

18 HINDUISM

1. Hinduism indicates one duty, only one, for the human soul. It is to seek to realise the permanent amidst the evanescent. No one presumes to point out any one way in which this may be done. Marriage or non-marriage, good or evil, learning or ignorance, any of these is justified, if it leads to the goal. In this respect lies the great contrast between it and Buddhism, for the latter's outstanding direction is to realise the impermanence of the external, which, broadly speaking, can only be done in one way. Do you recall the story of the young Yogi in the Mahabharata, who prided himself on his psychic powers by burning the bodies of a crow and a crane by his intense will, produced by anger? Do you remember that the young saint went into the town and found first a wife nursing her sick husband and then the butcher Dharmavyadha, both of whom had obtained enlightenment in the path of common faithfulness and duty?

2. From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and -the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu religion.

3. To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The ^contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.

4. To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite, each determined by the 'conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength till it reaches the Glorious Sun.

5. Notwithstanding the differences and controversies existing among our various sects, there are in them too, several grounds of unity. First, almost all of them admit the existence of three things-three entities -Ishwara, Atman and the jagat. Ishwara is He who is eternally creating, preserving and destroying the whole universe. Excepting the Sankhyas, all others believe in this. Then the doctrine of the Atman, and the reincarnation of the soul; it maintains that innumerable individual souls having taken body after body again and again, go round and round in the wheel of birth and death according to their respective Karmas; this is Samsaravada or ... the doctrine of rebirth. Then there is this Jagat or universe, without beginning and without end. Though some hold these three as different phases of one only, and some others as three distinctly different entities, and others again in various other ways, yet they are all unanimous in believing in these three.

6. You are hearing every day, and sometimes, I am sorry to say, from men who ought to know better, denunciations of our religion, because it is not at all a conquering religion. To my mind that is the argument why our religion is truer than any other religion, because it never conquered, because it never shed blood, because its mouth always shed on all words of blessing, of peace, words of love and sympathy. It is here and here alone that the ideals of toleration were first preached; and it is here and here alone that toleration and sympathy have become practical; it is theoretical in every other country; it is here and here alone, that the Hindus build mosques for the Mohammedans and churches for the Christians,

7. The cardinal features of the Hindu religion are founded on the meditative and speculative philosophy and on the ethical teachings contained in the various books of the Vedas, which assert that the universe is infinite in space and eternal in duration. It never had a beginning, and it never had an end. Innumerable have been the manifestations of the power of the Spirit in the realm of matter, of the force of the Infinite in the dominion of the finite, but the Infinite Spirit Itself is self-existent, eternal and unchangeable. The passage of time makes no mark whatever on the dial of eternity. In the supersensuous region which cannot be comprehended at all by the human understanding, there is no past, and there is no future. The Vedas teach that the soul of man is immortal. The body is subject to the law of growth and decay; what grows, must of necessity decay. But the indwelling Spirit is related to the infinite and eternal life; it never had a beginning and it never will have an end.

8. Proselytism is tolerated by Hinduism. Any man, whether he be a Shudra or Chandala, can expound philosophy even to a Brahmin. The truth can be learnt from the lowest individual, no matter to what caste or creed he belongs.

9. When the Mohammedans first came, we are said to think, on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Mohammedan historian to have been six hundred millions of Hindus. Now we are about two hundred millions. And then every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but an enemy the more. Again, the vast majority of Hindu converts to Islam and Christianity are converts by the sword, or the descendants of those. It would be obviously unfair to subject these to disabilities of any kind. As to the case of born aliens, did you say? Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on. In my own opinion, this statement not only applies to original tribes, to outlying nations, and to almost all our conquerors before the Mohammedan conquest, but also to all those castes who had a special origin in the Puranas. I hold that they have been aliens thus adopted. Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were alienated by conquest-as in Kashmir and Nepal-or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed.

10. The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. If there are existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them. . . . The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising-not in believing, but in being and becoming.