics of traditional

⁸ See also p. 166.

Hinduism has been strict adherence to caste. The caste is a closed social group based on heredity, and possessing its own organization and rigid practices in marriage and dining, with strict punishments for those infringing caste rules. Its members normally practise the same or related professional trades.

The origin of caste is shrouded in uncertainty; some scholars think it is pre-Aryan. It seems to have grown with the multi-racial and multi-cultural nature of Indian society. The division of labour along professional lines which subsequently became hereditary must have been an important factor. With each conquest the ruling classes would assimilate the conquered into their classes or reduce them to serfs.

There are four main caste divisions with numerous sub-castes. In theory, the *Brahmins* are the priests and religious teachers, the *Kshatriyas* are the kings and warriors, the *Vaisyas* are the traders and merchants, and the *Sudras* are the cultivators and servants. Except in the case of the priests, this division is only approximate in India today. In the procurement of jobs, however, and in social customs, especially in marriage, caste continues to play an important part in Hindu society. Outside the four castes are the untouchables or outcastes, whom Gandhi called *Harijans*, or 'People of God' (*Hari*). Untouchability is a blot on Hindu society and several reform movements have attempted to eliminate it. Most leaders of *bhakti* movements have opposed caste divisions. The *Alvar* poets of South India from about the sixth to eighth centuries are examples of resistance to the system. Mahatma Gandhi, who was prepared to defend the division of Hindus into four castes, said, 'I consider untouchability to be a heinous crime against humanity.' Today scheduled castes and tribes, as they are known, receive special educational and other benefits. The earlier mass movements into the Christian church were largely from the lower castes and outcastes.

Another concept emphasizing social ideals is the four *asramas* (stages of life) forming the ideal for man's progress and control of spirit over matter. The four stages of student, married householder, forest dweller and *sannyasi*, or one who finally renounces the world, have in the past played an important part in Hindu society.

Customs and festivals

The multi-racial and cultural nature of Hinduism is reflected in the complex and diverse pattern of Hindu social customs and festivals. They vary from one community to another and one place to another. Some religious rituals are performed daily in the home, usually before images of gods or abstract symbols of deity. Some Hindus worship daily in the temple, others less frequently. No fixed day of the week is set apart for religious duties. Festival days are usually reckoned according to the lunar calendar. Astrological

calculations determine the auspicious days for undertaking any course of action, in particular for arranging marriages.

Many of the annual festivals are connected with the worship of particular gods and goddesses such as Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and beauty, Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, Ganesa, the god of wisdom and success, Kali or Durga, the mother goddess. Some festivals celebrate mythical events in the lives of divine incarnations; for example, Dashera celebrates the triumph of Rama. Other festivals are connected with the domestic life of the family or the seasons of the year. Some ceremonies are connected with stages of life such as naming a child, weaning it, initiation into the privileges of caste, marriage and funerals.

Pilgrimages play an important part in the religious life of Hindus. Holy places are numberless. Rivers such as the Ganges and the Godavari are sacred. Holy cities such as Banaras, Puri, Hardwar, are associated with Hindu mythology and attract large numbers of pilgrims. Pilgrim centres high in the everlasting snows of the Himalayas draw large numbers seeking merit and a vision of their god.

In village India, local gods and goddesses are worshipped and propitiated with gifts or food or in certain cases by the sacrificial blood of animals. Animistic spirit-worship plays an important part in the religious life of village people. The spirits of the departed have to be provided for and honoured and demon spirits kept out of the village. Diseases, epidemics and disasters are often attributed to goddesses, who must be appeased. The genius of Hinduism is its capacity to assimilate the religious beliefs and practices of all who come under its influence. Temple and family priests, *gurus* and religious pundits, wandering *sadhus*, numerous festivals and an increasing number of local temples and monasteries guarantee the continuance of the Hindu faith.

Hindu philosophy

In Hinduism philosophy is an integral part of religion. The main philosophical schools were fully developed by the third century AD, though their beginnings go back as far as the ninth century BC as doctrine began to be formulated on the fundamental issues raised in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. The six main systems of philosophy are usually grouped into three pairs: first, the *Nyaya* and *Vaiseshika*; second, the *Samkhya* and the *Yoga*; and third, the *Purva-Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. The systematizer of each school stated the principles in the form of short aphorisms or *sutras*. Later, numerous and extensive commentaries were written on these brief *sutras*.

1. Nyaya and Vaiseshika

Nyaya is a system of logical realism, accepting the reality of the external world on the basis of logical reasoning. An idea must conform

to its object. It recognizes four sources of knowledge: perception, inference, analogy and testimony. The analysis of the process of reasoning resembles the syllogistic analysis of Aristotle. The basic text was written by Gautama probably in the fourth century BC. It early accepted the metaphysical scheme of the *Vaiseshika* and its logic and epistemology came to be accepted by the other schools. The *Vaiseshika* school developed an atomistic cosmology reducing the plurality of the physical world to four kinds of atoms, earth, water, fire and air, together with the non-material concepts of space, time, ether, mind and soul. God created the world out of these nine elements.

2. Samkhya and yoga

Samkhya is one of the oldest systems of Indian thought. Its origin is attributed to Kapila, probably of the seventh century BC. It is basically dualistic with the two realities of *purusha* (soul or pure consciousness) and *prakriti* (the primal cause of nature) eternally distinct. *Purushas* are separate entities, infinite in number, without qualities and eternal. *Prakriti* is the basis of all material and physical nature and is unconscious. It comprises the three qualities of *sattva* (goodness or purity), *rajas* (energy or passion) and *tamas* (dullness or darkness). Evolution takes place when the balance of these three qualities is disturbed. The world, inherent in *prakriti*, is made manifest through this evolution. When the *purusha* wrongly identifies itself with the material world, it is held in the bondage of ignorance. *Moksha*, or liberation, comes when the soul knows itself to be independent of *prakriti*. This idea of salvation as the isolation of the soul is distinct from the pantheistic trend which characterizes the *Upanishads* where individual souls are not distinct, but are part of the divine Soul, *Brahman*.

The *yoga* philosophy accepts the metaphysics of *Samkhya* but in addition formulates a method of mind control by which the isolation of the soul from matter can be achieved. *Yoga* is a technique to still and empty the mind so that it assumes its original and pure non-conscious state. The eight well-defined steps in this process have already been described. In the *yoga* philosophy, devotion to God is one of the objects of concentration. God is the supreme *purusha* unaffected by *prakriti*.

3. Purva-Mimamsa and Vedanta

These philosophies attempt to systematize the *Vedas*. The former seeks to establish the authority of the early *Vedas* and is concerned with the nature of *dharma* or right action, especially in the performance of sacrifices. It is more practical than speculative. The latter, which means 'the end of the *Vedas*', seeks to give a systematic interpretation of doctrines drawn from the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Brahma Sutra* of Badarayana. *Vedanta* developed along two lines, one

strictly non-dual (*advaita*) and the other of varying degrees from modified non-duality to dualism. The most famous exponent of the former is Sankara and of the latter Ramanuja.

Sankara (788-820 AD) identified *atman* (soul) with *Brahman* (Absolute). He did not describe the phenomenal world as pure illusion, however, as is sometimes maintained. Using the analogy of mistaking a coiled rope for a snake, he argued that the world (compared to the snake) is neither real nor unreal. It is not real, for the snake is not there. On the other hand, it is not entirely unreal, for the rope is there. *Brahman* may be compared with the rope. The world's appearance is based on the existence of *Brahman*. This relationship is called *maya* (illusion), and should be thought of as the mysterious power by which the Absolute appears to us as the phenomenal world. The cause of this confusion is *avidya* (ignorance). The individual soul is a manifestation of *Brahman* which is without attributes and beyond all phenomena. Ignorance of the soul's real oneness with *Brahman* is overcome by *jnana marga*, or the way of knowledge, which is intuitive and mystical.

Ramanuja (1017-1137 AD) reacted against this undifferentiated monism of Sankara. He argued for the plurality of reality. God, the soul, the world, are distinct but not separate. The soul and the world are dependent on God in the same way as the body is dependent on the soul. Personal God (*Isvara*) is the manifestation of *Brahman* with attributes. Ramanuja's theism is known as *visistadvaita* or qualified *advaita*. All is a relational unity within *Brahman*. Ramanuja emphasized the place of *bhakti* or devotion to God as personal and as love.

Madhva (1199-1278 AD) described himself as a dualist (*dvaita*), emphasizing the separate existence of the eternal entities of God, soul, and also the world.

The origin and development of Hinduism

Hinduism, as we have seen, is the present product of many races and cultures. Its origin is obscure and its development exceedingly complex. It was previously thought that Hinduism began with the Aryan invasion into India in the second half of the second millennium BC, but it is now realized that many Hindu concepts and practices originated in pre-Aryan civilizations. Excavations of the sites of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley, now Pakistan, have greatly increased our knowledge of the pre-Aryan culture as it existed in the northern part of India. By 2500 BC this largely urban culture had developed a highly advanced civilization, comparable with the then contemporary Mesopotamia.

When the fair-skinned Indo-European race, who called themselves Aryan, entered India from the north-west in a series of migrations, they gradually suppressed the dark-skinned Dravidians. Many tribal groups such as the Gonds were able to retain their self-identity by

retreating to the forests and hill country. Today they continue to occupy the less accessible parts of India. By the beginning of the first millennium BC there was a notable fusing of Aryan and non-Aryan religious ideas and practices. The religion of the conquered people was re-emerging, transforming the religion of the conqueror into a new synthesis. A clear example of this is phallus worship, which the early invaders described as belonging to the enemies of the Aryans. The discovery of seals representing an ithyphallic god at Harappa suggests that phallus worship was part of the Indus Valley civilization. In later Hinduism the phallus reappears as the principal symbol of the god Siva. Figurines probably representing the mother goddess have also been found. These are conspicuously absent from early Aryan religion, but in later literature the mother goddess appears in the form of Durga or Kali, the consort of Siva. Other figures suggest a knowledge of *yoga*, which, again, reappeared in later Hinduism.

The development of Hinduism can be broadly divided into five periods.

1. The Vedic period (2000-600 BC)

It appears from the *Vedas* that the Aryans brought with them a religion which consisted in worshipping and propitiating a number of gods who personified the forces of nature, but with the merging of culture the myths of Aryan religion increasingly reflected the developing social structures. As nature-worship, the Vedic pantheon can be divided into three classes of gods: those of the heavens, those of the atmosphere and those of the earth. From an ethnological point of view the divine pantheon is analogous to the three great classes of society - priests, warriors and peasants. A fourth class, servants and slaves, was added, representing in the main the pre-Aryan peoples.

Of many Vedic gods we may note the following: Varuna, the god of creation and ruler of the moral universe; Indra, the god of storm whose character of warrior-king is emphasized; Agni, the god of fire who as priest mediates between the gods and men; Soma, the god of the intoxicating sacred juice essential to sacrifice and symbol of creative power, perhaps pointing to the mystic union of the soul with the All; Rudra, the god of destruction and healing who later received the title of Pasupati, the 'lord of cattle', and who prefigures Siva, the great god of classical Hinduism. Mention should also be made of Vishnu, a minor god in the *Rig-Veda* whose functions are cosmic and who becomes the great god of later Hinduism.

With the gradual synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan religion, Vedic religion developed in two directions, one ritualistic and the other philosophical. The worship of the Vedic gods gave place to an elaborate sacrificial ritual whose efficacy depended on its correct performance by the professional priests. This no doubt reflected the growing influence of the learned and pious priestly class called *Brah-*

mins. In the *Brahmanas*, composed at this time, the priest was exalted above the gods, for he alone knew the sacred *mantras* which had power over the will of the gods. These were the prayer manuals used by the priests in their practice of public worship. This emphasis on the external forms of sacrificial ritual replaced the simplicity of the earlier polytheism. The emphasis on the correct recitation of the *mantras* or sacred formulae opened the door to magic. The *Atharva-Veda* is a collection of these magical formulae.

The philosophical development in the Vedic period was in part a reaction against the preoccupation with rites and sacrifices. Forest schools began to flourish whose hermits sought for the internal and symbolic meaning of the sacrifices, with little or no interest in their external performances. Towards the end of the *Rig-Veda* period the seers were less interested in the plurality of gods and were concerned to go behind them and grasp the power of which they were the manifestation. Their aim was to discover the unifying principle of the universe. The personalities of the various gods became little more than names for the One Being. The function of the gods became more important than their personal existence. Thus the creative function came to be ascribed to Visvakarman, the maker of all things, or Prajapati, the lord of creatures, or Brahmanaspati, the lord of Brahmins.

This trend is seen in the merging of Vedic polytheism with the pantheistic monism of the *Upanishads*. The beginning of it is seen in the creation hymns of the *Rig-Veda*. Another important philosophical development was the emerging of the concept of cosmic natural and moral order (*Rita*) which was later developed into the characteristically Hindu concepts of *dharma* and the law of *karma*. Through the gods sacrificing themselves this cosmic harmony was maintained. The principle of sacrifice embraces both the process of creation and that of cosmic redemption.⁹

In the search for the unity and ground of the universe the central teaching of the *Upanishads* is, as we saw above, the recognition of the identity of the essential essence of the human soul (*atman*) with the ground of the universe (*Brahman*). The *Brahman* or Sacred Utterance (neuter-gender) in man is the same as the *Brahman* in God. This is the *Tat tvam asi* (that art thou) of the *Chandogya Upanishad*. In this way, *jnana* (knowledge) took the place of *yajna* (sacrifice) as the way to God. *Karma* is given a meaning wider than ritual, and the process of *samsara* (rebirth) developed as a corollary from it. The non-Vedic ideas of renunciation and asceticism opened the way for the classical understanding of *moksha* (deliverance), *upasana* (meditation) and *ahimsa* (non-violence).

⁹ An understanding of the Hindu origins of sacrifice can be an effective bridge for Christians trying to communicate the gospel to the Hindus. The nineteenth-century Indian Christian theologian, K. M. Banerjee, used the idea of Prajapati's self-sacrifice in his dialogue with educated Hindus.

2. The period of reaction and renaissance (600 BC-AD 300)

During the sixth century BC there was a wave of revolt against priestly religion and intellectual speculation throughout the ancient world. Zoroaster (c. 628-551 BC), Buddha (c. 563-483 BC), Mahavira (599-527 BC), the founder of Jainism, and Confucius (551-497 BC) were the great prophets of the period. (They were preceded by Isaiah and the other eighth-century prophets of Israel and followed by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.) The reaction was ethical, centring on a concern for morality, renunciation, good works and respect for all of life. In India the new thinkers offered a rational interpretation of the religious quests, and were generally agnostic or atheistic on metaphysical questions. In popular religion the trend was toward a belief in a personal God.

The period was marked by the emergence of two largely non-theistic movements, Buddhism and Jainism. They arose as reforming sects retaining the ethical ideas of Brahmanism but repudiating the authority of the *Vedas* and rejecting priestly religion and sacrifices. Buddha's practical teaching on the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path¹ eschewed any discussion on metaphysical questions. Buddhism early developed its own distinctive doctrines of the soul and the world and *Nirvana*, the state of perfection in which the flame of desire is extinguished. The Buddhist emphasis on monastic life and religion without worship separated it from orthodox Hinduism.

Jainism, which was older and more conservative than Buddhism and of which Mahavira was, strictly speaking, a reformer rather than founder, stayed within the boundary of Hinduism. It repudiated Vedic authority and belief in a personal God, and rejected the caste system. It observed a strict ethic of *ahimsa* (non-killing). Other vows include an undertaking not to speak untruth, not to steal, continence, and renunciation of material pleasures. Jainism is well known for the severe austerities of its ascetics.

The period of reaction is also marked by a renaissance of Hinduism, ushering in the so-called 'Epic Age' during which the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* began to take their present form.² This Hindu renaissance was a reaction to the growing influence of Buddhism during this period. During the period attempts were made to codify existing laws for the moral well-being of individual and community life. Reference has already been made to the laws of Manu.

The literature of the period reflects the growing synthesis of Aryan and non-Aryan cultures. Gods and goddesses worshipped by the ordinary people were accepted in the Hindu pantheon and eventually personified as the Supreme. The theistic movements of the *bhakti* cults had their origin in the non-Vedic cultures.

Saivism, or the cult of the god Siva, reflects the amalgamation of the worship of this non-Vedic god with the Vedic god Rudra. Siva

¹ For a description of these, see p. 172.

² See above, p. 139.

is also found as Yogesvara (the Lord of *Yoga*) and as Nataraja (the Lord of the cosmic dance of creation and destruction). Siva is the reconciliation of all opposites: creation and destruction, good and evil, male and female, rest and activity. He has no incarnations. The cult of Kali, a folk goddess, emerges as the mother force of the universe, the symbol of female energy.

The other great theistic movement whose beginnings are found in this period centres on the god Vishnu, who seems to have assimilated several other deities into his person. The three gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, form a *trimurti*, or triad of three roles of the Supreme. Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Siva the destroyer. The worship of Brahma is the least popular and few temples are dedicated to him. The emergence of theistic worship led to great increases in the number of temples, the worship of idols and the popularity of processions and pilgrimages. The temple and image worship became more important than the altar and sacrifice.

Perhaps the most important development during this period was that of the concept of *avatara* (descent) or incarnation, reflecting the strong theistic desire to make imminent the transcendence of God. The concept is absent in the *Vedas* but becomes central in the great epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Rama and Krishna, the two most popular *avataras* of Vishnu as God temporarily manifest in human forms, are loved by the masses.

The most popular and perhaps the greatest expression of this era of Hindu renaissance is the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The *Gita* synthesizes the Upanishadic doctrine of *Brahman*, the Absolute, with the theistic devotion of God incarnate and reinterprets and applies these concepts to practical life. It attempts to integrate all the teachings of the great schools of thought and the accumulated wisdom of Hindu spirituality and morality. The *Gita* attempts to give a new emphasis to orthodox Hinduism by extending the traditional concept of *yoga* to the whole of spiritual life, and by interpreting *yajna* (sacrifice) as ethical rather than ritualistic, and *karma* as selfless action. The whole field of personal and social ethics comes under discussion. The careful balance of salvation through *jnana* (knowledge), *bhakti* (devotion) and *karma* (action) has ensured its popularity with all schools of thought.

During this period almost all the main concepts and practices of orthodox Hinduism were developed. As teachers systematized and rationalized these many concepts, philosophical systems began to be organized. A great teacher would compile the texts of the school to which he belonged and interpret them in the form of *sutras* or short aphorisms. The six philosophical systems were developed during this period.

3. The Puranic period (AD 300-1200)

The Hindu renaissance of the epic age continued on through the

Puranic age, popularizing Hinduism through the myths, stories and legends of the *Puranas* and through the philosophical *sutras* of Hindu philosophy. In India this period witnessed the slow disappearance and absorption of Buddhism into Hinduism and the decline of Jainism. The *Puranas* were popular among the masses. They also reflect the growing sectarianism of the period.

The Puranic period marked the flourishing of the *bhakti* movement, centring mainly on the gods Siva and his *sakti* (female power) and Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi. During the eighth century and possibly earlier, there were in South India a number of *Alvars*, men claiming to have a direct knowledge of God, who were wandering singers devoted to Vishnu. Twelve *Alvars* have gained canonical recognition. Their devotional songs are collected in a volume of 4,000 verses. Recognizing no distinction of caste, rank and sex, their number include a king, a beggar, a woman, and others of low caste. By using Tamil rather than Sanskrit they appealed to the masses. Their poems, with which they are said to have sung the Jains and Buddhists out of India, teach that God is accessible to all through devotion and self-surrender. *Prapatti* or complete surrender is prescribed for those unable to attain the art of *bhakti*. Ramanuja, the greatest exponent of the philosophy of Hindu theism, was deeply influenced by the songs of the *Alvars*.

The *bhakti* movement of Vaishnavism, having been provided with an intellectual basis by Ramanuja, eventually split into the northern and southern schools. The former emphasized Sanskrit and the *bhakti-yoga* of Ramanuja. The latter school preferred the use of Tamil, was more monotheistic and emphasized *prapatti*. Reference has already been made to its founder, Pillai Lokachari.³ Another great *bhakti* leader, Madhva, believed in dualism of the Lord and individual souls. He accepted the reality of the physical world and of predestination to salvation.

Saivism, or the exaltation of Siva above all other gods, is the other great movement. It also is strong in southern India. Siva as a non-Aryan god was only gradually accepted into Hinduism. Early in the Puranic period the worship of Siva is found in many parts of India. He is often depicted as a blue-throated ascetic with a necklace of skulls and a trident in his hand and riding on the white bull Nandi. Sakti, the female power of Siva, also plays an important part in Saivism. The literature of Saivism includes both the *Puranas* and the theological treatises and manuals of worship known as the *Agamas*. Corresponding to the *stanzas* of Vaishnavism, the *Nayanmars* sang the praises of Siva as Lord and Lover of mankind. *Bhakti-Saivism* flourished from the sixth to the tenth century AD, in South India. The Tamil hymns of the Saiva saints are more chaste than those of the *Alvars* and generally more religious. In Kashmir,

³ See above, p. 147.

Saivism reflected the influence of the non-dualistic philosopher Sankara,⁴ where the Absolute was Siva. In Mysore, Saivism was called Vira or Lingayat Saivism from the fact that every worshipper wore around his neck the *linga* which is the distinctive mark of Saivite worship.

The sect known as Siva Siddhanta flourished in South India until the end of the Puranic era. It claimed the *Vedas* and the Saivite *Agamas* as its authority. Siva is the Lord who is imminent in everything yet transcends everything. He is related to the universe as the soul is to the body. He creates, preserves, destroys, conceals and liberates souls through his grace, the manifesting of his love. *Karma* and *maya* are divine agencies by which Siva purifies the soul, and thus his grace operates through *karma*, not apart from it. By his grace, Siva guides the soul through innumerable births and deaths. Rejecting the doctrine of *avatar*, Siva Siddhanta teaches that Siva may appear in any form to help the devotee, the chief form being that of *guru* or teacher. In many of its tenets it is closer to Christianity than any other Hindu sect.

Another *bhakti* movement developed around devotion to the principle of *sakti* in the form of the mother goddess called in her terrible aspects Kali, or Durga, and in her benevolent aspects Parvati. The movement was strong in Bengal. The texts of this movement, known as *tantras*, contain a mixture of philosophy, mysticism, magic, ritual and ethics. The purer form of *sakti* worship is known as right-hand worship, while the impure forms involving immoral practices are known as left-hand worship.

4. The medieval period (AD 1200-1750)

The chief characteristic of the medieval period is the spread of the *bhakti* movement throughout India, resulting in a flood of devotional literature in the vernacular languages. The *Bhagavata-Purana* became the main source text for the *bhakti* cults and even today continues to inspire the masses in India. This *Purana* is dedicated to the glorification of Vishnu as the one supreme God of love and grace and exalts the way of *bhakti* above that of *jnana* and *karma*. The *bhakti* movement of the medieval period centred mainly on Vishnu, Krishna and Rama and their consorts. It reached its zenith in the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. Zaehner compares it with the Protestant reformation in Europe because of its emphasis on personal religion, the singing of hymns in the vernacular, and general indifference to priestly worship.⁵

In North India *bhakti* spread in two movements during this period, one centring on the worship of Rama and the other on the worship of Krishna. In the first movement we begin with Ramananda, who lived at the end of the fourteenth century and who belonged to

⁴ See above, p. 153.

⁵ Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 138.

the school of Ramanuja but emigrated north to Banaras. He broke with caste altogether. He wandered from village to village teaching in Hindi that Rama was the Supreme Lord and that salvation was found in devotion to him and repeating his sacred name. Kabir, a Muslim weaver, became one of his disciples and preached a message combining the Sufi traditions of Islam and the *bhakti* traditions of Hinduism. He rejected the doctrine of *avatara* and denounced image-worship and ritualism. He retained the strict monotheism of Islam so that Rama became virtually a synonym for God. He was a pioneer of religious syncretism.

Nanak (1469-1538), the founder of Sikhism, was a contemporary of Kabir. He also sought to harmonize Islam and Hinduism. He organized his disciples, called Sikhs, into a close-knit community with himself as the first *guru* or teacher. The tradition of *guru* ended with the tenth, Govind Singh (1666-1708). Since then the sacred book of the Sikhs, the *Adi-Granth*, has become the sole authority. Salvation as mystical union with the Formless One is primarily through the power of *bhakti*. The Holy Name and the *guru* play a mediating role. Sikhism is the only *bhakti* sect to separate itself from the fold of Hinduism.

While Kabir and Nanak worshipped Rama without belief in incarnation, Tulsi Das (1532-1623) preached throughout the villages of North India a religion of intense devotion to Rama as *avatara*. His intense theism marks one of the high points of Hindu spirituality. He is best remembered for his Hindi version of the *Ramayana*. He emphasized *bhakti* devotion to personal god, reverence for the Holy Name and the sanctity of the *guru*.

The second *bhakti* movement centres on the impassioned devotion of Krishna for Radha, the cowherd girl. The first teacher of the cult appears to have been Nimbarka, who held that the difference and non-difference of God and soul are both true. The Radha-krishna cult was further developed by Vallabha (1479-1531). In Bengal, Chaitanya (1485-1533) turned the Krishna cult into a powerful religious movement. His intense emotional devotion to Krishna accompanied by *kirtan* or communal singing has provided the inspiration for the Hare Krishna cult. In Western India, Namdev (fourteenth century) and Tukaram (seventeenth century) are the best-known *bhakti* poets. Tukaram's sense of unworthiness, his trust and self-surrender to God were the 'bridge' that brought N. V. Tilak, the great Christian Marathi hymn-writer, to faith in Christ.

5. The modern period (AD 1750 onwards)

The Muslim domination of India had little influence on the Hindu religion for, in reaction to it, Hinduism turned in on itself and became fragmented through multiple caste divisions and obsession with ritual. At the beginning of the modern era, the Hindu religion and culture had reached a low ebb.

The British subjugation of India did not have much influence on the religious life of the masses, but for the small educated minority it had the dynamic effect of opening up a world of thought and practice totally different from their traditional past. This impact had two sources: western secular culture, and western Christianity. On the one hand, the rationalism and positivism of the European Enlightenment, and especially the social ideals of the French Revolution, had a profound effect on the new intellectual élite of India. On the other hand, the evangelizing zeal of the early Christian missionaries and their attacks on Hinduism and Hindu society resulted in both a number of influential converts and the beginning of a self-reforming movement within Hinduism.

The pioneers of Christian education, notably William Carey of Serampore, Alexander Duff of Calcutta, John Wilson of Bombay, and William Miller of Madras, believed that the imparting of western education would undermine the 'superstitions' of Hinduism and prepare the way for the spread of Christianity as the true religion. Another factor that aroused Hinduism from its sleep was the monumental work of the western orientalist including W. Jones, C. Wilkins, H. T. Colebrooke, H. H. Wilson, J. Muir, M. Monier-Williams and Max Müller who, through their translation of the sacred scriptures from Sanskrit, made available the storehouse of Hindu wisdom to the new educated class. A number of movements and men deserve particular consideration as we look at the modern Hindu renaissance.

a. *The Brahma Samaj*. The first reform movement of the modern era was the Brahma Samaj, founded in 1830, by Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833). In the main it took its inspiration from the secularism and the Christianity of the West. Rammohan Roy was a man of wide learning. He was skilled in the Hindu, Muslim and Christian scriptures, studied Greek and Hebrew and had a detailed knowledge of the Bible. He has been described as the father of modern India, and is best known for his social reforms, especially the abolition of *sati* or the burning of widows. He was a pioneer of the science of comparative religion. His approach to the subject was essentially rationalistic and deistic. He accepted the ethical teaching of the Gospels, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, but rejected the miraculous and theological claims of the New Testament. He emphasized universal religion based on morality and rationality.

His successor, Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), introduced the important principle that the teachings of Hindu scripture were to be accepted only in so far as they harmonized with reason and the light within. This marks the beginning of Hindu liberalism which has so deeply influenced the direction of modern Hinduism.

Keshab Chandra Sen (1836-84), the founder of one of the sectarian Brahma Samaj groups, introduced a strong element of

emotional subjectivism into the movement. In his search for the universal religion, he sought to absorb both Christian doctrine and ethics into an essentially Hindu religious philosophy of life. He interpreted his own movement as the church of the new dispensation, fulfilling the earlier dispensations of the Old Testament and New Testament. His adoption of baptism and the Lord's Supper, his devotion to an idealized Christ, and his acceptance of a modalistic form of the Trinity, reflect a Hindu-Christian synthesis but without the biblical Christ. Today the Brahmo Samaj is a spent force. By syncretizing the ideals of all it has effectively prevented conversions to Christianity. The Brahmo Samaj was a Bengali movement but its influence spread to western India, where parallel *samajs* were formed.

b. *The Arya Samaj*. Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83) founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay in 1875 and two years later in Lahore, as a conservative reaction to the liberalizing influences of the day. He preached the infallibility of the four *Vedas*, excluding the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishads*, and on this basis attacked the religious accretions of image worship, the caste system, incarnations, pilgrimages and child marriage. He campaigned for a monotheistic form of Hindu universalism open to all, regardless of caste or nationality. He did accept several post-Vedic doctrines, however, such as *karma*, *samsara* and the sanctity of the cow.

The Arya Samaj has become an intolerant and aggressively anti-foreign movement. In a special ceremony it invests the untouchables with the sacred thread, making them equal to the caste Hindus, and reconverts Muslims and Christians to the Hindu faith. In North India the movement has successfully restricted the growth of the Christian church.

Mention should be made here of the Theosophical Society, founded by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, as an occult movement sympathetic to Hinduism and bitterly opposed to orthodox Christianity. In India, Mrs Annie Besant, an ardent theosophist, out-did Hindu reformers in her zeal to defend everything Hindu. She, more than any foreigner, helped forward the movement of Hindu renaissance.

c. *The Ramakrishna Mission*. In the modern Hindu renaissance the Ramakrishna Mission especially represents the renewal of the wide-ranging religious spirit of India. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1834-86) is perhaps the greatest example of the synthesis of Hindu spirituality throughout the ages. He was a life-long devotee of Kali, the mother goddess, and yet he achieved the high point of the absolute trance experience of *advaita* Vedantism. He also went through all the disciplines of the *tantras*, and entered into the depths of Vaishnavism, as a *bhakta*.

Ramakrishna was not a systematic theologian but a deeply religi-

ous soul with an insatiable longing for the ecstatic mystical experience of complete union with God. Most of his life was spent as a priest at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta, living a severely austere life. For him good and evil ceased to have any meaning once he had experienced deliverance through *samadhi* (trance). His passion for God-realization led him to seek the religious experiences of other religions, especially Islam and Christianity. He claimed to have had a mystical vision of Jesus Christ.

Ramakrishna's heir and the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission was also a Bengali, Narendranath Datta, known as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). On meeting Ramakrishna, Datta fell completely under his spell and became his most devoted disciple. At the same time, he was deeply influenced by European philosophy and social action. His acclaim at the World Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893, where he presented Hinduism as a universal religion, gave to Hinduism in India a new self-confidence.

Although Swami Vivekananda proclaimed that all religions are true and lead to the same goal, he assumed that the monism of *advaita* Vedantism was the ultimate truth underlying all particular truths. He severely attacked the Christian view of sin and salvation and the claims of Christianity to be a uniquely revealed faith, believing that every man has within him the power to achieve his own salvation. The neo-Vedantism of the Ramakrishna Mission continues to have a strong appeal in both East and West and Ramakrishna Centres flourish around the world.

d. *Tagore and Gandhi*. Two men in the twentieth century, in very different ways, have had a profound influence on the Hindu renaissance: Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

Tagore (1861-1941) has been called the 'Leonardo da Vinci of our Renaissance'.⁶ He was a poet, dramatist, novelist, actor, composer, educator, philosopher, painter and prophet. He was a mystic and a great lover of nature and beauty. For him the finite and infinite were indissolubly connected. His poetry reveals both the devotional mysticism of the *bhakti* tradition and the nature mysticism that sees the whole world as a song, beauty, and the harmony realized in all things. He had a passionate love for the world of creation. Love for humanity stands at the very centre of his religion. Evil is only relative, to be overcome by perfection. Tagore interpreted the *Upanishads* for the modern world in the light of his experiences. He sought to demonstrate his religious philosophy by establishing a school at Shantiniketan in Bengal in which the pupils, through contact with nature, were led to experience the divine. Salvation is for both the individual and the community.

⁶ D. S. Sarma, *Hinduism Through the Ages* (Inter-Culture, Thompson, Conn., 1973), p. 167.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was both a practical politician and a deeply religious ascetic. He was a modern saint who made the religion of service his life mission. As leader of the Indian National Congress, he did more than anyone else to achieve political independence for India and at the same time gave to Hinduism a new dignity and self-assurance. He practised what he taught. He found his inspiration in the *sanatana dharma* or eternal law of Hinduism, the authority for which he found more in the heart and conscience than in the scriptures. Gandhi interpreted this *dharma* in terms of the basic ideas of *satya* (truth), *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *brahmacarya* (continence).

Gandhi oscillated between a monistic concept of truth as Ultimate Reality and the theism of the heart. Truth is sometimes the Absolute and sometimes the inner voice of conscience. *Ahimsa* is both harmlessness in thought, word and deed and a positive state of love. It is the soul-force that recognizes the sanctity and unity of all life. The difference between man and animal is one of degree not kind. For Gandhi, Hinduism is the 'search after truth through non-violent means'. *Brahmacarya*, which Gandhi believed indispensable in the search for truth, is total self-control in all things including eating, drinking and sexual relations. In both his political fight for freedom and his religious search for salvation, as expressed in his *ashramas*, or retreat centres for communal living, Gandhi ruled his life by these principles.

His views on non-violence were deeply influenced by the writing of Tolstoy and Ruskin. Although his knowledge of Hindu scriptures was limited, he found in the *Bhagavad-Gita* inspiration for his daily living. He interpreted the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount in terms of his own understanding of the eternal *dharma*. He believed that all religions are true, being reflections of the universal religion. While he expressed great admiration for the ideal Christ, he had no interest in the incarnation, atonement and resurrection of the historical Christ. To him the cross was an eternal event symbolizing self-sacrifice. He resented conversion from one religion to another as being an impediment to peace and harmony. He maintained that true conversion was self-purification and self-realization.

e. Sri Aurobindo and Dr S. Radhakrishnan. These are two of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century.

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was a Bengali, educated in England, who after a short political career retired to found an *ashram* at Pondicherry, South India. He taught that the divine energy is at work everywhere, manifesting its presence in both a descending and an ascending order. It descends through the three orders of reality - a supreme plane of infinite consciousness, a middle plane of supermind or *gnosis*, and a lower plane of mind, life and matter - and ascends again, integrating each level with the higher level. The process of

transformation from matter to life, to consciousness, to supra-consciousness, ends in complete identity with the Absolute, and is advanced through a process of *yoga*. Sri Aurobindo looked for the emergence of an élite of 'super-men' who would initiate salvation for all. The influence of this gnostic philosophy has largely been restricted to intellectuals.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) had a distinguished career as a Professor of Philosophy in India and as Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University. He served a term as President of India. His neo-Vedantism has profoundly influenced the modern educated class, though his syncretism has been severely criticized by conservative Hindu scholars. He was an apologist of Hindu thinking rather than a faithful interpreter. He vigorously defended Hinduism against the attacks of western philosophy and Christianity. In his own religious philosophy he sought to incorporate the ideas of man's internal freedom determining his own destiny and the principle of evolution by which non-Being has emerged from Being and will finally evolve into Being. He advocated a scientific methodology for establishing a philosophy of religion based on the principle of accepting the truth of religious experience that can be demonstrated to be universal. In his writings he sought to show that this is the mystical experience of union with God, which he found common to all religions. He appealed for a Parliament of Religions based on freedom and tolerance, recognizing the relative truths of each religion. His tolerance was passionately intolerant of all dogmas and exclusive claims to truth. By separating the 'Jesus of history' from the 'Christ of faith', he was able to identify Christian concepts with his Hindu idealism. In his attempt to synthesize East and West and to put a new humanism into Hinduism, Radhakrishnan has been a symbol of the Hinduism of the future.

f. Contemporary gurus. If Vivekananda gave self-confidence to Hinduism, and Professor Radhakrishnan intellectual prestige, the modern *gurus* and godmen have given it a popular appeal by relating it to the individual needs of the modern man.

The secular man of the twentieth century has come to a dead end with naturalistic ideologies and has failed to find any meaning for his life. He has begun to feel the dehumanizing effects of our present-day mechanistic society, and in the search for an alternative has turned to the various types of the mystical experience, through *yoga*, drugs, the occult and sex. The modern Hindu *gurus* have capitalized on this vacuum. The prominent *gurus* can be divided into four broad categories.

First, there are those who offer their followers various psychic experiences. Bal Yogeshwar, popularly known as 'Perfect Master', invites people to surrender their minds and bodies to him unquestion-

ingly and in return he helps them to see the 'Divine Light', and to hear the 'Sound' or the 'Holy Name'. Maharaj Charan Singh of Beas, Punjab, and Jai Gurudev of Mathura offer to help open people's 'third eye' through secret ceremonies which give them ecstatic experiences of various kinds.

In the second category are the *gurus* such as Sri Satya Sai Baba and Sri Nil Kantha Bhagwan, both of South India, who claim to have supernatural powers and have a following attracted by the miracles they claim to perform. Then there are thinkers, such as Acharya Rajneesh of Bombay, who have revived some of the old techniques of attaining super-consciousness through nudity and sex-experiences, and who are drawing a large number of converts from the upper classes.

The most influential, however, are *gurus* such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who have combined the offer of psycho-physiological benefits such as mental peace, rest and energy, with an appealing intellectual system of thought as a total alternative to secular, naturalistic world-views. His technique of Transcendental Meditation involves silent recitation of a *mantra* (often a mono-syllabic word) in one's mind. During a twenty-minute period of meditation, the meditator experiences a deep rest because he stops all physical and mental activity. The Science of Creative Intelligence (God) is his term for the pantheistic theory behind the technique. His followers are seeking to rewrite the whole of the academic curriculum from his pantheistic presuppositions. This is appealing to a great number of intellectuals who have been dissatisfied with secular, naturalistic world-views. If this catches on further, Hinduism promises to become a great ideological force in the world.

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Buddhism

David Bentley-Taylor and Clark B. Offner*

Buddhism is the offspring of Hinduism and of India. While Islam arose about 600 years after Jesus Christ, Buddhism came into existence almost 600 years before Christ. Of these three religions which share a world-wide appeal, Buddhism was by several centuries the first to become international.

The successes of Buddhism have been almost entirely confined to the continent of Asia. While Christianity spread primarily westwards into Europe, Buddhism moved in the opposite direction, and it claims attention today as the predominant religion of the Far East, that immense region which stretches from Manchuria to Java and from Central Asia to the islands of Japan.

We tend to think of an unfamiliar religion as a homogeneous whole, but in reality Buddhism presents a vast variety of doctrine and practice. It knows the rival trends of conservatism and liberalism, of orthodoxy and revolt, the tensions of sects and parties, the corrupting influence of other systems and cultures and the recurrent return to the original fountain of the faith. The differences to be found within Buddhism have been compared with those existing within Christianity between Greek Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, including the many movements and groupings which each of these itself contains. The divergencies within Buddhism are more basic than this, however. It would be more accurate to draw the comparison between Buddhism and the entire Semitic religious family, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam with their complex relationships based on certain fundamental truths shared by all, yet with completely different developments in both doctrine and practice.

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Contents

Introduction	7
1 Religions of pre-literary societies Edward G. Newing	11
2 Judaism H. D. Leuner	49
3 Islam Norman Anderson	91
4 Hinduism Bruce J. Nicholls	136
5 Buddhism David Bentley-Taylor and Clark B. Offner	169
6 Shinto Clark B. Offner	191
7 Confucianism Leslie Lyall	219
8 A Christian approach to comparative religion Norman Anderson	228
Index	238