

**SOCIAL CONTENTS
OF INDIAN RELIGIOUS
REFORM MOVEMENTS**

Edited by

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Ancient Period

THE EARLY BUDDHISM AND ITS SOCIAL CONTENTS

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THE GREATEST impediment to the reconstruction of the history of the origin and early growth of Buddhism is the absence of Buddhist literature datable to the period of its founder, the Buddha, who died in c. 544 or rather c. 486 B.C. at an age of over eighty years.¹ Nevertheless, an idea about the preachings of the Buddha may be formed on the basis of old sayings and traditions recorded in early Buddhist canonical works like the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the *Digha Nikaya*, the *Majjhima Nikaya*, the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the *Anguttara Nikaya*, and the *Suttanipata* belonging to the fifth *Nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka*.² The existence, in some forms, of these texts in the age of Asoka (second and third quarters of the third century B.C.) is suggested by his Calcutta-Bairat edict. It refers to a few expositions on Dhamma, which are considered to allude to certain sections of the above compositions.³ Valuable pieces of information on the general conditions in the northern region of the Indian subcontinent immediately before and about the time of the rise of the Buddhism can be gleaned from the early Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. As Buddhism accepted the Upanishadic doctrine of transmigration, early Upanishads may be placed at and before the time of the Buddha.⁴ The beginning of the period which produced the early Brah-

manas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads has been dated, on various considerations, to c. 800 B.C.⁵ Some data on the material conditions of about the age of the Buddha are furnished by the results of certain archaeological excavations.⁶ These sources will help us to study the religious and socio-economic background to the rise of the Buddhism and also the social significances of the teachings of the Buddha.

The centre of Vedic civilisation, as reflected in the Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, was not, as in the age of the *Rig Vedas*, in the land between the Sarasvati and Drishadvati in the North-western part of the Indian subcontinent. It was shifted towards the eastern direction — to the Ganga-Yamuna region. Five-fold division (of the Indian subcontinent) — Middle, Northern, Western, Southern and Eastern — is mentioned in the *Aitareya Brahmana*.⁷ The Southern region beyond the Vindhya was just being colonised by the protagonists of the Brahmanical civilisation. East was also being opened up. Videha in North Bihar, Magadha in South Bihar, and Anga in East Bihar came under the influence of the Brahmanical culture. This process of extension of Brahmanical civilisation in the South, East and perhaps also in the West continued in the period in which the early canonical texts of the Buddhists were composed.⁸

The gradual widening of the geographical limit of the Brahmanical influence and the consequent inclusion of the non-Aryan tribes within the fold of Brahmanical culture probably helped the aggrandisement of the territory of old Brahmanical or Brahmanised kingdoms and also the foundation of new Brahmanical or Brahmanised governments. At least such a hypothesis explains the growth of many of

the sixteen great countries (*mahajanapadas*), which, according to certain Buddhist texts, flourished shortly before the time of the Buddha.⁹ The political set-up favoured the enhancement of the power and social position of the king, his kinsmen and retainers, which formed the Kshatriya element. This is clearly suggested by a passage in the *Aitareya Brahmana*, which defines other castes according to their relations with the Kshatriyas. The king could control Brahmana, had Vaisya as his inferior and tributary, and could treat the Sudra as having no right of property or life against him.¹⁰ The kings even sometimes participated in intellectual movements.¹¹ Nevertheless, the spiritual supremacy of the Brahmanas over others was recognised and they, serving as the priests of the kings or of the villages and localities,¹² formed together with the Kshatriyas the upper strata of the Society. Among the Vaisyas, the enterprising ones could improve their material conditions by utilising the services of slaves belonging to the conquered tribes. They were also favoured by the availability of arable and pastoral lands in subjugated territories, the knowledge of the use of iron and heavy agricultural implements, and the increasing opportunities offered by trade and industry and also by towns, which served as emporia.¹³ The references to rich setthis and gahapatis in the early Buddhist texts¹⁴ suggest concentration of wealth in the hands of a class of free men. Similarly, as it has been suggested, among the Sudras some were rich.¹⁵ It appears that though in contemporary religious life the Brahmanas were superior to others, they had to depend on kings and rich persons for sustenance. The kings, though very powerful, still belonged to the second and not to the first caste. The rich merchants or well-to-do peasants were materially influential and supe-

rior to the humble Vaisyas, but had to remain content with a social position much inferior to that of the comparatively poor Brahmanas. The financial position of impoverished free men, including hired labourers, was not much better than slaves, many of whom were gradually acquiring the position of serfs.¹⁶ The economic disparity created a crisis in the society.

The religious life also felt the impact of this crisis. The Brahmana texts show that rituals and sacrifices had grown to very large proportions, obviously to the advantages of the members of the first caste, who found employment and received fees.¹⁷ The poor as well as the rich, who had to bear the expenses for unproductive labour of the Brahmanas and senseless animal sacrifices, must have been grudgingly accepting their religious superiors. In fact, the supreme position of rites and rituals was challenged in the Upanishads, which were engaged with the discussion of underlying reality.¹⁸ Even when a Brahmana called Bavari was cursed by another Brahmana who had not been given proper fees for performing a *Yajna*, he sent pupils to enquire of the Buddha the real meaning (and so impliedly also the efficacy) of that curse.¹⁹

The area in which Buddhism rose was not only under the influence of the Brahmanical religion, but also was familiar with some organised religious systems provided by the Ajivika, Jaina, Agnostic (Ajnana) and Lokayata schools.²⁰ Different and often conflicting ideas preached by them must have confused the minds of the people. They did not know whether salvation lay in unrestrained individualistic self-indulgence or in equally individualistic but preposterous ascetic punishment of the body.²¹

The above schools were active in eastern India in a period which saw the gradual emergence of Magadha as the most powerful Indian kingdom in the days of Bimbisara and his son Ajatasatru, both of whom were contemporaries of Gautama.²² The establishment of a central authority over a large area was no doubt conducive to the growth of trade and commerce. But this also led to the concentration of wealth and consequent economic disparity and, as shown above, the traditional society could not cope with the situation successfully. The people, generally poor, were bound to become more and more pessimist and weary of finding the correct path to happiness. In the richer stratum of the society the king and his kinsmen were not reconciled to the higher social and spiritual position of Brahmana parasites. Siddhartha, himself being a prince, must have been aware of this feeling.

The Buddha felt the pulse of the age, which was throbbing with dissatisfaction in all spheres of life. He knew of the growing economic disparity of wealth within the society. He seems to have alluded to the undue advantages enjoyed by the rich.²³

The Buddha tried to find out a path which could lead the fellow human beings from sufferance to happiness. In his first sermon he spoke of four noble truths (*aryasatyas*). He pointed out (1) that the worldly existence was full of pain and misery (*duhkha*), (2) that thirst, craving for gratification of passion, craving for success, etc., are the causes of the renewal of worldly existence, (3) that the worldly existence can be ended (*nirodha*) by destruction of thirst, etc., and (4) that there is a path for destruction of sorrow. This is the eight-fold path, viz., right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindedness and right contemplation. It

was claimed that this Middle Path, which keeps clear of two extreme ways of life, one being that of luxury and the other of rigorous asceticism, "leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, to *Nirvana*".²⁴ Nirvana is the final result of the extinction of the desire or thirst for re-birth.

Suffering can be escaped by human beings by leading a correct life and by realising the Truth or Reality about the non-existence of the phenomenal world. Ignorance of the impermanence of the world "produces desire: desire leads to action (*Karma*): action to the impulse to be born again and again to satisfy desire. The chain of transmigration leads to further actions, which in turn lengthens the chain of rebirth. But this chain can be snapped once the seeker realises the truth that the world of things is impermanent, and that there is not even permanent soul". There is no personal deity or god, and hence attainment of Nirvana does not depend upon prayers or sacrifices. "The five constituents which make a being are without a self (*anatma*), impermanent (*anitya*) and not desirable (*duhkha*). One who realises the absence of soul in the constituents" is free (*vimukta*), he is an *arhat*-perfect".²⁵

The Buddha denied the existence of God or soul and rejected the efficacy of rituals and sacrifices and the belief that knowledge of the Vedas leads one to the union with the God (*Brahma*).²⁶ This was a loud protest against the prevalent system of Brahmanical religion. No doubt, the Buddhist doctrine of Karma was indebted to the Upanishadic theory of transmigration, and the Buddhist belief in the doctrine of suffering (*dukkhavada*) was comparable with the similar idea propounded by the Sankhya-Yoga philosophy.²⁷ Nevertheless, the first preachings of the Buddha must be considered as marking the beginning of

a movement which was on the whole directed against the ritualistic Brahmanism and the schools advocating either of the extreme ways of life.

The doctrine of Middle Path, which was mostly a moral code of conduct, could be followed by the laity as well as by the members of the Order.²⁸ The belief that by following this one could attain happiness induced people, tired of earthly misery, economic and social, to seek refuge in it.

The Buddha laid stress on the practice of righteousness by all. He observed that "five-fold is the gain of the well-doer through his practice of rectitude. In the first place the well-doer, strong in rectitude, acquires great wealth through his industry; in the next place, good reports of him are spread abroad; thirdly, whatever society he enters — whether of nobles, Brahmanas, gahapatis, or members of the order — he enters confident and self-possessed; fourthly, he dies without anxiety; and lastly on the dissolution of the body, after death, he is reborn into some happy state in heaven".²⁹ This was a clear invitation even to the worldly wise common men to get involved in the new movement.

The Buddha could not deny the existence of the caste system.³⁰ It was perhaps too deep rooted in the Indian society to be got rid of altogether. He, however, tried to mitigate the evils of this system. He preached that "one does not become a Brahmana by birth. One does not become an outcast by birth. One becomes a Brahmana by act. One becomes an outcast by act."³¹ A scavenger, a dog eater and some other members of the low castes, were initiated by the Buddha and they became highly respected monks.³² Though he recognised the

special position of the Brahmanas,³³ he did not accept their supreme position and even indicated that the Khattiyas were higher in status than the Brahmanas.³⁴ Similarly, the gahapatis, who mostly belonged to the third caste, were sometimes called Kulaputtas or men of noble birth.³⁵ This satisfied the ego of the powerful royal classes, and accorded social status to the rich gahapatis, who became great patrons of the new movement. On the part of the Buddha, who knew the worthlessness of the caste system,³⁶ these were perhaps diplomatic moves to win the support of two powerful and rich classes of the Society.

Patronage of the rich was required and accepted for the maintenance of the Sangha.³⁷ The Sangha itself was broad based and followed some sort of a democratic constitution. Some of its traits were perhaps adopted from the constitution of the republican or oligarchic tribes of the Vajjian confederacy.³⁸ The universal character of the Sangha was clear when women were also admitted to it and an order of nuns was formed. This as well as the fact that the Buddha did not despise even a courtesan, gave the women a status higher than what they enjoyed in the society known to the authors of the Brahmana texts.³⁹

The doctrines of the Buddha thus, to some extent, broke the social barriers, provided common people with a viable way of life in an age of frustration. The desire to do good to the society was also perhaps one of the reasons for preaching the doctrine of *ahimsa* or non-violence. The Buddha said that "cattle are our friends, just like parents and other relatives, for cultivation depends upon them. They give food, strength, freshness of complexion and happiness. Knowing this the Brahmanas of old did not kill cattle."⁴⁰

Monastic institutions, which were distinct contribu-

tions of the Buddhism to Indian culture, had to depend on the munificence of the rich. This affiliation to richer class of the society was perhaps an impediment to the formulation of means of attaining worldly happiness through a more proper distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, the aim of the new movement was to do the maximum amount of good to the maximum number of the members of the society. The canonical writings, almost all supposedly from the Buddha's discourses and dialogues, were in every day languages and plain style. "This was a new type of religious literature addressed to the whole of the contemporary society, and not reserved for a few learned initiates and adepts."⁴¹ Society was enmeshed in early Buddhism, which was most social of all contemporary Indian religions.

We do not intend here to discuss the different phases of development of Buddhism in India and abroad and to trace its impact on the art, society, and thought of India and other countries.⁴² This is outside the scope of the present paper. We, however, like to point out that Buddhism lost its influence in the Indian subcontinent from about the early mediaeval period, probably due to the revival of inimical Brahmanical cults, induction of baser elements into it, and loss of patronage of kings and of rich gahapatis,⁴³ who had earlier helped its dissemination in various countries of Asia. However, in these countries it still guides the socio-religious life of millions of people.⁴⁴ In modern times Buddhism is again gaining ground in India. The foundation of the Mahabodhi Society and the conversion of the late B. Ambedkar and the large number of his followers to Buddhism provides land marks in the new development. Buddhist philosophy, literature and art have made great impact on the

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minds of great intellectuals of the West and India — including G. Keyt, T. S. Eliot, Rabindranath and Abanindranath.⁴⁵ These speak in volume of the vitality and usefulness of Buddhism, even if all of its objects are not yet fulfilled. The wheel of Dhamma which is known to have been once set in motion by the Blessed one, is still rolling towards the goal of salvation of mankind.

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- ³ H. Hultsch, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, p. 173; E. J. Rapson (editor), *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. I, *Ancient India* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 193; N. Wagle, *op. cit.*, p. 1. We are here not considering the evidence of the *Jatakas*. "The major part of the verses are perhaps not earlier than the third century B.C., whereas much of the prose is later than (the beginning of) the Christian Era" (R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 405).
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- ⁸ E. J. Rapson (editor), *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117; H. C. Raychaudhuri, *Studies in Indian Antiquities* (2nd edition), pp. 58f.
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- ¹⁰ *Aitareya Brahmana*, VII, 29.
- ¹¹ E. J. Rapson (editor), *op. cit.*, pp. 126-127.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 126-128.
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- and 13f; etc. See N. R. Banerjee, *The Iron Age of India*, pp. 4-5 and 224-225 for the archaeological evidence about dating the first use of iron in the subcontinent. The existence of a medium or media of exchange is suggested by the evidence in the Brahmanas about the use of Satamanas and Nishkas, though originally these might not have been meant for such uses. The early Buddhist canonical texts refer to big purchases made by paying certain units of value (E. J. Rapson, *op. cit.*, p. 137; N. Wagle, *op. cit.*, p. 154). Such big transactions made through a medium of exchange presupposes brisk trading activities in the area concerned. However, it should be admitted here that archaeological excavations have so far not yielded coins datable to the age of the Buddha.
- ¹⁴ *Suttanipata*, I, ii; *Mahavagga*, 34, 19; *Vinaya Pitaka*, II, pp. 154, 158, 157; I, 172; etc. See also N. Wagle, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-153.
- ¹⁵ E. J. Rapson, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 129; see also A. N. Bose, *op. cit.*, pp. 424 and 431.
- ¹⁷ A. B. Keith, *The Religion of the Veda and Upanishads*, vol. I, p. 454; E. J. Rapson, *op. cit.*, p. 141. "The Brahmana is a receiver of gifts" (*Attareya Brahmana*, VII, 29).
- ¹⁸ A. B. Keith, *op. cit.*, pp. 551f; E. J. Rapson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
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- ³² D. D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
- ³³ See above no. 30; and N. Wagle, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
- ³⁴ See above no. 30.
- ³⁵ *Mahavagga*, I, 7, 7; A. Fick, *The Social Organisation of North-Eastern India in Buddha's Time*, p. 254.
- ³⁶ *Assalayana Sutta*; A. Fick, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20.

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³⁷ N. Wagle, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

³⁸ R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 376; see also *Buddhism, the Marxist Approach*, p. 28.

³⁹ *Vinaya Pitaka*, IV, pp. 332-333; N. Wagle, *op. cit.*, p. 142; E. J. Rapson, *op. cit.*, p. 135; R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

⁴⁰ *Suttanipata*, 295-6.

⁴¹ D. D. Kosambi, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

⁴² See P. V. Bapat, *op. cit.*, pp. 35f.

⁴³ A. N. Bose, *op. cit.*, pp. 481-482.

⁴⁴ P. V. Bapat, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 447f.

BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST SOCIETY

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BUDDHISM emerged when the whole civilized world was in intellectual ferment. In India this ferment was expressed in the sixty-three heretical non-Vedic sects as well as in the Vedic Upanishads. The non-Vedic or non-Aryan element, both in culture and race, was sufficiently strong. The non-Aryan reaction to the Aryan religious beliefs including the sacrificial system and to the rigid social order of the four *varnas* is reflected in early Buddhist works. Unlike the Vedic society classified into four *varnas*, the Buddhist literary works give the *hina-jatis* (low castes), *hina sippanis* (low trades), tribals, untouchables and slaves, as people below the status of the Sudras. Household servants (*Kammaraka puruso*) and slaves (*dasa*) belonged to the lowest social status. They were socially and economically the most backward. Even the methods of addressing people like *bho*, *abhivadeti*, *bhadante*, *tata*, *maharaja* and *deva*, reflected their social positions (cf. Wagle, *Society of the time of the Buddha*).

In the early Pali texts the tribal group has not yet become an occupational one. A family (*Kula*), therefore was more rigid in the Vedic society and not in the non-Vedic or Buddhist. The tribal group was undergoing a socio-economic change from tribe to caste; blood relationship was being supplanted by economic, territorial and administrative division.

Numerous towns and extensive agricultural lands to support them are mentioned in the early Buddhist scriptures. The division and specialisation of labour and a growing awareness of social stratification based on riches, power and occupational status, have been emerging.

The cities were characterised by affluence. A very high standard of luxury was enjoyed by kings, nobles and merchants, and many of the latter had amassed very vast fortunes. An average trader was worth 80 crores (of coins). The *setthi gahapatis* of Rajagriha and Benares paid the physician Jivaka 1,00,000 and 16,000 panas respectively, for curing diseases. The story of Anathapindika who purchased a piece of land for the number of coins required to cover it and subsequently giving it to the Buddhist monastery, is a very well known account narrated in sculpture as well. Sona Kolavisa of Champa is known to have renounced "80 cartloads of gold and a herd of seven elephants and joined a monastery". Caravans of thousand carts are common in Buddhist literature. The actors, dancers, acrobats, magicians, courtesans (*ganika*), drummers, prostitutes (*vesi*), singers, etc., reflect, too, an affluent city life. To Rhys Davids this society represented early India's national wealth and economy (*Buddhist India*).

But India of the time of the Buddha did not consist of cities alone. Along with the *mahanagaras*, *nagaras* and *puras*, *gamas* and *nigamas* too existed. In contrast with the affluent city the poor village has been also well depicted in Pali literature. If a courtesan, for example, received 1,000 panas for her single performance, a water-carrier received for his full day's labour two panas as his wages. A slave cost 100 panas, while a wood-cutter received a very poor amount like the water-carrier, for his full day's

labour. A glass of the rich Kapotika wine cost a gold coin, but a pair of bullocks could be purchased for 24 Kahapanas. The possession and sale of slaves referred to by Pali sources, the details of the maintenance of the slaves mentioned in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya and the good treatment to be given to the slaves as inscribed in the edicts of Asoka, indicate the existence of slavery. There are innumerable evidences of impoverished free men becoming slaves of the debtors. May be that Chandragupta's construction of an embankment around the Sudarshana Lake of Girnar and the transport of the huge pillars of Asoka to distant places of India from the quarry near Benares, had utilised slave-labour.

Buddhist India was experiencing a change from tribal to imperial polity. There was, however, no uniformity in this change, at all places at one and the same time. The primitive tribal life continued along with the imperial. The kingdoms of Kosala (U.P.) and Magadha (South Bihar) were expanding. With these powerful monarchies small tribal oligarchies were also precariously maintaining their existence against the greater states. Even the largest confederacy of the Vajjis was soon to be conquered by Ajatasatru, the son of Bimbisara of Magadha. The performance of the Vedic animal sacrifice entailed so much cost and paraphernalia that it became almost an exclusive privilege of the richer class who had nothing to lose. The cattle-grazers and cultivators, who owned the animals, followed Buddhism due to its condemning animal sacrifice. To them, following Buddhism was a great source of relief and economic gain, their cattle being saved by the Buddha's teaching. It could be that in such conditions Buddhism received royal patronage from the ambitious rulers because it had opposed the supremacy of the priestly

class, who were always a check through their moral and divine sermons to the kings for their greed for loot, plunder and power.

The reaction of Buddhism was, in part, a revival and re-statement of pre-Aryan and pre-polytheist animism. The belief in transmigration and rebirth could be traced to older animist theories very widespread among the primitive peoples. "The impersonal Brahman of the Upanishads", rightly says Basham, "is probably derived not from the anthropomorphic polytheism of the Vedic Aryans, but from the belief in the impersonal magical power, or *mana*, common to most primitive peoples" (*Doctrine of the Ajivikas*). The conception of *dharma*, *adharma*, *sukha* and *dukkha*, which in some sense is material, is surely a survival of the primitive mentality, which is scarcely capable of conceiving an abstract entity. Even the Buddha's opposition to the Vedic caste system and his throwing the *sangha* open to all, irrespective of caste or creed, reflect his background of the primitive tribal group-organisation.

It could also be possible that the success of Buddhism was due to the society changing from pastoral to agricultural economy. To the pastoral people the destruction of animals for food was a common feature of their tribal group life. But with the development of the agricultural society, cattle became more useful and therefore more valuable. The agriculturists saved the cattle and utilised them for their better life than the pastoral people who were required to destroy them mostly for human and divine consumption.

Buddhism thus seems to get its inspiration and support from the then existing socio-economic and political changes overcoming India of the early days.

JAINISM AND ITS SOCIAL CONTENTS

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AS EARLY as in the sixth century B.C. a new wave of religious philosophy affected the regions of Persia, China and India. Zoroaster in Persia and Confucius in China modified the existing faith of the people. Likewise, there was also growing discontent among the people of India regarding the existing religious practices and beliefs. The Vedic religion gradually lost its hold on the people mainly because of its growing tendency towards rigid orthodoxy and ritualism. The pre-eminence of the Brahmanas in spiritual matters marred the pure form of religion. The essentials and the utility of religion came to be doubted by the sceptics, which ultimately was responsible for the simultaneous occurrence of various sects.

The nineteenth-century thinkers in an effort to fix the chronological layers in literature classified the divergent thinking belonging to the latest period of the Vedic studies. This literary period is supposed to be of the *Upanishadas*. A number of ideas bear strong resemblance to the ideas of the heterodox school. In the heterodox school, three are most prominent: Charvaka, Jains and Buddhist. Before the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism, Ajivikas and Prajivikas, the class of ascetics, prepared the ground against the Vedic religion. These ascetics, free from the prevailing ideas and practices, away from the worldly life,

specifically denied the necessity of the Vedic gods, together with the superiority of the Brahmanas in spiritual matters.

The atheistic attitude of the wandering ascetics had profound effect on the society and generated two-fold reaction. The one being the atheistic movement and the total denial of the existence of God and the other was monotheistic movement which accepted devotion as the only way of pleasing a personal god. Thus with various other sects, which according to Jainism numbered 363, Jainism and Buddhism also emerged as powerful philosophies.

The Jain traditions indicate that their school of thought is as old as the Vedic school. Rishabha and Arishtanemi, two of the Jain Tirthankaras, the former being the founder of the Jain religion, are mentioned in the Rîg Veda. Vishnupurana and Bhagavadpurana bear the testimony of Rishabha as the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, prior to his ten incarnations. The belief of the Jains, though based on the Hindu scriptures, has raised doubts among the historians. However, if this attitude is taken then the two distinct trends running simultaneously could be envisaged. The so called historical scholarship takes cognisance of the historical existence of Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Tirthankara. Therefore, the tendencies of Jainism easily go to a period fairly earlier than that of Mahavira.

The gradual expansion of Aryan settlements from the regions of Sapta Sindhu towards the Gangetic plains left powerful impressions of their religious ideas in the north-west and the adjoining regions. However, the expansion of the Aryans towards the Gangetic basin failed to receive similar response for their religious ideas and practices. Instead, they welcomed the philosophies which suited their

social and economic growth. Hence, the contrary ideas to the Vedic religion appealed to them the most, which in their turn gave birth to Jainism and Buddhism in this region. A passage in *Satapatha Brahmana*, and corroborated by the *Mahabharata*, brings out the reasons as to why the priests of Kuru Panchala should avoid travelling to the territories of Kashi Koshala, Videha and Magadha. It is stated that the Aryans of the East had lost their purity by giving up the Vedic religion and embraced the new faith based on the non-performance of Yajna and animal sacrifice. Besides, they had violated the rules of the Aryan social organisation by giving the highest position to Kshatriyas and inferior status to the remaining classes. *Vajasaneyi Samhita*, also, puts emphasis on similar points of difference between the two Aryan settlements. The Aryan society in the Gangetic basin not only lost the dharma or Vedic sacrifice, not only challenged the social supremacy of the priests but had also undergone a degeneration even in their language.

The Jain tradition affirms the stand that the Vedas initially were based on non-violence but at a later stage the rivalry between two saints Visvamitra and Vasishtha, during the reign of king Vasu, perverted the emphasis on Ahimsa in the Vedas. The meat eaters introduced animal sacrifice as a necessary part of religion. This in its turn displeased the followers of Ahimsa Dharma and forced them to constrain their own Agamas resting upon their Ahimsa Dharma.

The considerable appeal and the prominence of heterogeneous religion in one narrow region implies some social need that the older doctrines could not satisfy. This need can be analysed by the study of the social order and the new class of disciples that embraced these religions.

The process of Aryanisation began at a time when the material life began to impress upon the social and economic activities of the people. Various new classes, different from the traditional groups of Vedic society, existed prior to the emergence of the heterogeneous sects.

From among the new classes emerged in the Gangetic basin, the farmers and the free peasants were the one. The neo-Vedic pastoral class of the Vaishyas within the tribe was replaced by agriculturists, for whom the tribe had ceased to exist. The growth in commerce and trade promised a better life with the influx of wealth and wealthy class of traders, through its economic power which remained important in the eastern towns. The term 'shresthi', normally attached with the urban civilization, not known earlier, derived from 'superior' or 'pre-eminent'. The change in the economic life also considerably changed the concept of the word 'Grihapati' or house-holder. Formerly the house-holder was attached with the sacrifice and the house-hold duties, but now it came to mean the head of any patriarchal family of any social status, who commanded respect primarily because of his wealth, which no longer was measured in cattle. This new elite of the society, though no longer was bound by the tribal regulations, was bound by the formal ties of caste and kinship, which became progressively lighter.

Agriculturists and traders, the important nuclei of economic activity, suffered from constant warfare preceded by Vedic sacrifice. Traders, particularly had to be on good terms with the people beyond their tribe, territory and state. This universal characteristic of the merchant community explains as to why Jainism appealed to them most. The continuous wars spoiled the prospect of agriculture and the requisition of cattle and other animals in great number

for the sacrifice without payment enhanced the feelings of agriculturists against the current Vedic religion. To minimise this, political stability and a single religion with unitary rituals were necessary. The wealthy merchant class also had another grievance against the order in which it had no social status; though the absolute monarch treated him with respect, it had no direct voice in politics. The political stability was possible with the strong universal monarchy instead of tribal kingship of early Vedic period.

The changing pattern of the eastern society, gradually witnessed the emergence of new thought currents and as a result the new eastern teachers rose above all rituals and tread a new path by accepting cooked food from the people of lower castes, and thereby gave the first but pertinent blow to the rigid social order. These revolutionaries and their followers, through their simplicity, austere character and noble ideas, became the symbol of good teachers and distinguished them from the greedy Brahmanas in a possessive society. Since then asceticism and penance became noble ideals. Many of the ascetics preferred a life of solitude in forest, killed nothing and obtained the food from the vegetation. The minimum requirements and away from the worldly pleasures of the new teachers, probably made the principle of non-violence a predominant feature of the new faiths.

Thus, when the society in the Gangetic basin was on the point of the revolution, Gautam Buddha and Mahavira set out with new religious philosophies, which not only drew large sections to their folds but also received the royal patronage. Buddhism, though no longer a faith of the mass, revolutionised the human faith. Jainism, in

contrast to Buddhism, had spread very little in and around Magadha. However, Jainism survived and remained an Indian faith, still largely attached with Urban society.

Mahavira, according to Jain tradition, was twenty-fourth Tirthankara. The first twenty-two Tirthankaras are completely mythical and have no historical foundation. Parsva, before Mahavira is a historical figure, but very little is known about his career, excepting that he was the son of king Asvasen of Benares and became an ascetic after years of Grahasthi. He received enlightenment after severe penance of eighty-four days and died on Mount Sammeta, in Bengal, two hundred and fifty years before Mahavira. Parsva, enunciated four vows, viz., life should not be taken, no falsehood spoken, nothing should be taken which is not freely given and non-attachment should be practiced.

Mahavira, too, like Parsva, was born in a royal Kshatriya family of Vaishali. His father Siddhartha was a wealthy noble man and mother Trishala was a Lichchhavi princess. His parents were the disciples of Parsva and through them he was introduced to this faith. After some years of married life with Yashoda, he left home and led the life of an ascetic. Severe penance of thirteen months made him to believe that the necessity of clothes to cover the body itself is a kind of Karma which fetters the soul. With this he gave up clothes and emphasised on the vow of celibacy. As such he accepted all the four vows but added to them the fifth vow of celibacy. This probably was the important step in the reformation in the church of Parsva, which allowed clothing.

Mahavira was a reformer of the existing faith rather than an originator of a new religion. The addition of a vow, the systematic arrangement of the tenets of the faith and

the organisation of samgha of church, may be credited to the reforming zeal of Mahavira. Besides this he popularised the principle of non-violence. He prepared the ethical code for house-holders and monks with a philosophy of seven Tattvas (realities). He, without considering the caste and sex, admitted all the aspirants to his organisation and left behind him a strong religious order, through whose efforts animal sacrifices fell a great deal. It may be accepted here that the principle of non-violence became an established rule even among the classes of people who did not join the order.

Jaina philosophy is largely influenced by the samkhya philosophy, which considered soul as different entity from the body, unaffected by any thing that affected body. The doctrine of transmigration, unknown to early Brahmanas, emerges in the Upanishadas and forms the essential element in this. Jains believe in the purity of soul and the presence of karma or individual's action pollutes it. The soul is the rythm of the free activity of the self-conscious force. It is the living essence and feels dull and heavy when burdened with unnatural tasks and obligations. With this notion about soul, it considers world full of misery and karma is the root cause of the cycle of births and deaths. Therefore the primary concern of the religion is to find out the means of liberation from this misery.

The soul, if detached from karma, is capable of attaining Moksha or Salvation. Through *Ratnatrayi* or three jewels of right conduct, right belief and right knowledge, the salvation is possible. Other schools of thought put emphasis on any one of these aspects, whereas Jainism has accepted all the three, viz., Karma, Bhakti and Jnana, essential for salvation. The yogic exercises and fast even

unto death have been emphasised. The rigorous discipline, it is believed, gives strength to the soul and keeps lower nature subdued. The purification of soul required living a balanced life and the pure soul resides in bliss. It also does not agree with the idea that salvation can be achieved through knowledge, for each man sees only a fraction of knowledge, which makes knowledge unreliable for salvation.

Jainism repudiated the Vedic gods and rituals on the ground that they do not have the foundation of human knowledge and experience. As contrast to this Jainism derived its authority from human knowledge of those great ones who had attained perfection with its aid. The reality, according to it, is uncreated and eternal. Reality is that which is characterised by appearance and disappearance in the midst of permanence.

The new faith in the beginning made considerable progress, by receiving the royal patronage. The Maurya king Chandragupta joined Bhadrabahu's march to the south and spread the religion in the Deccan with Sravana Belgola as their central seat. Kharavela, the king of Kalinga, professed Jainism and promoted its cause by setting up images himself. During the early centuries of the Christian era, Mathura in the north and Sravana Belgola in the south formed great centres of Jain activities. The early Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas and the Gangas patronised this religion.

The royal patronage to this religion enriched the Indian architecture and some provincial literature. Some Rashtrakuta kings of Manyakheta, between 8th and 10th centuries, patronised Jain art and literature. Jinsen and Gunabhadra composed Mahapurana and Mahaviracharya

composed a commendable work on mathematics. King Amoghavarsha, an ardent follower of Jainism, wrote his famous work *Ratnamalika*. Gujarat, under the Chalukya kings, also witnessed a growth in the field of literature. Hemchandracharya, the famous grammarian, was in the court of the Chalukya king Siddharaj. The two ministers, Vastupala and Tejpala, in the court of the Vaghela rulers of Dholka, are chiefly remembered in Gujarat for their literary and architectural activities.

The religion of the Jains has played an important part in the linguistic development of the country. Mahavira, by using current popular language as a medium of religious deliberations, not only minimised the importance of Sanskrit but also popularised this movement. It was a kind of challenge to the sophisticated Brahmins who considered themselves as the custodians of the culture of the Aryans. The practice started by Mahavira was continued by his followers, by utilising the prevailing languages of different places and different times, for their religious propaganda and for the preservation of sacred teaching. Thus it has predominant influence on the development of the Prakrit languages. Some of the vernacular languages also owes a great deal to this religion.

Jainism, so far as its philosophy is concerned, is one and undivided. But in the beginning of the Christian era, it was divided into Svetambaras and Digambaras, chiefly on the point of certain rules and regulations for the monks. The most important difference being that while the former held that monks could wear clothes, the latter asserted that they could not. During the centuries that followed, further splits took place amongst these sects, the most important of them being the one that denounced the idol

worship and devoted itself to the worship of the scriptures. These are the Terapanthis of the Svetambaras and Samaiyas of the Digambara sects. This sect came into existence perhaps after the sixteenth century.

From the seventh century onwards there was a downward cycle of the popularity of Jainism, mainly because of the influence of the revivalist movements of Vaishnavism and Saivism. Instead of getting the royal patronage, the Jain monarchs, as it happened in the case of the Kalachuri chief and the Hoysala kings, had to succumb to the revolution of the Lingayats and Vaishnavism. Jainism suffered more from the assimilative power of Hinduism.

Unlike the Buddhists, the Jainas are still in large number in the regions of Gujarat and Rajasthan, chiefly because they had suffered less from the iconoclastic fury of the first Muhammadan invasion.

In the present context, Jainism is chiefly popular in the business community. Here, too, it is strongly challenged by the Vaishnavas. But in certain sub-castes, this challenge brought an adjustment in the social relations. A study of their iconography, in some parts, indicates the amalgamation of various elements. They have a very strong current of many beliefs of the orthodox Hindu creeds. Thus Jainism in modern times has undergone a considerable change.

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SANKARA AND THE VEDANTIST MOVEMENT

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SANKARA is by any standard a world figure noted for his unique contribution to Hindu higher thought and he is usually associated with the concepts of Maya, Advaita and the Ekanma doctrine. To the Advaitin he is the greatest Indian thinker, and to the rest second only to their respective leaders. All this is true and natural considering the quality and bulk of his contribution to Hindu metaphysics. In fact his contribution cuts across Hindu metaphysics and epistemology and tends to become universal; hence his enormous popularity and reputation among even non-Hindus and moderns everywhere.

There are generally speaking two ways in which a philosopher can influence society, i.e., not only by inspiring and spelling out its ideals, but also by consciously structuring it in a desired way; often a pioneering philosopher is followed by men of action who believe in the philosophy and turn out to be leaders of society too. An eminent illustration is provided by the combination of Marx, the theoretician and Lenin, the man of action. The two ways adverted to above are: first, conscious creation of a sociological doctrine which by attracting and enlisting the support of like-minded intellectuals can make society in its own image; second, discerning and propagating a metaphysical principle which by its sentimental appeal

and rigorous logicality can of its own accord bring about change in society.

Of these two categories, Sankara belongs to neither. So far as he was concerned, he effected no change in the social structure but merely wished to strengthen the forces of conservatism sufficiently to ensure its defence against social reformers, disruptionists and subverters. To him, retrospectively one can say, change included changelessness, and the latter condition can, according to some, be more conducive to happiness than the former. This postulate, however, leaves out of account inevitable change due to natural conditions but relates only to consciously brought about change. It may even be said that the true conservative is one who permits of sufficient change for the continuation of the condition prior to externally imposed change. Sankara's orthodoxy was of this kind. That is he introduced changes in religious practices with a view to preserving the identity and corpus of the truly orthodox and Vedic religions.

Sankara played a positive and a negative role, the former in regard to his metaphysics and the latter concerning the Hindu society, a section of which was soon to recognize him as its 'acharya' or 'preceptor'. He was a revolutionary—and a daring one at that—in his philosophy and not a tame organizer. The revolutionary nature of his metaphysical postulates consisted in his willingness to borrow from his worst antagonist, viz., the Buddha. He was reputed to have defeated in debate many a Buddhist theologian and philosopher Buddha, the traditional and the most formidable foe of Brahmanism, was a compound of two important things so far as the Hindu was concerned: i.e., (i) a non-theistic but ethics-based religion; and, (ii) a

democratic (i.e., relatively speaking) social set-up. That is so far as the former was concerned, the Buddha wished to efface even himself, the founder of the religion somewhat like the Prophet who did not want even a relic of his to be preserved, to avoid posthumous worship. But the irony of it is that the Buddha became an object of veneration by apotheosis which would have shocked the Tathagatha. This started as early as the postulate of the Triratnas: 'Buddham Charanam Gachchami' was the beginning of Mahayanism, in a sense. Most of the godless persons are punished by their personal elevation to the status of a deity by their own creatures. This happened to the Buddha too. But the process by which Sankara arrived at the doctrine of Ekanma was not the same by which the Buddha was content to have a religion which could be independent of God. But the concept of Mava is older than Sankara and is seen in the life of the Buddha as one of his enemies and obstacles to wisdom. That according to Sankara also, the veil of ignorance is 'Mava which has to be removed before enlightenment occurs' shows that Sankara was not only keeping the Buddha in mind but also was not reluctant to borrow a telling expression from Buddhist religious tradition. Unconsciously perhaps Sankara paid the Buddha the supreme compliment of imitation when he spoke of the Mava as the dividing line between ignorance and knowledge. This 'Mava' became quite a fashionable word even with the Saiva Siddhantins who speak of Anavam (i.e., ahankara), Karmam and Mava.

Sankara was a relentless logician ; and had the moral courage to go the whole hog with his basic idea of the two levels of spiritual consciousness ; i.e., the lower one at which Mava is in command had to be transcended and that can be achieved not by Karma (the performance of Vedic

rituals and not 'good conduct' as some would say) or by Prapatti (i.e., total surrender to God) but only by the intellect trained for this purpose possible by Yogic practice among other means. This intellect is to be a tool to attain knowledge and the knowledge so attained is the true knowledge to be contradistinguished from false and futile knowledge. Since this knowledge lets one know (i) about the existence of Maya and hence (ii) the falseness of the ante-Maya phenomena and the (iii) existence of ultra-Maya truth, and (iv) about the passage of the consciousness of the human spirit from relative reality controlled by Maya to Absolute Reality divorced from Maya, it is clearly the indispensable tool for salvation. Salvation is Moksha, i.e., 'release from ignorance' which to Sankara is the greatest sin. The knowledge or *Jnana* that Sankara spoke of leads to the realisation of the equation between the creator and the created. This equation does not posit an equality but an oneness. The Visishtadvaitins and the Dvaitins are enthusiastic about an unbridgeable gulf between Paramanma and Jivanma but the equation of the two by Sankara as we said above leads not to 'equality' between but 'identity' of the two. According to genuine theists this is the worst blasphemy one can think of.

Moksha is a two-fold concept; in one it signifies release from ignorance or Maya and in the other merger with the ultimate and the Absolute. This merger becomes a fact the moment true knowledge dawns on one. All this has to be said to show that Sankara's monism was not the same as the Buddha's ignorance of God. In the Buddhist scheme Nirvana was the end and signified little beyond release from current misery; it did not lead to an identification with a supreme God.

Dualism as a religio-metaphysical doctrine was not acceptable to Sankara ; that is why he spoke not of 'Monism' but of 'non-dualism' which is what 'a-dvaita' means. But all his thoughts were conditioned by dualism in various other ways. His philosophical postulates tended to abolish plurality of phenomena ; but his social attitude was one of complete acquiescence in the *varnasrama* scheme which, as is well known, believes in perpetrating multiplicity of interests in society. He retained God on the one hand while he equated Him with His creature on the other. He spoke of two levels of consciousness and so forth. In fact, he was talking to two different audiences and preaching different truths to them ; i.e., what was a valid attitude for the man bound by Maya was not valid to the emancipated one. This means that having postulated the most revolutionary doctrine till then known to the Hindu world—even the Upanishads which speak of a monist Brahman do not use language identical with that of Sankara, who made a selective use of Vedic and Upanishadic statements for his purpose—he proceeded cautiously to prescribe a religion for the 'relatively real' world controlled by Maya. To Sankara, 'competence' was a central notion. The notion of a sort of competence is relevant to the Visishtadvaitins too, who speak of the operations of divine grace and of the Atman *fit* to receive that grace. But it is not as straight and unmistakable as in the case of Sankara's doctrine. According to him, the competence of the Atman to attain Moksha is determined by his capacity for true knowledge. So long as one does not attain this true knowledge, one's competence for release is nil.

Now the notion of competence at social level is undemocratic. For democracy holds that competence at the

most vital point of its operation is automatic; e.g., let us say 'every one is competent to make a political decision regarding the choice of his representative in the legislature'. Sankara agreed with the Sakya Muni in certain metaphysical matters like the need to get over certain current miseries and get into a state of bliss, but he strongly disagreed with him in regard to social organization. The Buddha for instance felt that caste was an unnecessary social irritant; to him men and women could enjoy equal rights in regard to religious practices too, like becoming a Sanyasin. Bikshus and Bikshunis were possible in the Buddhist arrangement, but to the Vedic Brahmanical Hindu a woman in ascetic robes was unimaginable. Sankara made no attempt to save the Hindu woman from a position of perpetual subordination, a status emphasised by the Smriti writers. Ramanuja, among the Hindus, was the first to permit Sanyasa asrama for women. In fact the Varna-srama Dharma was a sacrosanct for Sankara. The acceptance of a divisive society by one who could realise and preach a cosmic oneness can look like an enormous inconsistency; but that is not so, if one follows Sankara closely.

Sankara's metaphysics imagines two tiers—a higher and a lower divided by the spiritual fog called *Maya*. The mist of ignorance will clear when the sun of knowledge rises. Then the ascent from the lower to the higher becomes easy, natural and even inevitable. Into this arrangement, as we saw above, the notion of competence enters. The knowledgeable one alone is competent to move from the lower plane of social bondage to the higher one of true freedom. The lower plane is in the context of society and not in that of the isolated Atman seeking and realising its present autonomy and ultimate identity

with God. Thus so long as one is in the social milieu he is non-competent : or this statement can be inverted : i.e., so long as one is non-competent one is not released from the bonds of social conventions. These conventions, Sankara thought, were safely laid down by the Dharma Sastras, the Grihya Sutras and the Smritis in general. These texts consider the Varna system and the complex of domestic duties relevant and binding. So the Smritis, according to Sankara, are as authoritative in the (lower) social context as the Upanishads are in the (higher) metaphysical context. To the one into whose spiritual consciousness this realisation has not entered, the Smritis and the social plane are pertinent and only to those who have realised the truth are the Upanishads and the divine plane relevant. Thus it becomes clear that Sankara introduced a great revolutionary doctrine at the theoretical, metaphysical level but took care to keep at an orthodox and conservative level social arrangements, activities, values and attitudes. He held that so long as 'True ignorance', i.e., ignorance in regard to the ultimate truth persists, the observance of social norms established by the Smritis is necessary.

According to Sankara Bhakti cannot absolve a person from observing the Grihya sutra rules and the Dharma sastra norms. These can be ignored and they become meaningless only in the context of True Knowledge. This is how Sankara differs so much from Ramanuja who interfered with the social arrangements in the name of Bhakti ; and caste and community, ritual and sacrifice sat lightly on the Vaishnava. That Ramanuja in spite of his sociological experiments succeeded only in introducing a few more castes and getting bogged down by new rituals is another matter. We are, however, concerned here only

with stating that Sankara's loyalty to the Smritis was not inconsistent with his Advaita.

It is thus the Smartha group among the Brahmins in South India came to be a distinct sect. In philosophical opinion, religious faith and social practice, they follow Sankara closely. The Smarthas, i.e., the people who believe in the total validity of the Smritis, are at once the most conservative in their social life and revolutionary in their philosophical beliefs. It may be said that they have been the most truly Vedic among the Brahmins in the South.

As a result of Sankara strictly refusing to pull caste Hindus out of their old affiliation to the Smritis, the Smarthas held that the Smritis are the only authority for social conduct and religious practice. They never became Saivas, and this is in contrast to the followers of Ramanuja becoming staunch Vaishnavas. Among the Brahmins, in spite of Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikkavachakar being Brahmins, there have been no Saiva Smarthas; the only exception being the class of Smarthas known as the Mangudi Brihatcharanas, who are great and exclusive devotees of Siva. Among Srivaishnavas, on the other hand thanks to Ramanuja, we have both Brahmins and others as equal devotees of Vishnu. Appayya Dikshita, a great Smartha Brahmin, praised Siva and Vishnu equally; and Smarthas resort to Siva and Vishnu temples and bear the names of either deity indiscriminately. But Vaishnava Brahmins as well as others bear only Vishnu's names and resort only to His temples.

Among the Smarthas also we have the Vadamas, many of whom were converted to Vaishnavism during Ramanuja's days. Thus we have a proverb in Tamil which says 'Vadamas blossom into Vaishnavas'. In fact, the Vadamas

wear the sandal paste mark on their forehead even in preference to the sacred ash while the Brihatcharanas wear the sacred ash essentially in the Triyak Pundara fashion and supplement it only occasionally with the sandal mark. The Vadamas have a secret partiality for Vishnu, which is not the case with the Brihatcharanas. Thus we have differences in faith and practice among two sections of Smarthas themselves. But they all acknowledge the occupant of the Sankaracharya Pitha as their sole guru.

The Acharya, it is well known, was a Devi upasaka and in all the Mathas he founded he had placed in the sanctum Sakti Chakras. This is a combination of Tantrism and Saktism and their occurrence in the religion of the author of the Advaita doctrine can be explained only with reference to his practical outlook on social problems ; i.e., he did not want to prematurely boost by the force of his personality sections of society unfit for such aid, but made a temporal arrangement in which for the time being they could be at home. This is in complete conformity with his wish not to disturb the social arrangements in any manner.

The Smarthas, i.e., the followers of Sankara, due to their very catholicity find it difficult to summon sufficient fanaticism to support any religious cause other than primitive Vedism ; and for that reason they are the most amenable, by a strange paradox, to reform also ; for religion does not inhibit them seriously.

To propagate the Advaitic and Smartha ideals and to keep the Smartha flock together, Sankara founded a number of Mathas, on the pattern evidently of the Buddha sanghas. The occupants of the apostolic thrones in the Mathas are all Naishtika Brahmacharins following the example of Sankara himself, i.e., they pass on to Sanyasa

directly from Brahmacharya skipping grahasta. This is an innovation in the Asrama system introduced by Sankara to emphasise the special importance of his mission. This does constitute an infringement of the prescribed Asrama pattern and was not in line with the professions of the great supporter of the Smritis ; but this was not intended by him to apply to the common man ; and hence did not constitute any kind of reform.

Sankara's contribution has had the unique consequence of making the Smarthas, i.e., his followers, impervious to emotional religion and to stick to the ancient dogmas of the Smritis. This helps the Smarthas to seek shelter under a universal metaphysics, if they make lapses in their religion ; and to hide behind a permissive religion if they are discovered wanting in their understanding of their metaphysics. While Sankara's philosophy earned for him and the land of his birth great reputation among wisemen everywhere, his compatriots and followers learned to bask in the sun of that reputation conveniently treating the miseries of the temporal world as part of the Maya. Though this could not have been intended by the great philosopher, the logic of secular events had been relentless.

The duties of the successors of Sankara were not only to preach the doctrines clear to the Acharya but keep the flock together and so they had a religious as well as secular function to perform. When the religion was threatened it was their manifest duty to devise ways of saving the system and the doctrine, both when the danger came from dissenters inside and when disaster resulted from the onslaught of outsiders. An occasion on which serious notice had to be taken by the deteriorating secular situation was when the Muslims successfully raided the southern kingdoms and posed a threat to the Hindu way of life, in the

first few decades of the fourteenth century. Vidyaranya, associated with the Sankara Matha in Mysore, was largely responsible for the organization of defence against aggressive Islam and the creation of Vijayanagar. But apart from these early days, it looks as if the Sankaracharyas had little to do with the later developments—religious as well as temporal—in Vijayanagar.

The Smarthas, who became well knit as a socio-religious group since the days of Sankara had to face a new socio-religious force, namely, the Srivaishnavas whose doctrines and social practices were laid down by Ramanuja. The Smartha-Vaishnava antagonism starting in those days became very bitter in the post Vijayanagar period and at the best of times this hostility merely subsided into contempt. Of course inter-marriage at all times and inter-dining on religious occasions became impossible between these two groups. This is still a common phenomenon in the South.

Vedantism, if it is meant to indicate the movement directed towards an interpretation of the Vedanta, i.e., the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, etc., was not a monopoly of the Advaitins, since the others also have commented on the sacred texts but arrived at always different and occasionally contrary conclusions. Today one tends to identify the Vedantic movement with the activities of the Advaitins, largely because of the accident that certain men of religion like Vivekananda happened to hold Advaitic views and were held to be Vedantins per excellence.

When one considers the social consequences of Advaitism or Vedantism, it becomes plain that economically or politically there were no consequences worth mentioning. But what emerges unmistakably is the hardening of an

a-historical intellectual bias whereby the spirit of enquiry, the springs of a curious mind and spiritual promptings for secular investigation were dried up, though it may be some consolation that they never existed in great measure before. Under these circumstances, the basis for a scientific outlook on human and environmental problems could not be developed. The hold of Vedantism on the Hindu mind is so firm and settled that modernism is countered on the sly by an obviously unobjectionable spiritualism whose purpose is to arrest the responsibility for modernism but quietly enjoy its benefits.

This is a somewhat negative impact on society for nowhere does Vedantism call upon people to deny the mortal world and escape its responsibilities; but nevertheless the vice in which a great majority of the Hindu world, educated as well as otherwise, is held by this attitude is real enough to be historically effective. The tremendous and total onslaught of science and technology compelling man to face up to material realities and to contribute to their betterment was quietly annulled by the Vedantist attitude which created a mutually exclusive bi-cameral mental apartment in which the facts of the one were supposed not to clash with the opinions of the other. But it must be said ultimately that Vedantism has contributed greatly to the peace of mind of the average and normal practising Hindu and rescued him from the nagging doubts and uncertainties of a constantly changing world.

To sum up, it may be stated that Sankaracharya's movement was mainly a philosophical one at the denominational level; at the level of religion it tended to be conservative retaining the faith in the Smritis and refining but not rejecting Sakti worship and Tantrism, and including as

part of the official duties of his successors the need to preserve Smarthaism as a bulwark against the possible practical consequences of his theoretical postulates, and for these purposes to establish monasteries in many places in India. His successors did not seriously enlarge on these achievements.

TANTRICISM AND ITS SOCIAL CONTENTS

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To THOSE who are committed to the Victorian ethical values, the Tantric rites appear to be repulsive and obnoxious signifying nothing more than a crude form of sexploitation which goes against all canons of civilised human behaviour. Guided by this feeling of aversion they do not even hesitate to conclude that in Tantricism "theories are indulged in, and practices enjoined which are at once most revolting and horrible that human depravity could think of, and compared to which the words and specimens of Holiwell Street literature of the last century would appear absolutely pure."

Curiously enough, this attitude was also shared by the ancients. Buddhist and Jain works refer to the practices of the Tantras invariably in a spirit of denunciation. Some of the Puranas are found to have been quite outspoken in their condemnation of the Tantras. Some of the law books and also the ancient philosophical texts seek to demonstrate the unauthoritativeness and deceptive character of the Tantras.²

But such an attitude is absurd from the historical point of view. As Chattopadhyaya has rightly argued: "We cannot look at Tantricism as mere perversion without at the same time looking at ourselves as a nation of perverts In all likelihood, therefore, there must have been some original significance attributed to these particular beliefs and

practices, which we are apt to miss if we allow ourselves to be carried away by a spirit of sheer moral repugnance. The *Vamacara* of Tantricism, since our ancestors were so serious about it, could not have *meant mere perversion*, though these *are* manifestly so if practised in the context of our developed knowledge and moral values. And it is necessary to know why our ancestors had such absurd beliefs in order to understand how we have become what we are today.”³

What then can be the ultimate material basis of the primitive *deha-vada* of the Tantras, and the peculiar rituals related to it? Evidently this should be sought in the rituals based upon fertility magic which must have played a very significant part in the primitive agricultural societies. “So intimate appeared to be the relation between the processes of birth and generation and those of fertility in general that the two aspects of the same mystery found very similar mode of ritual expression under prehistoric conditions.”⁴ The magical rites designed to secure the fertility of the fields seemed to belong to the special competence of the women who were the first cultivators of the soil and whose power of child-bearing had, in primitive thought, a sympathetic effect on the vegetative forces of the earth.⁵ Thus, when natural productivity came to be viewed in terms of human productivity, earth-mother in terms of human mother, the agricultural rituals rested on the assumption that the productivity of nature or mother-earth could be enhanced by the imitation of human reproduction and this gave rise to the sex rites all over the world including cults of *linga* and *Yoni* (male and female organs), the former symbolising the act of cultivation and the latter, the fruit-bearing earth. When human body and the earth are assumed to have the same nature, the two must be

taken as interacting and interdependent. *The mystery of nature must therefore be the mystery of the human body, the deha or human body being the microcosm of the universe, and this alone accounts for the cosmogony of the Tantras which aims at explaining the birth of the universe in terms of the mysteries of the birth of a human being.*⁶

The central feature of the cosmogony of the Tantras is the female principle, the male principle having only a secondary position. This female-dominated world-view is in substantial agreement with that of the Sankhya, according to which the material *Prakriti*, conceived as a female principle, is the cause of the universe and the *Purusa* or the male principle is nothing but a passive spectator. There is reason to believe that the Sankhya philosophy was originally a development of the primitive proto-materialism which formed the substratum of Tantricism itself.⁷ The anomalous position of the male principle of the Sankhya and the Tantra can presumably be traced to the anomalous position of the males in the primitive female-dominated societies, in which the male had something to do in the matter of procreation but in the family he is insignificant and a passive spectator, exactly like the *Purusa* of the Sankhya.

In primitive society the clan centred in the women on whose responsibility rested the essentially important function of rearing the young and of imparting to them whatever could then be characterised as human heritage. The woman was not only the symbol of generation, but the actual producer of life. Her organs and attributes were thought to be endowed with generative power, and so they had been the life-giving symbols. In the earliest phases of social evolution, it was this *maternity* that held the field, the life-producing mother being the central figure of reli-

gion. But this female supremacy was short-lived in most of the cases. The growth of pastoral economy created condition for the growth of patriarchal societies. In the sphere of religion, the male element was introduced at first as the insignificant lover of the goddess, but at length he became the co-equal and eventually predominant partner. Still, where agriculture predominated over hunting in providing food, matriarchal conditions did not cease to exist, because agriculture was originally the invention and business of women, at least till the introduction of the cattle-drawn plough.⁸

In the religious history of India Mother Goddess never ceased to be an important cult of the peoples. It was so deep-rooted in Indian mind that even in the sectarian religions like Vaisnavism, Saivism, etc., the female principle had to be given a very prominent position. Even the basically atheistic religions like Buddhism and Jainism could not avoid this popular influence. Later Buddhism is, in fact, nothing but a disguised Tantric cult of the female principle. Among the vast masses of Indian peasantry male deities have only a secondary position. Indeed, a predominantly agricultural country like India, with her stunted economic development accounting for a strong survival of tribal elements, is only likely to be full of matriarchal relics, and this explains the cause of the popularity and survival of the cult of the female principle and kindred Tantric rituals. Baron Omar Rolf Ehrenfels, to whom goes the credit of collecting all the matriarchal data and organising them in a theoretical set up, observes that mother-right elements in India are stronger, both in extent and in degree, than those in any other part of the world and that, in spite of the ruthless efforts to establish male-superiority through hypergamy, child-marriage and *sati*,

mother-right elements could not be stamped out from the lives of the masses.⁹

The special vigour to overthrow mother-right must have necessarily implied a corresponding special vigour which mother-right must have been enjoying in India since pre-Vedic days. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya argues that, if the undeveloped agricultural economy had a natural tendency to create matriarchal conditions and if by far the largest proportion of the Indian masses remained predominantly agricultural, it was but logical that the most extravagant methods would have been necessary to coerce upon them the supremacy of the male, but the reason behind the peculiar tenacity with which the elements of mother-right have survived in the lives of the Indian people is that the majority of them remain the tillers of the soil. By contrast, the economic life of early Vedic people was predominantly pastoral which accounts for their highly organised patriarchal society with a characteristically male-dominated world outlook. It is here that we have the real clue to the basic difference between the two main currents of the subsequent religio-philosophical thought in India, the Vedic and the non-Vedic.¹⁰

The purely pastoral economy of the Rigvedic tribes eventually declined, but the patriarchal social organisation and patrilinear inheritance were retained by their descendants. These traits are historical realities which can be identified, traced and documented, and as an undifferentiated cultural complex originally stood in opposition to a female dominated outlook inherited from the pre-Vedic atmosphere with which it was in constant conflict and out of which emerged a synthesis, the pre-Vedic elements gradually working their way into the practices of the dominant society. Some of these elements were success-

fully absorbed while others were never *legitimized* by the sacred texts despite their wide prevalence. With the growth of higher pastoralism among the Vedic peoples, i.e., when their cattle-rearing economy was supplemented by agriculture, many rituals of the non-Vedic tradition, mainly sexual in character, found their way into ancient Vedic texts and became the visible portion of the Tantric iceberg,¹¹ but their real significance was denied or distorted by subsequent generations. Even then, the evidences relating to sexual rituals and their connection with agriculture and the cult of the Mother Goddess could not completely be hushed up, and it is interesting to note that, in almost every period, the Vedic literature shows traces of sex rituals and of a pattern of sexual behaviour different from the officially accepted norm.

Evidently this female-dominated world view and the associated rites were nourished, in the subsequent history of the Indian people, not by the upper strata of the society, the rich and the powerful, but by simpler peoples, mostly agricultural, belonging to the lower strata of society.¹² The higher religions like Buddhism and others, in order to get themselves popular among the masses and widely preached, had to make compromise with the existing cults and beliefs, and this was one of the processes through which the Tantric deities and rituals of the lower strata of society could have easy access to the upper levels. This process began to work in full motion from about the beginning of the Christian era, and the subsequent history of Indian religions was the history of conflict and fusion of the Tantric elements with the so-called higher religions. Tantric elements profoundly influenced Buddhism and transformed it almost beyond recognition. Saivism, due to its popular character, was saturated with Tantric

ideas, practically since its inception as an organised religion Vaisnavism, too, could not avoid this popular influence. Jainism alone withstood this current and could largely maintain its rigid orthodoxy. Still it had to make room for a good number of Tantric goddesses. The mass-strength behind the Tantric cults also created a new religion, entirely female-dominated, a religion in which even the great gods like Visnu or Siva would remain subordinate to the goddess. This new religion came to be known as Saktism.¹³

The earliest works dealing with Tantric Buddhism are the *Manjusrimulakalpa* and the *Guhyasamaja*, composed about the fifth or sixth century A.D. The philosophy of Tantric Buddhism as can be reconstructed from these texts may be summarised as follows: The gods and goddesses are symbols of the Buddhist conceptions of four elements and five constituents of a being. Creation is due to the Sakti or female energy of the Adi Buddha, and as such the adepts should realise that the female sex is the source of all. They are therefore to be initiated by Prajna or Sakti.¹⁴ As regards the Tantric practices, the *Guhyasamaja* and a few other early texts refer to meat-eating, union with the females and finger poses. As we have said above, sexual rites related to fertility magic are common to all forms of primitive religions. Erotic practices associated with the Mother Goddess cult are older than the Tantric texts themselves. Likewise, wine serves the same purpose of fertility and resurrection, as is demonstrated by its extensive use throughout the world in the rituals of birth, puberty, marriage and death.¹⁵ Fish is also closely associated with matriarchal beliefs as a fertility symbol.¹⁶ Aphrodite, the fish-goddess "was worshipped as a bestower

of all animal and vegetative fruitfulness, and under this aspect especially as a goddess of women."¹⁷ The geometrical patterns, like the Tantric diagrams representing the female generative organ, were also well known in the Mesopotamian and Aegean world, and their appearances on the persons of certain goddesses like Artamis, Hera, Demeter, Astarte and the Chaldean Nana, suggest that these signs were employed as fecundity symbols.¹⁸

The primitive basis of the Tantric Pancamakara or Pancatattva—the use of *madya* (wine), *mamsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mudra* (diagrams) and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse)—can thus be established on further investigations. The Tantras lay emphasis also upon the *mantras* (prayer and formulae), *bijas* (syllables of esoteric significance), *yantras* (diagrams), *mudras* (special positions of fingers) and *nyasas* (feeling the deities in different parts of the body). The aim of the Sakta-tantric worshipper is to realise the universe within himself and to become one with the goddess. The successive steps of the spiritual ladder are constituted by three stages—*pasu* (animal), *vira* (heroic) and *divya* (divine). In the first stage, the aspirant can worship any sectarian god, but he must follow all the rules of social morality, and by doing so he would be raised to the second or heroic level. In this stage the aspirant is able to get himself initiated in *Vamacara* and *Siddhantacara*. For a correct understanding of the mystic rites he requires proper training from a *guru* or preceptor. He has then to disregard the social conventions about sexual purity, defy taboos about food and drink, and look upon all women as manifestations of Sakti. The rituals of Pancamakara, performed in proper ways under the spiritual guidance of the *guru*, elevates the aspirant to the *divya* or

divine standard, and in this stage he is free to get himself initiated in the *Kaulacara*. The Kaula worshipper of Sakti is above all moral judgements, free from all worldly attachments. The logic of Tantra is in itself very simple. What appears to be complicated is the technical and esoteric aspects of the rituals.

In its social sphere the Tantra is free from all sorts of caste and patriarchal prejudices. All women are regarded as manifestations of Prakriti or Sakti, and hence they are objects of respect and devotion. The Tantras do not make any distinction between a so-called virtuous and a so-called fallen woman. The patriarchal concepts of female chastity has nothing to do with the Tantras. This attitude directly goes against the injunctions laid down by the Smritis. According to the Tantras, whoever offends any woman incurs the wrath of the great goddess. Every aspirant has to realise the latent female principle within himself, and only by becoming a female he is entitled to worship the supreme being (*bama bhutva yajet param*). A woman is entitled to function in the role of the preceptor and she has no sexual obligation to anyone. The same spirit holds good also in the case of the Sudras. The four-fold caste system is not recognised by the Tantras. The Sudras have every right to become the *guru*, and men of the higher castes, if they are initiated to the Tantric doctrines, must have to give up their caste prejudices in this respect.

It is therefore obvious that such a revolutionary system is bound to be discouraged by the Orthodox upholders of Brahmanical traditions. Very naturally Tantricism had its solid base among the lower section of the peoples who did not follow the injunction of the Smritis and whose women worked freely with men in fields, markets, mines

and industries, as they do even today. Seclusion of women was essentially the affair of the higher caste peoples who were guided by the patriarchal *smarta* tradition. In the Tantras supreme importance is attached to such characters as the Candali, Dombi, Rajaki, Sabari, etc. These are all female names representing some of the lowest castes carrying on despised occupations. According to the Natha tradition the queen Mainamati was initiated by a Hadi, a member of a despised caste. Saraha of the Sahajiya tradition says in his *Dehakosa* that the Brahmanas as a caste can not be recognised to be the highest of men, because their only task is to deceive the people. Such examples can be multiplied.

The intrusion of Islam brought an important change in the religious outlook of India. It was responsible for the establishment of closer relations among the conflicting religious communities of India. The higher Hindus required the active assistance of the lower to face the destructive inroads of Islam, and in this context the conception of Sakti as 'power' or 'energy' acquired a new significance. Belief in the efficacy of *mantra* and *mandala* and other elements of esoteric practices was firmly established, while the conception of ultimate reality as a duality of male and female principles—Upaya and Prajna in Buddhism, Siva and Sakti in Saivism and Krishna and Radha in Vaisnavism—became a common basis of philosophical understanding.

The Mantrayana group of Mahayana Buddhism became the introductory stage from which other offshoots like Vajrayana, Kalacakrayana, Sahajayana, etc., arose in later times. The Sahajiya Buddhists adopted human nature itself as the best appliance for realising the truth,

and hence they called their path the easiest and the most natural (*sahaja*).¹⁹ The followers of this new line were men of the street who had nothing to do with the previous Buddhist mode of monastic life. They revived the old Tantric ideal that the body is the abode of truth and also the medium of realising the truth. A section of the Vaisnavas of Bengal also developed a typical Sahajiya cult of their own.²⁰ A section of the followers of Kashmir Saivism developed a peculiar form of Tantricism known as Saktyadvayavada according to which Sakti is not different from Siva and as such the material world is the *parinama* or consequence of Sakti. The South Indian Virasaivism or Lingayatism which was a reform movement also resorted to some of the primitive aspects of Tantricism. According to the *Kaulajnananirmaya*, a work of the eleventh century, the Kaula class of Tantras was introduced by Matsyendranatha, who was probably the founder of the Yogini-Kaula of Kamarupa. Bagchi points out that the Yogini Kaula of Matsyendranatha had something in common with the Buddhist Tantras of the Sahajiya class.²¹ This syncretism probably led to the growth of the Natha sect of the succeeding centuries which was composed essentially of men belonging to the lower sections of society. The aspirants of all these groups believed in the use of psychic energy in bringing about the union of the two principles, the male and the female, within the body.

The immediate effect of the advent of Islam on the Hindu society was the deterioration of what is known as the Brahmanical Culture. In fact, the Brahmanas withdrew themselves altogether within their shells, adopting the 'habit of tortoise' (*kurmavritti*). Now that the grip of the Brahmanas on the people was somewhat relaxed, the protestant and esoteric cults and sects came to the fore-

front. Most of the available Tantric texts belong to the late medieval period, and hence it appears that from about the fourteenth century onwards Tantric ideas gained greater dimensions. Siva and Sakti formed the basis of the later Yogic schools, the Natha cult, the Siddhas and other kindred sects. Their religious discipline was that of *Hathayoga* which was an article of faith with them. Their objective was to attain *jivanmukti* or immortality in life. Through the process of *Uta-sadhana*, that is, by making the semen flow upwards instead of downwards and that of *Kaya-sadhana*, that is, by the disciplining of physical body, they believed that the imperfect body could be transformed into perfect and then divine, which was the only way to overcome decay and death. The right and left nerve channels were designated as the sun and the moon, the former standing for fire or heat and the latter for *somasara*, the nectar essence. The sun was identified with Sakti or the female and the moon with Siva or the male. The latter being the agent of creation, it was supposed to hold in its bosom the nectar which the former was always after to consume.

These Tantric cults offered a sharp criticism and rejection of all external formalities in regard to religious practices and spiritual quests, revived the mystical, obscure and esoteric, but protestant and heterodox, elements of the existing religious systems and upheld a new philosophy of life which consisted of the recognition of the *guru* as essential for any spiritual exercise and quest, of the human body as the seat and habitat of all religious and spiritual experience, and of the experience of the ultimate reality as one of inexpressible happiness and absolute non-duality. The belief in the physical body as the abode of all truth induced the followers of the Tantric schools to

explore the mysteries of the organism of the human body. Thus they assumed that, of the innumerable nerves of the body, three were the most important, two by the two sides of the spinal cord and one in the middle. With these two side nerves are identified the Buddhist principles of *Prajna* and *Upaya*. In the Sakta Tantras the nerve in the right is known as *pingala* and that of the left as *ida*. These two represent the principle of duality, and the middle one, variously known as *susumna*, *avadhutika* or *sahaja*, represents absolute unity. The Sakti which resides in man, and the development of which is one of the aims of Tantricism, is called *Kundalini* which resides in the *muladhara*, the lower extremity of the spinal cord, where it remains latent and sleeps quietly. When roused up by successful manipulation, this *kundalini* ascends the next higher stage, viz., *svadhithana* which is situated near the root of the generative organ. Thence it moves on to the centres, *manipura* (the naval region), *anahata* (heart region), *visudha* (junction of the spinal cord and the medulla oblongata) and *ajna* (between the eyebrows) and finally to *sahasrara* (the highest cerebral region) where the Sakti meets its source.

The conception, although fantastic, has a tinge of reality so far as the Tantric attitude towards life is concerned. The Tantras, like other Indian schools of thought, also hold that liberation or *moksa* should be the aim of human life. But while the other schools think liberation in terms of the 'liberation of soul' which is not possible for a man to attain so long as he lives, the Tantras speak of *jivanmukti* or liberation within the span of life, and as such lay supreme emphasis on the material human body. The enjoyment of supreme bliss within the physical body is believed to lead an individual towards immortality and liberation. The bliss produced by sexual union is momentary, but it can be per-

petuated if the ejaculation of the semen can be given an upward motion.

No wonder, therefore, that the Tantras which conceive liberation only in terms of the discipline of the body (*kaya-sadhana*) must be concerned more with the material measures that could ensure the development and the preservation of the body itself. This explains why the Tantras contain the potentialities of later Indian science, particularly the sciences of physiology and alchemy. The Tantric cult, observed P. C. Ray, is "a curious mixture of alchemical process on the one hand, and grotesque and obscene and sometimes revolting rites on the other."²² The question of the 'grotesque and obscene rites' we have discussed above. As Needham points out: "Naturally Victorian scholars spoke of Tantrism with bated breath, but we may well question whether these ideas, which after all we cannot judge by the canons of a civilization which has had two thousand years of Pauline anti-sexuality, were not quite reasonably associated with the magical-scientific view of the world. I would remind the reader only of the great, though sometimes unsuspected, part which sexual symbolism has played in the language of the alchemists."²³ The conception of material immortality was of 'incalculable importance to science' because it 'stimulated the development of the technique of alchemy',²⁴ and it is this conception that led the followers of the Tantra to explore the mysteries of *parada* or mercury, for it was believed that mercurial preparations alone could make the body imperishable. The importance attached to the techniques of respiration (*pranayama*), physical exercise (*asana*), alchemy and medicine (*rasayana*), etc., serves the same purpose of attaining the state of material immortality. Because of this proto-materialism we can argue that the Tantric specula-

tions lie at the basis of the development of Indian science.²⁵

The role of Tantricism has changed from time to time in accordance with the changing social demands, but it always maintained an uncompromising revolt against all formalities and orthodoxy in society and religion. Throughout the ages Tantricism stood for the oppressed class, symbolising all the liberating potentialities in the class-divided, patriarchal and authoritarian social structure. Chronic insistence upon this structure by the writers of the *Smritis* and its violent enforcement by the ruling class in public life indirectly contributed to the survival and development of another set of values quite opposite in character which was upheld by Tantricism. We do not know whether the followers of Tantricism were really persecuted for their radicalism, but there is evidence to show that attempts were made from different corners to blacken their ideals.

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- ¹⁶ S. K. Dikshit, *Mother Goddess*, Poona 1943, pp. 30-36.
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- ²³ J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. II, Cambridge 1956, p. 426.
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Medieval Period

SRI-CHAITANYA AND THE GAUDIYA VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT

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SRI-CHAITANYA, the great Vaishnava saint and reformer, appeared in an age of distrust and frustration, when religion lost its spiritual values and was reduced to a mere form. Buddhism had practically lost its hold, Jainism was confined to the Gujarat-Kathiawad sector, while orthodox Brahmanism, despite its pan-Indian supremacy, was no more a homogeneous sect. Brahmanical religion with its major sects (Vaishnavas, Saivas, etc.) and sub-sects came under the evil influence of debased Tantrism. This is the general picture of the religious life in India during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Navadvipa (district of Nadia, West Bengal), the birth-place of Sri-Chaitanya, was no exception to what has been said above. Of its uncultivated plebeian masses, the majority were conventional worshippers of deities like Mangal-chandi (goddess of welfare) and Manasa (goddess of serpents) of semi-tribal origin, while others were indulging in abominable Tantric practices of Sakta and decadent Buddhist orders. The elites of the society were by and large following Vedic and Smriti regulations and worshipping cult-images of the Brahmanical divinities like Vishnu and Siva; and teachers and scholars of the cultivated stratum used to find pleasures in dialectic exploits in the line of highly scholastic system of New Logic called

Navya Nyaya, turning many of the colleges of traditional learning (*tols*) at Navadvipa into noted centres of this *Navya Nyaya*. Politically, Navadvipa was under the Muslim rulers, most of whose attitude towards the Hindus was in general hostile and evidence is not wanting that the followers of Sri-Chaitanya were persecuted by the officers of even a relatively liberal Muslim ruler like Husain Shah (1493-1519).¹ The common people of Navadvipa, Hindus and Muslims alike, were economically exploited by the ruling class as well as by the members of the upper sections of the society. Socially, the caste system was eating into the vitals of the Hindu society and the downtroddens of the Muslim society were at par with their Hindu counterparts from the socio-economic standpoint. In short, the people of Navadvipa were leading a life that was socially moribund, economically bleak, intellectually dry, and religiously inane. In this age of crisis of confidence Sri-Chaitanya appeared like a saviour to restore confidence in Man. Himself an embodiment of universal love, the great religious leader preached the gospels of love, playing the role of an *avatara*, the other name of historical necessity.

II

Sri-Chaitanya, the simpler form of Sri-Krishna Chaitanya, born at Navadvipa in a full-moon night of 23 Phalgun of Saka 1407 (= February 23, 1486), was known as Visvambhar (nicknamed Nemai) in his pre-ascetic life. He came of a Brahmin family, belonging to the first order of the Hindu society. He received his education in a local *tol*, acquiring proficiency in different branches of Sanskrit learning within a short time. The death of his father

put the burden of the household on his shoulders and young Visvambhar set up a *tol*, like most learned Brahmins of his time, to make both ends meet. At the age of twenty-two he went to Gaya where his meeting with Isvarapuri, a well-known ascetic of the time, transformed him into a completely different man: the secularly-minded sparkling scholar was turned into a god-intoxicated devotee, behaving at times like a lunatic.

On his return to Navadvipa he closed his *tol* passing away most of his time in continuous chanting of the name of the god Krishna. To his relatives he was a cause of anxiety, to well-wishers a problem, but pious men of the town recognized in him a great man, an *avatara*, a Messiah. Devotees soon gathered round him, and with his two most notable disciples, Advaita and Nityananda, Visvambhar adopted an unritualistic mode of musical worship, known as *samkirtana*, in the daily devotional meetings, at first private, lately public. This method of congregational excitement by means of enthusiastic chorus singing to the accompaniment of peculiar drums and cymbals, along with dancing, proved fruitful in utilizing group emotion and soon became a distinctive feature of the faith. The influential section of people of Navadvipa, however, began to look upon this uproarious movement as a public nuisance. They sought the aid of the Muhammadan Kazi (Magistrate) of the town, but the latter was eventually convinced of its spiritual nature. Towards the end of Magh in Saka 1431 (= January, A.D. 1510) Visvambhar renounced the family life and was initiated under the name of Sri-Krishna Chaitanya, usually abbreviated to Chaitanya, by a certain Kesava-Bharati at nearby Katwa, on the other side of the Ganges. Within a month after his initiation he departed for Puri (Orissa) accompanied by some of his disciples in-

cluding Nityananda. He stayed for some time at Puri and thereafter went out on pilgrimage tours more than once, wandering for about six years from shrine to shrine in Northern, Southern and Western India, visiting sacred places like Varanasi, Gaya, Vrindavana and Srirangam. His Bengal disciples organized annual pilgrimages (altogether twenty) to Puri to pay homage to him. On conclusion of the first meeting of ardent fellowship and daily adoration, they went back to Navadvipa, carrying the message of the *guru* (Master) to organize propagation of the new faith in and beyond the frontiers of Navadvipa. About Saka 1437 (= A.D. 1515) Chaitanya settled permanently at Puri, passing most of his time in spiritual trances. The end came to the saint when he was forty-eight.

III

The transition from Visvambhara to Sri-Chaitanya was a transition from logic and rationality to simple faith and emotion. Sri-Chaitanya was essentially an emotionally oriented religious leader, caring little for expounding any definite theological system. Except perhaps eight Sanskrit verses known as *Sikshastaka* dwelling on his simple and passionate faith, he wrote nothing, a fact frankly admitted by Anandin in his commentary on Prabodhananda's *Chaitanya-Chandramrita*. The theology that is attributed to him by his biographer, Krishnadasa Kaviraja, is of a later origin. Rupa and Sanatana, two erudite disciples of Chaitanya, systematised the doctrines and practices of the faith and defined its creed, probably on the basis of the ideas of devotion of their *guru*. How much of the teachings set forth in their works is Chaitanya's and how much

their own will perhaps be never definitely known ; but it is probable that most of them, written within a few years of his death, were directly inspired by his personal example and teachings. Another scholar disciple, Gopala Bhatta, appears to have codified, probably in collaboration with Sanatana, the Vaishnava social and religious practices in a voluminous work which is regarded as the most authoritative ritualistic text of the cult. With these three scholars are associated three more: Jiva, Raghunatha Dasa and Raghunatha Bhatta, and all these six, styled 'Gosvamins' (Vaishnava teachers of esteem), stayed at Vrindavana and hence are known as 'Six Gosvamins of Vrindavana'. To this band of scholar devotees belongs the credit of working out and defining the whole system of tenets peculiar to Bengal Vaishnavism, in other words, Chaitanyaism.

Exigency of space forbids us to enter into details of the theology and philosophy of Chaitanyaism as enunciated in the works of the above-noted Gosvamins and of later writers.² Though Sri-Chaitanya was not the originator of Vaishnavism in Bengal, undeniably he reoriented the system to a significant extent and gave it a distinctive character of its own. And though the two fundamental elements of his faith, *bhakti* (passionate inward devotion) and the Krishna cult, were not his innovations, since other mediaeval saints, such as, Ramanuja (c. 1017-1137), Vallabha (1481-1533) and Madhva (c. 13th century) also centred their teachings round them, the differences between Chaitanyaism and Vaishnavism of such schools are not far to seek.³ Vaishnavism of the Chaitanya school is based on, or rather, steeped in unflinching and intensely emotional *Bhakti*, which rejects all *tarkas* (discursive reasoning) and *pramanas* (sources of knowledge): *visvase milay Krishna tarke bahudur*—Krishna is obtained through belief, never

through reasoning. In other words, in the Chaitanyite belief salvation comes through *bhakti* alone—affectionate devotion in thought and action to the Supreme, and herein lies the quintessence of Chaitanyite *bhakti*, a type which in practice or concept was never attempted before him. The other element, the Krishna cult, was also recast in the Chaitanya school in a special manner. In spite of some differences in the treatment of the Krishna theme in the works of the Vrindavana Gosvamins and the authors of Navadvipa, Chaitanyaism is essentially based on the Radha-Krishna cult instead of the cult of godhead of Krishna and thus it involves a sense-duality between the worshipper and the worshipped.⁴ Chaitanyaism was symbolically expressed in the figure of human love, a deep attachment that a young man feels for a maiden and *vice versa*. The founder of the faith, we are told, always identified himself with Radha, the most beloved of Krishna, and passed most of his time (particularly at Puri) in trances—sometimes in rapturous joy of union with Lord Krishna, but often in excruciating pangs of separation from Him. A true Vaishnava of the Chaitanya school longs for Krishna in the same way as Radha did for her lord ; he is passionately devoted to Krishna and believes in the efficacy of simple *nam-gan*, chanting of the name of his lord.

IV

Sri-Chaitanya was a religious teacher, intent upon preaching messages of his spiritual realisation. Yet as the most distinguished member of his society, he made an impact on it through his messages. The religious teacher became a religious and social reformer as well. As the

teacher of this socio-religious movement he had to clear away many rampant evils of the contemporary society. This he did by his unending love for mankind, the basis of all religious systems of the world. He approached people through their heart. Noted below are some salient features of Chaitanya's Vaishnavism, supposedly expressed by the Master himself.

First, he averred that the way to salvation is obtained only through sincere and passionate love for God, the other name of Krishna. And as a means to achieve it he devised a simple mode of worship called *samkirtana* consisting merely of the chanting of the name of Krishna. *Second*, in his words, "God is wholly independent ; his grace does not follow the lines of the Vedas. God's grace does not care for caste or family".⁵ *Third*, still more explicitly and emphatically he denied any consideration of caste and family in the worship of Krishna.⁶ *Fourth*, he preached the maxim of the *Brihan-Naradiya Purana*: "Even a Chandala is to be honoured if the former has attained the knowledge of God." And hence he urged his followers "to give Krishnabhakti down to the Chandalas and others". Once he reportedly described a Vaishnava as one who abandons *varnasramadharmā* (social prescription based on caste-system) and takes shelter in Krishna.⁷

He practised what he had said. He opened the portals of brotherhood to all men irrespective of caste and creed and social position. He also invited the Muslims to join his order. Thus he simplified religion and concretised the concept of universal love and brotherhood.

Certainly this was a bold and radical step from the social point of view. Such simplification of religion had a two-fold effect on the contemporary society. *First*, it struck at the root of the vested priestly interests and eman-

ipated the common man from ecclesiastical tyranny. *Second*, it dealt a blow to the age-old caste system, the limits of which were then too stifling to be overcome. The debased Tantrism also received a set-back; and above all, frustration and fatalism gave way to self-confidence and human values.

Sri-Chaitanya's ideology was perhaps more effectively followed and implemented by his close associate Nityananda, who though a Brahmana, was free from caste bias. He mixed freely with the fallen and lowly without caring for the consequence. While Nityananda admitted the low-caste Hindus including the members of the mercantile community who had fallen socially on evil days after the decadence of Buddhism, his son Virachandra went a step further by enrolling a large number of Sahajiyas, a sect of Buddhist *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* (male and female mendicants), nicknamed as *nedas* and *nedis*, as members of the Chaitanya order.⁹ To what extent the reaction to casteism went may be illustrated by a story, according to which a certain Kalidasa, a Kayastha by caste, used to eat the refuse food from the plates of the lowliest Doms and Hadis, and we are told that he did it with the full approval of his *guru*, Sri-Chaitanya. Kalidasa defended his action by saying that when the taking of meal touched by others is taken as a ground for condemning a man in society, it was necessary to take the extreme step as he did in order to convince the people of the folly of such a view. Haridasa, a distinguished Muslim disciple of Chaitanya, once reportedly told his Master: "You have given me an exalted rank so that though a Mohammedan I have received presents at the *Sraddha* ceremony from high-caste Hindus, as though I were a Brahmana."

SRI-CHAITANYA AND THE VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT

Sri-Chaitanya is well-known for his strikingly modern outlook in respect of his humanism and socio-religious catholicity. Yet at times a student of his cult gets confused and embarrassed by some of his actions and observations which are inconsistent with the ideas and ideals he preached. To cite a few illustrations. When in Puri Haridasa, his Muslim disciple, was not allowed entry in the local Jagannatha temple. Chaitanya did not make any protest, nor did he try for his admission to the temple. He accepted the arrangement of putting Haridasa at a separate quarter and sending sacred *prasada* (food dedicated to the deities) to him.⁹ Similarly, when Sanatana, another disciple, refrained from using the road by the temple gate for contaminating the servitors (*sevaitis*), the Master approved of his action. On one occasion Chaitanya reportedly averred: "It is the nature of a *bhakta* to observe rank. The maintenance of dignity (*maryada*) is the ornament of a *sadhu* (ascetic, good man). People ridicule when rank is broken and both the worlds are lost. My mind is pleased when propriety of conduct is maintained. If you do not act thus, who will?"¹⁰ Was Sri-Chaitanya then a believer in the prescriptions of a caste-ridden society? Was his socio-religious reform movement a partial one?

The situation may be explained by either of these two presumptions. The biographers of Sri-Chaitanya projected their own ideas about caste and other things in their works; in other words, they attributed their ideas to Chaitanya and may have fabricated legends reflecting them. It is equally possible that the great leader of the reform movement did not dare to shake the foundations of the Hindu society and was content with effecting social reforms with-

in the framework of traditional Hinduism. Like Ramanuja, Chaitanya also tried to democratize Vaishnavism without violating or infringing the age-old sacred institutions of Hinduism.

As a matter of fact Sri-Chaitanya being primarily a religious leader, was not interested in social rules and regulations and in changing them. Breaking of caste barriers was not his aim. He tried to preach the messages of his spiritual realisation. He felt that it was the nature of *bhakti* to create its own fellowship by a higher law than that of caste. He wanted that caste restrictions should not interfere with his community of worship, and so long as they did not do that, Chaitanya agreed to leave them undisturbed. Chaitanya wanted that his movement should touch upon the lives of his countrymen at large, and lest his insistence on anti-casteism should damage the interest of his movement, he accepted certain things and action apparently inconsistent with his ideas and ideals.

Yet the fact is undeniable that his *bhakti*-based messages broke down the caste conventions, bringing numerous low-caste Hindus, and a number of Muslims under one roof. This was a significant social change. His *samkirtana* mode of worship, simplest of its kind, released the society from priestly domination, and gave men a new sense of freedom.¹¹ The continuation of this anti-ecclesiastical note in later days, when Chaitanyaism lost its pristine glory, will be apparent from Narottama's (seventeenth century) declaration that the *sraddha* ceremony (rites performed in honour of the deceased) is unnecessary in outward observance and pilgrimages to shrines are futile and useless.¹² The declaration of Sri-Chaitanya that spiritual power is not confined to the Brahmanas alone, since it may be found in a Sudra as well, struck a strikingly modern

note of social democracy. The members of the Chaitanya school faithfully followed their Master by recognizing many non-Brahmana *gurus* with Brahmana disciples. Not any caste criterion, but real *bhakti* alone, thus has been the determining factor in making one a *guru* in the sect.

VI

The influence of Chaitanya and his movement on the creative life of Bengal has a contextual significance. Scholars and talented writers of the Chaitanya school made the Bengali language as the medium of literature of thought, thus placing it beside Sanskrit. Bengali literature henceforth became animated, marked by a new style and diction. Verses and lyrical poems styled *padavali* (series or bunches of *padas*), suffused with multi-chrome emotional experiences, bear the stamp of the talents of their authors and not a few of them may deservedly claim to be gems of world literature. The biographical sector of Bengali literature is practically the creation of the Vaishnava writers. The Gaudiya Vaishnava literature has been a perennial source of inspiration of several Bengali authors, including the greatest of them, Rabindranath Tagore. Equally undeniable is the contribution of Chaitanya's Vaishnavism to our education. The discovery of a large number of manuscripts from humble homes shows the urge of the illiterate devotees to make themselves so literate as to possess and enjoy something of the literature of their sect. It is interesting to note that low-caste men of the sect like Shyamanda and Govinda Karmakar succeeded in earning reputation as authors. *Kirtanas* and *Kathakatas* (the acts of edifying story-telling in public by a raconteur) of the sect

also substantially helped in the spread of education. Mention may be made in this connection of several Vaishnava women who were more educated than their sisters belonging to other faiths. Adam's 'Report on Vernacular Education' on this issue is revealing. It states that "the only exception to the universal illiteracy among females was found among the mendicant Vaishnavas who could read and write and instructed their daughters".¹³ Adam's finding is in conformity with the tradition: Jahnvi, wife of Nityananda, and Hemalata, daughter of Srinivas (another associate of Sri-Chaitanya), were esteemed for their learning and sanctity. At one time learned women ascetics took an active part in the spread of education among the sisters of their faith. Another illustration of this educative influence of Gaudiya Vaishnavism may be found in Harisabha, a typical Vaishnava product; a sort of an academic *rendez-vous*, these Harisabhas have played the role of modern mass education centres. The contribution of Bengal Vaishnavism to art and architecture also needs a noted mention. The four oldest temples in Vrindavana, marked for their beauty and elegance, were built under the supervision of Chaitanya's disciples, Rupa and Sanatana. Some of the finely carved temples of Bengal, as for instance the Madanamohana and Jorbangla at Vishnupur, are commendable architectural examples of the Vaishnava inspiration of the Chaitanya school.

VII

In retrospect, the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, inaugurated by Sri-Chaitanya, has made significant contributions to the revitalisation of the Bengali society: by simpli-

fyng religion, liberating it from ecclesiasticism, and by dealing a blow to casteism through what may be described as the religion of heart, Chaitanya's Vaishnavism salvaged the contemporary Bengali Society and gave it a new lease of life, and by lifting the Bengali language from the humblest vernacular level to a position nearly comparable with that of Sanskrit, providing inspiration to art and architecture and above all, by spreading education among common people in several ways, members of the sect founded by Sri-Chaitanya have directly and indirectly contributed a great deal towards the resurgence of the life of the people which had become socially moribund, economically bleak, intellectually arid and religiously inane.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Cf. the story of the oppression of Jalaluddin Fath Shah (1481-87) on the Brahmanas of Navadvipa just before the birth of Chaitanya, as mentioned by Jayananda, the author of *Chaitanya-Mangala*, and others.
- ² For details of the theology and philosophy of Chaitanyaism, see S. K. De, *Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal*.
- ³ *Bhakti* and Krishna cults are of appreciable antiquity, being traceable in old works like the *Mahabharata*, *Srimad-Bhagavata* and *Brahma-sutra*. *Bhakti* has been defined as unflinchingly serving Hrishikesa: *Sarcopadhi-Vinirmurtam tatparena nirmalam/ Hrishikena Hrishikesa-sevanam bhaktir-uchyate//*
Action, involution and knowledge are all dependent on *bhakti* (devotion), but *bhakti* is independent of others.
- ⁴ The Vrindavana Gosvamins were chiefly concerned with the godhead of Krishna and his *lila* (divine sport) as revealed in other scriptures; They are almost silent about Chaitanya-lila and is indifferent about its place in their devotional scheme. The Navadvipa disciples of Sri-Chaitanya endeavour to portray the passionately devotional life of their Master, rarely paying attention to his teachings.
The Gosvamins of Vrindavana wrote their works in Sanskrit, perhaps to reach a larger learned public and to emulate the standard

Sanskrit texts of other schools and to obtain equal recognition.

⁵ Krishnadasa Kaviraja, *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, II. 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, III. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II. 15.

⁸ The merchants of Saptagram or Satgaon (district of Hughli), headed by Uddharana Datta of the Suvarnabanik caste (the third order), gathered round Nityananda and were deeply devoted to him. Merchants of other areas also bore the same feelings for Nityananda. His son Virachandra made practically all the Sahajiya Buddhists members of his community. This mass-scale conversion took place at Khardaha (district of 24-Parganas), which may be justly described as the death-bed of Buddhism in Bengal.

⁹ *Chaitanya-Charitamrita*, II. 11 ; III. 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, III. 4.

¹¹ Cf. Krishna's name alone removes all sin. It does not depend upon initiation or priestly ceremonies. *Ibid.*, II. 15.

¹² *Bhakti-tattova-sar*, *Premabhakti-chandrika*, p. 33.

¹³ Quoted in *Calcutta Review*, January, 1916, p. 68. The British government once thought of setting up a Normal school for these Vaishnava female ascetics, known as 'Vairaginis', with a view to employing them in educational work. See R. L. Mitra, *Antiquities of Orissa*, I, p. 110.

KABIR PANTH AND ITS SOCIAL CONTENTS

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IN THE socio-religio-cultural sky of mediaeval India Kabir shines as a bright star with sharp and clear rays. He is a poet, a mystic, a yogi, a reformist, a critic, a saint and a lover of mankind—all blended into one. With all these facets representing diverse qualities and characteristics of his creative genius, his personality appears to be at once fresh and vigorous, remarkably original, and as a result, perhaps, unique. As a perspicuous social reformer and a critic, and also as a poet with subtle sensibilities, Kabir was concerned with human life, and with everything around him. He spoke simultaneously in the languages of the head, heart and soul. He was deeply moved by the sufferings of the people around him and the social injustices to which the lower strata of Hindu society were subjected in the countless years past.

Kabir lived in an age which witnessed the conflict of two dominant cultures, Hindu and Muslim, which were at loggerheads with each other on several social and religious matters. Pained at the ignorance, blind faith and the meaningless habits and customs of most people of his time he strived, with a missionary zeal, to bring sense and reason to the fanatic and the ignorant. In levelling criticism he spared neither the Hindu nor the Muslim, but his tirade was directed more against the gross inequalities and social injustices prevalent in the contemporary Hindu

society.

It is a well-known fact that Islam had a deep impact on the poetry of Kabir. But as a mystic and religious reformer he was no less indebted to Ramananda, his spiritual preceptor. Thus his critical spirit could easily discern the kernel of truth contained in the two great religions. Kabir's imagination and perspicacity enabled him to draw reason from natural laws. Criticising the Brahmin for his pride in high birth he says: "If you are really boastful of having been born of Brahmin parents why did you not choose any different path of birth?" Emphasising this point further he again says: "Everybody is born of a perennial light; who is a Brahmin and who is a low-caste? This is all absurd since all those who are born have a common blood and limbs." This clearly indicates that Kabir was a great believer in the equality of mankind regardless of their status or birth, and all inequality that existed in the world around was due to gross ignorance.

Kabir was one of the highest exponents of truth and non-violence. Truth and God were synonymous to him. He stood for only one God—the God above all 'isms', rituals and formalities that individually or jointly continue to mislead people from the real path of truth and sharply divide man from man. To that end he adopted a secular approach. Himself a weaver, he earned his bread by pure labour, upheld the qualities of humility, honest labour, uprightness and piety. He stood for the common and the down-trodden. He was staunchly hostile to the unhealthy considerations of high and low by virtue of birth, family, religion, caste, creed and sex. He valued equality, fraternity and freedom of speech and individual and social justice. His cure of all social evils was love and mutual understanding and his approach throughout his life was humane.

A close study of the social contents in the ideas as expressed by Kabir in his poetry necessitates an examination of his views on different aspects of the social evils of the contemporary Hindu society. And hence we have to consider different forces and influences that went into the making of the subtle and versatile personality of Kabir. Of these the foremost was his birth and parentage. Born in 1398 A.D.,¹ Kabir grew up into his own consciousness in an age when Islam had not only taken deep roots in India, but was also posing a serious threat to the very existence of Hinduism as a religion. The dark clouds of ignorance, frustration and hatred loomed large over the Indian sky and it was Kabir who was destined to be a torch-bearer to both the Hindus and the Muslims. It is no wonder, therefore, that Kabir is regarded as, "the central personality in the religious life of medieval India".² With his clear insight Kabir discerned the strength of Muslim society and religion and hence tried to impress upon the Hindus about the futility of maintaining the age-old but irrational caste system. At the same time Kabir was a critic of Islam, and he denounced Muslim rituals as he did the Hindu ones. Addressing the Muslims he declared without fear or favour that:

"Adam, who was first, did not know

Whence came mother Eve.

Then there was not Turk nor Hindu ;

No blood of the mother, no seed of the father.

Then there were no cows, no butchers ;

Who, pray, cried 'In the name of God'?

Then there was no race, no caste :

Who made Hell and Paradise?"³

Thus we find that there is much force in Wilson's assertion: "Kabir's activity lay in the direction of a compro-

My heart into my Guru doth incline,
Who showed the way to God, Oh Guru mine.”
“Like God, my Guru doth before me stand ;
The gainings of this world with hate I brand.
I love him, and with love him I do meet,
I lay my constant head before his feet.”

Himself a religious reformer, and a man of cosmopolitan views Ramananda left behind a band of devoted saints who were drawn from every sect and caste. The magic touch of his feet is said to have turned Kabir from an ordinary pedestrian into a great saint. “Kabir received a new impetus from Ramananda and struck firmly at the root of caste-distinctions, idolatry, pilgrimages, vows, fasts, and all the external paraphernalia of religious life.”⁸ Ramananda had a large following who belonged to all castes and creeds. Many of his disciples were drawn from the Sudra Caste and some came from peasant families. Ravidas, a cobbler ; Kabir, a weaver ; Sena, a barber ; Pipa, a Rajput ; and Dhanna, a Jat peasant, were among his famous disciples. Throughout his life “Ramananda preached that there is only one God who is the origin of all, all the distinctions of caste and creed vanished from him, and he saw humanity as one large family and all men as brothers. One man is higher than another, not through his birth but only through his love and sympathy. So he started preaching to all without any reserve, and his fundamental teaching was the gospel of love and devotion.”⁹

It was these teachings of universal brotherhood, equality and compassion for all created beings that revolutionised the whole thinking of Kabir. But he was more rational in his approach to reform society and religion. Realising the great truth that the basis of all in-

equality and injustice obtaining in Hindu society are the sacred scriptures, i.e., the Vedas and the Sastras, he decided to dislodge the great reverence in which they were held among the masses. The following few verses reveal his distrust in Hindu scriptures:

“Think Hari, and chant his name for aye,
Control your mind. This all the Sastras say.
Why are you cramming all the books for nought—
This jumbled trash with saws of wisdom frought.”
“Who takes the name of God that name alone
Doth find all Sastric mysteries unknown ;
Who doth not take the name doth go to Hell,
Let him the Vedas mutter e'er so well.”¹⁰

And again :

“Too vain is all your Veda philosophy,
Too vain is all that in the scriptures be,
The Gita too, doth help not in this side ;
The helper is the Master, none beside.”¹¹

Having thus attempted to dislodge the reverence in which the Vedas and the Sastras were held by the then Hindu society Kabir proceeds on to attack the caste system which was the root cause of the many social evils among the Hindus. With his characteristic reasoning which is entirely his own, he lashes out vehemently at the vanity and hypocrisy of the Brahmin. In one of his verses he asks: “How are you Brahmin and why am I a Sudra? If I have blood in my veins, do you have milk in yours?”¹²

In one of his more famous and oft-quoted passages he further elaborates his point by declaring:

“It is needless to ask of a Saint the caste to
which he belongs ;
The barber has sought God, the washerman and

the carpenter,
 Even Raidas was a seeker after God.
 The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.
 Hindus and Muslims alike have achieved that
 End, where remains no mark of distinction.”¹³

Numerous verses of Kabir may be quoted in support of his hatred for the caste system. However, a complete discourse is to be found in the *Amar Mool*, a famous Kabir-Panthi book. In this volume are contained the discourses Kabir had with his disciple Dharamdas. In Chapter VII which is entirely devoted to the caste system, Kabir tells Dharamdas :

“The Sudra whose duty it is to render service has discovered the Bhakti of the Sat Guru. He serves the Brahmin and has cast from his heart all desires of the flesh, anger and avarice. He serves also the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas and is well spoken of in Brahma Loka. Other castes neglect their duties, but the Sudra prostrates himself at the feet of the Sat Guru and so finds his way to Satya Loka.”¹⁴

The teachings of Kabir have been aptly summarised by the Rev. G. H. Scott in the following works: “Vain are the distinctions of caste. All shades of colour are but broken arcs of light, all varieties in human nature are but fragments of true humanity. The right to approach God is not the monopoly of Brahmins but is freely granted to all who are characterised by sincerity of heart. He who reflects on Brahma is rightly called a Brahmin. The distinctions observed by Hindus are merely productive of that pride which God abhors. The rules regarding impurity deal merely with externals and cleanse not the thoughts of the heart.”¹⁵

After the death of Kabir, his son Kamal was request-

ed to lead the sect and become its preceptor but he declined. The followers soon split up into two divisions or Panth. The headquarters of the major branch were at Kabir Chaura in Varanasi and the minor branch was founded at Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh by Dharamdas, a close disciple of Kabir. Later on numerous small colonies were established in Gujarat, Malwa, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. The Kabir Panth never developed into a strong religious creed like the Sikh religion. As an authority observes: "The Kabir Panth exists as a protest against the religious exclusiveness of the twice-born castes. As a natural result few but Sudras whose cause it champions have associated themselves with the movement. The Panth contends for a truth which forms part of the Gospel of Creation, viz., that all men have spiritual powers which should find their natural expression in communion with God, now in this life."¹⁶

However, it must be added that the Kabir Panth did not succeed much in eradicating castes even from the limited followers it has attracted through the ages. They have descended from the high ideals of Kabir and confined themselves only to following his religious teachings alone. Professor H. H. Wilson rightly concludes: "His followers, the Kabir Panthis, neither worship the gods of the pantheon, nor observe the rites and ceremonials of the Hindus but are in close touch with the Vaishnava sects, specially the Ramavats, and generally worship Rama as the supreme deity. While very numerous, the mendicants of this creed, however, never actually solicit alms, and indeed, the quack-life spirit of the sect, their abhorrence of all violence, their regard for truth and the inobtrusiveness of their opinions render them very inoffensive members of the State."¹⁷

Nevertheless, the message of Kabir for the caste-ridden Hindu society is as fresh to-day as it was during his life-time. Like a vast tree with its wide branches and thick foliage, a veritable witness to the potency of the nature and quality of the seed, the net-work of the Kabir Panth suggests the vital force Kabir carried in him. The contribution of Kabir to Indian religion, culture, literature, society and social thought is great, indeed. His ideas are progressive, even by the modern standard. His message is fresh and relevant to the situations of the day. His message paved the way for Hindu-Muslim unity. It is fresh and relevant to the present situation in India as well.

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- ² Kshitimohan Sen, 'The Mediaeval Mystics of North India', in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, edited by H. Bhattacharya.
- ³ The *Bijak* of Kabir translated into English by the Rev. Ahmad Shah (Kanpur, 1911), p. 72.
- ⁴ H. H. Wilson's article on Kabir Panth in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. XIII, pp. 234-35.
- ⁵ *Bijak* (Ahmad's translation), p. 67.
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- ¹⁰ Jhabvala S. H., *Kabir*, Verses 21 and 22, p. 5.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, Verse 232, p. 51.
- ¹² Presidential address by Professor Ganda Singh in Section 2 at the Ranchi session of the Indian History Congress. See *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Ranchi session (1964), Part II, (Aligarh, 1967), p. 6.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- ¹⁴ Westcott G. H., *Kabir and the Kabir Panth*, p. 107.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
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SANKARADEVA AND THE VAISHNAVA MOVEMENT IN ASSAM

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THE NEO-VAISHNAVA movement of Sankaradeva was so forceful and widespread that even today the impact of the saint's life and activities is abidingly felt in the corporate life of the people of Assam. The movement brought about a new, deep and comprehensive outlook on life, promoted a healthy social behaviour, organised a new social build-up, fertilised the production of a new *bhakti*-based literature in the language of the people and developed a taste for fine arts like music and painting. All this went a very long way to deepen Indian culture in the soil of Assam, which for sometime experienced Tibeto-Burman wave.

Sankaradeva (1449-1568), the leader of this Vaishnava Renaissance in Assam, is traditionally believed to have been born in 1371 Saka and died in 1490 Saka. This would roughly give us one hundred and twenty years, the full span attributed to the *mahapurusha*, although in another opinion he was born in 1385 Saka. Born to the family of the Sakta Kayastha overlord of the Bara-Bhuyans at Bardowa, Sankara enjoyed a gay and wild childhood, his parents having died and left him in his infancy. In his twelfth year he was placed under the care of a local *pandit*, Mahendra Kandali. After a thorough education in grammar and Sanskrit lore, he came back home a proud and

finished scholar, when he was caught in the silken tie of matrimony and had to confine himself to the coarse duties of a Bhuyan chief in spite of all his inclination on the side of a studious career. There were constant skirmishes with the neighbouring Kachari tribe to worry him, and at the head of it came soon the death of his young wife, who left a girl child behind her. This bereavement seems to have made a deep influence upon Sankara's mind with its natural poetical proclivity, for he became now determined to go on pilgrimage to Puri, Vrindavana and other holy places. This he did when he was thirty-two years old (1481 A.C.), and left the administration in the hands of his two old uncles. His stay at Puri seems to have been long, and it was possibly in this religious centre that he received his illumination, for no earthly *guru* of his is known, and he later said to one of his followers that after he had visited the temple at Puri and bowed his head to Jagannatha enshrined there, it was his resolve not to bow it down to any other god, meaning that Jagannatha alone could be his *guru* and worshipful. Sankaradeva composed lyrics in the artificial Brajabuli idiom during his sojourn in Northern India, although some of his works like the *Harischandra-upakhyaṇa* are said to have been written as early as his school-days. After twelve years of travelling Sankara returned home a saint, carrying an abiding impression of the renascent Vaishnavism, which with its lyric grace was 'pulsating in the heart of India in the widest commonalty spread'. He had now discovered his mission of life, and was well intent on forsaking the world. But the affectionate anxiety of his grandmother and all others around him made him marry for a second time ; and he had also to resume administration under their pressure.

In the meantime he received from Puri a copy of the

Bhagavatapurana, furnished with the 'Bhagavata-bhavartha-dipika' commentary of Sridhara-svami, and set to rendering parts of this Vishnuite *purana* into Assamese with the definite intention of propounding and propagating the cult of *bhakti*, of the exquisite beauty of which he was firmly convinced. After he had made some sections of his *Kirtana-ghosa* among other books, he received his first prose-lytes. He adopted the attractive method of holding *kirtana* or mass prayer and dramatic performances, and this soon attracted many people to his religion. He made a temple (*kirtana-griha*, *namghar*) near his official headquarters at Bardowa, and this institution became the nucleus of the Vaishnava organisation, which later spread throughout the three Assamese States of Asama (Ahom kingdom), Kamarupa and Koch Behar in the form of regional establishments, called *sattra*, and numerous village temples, known as *namghar*.

Sankara soon renounced his bhuyanship, and with his following, both mundane and divine, retreated across the Brahmaputra to regions occupied so long by other lesser Bhuyans. But finding themselves too near the growing Koch power under Visvasimha (c. 1496-c. 1533), they migrated further to the east, and stationed themselves at Dhuwahat or Belaguri in the Majuli island on the Brahmaputra, now a part of the Ahom kingdom.

At Dhuwahat a Sakta youth, Madhava (1489-1596), also a scion of Kayastha Bhuyans, a busy tradesman too, came to have a religious disputation with Sankara as he found that the Vaishnava was interdicting people from the worship of, and bloody sacrifices to, the Devi, and all that in Kamarupa, the spiritual domain of the Mother Goddess. The hot debate, which went on vigorously for quite a few hours ended in the immediate conversion of

Madhava. And Madhava very readily gave up his trade, and dissolved a maturing proposal for marriage to choose a life of celibacy and ardent devotion and service to the *guru*. He became Sankaradeva's dearest and closest disciple, supporting the *guru* in his proselytising and literary activities, and the greatest apostle of the new faith, giving poise and strength to the organisation of the Vaishnava order in Assam.

But soon followed a period of unrest for the Vaishnavas due to the hostility of the brahmana priesthood, which found, to much chagrin, that its authority was being challenged by the new-fangled creed, which placed the brahmana and the pariah alike on the same religious footing and opened the portals of sacred knowledge to the common man by rendering religious texts into the local language, and minimised the importance of ritualism by extolling the *kirtana* form of worship and discarding the worship of many gods in favour of a rigid monotheism. Sankara's followers were openly molested. He, therefore, arranged to meet the scholarly section of the hostile camp, and in the discussions that ensued the latter was completely routed. The opposition then vilely poisoned the ears of the Ahom monarch, Suhummung (1497-1539), against the religious rebel, who was immediately hauled up for trial: but the saint acquitted himself well in the presence of the king, and was let off with honour. All the same, there was no cessation of hostility; and although Sankara's cousin, Ramaraya, seems to have some administrative responsibility under the Ahoms, the Bhuyans, always suspects as a possible source of mischief, soon earned royal disfavour, and there was an order for the arrest of some of them including Sankaradeva. Madhava persuaded the Master to go underground for a time; and

he himself and Sankara's son-in-law, Hari Bhuyan, were apprehended, and taken to the capital at Gadgao for trial. Hari was beheaded; and Madhava, though an ascetic, was kept under detention for about nine months and then released.

This incident filled Sankara's mind with disgust, but also provided the determination to leave the Ahom kingdom. The king of the western state of Koch Behar, Naranarayana (c. 1533-1587), and his brother and commander-in-chief of the Koch army, Sukladhvaja (the author of the *Saravati* commentary on the *Gitagovinda*), already well-known for their learning and wisdom, were now leading an attack on the northern parts of the Ahom kingdom. Some of the Bhuyans, related to Sankaradeva and his group, had already joined the Koch camp. Sankara and his following seized this opportunity, and rowed down the Brahmaputra to safety within the Koch state. They made their settlement at Barpeta, where the creed began to thrive and the Order began to swell. The rich merchant, Bhavananda (later, Narayana Thakur), a Musalman tailor, Chandsai (Chand-khan), some brahmanas like Damodaradeva, and some officers of state were among those who joined him. The Vaishnava could also count upon the help of Sukladhvaja, who married the daughter of Ramaraya and also accepted the saint's faith. For the last eighteen or twenty years of his life now remaining, his *sattr*a at Patbausi (Barpeta) became the centre of dissemination of the new light that *bhakti* brought. He, now a centenarian, made a second pilgrimage, covering only six months, to Puri. All the time he was also busy in writing books, which were to be the gospel of the new faith. The prestige and influence that he now commanded in the Koch kingdom made others jealous of him; and

insistent complaints against him and his religious activities were lodged with the king. After some persecution of the Vaishnavas Sankaradeva presented himself at Naranarayana's court, and soon found himself pitted in a battle of arguments with brahmana adversaries of the capital. At the end he emerged triumphant; and the saint and the monarch, so much struck by the profundity of his scholarship and the sublimity of his faith, became friends, and remained friends for the rest of their lives. The Vaishnavas now felt completely secured, and filled the land with their holy music. Sankaradeva visited the Koch capital several times after this; and it was here that he passed away in 1568. His soul and his message of Love have gone deep into the collective consciousness of the people. His name is ever on his followers' lips, and his music in the heart of the soil.

Sankaradeva nominated Madhavadeva as his successor to hold charge of the order. The latter set up his *sattra* at Sundaridiya (Barpeta), where he made his chief work, *Namaghosha*, among other compositions. From time to time he visited different places round about his *sattra*, and erected a temple primarily for the purpose of dramatic performances, but this soon grew into a *sattra*, the Barpeta-*sattra*. The hostile people were busy all the time, bringing allegations of broadcasting a corrupt religion against Madhavadeva in the court of Raghudevanarayana (1581-1603), the son of Sukladvaja, who quarrelled with his uncle Naranarayana after his father's death, and declared himself independent as the king of Kamarupa (the eastern half of the Koch state built by Visvasimha, Naranarayana and Sukladvaja). A contingent of sepoy's raided the Barpeta-*sattra*, seized the petty belongings of the

cloistered Vaishnavas, and carried Madhava and some of the monks there in boats to the capital at Vijapur. But before the saint could be summoned for trial in the open court, the hostile *pandits* withdrew their charges; Madhava was honourably acquitted, and the effects of the monks were returned to them. Soon after, however, the whimsical king sent Madhavadeva a writ, asking him to leave Bārpeta as early as possible and settle at Hajo with its Haya-griva-Madhava temple. But here the saint Madhava attracted more people than the god Madhava; and seeing herein the possibility of fresh troubles, he hastily decided to leave Raghudeva's kingdom, and accordingly crossed the border over to Koch Behar, where Naranarayana's son, Lakshminarayana (1587-1627) was now ruling. There too he did not find a quiet life as many people found it difficult to accept Sankaradeva's creed, and particularly because an officer, a *qaji*, could not take kindly to him on account of the Vaishnavas' refusal to inter-dine with people outside of their fraternity. Madhava was confronted with harsh controversies at the royal court; but the profundity of his learning came to good account in this impasse, and Lakshminarayana declared the new faith, with two *sattras* in the capital, the state religion. The saint-like Master died in Koch Behar in 1596.

Sankaradeva delegated to his brahmana follower, Damodaradeva, the power of administering ordination, as this was considered expedient particularly in the case of brahman neophytes. Immediately after the death of the *guru*, however, there was a 'rift in the lute', and Damodara seceded from the main Order, and formed a schism. It was represented to Pariksitānarayana of Kamarupa (1603-1616) that this brahmana was bringing pollution on the country by accepting a sudra's faith and by crying against

the worship of all gods and goddesses. The king ordered excommunication of the saint, who made his way to the Koch Behar capital and built himself the Vaikunthapur-sattras there. It is remarkable that the first three great Vaishnava acharyas (preceptors) of Assam died in Koch Behar, which, by the logic of political history, is now outside this State.

Another brahmana dissenter like Damodaradeva was Harideva, who claims only a few *sattras* of his following, confined to the present district of Kamrup. Sankaradeva's family priest and friend, Ramarama, remained by his side all through his life, and the family springing from Ramarama remained loyal to the Order, and supplied Patbausi and Barpeta-sattras with Superiors.

Madhavadeva sent out holy men as apostles of the *bhakti* faith, the chief among them being Gopaladeva of Bhavanipur, Padma Ata, and Gopaladeva better known as Vamsigopala. The nomination of Vamsigopala, a brahman, was approved by Damodaradeva also. These three apostles and their deputies established *sattras* mostly in Assam, that is, the Ahom kingdom; and some of their *sattras* are very rich, and claim each a large and widespread laity. Madhava's sister's son, Ramacharana, and Mathuradasa were left in charge of the temples built by the saint at Sundaridiya and Barpeta. The three sons of Sankaradeva died prematurely, and his grandsons, Purushottama and Chaturbhuja, and the latter's wife, Kanakalata, appointed their deputies, who organised *sattras* in various places; and these *sattras*, almost a church by themselves, look up for inspiration to Bardowa, the birthplace of the saint. Damodaradeva appointed three nominees, who stayed in *sattras* in Kamarupa, while Vana-

malideva, a brahman monk staying at his Vaikunthapur-*sattra*, migrated to the east, and established a powerful *sattra* (Dakhinpat) under the patronage of the ruling Ahom king. Some *sattras* were brought into being by persons connected with Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva ; and some of those set up by the divines mentioned above branched off each into several petty establishments.

Thus the three Assamese States of eastern India, namely, Asama, Kamarupa and Koch Behar, were covered by the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth with a network of these Vaishnava establishments, and almost the whole Hindu population was now divided among them. Some of the adherents of the Vaishnava Order have made serious departures from the original tenets of the faith, or have relapsed into heterogeneous doctrines discarded by the *gurus*. Others again have carried the puritanic zeal of the new faith very far indeed. The followers of Gopaladeva formed into a school, characterised by catholicity and a democratic outlook and freedom from the tyranny of creeds. It particularly thrived and acquired large followings in the north-eastern parts of Assam with their predominantly Tibeto-Burman population, and reclaimed large numbers of people from animistic practices. The followers of the Mowamara or Mayamara *mahanta* within Gopaladeva's Order rose in revolt as one man against royal oppression (1769), and succeeded in subverting Ahom power for a time. The history of Assam Vaishnavism is one of many conflicts and persecutions. The course of political history of this eastern part of India also has been changing considerably from time to time. But the Renaissance, which had its beginnings in the activities of Sankaradeva, has wrought itself into fulfilment in many ways, and marked out a de-

finite place for Assam in the cultural map of India.

An attempt is often made in some quarters to describe Sankara as a social revolutionary, who set aside all caste barriers and preached a faith, unconnected with the *Srutis* and *Smritis*. Lakshminath Bezbaroa sought to discredit such an extreme view of the matter, when he said: "Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were no visionaries or revolutionaries. Their aim was to purify Hinduism from within." It will help us to understand the matter if we examine the charges brought against Sankara by interested parties on different occasions. It was variously alleged:

- (a) that Sankaradeva preached *ekasarana* doctrines, and interdicted people from worshipping Durga, Siva and all deities other than Vishnu ;
- (b) that he preached against blood sacrifices ;
- (c) that being a Sudra (non-Brahman, Sankara studied the *Bhagavata-purana* and rendered it into verses in the language of the common people ;
- (d) that, a Sudra, he had become a religious preceptor, rendered *nama-mantra* to others, and also taught them the secret of counting of beads on a rosary ;
- (e) that he became the *guru* to brahmanas also, received salutations (*namaskara, sewa, olag*) from brahmanas, both men and women, and gave to them religious precepts (*upadesa* or *guru-vakya*) ;
- (f) that Brahmanas, Kaivartas and Sudras alike became his disciples ; and that Kaivartas, Kolatas (Kalitas), Koches and Brahmanas sat together during congregations to repast on milk, flattened rice (*chira*), bananas, etc. ;

(g) that as a result of the propagation of his faith, people were turning their back on rituals (*karma-dharma*); and

(h) that due to his teachings a son would not dine in his father's house only because the son became a convert to the new faith, and his father not.

These were the main charges which could reasonably be levelled against the saint. But there were other allegations, against which Sankara is represented by these early biographers as pleading not guilty, or which could legitimately be described as mere exaggerations.

Sankaradeva's form of Vaishnavism is officially named *ekasarana nama-dharma*, having a strict monotheism as the central doctrine and the recitation or remembering of the names of the One Deity as the principal form of worship.

In many places of his works like the *Bhagavata*, XI, Sankara refers to the *ekasarana* conclusion of the *Bhagavadgita*. In his *Bhagavata*, XI, Krishna thus says to Uddhava: "He who doth not worship other gods, doth not forsake from his lips my names, whether in prosperity or in adversity, and even doth hold within his heart my image, is a saintly person." And again: "Do thou keep away from the cult of other deities." "O friend, do thou not worship other gods lest devotion to me be vitiated."

When it was reported to King Pariksitānarayana of Kamarupa that Sankaradeva's follower Damodaradeva interdicted the worship of Durga and other deities too, the monarch sent some constables (*dhopdhara*) to ask the holy man to worship the goddess with sacrifices or, if he failed to comply, to bring him down under arrest. The men came and announced the royal order. Damodara was too

bold to tell them: "Place my neck above and that of the *bali* (the sacrificial animal) below, and cut them both asunder if you have the strength in your body. I may go and face the king, but will not worship (the goddess). I acknowledge no ten-armed (goddess), but only Hari." His sermons also contained this interdiction against the worship of other gods than Vishnu. Another brahmana Vaishnava, Vanamalideva, was confronted with the appearance of a Siva icon raised from the bottom of an old tank, when he saluted the deity as if it were only Vishnu whom he saw, saying: *namo namo laksmi-pati bhagavanta deva*. This strict injunction against the worship of other gods created bitterness amongst the votaries of various deities.

Sankaradeva and other Vaishnava leaders of Assam were rigidly opposed to all blood sacrifices. A veritable stronghold of Sakti worship, the country seems to have in those days presented a picture of constant sacrifices to the various forms of the Devi.

King Laksminarayana of Koch Behar once arranged the worship of Durga and bought a number of goats for sacrifice. Then an idea struck him, and he sent some persons to Damodaradeva, who happened to be in the capital, to ask him if he approved of the sacrifices. Damodara deeply pondered over the matter and sent the reply that, being *bhaktas*, Sankara (Siva) and Parvati would not accept such sacrifices. The good king thereupon sent back the goats to the owners and sent the recovered cost of the goats to Damodara, who thus tactfully saved the situation without committing himself to an approval of Devi-worship.

It was Ramananda of Northern India (1299-1410), who

adopted the medium of the language of the common people for his teaching and gave it the dignity of a classical tongue. Sankaradeva also adopted the effective method of propagating the gospels of his faith through Assamese. The *Bhagavata-purana* formed the mainstay of his cult. This work he studied thoroughly and rendered portions of it into simple Assamese verses, songs and dramas, so that the teaching might appeal to the commonalty. This was more than the existing priesthood could tolerate, and some of this class in their private discussions said: "Being a Sudra, he has rendered the *Bhagavata* to the *payara* metre. Verily this act is immensely wrong. What we say, (the people) should do: such is the reasoning of sastras." The objection that a Sudra should not read this great Purana was met with by Sankara on the authority of the work itself.

Sankaradeva was brought to book in the Koch court of Behar for accepting brahmanas among others as disciples, and this was his reply to the charge, addressed to Naranarayana: "Thou hast invited me to explain why, a Sudra, I render nama (the secret formula composite of names of Vishnu) (to people). Hath not Kapila's mother thus said in the *Bhagavata*?—'A Chandala, whose tongue giveth out the names of God, is superior to a brahmana, versed in the four Vedas. That (Chandala) hath (as it were) undergone all penances, performed all sacrifices, abided by all rules of custom and visited all sacred places.' Listen, O king, to another point of reason I adduce from the sastras: it is only brahmanas who can render lessons in the Veda, diksha and mantra. But caste is not to be considered in the case of an *acharya* (preceptor) who giveth only *nama-upadesa*; he can be *acharya* to people of all the four castes, and that can be counted as no wrong."

A Sudra *guru* received the same sort of salutations from a brahmana disciple as could be expected of a Sudra follower. Persons belonging to different castes became heads of *sattras*, and their following also presented a motley variety.

In his *Namaghosha*, Madhavadeva refers to the acceptance of *namadharm*a by people of Garo, Bhota (Bhutiya), Yavana (Muslim), Miri, Asama (Ahom) and Kachari origin, who were till the time of Sankara outside the pale of Hinduism. An old work called *Amulya-ratna* names together these bhaktas of Assam—Govinda, a Garo ; Paramananda, a Miri ; Narahari, an Ahom ; Jayananda, a Bhutiya ; Chandsai, a Muslim, and Bhattadeva, a brahmana. Chandsai (Chandkhan?) was converted by Sankaradeva himself into the faith, and he was so much respected within the Order that he is counted among the great devotees, identified with the beads of an Assam Vaishnava's rosary. Jayahari, originally a Yavana or Muslim, is said to have been accepted by Madhavadeva as a disciple in a dream, and to have been attending the *sattra* services regularly ever since. But it is sometimes asserted that Jayahari came to Mathuradasa at Barpeta, who declined to accept him, and that he placed a purse at the threshold of the *kirtana-ghar*, called Madhavadeva his *guru*, and on return home burnt his old house, built a new one and also gave up his usual food. Sankaradeva converted a Garo, who was newly named as Govinda. According to another account, Govinda Garo and the Bhutiya, later named Jayananda, were accepted as proselytes by Madhava. Among the other disciples of Sankaradeva, Madhava of Jainti village, Srirama Ata and Bhobora Das (Damodara?) are believed to have been of the Hira, Kaivarta and Baniya castes respectively. The chief among the Koch converts of Sankaradeva was Chila-

raya. A Naga (Nocte) chief, Lakha (later re-christened as Narottama), and his subjects were initiated to Vaishnavism by Sriramadeva of the Bareghar-*sattrā*.

The gravest allegation of public indecency levelled against Sankaradeva was that among his followers Kaivartas, Kalitas, Koches, brahmanas and others assembled and dined together. The commodities of food mentioned are milk, bananas and, what is more, flattened rice. This is possibly a reference to the daily *nam-prasāngas* in Sankara's *sattrā* after which food offered to God (*prasāda*) was distributed. It is related how on one occasion Chandsai, the convert from Islam, was asked by Sankara to make the distribution. When this was done, a few in the assembly had some misgivings, which were dispelled by Chandsai himself through a song of a gnomic character.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa says that it was not the intention of Sankara's sect to do away with the traditional Vedic rites for the initiate. Madhavadeva held an ideal in this respect to all people by performing the *śraddha* ceremony of his mother. But this was during the transitional stage of his life, when he was passing from an *avirakta* to a *virakta bhakta*. After this, however, Madhava never performed the ceremony; and this rule was also never performed in his monastery manned by celibate monks only. When a monk died, brahmanical rituals, attendant upon cremation, were not observed.

The great Sankaradeva movement thus brought about a new and comprehensive outlook on life and a distinctly healthy tone to social behaviour. It accelerated the pace of a renaissance of literature and fine arts like music and painting. The dignity of the individual endeavour of man

as a distinct religious being and not as 'the thrall of theological despotism' was declared. Assam rediscovered herself as an integral part of the holy land of Bharatavarsa, and gloried in that discovery. The holy books in Sanskrit, the litterae humaniores of India, could no longer be sealed to the common man's view by a rigid oligarchy. The use of the local language in expositions of theology and philosophy was in itself a challenge to the erstwhile guardians of secret doctrines, who understood the significance of the challenge and 'protested very much.' The new humanism eyed askance at the numerous bloody sacrifices, including the immolation of man, and the nice sacerdotalism that was the order of the day in the Hindu society. The use of Assamese, an Indo-Aryan tongue, which formed but an island in a Tibeto-Burman ocean, as the medium for the propagation of the neo-Vaishnava faith led to its emergence as the language of all the people. The ancient kingdom of Kamarupa was now undergoing a great change, and it was having almost a regeneration, political and social, which timed well with the cultural resurgence initiated by Sankaradeva; and the first possibilities of a unified and modern Assam were now in evidence.

GURU NANAK AND SIKHISM

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GURU NANAK and Sikhism are most modern both in terms of time and concept. The Guru was born in 1469 at Talwandi Rai Bhoi, now Nankana Sahib in Pakistan, and had his early education with the Brahmin and Muslim teachers. In his early youth he occasionally mixed with Muslim saints and Hindu *Sadhus* of different orders. For some time he was in the service of the Punjab Government under Daulat Khan Lodhi at Sultanpur. There he not only used to discuss with professional Muslim priests and government officials but also obtained first-hand knowledge of the socio-political and religio-social lives of the ruling *junta* and of the common people. In the field of religion, which is supposed to guide people in the conduct of their lives, he noticed to his surprise the lack of harmony between the scriptural teachings and priestly preachings. The practices of the people were at variance with their professed creeds. They were Hindus and Muslims only in names. "There is neither any one a Hindu nor a Muslim"—*Na ko Hindu hai na Musalman*—he said on his emergence from his three-day seclusion on the bank of the rivulet Bein near Sultanpur. He was not satisfied with the irreconcilable beliefs and practices of the followers of the two religions nearer home. He wished to see the practical lives of the people of different religions in other parts of the world as well. He, therefore, under-

took extensive tours, visited not only the religious centres of the orthodox Hindus, the Yogis, the Vaishnavites, the Buddhists, the Jains, etc., but also of the Shiah, the Sunnis and other sects of Islam in their original homes in Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Tradition avers that he also visited north-eastern part of Africa in the West and Tibet and south of China in the north. He found that the practice of religion all over the world was confined mostly to the performance of certain rituals and pilgrimages, forgetful of man's duty and responsibility towards his fellow beings, the sons of the common father God, whose Unity and Uniqueness they all proclaimed as the fundamental of their creeds.

During his travels and on his return home, and settlement at Kartarpur (now in Pakistan), on the left bank of the Ravi opposite to Dera Baba Nanak in the Gurdaspur district, he laid the greatest stress on moulding lives in accordance with the teachings of their religions, keeping in view that, as creation of the One and the same God, all human beings were brothers and equals. The differences of colours and creeds were due only to geographical and historical factors. According to him, as he told the Yogis:

Religion does not consist in mere words.

He who looks on all men as equal is religious.

Religion does not consist in wandering to tombs
or places of cremation or sitting in
different postures of contemplation.

Religion does not consist in wandering from
country to country or in bathing at sacred places.

Abide pure amid the impurities of the world,
thus shalt thou find the way of religion.

(*Suhi*, 1, 4-1-8)

The purity of life, according to Guru Nanak, was in truthful living reflected through honest behaviour. "Truth is higher than every thing," he said, but "Higher Still is Truthful living—*Sach-hu orai Sabh ko, uppar sach achar*" (*Sri Rag I, Asht. XIV-6*). In fact truthful living, according to him, was the only religion of man. "Religion there is but one—the religion of Truth—if anyone were to realize and practice it—*Eko dharma drirhe sach koi* (*Basant I, Asht. iii-4*). And the religion of Truth is nothing but truthful living—a life of realization and remembrance of God, who is One, the only One, Eternal Supreme Being, the Creator and Lord of the Universe."

Guru Nanak has defined at some length the qualities of God so that men may imbibe their Spirit in their lives, as, according to him, "one becomes like the one he adores—*Jaisa Seve taise hoe* (*Gauri I, Asht. (Guareri) VII-4*). He wished his followers to realize the omnipresence of the Almighty God and to become truthful, fearless, friendly and benevolent, and to recognize no distinction between man and man on the basis of caste, creed or colour.

The entire concept and structure of religion of Guru Nanak is based on this cardinal principle which is placed in the beginning of the Sikh holy book, the *Guru Granth Sahib* as its opening line:

*Ik Onkar, Sat-nam, Karta-purkh, Nirbhau, Nirvair,
Akal-murat, Ajuni, Saibhang, Gur-prasad. Adi
Sach, Jugad Sach, Hai Bhi Sach, Nanak, Hosi bhi
Sach.*

There is but one God, who is All-Truth, the Creator, devoid of fear and enmity, Immortal, Unborn, Self-existent; the True One was in the Beginning; the

True One was in the Primal Age ; and the True One is now also ; O Nanak, the True One also shall be.

(*Japji—Mulmantra*)

And,

He is of no caste, Unborn, Self-existent, without fear or doubt.

He hath no form or colour or outline

(*Rag Sorath*)

To Guru Nanak, He is neither exclusively the *Allah* of the Muhammadan nor *Vishnu* or Rama of the Hindu, but God of the universe, of all mankind and of all religions. These words denote nothing more than the names of God, the same One God, in different languages. He is not stationed in any particular place, temple or heaven, but pervades the entire universe. He is unparalleled and unequalled. His power is not so limited as to his being driven to the necessity of being incarnated for the proper fulfilment and completion of a certain mission. He is all-powerful and can successfully accomplish anything, anywhere and at any time without assuming human form. He is unfathomable and is manifest in Nature—*balhari qudrat vassia, tera ant na jai lakhia*.

The remembrance of God—*Nam Simran*—is also enjoined by Guru Nanak with the purpose of the realization of his omnipresence. It is not the mere utterance or repetition of a particular word—though that too helps concentrate one's mind on his various attributes—but it is to make one feel and see His presence in every thing, everywhere and at all times, in man, animal and nature. It is to remind one that He is the Creator, the father, of the entire mankind and the Giver of all gifts in life, including the gift of life itself. Forgetful of God's omnipotence and

omnipresence, man in his ego and self-conceit behaves like a tyrant and rides roughshod over the rights of other fellow beings.

He pervades the universe and His command reigns.

(*Rag Sorath*)

By Thy power were made the heavens and the
nether regions.

By Thy power all creation . . .

Thou art the Omnipotent Creator.

All things are subject to Thy Command ;

Thou art altogether unrivalled.

(*Asa di Var*)

Guru Nanak held out no alluring promises of eternal bliss and happiness on the mere adoption of certain sacerdotal rites or a lip-belief in the prophetic character of a particular individual, but enjoined upon his followers to live the life of purity, not as ascetics living upon public charity, but as ideal worldly men living upon the fruit of their honest labour.

They who eat the fruit of their labour and share it
with others, O Nanak, recognize the right path.

(*Sarang ki Var*)

External purification without cleansing of the heart of its defilements is nothing more than hypocrisy. Guru Nanak set no value on ablutions and pilgrimages as such. These, according to him, only add to the vanity and impurities of heart rather than washing them away.

What religious act can he perform who hath greed
in his heart ?

He only uttereth falsehood and eateth poison.

(*Sorath, Ashtpadi*)

When mind is impure, the body is impure

Impurity of the heart is greed.

Impurity of the tongue is falsehood. . . .

Those are not really pure, who sit with their bodies washed.

They alone are pure in whose heart God dwells.

(*Asa di Var*)

O man, remain at home ; go nowhere, my friend ;

By searching abroad thou shalt suffer much affliction ;

The water of life is in thy heart at home.

Forsake vice and pursue virtue ; thy vice thou shalt regret.

Inside thee is the great filth of covetousness and falsehood ; why wastest thou thine outside? . . .

Abandon covetousness and slander, forswear

falsehood and thou shalt obtain the true fruit

(*Rag Sorath*)

The practice of truth is the acceptable ablution.

When there is truth in the heart, then man becometh true and obtaineth the True One.

(*Wadhans Chhant*)

Guru Nanak believed in the unity and uniqueness of God. He would not accept the multiplicity or intermediation of any gods and goddesses and he rejected the worship of idols, tombs and places of cremation.

My brethren, you worship gods and goddesses ;

What can you ask them? And what can they give you ?

(*Sorath, Ashtpadi*)

He who worshippeth stones, visiteth places of

pilgrimage, dwelleth in forests and renounceth

the world, wandereth and wavereth.

(*Danasari, Ashtpadi*)

He believed in no taboos and prohibitions attached to eating, drinking and clothing as were observed by certain classes of people, both Hindus and Muslims. He considered the drawing of lines for cooking squares and the defilement of food on its being touched by men of the so-called low castes and classes, as superstitious. In his words "eating and drinking is pure, it is given by God for sustenance." However,

The enjoyment of that food is evil, my friend, which gives pain to the body and evil thoughts to the mind.

The wearing of that dress is evil, my friend, which gives pain to the body and evil thoughts to the mind.

(*Sri Rag*)

He maintained that the salvation is not obtained by renouncing the world, residing in forests and there torturing and annihilating the body by austerities and penances. Nanak described the body as "the palace, the temple, and the house of God, where He has put His eternal light" (*Rag Malar*), and so he asked the mankind to "So nourish the body that you may serve the Lord" (*Rag Suhi*). According to him, the Lord could be served the best in the service of humanity, and humanity in turn, was served the best by the cultivation of virtue and renunciation of evil. He says:

Man's life is as acts constrain him.

As a man soweth so shall he reap ;

As he earneth so shall he eat.

(*Rag Suhi*)

Truth is higher than everything ; but higher still is
truthful living.

(*Sri Rag*)

The conquest of the mind is the conquest of the
world.

(*Japji*)

The words man speaketh, shall be taken into
account.

Man's movements shall be taken into account ;
what he heareth and seeth shall be taken into
account.

Every breath that he draweth shall be taken into
account.

Make thy mind the farmer, this body the earth,
good deeds the seed, and irrigate it with the rain
of God's Name.

God will germinate in thy heart and thus
shalt thou gain imperishable merit.

(*Sri Rag*)

Guru Nanak clearly saw the inequity of the caste system and the state of torpor in which it had enveloped the whole Indian society. He set his face against it resolutely and resorted to no half-way measures. There was no question of reform ; the system was to go lock, stock and barrel. He declared that caste was incorrigible evil and must be abolished.

Nonsense are castes, and nonsense the names
attached to them.

All creatures are under one shelter, that of God.

(*Sri Rag*)

He would recognize no special privileges for the high castes, nor would he hold the low ones in compulsory

subjection. To him all were equal. There could be no distinction of high and low amongst the children of the One Father God. Guru Nanak declared the fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man and proclaimed absolute justice in the divine realm in the light of merit based on individual action. He said: *Sa zat sa pat hai, jehe karm kamae* (*Prabhati*), that is, the caste and status are determined by the work one does, and not by the accident of birth.

Recognize divine light in everyone. Do not enquire about caste.

There is no caste in the next world.

(*Rag Asa*)

What power has caste? It is one's action that is to be judged.

(*Rag Majh*)

The whole world is made of the same clay, as a potter makes vessels of different shapes.

(*Rag Bhairo*)

Nanak, no body is without some worth.

(*Rag Ramkali*)

Untouchability and contemptuous treatment of the depressed *Sudra* classes are inseparable adjuncts of the caste system, and Guru Nanak unrelentingly attacked them with all the force at his command. He condemned the haughty and scornful attitude of the high castes and identified himself with the lowest of the low.

There are lowest men among the low castes ;

Nanak, I am with them, what have I got to do with the great?

God's eye of mercy falls on those who take care of the lowly.

(*Sri Rag*)

He denounced the very idea of impurity attached to God's creation and refused to admit of any distinction between the high-caste Hindus and the so-called untouchables. According to the Brahmans, foul is the ablution of the Chandala, and vain are his religious ceremonies and decorations. But to Nanak, a low-born, but God-abiding and truthful Chandala living upon the fruit of his honest labour, is a thousand times better than the hypocrite high-born who enjoy carrion and human blood.

It is true that some work in this direction had been done by some *Bhaktas* and reformers in the middle ages, 'but the snake of untouchability still remained unscotched', because the privilege of equality was not extended to *men* as such, but to those individuals who had washed off their untouchability with the love of God. Kabir, Ravidas, Namdev and Sadhna had no doubt become *Bhaktas*, but the other weavers, shoemakers, calico-printers and butchers were still held as untouchables. It was reserved for Guru Nanak and his successors to effect an improvement on this idea. They declared the whole humanity to be one, and that man was to be honoured not because he belonged to this or that caste or creed, but because he was a man, an emanation from God, and because He had given the same senses and the same soul to all men.

Guru Nanak also raised the social status of woman. For centuries of Brahmanical domination, she had been condemned to a low position in society and was identified with the depressed *Sudra*. Guru Nanak felt for her suffering lot and stood up in her defence. He said :

It is by woman that we are conceived and from her that we are born. It is with her that we are betrothed and married.

It is woman we befriend, and it is she who keeps the race going.

When one woman dies, another is sought for, and it is with her that we get established in society.

Why call her evil from whom are born kings and great men?

(*Asa di Var*, 19)

The observations of Guru Nanak were not confined to religious matters only. As an active member of society he was no less vocal about the socio-political life of his people. To him politics was as much a part of their social life as anything else that regulated and governed it. He condemned the tyranny and injustice of the ruling classes as well as the cowardice and cringing servility of the subjects who were giving up their traditions, dress, language and, above all, self-respect, and were taking to the ways of the foreign rulers to please them. He was very unhappy with this state of affairs and has said in more than one hymn :

They who have no honour while alive,
shall have an evil reputation after their death.

(*Sarang ki Var*, xiv-1)

They alone are counted as good and praiseworthy
who have self-respect and honour to their credit.

(*Asa di Var*, II)

Guru Nanak was a man of the masses, a prophet of the people. He would not sit idle feelinglessly while the people around him groaned helplessly under the tyrannous oppressions of the rulers. He stood up for them manfully and said in unambiguous terms :

Kings are butchers, cruelty their knife. *Dharma*, or the sense of duty and responsibility, has taken wings and vanished.

Falsehood prevails like the darkness of the darkest night. The moon of truth is not to be seen anywhere.

(*Var, Majh*, 16-17)

“It is the fools and idiots who rule over the people without the good of the people at heart”, said the Guru. And, in his words, “the kings should be the dispensers of equity and justice.”

He was an eye-witness to the massacre of the town of Saidpur (now Eminabad, in Pakistan) at the hands of the Mughals during the third invasion of Babur in 1521 and he felt deeply shocked at the helplessness of his countrymen reduced to abject slavery by the invading soldiers. Referring to this event the Guru said :

With the bridal procession of Sin, Babur issued forth
from Kabul and by force demanded the hand of
the bride, oh Lalo!

Modesty and religion have disappeared and falsehood
marcheth in the van.

People sing the paeon of murder and smear themselves
with saffron of blood.

(*Tilang*, 3-5)

What pained him most were the pitiable sufferings of the womenfolk carried away and dishonoured by the ruthless soldiers of the Mughal army. He shed tears of blood, saying :

Those who wore beautiful tresses and had the partings
of their hair with vermilion have their locks
now shorn with scissors, and dust is thrown upon
their heads.

Broken are their strings of pearls. Wealth and beauty

have now become their bane. Dishonoured, and with ropes round their necks, they are carried away by soldiers.

When Babur's rule was proclaimed, no one could eat his food.

(*Asa, Asht. I, 3-5*)

If a powerful person were to attack another powerful person, there shall be no anger in my mind, but if a ferocious lion falls upon a herd of cattle, the master of the herd should show his manliness.

(*Asa, ghar vi, 39*)

He laid the responsibility for the misery of the people on the ruling Lodhis who could not manfully defend their subjects and allowed the precious gem of the country to fall into the hands of the foreigners. To quote his own words :

The dogs (the Lodhis) have thrown away the priceless gem of inheritance ; when they are dead and gone, no one will remember them with regard.

(*Asa, ghar vi, 39*)

This was evidently said after the battle of Panipat in 1526 when the Lodhi Sultan Ibrahim lost the Indian empire to Babur.

Guru Nanak's protest against tyranny was simultaneously a demand for liberty, for freedom from foreign yoke. Attack on any type of slavery is born of a yearning for the upliftment of the down-trodden people, and he laid the greatest stress on it.

In this way the teachings of Guru Nanak touch all aspects of human life and deserve a close study by all seekers of truth in life and of goodwill and peace in the world.

Guru Nanak, as we have seen, was not a visionary idealist or a speculative theorist, nor does his religion boast of any complicated philosophy couched in a language beyond the understanding of ordinary men. He knew that men in the world do not always live by philosophy. They live by sheer force of habits formed in their day to day lives. If people were to live by philosophies, this world of ours would be a world of saints and sages. There would then be no untruth, no hypocrisy, no slander and covetousness, no ego, no differences of high and low, no distinctions of superior and inferior people, no colour prejudices, no quarrels and no wars. The whole world would then be one family, living and working for peace and goodwill among its members. From days immemorial, the ancient land of Bharata has been the home of great philosophers. But, has it ever been without any evil, misunderstanding and war? The Brahmins of India have given to the world the greatest philosophies of mankind. Yet it is their descendants and successors who are mostly responsible for creating and perpetuating the distinctions of castes and classes and for suppressing innumerable groups of human beings as untouchables and unapproachables whose slightest touch and shadow polluted the upper-class people. This evil has, through the centuries, been so strongly entrenched in the minds of people that it persists up to the present day, and, at times, sincere devotees of God are refused admission into the temples dedicated to Him. This is all due to prejudices of caste distinctions which have come to be confirmed as uneradicable habits. The same may as well be said of other practices in social or religious life. It was, therefore, that Guru Nanak laid special emphasis on the practical side of religion which, according to him, is not a philo-

sophy but a way of life to be lived in the world as an integral part of its great family.

To introduce and inculcate a new way of life into the people, they must first be convinced of the error in their old ways. This should be done in a manner which should appeal to their reason and inner self. The use of force for the spread of religion is most undesirable and is harmful to religion itself. It either demoralises its victims or creates in them a spirit of resistance and hatred.

Guru Nanak was a great psychologist. He understood the nature of the people he had to contend with for the propagation of his views. His aim was to mould the minds of those whom he wished to reform. He, therefore, always had a smile on his face, and used the receptive method of humour. And he was always successful in his mission, even under the most trying circumstances and in the strangest of lands far away from his country and his people. He was endowed with an extraordinary presence of mind. The fearless expression of his views touched the inner chords of his listeners and carried conviction not only with the most religious fanatic but also with professional cheats and diabolical murderers whom he was able to transform into pious devotees.

The unprecedented success that attended his mission of spiritual emancipation and social uplift of people was mostly due to his correct diagnosis of the ills of the suffering humanity and the proper remedies that he prescribed for and administered to them. He could at once see that estrangement and strife between different peoples and communities in the world was due to the lack of correct understanding of their common spiritual heritage and close relationship with one another. If people were to

realize, he felt, that God as the Creator, was the common father of all human beings and they were all members of the universal brotherhood, much of the misunderstanding and strife responsible for the miseries of the world would disappear. And, as long as people persisted in following their old ideas and worshipping different gods and goddesses, creation of mutual goodwill and understanding was impossible. Therefore, he laid the greatest stress on the unity and uniqueness of God which is the basic principle of Guru Nanak's creed.

During his travels he had established *Sangats* or mixed congregations to propagate his message. To these *Sangats* was attached, as an essential part, *Guru ka langar* or free community kitchen where the entire gathering sat in *Pangats* or mixed rows, regardless of caste, creed, country or colour, and had their meals together. This served as a leveller for all distinctions of the Brahmanical high and low—the Brahmin and the *Sudra*—and of the Muslim *Mamin* and *Kafir*. No ritual was observed at these congregations beyond a thanks-giving prayer to the Bestower of all gifts and the singing of His praises to put the congregations in tune with the Infinite. Constant remembrance of God, honest and conscientious work and sharing the fruit of one's labour with one's fellow-beings—*Nam japna (simran)*, *Kirt karna* and *Wand chhakna*—were the cardinal principles that were to guide the lives of the followers of Guru Nanak and were inculcated at these congregational centres popularly known as *dharm-sal*.

Kartarpur, where the Guru finally settled down with his wife and children, virtually developed into a *dharm-sal*. People from all sides flocked to him for instruction in the new faith and were surprised to find the *Guru* leading the life of a householder and following the profession of

an agriculturist. This, not un-naturally, upset the professional ascetic practitioners in religion. It, however, had a great appeal to the common people who had to live in the world, with duties and responsibilities towards their kith and kin, towards their neighbours, and towards their fellow countrymen and others. As a practical way of life, the precept and example of Guru Nanak greatly helped mould the lives of his visitors and disciples, known as the *Sikhs*, into the new pattern of Guru Nanak's discipline, *Sikhi* or Sikhism, which literally means 'learning (and practising) the Master's precepts'—*Sikhi sikhia Gur vichar* (*M. 1, Var Asa, 5*).

Guru Nanak felt that the emancipation of people from the age-old prejudices and traditions, creating differences and hatred between men and men, could not be effected in one generation. He had, no doubt, set the people athinking and created an awakening. But there was the fear of people dozing back into the old slumber. Therefore, it needed sustained effort to keep his movement alive and to make it an integral part of the life of the people.

Some time before his death in 1539, therefore, he selected a devoted disciple of his, Lehna by name, to succeed him and formally bestowed the *Guruship* upon him in preference to his sons. One of them Sri Chand had renounced the world and had become an ascetic *Sadhu*, while the other Lakhmi Das was too worldly to come up to the required standard. Lehna, on the other hand, had so identified himself with the teachings of Guru Nanak as to be indistinguishable from the Master, and the Guru considered him to be his own very self, the spirit of his spirit and the limb of his limb, and called him 'Angad' (of his own limb). The new *Guru Angad* literally merged

his personality into that of Guru Nanak and composed all his hymns under the *nom de plume* of Nanak. This practice was also followed by the subsequent Gurus, Amar Das to Tegh Bahadur.

Guru Angad strengthened the institutions of *Sangat* and *Pangat* set up by the first Guru, and his successor Guru Amar Das stood for the emancipation of women and opposed the practices of *Parda* and *Sati*. The fourth Guru Ram Das gave to the Sikhs a rallying centre at Amritsar where, in 1574, he laid the foundation of the present city of the Golden Temple. It was reserved for the fifth Guru Arjan (1581-1606) to collect the writings of his predecessors and to compile the holy scripture of the Sikhs, including therein his own compositions. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, as this book is called, includes not only the hymns of the Sikh Gurus but also of a number of Hindu, Muslim and so-called untouchable saints and sages of India. It may as such be called the Bible of the People. The most remarkable thing about it is that it is written in the spoken language of the people to whom the Masters delivered their message of devotion to God and service to humanity.

This steady growth of Sikhism and its increasing popularity among the Hindus as well as the Muslims who joined the Sikh faith in large numbers, created a heart-burning jealousy among the *Naqshbandi* enthusiasts who used their religious influence with Emperor Jehangir and had Guru Arjan arrested and executed under a political pretence. He was the first martyr at the altar of Sikhism.

Guru Arjan's son and successor Guru Hargobind (1606-45) felt that a stage had arrived in the development of Sikhism when its followers should be prepared to

defend themselves against the tyranny of the ruling *junta*. He, therefore, combined the spiritual and temporal resources—*Piri* and *Miri*—to combat the forces of evil and encouraged the use of arms in defence of *dharma*.

This was the first step towards the transformation of Sikhism into a militant church. *Shri Samarth* Ramdas, the great Maratha saint, was surprised to see *Guru Hargobind*, the successor of *Guru Nanak*, riding a horse, with swords dangling by his sides. "I had heard that you occupied the seat of *Guru Nanak*. . . .Nanak was a *tyagi sadhu* . . . What sort of a *sadhu* are you?" he asked. *Guru Hargobind* replied: "Internally a hermit, and externally a prince. Arms mean protection to the poor and destruction to the tyrant. *Baba Nanak* had not renounced the world but had renounced *maya*, i.e., self and ego."

These words of *Guru Hargobind* found a ready response in the heart of *Samarth* Ramdas who spontaneously said: "*Yeh hamare man bhavti hai*—this appealeth to my mind" (*Pothi Panjah Sakhian*, No. 39).

Guru Hargobind was succeeded by *Guru Har Rai* whose assistance to the fugitive philosopher-prince *Dara Shikoh* excited the wrath of Emperor *Aurangzeb*. The eighth *Guru Har Krishan* was followed by *Guru Tegh Bahadur* who was ordered by the Emperor to be executed in 1675 for his proselytizing activities and espousing the cause of the Kashmiri Hindus and associating with Sufi saints like *Hafiz Adam* and others for whom he harboured in his mind the deepest of hatred.

Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708), the well-known soldier-saint of India, was the tenth and the last *Guru* of the Sikhs. He believed that, like the saviours of old, he had come into the world with a particular mission. He

could see that although the teachings of his predecessors and their unique examples of martyrdom at the altar of their faith had elevated the spirits of the Sikhs, the old social prejudices and shackles of the caste system had not yet been completely broken. And this had hindered the integration of the Sikhs into a homogeneous classless people inspired by a common national ideal. In fact, the idea of nationalism had not yet emerged in this country and Guru Gobind Singh felt that a change in the psychology of the people was necessary for its birth. This he achieved by introducing into the Sikhs a new form of baptism, *Khande da Amrit*, and enjoining upon the baptized Sikhs to be called the *Khalsa*, *Wahiguru ji ka Khalsa*, the Lord's own, wearing at all time in future the same five distinctive symbols beginning with the letter *K*: *Kesh* (uncut hair), *Kangha* (a comb), *Kachha* (a pair of shorts), *Kara* (an iron bracelet) and *Kripan* (a sword). Not only this. As soon as the first ceremony was over, he himself, to the surprise of all present, knelt down before the Initiated Five as a candidate, begging them that he might as well be baptized in the same form and manner. The initiation of a *Guru* by his disciples was a thing unknown in the history of religions. But Guru Gobind Singh wished to level down the distinction between the *Guru* and the *Shishyas* (Sikhs), the Master and the disciples, offering to adopt the same forms and symbols and to submit to the same discipline as had been laid down for the *Khalsa*. He was of the *Khalsa*, he said, and the *Khalsa* was the very breath of his life, nay, his very self. Well has this strange phenomenon been acclaimed by a contemporary poet Bhai Gurdas II, saying:

Waih pargateo mard agammra waryam ikela
Wah! Wah Gobind Singh, ape Gur chela.

And lo! there appeared an unsurpassable man,
a unique hero ;

Wonderful, wonderful is Guru Gobind Singh,
a venerable preceptor as well as a humble
disciple.

The emergence of the new order of the *Khalsa* which recognized only the unity of God and rejected the multiplicity of gods and goddesses and abolished the distinction of castes and classes, created a stir among the idolatrous Hill Rajputs of Brahmanical persuasion. They not only attempted to eject the Guru from his ancestral residence at Anandpur at the foot of the Shivalik Hills, but also occasionally excited the Mughal officials against him and sought their help to oust him.

Writing to Emperor Aurangzeb in response to his invitation to see him in the Deccan, the Guru tells him in his well-known letter, the *Zafar Nama*, that the cause of the Hill Rajput Rajahs' opposition to him was that "they are idol-worshippers and I am an idol-breaker—*kih o but-prast and wa man but-shikan*." And the cause of his reluctance to proceed to the Deccan was that the Emperor's "*bakhshis* and *diwans* (who generally carried his messages) are all liars" as they had in the past gone back upon their oaths on the holy Quran.

The Guru, however, later set out for the Deccan to see the Emperor and was near Baghaur in Rajasthan on his way when the news came to him that the Emperor had died at Ahmadnagar in February 1707. A few months later he met the new Emperor Bahadur Shah and helped him with a detachment of men in the battle of succession at Jajau in June and accompanied him to the Deccan where, at Nanded, he died on October 6-7, 1708.

A day before his death when some of his Sikh companions enquired of the Guru as to who would be his successor, he replied that in view of some past experience and future fears about the rise of pretenders and its unhealthy effect upon the community as a whole, it was not desirable to appoint any person as the *Guru* and that he had transferred his physical self to the *Khalsa*, who was his very self, and entrusted their spiritual guidance to the 'Word of the Masters' as embodied in the *Granth Sahib* which would thenceforward be recognized as *Guru Granth Sahib*.

This was the last word of the tenth and the last *Guru* Gobind Singh in the historical development of Sikhism which had its birth in the teachings and preachings of Guru Nanak and had been expounded by his nine successors without any change whatever.

The subsequent history of the Sikh people belongs to their rise to political power for which they had to make innumerable sacrifices and had to wade through pools of their blood during the eighteenth century. The establishment of their republican confederacies under the Misaldar Sardars in the seventeen fifties and sixties and of the kingdom of the Panjab under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the nineteenth century were the direct results of the impact of Sikhism on the people of the country.

The Udasis, the Nirmalas, the Nihangs, also known as the Akalis, etc., are missionary orders of the Sikhs. The first two have rendered invaluable service to the community in carrying the message of Sikhism far and wide, in India and abroad. The Nihangs or the Akalis have kept alive the spirit of the *Khalsa* of the eighteenth century. The Nirankaris and the Namdharis have also contributed

in their own way to the spread of Sikhism during the nineteenth century. The seventies of the nineteenth century also saw the emergence of the Singh Sabha movement at a very critical time in the history of the Sikhs and Sikhism. At that time they encountered multi-pronged attacks from different sides and were threatened with absorption into older religions in the country. The leaders of the movement, however, were successful in meeting the challenges and enthusing the community with revivalism through a network of Singh Sabha spread by the Khalsa Diwans of Amritsar and Lahore and the Chief Khalsa Diwan, Amritsar, and its Sikh Educational Committee.

SUFI MOVEMENT

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By SUFISM is meant the mode of religious life in Islam, in which stress is laid more on the cultivation of the inner self than on the performance of the prescribed rituals. In other words, it is a term signifying mysticism in Islam. Opinions vary among scholars as to the derivation and connotation of the word 'Sufi'. According to Professor A. J. Arberry, the eminent modern Islamicist, the nickname *Sufi*, which is undoubtedly derived from the Arabic word *Suf*, meaning 'wool', appears to have been applied in the first place to one Abu Hashim Uthman b. Sharik of Kufa, who died about the year 776 ; by the middle of the ninth century, the term came to be used as a regular appellation of those who practised austere asceticism. It was not until the tenth century that the word acquired a theosophical connotation. Starting from Basra and Kufa, the mystical movement spread to all parts of the Islamic world.

Before reaching India, the Sufi movement had already touched a high watermark of perfection in the twelfth century with the institution of the first mystic Order by Syedna, Hadrat Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani al-Baghdadi, universally recognised as the greatest saint of Islam, who is invariably invoked by the titles of "Muhyi al-Din" ("Reviver of Religion") "Gauth al-Azam" ("the greatest succourer") and "Piran-i-Pir" ("Saint of all Saints"), etc. He dec-

lared ex-cathedra in Baghdad: "My foot is on the shoulder of every Saint." This celebrated dictum of the holy saint has been accepted by the saints of all the Orders. The determining factor in the widespread influence of Qadiri Order was its insistence on strict adherence to the religious laws and the practices of orthodoxy. In fact, the entire Muslim world holds the founder of the Order in highest reverence. Though the Order was introduced much later in India, it has always enjoyed and still enjoys, widest popularity. In fact, all the mystical orders of Islam owe their allegiance to the Qadiri Order.

The Chishti and the Suhrawardi were the earliest Sufi Orders to flourish in India. The Sultanate period of mediaeval India is marked by the dominance of these two Orders, while the Moghul era is noted for the pre-eminence gained by the Naqshbandi and the Qadiri Saints. The Chishti Order of Sufism was introduced in India by Khwaja Mainuddin Sijzi (d. 1236) who arrived in India shortly before the conquest of Muhammad Ghuri, after receiving spiritual blessings from Hadrat Ghauth al-Azam. The saint after some wanderings in the land finally settled at Ajmer, where his mausoleum is a great centre of pilgrimage for the people of the subcontinent.

The Khwaja's disciple and spiritual successor Qutubuddin Bhaktiyar Kaki (d. 1236) chose Delhi as the centre of his mission. The saint commanded great respect from all and sundry and was held in high esteem by Sultan Iltutmish. Another centre, noted for its austere ascetic discipline, was established at Ajodhan by Khwaja Kaki's disciple Khwaja Farid-ud-Din Masud, hagiographically known as Ganj-i-Shakar (1175-1265), whose tomb is situated at Pakpatan.

But the most eminent of the Delhi Chistis was Baba

Farid's disciple Hadrat Nizam ul-Din Auliya (d. 1323), who exercised such a great spiritual influence over the people that some of the Tughlaq Sultans even saw in the saint a great political danger. The Shaikh saw the reigns of seven successive Sultans of Delhi, all of whom, except Qutubuddin Mubarak, held him in great respect. It was on account of the endeavours of the Mahbub-i-Ilahi (the beloved of God), with which title the Shaikh was popularly known, that the Sufi movement struck its roots deep in the hearts of the common people. His shrine in Delhi still serves as a cementing force among the many thousands who throng round it throughout the year.

Among the saint's successors, Nasiruddin Chirag of Delhi (d. 1367) enjoyed popularity. The reign of Sultan Muhammad Tughlaq (1325-51), who was not well-disposed to the saints based in Delhi, marks the decentralization of the Chishti branch of the Sufi movement. The result was that the Sufis gradually dispersed into provinces. Thus Shaikh Sirajuddin Uthmani (d. 1357), known as Akhi Siraj, carried the message to Bengal. The Shaikh's spiritual successor in Bengal was Shaikh Alauddin Alaul Haq (d. 1398), whose son, Shaikh Nur Qutb-i-Alam propagated, through his mystical teachings, the Islamic message of love, equality and brotherhood among the people. In the Deccan, the torchbearers of the Chisti Order were Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib (d. 1340) and Khwaja Muhammad Gesudraz (d. 1422), who was the author of several interesting works on Sufism. Among the Chisti saints who shone under the great Mughals, the pride of place goes to Shaikh Salim Chisti, for whom Emperor Akbar had great regard. The Chisti saints imparted instruction to their disciples in practical mysticism, which aimed at the complete transformation of the life of the disciple's spiritual

being. The lives of these saints are marked by simplicity and purity. They attached greatest importance to the upliftment of the society as a whole. In their zeal to serve the people, they even incurred the wrath of the kings and nobles of the day. Memoirs of the Chishti saints are full of illustrations when the saints shunned the favours shown by the rulers. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, who witnessed the reigns of as many as seven Delhi Kings, represented a dynamic spiritual force in mediaeval India. His disciples carried his message of love to all parts of the country. 'Reforms of the People' was the sheet-anchor of the Shaikh's teachings and as such it has great relevance to the concept of social justice and benevolence of Islam. Love of humanity was the cornerstone of his ethical messages which he inculcated among his followers. In their mystical experiments, the saints did not lose touch with the realities of life.

The Chishti mystics believed in the spiritual value of music, and the musical assemblies (*Mahfel-i-Sama*) were the common features of their *Khanquahs*. Though the observance of such musical festivals carried some restrictions, this exclusive Chishti feature became gradually an institution by itself. Talented professional singers, irrespective of caste or creed, were patronized by the saints. Music as a spiritual stimulant thus acquired a strong social significance which continues to the present day. The musical assemblies at the Khanquahs of Chishti Sufis played a congenial role in the popularization of vernaculars, in which many verses were composed.

While the Chishti Sufis lived a life of ascetic poverty, the Suhrawardy saints generally maintained their Khanquahs in wealth and affluence. Unlike the Chishtis, they

established good relations with the Delhi kings of the day, mainly with a view to exercising a moral impact on them. Hadrat Bahauddin Zakariyya, a disciple of Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardy, set up his hospice in Multan and exerted a tremendous influence on the people by means of his spiritual powers. Sadruddin Ariff (d. 1285), Zakariyya's son and successor, led a puritanic life and unlike his father, kept himself aloof from the kings and nobles. In 1443, a Multani Suhrawardi, Shaikh Yusuf, was even elected king of Multan and northern Sind, but his reign was short lived. The Suhrawardi Order broke up in Northern India in the wake of Timur's invasion. The subsequent Suhrawardis lived mainly in Gujarat where they enjoyed great respect and prestige in the Courts of Gujarati Rulers.

The Sufi Order of the Naqshbandis spearheaded Islamic reaction against Akbar's heresy. Their most outstanding contributions lay in the intellectual sphere. It was introduced in India by Khwaja Baqibillah (d. 1603), seventh in line of succession to Khwaja Bahauddin Naqshband, the founder of the Order. The Naqshbandi mission reached its climax in the life and work of Khwaja Baqibillah's most distinguished disciple, Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi. The latter used the pen as a powerful medium for his preachings. His epistles, written to individuals for the propagation of Islam and its mystical ideas, were directed towards the rehabilitation of the said religion in India. He was much respected for his learning by Abul Fazl and Faizi and had powerful disciples at the imperial court. Jahangir, who once imprisoned the Shaikh, later bestowed gifts on him and made a respectable mention of his name in his *Tuzuk*. Shaikh Ahmad was op-

posed to heterodox Sufism as it was susceptible to pantheistic notions, having resemblance to the Hindu traditions. The only way to realize the mysteries of Divine existence, asserted the Shaikh, is to follow the Shariat without which a believer is very likely to be led astray. It was on account of the Shaikh's efforts to harmonize the doctrines of mysticism with the teachings of orthodox Islam that Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi was called the 'Mujaddid', the renovator of Islam.

Another outstanding figure in Naqshbandi Sufism was the poet Mazhar Jan-i-Janan, who exercised profound influence on contemporary mystic thought. His hospice at Delhi was a great centre of mystic activity and hundreds of devotees daily received instructions from him in the intricate liturgical practices of the Naqshbandi Order. In short, Mirza Jan-i-Janan was a mystic with a cosmopolitan outlook and wide sympathies.

The Qadiriyya Order of Sufism has always had a pre-eminent position in the subcontinent, ever since it was introduced here. Its founder, as stated above, is the most universally revered of all the saints of Islam. The Qadiri Order has been the main force behind the spread of Islam in Western Africa and Central Asia. The first representatives of the order in India were Shah Nimatullah and Makhdum Muhammad Jilani, who lived towards the middle of the fifteenth century. During the sixteenth century, Shaikh Daud was the leading Qadri Saint who was greatly loved by the people, irrespective of caste and religion. Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith Dehlawi, one of India's leading Muslim theologians, came into the fold of this order by accepting the discipleship of Shaikh Musa

Gilani, the eminent contemporary Qadiri saint.

The Qadiri Order found a great devotee in Prince Dara Shikuh who came under the direct spiritual influence of the celebrated saint Miyan Mir. At this point of time, the spiritual life of Muslim India had reached a critical stage. Esoteric heterodoxy, as represented by Akbar's eclecticism, and conformist orthodoxy, as represented by the Naqshbandi mission, brought about a tension which had its reflection in the imperial household, as everywhere else in the Muslim society of India. The speculative syncretism of Prince Dara Shikuh, and the theocratic particularism of Prince Aurangzib were an illustration of the polarization of tension in the royal dynasty. After having acquired the esoteric knowledge of the Qadiri Order, Dara Shikuh wrote two well-known hagiographical works, the *Safinatul Aulia* and the *Sakinatul Aulia*. Gradually, the prince switched over to the syncretic interpretation of Hindu scriptures with the purpose of establishing an identification of the Hindu mysticism with the Islamic. He had the *Yoga Vasistha* and the *Bhagvad Gita* translated into Persian, and himself prepared a Persian rendering of fifty-two Upanishads under the title *Sirr-i-Akbar*. Through his syncretic mysticism, Prince Dara Shikuh aimed at creating harmony and concord between Islam and Hinduism and removing the barriers imposed by the dissimilarity of the religions. It should also be noted that the missionary work of the Sufis contributed to the development of Indian vernaculars. The hospices of the saints was a meeting ground of the various sorts of people, including the nobles and the lords. The intermingling of the multitude, which included converted Muslims and unconverted or semi-converted Hindus, at the Khanquahs of the Sufi Shaikhs gave an indirect im-

petus to the growth of native tongues in the context of Perso-Arabic linguistic impact. The mystics were mostly Persian-speaking, yet they insisted on using the indigenous language as their medium for propagating their message of love and brotherhood. The teachings could only be imparted in the language understood by the masses. *Hindawi*, which was the other name for Urdu in its embryonic stage, was the *lingua franca* of India during the mediaeval era. The Sufis found this common vernacular to be the most suitable vehicle to convey their message to the people. Hagiological documents attribute pre-Urdu expressions to saints like Shaikh Ganj-i-Shakar who flourished in the thirteenth century. Saints flourishing in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries too have been recorded as having composed phrases in Hindawi much earlier than Urdu actually took a definite literary shape. But there is no denying the fact that the Sufi mendicants were the first to make literary use of Urdu whether in the Northern, Southern or Western India -centres where the language developed simultaneously later on. The first prose work in Urdu is the *Miraj ul-Ashiqin* (1421) written by Khwaja Muhammad Gesudaraz. In Gujarat, Shamsul Ushshaq Meranji (d. 1496) wrote *Khub Tarang* in an Urdu mixed with Gujarati dialects and thus set up a model medium for Sufi narrative verse. The early poetical utterances of the Sufis contain borrowings from Hindu mystical traditions and literary motifs. Thus, the contributions of the Sufis to the growth of vernaculars, particularly Urdu, eloquently testify to the social significance of their movement.

In the field of Persian epistolography, the Sufi tradition held the upper hand. The Shaikhs wrote to their

followers long expository epistles which are noted more for their contents than their style. The letters of Ahmad ibn Yahya Maneri and Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi constitute important parts of Indian Sufistic literature. The Sufi Shaikhs also wrote political letters to Muslim lords and amirs, offering advice on contemporary political issues. The Naqshbandi saint, Ahmad Sirhindi, wrote to Shaikh Farid, on Jahangir's accession to throne, to try to put the new Emperor on the path of orthodoxy, and guard him against the heretical heritage of Akbar. Shaikh Abdul Haq Dehlawi and Shah Waliullah are also noted for their epistles containing political admonitions, apart from theological and ethical matters. It needs no saying that the political themes of the writings of the Sufis did not amount to their involvement in the political tussle of their respective age. In whatever they wrote their objectives always were reformist in nature, in accordance with the requirements of the Sharia.

The Sufi Khanquahs were not an institution of asceticism. The life lived in the Sufi hospices had an essential social basis established on the principle of contact—close contact between the Shaikh and his followers, on the one hand and humanitarian mutual contact among guests, new-comers and the surrounding populace, on the other. The life of a Khanquah was centred on the personality of the Shaikh and every activity therein emanated from his instructions. Visitors to the convent included not only Muslims but also Yogis and Hindus, who came to seek both blessings and knowledge. The centres of Sufi movement were, therefore, not isolated oases in the desert of worldly life. They were dynamic centres of

propagation of universal Islamic message of humanity and love.

Among the missionaries of Islam in India, the ascetic Sufi proved closer to the masses of the people than the learned theologian who usually lacked spiritual sensitiveness. Wherever he went, the Sufi proved himself to be a pivot of the circle of his disciples, radiating the effulgence of spirituality and humanity which invariably generated deep respect and admiration for him. The exoteric conversion often followed the esoteric. As missionaries and spiritual leaders of Islam, the Sufis were the first among the Muslim intelligentsia to come in contact with the Hindu masses, and thus had the occasion to know, somewhat intimately, of the characteristics of Hindu mysticism, particularly the Yoga. Indigenous hagiological writings record numerous instances of personal contacts between the Yogis and leading saints of the mediaeval period, such as Hadrat Farid Ganj-i-Shakar and Hadrat Nizamuddin Auliya. Illustrations from Hindu religions and mystical traditions to expound the tenets of Islamic mysticism are commonly found in the memoirs of Sufi saints of India. For example, Hadrat Nizamuddin Auliya, in order to prove the superiority of Divine love to worldly attachments, cites the case of a Brahmin who had lost his all, but was happy that his sacred thread was still with him.

After al-Beruni, the first translation of a work on Hindu mysticism by a Muslim is that of *Amritkund* by Rukunuddin Samarqandi, first into Arabic, then into Persian, with the help of a Brahmin called Bhujan, from whom he learnt Sanskrit and whom he claims to have converted during his visit to Lakhnauti in the early thirteenth century.

In the fourteenth century, wandering in forests,

which is a distinctive feature of Hindu and Buddhistic asceticism, appear to have been favoured by some heterodox Indian Sufis, such as Sharafuddin Abu Ali Qalandar. Nasiruddin Chirag of Delhi and Khwaja Gesudaraz were also formerly wandering darwishes. Sharafuddin Yahya maner, who founded the Firdausiyya Order in India, made Rajgir, ancient centre of Buddhistic monasticism, a location for his religious exercises.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Sufism penetrated to the core of Hindu Society which produced many converts to Islam. It was in this contact that the Bhakti movement rose as a Hindu counter-challenge to the growing influence of Sufi humanism. The Shattari order of Sufi, whose influence was mainly confined to Gujarat region, absorbed much Hindu influence into liturgy and spiritual exercises. It seems to have borrowed elements directly from Yoga and other forms of Hindu mysticism. The renowned exponent of this Sufi Order, Shaikh Muhammad Ghauth Gawaliari, held Hindu mystics in high esteem and his work *Bahr al-Hayat* is the first treatise written by a Muslim in India on the practices of the Yogis.

Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan (1699-1780) regarded the Vedas as divinely inspired. Shaikh Muhibbullah Allahbadi, a leading exponent of the Qadiriyya order, expressed the view that the prophet of Islam was a blessing for the Muslims and the non-Muslims alike; hence the fruits of spiritualism should not be made a taboo for the Hindus. A late seventeenth century Chishti saint, Shah Kalimullah (d. 1719), declared himself to be in favour of mystical training being given to a Hindu, even before his conversion, to attract him to Islam.

The Sufi movement came into closest touch with the Hindu gnostic sciences and traditions towards the later part of the Moghul era when Prince Dara Shikuh spear-headed the heterodox elements with his intellectual experiments with Hindu mystical doctrines.

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THE RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENT IN MEDIEVAL RAJASTHAN

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THE PERIOD just before the eleventh century A.D. witnessed the sowing of the seed of the religious movement and reform in medieval Rajasthan. The geographical features were very much congenial for the steady progress in thinking and introspection.¹ That the vastness of deserts in the west created a stir in the sensitive minds is apparent in the fact that a large number of the saints of Rajasthan like Pabuji, Tejaji, Mallinath, and others belonged to the desert region. Similarly, the sylvan solitude of the Aravalli range gave shelter to many saints who lived in its caves and the recesses of its forests. These caves and seats of saints still bear the names of Gopi Chand Bharatri and Guru Gorakh Nath. The caves of Trikuta, Mewat and Titadi have been associated with Gopi Chand Bharatri. The hill-tops of Jargah and Arbuda are still known as the seats of Guru Gorakh Nath. The question whether these saints ever resided in these caves may be doubted, but there is little scope to disbelieve the fact that they were the favourite resorts of those who were given to penances and meditation.

The hilly region of Rajasthan played a significant part in the religious history of the land. For saving themselves from the onslaughts of the Muslims several rich

families of Gujarat and other neighbouring parts took shelter in the isolated places where they quietly followed their religious persuasion. The temples which they built at Nagda, Abu, Arthuna, Lodrava, Dhulev, etc., bear witness to this event.²

Next to these physical features and their influence on the history of religious movement mention may be made of the growing spirit of toleration and catholicity of the Rajputs towards the aborigins. At the early stage of the Rajput settlement about the sixth-seventh century, the relations between the Bhils and the new conquerors were not cordial.³ But with the passage of time they reconciled themselves with the situation. As there was not much difference in habits and manners between the conquerors and the conquered, eventually the aborigins left some impress on the life and culture of the new conquerors and the masses. In course of time they rose from their low social position and became the defenders of the land. This change in the social order led to the emergence of some persons who were revered by the people as saints. The Rajput rulers, finding them useful for military services, recognised their proprietary rights through a singular custom. The coronation ceremony of a Rajput chief in any state, where there was a Bhil or a Mina population, was not considered complete unless the *Tika*—or mark of kingship—was impressed upon the forehead of the new chief by the bleeding thumb of the head of the family to which that hereditary privilege belonged.⁴ They were granted rent-free lands⁵ and their age-old institution of *Panchayat* was respected.⁶ The spirit of mutual goodwill of the two classes is best illustrated by the peculiarities of Rajasthani language, whose base is Bhili dialect, but whose form and structure are regional.

This due proportion of the different elements found its expression in the ballads, the *Pawadas*, the *Rasa*, etc., of the Bhakti literature of medieval Rajasthan.⁷

Along with these peculiarities, we should not lose sight of the fact that the differences among the Hindu sects like the Vaishnavas, Saivas, Saktas, etc., in Rajasthan were not as marked as they were in South India. Indeed, sectarian rivalries and jealousies were practically absent in Rajasthan. While the epigraphic records⁸ attest to the prevalence of Vedic beliefs and practices, the evidence furnished by the old temples and monasteries at Osia, Arthuna, Ahar, etc., testify to the existence of the Hindu and Jaina communities side by side. The Nath Inscription⁹ informs us that both the Saiva and Jain thinkers were patronised by the Guhilot rulers of Mewar. The Chauhans of Ajmer showed tolerance to every sect and fostered religious harmony and rapprochement.¹⁰

These factors of socio-religious and politico-ethnic importance constitute a vital force in creating a favourable atmosphere for the growth of religious and social equilibrium.

The religious reform movement of Rajasthan made its first appearance in the form of saviour of pastoral and agricultural class, in particular, and craftsman of low origin in general. The attempts of the foreign invaders to lift cows and destroy habitations of the North Western Rajasthan, during the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, had important effects on the religious awakening. To allay the unrest and stave off disturbance many a daring warrior like Gogaji, Tejaji, Pabuji, Deoji, and others, whose time ranges from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, sacrificed their lives for the defence of their patrimony and animal life and thus obtained an esteemed place

in the society. In the eyes of the people of this region they were deemed as saviours of their land. Very soon several folklore and mystic beliefs were woven around them and in course of time they were transformed into folk-gods.¹¹

“Although these folk-gods do not fall strictly within the class of reformers on account of their being bound by crude beliefs in magic, miracles and spirits, they may be classed as the tribal religious heads. But a great importance of such beliefs recorded in the relevant literature was that the pastoral and agricultural class along with other low classes had a proud satisfaction that there was some supernatural world and a world of powers, spirits and miracles which shape their destiny. They had a full faith that through their own local gods they could gain some material or social advantage. By brooding over the life and accomplishments of the local gods they could understand the deep significance of religion that the gods were immortal and for men death was inevitable and had to be accepted. The devotees of these pastoral gods could also understand the value of kindness, righteousness, sincerity, justice, respect for law, etc., by singing the songs ascribed to the virtues of their dead heroes. The great worth of these ‘desert-born geniuses for religion’ was that “without leading the simple minds of country-men towards the controversies of theology, they impressed on their followers the worth of unity, contemplation and virtues of life—the main themes of religion.”¹²

From the fourteenth century onwards a new form of Bhakti cult emerged, and that was an impact of Islam on Hinduism and vice versa. In the north-eastern and central part of Rajasthan, in and around Ajmer, Nagor,

Mandal and Chitor, where some Sufi saints lived and where Hindu pilgrim places existed, circumstances became favourable for the meeting ground of the Muslims and Hindus. Impressed by the simplicity of the Muslim creed and its insistence upon the oneness of God, the Rajasthan reformers began to emphasise on love of God and meditation—the true aspects of religion. They denounced caste-bound society and ritual-ridden dogmas. In the *Aksharbhavani*, the *Chitvilas*, the *Apan-ra-Duha* and the *Viprabodha* an attempt towards synthesis is clearly visible. The Muslims too did not fail to adopt several rites in their ceremonies along with the moral principles after the Hindu ideas.¹³

A modest beginning in the direction of reconciling orthodoxy with mysticism within Hinduism was made by Dhanna who was a Jat by caste and is said to have been born in 1415 A.D. By his personal experience he made his followers believe that God could be realised through internal search and meditation.¹⁴

To the latter half of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth century belonged Jabhaji, who was a Paramara Rajput. He was an advocate of both 'old' and 'new' concepts of thinking. By insisting twenty-nine rigid principles for his followers he emphasised the importance of moral behaviour. They were non-injury to living beings, abstaining from theft, robbery, etc. His insistence on burying of dead, shaving of the head-knot, growing of beard served the need of the age. The idea of remarriage of widows shows his inclination towards reforms of social evils. In his case the attempt for reform is both radical and symbolic. Though he remained within the fold of Hinduism and continued to profess the worship of Vishnu

and performance of *Homa*, he tried to bring Hindu faith abreast of medieval progress through new approaches.¹⁵

Along with the trends of synthesis of ideas the simple faith in the ideals of Vaishnavism produced a ferment which was focussed by Mira Bai, the celebrated Rajput princess. She was born in the village Kukri (near Merta) about 1498-1499 A.D. In due course of time she was married to Bhoj Raja, the son of the valiant Rana Sanga. But the discharge of marital obligations was short-lived. Soon after her marriage Bhoj died. Then followed calamities after calamities leading to the deaths of her grand-father, father and father-in-law. The expulsion of Vikram Deva, her uncle from Merta, was another shocking event which Mira faced. All these and her harsh life of a widow were conducive to fill Mira with a spirit of detachment (*vairagya*). Her devotion to Gopal from a tender age together with reverence towards Sadhus got intensified. The torture and hardship to which she was put by the environment of the royal family made her dauntless in her devotion to Lord Krishna. In her love for Him she could accept no compromise.¹⁶

Mira left behind her a wealth of poetry which gives the main line of thinking. In her eyes earthly objects and worldly honours and joys of life were transient. She believed in Lord Krishna as an incarnation of God. Her religion was the religion of Bhakti which had no scope for formality or adherence to caste and creed. The essential part of devotion recommended by her was singing and dancing. Mira's cult was a presiding force. It attracted the attention of princes and peasants to tread on the path of spiritual devotion pure and simple. Her personal experience was taken as a cult and as a result several chiefs, chieftains and house-wives of all ranks and file be-

came the admirers and devotees of Mira.¹⁷

We find this echo of free-thinking in Dadu (1550-1605 A.D.) of Naraina. His poetic utterances, collected in the *Dadu-Dayal-ki-Bani*, breathe an atmosphere of free-thinking without any prejudice of caste and creed. His precepts are held in great veneration by his disciples. They reveal his belief in unity of God, in Guru, mercy, affection and righteousness. He insisted upon the unity of God and regarded Hindus and Muslims as two brothers. With regard to rituals, rites and formalities of worship he held the same view as Kabir. According to him one cannot obtain Bliss by abandoning the world and repeating the name of Rama and Allah day and night. These and other views he expressed in a mixture of dialects like *Braja Bhasha*, *Rajasthani*, *Punjabi*, *Rekhta* and corrupt Persian which could be understood by both Hindus and Muslims.¹⁸

In spite of all these efforts a large majority of princes and people of Rajasthan continued, up to the end of the seventeenth century, to profess some form of traditional religions—Saivism, Saktism, Vaishnavism, Jainism, etc. Traditional religions remained a distinguishing feature of the states. In the beginning of the eighteenth century on account of political, social and intellectual changes a group of people were not prepared to retain their loyalty to the religious traditions of the past. The Maratha invasions had degenerated the condition of the rulers of the state. The conflict between the nobility and the princes of the state weakened the political solidarity. The life in *Mathas* and monasteries was not free from abuses. The *Abu Gazal*¹⁹ rightly pictures the nature of criticism against prevailing evils in Jainism which emanated from all quarters. The Nath Sadhus, the hereditary *gaddi*-holders of Eklinga

temple, were removed from their position due to their depraved condition and were replaced by the Dandin Sadhus by the Maharana of Udaipur. To a rapidly growing number of persons certainly—among the masses as among the awakened classes of industrial and intellectual centres—traditional religion was losing its ground. Thus in order to fulfil the need of the age a new tendency among the religious teachers arose to ignore some elements of the traditional creed and adopt new approach towards life and thought.²⁰

To represent this feeling Charandas of Mewat (1703-1780), who belonged to a Dhusar Baniya family, emphasised the unity of God, the recitation of His name and the greatness of Guru. He denounced idolatory like Kabir. Both men and women were accepted as his disciples. Laldas, another teacher of Mewat, who belonged to the Meos tribe, preached the same idea. He allowed married life and emphasised on singing and dancing as the mediums of Bhakti. Another teacher, Mavaji, an enlightened Brahmana of Vagad, denounced caste restrictions. It is said that he had four wives, of whom the first and third were of his own community, the second was a Rajput and the fourth a widow of Patel caste. He believed in social and religious equality and admitted to his discipleship all Hindu castes and sexes without prejudices. In one of his works entitled *Nyaya* he has discussed problems dealing with God, heaven and righteous acts, which embodied a new message for the individual and for society.²¹

Another important teacher was in the personality of Ram Charan (1718-1798). He belonged to the Bijavargi Visya order. He tried to bring about a change in the outlook of the people who were enlightened. He, therefore, chose industrial centres like Bhilwara and Shahpura

regions for his preaching. He accented on the austere habits, moral and religious disciplines, both for monastic and the lay members. Though he adopted religious services after Muslim fashion he preached to his followers to worship Rama and abstain from intoxication, tobacco and non-vegetarian diet. In his work he underlined the importance of Guru and good action. Both men and women were allowed to take part daily in the service, though the two sexes were not permitted to do so at the same time.²²

The Movement and its differences with current Hinduism

As the medieval Religious Reform Movement was not a protest movement against Hinduism, the teachers and the followers of the new movement remained Hindu. Mira and Dadu, as for example, never denounced the traditional beliefs in Hindu gods. Similarly, Ram Charan, the founder of Ramsnehi cult centred round Rama. The Law of Karma and Rebirth, the Guruship, the spirit of toleration and purity of life are also the common features found in both the schools. But the introduction of devotion through Bhakti is the novel feature of the new movement in clear contrast to rituals, ceremonies and formulae of Hinduism. The next important point of difference between the two was that whereas Canonical texts of current Hinduism were all written in Sanskrit, those of the new movement were composed and sung in the spoken language of the people. Moreover, the saints of this movement denied the authority of the Brahmanic ceremonies, sacrificial worships and caste system. What distinguished it as a whole from Hinduism was its evolutionary attitude towards religion and God. Briefly speaking, the new move-

ment involved a curious shift of emphasis from 'blind faith' to 'moral action and purity of life'.

Some general observations

The religious reforms, as sketched above, fulfilled a basic need of the society. The founders of various organisations tried to devise a scheme of moral and spiritual discipline with all its simplicity and directions necessary to meet the new situation. Moreover, by opening the path of devotion to the depressed communities, the movement strengthened Hindu society by retaining them within the fold of Hinduism.

The message transmitted to the masses by these saints, through popular language, made a wide appeal and the theological doctrines of great significance were known to ordinary persons who were devoid of the study of scriptures. Moreover, the teachings of the saints made clear that both Hinduism and Islam could come close to each other if the externals are overlooked and the essence of both religions is accepted. They at least succeeded in bridging the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims. The doctrine of love, belief in one God and reverence to the Guru, were the cardinal principles respected nearly by all religious reformers. The movement reduced the importance of dogma, consequently making it an object of sharp criticism. The followers of the religious movement evinced a special regard for good life, humanitarianism, social uplift, organized *kirtan*, and hatred against alcoholism. To the realization of such an ideal the medieval religious movement certainly contributed to the development of comprehensive organizations of Ramdwaras, Dadudwaras and Akharas. They are more or less centres of social and

religious comradeship. Most of these organizations were far more active in social work and missionary enterprise. Taking a total view of these sects it may be said that they were fairly rational and were successful in providing a spiritual basis for rapprochement.

But in assessing the value of these sects we must not lose sight of their limitations. The successors of these saints who became *gaddi*-holders eventually largely defeated the aims and objectives of the founders of these paths by indulging themselves in vices as well as by reintroducing rites and rituals in one form or the other against which these saints once raised their voice. The general pattern of our society remained the same. Conservatism, orthodoxy, superstitions remained deep-rooted. The study of the Vedas remained the monopoly of the higher caste. The realm of knowledge was, as it were, still a forbidden land for the Sudras. Old ways of thinking and acting continued to be reared with varying strength and vitality. In the very fundamentals, it seemed, there was something which was lacking.

However, in spite of these short-comings the Bhakti movement sounded the innermost depths of the common consciousness. It was a revival of popular literature, which popularised the lofty poetry of Kabir, the refined melodies of Mira, and stirring messages of Dadu. A small sect called Mirabais, comprising of widows of various castes, still inspire the village communities by their simple habits and by maintaining themselves simply on public charity. The organization of annual fairs held in the honour of Gogaji, Tejaji and Jambhaji all over Rajasthan and at some specific places share in popularizing the idea of Dharma and Bhakti. Most of these organizations are

quite active in social and missionary enterprise. The Dadu Panthis and Bishnois as well as Ramsnehis are very enthusiastic in upholding the cause of popular education, public health and recreation. Thus the services of these saints occupy a respectful place in the social and cultural history of our country. The names of Mira, Dadu and Ram Charan and their collective moral and religious teachings, divorced from several dogmas, provide a spiritual and ethical setting for contemporary material progress.

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SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN MEDIEVAL MAHARASHTRA

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THE RELIGIOUS movements in medieval Maharashtra commenced in the thirteenth century when the Yadavas of Devagiri were the ruling power in Maharashtra, and Islam had not yet made its incursions into the Deccan. The Yadavas patronised the traditional Vedic religion, but that religion was no longer a living force and could not sustain and nourish the spiritual urges of the Maharashtrian society. Religious power had been monopolised by a few Brahmin pundits who alone understood the Sanskrit language in which the ancient religious texts were available. As the illiterate masses and most of the upper classes too were ignorant of Sanskrit, their superstitious beliefs came to be exploited in the name of religion. Traditional religion had come to mean either theological obscurantism or rampant ritualism. Pedantic commentaries and abstruse metaphysics in which the learned Brahmins indulged brought little consolation to the common man. The excess to which ritualism had been carried may be inferred from the *Vratkhand*, a compilation by Hemadri, a minister of the Yadavas. He prescribed no fewer than 2000 rites and ceremonies to be performed in the course of 360 days! Hemadri's *Chaturvarga Chintamani* became not an authority for religious enlightenment but an excuse for feeding the Brahmins in propitiation of particular

deities for almost every day of the year. This tragic lack of wisdom amidst apparently great learning has been aptly compared by Dnandev, with the plumage of a peacock which has eyes all over but lacks in essential vision. The common man in Maharashtra could only turn to his primitive village gods for spiritual solace and material rewards as well, if possible. The rise of the various religious movements in medieval Maharashtra is to be traced to this decline in the true spirit of the Vedic religion then prevailing in the country. They arose not to reform society, but to answer the call of the common man for the science of self-knowledge, spiritual enlightenment and religious instruction. The significance of these movements was primarily religious, and only secondarily social.

In point of time the Nath Sampradaya of which Gorakshanath is generally believed to have been the real founder comes first. Gahininath and Nivrattinath, the latter an elder brother of Dnandev, were its chief propagators in Maharashtra. But this all-India sect failed to strike deep roots in Maharashtra, possibly on account of its excessive emphasis on *Yogic sadhana*. The pioneer of what is popularly called the Pandharpur movement (also alternatively known as the cult of Vitthala, the Warkari *Sampradaya* or Bhagwat Dharma) was Dnandev who was born in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. In spiritual parlance Dnandev's *guru* was Nivrattinath, and as such he might be regarded as a Nathpanthi. But Dnandev's famous Marathi commentary on the Gita, the *Bhavartha-Deepika*, popularly called the *Dnaneshwari*, became the Bible of the Warkaris. The Warkaris regard Dnandev as their spiritual fountainhead. The sect itself is distinguished by its stress on devotion to and love for God as the means of self-realization. Though nearly fifty

different saints may be counted among its followers, the most prominent amongst them were Namdev who was Dnandev's contemporary but outlived him by many years, Eknath who lived in the fifteenth century, and Tukaram, a contemporary of Shivaji in the seventeenth century. Ramdas, another contemporary of Shivaji, has been generally hailed as his *guru*. He founded his own sect. From the point of view of social significance, the cult of Vitthala and the sect of Ramdas, also known as the Samartha Sampradaya, overshadow other religious sects and movements in medieval Maharashtra, such as the Mahanubhavas whose founder Chakradhar started his movement earlier than Dnaneshwar, the cult of Dattatreya founded by Narasinha Saraswati in the fourteenth century or the Chaitanya sect of Raghav Chaitanya who flourished around the sixteenth century. Since the influence of these other sects was marginal, we shall later touch upon them briefly.

II

The late Justice M. G. Ranade was practically the first historian of the Marathas who linked up the religious movements in medieval Maharashtra with the rise of the political power of the Marathas under the leadership of Shivaji in the latter half of the seventeenth century. At the end of his chapter entitled "The Saints and Prophets of Maharashtra" Ranade sums up the social significance of the religious movements in Maharashtra in so eloquent a fashion that I quote it here in full. "The religious movement, which, commencing with Dhyandev who lived in the fifteenth century (*sic*), can be traced to the end of the last century as a steady growth in spiritual virtues. It

gave us a literature of considerable value in the vernacular language of the country. It modified the strictness of the old spirit of caste exclusiveness. It raised the Shudra classes to a position of spiritual power and social importance, almost equal to that of the Brahmans. It gave sanctity to the family relations, and raised the status of woman. It made the nation more humane, at the same time more prone to hold together by mutual toleration. It suggested and partly carried out a plan of reconciliation with the Mahomedans. It subordinated the importance of rites and ceremonies, and of pilgrimages and fasts, and of learning and contemplation, to the higher excellence of worship by means of love and faith. It checked the excesses of polytheism. It tended in all these ways to raise the nation generally to a higher level of capacity both of thought and action, and prepared it in a way no other nation in India was prepared, to take the lead in re-establishing a united native power in the place of foreign domination. These appear to us to be the principal features of the religion of Maharashtra, which Saint Ramdas had in view when he advised Shivaji's son to follow in his father's footsteps, and propagate this faith, at once tolerant and catholic, deeply spiritual and yet not iconoclastic."

With his perceptive imagination Ranade found a curious parallel between the Protestant Reformation in Europe and the religious movement in medieval Maharashtra. Protest against the spiritual authority of the clergy, against self-mortification, penances and fasts, liberation from the thralldom of scholastic learning, emphasis on the vernacular as against the classical language for religious instruction, these were some of the common features of the two movements. Ranade, however, found a contrast in the stress on *Bhakti* in the Maharashtrian

movement. Unlike the Protestant Reformation the religious movement in Maharashtra upheld devotional love as superior to all other methods of attaining supreme knowledge. The comparison drawn by Ranade is, however, applicable only to the *Warkari* movement. Ranade also ignored the fact that the Brahmmins in Maharashtra never enjoyed the same temporal power as the catholic clergy did in Europe. Nor were they as well organized as the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Catholic Church enjoyed the ownership of vast tracts of land in Europe, the Protestant Reformation implied significant changes in economic relations in rural areas. Maharashtra never had big *zamindars*, be it institutional *zamindari* like that of *maths* and temples or of individuals. Consequently the religious movements in Maharashtra did not have the same economic implications. Customarily the *Warkaris* were required to abandon their normal occupations, and visit Pandharpur in months between *Ashadha* and *Kartik* at a time when agricultural operations were in full swing. This practice might have affected the agricultural production adversely. Unless this is to be regarded as an economic implication of some consequence, the religious movement in Maharashtra does not appear to have any other.

Ranade's conclusions were based not upon an analysis of the writings of the saint-poets themselves, but, as admitted by himself, upon the *Santavijaya* by Mahipati, an eighteenth-century poet. This work which purports to be a collection of biographical sketches is, in the main, a compilation of accounts of the miracles, alleged to have been performed by various Saints. It was indeed a feat of historical imagination on the part of Ranade to have reached such profound conclusions on the basis of so unreliable a source. Ranade did not also care to differentiate between

the teachings and ways of life, recommended by the various saint-poets of Maharashtra. He bundled up the different sects together and regarded the whole as a unified religious movement. His approach to the subject was synthetic, but not analytical. Himself a deeply religious man, he went so far as to claim that the political movement in Maharashtra in the seventeenth century was itself a culmination of the religious developments of the earlier period.

III

Ranade opened the floodgates of controversy. His interpretation of the religious movement was in itself a nationalist interpretation in its own way. Ranade had sought to emphasise that the rise of the Maratha power was not accidental, but assisted by several antecedent factors, among which he gave overriding importance to the religious movement. He was thereby reacting to Grant Duff's view that the rise of the Marathas was a fortuitous development like the forest fires in the Western Ghats. Rajwade, an ultra-nationalist historian, fiercely challenged Ranade. He separated Sant Ramdas from the rest, and asserted that it was Ramdas alone who proved a source of inspiration to Shivaji. In his opinion, all the other saints, particularly those belonging to the *Warkari* movement, with their other worldly outlook and pre-occupation with personal salvation, could have hardly created the environment for Shivaji's ultimate success. According to him, it was Ramdas who converted the *Warkaris* into *dharkaris*, or the pious pilgrims into fighters for freedom. The *Sahishnu* (tolerant) psychology was transformed into

the *Jayishnu* (etching for victory) one by Ramdas. The god of the virile Ramdasi cult was not the static Vithoba of Pandharpur, but the dynamic Hanuman of Ramdas. Ramdas's *magnum opus*, the *Dasbodha*, was according to Rajwade a philosophy of history, treating the subject in a spiritual manner. It was Rajwade who first discovered the *Wakenisi Tippan* dated 25 January, 1682 (in the week in which Ramdas died) which has a number of entries relating to Ramdas's life, and a few other papers. Though Rajwade was one of the pioneer archivists and historians of Maharashtra, he, unfortunately, used these papers in the most unhistorical fashion to prove that Ramdas, as *rashtraguru*, guided Shivaji in his political career. Other writers, notably Shankar Shrikrishna Deo, B. V. Bhat, J. S. Karandikar and even an admirer of the *Warkari* movement like L. R. Pangarkar, followed Rajwade's lead. But Rajwade did not go unchallenged in his own lifetime. C. G. Bhate cogently disproved the claims made on behalf of Ramdas by Rajwade. The English biographers of Ramdas, the Rev. Deming and the Rev. Abbot, considered that Ramdas's work and influence were primarily spiritual and only secondarily political. Professor N. R. Pathak has spent almost a lifetime in demolishing convincingly the Rajwade school of thought in respect of Ramdas. The latest to rally round his flag is Dr. A. G. Pawar who has once again flogged practically a dead horse.

It is not, perhaps, really necessary once again to explode many of the myths about Ramdas for which Rajwade is largely responsible or to prick the bubbles of hyperbolic praise bestowed upon the Saint. Suffice it to say, that Ramdas established his own separate sect, and did not in the least endeavour to transform the *Warkari* movement

into a virile cult by changing its *Sahishnu* (tolerant) psychology. A mere perusal of the *Dashodha* will convince anybody with an open mind that it is neither a political testament nor a philosophy of history, but a work of religious instruction. Ramdas's God, as his name itself indicates, was Rama, and Hanuman came only after the latter. The *Wakenisi Tippan* is not very reliable, and sound historical evidence makes it clear that Ramdas did not meet Shivaji earlier than 1672, when the latter had already attained a great deal of success in his life's mission of creating an independent state for the Marathas. On the other hand, Ramdas was not just another spiritual *guru* of Shivaji, like Mounibawe or Bawa Yakut, as Dr. Pawar tries to argue. Shivaji's relations with Ramdas were certainly more intimate than those with his other *gurus*, as their mutual correspondence and Ramdas's letter to Sambhuji on his accession show. There was no need for Ramdas to write on *Rajdharm* (duties of the king) if the great king had not gone to seek for his advice. Similarly, Ramdas instructed Shivaji's soldiers in *kshatradharma* (duties of the soldier) when they went to him for his blessings.

The term *Rajkaran* employed by Ramdas on many occasions might mean simply cleverness and alertness unlike its presentday connotation, and *Maharashtradharm* was perhaps not different from Hindu religion elsewhere, as Professor Pathak ably argues. But neither he nor Dr. Pawar can deny that Ramdas was more aware than the Warkaris of religious anarchy, social degradation and political slavery in his time, and yearned for all-round emancipation. Can it be denied that activism characterised his teachings, that he possessed a practical wisdom and was endowed with an intellectual pragmatism which he brought to bear upon spiritual life as well? In the heat

of the controversy Ramdas's unique role as an organizer of Hindu religion has come to be unduly under-estimated. His instructions to his *mahants* to gather and win over religious assemblies are so practical and detailed that they can be easily applied to workers in the political sphere, and are hence liable to misconstruction. Ramdas, more than any other saint of Maharashtra, endeavoured to provide a sound organisational foundation for the people's religious life. He drew the people's minds to the performance of Duty and emphasized on the all-round development of human personality. His religious fervour and zeal recall to our mind those of Swami Vivekananda in modern times. The fact that Sabhasad in the seventeenth century and Sambhaji Angre in the early eighteenth do not mention Ramdas as Shivaji's spiritual *guru* is put forth as an argument by the Rev. Abbot and Dr. Pawar to underplay Ramdas's role. But this is quite fallacious. For that matter, Tukaram, a contemporary of Shivaji, residing just a few miles away from Poona, does not mention Shivaji at all in his *abhangas*! This does not prove or disprove anything. It is undeniable that both Ramdas and Shivaji worked in their own ways for a common cause, namely, the creation of a Maratha nation, and to that extent they assisted each other indirectly, if not directly. That is why Ramdas alone among all the Marathi saints rejoiced in the Kingdom of Bliss (*Anandvaubhuian*) brought about in Maharashtra by Shivaji, and Shivaji officially proclaimed himself to be *Go-Brahmana-Pratipalaka* (Protector of the Brahmins and cows).

It is one of the ironies of history that the Warkari movement, with its basic appeal to the common man, continued to flourish without any specific attempt on the part

of its followers to organize it, while the Ramdasi sect failed to strike roots in the soil of Maharashtra with all the organizing ability of its founders. Even Ramdas's words and works came to be misinterpreted by later generations. It is very strange but true that Ramdas misunderstood wielded a much more powerful influence on the nineteenth and the early twentieth-century freedom-fighters than Ramdas properly interpreted. Many of Tilak's followers drew their spiritual sustenance from Ramdas, as they understood him. The articles on Ramdas written by an ardent devotee of the *Bhakti* cult like L. R. Pangarkar were considered so explosive that the British Government confiscated the publication in 1908. S. S. Deo felt so inspired by Ramdas that he devoted his entire life to the collection and publication of everything relating to this saint, mostly at his own expense. All that we know about Ramdas and his sect today is almost entirely due to Deo's life-mission which is practically unknown outside Maharashtra.

IV

Besides Ranade's 'nationalist' and Rajwade's 'ultranationalist' view of the religious revival in Maharashtra, there is yet another interpretation of it from the economic point of view, which, for the sake of convenience, may be termed as the Marxist interpretation, though how far Karl Marx himself would have agreed with it is doubtful. B. R. Sunthakar and Lalji Pandse are the chief protagonists of this view. The latter regards Shivaji's *swarajya* as a social revolution wrought by the peasants and workers of Maharashtra under the banner of Shivaji, and holds that the religious revival was of no assistance in bringing about

this transformation. If at all, it proved a hindrance to this revolution. Sunthakar seems to derive his data from the works of the saints themselves, and looks upon the religious revival as a reactionary force in the class struggle. In the absence of adequate economic data these interpretations tend to be extremely speculative. The scanty economic data collected so far go against such a conclusion. It is a known fact of history that Shivaji extended his Poona *jagir* to the extent of an independent kingdom by freeing large parts of Maharashtra from Muslim rule. Shivaji's movement might have been described as a peasant revolution, if large portions of land in Maharashtra had been held by rich and oppressive Muslim landlords. On the contrary, it would appear that the Muslim rulers of the South granted many hereditary privileges, revenue offices and other rights, collectively or individually known as *watans*, to their Hindu servants. These *watans* were so coveted by the Maratha populace, that it resulted in long-standing feuds amongst them lasting over generations. The institution of *watans* was so deep-rooted that Shivaji too tried to modify it rather than abolish it altogether, as Dr. A. R. Kulkarni has shown in his study of the economic life of the Marathas under Shivaji. The exact proportion of *watandars* and landless labourers in Shivaji's army or civil service is not known, but that many of his lieutenants were *watandars* is a known fact. They sided with the rising power of Shivaji to safeguard their landed interests. Does it make Shivaji's struggle look like a peasant revolution? The relationship of the religious revival with the rise of Shivaji cannot be decided from a purely economic angle. It is noteworthy that a revenue survey in the early nineteenth century showed that four-fifths of the lands in the Poona district were held by peasant proprietors. The

the Pandharpur movement but certainly represented the religious revival, had a high concept of a true Brahman. Mere learning did not make a Brahmin worthy of worship nor did it place him on a higher pedestal than other members of the society unless he also followed the path of virtue in his daily life. The domination of the Brahmins in the spiritual sphere was certainly broken down by the incessant preachings of the saints. The latter asserted the dignity of the human soul which is quite independent of the accident of its birth. Any man can attain salvation by faith and love in spite of his birth in an humble caste or class. The saints fostered a democratic spirit by emphasizing the equality of all men and women in the eyes of God. Particularly in the Warkari movement caste differences were forgotten in the annual pilgrimages to Pandharpur and the mixed religious gatherings on the way and on the banks of the Chandrabhaga. Dnandev, a Brahmin, did not hesitate to embrace Namdev, a tailor, and Eknath, another Brahman saint, is reported to have assisted in building the *Samadhi* (tomb) of Chokha Mela, the Mahar saint (belonging to a very low caste). But the lives of the saints themselves and their own verses indicate that this equality was confined to the religious field only.

In social life the saints accepted the inequities of the caste system and did not protest much against its rigours. Dnandev himself was an outcaste, being born to a man who had returned to the householder's life after renouncing the world. The Brahmans refused to perform his sacred thread ceremony as well as that of his brothers. One of the greatest intellectuals of his time and one who was regarded as the fountainhead of spiritual life, Dnandev

had every reason to protest strongly against such a boycott. But he preferred instead to accept the letter of purification (*shuddhipatra*) given by Bopdev Pandit which convinced the Brahmans of Dnandev's spiritual prowess. Dnandev gave a feast before entering *samadhi*, but his close disciple Namdev, being a tailor, had to wait till all the Brahmans had been fed. In fact, in one of his *Ovis* Dnandev clearly states that however delicious the food in a Shudra home might be, a Brahman must not eat it. This assertion is made by way of explaining how *swadharma* is to be upheld irrespective of its rigours. The term *swadharma* is, of course, capable of subtle, sophisticated and wider implications. But Dnandev himself emphasized that all *varnas* (castes) must perform their duties, as laid down in the Vedas. His followers took *swadharma* to imply the duties of their own caste. Sena, the barber saint, therefore emphasized that while he devoted his spare time to the worship of Vitthala, he was not lagging behind in performing his caste-duty of hairdressing. Saint Eknath was boycotted by the Brahmans of Paithan for his kindly treatment of an untouchable boy. Eknath, like Dnandev, preferred to be taken to the Godavari for ceremonial purification. The miracle performed there by Eknath whereby the merit of feeding a hungry Mahar was proved to be greater than that of feeding a hundred Brahmans may or may not be believed. What is worthy of note, however, is the equanimity with which Eknath let the Brahmans purify him in their own way. Through the verses of Namdev and Tukaram one can see that the former accepted his low position in the social hierarchy albeit with a touch of regret. The latter was more vocal in expressing his bitterness at the inequities of the social system, and yet reconciled himself to it.

The sad life and verses of Chokha Mela, the untouchable saint, are sufficiently indicative of the sufferings of the scheduled castes in Maharashtra which even their spiritual attainments failed to alleviate. The Brahman priests of Pandharpur beat up Chokha Mela for having dared to enter the temple and embrace the idol in a fit of religious ecstasy. His explanation that the spiritual force within him compelled him to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* cut no ice with them. Hundreds of *Mahars* and other low-caste people were forced to render unpaid labour to build a wall at Mangalvedha, Chokha's home town, and though the latter was quite advanced in age, he was not spared. A story runs that the wall would not stand without human sacrifice, and that therefore a large number of *Mahars* including Chokha were allowed to be buried alive and no rescue operations were permitted. Metaphorically speaking, the wall of the medieval Maharashtrian society itself stood on the foundation of forced or unpaid labour of the lower castes. Such sacrifice on their part was deemed to be a matter of social duty. Chokha cried out in anguish that he might be deformed (i.e., untouchable) but his faith was not, just as the sugarcane might be crooked but its juice was always sweet. All his life Chokha wondered, "Who indeed is born unsoiled? The pollution is born with the birth of the body and one dies unclean." He went so far as to say, "The Vedas are polluted; polluted are the *Shastras*, and the *Puranas* even more so. Life itself is polluted; *Vishnu* is polluted; the human body more so." Mortified that his body and soul alike were regarded as untouchable by the orthodox, he retaliated, "Chokha's temple is the human body and the *Chandrabhaga* flows eternally as Living Water within it." Though Chokha Mela came to be venerated as a saint by

later generations, neither his life nor his writings and preachings modified the social attitude towards untouchability. Justice Ranade and others of his school appear to console themselves that at least in the religious sphere caste exclusiveness found no place in Maharashtra, and that the Brahmans in Maharashtra, unlike their brethren in South India, did not go so far as to abhor even the shadow of a scheduled-caste person in the exclusively Brahman areas of a village or city. This is indeed cold comfort. It is, perhaps, needless to mention that the religious brotherhood of the Warkaris did not, in the least, affect the functioning of *gotsabhas* which played a decisive role in the social history of medieval Maharashtra. These *gotsabhas* were something like caste *panchayats*, or autonomous bodies which dealt with the affairs of particular *gots* or communities. Not enough work has been done on their formation and functioning. The little that is known indicates that the political authorities rarely interfered with them till the advent of the British rule. Their decisions were binding on all members of the community, and the political authorities intervened only when the verdicts of one *gotsabha* conflicted with those of another, in which case the dispute was submitted to the existing political authority for final decision.

Ironically enough, the religious reform movement appears to have given birth to new sub-castes within the existing castes. Thus, the tailors and dyers who originally formed one caste divided themselves into two sub-castes after Namdev. Those who followed the tailor-saint Namdev formed an exclusive sub-caste of their own, called Namdev Shimpis. The Namdev Shimpis do not dine with or marry girls from the community of other *Shimpis*. Similar is the case of gardeners who followed Savata

Mali. The most ironical effect is to be seen in the evaluation of the work of the saints themselves by scholars. Of late there is a tendency amongst some of them to regard Namdev as greater than Dnandev and Tukaram as more important than Ramdas, whereas Eknath's work is regarded by them as of little value. It is not merely accidental that the saints, viz., Dnandev, Eknath and Ramdas who are thus being devalued and held in lower estimation happen to be Brahmans.

VI

The fact that a number of saints lived with their families has been considered by Ranade as in itself a very high tribute to the sanctity of family life paid by them. But, let us study a little more closely the biographies of the five most prominent saints of Maharashtra. Dnandev ended his life in *samadhi* at the age of twenty-two or so ; Ramdas ran away from the marriage-altar before the ceremony could be performed ; Namdev spent a considerable part of his life in the Punjab, far away from his family. Neither his wife nor Tukaram's was sympathetic towards their spiritual ideals. In fact in one of his *abhangas* Tukaram heaves a sigh of relief that his wife and children died in famine, thereby enabling him to devote his attention fully to Vitthala. Eknath is the only saint who appears to have combined successfully his domestic duties with his spiritual urges. The others were so pre-occupied with their personal salvation, that they were quite indifferent to the affairs of their families and set no great store by them. On the contrary, the saint-poets repeatedly stressed the importance of non-attachment to mundane affairs.

If they did not actively preach renunciation or *sanyasa* for attaining spiritual salvation, they did not sanctify family-life either. References to family-life occur in their poetic preachings by way of illustrations only, and these invariably present a gloomy picture. Obviously so; for, the saint-poets wanted to emphasize that by getting attached to families which guaranteed neither happiness nor success a man lost his chance of success in the spiritual sphere as well. 'Vitthala, Dattatreya or Rama is the real fountain of happiness', this was the refrain of so many of their songs. Celibacy was not idealized by any of them as a virtue in itself. At the same time, neither their own lives nor their preachings idealize family-life. Their emphasis is altogether different. They often urged that spiritual bliss was possible not *because* but *in spite of* one's being burdened with the cares of tending and raising a family, provided one had enough faith and devotional love for God.

Eternal Eve has usually been regarded as a temptress by many religious sects. The Maharashtrian saints and sects were no exception. Late Mrs. Iravati Karve, the eminent sociologist, joined the Pandharpur movement for a season to gather first-hand experience. She was scandalized by some of the songs, *abhangs* and *Ovis*, sung by the religious groups. In them the woman's body was described as a veritable hell, and man was warned to keep away from it. The unsavoury parts of her anatomy were depicted in disgusting detail and an amazement expressed that man could be so foolish as to be tempted by such a foul, perishable creature. Any religious movement that regards woman as an obstacle to spiritual development can hardly claim to raise her social status.

As we have said before, Mahipati's *Santavijaya* is not a dependable source of history. But if we are to take it with a pinch of salt, as Ranade does, the Almighty Himself assisted the female saints on account of their faith in their household chores, and by assuming strange disguises permitted them the freedom to serve Him without being missed by their jealous and zealous relations. Ranade perceives some high moral in these stories. The average reader wanting in this perception can draw only one moral, viz., that women of the time were treated as no better than domestic drudges, notwithstanding their being saintly in character. These stories also throw light on the stresses and strains, friction and strife to which women were subjected in joint Hindu families. Many similar references to ill-treatment of women, not excluding physical torture, are to be found in the poetic compositions of the many saint-poets. It is needless to mention that these references occur by way of illustrations or as allegories. As such, it would be risky to make generalisations about the condition of women in medieval Maharashtra on this basis alone.

Those who tend to regard the Maharashtrian saints as social reformers, trying to raise the status of women, will also find it hard to explain their indifference to the custom of *muralis*. *Muralis* are akin to *devadasis*. Childless parents would sometimes take a vow to dedicate their children to the god, called Khandoba of Jejuri (in Poona District), if by his blessings they could beget children and these happened to survive. The male children thus dedicated were called *waghyas*, and the girls called *muralis* were married to Khandoba; sometimes, married women also abandoned their families to worship Khandoba as his

muralis. *Muralis* earned their livelihood by begging and prostitution in the name of Khandoba. Hardly a Maharashtra saint-poet cared to condemn this evil practice. The only exception was Shaikh Muhammad Shrigondekar, a Hindu convert to Islam. On the other hand, his more famous contemporary Saint Eknath took the custom of *muralis* as the theme of one of his allegorical and devotional poems. This is in sharp contrast with Gauranga Probhu who visited the shrine twenty years before Eknath's birth, was deeply moved by the vicious lives led by the *muralis* there and is reported to have persuaded at least one of them, Indira Devi, to abandon her way of life. The custom of *muralis* provided excellent material to the Christian missionaries in Maharashtra to ridicule the Hindu religion. Though the custom has been stopped by legal enactment of late, it cannot be said to have ceased altogether.

If the saints of Maharashtra can be deemed to have raised the status of women at all, it was only in the spiritual sphere. The spiritual authority of Muktabai, Dnandev's sister, was accepted by no less a person than Changa Vateshwar, a Nathpanthi. It is she who gave him *gurupadesh*. Janabai was a maid-servant and Kanhopatra a fallen woman. But both of them sang songs in praise of the Lord which sound sweet even to-day. The Vedas had been made inaccessible to women by Manu but spiritual progress was assured to them by the religious reformers of this age only if they followed the path of devotion (Bhakti). Even in the Samarth *Sampradaya* a celibate saint like Ramdas did not hesitate to accept Venubai and Akkabai as his disciples; and such was the high

moral character of Ramdas, that there could never be even a hint of scandal from his fiercest opponents.

VII

A large temple dedicated to one particular god, but providing niches or small places of worship of numerous other gods and goddesses within its precincts truly symbolises the Hindu concept of God. The various forms in which He is worshipped are believed to merge finally into one Supreme Being. This basic catholic belief was so deeply ingrained in the people's mind in medieval Maharashtra that the saint-poets found no reason to condemn polytheism either in theory or in practice. Justice Ranade is definitely in error when he states that they did so. "Each of them had his own favourite form of the divine incarnations . . . (which) left no room for allegiance to other gods", according to Ranade. This is easily disproved by the variety of hymns, prayers, *aratis* and similar devotional songs composed by the saint-poets in praise of other gods besides their own favourite ones. Ramdas exhorted all to follow Shri Rama, but actually set up many new temples of Hanuman, did not hesitate to sing a hymn in praise of Bhawani of Tuljapur, and was thrilled at the throng that crowded around Khandoba of Jejuri. Eknath was visited by Dattatreya in his dreams, but he also composed sweet lyrics on Krishna and many other gods, and wrote his own excellent version of the Ramayana. Many of the saint-poets were devotees of Vitthala, but that did not prevent them from bursting into highly devotional songs in praise of the particular god whose temple they happened to visit at the moment. Examples can be mul-

tiplied, but are not necessary.

What the saint-poets did condemn, however, was the crude worship of aboriginal gods and village goddesses, and the frightful rites and sacrifices carried on in the name of worship of some primitive divinity. They denounced in no uncertain terms the worship of stocks and stones, and the worship of a mere image when the idol did not symbolise the Supreme Being. Most of the saint-poets favoured one particular god or another ; so, it was not possible for them to set aside image-worship altogether. They were also practical enough to appreciate that an average man finds worship of the formless Absolute very difficult. But the saints of Maharashtra always regarded image-worship as purely ancillary to real faith and devotion.

Their condemnation of crude idol-worship and denunciation of sacrifices to village gods could not, however, affect the popularity of a primitive god like **Khandoba** of Jejuri. Khandoba is as big a draw among the lower classes of Maharashtra as Vithoba is among the higher classes. The conversion of this almost animistic god into a form of Shiva and the rise in his popularity which coincided with the religious revival in medieval Maharashtra form indeed a telling commentary on the religious atmosphere of this age. Unlike Vithoba who is purely a god of loving devotion, Khandoba is supposed to fulfil the worldly wants of his devotees. Many of them, in fulfilment of their vows, walk on fire, hang themselves by hooks in front of the image, pierce their thighs with iron pieces, and resort to similar other barbarous practices. Such a god was adopted as the family deity by many families who had earned renown in Maratha history, such as the Purandares, the Vinchurkars, the Bokils, the Chandrachuds, the Atres, and the Holkars. The Peshwas popu-

larised the worship of Ganapati, their own family god. But, when Peshwa Narayanrao was murdered, it was Khandoba who was approached by Nana Phadnis for the birth of Peshwa Madhavarao II. When Khandoba answered the Phadnis's prayer, more than a lakh of rupees were spent on his temple, and the idol was decorated with a pearl-studded headgear. Whether Umaji Naik (1791-1832), the Robin Hood of Maharashtra, who rebelled against Peshwa Bajirao II is to be regarded as a freedom-fighter or not may be debatable. But it is certain that he robbed the rich in the name of Khandoba and not in the name of socialism. Another of his devotees, Rogho Bhargya, a Koli by caste, robbed the temple of Khandoba itself. Among the Kolis there is a sub-caste named Malhar-Kolis, distinguished by their Khandoba-worship. Khandoba was adopted as the family deity (*Kuladaivat*) by many Deshastha Brahman families as well. It may be mentioned that Khandoba is the same as Mailar god in Karnataka.

The custom of *gondhalis* is another indication of the saints' failure in checking the popularity of the village gods. It is customary in Maharashtra to invite the people of a community called the *Gondhalis* on occasions like marriages, etc., for special recitals. These *gondhalis* sing invocations to almost all the village gods of Maharashtra to grace the occasion and the custom continues till to-day in rural areas.

The medieval Maharashtrian society was, however, distinguished by its religious tolerance. While the saint-poets minced no words in condemning crude forms of worship of specific sects wherein the emphasis was not on *bhakti*, sectarian differences were never carried to the extreme as in South India. Religious persecution of one

sect by another was unheard of. No instances have come to light of violent disturbances, large-scale migrations or desertion of villages on account of such persecution. How far this religious tolerance was due to the philosophic attitude of the saints towards polytheism cannot be measured.

VIII

While generally attaching no importance to the religious movements in Maharashtra, Rajwade, however, agreed with many others that it succeeded in halting the spread of Islam on a large scale. Muslim rule on the whole tended to be more tolerant in this part of India than elsewhere. That a saintly person like Janardanswami, *guru* of Eknath, was not only retained as the commander of Daulatabad fort by the Bahamanis but was also respected by them for his spiritual status may, perhaps, be regarded as indicative of their religious policy in general, though this largely depended on the individual ruler. It is said that instead of Friday (which is sacred to the Muslims) Thursday was declared a public holiday at Daulatabad, since it was the day of Dattatreya, Janardanswami's god. On the other hand, we have the story of his disciple Eknath on whom a Muslim spat every time he returned from a bath in the river. Eknath ultimately put him to shame by his saintly behaviour, but the Muslim's action shows how confident their community felt of being backed by the ruling power even in their misconduct. Eknath's poem entitled "Hindu-Turuk Samvad" (or, Dialogue between a Hindu and a Muslim in which each criticizes the religion of the other, but finally embraces the other, realizing that they are looked upon alike by God) is more in-

dicative of the saint's own attitude than of the actual state of relations between the two communities. The destruction of Hindu temples and idols, and building of mosques in their place, of course, continued from the time of Namdev in the fourteenth century to that of Ramdas in the seventeenth, and the saints were obviously powerless against it. Namdev utilized it to moralize against meaningless image-worship, while Ramdas, true to his nature, cried out in anguish and urged protection. It would not be wrong to assume that the saint-poets with their repeated preaching of what according to them was true religion and their exhortations on ethical behaviour and the path of virtue could check such selfish Hindus as embraced Islam for material benefits. They could not, however, prevent those who were attracted by Sufism. Chand Bodhle and Shaikh Muhammad Shrigondekar may be cited as examples in this connection. There were some other Marathi saints who, strangely enough, embraced Sufism in spite of the fact that the *Bhakti* cult also contained elements of mysticism and the idea of direct communion with God. In spite of their embracing Islam, however, they continued in strains similar to that of the *Bhakti* poets. Conversion was a oneway traffic. We do not have examples of Muslims embracing the Hindu religion. Some Hindu saints and religious men were, however, appropriated by the Muslims as their own, not so much because of their spirituality but because of their alleged miraculous powers of granting material rewards. This happened in the case of many saintly persons following the cult of Dattatreya. Similarly Raghav Chaitanya, Keshav Chaitanya, Baba Chaitanya and Anant Chaitanya are venerated as Hazrat Ladley Mashyakh, Gesu Daraz, Shaikh Shahebuddin and Shaik Allauddin, respectively.

The Anand Sampradaya regards Shahdatta Allama Prabhu, probably a Muslim convert from Hinduism, as an incarnation of Dattatreya. The god Dattatreya gave *darshan* to his devotees in the form of a *fakir*. Despite the criticism of the saint-poets, the Hindus continued their worship at *dargahs* and of *pirs*. Whether all this is to be regarded as cultural synthesis or cultural surrender depends on the bias of the interpreter.

IX

As we have mentioned earlier, the spread of the Nath cult in Maharashtra was earlier than that of the cult of Vitthala, but its impact on the Maharashtrian society is so negligible that it may be safely left out of account. A study of this cult would, however, be useful in understanding the inter-connection between various other sects in Maharashtra, as Mr. R. C. Dhere has demonstrated its all-pervasive influence on them by quoting illustrations from the works of the saint-poets. The cult of the Mahanubhavas founded by Chakradhar is also earlier than that of the Vitthala cult in point of time. Of late, scholars like S. J. Bhagwat, Dr. V. B. Kolte and Professor A. N. Deshpande have attempted to endow Chakradhar with the halo of a social revolutionary, as unlike other saint-poets, he did not preach within the broad framework of *Varnashramadharma*. As a matter of fact, in Chakradhar's own writings no disrespect has been shown to the Vedas. With its excessive emphasis on *sanyasa* for self-realization the Mahanubhava cult had no chance of becoming popular, and it died out in course of time. As such, its social impact hardly deserves our attention. It

may only be pointed out that mere holding of unorthodox views does not make the founder of a sect a social revolutionary. The Mahanubhavas were themselves afraid of their heretical opinions, and locked up their teachings in a secret script, known only to those formally initiated into their cult. Such a cult cannot usher in a social revolution.

The cult of Dattatreya, founded in Maharashtra by Nrisinha Saraswati in the fourteenth century was an attempt at the revival of traditional Vedic religion, but in course of time it has deteriorated into practising a particular way of life with the ulterior object of achieving some worldly desires (sakamabhakti). Its gospel, the *Guru-charitra*, is read by students who want to get through examinations without studying their books and other persons with similar objects in view. The Warkari Tukaram's own spiritual guru was Baba Chaitanya, but the Chaitanya sect had less influence in Maharashtra proper than in the regions bordering on Karnatak. Moreover, the main exponents of the cult were appropriated by the Muslims as their own on account of the alleged miraculous powers of the former. It may also be pointed that this cult in Maharashtra has nothing to do with Gauranga Prabhu. The Ananda Sampradaya is to be mentioned only to indicate the variety of sects existing in Maharashtra ; its followers were really very few in number.

X

If the saint-poets of Maharashtra may at all be deemed to have prepared the ground for the rise of Shivaji, it was by initiating the growth and development of Marathi language and literature. Language is one of the potent for-

ces that weld men into a nationality. Before the establishment of *swarajya* by Shivaji under which the greater part of Maharashtra came under one flag, different parts of the country were ruled over by different Muslim dynasties. Even if it were under one rule, it is debatable how far it would have helped the growth of a Maratha nationality, since the self-governing village societies were hardly concerned with the ruling power at the centre. As Rajwade pithily puts it "*mahar*, a dog (both of these helped the defence of a village) and the *chawdi* (common meeting place) were the only links of the village society with political authority." In those days of rudimentary means of communication and absence of mechanical mass media *kirtans* and *bhajans* were the main instruments for bringing large bodies of men together. It was possible for the saints of Maharashtra, at least for learned Brahmins like Dnandev, Eknath and Ramdas, to have preached in Sanskrit. But in that case the appeal of their teaching would have been confined to a microscopic minority who understood Sanskrit. The large masses were illiterate. By choosing the language of the people for religious instruction the saint-poets not only brought philosophy and religion to every Maratha hearth and home, but also created a common bond and a common heritage which could be utilized by Shivaji later on. Divided as the Hindu society in Maharashtra was by castes, sub-castes and sects each of which recommended its own distinctive way of life, nothing could be more effective in uniting it than a common language.

The choice of Marathi by the saint-poets as the medium of their instruction was not accidental but deliberate. A beginning had already been made by Mukundraj, and

the cult of the Mahanubhavas, founded by Charkradhar. But the *Viveksindhu* by Mukundraj proved too abstruse a philosophical work for the comprehension of the common people. The Mahanubhavas also chose to write in a secret script for fear of popular ridicule. It was Dnandev who boldly adopted the popular exposition of a popular text like the *Bhagavadgita*. His *Bhavartha-deepika*, popularly called *Dnaneshwari*, is a commentary on the *Gita*. He showed great insight in choosing to comment on this part of the *Mahabharata* rather than translating the Vedas, the Upanishadas, or the Smritis. The *Gita* has been and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. At a time when Maharashtra was about to be invaded by Islam, Dnaneswari wrote a commentary on it to convey to the masses a message of action, of duty, of courage, of hope ; and he did so by deliberately choosing the language of the people. Eternal truths and the hidden treasures of philosophy were boldly made accessible by Dnandev to all and sundry with a wealth of homely illustrations and easily understandable metaphors. He challenged the protagonists of Sanskrit by proclaiming that he would use Marathi which would be sweeter than nectar in its effect. There are several *Ovis* in the *Dnaneshwari* in which the author confidently asserts that his work would in no way be inferior to works in Sanskrit. The example of Dnandev was followed by Eknath two centuries later. In his hometown of Paithan, which was the citadel of Sanskrit learning, Eknath had once again to assert that "My Marathi is an excellent vehicle and is richly freighted with the fruits of divine thought." Distinguished generally by his mildness, the saint was compelled to enquire forcefully, "If Sanskrit is to be regarded as the speech of the gods, is Prakrit (i.e., Marathi) to be considered the language of

thieves? Let alone these errors of vanity", he declared, "both are equally sacred when used for praising God. God is no partisan of one speech or another." If Dnandev interpreted the *Gita* for the masses, Eknath used his own version of the *Ramayana* (*Bhavartha Ramayana*) and the *Bhagavata Purana* to convey his message. The use of Marathi as the medium of instruction by Eknath almost compelled his grandson Mukteshvar and several other Brahman poets like Vaman, Raghunath and Moropant, to tell stories of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in Marathi verse. These Brahman poets would have otherwise used Sanskrit. The *abhangas* of Dnaneshvar in the meanwhile had already provided the masses with an easy form for the expression of their deep religious emotions and ecstasies. This form was put to the most effective use by Namdev, and after him by Tukaram. Their *abhangas* are to be found on the lips of even the illiterate people, and have acquired the vogue and authority of proverbs. If the *Bhavartha-deepika* and the *Bhavartha Ramayana* are unrivalled classics of popular enlightenment, the *gathas* of Namdev and Tukaram are unique repositories of religion for the common man.

Much has been and can still be written on the contribution of the saint-poets of Maharashtra towards the growth of the Marathi language. Suffice it to say here that without their writings hardly anything worthwhile would remain in the early history of this language. They provided a powerful medium of communication for the commonalty which united the Maharashtrians. Nothing else in their religious movement could bring them so forcefully together as this common bond of language and the common heritage created in it.

XI

The religious reform movement in medieval Maharashtra was in the main an attempt on the part of the saints to purify, simplify and revitalise traditional Hindu religion. They were eminently successful in democratising religion and leavening the whole society with universal devotion. Caste barriers were broken down in the religious sphere, and this enabled women and the lower classes to rise to their full stature spiritually. This success was somewhat limited by the prevailing polytheism and the gradual penetration of Islam. In so far as religion played an important part in the life of the people, their achievement certainly created a beneficial impact on the society. But the saint-poets were not social reformers in the sense in which we understand that term to-day. They preached universal, spiritual and ethical values within the broad framework of the traditional *varnashrama-dharma*. The movement was never aimed at introducing structural changes in the society nor can mere preaching bring about a social transformation. Such transformation became possible only after the establishment of direct and immediate contact with the West, and the gradual but inexorable impact of the Industrial Revolution. A balanced critic like Professor G. B. Sardar admits the limitations of the movement and even raises the question of criteria for evaluating and assessing a movement. In his opinion, both the intentions of its propounders and its actual consequences must be taken into consideration. In his study of the social impact of the movement, however, he proceeds and concludes only with a perceptive analysis of the preachings of the saint-poets. Possibly he might have been alarmed at the prospect of reaching the logical answer to the basic

question raised by him. For, the religious movement was neither aimed at nor succeeded in leading to far-reaching changes. In fact, it might be inferred that the saint-poets' excessive emphasis on faith and devotion checked the spirit of enquiry which always marks the beginning of scientific progress. On the other hand, these saints were men of God, and there was no hypocrisy about them. Their sincerity and honesty of purpose are transparent in their verses. They practised what they preached. They led exemplary lives which influenced large numbers of men and women even in later generations. By intentionally choosing to preach in the language of the people, by giving a poetic expression to their deep, religious experiences and emotions, and also by making a substantial contribution to the growth of Marathi they forged the common bond of language which is one of the most potent factors in the creation of a sense of nationality. The saint-poets of Maharashtra created a cultural heritage which Shivaji sought to defend and propagate through political independence.

It may be noted in the end that a dispassionate, objective study of the movement, by placing it in a sociological perspective in the context of the social history of medieval Maharashtra, has not yet been undertaken. The nationalist, ultranationalist and other interpretations of the movement were really a kind of historical necessity, serving consciously or subconsciously the political ends in view. A student of the subject also stumbles at every step as there have been controversies right from the very identity of the various saints, to the authenticity of their poetic compositions and the precise connotation of the terms used by

them. If political freedom means anything to a student of history, it is that history should no longer serve as a handmaid to politics. This freedom should enable a historian to shed preconceived bias to the extent to which it is possible to do so. This paper is an attempt in that direction, and presents only a point of view, the subject being too large and controversial to be encompassed in a brief survey.

SWAMI PRAN NATH
AND
THE PRANAMI RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT
IN THE 17TH CENTURY BUNDELKHAND

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IN BUNDELKHAND no two other names conjointly inspire so much respect and reverence as those of Maharaja Chhatrasal of Panna (1649-1731) and Swami Pran Nath (1618-94), the Pranami teacher. Chhatrasal, like his contemporary Shivaji in Maharashtra, was indeed the first in Bundelkhand to offer a determined resistance to the Mughals during the reigns of Emperor Aurangzib and his successors, and come out of the contest with a definite measure of success to his credit, a fact which is even acknowledged by Sir J. N. Sarkar in these words: "His long life of 81 years ended in 1731 with the complete effacement of Mughal rule in Bundelkhand."¹ In this struggle Chhatrasal was ably supported by his Guru Swami Pran Nath who, like Samarth Ramdas, lent some sort of a divine sanction to the cause of the Bundela war of independence.

II

Pran Nath was born at Jamnagar in Kathiawar on Sunday, 6th September, 1618, in a Kshatriya family and

was given the birth name of Mehraj. His father Keshav Thakur was a minister to the then ruler of Jamnagar, and his mother Dhan Bai was a noble lady of great piety. Mehraj inherited her pious nature which later on blossomed out into a saintly disposition by his close contact with Dev Chandra, the founder of the Pranami religious order.² Dev Chandra adopted him as his chief disciple, and Mehraj learnt the tenets of the new creed at the feet of his master. He studied the Vedas and the Puranas, and became well versed in Brahmanical learning.³

On the death of his father Mehraj, now better known as Pran Nath, worked as a minister for some time. He was married by that time to a fair damsel named Baiji. But all these ties could not hold him for long. He was a seeker after truth and his restless soul was impatient of the worldly bonds. The death of Dev Chandra (5th September, 1656) provided Pran Nath with the much sought for opportunity to renounce the luxurious life of a state dignitary. Dev Chandra had once expressed to Pran Nath his desire to propagate his teachings in other parts of the country; now that task devolved upon the latter.⁴

Some time after the death of Dev Chandra, Pran Nath, accompanied by his wife Baiji, set out on his mission to propagate the principles of the Pranami sect. Besides touring extensively in Kathiawar, he also visited Bandar Abbas in the Persian Gulf, and travelled widely in Kutch, Sindh, Rajputana and Northern and Central India. He gave discourses, conducted recitations and also invited discussions with the learned Brahmans, Maulvis, Kabirpanthis, Nanakpanthis and others, and is said to have impressed a few of them so favourably that they embraced the new religious order.

Curiously enough, Pran Nath appears at this time as

a militant Hindu patriot giving moral support to the champions of Hindu India, such as Maharaja Jaswant Singh Rathor and Maharana Raj Singh. According to Pranami scriptures, he fervently appealed to Aurangzib himself to desist from the policy of religious persecution. He is also credited with writing a letter addressed to Maharana Raj Singh exhorting him to fight the armies of Aurangzib which were then converging on Ajmer. He even proceeded to Udaipur, obviously with intentions to give moral support to the Rana. But the proud Rana derided the assistance of a wandering mendicant, and Pran Nath was asked to quit the Rajput capital which he accordingly did.⁷

The rising fame of Chhatrasal Bundela as the champion of Hindu religion and freedom attracted Pran Nath to Bundelkhand. Chhatrasal held aloft the torch of liberty, and round his banner gathered all the true sons of Bundelkhand. Now a saint's spiritual force was to stir the military prowess of Chhatrasal. The eventful meeting of Chhatrasal and Swami Pran Nath took place at Mau⁶ in the year 1683. From now onwards Bundelkhand became the permanent abode of Swami Pran Nath till his death in Panna⁷ on Friday, the 29th of June 1694.⁸

III

Swami Pran Nath became to Chhatrasal what Swami Ramdas had been to Shivaji. Pran Nath provided the necessary spiritual sustaining force for the political activities of Chhatrasal. He actively voiced through his religion the political opposition to the reactionary and anti-Hindu policy of Aurangzib. He roused the public opinion against the imperial Mughals, and his missionary zeal

popularised the cause of Bundela independence. Pran Nath inflamed the masses by his stirring appeals. One such piece of his eloquence runs thus :

“Oh, the Rajas, the Ranas and the Raots! The religion is in danger. Run to its rescue. You warriors, rise from the cursed sleep and be on your feet. The swords of the Kshatriyas seem to be broken. Religion of the Hindus is endangered. You followers of the true religion, do not abandon it. The Turks are gaining the upper hand. In the three ‘Lokas’ the land of Bharat is the most glorious and in it Hinduism is the best of religions. The crowned heads of the land are down with shame. The ‘Asuras’ have imposed ‘Jejiya’ on the Hindus. They are not even getting the food and the water. The poor who are unable to pay the ‘jejiya’ are forcibly made Muslims. Lo, the Bundela Chhatrasal has heard the appeal. He has come forward with the sword in hand and has taken this service upon his head. God has marked him to be the general and the leader. Flock to his standards!”

Pran Nath’s piety and personality drew to himself many followers from all ranks who swelled the number of the Bundela forces fighting against the Mughals. He sometimes even accompanied Chhatrasal in his expeditions to keep the spirits of the Bundela chief and his levies. Above all, it was Pran Nath who supplied the sinews of the war of Bundela independence by divulging to the needy Chhatrasal the existence of the Panna diamond mines which till then had been hidden from his eyes. It greatly relieved the financial distress which was retarding the progress of the Bundela arms. Then again, it was Pran Nath who advised Chhatrasal to establish his capital at Panna, and prompted him to perform the coronation ceremony to legalise his position as a ruler.⁹ In

short, Swami Pran Nath was a perennial source of inspiration and strength upon which Chhatrasal often drew in moments of troubles and tribulations.

IV

Founded by Dev Chandra, the Pranami sect was organised as a definite order by Swami Pran Nath. The philosophy and principles of this sect are said to have been revealed to Dev Chandra by Lord Krishna himself while he was reciting the *Srimad Bhagwat*. This only indicates that they were derived from a close study of the *Gita* and the *Bhagwat*. The Puranas and the Vedas are also quoted in the holy scripture of this sect known as the *Kulzam*¹⁰ to impart authenticity to its doctrines. In the *Kulzam* the theory of *Karma* has been upheld and idolatory discouraged. It emphasises the worship of one supreme God and prescribes meditation as the best form of worship.¹¹

The Pranami sect really represented a liberal socio-religious movement within the fold of Hinduism. However, it is very obvious that Pran Nath was greatly influenced by the teachings of the saints of Maharashtra and by the cults of Kabir and Nanak. This fact is amply borne out by the verses of the *Kulzam* in which the Muslims and the Hindus come under equally severe satire and criticism for the superstitions and mal-practices of their respective religions. If the Muslims are denounced for their intolerance towards the Hindus, the latter are also not spared for their caste rigidity and social discrimination. Pran Nath also made attempts to reconcile the controversies between the Vedic religion and Islam. He pointed out

repeatedly that both the Vedas and the Quoran lay stress on allegiance to the one Supreme God. Pran Nath declares :

“The Quoran and the Vedas emphasise the same. Both the Hindus and the Muslims are the disciples of the same Master. But the differences of language, names and customs have created knotty problems. I will undo these by explaining the existence of the common God to all of them.” Then again, he emphasizes that

“There is only the difference of name and rituals ; in fact, Khuda and Brahma are the same.” Unity in diversity is well emphasized and the vices which have crept into both the religions are denounced in no uncertain terms. The following lines breathe unqualified condemnation of the religious intolerance of the Muslims :

“They force the Hindus to abandon their dress and customs. The latter bewail but the former consider it a pious act.” Then again, “They oppress the poor. None redresses the wrong done to them. They inflict circumcision and forcibly make them eat meat. They compel them to visit the mosque and recite the *Kalma*, and deem it all to be highly meritorious. They allow a born tyrant addicted to meat and wine to embrace Islam and consider it to be a pious deed.”

In the following lines Pran Nath defines a true Muslim :

“One who oppresses others is not a Mussalman. The Prophet named Mussalman the one, who is kind.”

Swami Pran Nath was also a social reformer of no mean order. He denounced the caste-rigidity of the Hindus, and condemned the Brahmans for stretching it to intolerable lengths. He praised purity, devotion and sincerity of heart, and condemned mere display of outward

symbols designed to deceive the innocent people. In a discourse to this effect he posed the following question to the Hindu bigot :

“Now tell me who is an untouchable, the Brahman with a most callous heart or a Chandal with an enlightened soul.”

Examples of such pithy sayings may be multiplied. Pran Nath, like Kabir and Nanak, emphasized the common brotherhood of man. He believed with them that “The true piety is to love all, the great and the small alike, and take God to be their common Lord.”

The disciples of Pran Nath came from all grades of the Hindu society, and he had a few Muslim followers as well. As a matter of fact, the Pranami sect was not against any particular religion, it only emphasized the equality of all human beings and preached the golden rule of universal toleration. But, if the followers of one religion oppress the adherents of another, it is praiseworthy for the oppressed to resist the oppressor. Therefore, Pran Nath, while not opposing Islam as a religion, actively preached against the Mughal imperialists because they were the oppressors. Thus he was not only a religious preacher, but also a social reformer and a tenacious fighter for the freedom of conscience.

The Pranami sect by its emphasis on social equality and open denunciation of the discriminations based on caste and creed, especially impressed the down-trodden and the social outcasts. They embraced it in large numbers to the chagrin of the high-caste Hindu whose religious leaders could never brook any criticism directed to undermine their influence. Hence this faith and its followers have suffered a great deal at their hands. Till the beginning of the present century the followers of the Pranami

sect were treated as outcasts by the high-caste Hindus. No social inter-communion, even of a formal kind, was allowed with them and all sorts of scandals regarding their social customs and religious practices were widely circulated among the people. For example, Pran Nath, according to these high-caste Hindus, was a Muslim prince;¹² and partly because there is a *Panja*¹³ instead of a *Kalash* at the top of the Pran Nath temple in Panna and partly because of the fact that the Pranamis used to bury their dead at Panna,¹⁴ the religion was considered to be an offshoot of Islam.¹⁵

The followers of the Pranami sect are scattered all over Bundelkhand. But they are mostly drawn to Panna which is their chief place of pilgrimage. Every year the followers of this faith from Kathiawar, Gujarat, Bombay, Sindh, Nepal and other places gather on the occasion of *Sharad Purnima* (Autumn Full Moon Day) in Panna. As a token of the old spiritual allegiance of Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundela to Pran Nath, the head priest of the Pranamis still gives betel and nuts to the ruler of Panna, descending from Chhatrasal, on the Vijaya Dashami day, this being an old practice followed from the times of Chhatrasal.¹⁶

A P P E N D I X

The Pranami Scriptures

The manuscripts of the Pranami scriptures are preserved in the Pran Nath temple at Panna. In order to avoid damage to the original manuscripts by frequent

handling, they were copied out in the temple for general use. These copies are as authentic as the originals. Due to their religious sanctity, their contents were never interfered with by the transcribers since any alteration, even of a word or of a punctuation mark, amounted to sacrilege. These scriptures are as following :

Kulzam (Ms.)—It is a collection of the teachings of Swami Pran Nath and contains the following fourteen chapters, variously written in Gujarati, Sindhi and Hindi, interspersed with Persian and Arabic phrases.

<i>Name of the chapters (Prakaran)</i>	<i>Language</i>
1. Ras	Gujarati
* 2. Prakash/Prakash	Gujarati/Hindi
3. Khatruti	Gujarati
* 4. Kalas/Kalas	Gujarati/Hindi
5. Sanandh	Hindi
6. Kirtan	”
7. Khulasa	”
8. Khilwat	”
9. Parkarma	”
10. Sagar	”
11. Singar	”
12. Marfatsagar	Hindi
13. Sindhi	Sindhi
14. Kayamatnama	Hindi

(*Prakash and Kalas—2 and 4, originally written in Gujarati, were rendered into Hindi by Pran Nath himself).

The differences of language in these chapters or Pra-

karans were due to the zeal of Swami Pran Nath to preach in the language of the people whom he was addressing. For example, at one place he says, "Now I will explain in the language of the Hind for the Muslims of Hind." At another he declares, "I will preach in Sindhi for the Muslims of that place." (Sanandh, Prakaran verses 3, 4, 13, 14, etc).

An accurate copy of the *Kulzam* is also preserved in the Amiruddaula Library of Lucknow. Growse probably received a copy of the *Kulzam* from a Pranami, Kakar Das of Mathura, and he wrote an article on it in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1879), entitled 'The sect of the Pran Nathis' (pp. 171-180). In the quarterly report on the old Hindi manuscripts of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Kashi, Rai Bahadur Hiralal also made a mention of a Pranami scripture named *Anjir Ras*, which contained eleven chapters of the *Kulzam*. (*The Nagari Pracharini Patrika*, vol. 8, pp. 474-75).

Some of the Pranami scriptures listed below are called *Bitaks* or histories. They deal in detail with the lives of Dev Chandra and Pran Nath, and incidentally refer to other contemporary historical personalities (like Aurangzib, Jaswant Singh Rathor, Maharana Raj Singh and Chhatrasal Bundela, etc.) and events (such as Aurangzib's campaign in Rajputana and the early struggles of Chhatrasal with the local Mughal *Faujدارs*). Their subject matter is the same, and treatment is so similar that save for the style and prosody no marked difference is to be found among them.

Lal Das Bitak (Ms.)—It was written by Lal Das, a disciple of Pran Nath. His original name was Laxman, and he joined Pran Nath at Thatta. The available copy of the work was transcribed by one Manohar Das in Panna in Samvat 1948 (1891 A.D.).

Hansraj Bitak or *Mehraj Charitra* (Ms.)—It was written by Hansraj, who was made *Bakhshi* by Hirdesah, the son and successor of Chhatrasal. He began the work in Sam. 1803 (1746 A.D.). The available copy of the work was done in Sam. 1808 (1751 A.D.) by one Gosain Par-daun Das, the one in the possession of the ruler of Panna.

Brajhushan Bitak or *Vratant Muktavali* (Printed)—The work is said to have been written about Sam. 1755 (1698 A.D.). The author Brijhushan was a disciple of Chhatrasal Bundela.

Other Scriptures of Note

Naurangji or *Mukund Das ki Vani* (Ms.)—Mukund Das was also a disciple of Pran Nath. The available copy in the Pran Nath temple at Panna was transcribed in Sam. 1862 (1805 A.D.) at Garhakota by Pradyumna Das. Besides containing biographical details about Dev Chandra and Pran Nath, it also consists of discourse on the Pranami sect.

I am told that a disciple of Mukund Das of Naurang, named Bahurang, also wrote a *Bitak* which, however, is not available. *Mastana Ka Panchak*—Mastana was a muslim disciple of Pran Nath. The verses contained in his work are virtually a Hindi rendering of the teachings of Swami Pran Nath. Parts of this work are published under the title *Panchak Prakash*.

REFERENCES

- ¹ J. N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, vol. V, p. 191.
- ² This sect is variously known as Nijanand Sampradaya, Pranami, Dhami and the Pran Nathi. Nijanand was another name of Dev Chandra. Pranami is said to have been originated from the word *Pranam* by which the followers of this sect greet each other. Similarly, it is also called Pran Nathi sect after the name of its second teacher Pran Nath. Dhami is a derivation from the word *Dham* (The Hallowed Residence) which is used for Panna. Only those Pranamis who reside at Panna are called the Dhamis. Therefore, this term cannot be applied to all the followers of this sect who, in general, are called the Pranamis.
- ³ *Vratant Mukatavali* (hereafter designated as *Vratant*), pp. 112, 147-148; and *Mehraj Charitra* (hereafter designated as *Mehraj*), p. 24.
- ⁴ *Vratant*, pp. 127, 150. *Mehraj*, p. 32.
- ⁵ *Vratant*, pp. 241, 310, 312-317; *Mehraj*, pp. 160-161.
- ⁶ Mau or Mau Sahaniya is four miles south of Nowgaou in Madhya Pradesh.
- ⁷ Panna is in Madhya Pradesh, forty-four miles from Satna by road.
- ⁸ *Vratant*, pp. 128, 346-347; *Mehraj*, pp. 211-212; *Navrang Das ki Vani*, p. 127; Laldas Bitak, 489-92; Letter of Chhatrasal to his son Jagatraj, dated 21 April, 1730.
- ⁹ The above letter of Chhatrasal, dated 21 April, 1730.
- ¹⁰ Vide Appendix which also contains a note on other Pranami scriptures.
- ¹¹ Dev Chandra was also greatly influenced by the Radhavallabh sect which was then very popular in Kathiawar and Kutch. It is noteworthy that though idol-worship is discouraged in theory, it still continues in practice. In the temples of the Pranamis the flute, the crown of Krishna or Radhika and a copy of the *Kulzam* receive regular offerings. The walls and the ceilings of the Pranami temple at Panna are profusely painted with scenes from the life of Krishna. The Pranamis maintain all the outward paraphernalia of Hindu temples including the distribution of the holy water and the *Prasad*.
- ¹² Pran Nath is taken to be Shuja, the fugitive brother of Aurangzib, who died in Arakan.
- ¹³ The *Panja* or the open palm only symbolises the hand of Pran Nath blessing his followers, and has certainly nothing to do with the practices and symbols of Islam.
- ¹⁴ Pran Nath met his death by burying himself alive. This practice is not quite unknown to other *Vatragis* and *Gosains* professing Hinduism. Even now the Pranamis who die in Panna are buried.

while all those who die elsewhere are cremated.

- ¹ As late as 1880 and 1902 the Pranamis were persecuted and expelled from Nepal (*The Panna Gazetteer*, pp. 37-38).

RAMANUJA AND THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH

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SOUTH INDIA has played its part in shaping the history of India and contributing to her development in the fields of religion and philosophy, art and literature. It is the home of the three well-known schools of Vedanta, viz., Advaita, Visishtadvaita and Dvaita, founded respectively by the three great Acharyas—Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva. Ramanuja was the greatest exponent of the philosophy of Visistadvaita or Qualified Monism. It is true that Ramanuja had illustrious Vaishnava teachers, such as Nathamuni, Yamunacharya and Alavandar preceding him. But the credit for consolidating and expounding systematically the philosophy of Sri Vaishnavism undoubtedly goes to him.

The age which saw the advent of Ramanuja was comparatively peaceful, politically and socially. South India was free from the political disturbances of the North. Rajaraja the Great, and Rajendra, the two illustrious rulers of the Vijayalaya line, had raised the power and fame of the Imperial Cholas to heights unknown in their history. They had brought under their control the Pandyas of Madura and the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi had been united to their house through a marriage alliance. In Karnataka, the Hoysalas, whose ruler Vishnuvardhana figures prominently in the history of Sri Vaishnavism, were

the feudatories of the Chalukyas of Kalyani.

The South Indian society, like its counterpart in the North, was based on *Varnasramadharmā*. The people had willingly accepted the social and economic implications of the caste system (*Varna*) without any protest. The upholding and preserving of the social order on its basis was considered as the primary duty of the king. The establishment of a large Kingdom by the Cholas, which comprised the whole of the Tamil country and certain other parts of the Deccan, created some new problems. But this did not lead to any unseemly quarrels. On the other hand, it was responsible for the development of a sense of greater social freedom. The people were free to change their occupation. We have the recorded instance of the Brahmanas of Ennaviram adopting the occupation of the Vaisyas. They came to be counted in one group along with the Valanjiya merchants of South Bazaar.¹

The Brahmanas enjoyed a position of honour in the society. They were able to command respect from different sections of the population by virtue of their character, learning, integrity and honesty. As Sir Charles Elliot rightly points out, "The intellectual superiority of the Brahmanas as a class was sufficiently real to ensure its acceptance, and in politics they had the good sense to rule by serving, to be ministers and not Kings. In theory and, to a considerable extent, in practice, the Brahmanas and their gods are not an imperium in imperio but an imperium super imperium".² The Brahmanas even fixed the duties and rights of the mixed castes. This indicates that the caste system never corresponded to the scholastic theories of the Smritis (Law books).

even to the uninitiated (according to the orthodox standards). It is this element in the teaching of the saints that gave them the ultimate ascendancy among the rival creeds of Buddhism, Jainism and Agamic Saivism. It involved an attempt at uplifting those who could never obtain the Divine grace, so long as that grace was attainable through the exact performance of an exceedingly difficult and elaborate series of religious rites. The simplification of the process of attainment of the Divine grace came in response to the needs of the time, as very often one comes across the statement that for the *Kali-Yuga* more elaborate courses were impossible to adopt. They insisted on the need for inner purity and personal experience, and without in any way breaking with the traditional and institutional faith, disseminated spiritual knowledge among the common people without distinction of caste, creed, colour or social status, and thus revitalised Hinduism.⁷ According to them, every man is the son of God and can attain salvation by seeking Him and responding to His love. The highest end of life is not *Mukti* (salvation) in the world yonder, but *Bhakti* (love of God) here and now, because love is for ever absolute, un-conditional and eternal. Man's only responsibility in life is to respond to the love of God. The lofty view of Vedantic philosophy was thus turned into the Vaishnava religion, and instead of dividing Hinduism into a domain of philosophy for the few and a domain of religion for the many, this process vivified and invigorated Hinduism and made it live for ever as a philosophy of religion.⁶

Passionate devotion to God was thus the predominant characteristic of the religion of the Alvars. Moreover, their devotion to God was so all-absorbing, that every thing other than God seemed utterly worthless to them. The

result was that God became the centre of the town and the village, just as the soul is the centre of the body. Temples grew only because the Alvars wanted to make it *mangala-sadana*.

The Age of the Alvars which may rightly be described as the Age of Intuition was followed by the Age of Reason. During this period philosophy became a necessary adjunct to every endeavour of man, and rationalism was emphasized. Then came the line of the Acharyas (religious teachers) who championed the intensive religious experience of the Alvars. However, it could capture the imagination of the masses during the time of Ramanuja, the chief among the Vaishnava *acharyas*. He performed the great feat of linking up the traditions of the South and those of the North, in order to show that they were preserving the tradition continually.

III

Ramanuja was born in 1017 A.D., at Sriperumbudur. His parents were Kesavacharya and Kantimati, sister of Srisaila-purna, grandson of Yamunacharya. He had his early education under Yadavaprakasha, a teacher of Advaita. Soon differences of opinion arose between him and his teacher over the interpretation of a certain passage. He left his teacher and came down to Kanchi to lead the life a householder.

Ramanuja who was known for his pious bent of mind and an extraordinary precocity of intellect naturally attracted the attention of Alavandar. Alavandar had a desire to entrust the pontifical seat at Srirangam to him. He even

sent a message to Ramanuja, requesting the latter to meet him. But before the meeting could take place, the master, who was aging and ill, died.

Ramanuja's domestic life was not a happy one. His wife's cooperation was found wanting in his spiritual exercises. At times, she was quarrelsome. She even misbehaved with his *guru's* wife. Ramanuja's patience was almost exhausted. When a call came from his father-in-law, he sent his wife to her father's place and embraced the life of an ascetic.

At the invitation of the disciples of Alavandar, Ramanuja proceeded to Srirangam to occupy the pontifical seat. But, there he found that the position of the Vaishnavas had become difficult. It is said that the Chola King in his bigoted zeal for Saivism tried to suppress the Vaishnava faith by putting many of its adherents to death. So Ramanuja retired to Karnataka. He stayed in Karnataka for twelve years, converted several thousands of people to Sri Vaishnavism, and erected a temple for Lord Narayana and a monastery at Melkote.

When the news of the death of the old Chola King reached him, he left for Srirangam. He organised the ceremonials at the Srirangam temples, visited Vaishnava shrines all over the South, established several temples and *mutts*, and thus secured for the Vaishnavas a recognised place in the life of the community. Finally, having made arrangements for the continuation of his work after his death, Ramanuja departed from this world in 1137 A.D. at the ripe old age of one hundred and twenty.

As pointed out before, Ramanuja preached the religion of *Bhakti*, as propounded by the Alvars. He man-

tained that the *Bhakti marga* was the direct means of knowing the Brahman (Absolute). He met the demand of metaphysics and satisfied the supreme call of love by his theory of 'Jnana turned into *Bhakti*'. *Bhakti*, according to him, was the unbroken contemplation of God which he compared to the smooth and ceaseless flow of oil. This ceaseless contemplation originated from the love of God, who was so dear to the devotee. Ramanuja did not use the word *Bhakti* in the popular sense of blind faith. It implied loving meditation for its own sake, and it helped the devotee to attain a firm recollection (*dhruvanusmriti*) of God.

Ramanuja was opposed to the popular and unscientific distinction between the path of Knowledge and that of Love. The knowledge of God, who is the Supreme Reality, and the Supreme Bliss, itself passes into the love of God. Knowledge of the Supreme and love of the Supreme are not two distinct psychological processes. To know God and not to have that knowledge converted into love is sheer impossibility. True knowledge is the knowledge of God and true love is the love of God. The identity of the objects brings about the fusion of the two reactions of the individual spirit to God.⁷

The *Bhaktimarga* (path of love or loving devotion) has a universal appeal, and even the hardened Jnani (Seer) cannot but give a high place to it. This is because *Bhakti* comes from the heart. It is easier to picture God as love than to conceive of the Absolute as Truth. Even the lowest forms of creation are familiar with love, and can very easily respond to a gesture of love. The superiority of this path consists in the fact that it appeals to the heart rather than to the head. Therefore, it is much more intelligible and hence much more appreciated.

IV

The religion of Bhakti which Ramanuja preached ministered to the religious cravings of all people without distinctions of caste or colour. He declared that devotion knew no caste, colour or social status, and therefore salvation could be attained by one and all without considerations of caste. In the Vaishnava community, there were many devotees who were not Brahmanas. Many incidents are recorded by the biographers of Ramanuja which bring forth his attitude towards caste. It is said that Ramanuja was attracted by the divine grace of Sri Kanchipurna, a Sudra by caste. He invited the latter one day for meal. After the meal he went forward to stroke his guest's feet with his hands as a gesture of devoted service. But the guest said, "I am a low-born Sudra. Good God! How could you serve your servant?" Ramanuja became sad and said, "I consider it my bad luck that I may not serve a noble soul like you. Pray, noble Sir, is it the wearing of the sacred thread that makes one a Brahmana? He who is devoted to God, is alone a genuine Brahmana. You know very well how Tiruppaulvar, low-born though he was, came to be worthy of the worship of the Brahmanas."⁸

On another occasion, when Ramanuja requested Kanchipurna to accept him as his disciple, Kanchipurna said, "Ramanuja, my child, I am a Sudra, and what is worse, an ignorant man. You are a Brahmana and a great scholar I am your servant; you are my Guru." To this Ramanuja replied, "Sir, you alone are really wise. If the knowledge of the *sastras* only brings about pride of erudition instead of devotion to God, then it is false knowledge; better is ignorance than this. You have verily

tasted the real essence of the *sastras* ; other scholars merely carry the burden, like the ass that carries the load of sandalwood. Please do not forsake me ; I take refuge at your feet.”⁹ Ramanuja even wanted to partake the leavings of Kanchipurma though his wife did not like it. And when it came to that, he abandoned the householder’s life, donned the robes of the *Sanyasi* (mendicant) and thus broke away from all family traditions instead of giving up his faith.

Dhanurdasa, a Sudra, was a famous disciple of Ramanuja. After taking a bath in the river Kaveri, Ramanuja used to return leaning on the shoulders of this disciple. His Brahmana disciples were very much displeased at this. When they asked him for an explanation, Ramanuja replied, “O Vaishnavas, have you not heard that learning, riches and high birth make one swell with pride, Dhanurdasa is utterly destitute of this three-fold vice, viz., pride of learning, pride of wealth and caste pride, but you are affected by them intensely. The waters of the Cauvery only wash my body clean, but my mind is cleansed by the touch of a devotee like him.” On hearing this, the disciples bent their heads in shame, and dared make no protest.¹⁰

Ramanuja was never tired of telling his disciples that it was the qualities of head and heart and not birth which produced good. “Relinquish all your pride of caste and take pains to acquire good qualities. If caste becomes the mother of conceit, then there could be no more formidable a foe. But if it saves you from the evil, you cannot find a better friend.”¹¹

It is told of Ramanuja that a *mantra* (mystic formula for recitation) was once given to him by his *guru* (spiritual

preceptor) Gostipurna. Ramanuja asked his *guru* what would happen if he told it to another. "Thou will die," was the answer. "And what will happen to the one who hears it?" "He will be liberated." Then went out the devotee of Sri Krishna, and climbing to the top of a tower, he shouted out the *mantra* to the crowd in the street below, careless of what happened to himself, so that others might be set free from sin and sorrow. There was the typical devotee, there the love of God was transformed into the likeness of the beloved.¹²

Ramanuja showed an equal solicitude regarding the position of the *panchamas* or untouchables. The incidents that are chronicled bring out in bold relief his earnestness in elevating them socially. It is recorded that on a certain occasion the disciples of Ramanuja urged him to undertake a mission to make accessible his religion to the world at large. He consented and set out on a pilgrimage. He first visited the birth-place of Tirumangai Alvar. Here, while he was devoutly making his round of the holy shrine, he saw a Chandala woman approaching him. Ramanuja asked her to move away, so that he might pass on. But without moving away she addressed Ramanuja and said, "Sir, which side shall I move? There is purity all about me here, to which side then can my impurity turn?" Ramanuja was struck dumb at this unexpected answer from an unexpected quarter. "Forgive me, Madam", he replied, "I have offended thee, for all that you are holier than myself."¹³

We may mention here another interesting incident. On the outskirts of the town of Srirangam, there lived a Vaishnava devotee who was of low caste. He used to drown himself in the joy of singing the psalms of the holy

Alvars. Ramanuja used to pass this way from the river Kaveri to Srirangam. One day he was returning from his bath, accompanied by a large number of his followers. He stopped near the hut, and bidding his followers leave him, entered into it, and spent a long time with the devotee, listening to one of his devotional songs.¹⁴

These instances clearly point to the fact that the great preacher of the *Bhakti* cult practised what he preached. He saw in a *Bhakta* (devotee) to whatever caste he might belong, the sparkle of holiness which deserved to be respected and venerated. He was opposed to the artificial barriers which divided people, and more so to keep a section of them outside the pale of the society. As Professor Yamunacharya in his illuminating work, *Ramanuja's Teachings In His Own Words* observes, "To elevate the untouchables socially, Ramanuja gave them the name 'Tirukulattar', which means people of high or noble descent. He opened the doors of religious instruction to all those classes. Ramanuja's great aim was to abolish the word 'Pariah' and thus put a stop to the degradation of a section of the people of this country. The hallowed name of Tirukulattar carries us back to those good old days when the practice and the preaching of religion meant really the elevation of men, and the saints considered it a part of their duty to minister to the religious cravings of the lowest and the humblest classes of people."¹⁵

Thus Ramanuja preached that salvation was attainable by all alike, whatever might be their position on earth. Whatever might be the position of a man in society, he stood as close to God as any one else, provided he fulfilled the high requirements of godly life. He had to carry on controversies with the Advaitins, with the Jainas and with the Saivas and he finally succeeded in his mission of put-

ting Vaishnavism on a permanent footing.

Sri Vaishnavism was opposed to the traditional practice of propitiating a number of gods for attaining various worldly objects. It laid more emphasis on devotion to the one Supreme Deity, refuting thereby the necessity of worshipping other deities. It abolished all distinctions of caste, creed and social status. To the eye of a true Vaishnava all beings are manifestations of God's power, and they are all equal. In fact, Vaishnavism is a great leveller. Impelled by this idea of universal equality and by the idea of God being in all things and all things being in God, Sri Vaishnavism refused to accept the artificial barriers between man and man, and between man and woman. Sri Vaishnavism thus became the centre of radiation of new spiritual knowledge. This was effected with the help of two important instruments; firstly, the doctrine of *prapatti*, which consists in taking refuge in God, with great faith and with the firm conviction that it is God and God alone who can help one to attain his goal; and secondly, the adoption for religious purposes of the divine wisdom of the Dravida Saints, and making them the common property of all devotees.

Ramanuja's broad-mindedness is, however, questioned by some who argue that in placing the Sudras in a separate position, he showed that he had not been able to free himself from old prejudices.¹⁶ As Sten Konow points out, "What Ramanuja has done is to heighten the popular conceptions and to give them a foundation and thereby secure them recognition by the leading spiritual section."¹⁷ It is important to note that *prapatti* "is open to all, without any distinction. What one has to do is to resolve to follow the will of God, not to cross his purposes, to believe that

he will save to seek help from Him and Him alone, to yield up one's spirit to Him and to be meek. *Prapatti* is so important that even the path of Jnana-bhakti is said to lead to it."¹⁸

The *Bhakti* movement of Ramanuja has left its deep impress on the history of India. The seeds of the *Bhakti* cult were later carried to North India where they grew into mighty trees yielding luscious fruits in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The *Bhakti* movement inaugurated by Ramananda owes a good deal to Ramanuja. This movement kept alive the essential preachings of Ramanuja for well over a century.

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RAMANUJA AND THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT IN ANDHRADESA

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EARLY in the eleventh century A. D. Andhradesa enjoyed the benefits of peace and security under the Eastern Chalukya kings and subsequently under the Chalukya-Cholas. In the social structure we find the four broad divisions of caste with sub-divisions in each one of them. The Brahmanas continued to be the guardians of traditional culture and learning. While the Kshatriyas were the warrior race, the Vaisyas were traders, bent upon acquisition of material wealth, and the Sudras were, in the main, the tillers of the soil. As the barriers of caste were horizontal and not vertical, the chances of elevation or changeover from the lower castes or classes to the higher castes or classes were few. So the social set-up was rather rigid and inelastic.

The imperial Chalukyas and the Chalukya-Cholas were personally pro-Saivite and their state religion was Saivism. Their tolerance of other religions, namely, Buddhism, Jainism and Vaishnavism was marked, though there were also rare occasions of their persecution of the members of these faiths. Change-over from one religion or sect to another was not easy. Consequently, the rigours of the caste system and of sectarian Hinduism led to discontentment, dejection and unrest among the people. While some of the restless elements swelled the ranks of

Buddhism and Jainism, other groups led the socio-religious revolt and protest, the first fruit of which was the religious reform movement of Sri Ramanuja with *Bhakti* or devotion as its sheet anchor, that made its appearance by about the turn of the eleventh century.

II

While the Brahmanical religion of the Aryans, falling short of its lofty ideals in practice, had earlier provoked the protest movements of Jainism and Buddhism, the schools of Mimamsa and Sankhya subsequently denied the existence of God and virtually preached atheism. So the theistic urge in the individual or man's yearning spirit was focussed towards the Vedas and the higher philosophy which sprang from them. The counter-reformation movement in favour of orthodox Hinduism which sought to re-interpret the Vedanta was led by Sri Sankaracharya (ninth century). By his theory of Monism or Non-dualism (i.e., Advaitism), Sri Sankara brought about a triumphant revival of Brahmanical religion in which the pride of place went to the Vedanta, the essence of the Vedas. But Sankara's *Brahma* was impersonal, offering no scope for the devotional emotion and prayers of man in suffering who was thus deprived of any solace. At this juncture, Sri Ramanuja by his unique doctrine of *Visistadvaita* provided for a personal God who could shower mercy on the sinner and assure him of safety in times of dire necessity.

The *Bhakti* movement at first emerged as a reaction against the Vedic ritualistic religion. It was an Ekantikadharm,² that is, monotheistic religion first preached by Sri Krishna to Arjuna ; later, when co-related with the cult

of Narayana and Vishnu, it developed into Vaishnavism. The two main classes of teachers among the Vaishnavas in South India were the Alvars and the Acharyas.³ Srivaishnavism, i.e., the more elevated form of Vaishnavism, in South India was founded by Nathamuni. Yamunacharya, entitled Alavandar, the grandson of Nathamuni, is considered the real founder of *Visistadvaita* or Srivaishnava school and he laid the foundation of all the doctrines that go under Ramanuja's name.⁴ Among his works the *Siddhitraya* demonstrates the real existence of the individual and the supreme soul and contradicts the doctrine of Avidya, the *Agama-Pramanya* defends the orthodox Bhagavata school against the criticism of Sankara, and the *Gitartha Sangraha* analyses the *Gita* as an exposition of the *Bhakti* doctrine.

Sri Ramanuja, the great Vaishnava reformer, had a long span of life (c. A.D. 1016-1137). He was a student of Yadavaprakasa at Kanchi. Not satisfied with the study of spiritual Monism, he, on the advice of his mother, went to Tirumala Nambi, his great uncle at Tirumala.⁵ Sri Ramanuja succeeded Yamunacharya at Srirangam. Persecuted by Adhirajendra, the Krimikantha Chola of the Vaishnava tradition or Virarajendra I (A.D. 1063-70) or Kulottunga I (A.D. 1070-1120), according to some scholars,⁶ Ramanuja proceeded with his followers to the Hoysala Kingdom in A.D. 1096, and converted Visnuvardhana there. He returned to Srirangam after a lapse of nearly twenty years.⁷ Subsequently Sri Ramanuja converted Yadavaprakasa to his own line of thinking.

Sri Ramanuja, at the direction of Yamunacharya, composed a commentary on Badarayana's *Brahma Sutra* which was absolutely essential to maintain the doctrine

of love and grace, the fundamental tenet of Srivaishnavism, as against the theory of Monism which Sankara had based upon the *Brahma Sutra* and the Upanishads. According to Sankara, there exists only one spirit and the attributes of animal spirit, i.e., feelings of individuality and variety of inanimate world, are due to illusion or *Maya*, and therefore unreal.⁸ Consequently, the love and piety of Vaishnavism occur only in an illusive state of the human soul. Now Vaishnavism had to defend its doctrine by reconciling it with the same *Brahma Sutra* and the Upanishads, and to overthrow the doctrine of *Maya* on the authority of the same works. Thus Sri Ramanuja's *Bhakti* movement, by protesting against the *Mayavada* of Sankara, developed into a protest movement.

Sri Ramanuja preached the doctrine of Salvation through *Bhakti* which he demonstrated to be the central teaching of the Upanishads, the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Brahma Sutra* in his commentary on the *Bhagavadgita* and works like the *Vedantasara*, the *Vedantasamgraha* and the *Vedantadipa*. His *Visistadvaita* has three eternal principles, namely, *chit* (individual soul), *Achit* (insensate world) and *Isvara* (Supreme soul). *Chit* and *Achit* form the body of the Supreme Soul (God) who, as the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world, has a composite personality. He has five different aspects, namely, *Para* (the highest), *Vyuha* in which He appears in four forms, namely, Vasudeva, Sankarsana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha, *Vibhava* in which He assumes ten incarnations, *Antaryami* living in the heart of every one, and *Pratima* or idol. Free from defects, he grants boons to his devotees. Sri Ramanuja regarded *Bhakti* as identical with *Upasana* or meditation prescribed in the Upanishads.⁹ Thus in his system *Bhakti*

is reduced to the level of continuous meditation on the Supreme Soul.

III

Sri Ramanuja's *Bhakti* school, the second of the three principal schools of Vedantic philosophy, differs from the then prevalent Non-dualism of Sri Sankara in several respects. Sri Ramanuja agrees with Sankara that the ultimate reality is one (i.e., the *Brahman*), but disagrees with him regarding the nature of that *Brahman* whom he considers an organic unity constituted by identity of parts, i.e., individual selves and things.¹⁰ While to Sankara, the *Brahman* alone is real, to Sri Ramanuja the world also is real though not different from the Brahman. Though Sankara systematised Hindu philosophy by writing commentaries on the Vedas and the Upanishads, and propagated it all over India, converting large numbers of people and establishing *mathas* or monasteries for the study of philosophy, his philosophy had little appeal to the heart. Sri Ramanuja's doctrine of *Bhakti*, emphasising the reality of the World Soul, the Individual Souls and Matter appealed to the common people. It was the school of Ramanuja that first blended in full harmony the voices of reason and devotion, by worshipping a Supreme Being of infinitely blessed qualities, both in His heaven and as revealed to the soul of man in incarnate experience.¹¹ Belief in the *Brahman*, His incarnations and the doctrine that a devotee may reach the *Brahman* by worship in self-forgotten love forms the basis of the cult of *Bhakti* (or devotion to a personal deity), as preached in the *Bhagavadgita*. Sri Ramanuja always endeavoured to show that the final stage in

an individual's spiritual evolution is *Bhakti* and that it is a particular mode of *Jnana* or Knowledge. While he derived his metaphysical theory from the Upanishads and the *Brahma Sutra*, he borrowed from the Puranas his theory of production of the external world. While Yada-vaprakasa held that the *Brahman* is changed into *Chit*, *Achit* and *Isvara*, Sri Ramanuja shows that the distinction between the *Brahman* and *Isvara* is unauthorised. The teachings of the Tantric schools¹² with their mystic exaltation of the female principle in the universe, and their emphasis upon religious value of sexual passion had exercised a tremendous influence over Buddhism and the Brahmanical religion and led to gross perversion of morals and ethics in north India. Vaishnavism was also degraded there and it became a byword for licence and immorality through the introduction of Radha, Krishna and the Gopis. Sri Ramanuja's system has no place for Gopala-krishna or Gopis, headed by Radha and Krishna. Possibly Sri Ramanuja purposely omitted this element from his Vaishnavism to raise the morale of the people for, in the *Bhagavatapurana* composed in the ninth or the tenth century A.D. in South India, there is clear evidence of the dominance of the Gopi element. Sri Ramanuja's line of thought was not new, but he surpassed his predecessors by clarity of expression, vigour of thought and urgency of appeal, and also gave a lead to his successors. He asserted that the *Brahma* impersonal, pure and with attributes is the same as Vishnu of the *Vishnupurana* and Vaishnavism. He profusely cited from the *Vishnupurana* and other Vaishnava works in his commentary on the Vedantasutras.¹³ Sri Ramanuja preached that knowledge alone is not sufficient to save the soul, but that it should be accompanied by devotion to God, i.e., *Bhakti* in order

to lead man to his ultimate destination, i.e., salvation.

IV

The traditional Indian social philosophy comprising the concepts of the *Purusharthas* (i.e., human aims), *varnas* (social classification on the basis of occupation) and *Ashramas* had high ideals of social organisation.¹⁴ The *Bhakti* Movement of Sri Ramanuja aimed at (1) the liberation of the general masses from the worst superstitious and immoral practices and the restoration of strictly moral and spiritual practices by the elimination of grossly erotic and sensuous practices under the garb of mysticism; (2) the restoration of *Bhaktivada* as the last and highest stage in the soul's progress towards *Brahman*, the other and earlier stages being *Karmavada* and *Jnanavada*; (3) raising of big temples to serve as centres of higher education, intense missionary activity, and spiritual inspiration; (4) establishment of *mathas* in large numbers to supplement the activities of the temples and undertake humanitarian work, such as feeding of the poor and tending of the sick; (5) providing the channel of devotion to the suffering mankind for getting solace, cultivation of love of humanity, and curtailing excessive egotism or selfishness; and, finally, (6) popularising the idea that love of man is service to God, for He has incarnated Himself in the form of all living beings.¹⁵

Going on pilgrimage to holy places in North India including Benares and Brindavan via Tirupati was consider-

ed in those days as a very meritorious act. Sri Ramanuja himself went on pilgrimage round the country from Ramesvaram to Badrinath, starting from the West coast and returning along the East. He carried on his missionary activity by organising popular worship in temples and by establishing seventy-four spiritual centres in different parts of India to spread his doctrine of Qualified Monism.¹⁶ In Andhradesa, Sri Ramanuja's principal centre of activity was Tirumalai-Tirupati. Originally the god at Tirumala was Harihara, for *Deyalvar* (end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century) tells us how the kindly God of Tirumalai united in himself the twin forms of Siva and Vishnu.¹⁷ When he actually transformed himself into Srinivasa is a mystery. Sri Ramanuja's association with Tirumalai-Tirupati was intimate from his childhood because his uncle was at Tirumalai and his devotion to Srinivasa was superb. He equated (in his *Sri Bhashya*) the *Brahma* with Srinivasa and prayed that Srinivasa might endow him with knowledge founded on *Bhakti* and not mere intellectual learning. He emphasised the tradition that the *Para-Brahman* had manifested Himself on the Tirumalai hill as Srinivasa.¹⁸ In Tirupati, Sri Ramanuja installed and consecrated the idol of Sri Govindarajasvami, which had been cast away by Kulottunga I from Chidambaram. He founded a small village round the Govindarajasvami Temple which later came to be known as Ramanujapuram after him. Sri Ramanuja developed it into a flourishing town by making it compulsory that all those who wished to serve in Tirumalai should have their permanent residence at Tirupati.¹⁹

All temples in the Tamil country and Andhradesa were originally consecrated according to the tenets of the

Vaikhanasa worshippers. Later Sri Ramanuja converted all of them one by one to the Pancharatra system. But at Tirumalai the daily worship of Sri Venkateshwara was according to the Vaikhanasa Agama. Either Sri Ramanuja did not consider it desirable or, more probably, found it impossible to disturb the old arrangements approved by his uncle Tirumala Nambi. Though Alavandar and Sri Ramanuja favoured the recital of Tamil songs, serious objections were raised by the worshippers of Vishnu in general (who did not subscribe to Sri Vaishnava doctrines) to these recitals in a temple where worship was carried on according to rituals prescribed in the *Agama*, based on Vedic texts in Sanskrit (i.e., Vaikhanasa). The latter did not recognise any *mantrams* or *slokams* other than those in the Sanskrit *Agama*, nor did they recognise Alvars as saints. At Tirumalai, even Tirumala Nambi satisfied himself by bringing water from the Akasaganga for *Abhishekam* and worship, by performing *mantrapuspam* through recitation of the *Riks*, etc., and by offering *Tulasi*. As the Vaikhanasa worshippers (Archakas) were conservative Telugu-speaking people who had been carrying on worship at Tirumalai for a long time before the emergence of Ramanuja, they would not give up their old customs including adherence to the lunar calendar. Tirumala Nambi had to cooperate with them and hence failed to bring about any radical changes. Sri Ramanuja followed the same policy, but he established the nucleus of an efficient administrative machinery for managing the affairs of the temple.

The parallel movements of Virasaivism and Viravaishnavism in the twelfth century Andhradesa and the unique cult of Harihara in the thirteenth century were indebted to the *Bhakti* Movement of Ramanuja for their

stimulus, objectives and achievements. While the Smar-tas in general adored both Siva and Vishnu, the three great scholars of Andhradesa, who were the followers of Basavesvara in the Kannada country, spread Virasaivism with devotion to Siva as the sole factor of unity in the country by using the vernacular as the medium of their writing and propaganda. Among the several Saiva cults Pasupata Saivism which followed *Visishtadvaita*²⁰ was spared by Mallikarjuna Pandita who dealt a death blow to Jainism and Buddhism. The Satsthala siddhanta of Virasaivism or Sakti Visistadvaita²¹ was possibly modelled after the *Visishtadvaita* of Sri Ramanuja. Like Ramanuja retaining Vaikhanasa worship in the temples at Tirumalai and Tirupati, as an exception in the whole range of temples in the Tamil land and Andhradesa, Mallikarjuna Pandita, though beholden in his devotion to Siva and Basava, refused to discard Brahmanism, and subsequently his followers came to be known as Aradhya Brahmanas and their religion as Aradhya cult, i.e., panditasampradaya.²² Viravaishnavism which had developed in Balnad on the northern side of the Krishna, under Brahmanayadu, as a rival to Virasaivism aimed at wiping out caste differences, by uniting all castes with devotion to Vishnu as the factor of unity. Brahmanayadu converted individuals from low castes to Viravaishnavism and created a new caste order called Padmanayaka Kula, i.e., the caste of heroes. This order of sixty-six heroes comprised persons from every caste. The influence of the *Bhakti* Movement was intense, as suggested by the prefix Vira attached to Vaishnavism in this region and the names Uddanda-Vira Tirupati²³ and Srivira Tirupati²⁴ assigned to Karempudi, the centre of this activity. Some of the heroes were Saivas and some Vaishnavas, but Brahmanayadu made all of them sit in the

same row for food (i.e., Capakudu).²⁵ Subsequently, this form of Vaishnavism developed into a Hero cult and spread into Telangana and other regions in Andhradesa. Their literary compositions were written in easy Telugu so as to be intelligible to the masses. While the extreme cults of Virasaivism and Viravaishnavism, with *Bhakti* as their main goal, were convulsing the social structure, the cult of Harihara which had been fairly widespread in South-East Asia in earlier times became a very popular cult in the thirteenth century A.D. due to the genius of Tikkana Somayaji.²⁶ It was a unifying force in Hinduism, preaching toleration among the various sects (oneness of Vishnu and Siva) and exercised a profound influence over the minds of the people.

The three shrines²⁷ of Sri Ramanuja at Tirupati, on the way to Tirumalai at Mokalla parvatam (Mulangal Murip-pau) and in the Tirumalai temple are monuments of the profound influence which his *Bhakti* movement exercised in this part of Andhradesa. Inscriptions show that the shrine at Tirupati was the recipient of gifts in A.D. 1220, the fifteenth regular year of Viramarasingayadevaraya. The earliest reference to the shrine at Tirumalai is an inscription dated A.D. 1476. Tradition recorded in the Guruparampara account says that both the shrines were built more or less simultaneously and the idols were placed at Dovabhasyakara Sannidhi and in the Sannidhi of Tiru-venkatamudaiyan. The shrine at Tirumalai was considered from the beginning a part of Sri Venkatesvara's pantheon; food offerings meant for him were first offered to Sri Venkatesvara, and then to Sri Ramanuja in his shrine. The recitation of Vaishnava *Prabandham* within the temple precincts was considered an act of pollution, but Vedanta Desika, who three centuries after Sri Ramanuja, extolled

the redemptive grace of Srinivasa as permanent incarnation of the *Brahman*²⁸ exposed the hollowness of this objection in his *Satadushani*. Inscriptions show that in A.D. 1360 the first attempt was made in front of the main *gopuram* to recite the *Tiruvoymoli* of Nammalvar during Brahmotsavam. Subsequently in 1475 and 1476 A.D. attempts were made in front of the shrine of Sri Ramanuja in the Tirumalai Temple. Non-Brahmanas were associated with the Brahmanas in these recitals. Though there were dissenters (obviously the Vaikhanasa priests and other Vaishnavas not professing the Srivaisnava cult), the attempt was successful probably because it was not in the presence of the idol of Sri Venkatesvara. Vedanta Desika established that *Prabandhams* were as sacred as the Upanishads. After A.D. 1500, there was a greater recognition of Sri Ramanuja and his movement.

In the *Bhakti* form of worship, as prevalent in these temples, the devotee or *Bhakta* used to clothe himself with the garment with which he had adorned his favourite deity, eat the food which had been offered to Him, and adorn himself with the sandal paste and flowers which had adorned Him. Then in ecstasy the devotee sang His praise and danced in joy. It was considered desirable that the best things in the world would first be offered to the deity and then shared together by His devotees. The Brahmanas reciting the Vedas and the Vaishnava *Prabandhams*, the *Devadasis* (women attendants of the Deity) singing and dancing and offering *Kumbhaharatis* at the close of street processions, and the Bhajan, and Nadasvara parties gradually came into existence. In Tirumalai-Tirupati, due to poor popular response to the Vaikhanasa form of worship emoluments were sanctioned later for the *Adhyapakas*, the *Vedaparayanans* (Vedic scholars) and

Devadasis. To infuse grandeur into religious festivals Kandadai Ramanujayyengar visited all the one hundred and eight sacred temples of Srivaishnavism. The latter also attempted to introduce new festivals with the help of Saluva Narasimharaya. The chanting of *Tiruvoymoli* and *Tiruppavai* came into vogue in other Vaishnava temples in Andhradesa.³⁰ The formulation and systematisation of a detailed code of temple worship, provision for offerings to deities on an augmented basis, permanent endowments to temples, establishments of disciples and their descendants in different Vaishnava centres for propagation of the faith under the name of Acharya Purushas and attaching to each prominent Vishnu shrine Ekangis for rendering service in them, all these owed much to the life-long efforts of Sri Ramanuja.

Some of the harmful effects of the movement may also be noted here. The ordinance that temple servants, especially these engaged in the religious part of the work should remain celibate in Tirumalai later became a fiction. There was also unseemly wrangling over individual and sectarian rights, and the Devadasis became morally degraded and ceased to perform any religious duty except offering of Kumbhaharati after the reign of Sadasivaraya Vijayanagar.

The *Bhakti* movement gave a great stimulus to literature and arts. It instilled a democratic spirit into the latter and widened their scope. It produced not only high-flown Sanskrit and Telugu works meant for the learned few, but also works in easy, racy and flowing Telugu and Kannada meant for educating the masses. The national epics, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata* were rendered into Telugu by poets, mostly enjoying

royal patronage. The *Bhaskara Ramayana* in Coastal Andhradesa and the *Ranganatha Ramayana* in Telangana and Rayalasima came to be recited daily by devotees, and provision was made for their recital in the Vaishnavite temples and a few Saiva temples as well.³¹ The *Palnavira Charita* in the popular couplet metre and conceived on the model of the *Mahabharata* gripped the imagination of the common man. Provision for the *angaran-gabhoga* (i.e., bodily and theatrical enjoyment) and *gitavadayanrta* (music and dance with instruments) of deities in temples constituted the material expression of devotion in the Vaishnavite temples like those at Simhachalam, Srikurmam, Sarpavaram, Bhimavaram, Bapatla, Srikakulam, Vijayavada, Tirumalai and Tirupati. In the Macherla temples are depicted scenes from the *Ramayana* and the sixty-four *bandhas* in Kamasastra in sculptures.³² Provision for the recital of hymns like 'Sahasranama', 'Visnu stotram', 'Narasimha Kavacham' and 'Purushasuktam' in the Simhachalam Temple and *sankirtana* in the temple at Mangalagiri attest to the influence of the *Bhakti* movement. Construction of shrines of Alvars and images of Alvars in the temples of Mangapuram, Tirumala, Tirupati, Srikurmam, Tangeda, Kamepalli and Singarutla agharam, and of temples like Kuntimadhava at Pithapur, Gopinatha, Kalyana Kesava, Harihara, Siva Kesava,³³ Sripallabha, Yogananda Narasimha, Laksminarayana, Alaghanatha, Vasudeva, Acyutaperumal, Pattabhirama, Varadaraja, Ranganatha, etc., temples with a variety of epithets prefixed to their names in Andhradesa, and the provision for appointing a Srivaishnava teacher for reading the *Sribhashyam* of Sri Ramanuja in the presence of Sri Venkatesvara during the time of ablution and for reciting 'Tiruvenkatamahatmyam' during the holy bath, and for

reciting the *Srinivasa Puranam* and the *Kasikapuranam* before Him show how the *Bhakti* movement of Ramanuja continued to influence the Hindu society in the South even after A.D. 1500.

The spirit of unity and oneness fostered by the *Bhakti* movement, among people of different classes and castes enabled them to withstand the attacks of the Muslims on Andhradesa since the beginning of the fourteenth century, and to lead a counter-attack by the end of the first quarter of the century in conjunction with other Hindu powers in the Deccan. This gradually transformed itself into a Hindu Liberation Movement which resulted in the emergence of a fresh crop of kingdoms from the embers of the old, namely, those of the Nayaks of Telangana, of the Reddis in Coastal Andhradesa and of the Rayas in Rayalasila. Tradition has it that Vedanta Desika, contemporaneous with Vidyananya had a large share in the founding of Vijayanagar. No doubt, he encouraged the people to fight back the invasions of Malik Kafur through his works and preachings. So the effects of the *Bhakti* movement on contemporary and later politics were profound indeed.

VI

Indian philosophical thought was practical in character from the very beginning and *Bhakti* started with the worship of nature in the Vedic period. In the epic period, *Bhakti* crystalised itself in the *Bhagavadgita*, the essence of the *Mahabharata*. It was attacked by the atheistic religions of Buddhism and Jainism in the same period. In the Sutra period. *Bhakti* was underrated by the Vedanta

which began with the conclusion of the Upanishads. Subsequently in the period of the great commentaries, seers and scholars studied and wrote commentaries on the Sutras of various schools, for example, Gaudapada in the sixth century, Sankara in the eighth, Bhaskara in the ninth, and Yamuna in the tenth. Except Yamuna, none of these realised the ethical, theistic and worldly wisdom of *Bhakti* as a direct means to reach Godhead, and attain *Mukti* or salvation. Ramanuja wielded this holy weapon of *Bhakti* to place God before the devotee, and enshrined Him with regal paraphernalia in the temple to be adored by the devotee to his heart's content by prayers as well as offerings to Him. His *Bhakti* movement, in its efforts to wipe out the evil effects of Buddhism, Jainism and the Trantric religion widely prevalent in North India, to check the moral degeneration of the people brought about there by the erotic mysticism of the Radha-Krishna cult and to propagate pure and unfainted devotion to God,³⁴ holds a lofty place in the history of social changes in India. It attempted to wipe out all social distinctions, the only bond among the devotees being devotion to God. Ramanuja's *Bhakti* was later developed by Nimbarka, a Telugu Brahmin (in the twelfth century) whose philosophy was called *Visishtadvaita* or 'Qualified Monism'. He again introduced Radha and Gopis in his cult, and his main scene of activity was Brindavan near Mathura. Madhvacharya in the thirteenth century also developed *Bhakti* on theistic lines, and his philosophy was pure Dualism (*Dvaita*). At the close of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, Vallabhacharya, another Telugu Brahmin, developed a philosophy which identified the *Brahman* not with Vishnu but Krishna of Gokula, His incarnation. The influence of Nimbarka and Madhva (i.e., Anandatirtha)

travelled far beyond their times and regions and affected the Vaishnava revival movements in North India, for instance, those of Ramananda and Chaitanya. Thus while starting as a movement of religious protest, the *Bhakti* movement sought to remedy the prevalent social ills and to improve the morals of the people by establishing them on the bedrock of *Bhakti*.¹⁵ It produced a unity of purpose in politics, helped the development of literature and arts and promoted through temples and *mathas* the diffusion of education and culture among the masses. All subsequent religious reform movements in Andhradesa were influenced by Sri Ramanuja's *Bhakti* Movement.

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BASAVESHVARA AND VIRASHAIVISM IN KARNATAKA

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VIRASHAIVISM is one of the major religions of Karnataka and has followers who form about twenty-one per cent of the total population of the province. It has also followers in the neighbouring provinces of Andhrapradesh, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra. The term Virashaivism suggests a militant form of Shaivism. Its followers were taught to cultivate single-minded devotion to God Shiva, and, as such, they refused to recognize any other god as supreme. The term could also suggest the missionary zeal with which the religion was propagated by Basaveshvara and his successors. The religion is also popularly known as Lingayatism, the religion of the Lingayat people. It is very difficult to fix the etymology of the word *Lingayata*. Many explanations are offered: one is that the term is composed of *linga* and *ayata* and a Lingayat is described as one who has become great (*ayata* = extension) by wearing *lingam* (= the phallic symbol) on the body. Another explanation describes it as a corrupted form of *lingavanta* a man possessing a *lingam*. It is a bit difficult to explain the above derivation linguistically, although there is a somewhat cynical statement that any word can be derived from any other word. But a more satisfactory explanation would be to take the term as meaning a person whose main concern is *lingam* (cf. *lokayata* = a person whose

'extension' is towards the world, i.e., a materialist).

Virashaivism is a branch of Shaivism. Like Buddhism it branched off as a kind of protest against the conservative religion. Any student of the religion easily recognises its protestant nature. This has prompted some enthusiasts among the Virashaivas to take pride in proclaiming that their religion is distinct from Hinduism itself, and that they are not at all Hindus. While it is difficult to define the term Hinduism precisely, it is a fruitless argument whether Virashaivism is a part of Hinduism or whether it is altogether a different religion like Buddhism. The majority of the Virashaivas 'feel' themselves as a part of the larger Hindu community and my own conviction does not go against it.

II

But it is pertinent here to define the areas wherein this particular branch differs from other branches of Shaivism. I mention two of its most important distinctive features: one concerning its philosophy, and another pertaining to its rituals. That the central fact of Shaivism is God Shiva is very clear. So is the case with Virashaivism also. In Virashaivism, the individual soul is taken to be originally part and parcel of God Shiva, who Himself is *anadi* and *nirakara*, i.e., one who is without a beginning and formless. The formless Shiva (*nirakara paravastu*) becomes the universe out of sheer *lila* or sport. This results in the *paravastu* itself taking a form and the duality between the worshipped and the worshipper gets established. Dualism (*dvaita*) is a reality, since God has willed it so. The individual human being who is separated

from God is taught by his *Guru* (preceptor) that he should concentrate all his efforts towards one goal, i.e., realization of God. The spiritual journey of an aspirant (*bhakta/sadhaka*) is regarded as having six *sthalas* or stages, viz., *bhakta*, *maheshvara*, *prasadi*, *pranalingi*, *sharana*, and *aikya*.

The journey which commences from the *bhakta* stage and ends in the *aikya* is construed as an evolution. In the *bhakta* stage, the aspirant is the *pasu*, the cattle, and God is *pasupati*, the cowherd. The relationship here is that of a servant and his master. As the aspirant moves on to the next higher stage (*maheshvara*) his loyalty towards his master intensifies. As he moves on to the next higher stages, he becomes more and more inwardly drawn. God whose existence was so long outside himself begins to be experienced within. As the aspirant reaches the *aikya* stage, he finds to his surprise that he himself is God. What was *dasoham* (I am His servant) becomes *soham* (I am He). This is *advaita* (non-Dualism) and Virashaivism is often called *dvaitadvaita*. The *shatsthala* philosophy seems to be very peculiar to Virashaivism and marks it out from other branches of Shaivism.

From the ritualistic point of view, Virashaivism has forbidden its followers from going to temples, even Shiva temples, and offering worship there. On the other hand, every Virashaiva is instructed to worship the *ista-linga* which he should carry always on his body. The *linga*, which will be of the size and shape of a small berry, is placed in a small casket and the casket is kept hung to one's neck. The devotee should take out the *linga* at least twice a day, keep it on his palm and worship it. The wearing of *linga* on the body is another distinguishing feature of Virashaivism. The religion is anti-Brahmanical

in spirit, and has little regard for the Vedas. (It might be of some interest to note that although Basaveshvara and others prescribed that their followers should neither build temples, nor offer worship there, the present-day Virashaivas do build Shiva temples and offer worship. This amounts to saying that Virashaivism of later days had to compromise with and yield to certain traditional, and at the same time, powerful institutions.)

III

Virashaivism is believed to have been founded by one Revanasiddha, the first of the five *acharyas* or prophets. All the stories connected with Revanasiddha tend to make him more of a mythical figure. But the same is not the case with Basaveshvara who is certainly a historical figure. He was undoubtedly a high official working under King Bijjala who usurped the royal throne and ruled over the Chalukyan territory in the middle of the twelfth century A.D. Some credit Basava with the establishment of Virashaivism, and this has been strongly contradicted by others. This is not the place to go into the details of the controversy. It is enough if we, for the present, rest satisfied that it was Basaveshvara who was responsible for bringing about a great socio-religious revival in Karnataka. The history of Virashaivism from the time of Basaveshvara up to the modern period is fairly clear and well documented.

Basaveshvara was the son of Mudiraja, a Brahmin leader of the *agrahara* village Bagevadi (Bijapur district, Mysore state). Bagevadi was known for its team of scho-

lars, and Madiraja was probably one among them. He wanted to perform the *upanayana* (putting on the sacred thread) ceremony for Basava who was then a boy of eight. The boy, however, refused to undergo the ceremony and wear the sacred thread. According to semi-historical accounts, the boy argued that the sacred thread symbolized the ritualistic aspect (*karma*) of the religion rather than its devotional aspect (*bhakti*). Since *karma* and *bhakti* were by nature contradictory, they could not exist side by side. This was the argument put forth by Basava against the *upanayana* ceremony. We do not know what really prompted the boy for taking such a daring decision. The parents pleaded that their family prestige was at stake. The boy then agreed to undergo the ceremony. He wore the sacred thread with great reluctance. His parents did not live long after this event. They died when Basava was still a boy of sixteen. Their death strengthened his earlier conviction ; he tore off the sacred thread and came out of the Brahmin community.

Our sources of information are unfortunately silent about what exactly took place after Basava left Bagevadi and went to Kudalasangama, a place about fifty miles from Bagevadi. He was received there by the chief priest of the Kudalasangameshwara temple and was employed to assist him in the temple services. The chief priest whose name is given as Ishanyaguru was most probably a follower of Lakula-Shaiva sect. There were many branches of Shaivism, the most prominent among them being the Lakulisha-Pashupatha and the Kalamukha. Although these two sects are listed separately in ancient classics, it has been very difficult to say how these two differed from each other. The religious leaders of these sects were great *sthanacharyas* and controlled many temples. They

were very influential among the masses and respected by the kings (rajapujya). It is a fact that Basava was given a place of refuge by a priest belonging to one of these two Shaiva sects.

In Kudalasangama, Basava spent very fruitful years. It was there that he came to be known as a great devotee ; it was probably there also that he dreamt of a social revolution and of bringing in new changes in the society.

After spending a few years there, he went to King Bijjala and took up a job as his Chief Treasury Officer. The capital of Bijjala was Kalyana (Basavakalyana of Bidar district, Mysore State) and it was here that Basaveshvara achieved many great things in life.

Basaveshvara was a revolutionary. As we have seen earlier, he was born in a highly conservative and sophisticated society, and yet revolted against his own men in his boyhood. The society which he wanted to build was based on truth, love and equality: all those who believed in these great ideals and in God were deemed equal. The popular conception was that religion was a set of rigid and classified rules and was meant for a few privileged classes. This was strongly disapproved of by Basaveshvara. He knew by experience how the Brahmins exploited the lower castes to achieve their own ends. He was painfully conscious of the miseries of the downtrodden masses and knew very well how they were barred from all social and religious activities. The medium which Basava chose for propagating his revolutionary ideas was religion, because it was religion which appealed to most people in those days. Besides, Basava was himself a man of God with spiritual leanings.

IV

The first thing that Basava did was to declare that anybody could come and embrace his religion. The religion which he preached and practised was both simple and appealing. Its main theme was devotion to God Shiva. It had a minimum set of rituals. A Virashaiva was one who, according to Basava, did not steal, nor kill, nor be angry with anyone; he was a man who was pure in and out, who showed compassion towards all beings, and who spoke the truth and nothing but the truth. Basava declared that to speak the truth was *svarga* or heaven, and to speak the untruth was *naraka* or hell. His religious teachings appealed to the masses, and people in large numbers, mostly belonging to the lower classes like the cobbler, the weaver, the hunter, and the washerman, came and embraced his religion.

The new entrant was advised to give up unclean habits like meat-eating, wine-drinking, etc. He was also forbidden to worship tribal gods. Rather, he was asked to recognise only one God, i.e., Shiva, and wear the *lingam* on the body. The worship of *ista-lingam* did not involve elaborate rituals, nor did it require money. The devotee was made to feel that he himself was the temple of God.

As we have mentioned earlier, Virashaivism rejected the Temple as an institution in its totality. By forbidding its followers from going to temples, Basava and his followers did throw a challenge to other traditional religious sects. The poor had no more to worry about going to distant places on pilgrimage; nor were the Harijans who embraced the new religion to worry at all whether they were allowed to enter the temple premises. If the temples refused entrance to Harijans, well, the best alternative

was to boycott the temples themselves. To Basava, temple symbolised conservatism, selfishness, discrimination and institutionalism of the rich and the bigoted. Said Basava :

The rich
 May build temples
 for Siva
 But what can I,
 a poor man,
 build ?
 My legs are pillars
 my body is the temple
 my head a cupola
 of gold
 O Lord of the Meeting Rivers
 the standing
 shall fall
 but the moving
 ever shall stay !

Temple could also mean some distance, an estrangement between the worshipper and the worshipped: there is the mediator who stands in between the God and the devotee. But, in the case of *ista-lingam* there is no mediator—the devotee has direct access to God.

V

Caste has been one of the important factors in the Hindu social structure. Ketkar defines caste as "a social group having two characteristics: (1) membership is confined to those who are born of members, and includes all

persons so born ; (2) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group". It was the duty of a king to see that the various caste groups kept up their separate entities. The king respected the hierarchy of castes, and himself paid respects to the highest caste, i.e., the Brahmins. Basaveshvara revolted against this caste system. The caste which topped the list was that of the Brahmins and the caste which came last was that of the *panchamas* or *anamikas* (lit. the nameless) or the untouchables. Himself a Brahmin by birth, Basaveshvara ridiculed the Brahmin caste in very strong terms and eulogized the untouchables or the Harijan community. He announced that he would be offended if he were to be reminded of being born of Brahmin parents ; he went to the extent of saying that he did not mind if he were to be called an illegitimate child born of a maid-servant and a male servant serving under untouchables. This attitude taken by Basava was probably a necessity ; it helped to bring down the proud Brahmin and raise the status of the meek Harijan. Once the latter became Virashaivas, they became equal with other men of their new religion. Basava rebelled against caste-distinction and declared in a rather crude way that since "no man is born through ears", all were born equal and that a high-caste person is really one who thinks of doing good to the world. We hear that Basava used to go to the newly converted Harijan people and take food with them. This naturally enraged the conservative people and we shall see later how this led to disastrous events.

The principles of *Kayaka* which he propounded had many implications ; it served to bring equality among the Virashaivas. *Kayaka* literally means anything connected with the physical body ('Kaya') ; technically used, it came

to mean any profession or occupation which involves physical (or mental) labour. According to Basava and others, every individual must take up some *Kayaka* or the other. Basava himself was serving under a king and that was his *Kayaka*. *Kayaka* also implied that there was no occupation which was inferior or superior; all *Kayakas* were equal. *Kayaka* should be taken up with a sense of sharing; each individual should share a part of his earnings with his less fortunate fellow-beings. *Kayaka* should be viewed as worship, a part of one's spiritual practices. Basaveshvara said that it was possible to realise God through one's *Kayaka*, ("Kayakave Kailasa").

This concept of *Kayaka* tended to inculcate a spirit of equality among all Virashaivas. In the *anubhavgosthis* or religious seminars which were periodically held at Basava's house, the treasury officer sat with the cobbler; the boatman sat with the cowherd; the washerman rubbed his shoulders with the doctor. Discussions that took place centred round topics like philosophy, religion and society. These took place in an atmosphere where the participants enjoyed complete freedom of speech. It is a pleasure to read the discussions that took place in those assemblies.

The people who formerly belonged to lower castes were thus infused with self-confidence. Some of them composed *vachanas* 'compositions in poetic prose' of rare literary quality. Women were looked upon as equal to men in all spheres. Basaveshvara and his followers condemned the practice of viewing woman as *maya* (illusion). *Atma* (the individual soul), they said, is neither man nor woman. Women were respected in the society and were

encouraged to play an active role in social affairs. Many of them took up such work as going around early in the morning, singing and waking up the people for early prayers. They were encouraged to pursue literary activities, and we find at least twenty-seven women writers composing *vachanas*. All this is clear evidence of the self-confidence regained by the common man and woman. An instance which needs mention here is this: the Harijans were expected to announce their coming into the city by crying 'samboli, samboli'. This was a warning that others should avoid their touch. There was a Harijan in Kalyana by name Samboli Nagideva who had stopped the customary shouting after his conversion into Virashaivism. One of the charges levelled by the conservatives against Basava was that he was instigating the lower-caste people to give up their decorum. This self-confidence sometimes showed up as haughtiness when a washerman went about in the capital, shouting that he was not going to wash anybody's clothes, even the king's, except those belonging to Shiva's devotees.

Virashaivism of Basaveshwara's times never glorified asceticism. Most of the leaders of this community were married men. For example, Basaveshvara had not one but two wives. He has said in one of his compositions that one who gets accepted in this world gets accepted in the other world also. To Basava, the world and the pleasures it offered were real. It seems as if the family where both husband and wife led a meaningful life was the ideal of Virashaivism. We do find pictures of such families depicted in the early Virashaiva literature.

VI

Basaveshvara wanted to bring about a revolution and usher in a new social order. His teachings were new and appealing. As we have already pointed out, people belonging to various castes and strata of society joined the movement. Virashaivism insisted on practising the ideals preached by its founders, and we have clear evidence to show that many of these teachings were put into practice by Basava's followers. Sociologists speak of 'static societies' and 'changing societies'. The general characteristics of a changing society have been described by Ogburn as follows: "In a changing society the attitude is one of seeking improvement. There is always a better way. The new tends to be favoured somewhat. Progress is a feature of the social mind. Optimism tends to prevail, and the social philosophy may favour pragmatism. The past is like a dead hand, something to get away from. The position of youth is strong, and young men often rise to influence. Authority as power yields to reason and evidence, but in crises dictators arise. There is no great respect for law, and crime is more frequent. Moral codes are ineffective, and good conduct rests upon intelligence in problem-solving. Moves are of slight significance. Manners are bad, and the egos of others become very annoying. Behaviour is more in accordance with biological nature and animal tendencies. Sentiment about institutions does not flourish while the ceremonial tends to decline. Conditions do not favour rigid barriers between the classes, and the milieu is somewhat difficult for art. Traditional religion finds a more hostile environment. There is no great harmony in culture. The times seem out of joint, and there is much maladjustment between the different parts

of culture, due to the lagging of some changes behind others. The different parts of culture are moving at unequal rates of speed”^{*} A few of these characteristics are to be traced in the society of the twelfth century, and it was no doubt a changing society.

It is to be doubted whether Basaveshvara wanted to establish or strengthen an organized religion which the present-day Virashaivism is. No doubt it had all the inherent qualities of an organized religion. For example, there was the priestly class called the *jungamas* which the society was expected to take care of. They were, in one way, the missionaries of Virashaivism. At the same time, the religion of Basaveshvara was more in the nature of a social philosophy whose main mission was how to make this life happier and more meaningful. To me, Basaveshvara is more a rebel, a reformer and a social philosopher than a religious preacher. This should not blind us to the fact that Basaveshvara was also a *bhakta*, a *sadhaka*, a spiritual aspirant who strived hard for God-realisation.

If we have spoken of Basaveshvara as a social reformer, it is simply to suggest that he was the accepted leader of a movement, the central figure of a social revolution. There were others like Channabasava, Allama who headed the movement and contributed their mite to make it a success.

VII

While Basaveshvara and his fellow-workers were engaged in propagating their religion, the natural reac-

* William F. Ogburn, *On Culture and Social Change*, pp. 60-61.

tion of other established religions was one of suspicion and indignation. They could not tolerate that the values which they held dear would topple down before their own eyes. The large-scale conversions to Virashaivism posed a great threat to religions like Jainism, Vaisnavism and Lakulisha-Pashupata Shaivism. Respect for the Brahmins as the highest caste was slowly dwindling. The leaders of all these religions joined hands and repeatedly complained to Bijjala that Basaveshvara was going against the traditional *Varnasrama Dharma* and that it was the duty of the king to protect it. King Bijjala took some of these complaints seriously, and there were occasions when he and Basaveshvara were at logger-heads. But in spite of these strained relations, Basaveshvara continued to serve the king as his treasury officer.

In the meanwhile, an incident happened which precipitated the crisis. There were two Virashaivas living in Kalyana, by name Allayya and Madhuvayya. Madhuvayya was formerly a Brahmin and Allayya a Harijan. They were close friends and Madhuvayya wanted to give his daughter in marriage to Allayya's son. The Virashaiva community approved of the proposal and was even jubilant over it. This inter-caste marriage, however, enraged the conservative sections of the society and the latter went to the king and strongly protested against this *varna-sankara* (mixing up of castes) taking place in the capital. This was too much for Bijjala to tolerate; he immediately ordered that Allayya and Madhuvayya must be blinded. In spite of the Virashaivas' protest, their eyes were pulled out. Bijjala was later murdered by an enraged Virashaiva, and Basaveshvara and his followers had to flee to distant towns for safety. The death of Bijjala seems to have taken place in about 1167-68 A.D. There are evidences to show that

Basaveshvara did not long outlive Bijjala. It is widely believed that he died during the same year, i.e., 1167-68 A.D.

VIII

The history of Virashaivism during the post-Basava period is one of rapid expansion. The leaders who fled from Kalyan carried Basaveshvara's teaching to various parts of the country, and popularised it. Before 1160 A.D. we do not find even a single reference to Virashaivism in inscriptions. But, from 1160 A.D. onward the number of inscriptions mentioning the religion and referring to its activities are found in large numbers. Virashaiva authors also made valuable contributions to Kannada literature.

At the same time Virashaivism slowly became an organized religion like any other, and lost its revolutionary character. During the twelfth century, we find more than four hundred authors who expressed their spiritual experiences through the medium of *Vachana*. Many of the authors had little education, and much less of schooling. The way in which they expressed themselves is interesting. For example, a cowherd knew his occupation well; he knew his cattle, the forest, the river, the meadow and the tiger. He could express his experiences through the imagery of the cattle and the meadow, and communicate them through the dialect he knew and spoke. So also did a weaver, a cobbler, a doctor, a juggler, and a farmer. For the first time women writers entered into the field of Kannada literature. About twenty-seven women writers are known through their compositions. After Basava, poems were composed by scholars only, and not by authors

having little education. We do not come across a single woman-writer during the whole of the post-Basaveshvara period (up to the modern times). This clearly points out that the Virashaivism of Basaveshvara was not the same as the Virashaivism of the post-Basaveshvara period. The religion lost its flexibility, vigour and revolutionary zeal. The present-day Virashaivas are in no way different from other people ; they go to temples, and, of course, wear the *lingam*. They observe caste-distinctions. They have religious monasteries which control the society and sometimes become the root cause of many of their problems. That is a different story. But the fact is that Karnataka witnessed a social and religious revolution eight hundred years ago which has not many parallels in the social and cultural history of India.

THOUGHTS OF VIRASAIVA SAINTS- THEIR SOCIAL CONTENTS

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IT WAS in the twelfth century A.D. that a new religious faith and a philosophical school known as Virasaivism came to prominence through the teachings of Virasaiva *Saranas* or saints. Virasaivism is also known as Lingayatism. The follower of this faith is a sworn votary of Siva.¹ Virasaivism is prevalent in Karnataka and it has also some followers in the neighbouring states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The stream of thought set forth by the *Saranas* had strength enough to lead not only the society of their times but that of all times and climes ; because they, without relying upon blind faith in religious matters, discovered an abiding answer to life's strife. Though inspired by the religious thoughts of the past, the *Saranas* tested those thoughts in the crucible of their personal experience and, throwing away the dross, accepted only those which were imperishable. What they considered and felt to be true they propounded fearlessly. Their words that proclaimed truth sounded revolutionary and were aimed at removing the rust clinging to the religious practices and social habits obtaining in those days and kindling the light of truth.

II

Indian society on the eve of the coming of the *Saranas* on the stage of history had become the victim of a lifeless tradition. Plunged in the darkness of ignorance and superstitions, it was unable to shape its own future. The religions which were then in practice had swerved from their true paths and had lost sight of their real goals. The Jaina religion which upheld non-violence was now sustained only by royal patronage. Buddhism centred mainly round individual personalities. The Vedic religion, with its stress on the rigours of *Karma* (religious rituals), had brought nothing but disillusionment among the masses. The superstition that salvation could be achieved only through laceration of the body and self-inflicted pain on it still held the society in its grip. Fraud, injustice and exploitation ruled the society in the name of religion and under the mask of *Karma*.

But the stability of a society depends on its moral values. It is through these values that the good of the society is realised. A good society necessarily believes in freedom, equality and fraternity. The Virasaiva saints aimed at establishing such a society, rebelled against caste distinctions and taught men to believe that the devotees had no caste and were all equal. The *Saranas* asserted that the ideal of equality could become a fact only when the class taboos in respect of food and marriage and the unwanted practice of deciding the worth of an individual on the basis of his birth or occupation were done away with. The following *vachana* of Basavesvara is a perfect illustration of the rationalism of the *Saranas* :

A pariah is the man who slays,
A pariah, if he eats the carrion :

Where is the caste here—where ?
Our Kudala Sanga's Sarana,
Who loves all living things,
He is the well born one.²

Thus, Basavesvara proclaimed that a man's worth should not be judged by his birth, but by his thoughts and deeds, his conduct and character. The same is stated by another saint Siddharamayya thus :

What if he reads and teaches the Veda ?
Could he become a Brahmana ?
What if he is born of the Vedantin's blood ?
Could he become a Brahmana ?
What if he performs eight sacrifices
and six *Karmas* ?
Could he become a Brahmana ?
He is the Brahmana who abides in Brahman
Knowing the Veda doctrine—
He who knows Brahma is Brahmana.³

The *Saranas* not only emphasized the principle that virtue is purity and vice impurity but also practised it in their daily life. This was certainly a revolutionary practice. The very untouchables, whom the high-born had kept at a distance and whose very sight had to be followed by a purificatory bath were admitted by Basavesvara, himself one of the high born, to the Anubhava Mantapa or a Religio-Mystic Academy. He gave them also an equal status in religion and society. Basavesvara who was the moving spirit of the Anubhava Mantapa exclaimed—

Shall I call Siriyala a man of trade,
And Machayya a washerman ?
Call Kakkayya, a tanner, and

Chennayya, a scavenger ?
 And if I call myself, a priest, will not
 Kudala Sangama just laugh at me ?⁴

These principles that were preached and practised by the Virasaiva saints were gloriously vindicated in the marriage brought about between the son of Haralayya, a tanner, and the daughter of Madhuvarasa, a Brahmana girl. The reactionary elements in the society, however, got the upper hand in spite of Basavesvara being the principal minister of the ruling monarch, Kalachuri Bijjala.

III

The individuals who form a society must be industrious. Otherwise the community will have to face an economic crisis. The Virasaiva saints perhaps knew this well and asserted that refusal to work and taking to beggary was a heinous sin. They evolved a new concept which stressed the primary importance of the sense of duty rather than of its rewards and called it *Kayaka*. Work becomes *Kayaka* only when it leads to self-realisation through social service.

The *Saranas* maintained that one must work and live well. Further, they asserted that one must overcome one's selfishness and not claim the reward of the work exclusively for oneself. But one must expend the fruit of one's labour in the spirit of *dasoha*—that one is just a servant in the scheme of the phenomenal world. Only then will work become *Kayaka* or holy work and worship. Any work undertaken for the good of the world is *Kayaka* or worship. They enunciated that every one must pursue one's spiritual progress through one's *Kayaka*. The *Saranas*

pursued different vocations as indicated by the words prefixed to their names :

Nuliya Chandayya, a rope maker ;
 Madivala Machayya, a washerman ;
 Medara Ketayya, a basket maker ;
 Hadapada Appanna, a barber ;
 Ambigara Chaudayya, a ferry-man ;
 Turugali Ramanna, a cowherd ;
 Sunkada Bankanna, a toll-agent ;
 Madara Channayya, a pariah ;
 Talavara Kamideva, a village watchman ;
 Ganada Kannappa, an oil-man ;
 Vaidya Sanganna, an ayurvedic doctor ;
 Sujikayakada Ramitande, a tailor ;
 Bachikayakada Basappa, a carpenter ;
 Kottanada Remavve, a paddy pounder ;
 Molige Marayya, a hewer of wood.⁵

Thus the *Saranas* who were following different occupations sat along with Basavesvara, the chief minister of Bijjala, in the Anubhava Mantapa and participated in its deliberations.

The *Saranas* were devoted to their work. Prabhu, who presided over the deliberations of the Anubhava Mantapa declared in unmistakable terms that one should pay undivided attention to one's work :

One who is engaged in work
 Must even forget the Guru's sight ;
 The Linga worship he must forget ;
 Even if the Jangama stands in front,
 The obligation must be snapped
 Since such work is as good as Heaven,

Amaresvaralinga Himself
Is found in it.⁶

Being absorbed in *Kayaka* one must also attain through it the height that transcends the worker. Prabhu counsels thus :

The deed you do must lead
To knowledge of some other thing.
Both faith and knowledge must be
joined in one
When faith has joined with knowledge, then
You must, by razing stark error out,
Attain the ultimate union in
Our Guhesvaralinga, O Marayya.⁷

IV

In order to preserve the society they had built up, Basavesvara and other *Saranas* established monastic institutions called *mathas* on a large scale for propagating and popularising the tenets of Virasaivism. Many of these institutions have survived even to this day. Though religious in character, the *mathas* largely contributed to the promotion of learning and education, secular as well as sacred. In this education Sanskrit had its due share but more emphasis was laid on Kannada. Every *matha* was presided over by a priest or teacher of the Virasaiva order, who was pious and well read. The *mathas* were also noted for their humanitarian services like giving free food and welcome shelter to the travellers and the poor and the needy.⁸

V

The *Saranas* upheld the purity of married life and showed to the world in their own lives how to lead an ideal conjugal life. Saint Molige Marayya and his wife Mahadeviyamma constitute a striking example to show the heights to which wedded kinship could rise. With such a couple in his mind, perhaps, Dasimayya, another *Sarana*, must have said thus:

The *bhakti* of a wedded pair
Is dear to Siva.
That without love between them
Is like poison mixed with nectar,
Mark it, O Ramanatha.⁹

For the seeker who can realise this, the *samsara* (earthly life) would not become an insurmountable hurdle. One need not run away from the *samsara* mistaking it for *Maya* (cosmic illusion). What is known as *Maya* is not in the worldly things but in the eyes that see them and the mind that directs the eyes. Prabhu expresses this thought in the following words:

They say gold is *maya*,
Woman and land are *maya*,
But gold is not *maya*
Nor woman nor land.
The greed before the mind
Is *maya*; mark it,
O Guhesvara.¹⁰

Ambigara Chowdayya says that—

The man who desires is ever a slave
He is the lord of himself who has wiped

Desire out of his mind.¹¹

Thus the *Saranas* assert that one who overcomes one's desire or greed can live here in this *samsara*. In this way they upheld the purity of married life and created a fresh confidence in life.

VI

The liberal outlook of the *Saranas* proved an incentive to women to come forward in the fields of knowledge, secular and religious, and also in respect of spiritual attainment. This wind of change which softly blew made many women grow to the full stature of which they were capable. Ayadakki Lakkamma was competent to advise her husband to go back and bring rice just sufficient for both of them for one day and no more. For greed is not worthy of the *Saranas*.¹² Akka Mahadevi was another well known *Sarane*. She referred to Basavesvara as her spiritual father¹³ and Basavesvara looked upon her as his mother.¹⁴

VII

The *Saranas* condemned all forms of violence to life and held that eating of flesh was a sinful act. They preached kindness to all living creatures and said that no religion would be worth the name without it. Basavesvara spoke thus: .

What sort of a religion can it be
Without compassion ?

Compassion needs must be
 Towards all living things ;
 Compassion is the root
 Of all religious faiths ;
 Lord Kudala Sanga does not care
 For what is not like this.¹⁵

Sarane Akka Mahadevi says that—

A fisherman drags the waters
 kills fishes and delights ;
 How is it he does not bewail
 them as he does his child
 See his grief is everyone's laughing
 stock ?
 What should I say of devotees who
 injure or sacrifice all life ?¹⁶

VIII

The Virasaiva *Saranas* and their followers have rendered enormous service to the Kannada language and literature. Virasaiva writers, departed from the old traditions of expression and opened out fresh channels of free and simple literary composition. "Virasaiva authors vindicated that Kannada was capable of conveying complex religious ideas, highly philosophical thoughts and subtle mystical experiences in simple and easily understandable style."¹⁷

Among the literary contributions of Basavesvara and his adherents, the *Vachana* compositions stand out foremost. *Vachana* is generally rendered into English as Saying or Rhapsody ; but this term does not adequately

reflect its full import. Though apparently prose in character, *Vachanas* are not mere prose. They are literary gems, simple, terse and pithy, often endowed with lyrical charm and poetic rhythm and beauty embodying the great truths of religion, philosophy, mysticism, human conduct and social behaviour. This may be illustrated with the following *Vachana* of Basavesvara :

Mighty is the elephant ;
 but could you say
 Less mighty the goad ?
 Nay, not so !
 Mighty is the mountain
 but could you say
 Less mighty the thunderbolt ?
 Nay, not so !
 Mighty is the darkness ;
 but could you say
 Less mighty the light ?
 Nay, not so !
 Mighty is oblivion
 but could you say
 Less mighty the mind that
 contemplates Thee ?
 Nay, not so !
 O God of Kudala Sangama.¹⁸

Again the *Vachana* of Sivalenka Manchanna on ethical practices is worthy of notice :

Not to accept another's pelf is an
 observance ;
 Not to covet another's wife in lust
 is a sanctity.
 To observe non-violence to all life is

an undertaking ;
 To know truth from myth
 is a permanent vow.
 This is an observance, beyond doubt,
 For Isanamurti Mallikarjuna Linga.¹⁹

IX

The method adopted by Basavesvara and other saints for bringing about these salutary changes in the social set-up was unique. At Kalyana Basavesvara established a spiritual parliament called the Anubhava Mantapa. *Saranas* from far and near came and settled at Kalyana and participated in the discussions that were carried on in the Anubhava Mantapa. This institution was exceptional in several respects.

In the history of religious movements there seems to have been no other example where a founder of a faith or a reformer has adopted this democratic method of meeting together for discussion and for laying down the path of spiritual advancement and social reconstruction based on free thinking. Basavesvara and his associates adopted this new method. They did not renounce their families nor moved from place to place to preach their gospel. The Anubhava Mantapa was a galaxy of free thinkers. All the *Saranas*, irrespective of their *Kayakas* or occupations, enjoyed equal status. Allama Prabhu presided over these deliberations. The discussions that took place in Kannada have been recorded in the form of *Vachanas*. Each *vachana* or saying is a self-contained unit and is a free expression of the *Sarana* on some spiritual, ethical or economic subject.

X

The thoughts of the Virasaiva saints are of more than regional and temporary appeal. They are not confined to the narrow limits of a bygone historic age or of a particular sect or set of persons. Their teachings possess the merit and force to last through long centuries, worthy of being heard and acted upon by men of the modern age, though placed in different circumstances. The conservatism, orthodoxy and vested interests, the Virasaiva saints crusaded against, and the defects and ills of the society they endeavoured to eradicate still persist among our people. Spirituality and equality of man are yet to be achieved in this age of democracy and materialism. Differentiations like the castes and communities, the rich and the poor, the high-born and the low-born have not yet become obsolete. We are still far away from the spirit of true religion. Faith in one Supreme Being, sincerity of heart, and real devotion need to be emphasised once again. There is the imperative necessity of bettering the lot of human beings at the material, moral and spiritual levels.²⁰ Hence the re-statement of some of the thoughts of the Virasaiva saints is the need of the hour.

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- ¹ P. B. Desai, *Basavesvara and His Times* (Dharwar, 1968), pp. 325-331.
- ² H. Thipperudraswamy, *The Virasaiva Saints—A Study*. Translated into English by Angadi S.M., Mysore, 1968, p. 183.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-183.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁸ P. B. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁹ H. Thipperudraswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

¹¹ P. Sama Rao, *Virasatva Vachanas and Vachanakaras*, (Bellary, 1966), p. 58.

¹² P. G. Halkatti (ed.), *Sivasaraneyara Charitregalu*, p. 45.

¹³ S. S. Bhusnurmath (ed.), *Sunya Sampadane*, 1965, p. 293.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹⁵ *Thus Spake Basava*, Verse 96, published by Basava Samiti, Bangalore, 1965.

¹⁶ P. Sama Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹⁷ P. B. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹⁹ H. Thipperudraswamy, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

²⁰ P. B. Desai, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

THE BASAVAS AND THEIR IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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THE MOST outstanding event in the cultural and religious history of South India, particularly in Karnataka and the Telugu Country, in the medieval period was the revival of Vira-Saivism. The Vira-Saivas are also known by their more popular designation 'Lingayat'. It is so-called because its followers carry a 'linga' or phallic emblem of Siva on their bodies. Scholars are not in agreement regarding the interpretation of the term 'Vira-Saiva'. Some are inclined to explain the compound 'Vira-Saiva' as a stalwart follower of Siva.¹ But the *Saiva Agamas*² and the *Siddhanta Sikhamani*³ maintain that the term signifies a follower of Siva who always delights in the supreme knowledge of the oneness of Siva and Jiva. According to these accounts the etymology of the term 'Vira Saiva' is as follows—the letter 'Vi' teaches the art of the union of Siva and Jiva which is of the nature of oneness of Linga and Anga. Those who delight in such an art are said to be Vira-Saivas. Professor S. N. Dasgupta thinks otherwise. In his opinion "such an etymology, accepting it to be correct, would give the form 'Vira' and not 'Veera.'"⁵

As regards the founder of this system scholars have expressed divergent views. According to one view Basava was the founder of the sect, while others believe that the real leader of the sect was Ekantada Ramayya.⁶ Apart

from the evidences of the *Basava* and the *Cenna Basava Puranas*, an exhaustive account of the early history of this sect is found in an inscription in the temple of Somanatha at Ablur in Dharwar district.⁷ Eliminating the supernatural elements of the record, we can undoubtedly trace some historical facts which show the influence of the Saiva Saints in different royal courts. The testimony of the *Basava Purana*⁸ discloses that the system was prevalent prior to Basava. Again, the account of the *Cenna-Basava-Purana*⁹ shows that Basava organised a wide spread missionary movement with the help of Cenna Basava for the propagation of his doctrine. This movement consolidated the position of Vira-Saivism among the people at large. Basava may thus be credited with building a strong structure of philosophy on the foundation of Vira-Saiva mysticism that had been practised by the earlier saints—like, Ekorama, Panditaradhya, Revana, Murala, and Visvaradhya. According to tradition they are said to have sprung respectively from the mouths of Siva in his five different forms of Aghora, Tatpurusa, Sadyojata, Vamadeva, Isana. J. N. Farquhar observes that the five founders of the sect probably seem to be the contemporaries of Basava, 'some older, some younger.'¹⁰ Tradition avers that the five original acharyas were born out of five different jyotir-lingas of Siva in different places. Thus Revana sprang from the Somesa-linga in Kollipaka, a village in the north of Sri-Saila ; Marula from the Siddhesa-linga in Ujjaini ; Ekorama from Mallikarjuna-linga ; Panditaradhya from the Ramana-tha-linga in Kedarnatha in the Himalayas ; and Visvaradhya from Visvesvara-linga in Benares. The names of these various places spreading from the Himalayas to the trans-Vindhya regions go to show that at one time this religious body had its followers scattered over both north and south,

though in later times it came to be confined to the Kanarese and Telugu countries.

Basava, however, popularised the Vira-Saiva faith and gave it a new appearance by his novel doctrines of socio-religious reformation. The rigid caste-system and the untouchability prevailing in the society were undoubtedly the worst evils at that time. Being a Brahmana by birth, Basava denied the superiority of the Brahmanas and tried heart and soul for abolishing caste-distinction. He vehemently opposed these practices of the society and proclaimed the real nature of religion in many of his vacanas. It is stated in the *Basava Purana* that when the usual time of the sacred-thread ceremony arrived, Basava, then eight years of age, refused to be invested with the Yajnopavita. Basava argues, "I am a worshipper of Shiva and do not belong to the generation of Brahman. I am the axe laid to the root of the tree of caste. I cannot comply with your request."¹¹ In another place he says, "None but the ancients can know it. O stop, stop! Only the devotee of God is of the highest caste. Hence no distinction of caste should be observed. He is neither born nor unborn. The servant of Kudala Sangama Deva is limitless."¹² In another place Basava says, "when devotee comes to my house with the symbol of God on his person, if I then ask him what his caste is, I adjure thee by Thy name, I adjure Thee by the name of Thy Pramathas, let my head be a fine, let my head be a fine, O Kudala Sangama Deva."¹³ It may be mentioned that none of his wives was Brahmana by caste. It shows that Basava tried hard to inculcate the ideals of his vocation for social orientation.

The Brahmanas, the controlling authority of the society, would never take food from non-Brahmanas and

avoided as far as possible all communications with the untouchables. The outcastes who tilled the land and did menial work lived generally in hamlets at a distance from the village proper. But Basava in many of his *vacanas* boldly represents himself as infinitely inferior to the members of the Kakkaya, Dasayya, Cennayya and others who were then despised as untouchables. In a self-abnegating way he thus describes himself in the following—

“I am a poor wretch undevout, O Lord ;
 I ’ve begged for alms at Kakkayya’s house ;
 I ’ve begged for them at Cannayya’s house ;
 I ’ve begged for alms at Dassayya’s too.
 O Kudala Sangama Lord, because
 The Saints together all have given alms,
 My bowl is full!”¹⁴

“The Vedas trembled and trembled ; the Sastras retired and stood ; Logic became dumb ; the Agamas went out and withdrew ; for our Kudala Sangama Deva dined in the house of Cannayya the Holeyoy (untouchable).”¹⁵

An exhaustive study of the *Vacana* literatures demonstrates that the Great Master of the Vira-Saivas had no faith in the supremacy of the Brahmanas and Brahmanical sacrifices. He did not believe in sacrifices, penance and other austerities in the name of discipline. He says, “Leave it alone, that horse-sacrifice, leave it alone, that initiation into the Ajapa Mantra. Leave it alone, that offering in fire, and those countings of the Gayatri spell. Leave them alone, those charms and incantations for bewitching people.”¹⁶ Mention may be made in this connection of some of the names of the famous devotees, e.g., Siriyala, Changale, Sindhu, Ballala, and others, who had led normal lives as

householders. In the opinion of Basava the pain of God's devotee was God's pain. So instead of ceremonial purification one should always try to purify one's will. "Brethren, bathing in the stream and washing yourselves bathe and wash yourselves of the sin of living with strange women, of the lust for another's money. Wash yourselves of these. My Lord Kudala Sangama, if they give up not these but bathe in the stream, the stream will have run in vain for them."¹⁷ It is really noteworthy that Basava's approach of explaining religion was entirely different. The people were ordained not to believe in the prejudices and superstitions.¹⁸

The caste-system, the Brahmanical supremacy and the untouchability were not the only untoward features of the society that Brahmanical religion had evolved. The lowering of woman as a class from the high position marked its degradation in no less conspicuous manner. Basava made an attempt to change this disparity of sex. Thus the diksha ceremony which takes the place of upanayana is performed in the case of girls also and the women, too, have to wear the Linga, like men.¹⁹ The advocacy of widow-marriage in the society was also another important social reformation of Basava. Basava maintains that marriage is voluntary, the consent of the bride before marriage is necessary and child marriage is considered wrong. Divorce is allowed. Widows are treated with respect, and they are permitted to marry again.²⁰ Women are not considered polluted and untouchable during the days of monthly sickness, as is the case among Brahmanic Hindus. How far Basava succeeded in the imposition of widow-marriage in the society has yet to be decided. But we must recognise and appreciate his progressive outlook and his way of thinking for

the betterment of the position of the degraded women. Long after the time of Basava the widow-marriage Act received assent of the Governor-General on the 26th July, 1856. But the mere enactment of law is not all for any social reform. Isvarachandra Vidyasagara tried hard to translate the Act into social custom after six months' interval of enactment.

Another remarkable contribution of Basava for the upliftment of the people of contemporary society was the imposition of the dignity of human labour. He is probably the first thinker in Indian history who preached the dignity of labour. He advised his followers to work hard for the satisfaction of the God Kudala Sangama. Basava says, "you yourself ought to work with an eager mind. You yourself ought to work, labouring with your body. If you do not work with your body, how will Kudala Sangama Deva be pleased with you."²¹ Again, in another Vacana he says, "I labour in my fields for the sake of masters. I trade for the sake of God. I accept service with others for the sake of servants. For, I know that whatever *karma* I form Thou dost subject me to the enjoyment of the fruit of that *karma*."²²

In a sense Basava may be regarded as one of the pioneers in the field of social development and moral and ethical upliftment of the people. His progressive outlook and scientific approach kept him alive to the sufferers and destitutes. There is no doubt that the system of Basava in its original form was one of resolute and wholesale opposition to the prevailing religious thought. It was revolutionary in doctrine, ritual and social custom. Basava was attempting to reform the narrow attitude of the religious teaching and to promote a consciousness of social behaviour.

The two features of this sect—the predominance of monasteries and more or less complete socio-religious equality have sometime been erroneously attributed to the influence of Jainism and Islam.²⁵ Brown finds the Christian influence in them and thinks that “an observation of the Christian faith in the neighbouring country of Malayala may have led to his (Basava’s) seeking a better creed.”²⁶ But none of these views stands the test of scrutiny. There are sufficient justifications to believe that Basava was influenced by the ancient religious scriptures. He was well-acquainted with our ancient religious literatures, like, the *Gita* and the epics and explained them in his own way. The vacanas of Basava have a great resemblance with those of the *Gita* and the epics.

While dealing with the gradation of caste Basava maintains that bad conduct is low caste, while good conduct is high caste. According to Basava “The servants of God Kudala Sangama, who wished good to all beings, were high-born men, the only real aristocracy, the aristocracy of character.”²⁷ A similar idea about the caste-system is also found propounded in the *Bhagavad-Gita*²⁸ as well as in the *Mahabharata*. Thus we read in the Great Epic—“Neither birth, nor the purificatory rites, nor learning, nor offspring, can be considered as grounds for conferring upon one the dignity of a twice-born person. Indeed conduct is the only ground.”²⁷ Similarly, the instances of widow-marriage are not scanty in our ancient scriptures. As regards the re-marriage of women, the *Agni Purana*,²⁹ repeats the texts of Narada and Parasara permitting a woman to take a second husband in the event of five calamities, namely, when the husband is lost, or is dead, or has adopted the life of a recluse, or is impotent, or has become an outcaste. Like-wise Visvarupa²⁹ seems to sanction re-

marriage of women, for he quotes an authority allowing a father to give away his daughter, though no longer a virgin. Taking all these evidences into consideration, what appears to be the truth is that after the inculcation of the Muslim, Christian and Jain thoughts the circumstances became congenial for Basava to render such a rational and thought provoking reformation in the Hindu Society.

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- ⁵ S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. V, pp. 44-45.
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- ¹⁸ P. G. Halkathi, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- ¹⁹ *Collected Works of Sir R. G. Bhandarkar*, Vol. IV, 1929, pp. 197-98.
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- ²¹ P. G. Halkathi, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

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- ²³ Tarachand, *Influence of Islām on Indian Culture*, pp. 119-29.
- ²⁴ *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, 1840, January, p. 145.
- ²⁵ M. V. Iyengar, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- ²⁶ *Bhagavad-Gita*, IV. 13. "Caturvarnam maya sistam guna-karma-vibhagasah."
- ²⁷ *Mahabharata*, XIII. 143.50. "Na Yanirnapi Samskaro na Srutam na ca santati/Karanani dvijatvasya Vrittameva hi Karanam."
- ²⁸ CLVI.5
- ²⁹ Visvarupa's commentary on Yajurvedya, I. 63.

Modern Period

THE BRAHMA SAMAJ MOVEMENT AND ITS SOCIAL CHALLENGE

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OF ALL the socio-religious movements in India in the nineteenth century the movement led by the Brahma Samaj was perhaps the most striking manifestation of the new spirit of the age. Historically, the Samaj represented one of a long series of attempts to found a truly spiritual religion based on original Hindu theism, from which popular Hinduism of the day had digressed to a great extent. But the Samaj was also inspired by other religious faiths like Islam and Christianity, and it accepted much of Christian ethics. Above all, the Brahma Samaj stoutly advocated a policy of social reform, and in its later phases it also developed a bias towards constitutionalism.

The impact of the Brahma Samaj can be assessed correctly only if we keep in view the social and religious conditions in Bengal in the early nineteenth century when the Samaj came into existence. The idea of the unity of Godhead and that of the symbolical nature of idol-worship were well-known to the learned Hindus of Bengal even before the advent of Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), the founder of the Brahma Samaj. This is clearly revealed by the writings of Ramprasad (c. 1723-1775) and Bharat Chandra (c. 1706-1760), the two great Bengalee poets of the eighteenth century. Even a discerning Christian clergyman like the Reverend David Brown who later became

Provost of the Fort William College wrote to a friend in 1792 that all the educated and instructed Hindus whom he had the opportunity of meeting "assent to the unity of God and . . . possess all the light of natural religion . . ."¹ Rammohun himself acknowledged in the preface to his *Translation of the Isopanishad* (1816) that many learned Brahmins of this country "are perfectly aware of the absurdity of idolatry, and are well informed of the nature of the purer mode of divine worship . . ." But, there was a wide gulf of difference between the religion of the masses and that of the learned people. The general body of Bengalee Hindus at the beginning of the nineteenth century worshipped different gods and goddesses in the shape of idols, and elaborate rituals and ceremonies were prescribed for the worship of each deity. Even the average educated person did not know much about the Hindu *shastras*, and the Vedas and the Upanishads were closed books to them. To the masses religion consisted mainly in the scrupulous observance of the rituals and ceremonies of their faith and also of the rules and regulations of the caste system. This great emphasis on rituals and ceremonies naturally resulted in the establishment of an undue influence of the priestly class on society, and the priests, to perpetuate their influence, encouraged various superstitious rights in the name of religion. Belief in the efficacy of magic, witchcraft, etc., also formed an important element of popular religion.²

The social malaise which the Brahma Samaj sought to cure was also a deep-seated one. The Bengalee Hindu society at the end of the eighteenth century was almost inane and stagnant. It was not materially different from what it had been nearly five hundred years ago. The rigid rules of caste prevented social integration and hampered political and social progress, though caste influence

in determining individual vocations was gradually declining in this period, and caste rules were also sometimes violated in secret.³ The degrading position of women was another bane of the Hindu society. Property rights of women had been very much curtailed by the medieval expounders of the Hindu law (like the authors of the *Dayabhaga* and the *Dayatattva*) whose opinions were considered by the people of Bengal as standard authority.⁴ Girls were rarely educated, and early marriage of both boys and girls was the general rule in the Hindu society. Polygamy had become a regular practice with the *Kulin* Brahmins of Bengal who, however, did not care to maintain their wives and children. The *Kulins'* wives usually lived in their fathers' houses which the *Kulin* gentlemen visited occasionally in consideration of financial gain. *Kulin* girls, on the other hand, could be married only to boys of their own rank, and many of them, unable to meet the pecuniary demands of the latter, had to remain unmarried till death.⁵ The widow also generally led a miserable life unless her children were grown up and dutiful to their parent. The bold attempt made by Raja Rajballabh of Dacca in the middle of the eighteenth century (1756) to introduce widow-marriage among the upper-caste Hindus met with complete failure. It was largely to avoid the disgrace and misery of widowhood that so many women perished every year in the flames along with the dead bodies of their husbands.⁶ This horrid practice of Sati, both voluntary and forced, was itself an indication of the great moral degradation of the Hindu community of Bengal. The complete callousness of our people to the sufferings of their own kith and kin is also illustrated by several other practices prevalent in the Hindu society at this time, such as the throwing of children into the Ganges

in fulfilment of certain vows, self-immolation under the wheels of the chariot of Jagannath at Puri and other places, infliction of horrible torture on *sanyasis* (devotees of Siva) at the time of the Charak festival, selling of people including children and young girls into slavery and the offering of human sacrifice before the image of Kali.⁷ Dr. R. C. Majumdar has rightly observed that there was, as it were, "a paralysis of moral sensibilities and utter lack of human feelings among the Hindus, or at least quite a large section of them." Not accustomed to reasoning and the exercise of free judgement for centuries, "men had lost all sense of moral values apart from injunctions of religious creed."⁸ Consequently, even their religious ceremonies (like the Durga Puja) sometimes degenerated into popular festivals of an immoral type. The Muslim community of Bengal, though generally less advanced than the Hindus in different spheres of life, was relatively free from the social prejudices and inhibitions of the Hindus, and unlike the latter they did not suffer from the tyranny of caste. But it is not necessary to dilate upon the condition of the Muslim society in Bengal in connection with the work of the Brahma Samaj which had hardly any impact on it.

The Brahma Samaj originated as a movement of protest against the prevalent polytheistic and idolatrous worship of the Hindus. It is true that even before the rise of the Brahma Samaj several heterodox groups and sects of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries like the Karta Bhajas, the Spashtadayakas, the Balaramis, the Sahebhdhanis, the Khushi Viswasis, the Ramvallabhis and others had openly abjured polytheism and idol-worship, and even renounced distinctions of caste⁹ which the Brahma Samaj was compelled to observe in its early days.

But these heterodox groups and sects did not create so much commotion in the Bengalee Hindu society as the Brahma Samaj did, because their leaders unlike Rammohun belonged mostly to non-Brahmanical castes and had no pretensions to scriptural learning. They never claimed like the founder of the Brahma Samaj that their particular type of faith constituted the true and original form of Hinduism, and therefore their existence was tolerated and almost ignored as that of some dissident caste groups on the fringe of the vast Hindu society.

Rammohun was perhaps originally a believer in deistic theology as his first theological work, the *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin* (written in Arabic and Persian and published in 1803) would indicate. But the bulk of the *Tuhfat* was "negative, critical and destructive in character", and many of the sweeping remarks which Rammohun made here about the leaders of different faiths and also about the value of religious tradition in general were repudiated by him later.¹⁰ From 1815 onward, after he had settled down in Calcutta, Rammohun began to publish Bengali translations of the old Hindu scriptures including the Vedanta and five principal Upanishads (*Isa, Kena, Katha, Mundaka* and *Mandukya*) with a view to laying before his countrymen the real basis of the original Hindu faith. He asserted that his ideas about the unity of Godhead and the rejection of idol-worship were in conformity with the true spirit of Hinduism, as embodied in these ancient scriptures, and that the prevalent practices were due to accretions that grew during later ages. He also made a scathing criticism of priestcraft and idolatry and pointed out their degrading effects on society and the morals of the people. The same views were also propagated in the meetings of the Atmiya Sabha, an association of friends, which Ram-

mohun established in Calcutta in 1815. Leaders of the orthodox Hindu society naturally challenged this reformist tendency, and great Sanskrit scholars like Subrahmanya Sastri, Sankar Sastri and Mrityunjay Vidyalkar engaged in religious controversies with Rammohun. Subrahmanya Sastri of Madras was defeated in an open public debate by Rammohun (1819) and he admitted this defeat frankly.¹¹ Rammohun also came to be involved in a religious controversy with the Baptist missionaries of Serampore, led by Marshman and Carey for criticising certain Christian doctrines like the idea of the trinity which he held to be later accretions. He emphasised upon the ethical and humanistic teachings of Christ and asked the missionaries to forget their dogmas and metaphysical theology.¹² The Christian Unitarians and Rammohun now came together and in 1821 the Unitarian Committee was established in the house of Adam where the worship of God after the Unitarian practice was held every week.¹³ But this arrangement did not satisfy some of Rammohun's Bengalee followers like Tarachand Chakrabarti and Chandrasekhar Deb, and it was at their suggestion that the Brahma Samaj, at first popularly known as the Brahma Sabha, was established on 20 August, 1828. It was originally meant to be an assembly of all persons who believed in the unity of God and discarded the worship of images and the use of unnecessary rituals.¹⁴ In January, 1830, the Samaj came to have its own building at Chitpur in Calcutta, and the Trust Deed of the Samaj which was executed on this occasion (January 8, 1830) directed that the building was to be used "as and for a place of public meeting of all sorts and descriptions of people without distinction" for the worship of one Great God, but that no image should be admitted or rituals permitted therein.¹⁵ The activities of the Samaj

were at this stage mainly spiritual. It met every Saturday evening (later, on Wednesday) when some sort of spiritual service was held. Readings from the Vedas by two Telugu Brahmins, readings of selections from the Upanishads by Utsavananda Vidyavagish, the religious sermons of Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyavagish and the chanting of spiritual hymns composed by Rammohun were the main features of the Brahma form of worship.¹⁶ It should be pointed out here that Rammohun never regarded himself as anything but a Hindu, and that he stoutly denied to the last day of his life the allegation that he was founding a separate sect outside the pale of Hinduism. Though holding up the Upanishads as the highest religious authority of the Hindus, he was ready to accord to the Puranas and the Tantras the status of sacred scriptures and to admit that the practice of idol worship was meant for the uneducated and ignorant masses. He also advised his followers clearly against reviling members of other religious persuasions, however misguided or misinformed they might be, in the opinion of the former.¹⁷ This spirit of toleration did not always, unfortunately, characterise the leaders of the Brahma Samaj, particularly in its later phases.

The form of community worship which Rammohun enjoined in the Samaj, however, failed to capture the imagination of his countrymen, and after the Raja's departure for England in 1831 and his subsequent death there (1833) the Samaj fell into a moribund condition, though the monetary help rendered by Rammohun's close friend and associate Dwarkanath Tagore somehow managed to keep it alive. During the period from 1833 to 1843 only a few middle-class men attended the weekly service of the Samaj, and most of the Raja's close friends and associates

seemed to have lost all interest in it.¹⁸ From this languishing condition the Samaj was resuscitated by Devendranath Tagore, the son of Dwarkanath, who formally joined it in 1843 and instilled a new life into it. Devendranath converted the somewhat loose organization of the Samaj into a spiritual fraternity, introduced a formal ceremony of initiation, and drew up the famous Brahma Covenant, a list of solemn vows which, in the form of a pledge, had to be signed by every member of the Samaj. The *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, started in 1843, became the organ of the Samaj and Devendranath also appointed a number of preachers to propagate his new Brahma doctrine.¹⁹ But it is important to note that the new mode of initiation was based on the *Mahanirvana Tantra* and the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* openly declared the Vedas as a true revelation. In interpreting the Vedanta and the Upanishads Rammohun had put greater emphasis on the doctrine of monotheism than on that of monism, and consequently, as Sir Brajendra Nath Seal has pointed out, he insisted on the duty of meditation and worship as obligatory till the liberation of the soul.²⁰ Devendranath, however, totally rejected the monistic interpretation of the Vedanta, as given by Sankaracharya, and asserted that original Hinduism was nothing but pure theism. Unlike Rammohun, Devendranath had scant regard for the ethical and humanistic teachings of Christ, and viewed Christianity almost as an unmitigated evil for the country.²¹ His theological controversy with the Reverend Dr. Alexander Duff of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland continued for nearly two decades, practically till Dr. Duff left India in 1863.²²

The younger section among the Brahmas, led by Akshay Kumar Datta, however, soon became openly criti-

cal of the doctrine of infallibility of the Vedas. These young men were so rationalistic in their outlook that they went even to the length of deciding upon the attributes of God by voting.²¹ Devendranath had to come to a compromise with them by making a compilation of select passages from the Upanishads inculcating the idea of unity of God-head in two volumes, entitled the *Brahma Dharma* (1848-49) and also by framing a new Covenant for the Samaj in 1850. But while rejecting the idea of infallibility of the Vedas, Devendranath tried to emphasise upon the special relation of the Brahma Samaj with Hinduism and described the abolition of idolatry and superstitious rites as merely a step towards the purification of the traditional faith.²⁴ Before long, however, the Brahma Samaj drifted away from the position owing to the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen, a new recruit of Devendranath from among the fold of his orthodox adversaries (a grandson of the orthodox leader Dewan Ram Kamal Sen).

Keshab Chandra who joined the Brahma Samaj in 1857 and became two years later one of its active workers introduced an element of devotional fervour into Brahmaism, and the movement advanced in rapid strides. Before the end of 1865 fifty-four branches of the Samaj came to be established in India,—fifty in Bengal, two in the North-West Province (modern Uttar Pradesh), and one each in Madras and the Punjab.²⁵ A new missionary zeal characterised the friends and followers of Keshab, some of whom gave up their secular pursuits of life and devoted all their time to the preaching of the new gospel.²⁶ But some fundamental differences of opinion soon became manifest between Keshab and Devendranath, and this led to the first schism in the Samaj. Keshab's belief in the cult of great men and his acceptance of the Christian ideas of

original sin and repentance were disliked by Devendranath, and the latter also did not share Keshab's zeal for social reform, particularly his insistence on the giving up of the sacred thread by the *acharyas* of the Samaj and his enthusiasm for inter-caste marriage and widow-marriage. In 1865 Keshab and his followers seceded from the Samaj led by Devendranath Tagore, and in the following year (1866) they established their own Church called the Brahma Samaj of India. Devendranath's organization, henceforth known as the Adi Brahma Samaj, quietly followed the pure monotheistic form of Hinduism, but, in spite of the tremendous personal prestige of its leader, it soon passed into obscurity.²⁷

The Brahma Samaj of India had for several years a triumphant career. Its missionary exertions extended beyond the boundaries of Bengal; by 1878 the Samaj came to have 124 branches all over India and it conducted twenty-one periodicals in English, Bengali, Marathi, Hindi and Urdu.²⁸ Keshab sought to combine the Christian idea of repentance and prayer with the Vaishnava spirit of *bhakti* (devotion). A striking innovation made by the latter was the adoption of *sankirtan* in the Vaishnava style for the purpose of propagating his faith. Sivanath Sastri has rightly observed that "Jesus was before the inspirer and teacher of Keshub Chunder Sen and now came Chaitanya. The two streams combined and made a confluence which soon produced novel and striking results". The passion of *bhakti* seized the members of the Samaj, but a complaint soon arose that all this was leading to man-worship, Keshab being regarded by some of his followers as a prophet and divine incarnation.²⁹ Keshab's claim that on all important occasions of his life he was guided by divine command

(adesha) was also not taken seriously by the younger Brahmas.³⁰ From 1875 onward Keshab came more and more under the influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great saint of Dakshineswar, and this contact brought about a profound change in his religious beliefs.³¹ He became more and more spiritual-minded and there was a decline in the philanthropic activities of the Samaj.³² This, together with Keshab's moderate views with regard to women's education and emancipation, led to another split in the Samaj. The marriage of Keshab's eldest daughter with the minor Raja of Coochbehar in March, 1878, which violated some of the established social practices of the Brahma Samaj and was solemnized according to some idolatrous Hindu rites, made the younger Brahmas furious, and having failed to dislodge Keshab from the leadership of the Brahma Samaj of India, they started their own organization, the Sadharan Brahma Samaj in May, 1878.³³ The new organization was formed with the consent of the great majority of the local 'churches', and under the leadership of men like Sivanath Sastri, Sib Chandra Deb, Anandamohan Bose, Bepin Chandra Pal and others it adopted an advanced programme of social reform and became the spearhead of the Brahma movement. Keshab and his followers soon organized a separate church called the Navavidhan or New Dispensation which sought to harmonise Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, but this organization shared the same fate as that of Devendranath, particularly after Keshab's death in 1884.³⁴ The spirit of the Brahma movement has since been focussed mainly by the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

Apart from the theological challenge which the Brahma Samaj presented to traditional Hinduism, it also

posed a great social challenge to the stagnant and devitalized Hindu society of the early nineteenth century. Rammohun's religious reform movement had definitely a social purpose before it. Rammohun never failed to emphasize that the traditional forms of Hindu worship encouraged the growth of various superstitious and immoral practices, helped the domination of the priestly class, and led to a degradation in the character of the common people. So he wanted that "some change should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort".³⁵ Kishori Chand Mitra, a junior contemporary of Rammohun, rightly characterised the latter as "a religious Benthamite" who evaluated the different religious creeds in the world according to their tendency to "promote the maximization of human happiness and the minimization of human misery".³⁶ Though Rammohun was an advanced social thinker and played a great role in at least one important reform movement of his time, namely, the anti-Sati agitation, the Brahma Samaj of his day failed to chalk out any clear-cut programme of social reform. Even the caste system was accepted in practice in spite of Rammohun's theoretical opposition to it. The Calcutta newspaper, *John Bull* of 23 August, 1828, noted that the Sudras had no access to the room where the Vedas were recited in the weekly congregation of the Samaj. This was also the practice when Devendranath formally joined the samaj in 1843,³⁷ though the Trust Deed of the Samaj had clearly laid it down in January, 1830, that the weekly religious services of the Samaj would be open to people of all denominations without any distinction.³⁸

Devendranath also lacked enthusiasm for social reform, though in his early life he toyed with some progressive ideas. He held that the caste system was wrong and that

inter-caste marriage might be introduced among the Brahma community. The Brahma Covenant of 1843, drawn up by Devendranath, made abstention from caste practices the first pledge to be taken by a member of the Samaj. A reformed code of ceremonials to be observed by the Brahmas was also drawn up by Devendranath (*Anusthana Paddhati*) and the marriage of his second daughter, Sukumari Devi, was celebrated according to these reformed rites in July, 1861.³⁹ But by 1865 Devendranath seems to have revised his earlier stand, and he refused to enforce the principle, adopted earlier (1861) at the instance of Keshab, that all *acharyas* and *upacharyas* of the Samaj should discard their sacred threads. This was really one of the major issues on which the first split occurred in the Samaj in 1865. After this split the Adi Brahma Samaj deliberately set its face against social reform or propaganda of any kind. Its leader openly asserted that the primary object of the Samaj was not the abolition of caste but to spread the worship of the God of truth and love.⁴⁰ In 1873 Devendranath invested two of his sons, Somendranath and Rabindranath, with the sacred thread according to reformed Brahma rites, though he had earlier discarded his own sacred thread. In his later years Devendranath became totally opposed to inter-caste marriage, as Sarala Devi, one of his grandchildren, tells us in her Bengali autobiography.⁴¹

The third great leader of the Brahma Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen, had, however, a strong social consciousness, and one of his great contributions to the Brahma movement was "the bringing of man's social life within the domain of his religious duty". While Devendranath was willing to leave questions of social reform to individual tastes and inclinations, and to concentrate on the worship of the

Supreme Being, Keshab "tried to view social questions from the standpoint of a pure and spiritual faith, making the improvement of their social life an accessory to men's progress in spiritual life". Under his leadership the younger Brahmas unfurled the banner of social reform by their systematic efforts for the abolition of caste prejudices and also by trying to communicate new light and new life to our womanhood.⁴² It was at Keshab's instance that the Brahma Samaj (still under Devendranath's leadership) first decided to give up all idolatrous rites and practices, and all *acharyas* of the Samaj were instructed to discard their sacred threads (1861). The first inter-caste marriage within the Samaj was celebrated on 2 August, 1864.⁴³ The Brahma Samaj in general and Keshab's followers in particular led a great movement for the improvement of the status of women in our society. They pleaded for granting our women a greater degree of social freedom and put pressure for the abolition of the *purdah* system. In April, 1862, Keshab took his wife to the Jorasanko house of the Brahma Samaj to sit beside him at the time of his ordination as the *acharya* of the Samaj,⁴⁴ a measure symbolic of the new ideal of Brahminism. In 1865 the Brahmika Samaj was established by Keshab for separate worship of God by women.⁴⁵ Ladies of some distinguished Brahma families came out in public. Satyendranath Tagore, the second son of Devendranath and the first Indian member of the I.C.S., went to the Viceroy's parties along with his wife.⁴⁶ In 1871 the progressive section of the Brahma Samaj of India demanded that Brahma ladies should no longer sit behind the *purdah* at the time of the religious service of the Samaj.⁴⁷ Some concrete steps were also taken to encourage women's education. In a meeting held at the Brahma Mandir on October 3, 1861, with Shyama

Charan Sarkar in the chair, Keshab spoke at length on the necessity of women's education. The Brahma Bandhu Sabha organized by Keshab in 1863 encouraged women's education within the family circle (*antahpura-stri-siksha*) and even prescribed courses of studies and text-books for girl students of different classes or grades. A Bengali journal, entitled the *Bama-bodhini Patrika*, was also instituted under the editorship of Umesh Chandra Datta for women readers.⁴⁸ The Bharat Samskar Sabha of Keshab was established in 1870 with a general programme of social reform which emphasised upon the social emancipation of women and proposed the establishment of schools for adult women. P. C. Mozoomdar, Umesh Chandra Datta and others were in charge of executing this part of the programme. The Antahpura Stri-siksha Sabha was established at Dacca for furthering the same object. A normal school for girls was started by Keshab Chandra in Calcutta in 1871 and within a month at least seventeen students were enrolled. In 1871 Keshab started the Bama-hitaishini Sabha, another institution for looking after the welfare of women.⁴⁹ Keshab was, however, not in favour of imparting higher or university education to women and he was also opposed to the free mixing of the sexes as was prevalent in Europe in his days. The more advanced group in his Samaj, not satisfied with Keshab's moderate activities, started a journal, called the *Abala Bandhab* (1869), and established the Hindu Mahila Vidyalaya in 1872 which later changed its name to Banga Mahila Vidyalaya. Still later, this institution was merged into the Bethune College.⁵⁰ Keshab and his followers also tried to fight against various undesirable practices connected with the Hindu system of marriage, such as early marriage, *Kulin* polygamy and the ban on widow-marriage (among the res-

pectable castes). Act III of 1872 (popularly known as the Civil Marriage Act) which was secured largely through the efforts of Keshab was a revolutionary measure indeed. This piece of legislation prohibited early marriage and polygamy and sanctioned widow-marriage and inter-caste marriage for those who did not profess any recognized faith like Hinduism and Islam. The Act could not be made valid for the whole Hindu society or even for all Brahmas because of the vigorous protest of the orthodox section including the Adi Brahma Samaj.⁵¹ An association called the Balya-vivaha Nibarani Sabha was established by a Brahma leader Nabakanta Chatterjee at Dacca for discouraging child marriage.

Besides advocating some concrete measures of social reform, the Brahma Samaj from the time of Devendranath onward rendered valuable social service, and distinguished itself by various humanitarian and philanthropic activities. The Samaj had considerable activities in the sphere of education. The Tattvabodhini Pathshala of Devendranath was established in 1840 to further the cause of religious education.⁵² The Brahma Vidyalaya of Keshab Chandra (1859) was also established for the religious education of of the Brahma youth.⁵³ The Bharat Samskar Sabha founded in 1870 had among its objects the promotion of general and technical education. The Sabha later on took over the management of the Calcutta School founded by a Brahma leader Haranath Bose.⁵⁴ The members of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj were also quite active in this field. The City School founded in 1878 and the Chhatra Samaj (Students' Association) of 1879 were their handiwork.⁵⁵ The Christian ideal of philanthropy was also introduced in the Brahma Samaj by Keshab Chandra Sen. The latter

himself took part in the work of famine relief in U.P. in 1860-61. Under the auspices of the Brahmabandhu Sabha many dispensaries were established for rendering medical aid to the common people.⁵⁶ The Bharat Samskar Sabha took up the cause of prohibition, and in order to support this cause brought out a Bengali monthly, entitled the *Mad Na Garal* (Wine or Poison?). The Sabha also established schools for middle class people and labourers, and charitable dispensaries for the poor. A night school was started for working men and a cheap weekly newspaper, the *Sulabh Samachar*, was published in Bengali for the benefit of the poor people.⁵⁷ The Bharat Ashram, started by Keshab in 1872, tried to propagate new ideas of family life, based on European and Christian ideals adapted to the Indian situation.⁵⁸ As we have already noted, the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, founded in 1878, was inspired by a zeal for social reform, and in some respects their ideas were more advanced than those of Keshab and his followers. They were in favour of imparting higher education to women and supported free mixing of the sexes. Complete abolition of caste prejudices and idolatry, and promotion of temperance and social purity were included in their programme of reform. They also took up in right earnest the old philanthropic activities of the Samaj, and undertook missionary activities among some backward tribes in the neighbouring provinces of Bengal.⁵⁹

But the most interesting feature of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj was the democratic character of its organization. Keshab's Brahma Samaj of India had no constitution, no governing body and no rules of procedure binding on all its members. Everything here was in the hands of the leader. But the constitution of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, as drawn up by Ananda Mohan Bose, was catholic

and democratic, deliberately designed to prevent the growth of an autocratic leadership. Bepin Chandra Pal, who was a leading spirit of this organization, tells us in his autobiography that the constitution of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj was intended to be the model of Free India's constitution. The *Tattvakaumudi*, the Bengali organ of the Samaj, solemnly declared in 1882 that Brahma ideas included not only religious radicalism but also the universal liberation of all peoples under the banner of democratic republicanism.⁶⁰ Many members of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj took part in active politics and worked in close co-operation with nationalist leaders like Surendra Nath Banerjia. The *Brahmo Public Opinion*, an organ of the young Brahmas, had its full share in the political agitation of the day. In 1877 a band of young Brahmas under Sivanath Sastri's leadership proclaimed their faith in independence, and forswore service under the alien Government, but promised to work for their country's elevation in a peaceful, constitutional manner. Members of the group were to act as a close consecrated community like the primitive Christian communities, their lives being dedicated to the service of the nation. This group was shortly dissolved, but it marked a significant development in the political life of the country. The attempt bore no immediate fruit, but it anticipated the later activities of some semi-political, semi-religious groups which became the nucleus of anarchist activity in Bengal.⁶¹ Bepin Chandra Pal, a prominent leader of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, became in the first decade of the present century one of the most vocal and effective critics of the British Government "round whom gathered the nascent Extremist sentiment". Bepin Chandra Pal and another prominent figure of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, Dwarkanath Ganguli, played an

important part in the agitation for the removal of the miserable plight of the Assam tea-garden labourers which started in 1886 and continued for nearly ten years until the National Congress took up the cause of these oppressed people and persuaded Sir Henry Cotton, the then Chief Commissioner of Assam, to take necessary action.⁶²

To estimate the total impact of the Brahma Samaj on the Bengalee society of the nineteenth century is a somewhat difficult task because it is almost impossible to disentangle the results of the Brahma movement from those of other forces in the social and economic life of Bengal, such as the growth of the Bengalee middle class, the process of urbanization, the spread of Western education and values of life, the break-up of the joint family system and so on. None of these forces originated in the Brahma Samaj movement; rather, the Brahma Samaj movement was an indirect result of the working of these forces, or, at best, it was a parallel development. A section of the Bengalee Hindu society was more affected than others by these new forces of the age, and some of them, but not all, joined the Brahma movement. Social reform, philanthropic activities and political agitation were not *exclusively* the concern of the Brahma Samaj in the nineteenth century. The cause of women's education was taken up early in the nineteenth century by the conservative Hindu leader Raja Radhakanta Deb,⁶³ and in the middle of the century its greatest champions were Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Madan Mohan Tarkalamkar, neither of whom belonged to the Brahma Samaj.⁶⁴ It was again the Hindu Vidyasagar whose agitation secured the legalization of widow-marriage in 1856.⁶⁵ Vidyasagar led the movement against Kulin polygamy in the second and the third quarters of the nineteenth

century and he was supported by several progressive front-rank Hindus like Raja Satyasharan Ghoshal, Jayakrishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara, the Maharajas of Burdwan and Nadiya, Dwarkanath Mitra, Rashbehari Mukherjee and others.⁶⁶ The movement against intemperance in the Bengalee society during the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century was led by Peary Charan Sarkar, again a Hindu.⁶⁷ The struggle against caste prejudices and social orthodoxy was started by the Derozians or the Young Bengal group in the thirties of the nineteenth century when the Brahma Samaj had not yet renounced caste in practice.⁶⁸ Similarly, the political or semi-political organisations of Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century like the Landholders' Society (1838), the British India Society (1843) and the British Indian Association (1851) were not exclusively Brahma concerns,⁶⁹ nor could the Brahma Samaj claim as its members Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the prophet of Indian nationalism, or Surendra Nath Banerjee, the most popular nationalist leader of Bengal in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It must, however, be admitted to the credit of the Brahma Samaj that at least from the sixties of the nineteenth century it consistently advocated a policy of social reform and acted as a sort of pressure group, trying to modify the age-old caste practices of the Hindus and to popularise ideas of emancipation of women and reformed family life among the latter. The example set by the Samaj quickened the impulse for reform among the educated Hindus. Philanthropy as a concrete social ideal (and not individual practice) was also successfully put forward by the Brahma Samaj in this country, and its example was later emulated by others.

The success of the Brahma Samaj in these attempts was evidently rather limited. The age-old caste restrictions of the Hindus were, in course of time, relaxed to a great extent, but inter-caste dining did not become very common (on ceremonial occasions, at least) in the nineteenth century, inter-caste marriage remained practically confined to the Brahma community in this period, and widow-marriage also did not prove to be popular at all with the respectable castes of the Hindu society. Higher or University education for women, late marriage of girls, and total abolition of the *purdah* system were also unacceptable to the great majority of the Hindu *bhadralok* class in Bengal before the twenties of the present century. The Brahmas who adopted these practices came to be regarded almost as a separate caste group, though not exactly as members of an alien faith, by most of the Bengalee Hindus. Their numerical strength was also never very large. In 1870, according to Keshab Chandra himself, there were not more than six thousand Brahmas in the whole of India, and in 1901 the total strength of the Brahmas of all denominations did not exceed 4,050.⁷⁰ Such a small minority naturally failed to present any effective challenge to the age-old social practices of the vast body of conservative Hindus. These practices were gradually modified by the operation of various socio-economic forces which became powerful in Bengal only after the First World War, e.g., the increased pace of industrialization and urbanization, break-up of the joint family system, growing economic stringency of the middle class, the spread of the freedom movement and womens' participation in it and so on. The influence of the Brahma Samaj was very much on the decline in these days. In one respect, however, the example of the Brahma Samaj

has totally failed to influence the Hindu society up to this day ; it was the emphasis put by the Samaj on monotheism and abolition of idol-worship, the first and fundamental idea with which the movement started in the days of Rammohun Roy and on which it constantly harped till the end. Surprisingly enough, the theological challenge of the Brahma movement indirectly helped the Hindu community by arresting the conversion of the educated Hindus to Christianity. As Sir Jadunath Sarkar has pointed out, the Brahma Samaj provided what awakened conscience asked without compelling an absolute break with the Hindu society.⁷¹

The gradual decline of the Brahma Samaj towards the end of the nineteenth century was due mainly to two factors. The first was the rising tide of aggressive religious nationalism of the Hindus which swept everything before it in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the opening decade of the twentieth. The chief exponent of this new gospel of religious nationalism in Bengal was Swami Vivekananda, and it also found expression through the writings of Bengalee litterateurs like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Ramesh Chandra Datta, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, and Nabin Chandra Sen.⁷² Secondly, from the eighties of the nineteenth century the Bengalee youths were diverted more and more to political questions, and consequently, they became indifferent to socio-religious movements like that led by the Brahma Samaj. Keshab Chandra's open proclamation of loyalty to the British Crown naturally alienated the rising generation of Bengalee nationalists.⁷³ The bitter internal feuds within the Brahma community also contributed not a little to their loss of popularity.

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THE PRARTHANA SAMAJ

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SPEAKING about India in the House of Commons, Lord Palmerston observed, "It is indeed remarkable that those regions, in which science and art may be said to have first dawned upon mankind, should now be subject to the rule of a people inhabiting islands which, at a time when these eastern regions enjoyed as high a civilisation and as great prosperity as that age could offer, were in a state of utter barbarism."¹ It is an irony of history that in modern times the foreigners had to remind the Indians of the "Wonder that was India".

Politically divided against herself and enslaved, socially degenerated, economically backward and exploited, spiritually low, religiously debased, intellectually stagnant, India at the beginning of the nineteenth century presented a pitiable spectacle of down and out. In this condition the shattering impact of the West rendered a great service. It brought about a splendid Indian Renaissance.

The essential spirit of the Indian Renaissance first expressed itself in the "nation's great new spiritual urge towards Truth and Justice and Love" which manifested itself in the religious and social reform movement. The Brahma Samaj founded by Raja Rammohan Roy, "India's Columbus in the discovery of a new continent of truth," has been the most shining expression of the new spirit. Raja Rammohan Roy and his Brahma Samaj are indeed the spiritual

parents of Modern India.

The ideas of the Brahma Samaj gradually spread outside Bengal, but it was only in Maharashtra that they found the most suitable soil to spring up in the form of a kindred organisation known as the Prarthana Samaj. On account of the humanist movement of the mediaeval saints, Maharashtra had experienced some measure of spiritual emancipation long before the rise of the Brahma Samaj. Secondly, after Bengal, the impact of the British rule was felt more keenly in Maharashtra than in other parts of India. The Prarthana Samaj, like the Brahma Samaj, came into being in response to the pressing need of the times.

II

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the social and cultural life in Maharashtra was at a very low level, and deteriorating on account of the chaotic political condition. Contemporary evidence, both indigenous and foreign, testify to this fact. Maclean gives a graphic account of the prodigal anarchy that prevailed in the Maratha country at the time of the dethronement of the last Peshwa. He says that the people were so much disgusted with the Peshwa's rule that none but "the court favourites, military chiefs and adventurers regretted the change of government." Judicious Elphinstone's description of the moral character of the people at that time is very revealing. He wrote that "falsehood in all shapes pervades all ranks, and adultery and . . . prostitution are common in the upper classes." The caste, says he, was the most predominant force in the society.³

Regarding the state of education, James Douglas

observed that the Peshwas did nothing to promote learning. Not a single book worth remembering was produced during the Peshwa regime.⁴ The average man had neither the inclination nor the desire to acquire learning.⁵ The whole of India at this time was suffering from the dreadful disease of colossal ignorance. "99 men out of 100 were ignorant. One per cent formed an exception. In the case of women, even this exception was not permitted by society."⁶ Maharashtra was not free from this disease.

The state of religion was at its worst. It had become a mass of rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices. Religion was so closely interwoven with the social life that it was impossible to draw a demarcating line between the two. From the cradle to the grave the whole life of man was governed by innumerable traditional customs and usages, which supposedly had their sanction in religion. The social code of each caste and sub-caste was made inflexibly rigid and rigorously guarded.⁷ People steeped in ignorance and superstition resorted to numerous shocking social evils. James Mackintosh recorded in his diary on November 9, 1808, of Captain Christie having told him that in Poona "the Carwaree Brahmins, who are charged with human sacrifices (The 'Numed'), have lately offered a Brahmin to the dread goddess Calee, whom they worship."⁸ In a society when the cruel Sati system was ceremoniously practised, this kind of human sacrifice in the name of religion was not unknown.⁹

The foreigners' account of the utter degeneration of the society and the government under Bajirao II is fully corroborated by Narain Vishnu Joshi, a Poona Brahmin, in his book *Poone Shaharache Varnan*, published in 1868. The latter writes : "Bajirao turned the people into pleasure

loving, indolent, lazy, faithless traitors. Surrounded by sanctimonious bawds, Bajirao gave himself up entirely to pleasures and religious rites. His example was followed by others in government and social hierarchy. Administration became lax and the lawlessness became the order of the day. Each Subhedar ruled over the people according to his own sweet will. Corruption reigned supreme in every department and justice fell into the laps of the highest bidder. Ryot and trader was subjected to extortion. Morality and religion were at a discount. Only those who valued money more than the honour of their mothers, wives, and sisters respected Bajirao. None liked him, except Brahmins who throve on his charity and feasts, and but for them he would have been long murdered. Ignorance was unbelievable. Hardly anyone knew who the English were or from where they came. Their knowledge was confined to the palace of the Peshwa and the feasts he gave. They thought Calcutta to be foreign and vice versa. Bajirao abandoned good old customs and set new ones which were all for the worse."¹⁰ This was the state of Maharashtra at the time of the establishment of the British rule.

With the collapse of the Peshwa regime the centre of gravity shifted from Poona to Bombay city, the capital of the new presidency. Bombay, which had so far grown in isolation now came to be integrated with the rest of Western India. The introduction of the British rule produced far-reaching consequences. The British administration of law and justice, Western education and Christian missionary activities started the process of transforming existing society.

Elphinstoue who was the Governor of Bombay from

1819 to 1827 laid the foundation of new education which proved to be the chief solvent of the traditional ideas and beliefs. The intellectual effects of Western education were profound. The newly educated young men, imbued with the scientific spirit of the West, began to question the validity of the customs and usages that could not stand the test of reason.

Since 1814 the Christian missionaries, who rendered very useful service to the education of the Indians, were active at conversion. By 1854, there were 1,12,425 converts in Bombay city alone.¹¹ Most of these converts were from the lower castes. The whole of Western India was, however, convulsed by the baptism of two Parsees, Dhanjibhai Nowrojee and Hormosjee Pestanji, in 1839, and again by the baptism of the first educated Brahmin Narayan Sheshadri in 1843. Narayan's brother Shripat was also converted. He was, however, restored to Hinduism by the efforts of Balshastrri Jambhekar in the teeth of opposition from the orthodox.

III

The impact of Western education and Christianity produced a new awareness. The unrestrained attack of the missionaries on the beliefs of the Hindus created a great resentment. At the same time thoughtful Indians felt the necessity for the reformation of the Hindu society and the purification of the Hindu religion. They realised that the age-old customs like child-marriage, polygamy, enforced widowhood, disfigurement of young widows, rigid caste restrictions, untouchability, denial of education to women and such other moral and social evils were the bane

and blight of the Hindu society. This awakening brought forth a great liberal movement in Maharashtra.

Lokhitwadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823-1892), Jyotiba Phule (1827-1895), Dadoba Panduranga (1814-1882), Balshastri Jambhekar (1812-1846), Jagannath Shankar Shet (1803-1865) and others did pioneering work in the field of social reform. Between 1848 and 1850 Gopal Hari Deshmukh, who subsequently became a member of the Prarthana Samaj, published his celebrated *Shatpatren* in a Marathi weekly, *Prabhakar*. His writings covered every aspect,—social, economic, religious and political,—of the Hindu society. One could hardly come across a more hard-hitting, brutally frank and merciless criticism of the social and religious customs of the Hindus as one reads in his *Shatpatren*. In his letter No. 64 dated 17th June, 1849, he gave fifteen striking suggestions for Hindu religious and social reformation.¹² In fact every one of his 108 letters and other essays are not only replete with criticism but also full of concrete suggestions for reform.

Jyotiba Phule (1828-1890), the founder of the "Satya Shodhak Samaj" (Sept. 24, 1873), was another inspired soul. He started a girls' school in 1842, a school for the untouchables in 1854, and an orphanage to prevent infanticide in 1863. This was indeed revolutionary achievement for that age.

Balshastri Jambhekar, the father of Marathi journalism, started the first Marathi and English journal *Darpan* in Maharashtra. In the very first issue of the *Darpan* he stressed the importance of Western education for the advancement of the Indians.¹³ Through the columns of the *Darpan* he strove hard to educate people in matters of educational and social importance. He stood for reconversion of the baptised into Hinduism. A versatile

genius, Balshastri Jambhekar is rightly called "the first social and religious reformer" in Maharashtra.

A number of periodicals followed the *Darpan* (1832). Important among them were the *Digdarshan* (1840), the *Prabhakar* (1841), the *Dnyanodaya* (1842), the *Dnyanprakash* (1849). These and other periodicals, along with the new learning, slowly spread enlightenment among the educated classes.

The two secret societies, the Manavdharma Sabha and the Paramhansa Sabha, forerunners of the Prarthana Samaj, were somewhat immature expressions of the new enlightenment. The founders of these Sabhas were influenced by the ideas of the Brahma Samaj. But they had no clear conception of religious and social reform. The Manavdharma Sabha was founded by Dadoba Panduranga and his friend Manchharam at Surat in 1843, to eradicate evil social and religious practices.¹⁴ Its counterpart in Bombay was the Paramhansa Sabha, organised again by Dadoba Panduranga in 1849. Its first and last president was Ram Balkrishna Jaykar who was deeply influenced by the thoughts of Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar.¹⁵ The Sabha was more concerned with social than with religious reform. Breaking of caste-barriers was its foremost aim. Every member of the Sabha had to undergo an initiating ceremony like eating a piece of bread made by a Christian and drinking water brought by a Mohamedan. In 1860 someone stole the records of the Sabha and threatened to publish the names of its members. There was scathing criticism in the newspapers.¹⁶ The people accused them of flirting with Christianity. Not all the members had the courage of conviction to face the ridiculing and hostile public. The Sabha met with a sudden and ignominious death. Some of its members went back to the traditional

practices. One member, Baba Padmanji, became a Christian.

The demise of the Paramhansa Sabha taught a great lesson. A conviction dawned on a few earnest members that it was not merely by adopting certain externals that the society could be reformed. They realised that "the only way to regenerate the country was to regenerate its heart, to purify it by means of God, humanity and religion."¹⁷ It would, therefore, be true to say that "out of the ashes of the Paramhansa Sabha, the Prarthana Samaj was born."

IV

In the meantime the liberal movement in Maharashtra was slowly gathering momentum. A number of forces were at work contributing directly and indirectly to the advent of a silent social revolution. Many literary and educational institutions like the Students' Literary and Scientific Society (1848), the Dnyana Prasarak Sabha (1848), the Bombay Association (1852), and the Royal Asiatic Society (1834) were active in the pursuit of knowledge. The progressive periodicals, especially the *Indu Prakash* (1862), were moulding public opinion in favour of social reform.

Social legislations passed by British Government,—equal punishment for even offence irrespective of caste and class (1817), abolition of Sati (1829), the right to inherit property even after conversion (1830, 1850), abolition of Pilgrim Tax (1840), abolition of Slavery (1843), legalisation of Hindu widow marriage (1856), etc.—had their own effect on society. The introduction of the railways in Maharashtra (April, 1853) was another factor that helped relaxing

social rigidity and orthodoxy.

The newly established Bombay University (1857) produced the first batch of four arts graduates—Mahadev Govind Ranade, Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Bal Mangesh Wagley and Waman Abaji Modak—in 1862.¹⁸ These four intellectuals played a distinguished part in the development of the Prarthana Samaj.

In 1862 the whole of Bombay city was convulsed by the sensational Maharaja Libel case. It brought to light many shocking evils practised in the name of religion. In his judgement Justice Sir Joseph Arnold observed, "What is morally wrong cannot be theologically right," and that for the common welfare of the society such evil and immoral practices must come to an end.¹⁹ The public conscience was stirred to its very depth by this unpleasant but true state of religion at that time. Such events provided an immediate stimulus to the idea of socio-religious reform that was agitating earnest minds.

Keshab Chandra Sen, the great leader of the Brahma Samaj, made a missionary tour of Bombay in 1864. He delivered a series of lectures on social and religious reform. But the city was then in the grip of a commercial crisis caused by the American Civil War.²⁰ The people were literally rolling in wealth.²¹ They were in no mood to follow religious discourses. Only a few religious-minded persons who heard him were thrilled by his thoughts. Keshab went back disappointed. The economic crisis ended in a great crash in 1865. The rich became poor and humble.²² The great economic crisis created a favourable climate for the rise of the Prarthana Samaj.²³ The change that came about in the thinking of the people was reflected in the tremendous enthusiasm with which Keshab was

heard on his second visit in 1868.

Ever since the demise of the Paramhansa Sabha, the reformists were thinking in terms of establishing an open religious institution. Keshab's first visit had provided an additional incentive. The preliminary meeting of the promoters of the new organisation which was later named Prarthana Samaj was held on December 30, 1866, at the residence of Dr. Atmaram Panduranga. Thereafter a number of such meetings were held where many social and religious problems were discussed. The final outcome was the birth of the Prarthana Samaj on March 31, 1867.

V

Among the founders of the Prarthana Samaj were Dr. Atmaram Panduranga, its first president, some members of the old Paramhansa Sabha and a few others.²⁴ The final draft of the principles of the Prarthana Samaj was adopted on July 30, 1867. The aims were theistic worship and social reform. The second visit of Keshab Chandra Sen in 1868 helped to strengthen the organisation.

Mahadev Govind Ranade and Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar who joined the Prarthana Samaj in 1868 and 1869 respectively gave it a definite form and character. To Ranade the Prarthana Samaj was "only a faint reflection and an humble off-shoot" of the ancient Dharma. He described the Bhagwat Dharma as "Protestant Hinduism", preached and practised by "the saints and prophets for two thousand years and more."²⁵ The spiritual and social emancipation of the degraded classes has been the keynote of the religious movement led by the mediaeval saints. The Prarthana Samaj, said Ranade, is but the continuation

of the same movement with its ideal of "love of God in the service of man." Ranade's "Theist's Confession of Faith"²⁶ admirably sums up the philosophy of the Prarthana Samaj.

Bhandarkar clearly explained the position of the Prarthana Samaj in the religious world. For the moral advancement of the country, he said, the existing mechanical mode of worship should be substituted by the spiritual. He declared that the doctrines of the Prarthana Samaj are derived from the Upanishads, Bhagavadgita, and the teachings of the mediaeval saints, "supplemented by certain ideals from Buddhism or from the Bible."²⁷

Ranade and Bhandarkar were the principal authors of the reconstituted Six Principles of Faith adopted by the Prarthana Samaj in the year 1873. They are :

- (1) God is the Creator of this universe. He is the only true God ; there is no other God besides Him. He is eternal, spiritual, infinite, the store of all good, all joy, without parts, without form, one without a second, the ruler of all, all-pervading, omniscient, almighty, merciful, all-holy, infinite in love and the saviour of sinners.
- (2) His worship alone leads to happiness in this world and the next.
- (3) Love and reverence for Him, an exclusive faith in Him, praying and singing to Him spiritually with these feelings and doing the things pleasing to Him constitute His true worship.
- (4) To worship and pray to images and other created objects is not a true mode of divine adoration.
- (5) God does not incarnate Himself and there is no one book which has been directly revealed by God or is wholly infallible.

- (6) All men are His children, therefore they should behave towards one another as brethren without distinction. This is pleasing to God and constitutes man's duty.²⁸

At the time of the inauguration of the Prarthana Mandir of the Samaj in 1874, it was declared: "Divine Service shall be conducted here in such spirit and manner as may enable all men and women irrespective of distinction of caste, colour and condition, to unite in one family, eschew all manner of error and sin, and advance in wisdom, faith and righteousness."

The faith of the Prarthana Samaj differed from the current Hinduism of the day in rejecting image worship and acceptance of one God without a form. It opposed the various religious rites and propitiation by visible sacrifice which had become the essential characteristics of the current Hinduism. It did not acknowledge or revere any book as the infallible word of God, but at the same time it did not 'ridicule or condemn' a book acknowledged by any sect as infallible. It did not believe in incarnation and miracles. In the theist's faith there is no absolute need for a mediator or redeemer. It did not believe in the practice of austerities and virtues of ascetic life. One of its cardinal principles was that "all men and women are equally children of God, and in His sight no distinction obtains between man and man."²⁹ Implicit in these principles was the ideal of social reform, towards the realisation of which the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj ceaselessly worked.

Although the Prarthana Samaj came into being through the inspiration of the Brahma Samaj, right from the start it had its own individuality. The difference in the two Samajas is to be found in the historical background

and the mental make-up of the two peoples. The difference between the excessive emotionalism of the Bengalees, and the shrewd commonsense and practical nature of the Maharashtrians is clearly reflected in the growth and development of the two institutions. Miss Collet gave an accurate description of the distinguishing characteristics of the Prarthana Samaj in her *Brahma Year Book* for 1880. She wrote "Although in thoroughly fraternal relations with the Eastern Samajes, it (Prarthana Samaj) is of indigenious growth and of independent standing. It has never detached itself so far from the Hindu element of Brahmaism as many of the Bengali Samajes, and both in religious observances and social customs, it clings far more closely to the old models."³⁰ Unlike the Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj at no time attempted to form a separate sect outside the general Hindu body.

VI

Right from its inception the Prarthana Samaj had to face bitter criticism from the orthodox Hindus and the Christian missionaries. Its Hindu opponents accused the Prarthana Samaj of blindly imitating the Christians.³¹ They also argued "that this form of eclecticism had no leg to stand upon, that reason and conscience without some support of authority in text and scriptures, were but a frail reed to lean upon."³² The missionaries on the other hand wishfully hoped that the Prarthana Samaj was a right step in the direction of Christianity.³³ The most severe attack, however, came from Lokmanya Tilak. Through the columns of the *Kesari* Tilak opposed the theistic religion of the Prarthana Samaj. In an article entitled 'Imitation',

Tilak even went to the extent of attributing the initial rush of the Samajists at the Prarthana Mandir to the presence of the ladies in the upper galleries."³⁴ More seriously he argued that theistic religion was "alien to the Indian tradition" and that the "religious and philosophical thought in India has always been firmly rooted in the Vedant."³⁵

In reply to Tilak's criticism Bhandarkar wrote two articles entitled 'Kesari and the Prarthana Samaj' and 'The Wild Pranks of Kesari', explaining the religious and social ideals of the Prarthana Samaj.³⁶ The position of the Samajist was well explained by the *Subodh Patrika*, the official organ of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj. It said, "As the members of the Samaj their attitude to all faiths was eclectic but they based their precept and practice on the best they found in the religious and devotional writings of their motherland."³⁷ One of the reasons why Bhandarkar and Ranade opposed the move to change the name Prarthana Samaj to Brahma Samaj was that "Keshab's religion clearly took its rise from Christianity."³⁸ This proves the falsity of the charge that the Prarthana Samaj was an imitation of Christianity.

VII

The Prarthana Samaj movement, inspired by the love of God, was reinforced by the love of humanity. Ranade, the Chief exponent of the Prarthana Samaj, incessantly stressed its ideal—"Religion was as inseparable from social reform as love to man is inseparable from love to God . . . That the life could not be shut up, as it were, into watertight compartments, cut off from one another, but that religion must give unity to all spheres of human activity."³⁹

This spirit manifested itself in various activities designed to bring about social reform.

In the face of hostile critics, the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj persuaded their generation to see the necessity of fighting the moral and social evils that had crept into the Indian society. Specifically they sought the abandonment of caste, the abolition of child marriage, the elevation of the depressed classes, and the encouragement of women's education. To achieve these aims they organised the social reform movement. The leaders of the Prarthana Samaj were the pioneers of many a movement started for the elevation of the Indians.

Education, the key to advancement in life, which had been hitherto the exclusive privilege of certain castes, engaged the attention of the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj. Bhikoba Laxman Chavan, the first revered minister of the Prarthana Samaj founded the first night-school (Chelwadi, Bombay) in the whole country in the year 1876. The idea was to spread education among the working classes. In course of time a number of night-schools were established under the auspices of the Prarthana Samaj. Students of all communities and castes were admitted to these schools. Among the students were peons, postmen, motor drivers, mill workers, factory workers, tailors, porters and many others. Sir W. Wedderburn who occasionally visited these schools was delighted to see the children belonging to different castes sitting and studying together. To the Prarthana Samaj belongs the credit of promoting the idea of "learn while you earn."

The first regular day school was started in 1917 and was named after Raja Rammohan Roy. Today, the Prar-

thana Samaj runs a net-work of primary and secondary schools in Bombay.

Umiyashankar Lalshankar, a great philanthropist and leader of the Prarthana Samaj, started a Foundling Home in 1875 and an Orphanage in 1878 at Pandharpur. The conduct of these institutions was soon taken over by the Prarthana Samaj, and they are still admirably rehabilitating unfortunate women, and saving the lives of hundreds of children, forsaken by their mothers. During the terrible famine of 1876-77 the members of the Prarthana Samaj did a lot to relieve the sufferings of the affected people.

Arya Mahila Samaj, another historic institution, was founded by Pandita Ramabai under the roof of the Prarthana Samaj in 1882, with the intention of emancipating women from the tyranny of evil social customs, and to encourage education and spread of knowledge among them. Ramabai Ranade, Ramabai Bhandarkar, Dr. Kashibai Navrangay and Lady Chandavarkar have rendered a great service to this institution. The Arya Mahila Samaj continues to do its good work till to-day.

From the pulpit and public platform leaders of the Samaj incessantly advocated the cause of women's education. In 1877 Pratap Chandra Mazumdar and Dr. Sakhararam Arjun started the work of educating women. Ranade started the Female High School in Poona in 1882. It is significant to note that Bombay's first three women graduates were from the Prarthana Samaj families. The emergence of women in public life was highlighted when the worthy daughter of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, Mrs. Sirur, moved the resolution on women's education at the Bombay Presidency Social Conference in 1901. She was

followed by many others. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Prarthana Samaj played a distinguished part in the elevation of the Indian women.

The Prarthana Samaj espoused the cause of the Harijans in right earnest. Vithal Ramji Shinde, a missionary of the Prarthana Samaj, founded the Depressed Classes Mission Society of India in 1906. The mission was inaugurated by Sir N. G. Chandavarkar, who was the moving spirit behind this effort for the advancement of the depressed classes. The 1901 census put the number of the Hindus in this country to 19,27,19,738 of which 5,32,36,632 were treated as untouchables. The attitude of the Prarthana Samaj to this human problem can best be described in the words of Chandavarkar: "By elevating the depressed classes, we elevate ourselves. So long we have the untouchables among us we shall bring to ourselves the contamination of the untouchables. He who tries to lower and degrade others and treat them as caste-aways ends in the long run by lowering and degrading himself. There can be no reform or hope for the higher so long as the so-called lower castes are despised."⁴⁰ The aim of the Depressed Classes Mission Society of India has been to promote education and provide employment, remedying social disabilities and preaching the principles of liberal religion, personal character and good citizenship.⁴¹

Other social reform objectives of the Prarthana Samaj like the abolition of child-marriage, re-marriage of widows, inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage, found their proper place in the all-India social reform movement. The first Brahma marriage between Vasudev Babaji Navrangay

and Krishnabai, a widow, was solemnised by Bhikoba Chavan on August 24, 1870. In response to an all-India inquiry by Keshab Chandra Sen regarding the suitable age for women to marry, two devoted workers of the Samaj, Narayan Mahadeo Parmanand and Atmaram Panduranga gave the verdict of 20 years.

The *Subodh Patrika*, organ of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj, was started on 4th May, 1873. Right from the beginning it has been popularising the theistic teaching of the Unity of God and spreading the tenets of the Prarthana Samaj. It has made an important contribution to the religious and social thought of the age. Undoubtedly it is a proud record for a religious journal to complete a hundred years of its existence.

Besides this religious paper, the Young Theists Union, the Brahma Postal Mission, and the Sangat Sabha have done a good deal for the moral and intellectual advancement of our people. The speeches and writings of the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj form a part of the modern religious literature of India. Among important religious works inspired by the Prarthana Samaj mention may be made of *Ranade Yanchi Dharmapar Vyakhyane* (1924), *Bhandarkar Yanchi Dharmapar Lekh va Vyakhyane* (1909), *Narayan Chandavarkar Hyanchi Dharmapar Vyakhyane* (1911), *Vaman Abaji Modak Hyanchi Dharmapar va Nitipar Vyakhyane* (n. d.), and *Shinde Yanchi Lekh va Vyakhyane* (1913). The Prarthana Samaj popularised the devotional songs of the saints of Maharashtra, especially of Tukaram.

The leaders of the Prarthana Samaj were among the first to envisage the Indian society as a whole. Ranade who devoted his whole life to the furtherance of the objects

of the Prarthana Samaj, was the first to conceive a plan for an all-India reform movement. Basically Ranade's philosophy was rationalistic and humanistic. He viewed the human life in all its aspects,—religious, social, economic and political,—and insisted that the reformer should deal with the "whole man". Ranade not only provided the thought but also gave a programme and plan of action for the elevation of the Indian people.

Ranade was one of the founders of the Indian National Congress. The Indian National Social Conference was also his creation. He was one of the sponsors of the Deccan Education Society in 1884. This institution produced some of the greatest leaders of Modern India. Ranade can be called the father of Maratha history and he is universally acknowledged as the Father of Indian Economics. In fact, there is not a single movement of national reconstruction with which Ranade was not actively associated. He may truly be called one of the makers of Modern India.

Bhandarkar, another patriarch of the Prarthana Samaj, was for "a complete scheme of national regeneration for India rather than a partial scheme for carrying out repairs in some parts of social structure". He declared the object of the social reform to be eradication of evil customs which sapped the energy of the society. This great Sanskrit scholar has made an invaluable contribution to the country's moral and intellectual advancement.

Sir Narayan Chandavarkar who succeeded Ranade to the Presidentship of the Prarthana Samaj in 1901 nobly followed the lead given by Ranade and Bhandarkar. He too was a great reformer and educationist. He founded organisations like the Social Reform Association, the Social Service League and others. Speaking at the Bombay Provincial Social Conference in 1901, he said, "In the National

Social Conference all castes, all races, all provinces, all causes are to meet in friendly rivalry in the pursuit of the social and moral progress of the common fatherland"⁴³—India of all Indians—Hindu, Mahomedan, Parsi, and Christian—united in mind and heart, such was the grand conception of the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj.

To the leaders of the Prarthana Samaj belongs the credit of bringing to Indian patriotism "the inspiration of lofty ethical ideal". Their spiritual idealism has been a potent factor in our national regeneration. They were among the initiators and authors of cultural and humanitarian nationalism, which helped the country's political emancipation.

VIII

In spite of its able leadership and high ideals, in spite of its excellent work in social and educational fields, the Prarthana Samaj has not spread widely. This is true in spite of the coming up of the associated Samajas at Poona (1870), Ahmedabad (1871), Ahmednagar (1874), Satara (1886) and many other places. One may adduce many reasons for this.

In the first place, the Prarthana Samaj never had a large group of missionaries to propagate its ideals. Vithal Ramaji Shinde and Sadashiv Panduranga Kelkar were the only two well-known missionaries of the Samaj in its long history. Its leaders were at best part-time workers. May be because its leaders "Telang, Ranade, Chandavarkar were from the Bombay Judiciary, it did not show the militant zeal which manifested in Bengal." The cautious rather than revolutionary approach of its leaders to various prob-

lems failed to strike the popular imagination. Lokmanya Tilak who had a great mass following in Maharashtra opposed the movement and that also affected its growth.

Secondly, the Prarthana Samaj appealed more to reason and conscience than to emotion ; hence it operated only on the intellectual level. No amount of rational explanation could resolve the contradiction that existed between the singing of the devotional songs of Tukaram and the rejection of the idol of his beloved "Vithoba" by the Samaj. Ranade himself admitted the Samaj's failure "to stir the heart of the nation," and regretted that its influence was "only operative over a few souls brought up in a particular atmosphere."⁴³ Nevertheless, it would be true to say that the Prarthana Samaj exercised a wholesome influence on the rising generation of intellectuals in Maharashtra and outside.

IX

Today, the Prarthana Samaj is silently carrying on the religious and social work it started a hundred and five years ago. The religious activities of the Samaj are: weekly Divine Service, Sunday School, Sangat Sabha, the Anniversaries and the *Subodh Patrika*. Its social and educational work is conducted through the following institutions: W. B. Navrangay Orphanage, Pandharpur Foundling Home, D. N. Sirur Home, Arya Mahila Samaj, Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar Library, Book Room. It has a network of primary and secondary schools. The first regular day-school, founded by the Prarthana Samaj in 1917 and named after Rammohan Roy, is indeed a model educational institution in the city of Bombay. The present President of the Samaj

Shri G. L. Chandavarkar, a worthy scion of the illustrious Chandavarkar family, earnestly follows and endeavours to promote the noble traditions of the Samaj.

In keeping with the spirit of the times, the Prarthana Samaj on the occasion of the celebration of its 104th anniversary has launched a new project of profound importance to the modern world. It has taken up the work of compiling an anthology of religions from the scriptures of the Faiths men lived by in different ages and in different parts of the world. The idea is to proclaim and bring about the SARVA-DHARMA-SAMA-BHAVA, the harmony of all Faiths. “

The spirit of the Prarthana Samaj has been the spirit of Modern India. The Prarthana Samaj played a distinguished part in the great nineteenth-century Indian Renaissance. It has been a centre of reform activities in Western India. All along it has championed the cause of social justice. It has done a lot for the spread of education. It has made valuable contribution to the growth of cultural and humanitarian nationalism, which undoubtedly helped the nation's struggle for freedom. Above all, its emphasis on catholicity of mind, tolerance and selfless service has exercised a steady influence in shaping the character of many a man and woman in India. The social ideals of the Prarthana Samaj have now become part and parcel of the ideals of the Indian nation. It is very significant that the motto “Satyameva Jayate” (Truth alone triumphs), “ adopted by the Prarthana Samaj from its inception has become the motto of the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India.

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THE ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT AND ITS SOCIAL CONTENTS

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AMONG the religious reform movements of the nineteenth century the Arya Samaj movement occupies a very important place. For one thing, its coverage is much wider today than that of any other reform movement. Almost all Indian states, except probably Meghalaya and Nagaland, today have flourishing Arya Samajes, and most of them boast of a provincial organisation of their own. Even Fiji, Mauritius, East Africa and South Africa have Arya Samajes. There is at least one in London, and there may be some more in other parts of England. The United States too has an Arya Samaj or two.

I

When Swami Dayanand was born at Tankara in Gujarat, in 1824, few persons could have foreseen the effect that his Arya Samaj would have on the history of the country and outside. After receiving routine education of a Brahman who would devote his life to the performance of rituals, he became dissatisfied with it and left home in search of truth and light. For about eight years thereafter he led the usual life of a *Sanyasi*, studying the Vedanta and trying to learn Yoga. In 1857 he became dis-

satisfied with his course of studies, his teachers and his *gurus*. From 1857 to 1860 he spent three years, going up and down both the banks of the Narmada, practising Yoga and studying the Vedanta, mostly on his own. Probably in May, 1860, he reached Mathura and spent three years of his life with a single teacher. Swami Virajanand was a great grammarian who had by now given up the use of the common text-books on Sanskrit grammar, the *Siddhant Kaumudi* and others. He now used the *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini and the great commentary on it, the *Mahabhashya*, for teaching grammar to his students. His discarding of the mediaeval text-books on grammar probably led to Dayananda's looking with suspicion on mediaeval works on other subjects as well.

Well versed in grammar which was then supposed to be the key to all Sanskrit literature, Swami Dayanand left Mathura. He was now on his own, studying such Sanskrit religious works as came to his hand, and on their basis veering now from one point of view to another. By November, 1867, however, he had come to the conclusion that idol-worship had no sanction in the Vedas. On some other matters, however, he does not yet seem to have made up his mind.

In October, 1869, he stormed Banaras, the citadel of orthodoxy, and challenged its pandits to prove that idol-worship which they practised and preached had Vedic sanction. The challenge was so bold that the Maharaja of Banaras was compelled to arrange a religious debate with his court pandits on the subject. His adversaries could produce no Vedic authority in favour of idol-worship, but claimed that the Puranas, which obviously sanctioned it, were works of as great authority. In spite of the Maharaja's presence the debate ended in a confusion,

Soon after this Swami Dayanand came to believe that the Advaita philosophy (Monism) had no justification. For one thing, it seemed to make man a plaything of God ; for another, it destroyed his responsibility for his actions which otherwise was a cardinal belief among the Hindus. He visited Banaras several times, but no pandit ever dared cross swords with him in argument. The Maharaja of Banaras is said to have declared that his pandits could not defeat the Swami in open debate. After visiting many places in the modern U.P. in 1870-71 and 1872 he reached Calcutta on 16 December, 1872. By now he seems to have made up his mind about most matters at issue between him and orthodoxy. He had some very happy meetings with the contemporary Brahma Samajists of both the factions and attended a meeting or two of the Brahma Samaj as well. The Brahma Samajists were prepared to welcome him as a social reformer, but he would not give up the cardinal belief in the authority of the Vedas and transmigration of soul. At Keshav Chandra's suggestion he agreed to wearing clothes in public and also speaking in Hindi instead of Sanskrit to make himself understood by the people at large. So few Sanskrit scholars seem to have been then interested in the studies of the Vedas that his efforts for the introduction of the study of the Vedas in the Sanskrit College, Calcutta, failed.

Back in U.P., he delivered his first public speech in Hindi at Banaras probably in June, 1874. Just as Keshav Chandra Sen had suggested that he should speak in Hindi to establish contacts with the masses, Raja Jaikishan Dass suggested that a collection of his teachings should be published in Hindi. He placed a pandit at his disposal most probably to give Hindi literary form to what he explained to the pandit on various subjects. The *Satyarth Prakash*

was thus composed at Banaras but published in 1875 after Swami Dayanand had left that place for Bombay. Like many amateur writers Swami Dayanand was neither interested in nor competent for correcting the proofs of the work as it was printed ; it has even been suggested that he did not even carefully go through the press copy prepared by the Pandit before it was sent to the press.

After reaching Bombay in 1874 Swami Dayanand published several works. Three of them dealt with current controversies raging in Bombay. One commented, adversely of course, on the Vallabhacharya sect, the second analysed neo-Vedantism and Mayavad, and the third attacked the Sahajanand cult which, by now, had degenerated into the worship of its founder. A book *Vedic Prayers*, and a *Manual of Domestic Rituals* were also composed and published. But the most important event of this period was the foundation of the Arya Samaj on 10 April, 1875, at Bombay. Its work was organised on the basis of twenty-eight principles then laid down. It is interesting to note that Gopalrao Hari Deshmukh, then Joint Sessions Judge at Ahmedabad, who had early in his youth (in a series of one hundred articles in the *Prabhakar*) declared that Sanskrit learning was of no use, had by now been converted to Swami Dayanand's views and lived to publish a scholarly edition of the *Asvalayana Grihya Sutra* on rituals.

Though Swami Dayanand visited various parts of U.P. in 1875 and 1876 and attended the Imperial Durbar at Delhi in 1877, the foundation of the Arya Samaj at Bombay remained an isolated event. In April, 1877, Swami Dayanand reached Lahore, and on 24th June, 1877, the second Arya Samaj in the country, that at Lahore, was founded. The twenty-eight principles adopted at Bombay were now pruned down to ten by leaving out matters of organisation,

programme and rules of procedure of the Samaj. Some of these, however, emerged as bye-laws of the Arya Samaj later on.

The Arya Samaj, though founded at Bombay in 1875, really took its final form at Lahore in June, 1877. Swami Dayanand died in October, 1883, and so he had a little more than eight years left for propagating the views which the Arya Samaj held. But, as we have said above, the principles of the Arya Samaj were finally defined in June, 1877, at Lahore. Thereafter Swami Dayanand may be said to have less than six years for the propagation of his maturer views. We can antedate his ministry by two years at most. From the accounts of his teaching in Calcutta, as found in contemporary Brahma newspapers, it seems that by then he had finally defined almost all his beliefs. It is a wonder that the Arya Samaj that he founded and which he lived to guide only for eight years has been able to do so much after his death.

II

We are surprised all the more when we study the social and religious conditions of the areas which he visited. Almost everywhere religion was synonymous with ritualism. Almost all the daily activities of a Hindu were governed by his religious beliefs which he did not really understand. The pandits whose predecessors might once have been scholars had sunk down to the status of guardians of ritualism which they neither understood nor cared to study. Fasts, pilgrimages and religious celebrations were the only components of religion for most of the Hindus. It is strange that though the philosophy of *Karma* was supposed

to be the kernel of original Hinduism, so many short-cuts to salvation had been invented and offered later on. A dip in the Ganges would completely wash off one's sins, but death in Banaras would lead one straight to salvation. The *Bhakti* cult of the mediaeval saints had degenerated in the hands of its followers into worse than idol-worship. Kabir, Darya Sahib Nanak, and Sahajanand had stoutly opposed idol-worship, but their followers encouraged the worship of the *guru*, not only the original founder, but also the contemporary head of the sect. It was surprising that in a country where Advaitism (Monism) seemed to be the basic religious belief of all sects, not only untouchability but also un-approachability flourished magnificently. In the land of Shankara, an outcaste could not even come within a specified distance of a Brahman.

Organisation of the Hindu society was supposed to be based on its two pillars, Varna and Ashram. Varna is usually interpreted as caste. It has been usually said that the Hindus were divided into four castes. The Brahmins were to be found everywhere, but how was the rest of the community to be defined? Except in the Panjab, U.P. and Rajasthan no group could be described as belonging to the Kshatriya caste. Even in the Panjab the Khatri who, on account of their nomenclature, claimed to be Kshatriyas were not so recognised by the Rajputs. The Rajputs of Rajasthan looked down upon the Rajputs of other parts of the country. Outside the Brahman and the Kshatriya communities it was difficult to decide who was what. Emergence of the word non-Brahman later on testified to the fact that in Madras at least no other caste existed as recognised by the rest of the community, or by the Brahmins. The claim of descent by *gotra* (kinship group) settled in

practice nothing. A weaver at Una claimed to have the same *gotra* as the highest Rajput in the Hoshiarpur district. In a Sholapur College a peon, belonging to a caste considered by the rest of the community as below that of the Harijans, claimed the same *gotra* for himself as did the Gaikwad of Baroda.

Caste was supposed to be determined by birth. But when Swami Dayanand confronted the pandits with a Brahman who had become a Christian or a Muslim it was discovered that birth could not really solve the problem. On conversion those people had lost their caste. The main evil in the social system was not the prevalence of caste by birth, but the gradations of high and low among the various castes and within each caste as well.

In the villages, high-caste men enjoyed various social privileges as well. The Rajputs of Una tehsil would not allow even the wealthiest Sudra—some of them could buy them many times over—to ride in a palanquin at the time of marriage; that was their privilege! The Sudras, whatever their caste (by profession, most of them were merchants), could not ape them. Every caste was sub-divided into many closed groups; marriage was possible within one's own group only.

Child-marriage was not only common but also favoured. Mahatma Munshi Ram tells us that the marriage of his brother-in-law's son who was aged one year was arranged by the grand parents with a girl a year and a half old! Sanskrit texts, of dubious authority no doubt, were quoted in support of such marriages. Widow-marriage was prohibited. Lord Dalhousie passed an Act in 1856, permitting widows to marry, but for decades this law remained practically a dead letter. When the first widow-marriage in Maharashtra was celebrated in the seventies of the last

century, police protection had to be sought for and provided. Things were no better elsewhere.

The belief in *Karma* and the habit of looking at evil and misery as a result thereof further incapacitated the Hindus for leading an active social life. Misery, filth, illness and other hardships were comfortably explained as the result of past actions of those who were suffering from them. Nobody need therefore do anything to alleviate such misery. Of charity there was much and in abundance, but most of it was directed not towards alleviating human sufferings but to earning merit by performing prescribed rituals or by giving donations to those who neither deserved them nor earned them by active social service. Almost everything that was being done for alleviating human sufferings anywhere was being done by the Christian missionaries.

During the Muslim period the Hindus had kept up their self-respect by considering their Muslim rulers as *Mlechhas*. What was even stranger was the fact that the Muslim rulers accepted this evaluation. When Todar Mal's Siva-idols got left behind at Haridwar the royal court could transact no business because Todar Mal, the finance minister, would do no work without worshipping them. But, unfortunately, under the British rule, under the onslaught of a conquering army and of a dazzling civilization, most of the English-educated Hindus lost their poise. They lost faith in their religion because there was no one to explain the whys and wherefores of their beliefs. The Christian missionaries and English education delivered a two-pronged attack on the educated Hindus. The missionaries at the fairs, in the street corners, in schools and elsewhere cited enough from the prevailing Hindu beliefs which would

shock any decent individual and much more so the English-educated Hindus. The English education that they received in the English schools taught them the falsity of Pauranic astronomy, cosmography, geography and history. As Macaulay had predicted, if all of them did not become Christians, most of them did become doubting Thomases who could find no rational ground for their religious beliefs. The study of Sanskrit and Vedic literature by the European savants at this time was very often inspired by the conscious or unconscious Christian beliefs of these scholars. Very often their studies hindered rather than encouraged beliefs in our ancient scriptures.

What was worse still, though almost all the Hindu sects paid lip-service to the Vedas, there were no scholars interested in studying or understanding the meaning of the Vedic *mantras*. The Puranas were the scriptures, both for the masses and for the elite. For performing rituals not the original *Srauta Sutras* but the mediaeval glosses on their commentaries were consulted. Almost everything written in Sanskrit had a scriptural value. Nobody stopped to enquire who exactly was the author of a particular statement and why and in what context he had made this statement. Apart from that, whatever was old was respected and could not be easily dislodged by mere reasoning. Worship of trees, of serpents, of the mausoleums of the Hindu saints and of the tombs of the Muslim devotees was equally rife. Nobody could successfully protest against such practices because they were of a long lineage. In spite of the belief in the *Karma* philosophy oblations to the dead were customary as if to provide them sustenance in their new life. Belief in astrology and omens was common and one could not start on a journey on an inauspicious day.

III

As we have seen above, the first Arya Samaj was founded at Bombay in 1875. The second came into existence two years later and more followed soon in the Panjab and U.P. The *Principles of the Arya Samaj* were defined finally at Lahore in 1877. Swami Dayanand added a declaration of his own personal belief to the second edition of the *Satyarth Prakash*. A *Rosary of the Ideals of Aryas* was also published separately. But Dayanand did not formally bind his followers either to the one or to the other. Some of his followers have sometimes tried to bind the Arya Samajes to the one or the other. But if a learned Episcopical Commission in England after several years of hard labour could come to the conclusion that the only possible definition of a Christian is that one claims to be one, those who hold that Dayanand bound the Arya Samajists to the Ten Principles alone cannot be very wrong.

“Among the great company of remarkable figures that will appear to the eye of posterity at the head of the Indian Renaissance, one stands out by himself with peculiar and solitary distinctness, one unique in his type as he is unique in his work. It is as if one were to walk for a long time amid a range of hills rising to a greater or lesser altitude, but all with sweeping contours, green-clad, flattering the eye even in their most bold and striking elevation. But amidst them all, one hill stands apart piled up in sheer strength, a mass of bare and puissant granite, with verdure on its summit, a solitary pine jutting out into the blue, a great cascade of pure, vigorous and fertilising water gushing out from its strength as a very fountain of life and health to the valley. Such is the impression created on my mind by Dayananda”, said Aurobindo Ghosh.

Another student of Indian culture, C. F. Andrews almost follows Aurobindo Ghosh in assessing his place among the great reformers of modern India. Andrews found that "the secret of his (Dayanand's) influence" as against other social reformers of the age lay "in the way in which he embodied the ideal of ancient India, the soul of the Motherland". Just at the very time people were beginning to give up their cherished tradition in helplessness and despair, and to adopt unthinkingly and weakly in a wholesale manner the manners and customs of the West, Swami Dayanand stood out, revealing in a living and inspiring form by his own magnetic personality what in truth ancient India really was, what in truth she stood for, what was the vital spirit of her past.

"Swami Dayanand swept aside with a magnificent gesture of rejection a hundred age-long abuses which were binding in fetters the soul of the country which he loved so well. He proved by his own life and actions that these customs did not really belong to the true Indian tradition."

Thus, though like the Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj was a movement of protest, it differed from the former in two respects. For one thing, it was a movement of total protest as has been said above. It rejected most of what went under the name of current Hinduism. But it did not reject the two cardinal principles to which Hinduism has been attached through the ages, the respect for the Vedas and belief in the transmigration of soul. Instead thereof it based its entire programme of protest and action on the Vedas. Similarly, when it rejected the various short-cuts to salvation, it based that rejection on the *Karma* philosophy. These were the two main principles which the Brahma Samaj found hard to swallow. All efforts to reconcile the two bodies broke down on these two differences.

Arising out of this emerges the second difference. The Arya Samaj was inspired entirely by Indian tradition and Indian ideals. The most learned pandits of that day among the Brahma Samajists did not approach the Vedas. Hence their movement was very much inspired by Western thought, so much so that Keshav Chandra Sen's New Dispensation almost made him another Christ. The Arya Samaj has no place for *gurus* as the term was then understood. As he said in one of his lectures at Gujrat (in the Punjab), he did not want the Arya Samajists to follow what he said blindly. They were to examine what he said, and if they were satisfied of its truth they should follow it, otherwise not. Dayanand named no successor. The various Arya Samajes he founded in different parts of India had their separate organisation ; he never tried to interfere with their activities, except when appealed to and hard pressed to act as an umpire. He refused to preside over a meeting of the executive committee of the Arya Samaj of Lahore when he happened to be present at that place, and insisted that the regularly elected president should preside over it. Similarly, he refused to take part in the deliberations of the executive committees of the Arya Samajes of Lahore and Amritsar. He never tried to play the role of a dictator as some political and religious leaders sought to do later on.

IV

Probably, the foremost place in the programme of social reform of the Arya Samaj should be given to the new concept of charity introduced by Swami Dayanand. The Hindus were proverbially charitable ; they fed innumerable

beggars, and countless stray cattle and the Jains even went to the length of feeding the lice! But all this charity was self-oriented, directed to the object of obtaining merit for oneself. In this scheme of charity there was not much room usually for feeding the hungry, or for helping the poorer and more backward sections of the community. Some work was done in this direction no doubt before the Arya Samaj was born, but by far the largest part of Hindu charity went to feed the idle who seldom deserved the charity extended to them. Swami Dayanand himself started a new tradition. While he was lecturing at Ajmer, news came that fire had broken out in a part of the town. He immediately collected donations from the audience for the relief of the distressed. He founded a trust in 1883 for rendering public service. Soon after his death the D. A. V. College Trust and Management Society was founded for imparting secular, religious, technical and industrial education. It was soon followed by a large number of Arya Samajic trusts in the service of the community, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. The D. A. V. College organised the first relief movement conducted by the Indians in Western India. Its appeal for organised work in the service of the community met with a tremendous response; almost always it got more money than it was able to spend for a particular cause. Other sections among the Hindus followed its lead and similar work was organised by them as well.

By attacking *Advaitavada* (Monism), then current among the Hindu intellectuals, he directed their attention to the realities of this world. He found it impossible to consider poverty, ill-health, disease and similar afflictions as illusions towards which a man, having no individuality of his own, had any social responsibility. He saw no use

in preaching patience to the afflicted or those in want ; telling them that these were the results of their past actions would not help them at all.

One of the Ten Principles of the Arya Samaj was to serve the humanity in all possible ways, and the Arya Samaj tried to live up to its profession. Whenever a call for help came after 1899 the Samaj was ready to meet it. The victims of natural calamities were sometimes surprised to find agents of the Arya Samaj working among them so speedily after the news of the disaster had come to be known outside. In the Kangra earthquake relief work in 1905, the Government found that the workers of the Arya Samaj had been turning up the debris and looking for the victims underneath much before the Government machinery could be mobilised into action. Sometimes attempts were made, as at the time of the Moplah rising, to mute the appeal of the distressed. Neither was the Government anxious to broadcast the fact that these zealous Muslims had converted hundreds of Hindus by force to Islam, besides murdering others, nor was the Congress, singing the song of Hindu-Muslim unity at that time, willing to let the newspapers know about this ghastly attack on that unity. Somehow or other, the fact leaked out to an Arya Samajist in Bombay who then wrote to Mahatma Hans Raj, president of the Arya Pradeshik Pratinidhi Sabha, Panjab, Sindh and Baluchistan. The Indian Legislative Assembly was then in session at Simla. With some other colleagues, he left Lahore for Simla at once to consult such Madras Hindu leaders as were available there. One and all declared that converting these Hindus back to Hinduism was an impossible task. For one thing, the Moplahs, still not fully subdued, would not allow such work to be undertaken, and they might even kill such Hindu workers as

would try to do this work among them. For another thing, orthodox as the Madrasis were, they would not accept such Hindus back into the fold of Hinduism! The leaders of the Arya Samaj were not, however, satisfied. Mahatma Hans Raj spent a sleepless night after that discussion. The next morning his mind was made up. He was prepared to thrust his workers into such a dangerous field, and expect fruitful results. A mission was sent to Malabar. In spite of countless obstacles they succeeded soon in tracing some of the newly converted unfortunate Muslims, but before they began their work of reconversion, their work of relief among the sufferers had won them all praise.

The Arya Samaj also declared a crusade against child-marriage. Its D. A. V. High School at Lahore refused admission to married students. Working through various sectarian and even sub-sectarian agencies, it succeeded in convincing the society that child-marriage was an evil to be avoided at all costs. War against child-marriage was an essential part of the propaganda it carried through press and platform. During its anniversary conferences were held against this evil. It was an Arya Samajist, Harbilas Sarda, who succeeded in getting through a legislation raising the minimum permissible age of marriage to fourteen. As before, the Government's attitude towards this social question was ambiguous, if not neutral. It did not like to touch the social pitch for fear it might defile it.

The Arya Samaj's campaign for widow-marriage was equally vigorous, particularly in the case of child widows, who numbered among the Hindus in thousands. Here again it did not disdain from using other bodies, religious and social, to gain its end. Particularly vigorous was the

help it secured from the great Panjabi philanthropist, Sir Ganga Ram whose Vidhva Vivah Sahayak Sabha through its propagandists and its homes for the widows did much useful work.

We have said above that the Samaj gave Hindu charity a new orientation by channelling it through organised trusts for social service. We have also mentioned above that Dayanand was neither a *Guru* nor a dictator. These two things combined together made it possible for the Arya Samaj to make another very important contribution in the service of the society. It practised and inculcated among its followers the habit of working through committees. In secular matters the respect paid to seniors in age, experience or status had almost stifled all young hopefuls. Nurtured in this tradition, an Arya Samajist dared tell a Privy Councillor that his phrasing of a particular provision made no sense! Fortunately, the Privy Councillor was a good old man and he accepted the fact. On another occasion when three members of a sub-committee submitted an acrimonious report, the president's note insisting that what was needed was a unanimous report almost immediately produced one. It is not surprising therefore that in the areas where it flourished, the old Panjab and U.P., and even in the areas where it had no sure foundation, Orrissa, for instance, charitable-minded persons, and semi-Government institutions have turned to the Arya Samaj for organising public institutions, placing funds at its disposal, rather than entrusting it to the Government as was long the custom in Bengal, Bombay, Madras and elsewhere.

The Arya Samaj also made a great contribution to the social uplift of the country by starting educational institutions for girls. Early marriage for one thing and the belief

that the girls need not be educated for another made its work extremely difficult. Strangely enough, in some places, rich Hindu parents were prepared to send their girls to missionary girls' schools where they were given as big a dose of Christianity as of secular education. But the Arya Samaj's attempt at starting girls' schools in many places were at first ridiculed, the organisers were abused, and the parents who sent their children to those schools were sometimes threatened with ex-communication from the caste. But, braving all difficulties, the Arya Samajists stood their ground. Unlike other popularisers of girls' education, they had not derived their inspiration for this task from the West. They appealed to India's past, wherein learned ladies had disputed fine points of law and of religion with learned pandits. Ultimately their appeal went home and education for girls came to be accepted as a necessary equipment in their life.

Another very important contribution of the Arya Samaj was to recreate an image of India's past which made it possible for the Indians to look at their European masters boldly in the face. They had been told that they had been ignorant and stupid children of nature in the past. Somehow or other, the English-educated Indians, very often in search for lucrative jobs or to fit in well in lucrative professions, had accepted this estimate about their past. Centuries of Government by foreigners had followed. Under these conditions there seemed to be no hope for them in the future. The British Government, particularly that of Queen Victoria after 1857, had seemed to many of them an act of providence. It was left to Dayanand and after him to the Arya Samaj to reveal the realities of India's past and claim that parts of it were glorious indeed. Till the tenth

century A.D. the foreign conquerors of India had ended by becoming Hindus and devout Hindus at that. The Arya Samaj saw the effect which English education was producing on the young men of this country. Its educational institutions undertook the task of making their students proud of their past. Along with secular education, it gave them a strong dose of patriotism, a pride in the past achievements of their country and made them confident that its future was as bright. The exercise books which the students of the D. A. V. High School of Lahore used boldly carried on the title page the triple objective of this institution, namely, learning, piety and patriotism. This sometimes made it suspect in the eyes of those in power, but its leaders usually did not worry themselves much about such things. Dayanand was not even content with that. Like the *Smritikaras* (law-givers) of old he included a chapter in his *Satyarth Prakash* on Government, wherein with the help of ancient authorities he drew up an outline of our ancient political ideals which came as very surprising to many educated Indians. Thus he restored the self-respect of the Hindus, mirrored a past for them which looked very glorious, and naturally held out future hopes for them as well.

Another contribution of the Arya Samaj was the introduction of Hindi as the official language in some states and as the medium of instruction in many of its institutions. Replacing Persian by English first, the East India Company had then tried to introduce the local languages for its official work and as medium of instruction up to the secondary stage. West India, Maharashtra, the South and Bengal had no special problems, but rather unwisely the Government introduced Urdu in the Panjab and the North-Western Province, in spite of the fact that it was not the local language.

Swami Dayanand, though a Gujarati by birth, seemed to sense that Hindi alone could function as the common language of the country. When he gave up the use of Sanskrit in his discourses he adopted Hindi. Thereafter though he wrote many works partially in Sanskrit, they almost always had a Hindi version. His *Satyarth Prakash* was published in Hindi and is probably the only modern Hindi work to have been translated into all the Indian languages besides English, French and German. The Arya Samaj made a determined effort for the spread of Hindi in the old Panjab with the result that Haryana and Himachal Pradesh have now Hindi as their official language ; Chandigarh is for the time being bi-lingual. Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have also Hindi as their official language. The clause in the Indian Constitution declaring Hindi to be the official language of the country is the work of some Hindi enthusiasts belonging to the Arya Samaj, such as Bakhshi Tek Chand, Ghanshyam Dass Gupta and K. M. Munshi who had at one time been Secretary of the Bombay Arya Samaj.

Equally important is the mark left by the Arya Samajists on the constitutional articles relating to the Harijans (depressed castes). Long before Mahatma Gandhi stepped into the field, they had started ploughing it for good purposes. They raised the status of the Harijans in many ways in several parts of the Panjab, Jammu and Kashmir and even U.P. Much against Mahatma Gandhi's advice the Samaj launched a campaign for allowing the Harijans to use public roads in Travancore. The students of the D. A. V. College Hostel, Lahore, some seven hundred in number, refused to take their meals in their messes because the cooks would not serve a Harijan student. The college management did what it could to mitigate their sufferings

till the student was finally allowed to take his meal along with other students. It is necessary to remember that this happened at a time when the Madras Christian College was maintaining a separate hostel for the Harijan converts to Christianity because other Indian Christians were not prepared to dine with them. The Arya Samaj's crusade against the notion of caste by birth went home. The caste system lost some of its rigidity, and quite a lot of its inflexibility. The Arya Samajists even refused at one time to declare their caste for census purposes. This campaign was a harbinger of the constitutional article banning discrimination of any type on account of caste.

Thus the impetus that the Arya Samaj imparted to the movement of social reform in India lives even today partly in some of the articles of the constitution, and partly in other changes that its work has brought about in the Hindu society. Its work has been so effective that old distinctions have now become blurred, and it is sometimes difficult to make a distinction between an Arya Samajist and an orthodox Hindu; orthodoxy has assumed by now much of the Arya Samaj colouring.

ARYA SAMAJ MOVEMENT IN RAJASTHAN

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THE HINDU social system has the distinctive characteristic of being intimately connected with religion, and being a synthesis of groups as against individuals. It is a socio-religious system as the Hindu social institutions, from the Vedic period down to the modern age, have a religious basis, and the prescriptions of the all-pervading social rules have religious sanctions.¹ This fundamental basis is further conditioned by the character of the people and the political set-up under which they live in different parts of the country.² The people of Rajasthan have been, in general, an orthodox people, allergic to change in their social outlook, even in the face of a grave challenge. Their orthodoxy, backed by their physical prowess and the untraversable nature of the country, kept all changes at bay and maintained intact the traditional social set-up. This is why Rajasthan, of all the princely states, lagged behind in imbibing new social values which had already made their appearance in the advanced states, more or less under the British influence.

Rajasthan, during the opening years of the nineteenth century, was combed with social evils ranging from infanticide³ to untouchability. The untouchables were debarred from planting the 'Tulsi' sappling in their houses and in Kota they could not even maintain a cow or put on gold

ornaments.⁴ The high-caste Hindus who accepted water from the low-born were liable to pay a fine of eleven Gumanshahi rupees and forbidden to continue this practice in future at the peril of being fined one hundred Gumanshahi rupees.⁵ The pathetic condition of the low-born and the untouchables has also been corroborated by the account of Bishop Heber who toured Bharatpur in 1824-25 A.D. The 'Chamars' were not admitted in those days into any of the towns of Rajasthan.⁶ To crown it all, Zalim Singh of Kota circulated an order to the effect that the untouchables and the low-born should not be allowed to put on a 'dhoti' but they could use only an underwear.⁷ Even restrictions were imposed on the worship of gods. Belia 'Chamar' (the cobbler) was fined for getting a temple constructed.⁸ When such rigid rules were in force in one of the leading princely states of Rajasthan, the plight of the untouchables and low-born in other states can better be imagined than described.

The plight of the widows was no less sore than that of the untouchables. Widow-marriage was not completely unknown in Rajasthan, for the agricultural classes⁹ permitted it. But the Rajputs and the high-caste Hindus did not favour the practice.¹⁰ The Kota rulers used to impose a tax on the widows who married,¹¹ but provided for the maintenance of those who did not.¹² Even as late as 1930 the Thikana of Loharu introduced a rule against those sections of the people among whom the custom of widow-marriage was rife.¹³ The Alwar Durbar in its notification dated January 27, 1930, prohibited and penalised widow-marriage.¹⁴

Lack of education, child marriages, in which the contracting parties had no right of selecting their partners, indulgence in carnal gratification and other social evils were

rampant in Rajasthan even in the early fifties of the nineteenth century.

II

One of the many reasons for such an obnoxious state of affairs was the hold of religious superstitions, for social backwardness is directly proportional to the extent of ignorance prevailing at a given time. The Arya Samaj tried to wipe off this evil of ignorance and secretiveness fostered by the Brahmin priests. They maintained that the Vedic religion was the oldest in this country, and that after the age of the Mahabharata different religious sects of the Hindus had come into existence. With the passage of time the priestly pomp and imposture cramped, dwarfed and enervated the Hindu society by its numerous harmful evil practices and sanctions,—all in the name of religion. As Mr. Seth puts it, “The astrologers were the masters of the situation, and the Brahman priests of India became the gate-keepers of Heaven.”¹⁵ The complexity of the Hindu religion, attended, as it was, by numerous unsavoury rites made it very burdensome for the poor. Naturally, the times claimed a number of religious reform movements which aimed at purifying the religion by eliminating its dogmas and rituals. The Arya Samaj was born for the revival and propagation of the Vedic religion against the orthodoxy of the priestly class which had introduced the multiplicity of deities, idol-worship, caste restrictions, and various licentious rites.¹⁶ A natural corollary of this effort was the mitigation of the evils which had crept into the Hindu society.

It was not only against Brahmanical orthodoxy but also

against Christian chauvinism and Muslim fanaticism that the Arya Samaj boldly stood up. As early as 1866 Dayananda Saraswati had his first religious debate with Christian missionaries like the Revs. Gray, Robson and Scoobred.¹⁷ He also requested Major A. G. Davidson, Deputy Commissioner, Ajmer, to save the local people from being baptised.¹⁸ He replied effectively to the Christian propaganda against the Hindu religion and condemned the policy of proselytization.¹⁹

By the closing years of the nineteenth century British ideas and ideals completely dominated the social and political structure of Rajasthan. But, by that time a new class in Rajasthan had also emerged which was not prepared to accept the superiority of the British culture. As B. C. Pal put it, "Instead of apologizing for their medieval ideas and institutions and seeking to reform and re-construct them after European ideas, they boldly stood up in defence of what they regarded as truly Indian."²⁰ The Arya Samaj was admirably fitted to give expression to this protest, for the only other society with a similar purpose, namely, the Theosophical Society had no standing in Rajasthan in those days. The revivalist spirit echoed in the writings of Bankim Chandra found a bold and exerting champion in the founder of the Arya Samaj. Thus the establishment of the Arya Samaj on February 13, 1881,²¹ signified the success of the revivalist movement. The visits of Swami Dayanand Saraswati to Shahpura, Mewar, Jodhpur and other places from time to time revived among the Rajasthanis a deep respect for the ancient Vedic culture and a desire to find out a solution of their social problems in the ancient scriptures.

III

Dayanand Saraswati set up a 'Paropkarini Sabha' at Udaipur on February 27, 1883 under Maharana Sajjan Singh.²² As this newly established Sabha alone could not accomplish much, so, on the pattern of other states, a 'Pratinidhi Sabha' was established in Rajasthan in 1888.

The founder was not satisfied with the popularity of his views among the masses and correctly diagnosed that the enlightened rulers would be a vital factor in the regeneration of the society²³ in a traditionally backward area where princes were taken to be the natural leaders of the people. So he began to woo the princes to his creed, and soon his influence was perceptible in many of the courts of Rajasthan. His hold over the court of Jodhpur was fully evinced by his visits in 1880 and 1882 A.D., and by those of his disciples,—Bhaskaranand (1888) Prakashanand (1889), Giranand (1891), Thakur Prasad (1892) and Sultan Singh (1898). The meetings addressed by the Arya Samaj leaders used to be attended by the members of the royal family and high dignitaries of the court. Rawat Arjun Singh of Asind, Rao Ratan Singh of Parsoli, Raja Dhiraj Nahar Singh of Shahpura, Maharaj Rai Singh of Sheogarh, Bakhtawar Singh, Kaviraj Shymal Das, Rao Panna Lal Mehta, Takht Singh Mehta, Jagannath and others²⁴ became at once the followers of the Arya Samaj. Sir Partap Singh, the younger brother of Maharaja Jaswant Singh, was so highly impressed by the discourses of Dayanand Saraswati that he is said to have remarked, "To my mind it was a fortunate thing for India that Swamiji came to awaken her from her slumber of lethargy."²⁵

During these visits the Arya Samaj preachers impressed upon the rulers their duty towards their subjects and the

high ideal of kingship. Among the masses they deprecated the prevailing Hindu belief that religiosity consisted in adopting a posture of indifference towards the problems of the world and running away from it. The exclusive salvation of one's own self, by having recourse to meditation in the far off jungles, had no bearing on *Dharma* as long as it was not actively associated with the alleviation of the sufferings and miseries of the fellow-brethren.²⁶ Much against the ancient Hindu view of isolated abstract spiritualism, the Arya Samaj propounded the collective view of *Dharma*, emphasizing the service of His creation as the best way of worshipping the creator. The individual religiosity of the Hindus was subordinated to the collective consciousness, and thereby the latter imbibed a sense of duty towards the helpless and the down-trodden in their society. The self-centred Hindu was asked to think in terms of the society as a whole. The Arya Samaj did not believe that the exclusive salvation of one's self has any meaning if the masses were engrossed in diabolical superstitions and unsavoury social customs. This was one of the reasons for which the Arya Samaj adopted a programme of removing the prevailing social evils from the Hindu society and to uplift it from the abyss into which it had fallen.

The Arya Samaj voiced the ideal of human solidarity, as is evident from its ten principles. Excluding the first two which are in the nature of personal confession of faith in God, the rest are characterised by the utmost catholicity or liberalism. The sixth principle has the object of doing good to the world by improving the physical, spiritual and social conditions of mankind. The seventh principle enunciates the treatment of all with love and justice, and the eighth enjoins an Arya Samajist to dispel ignorance and

diffuse knowledge. Similarly the tenth principle subordinates one's individuality to the general well-being of the whole society. Summing up the whole,²⁷ it has been rightly pointed out that the social ideals of the Arya Samaj are based on the brotherhood of man, equality of the sexes and equal opportunities for all according to their nature and merit.

In the light of these principles the Arya Samaj condemned the presence of 'nautch girls' and prostitutes at the marriage ceremonies and the insanity of arranging sumptuous post-funeral dinners. Their attacks were also directed against intemperance and extravagance of marriage expenses. They condemned child-marriage as vigorously²⁸ as they supported widow-marriage.²⁹ They denounced *Sati* and untouchability in unequivocal terms as these were against the injunctions of the Vedas, and refused to treat the woman on any term other than that of equality with man. Spread of education among both the sexes and the denunciation of caste were also two of the social objectives for which they strived in Rajasthan. In a word, the social objectives of the Arya Samaj were the ideals of the ancient *Rishis* (seers) of India.³⁰

IV

The Arya Samaj courageously stood up to eradicate these social evils, and lined up a team of devoted workers who religiously took to propagate against the social evils and prepare the public opinion for their eradication. Bhaskaranand Saraswati and Prakashanand Saraswati visited Jodhpur time and again, and made public speeches against the existing social evils.³¹ The Arya Samaj leaders in Kota

propagated widely in favour of social reforms and impressed the Maharao with their convincing arguments. Maharao Umed Singh, under their influence, appointed two learned Pandits who visited the villages of his dominion with the purpose of making the people conscious of the glaring social evils.³² The Raj Rana of Jhalawar disfavoured untouchability and child marriage³³ in his state. The Udaipur Durbar favoured social reforms as enumerated by the Arya Samaj.³⁴ The Arya Samaj held to the view that before carrying out the desired social reforms it was absolutely necessary to create a public opinion in their favour, and this they wanted to achieve through public meetings and making contacts with the local rulers. Indirectly it gave an impetus to a host of organisations in the form of caste-conferences which sprang up in Rajasthan during the last decade of the nineteenth century. There were as many as six caste-conferences in Ajmer alone which was the centre of Arya Samajist activities.³⁵ The influence of the Arya Samaj was also clearly visible in the activities of the National Social Conference.³⁶

The Arya Samaj activity was not restricted to propaganda alone. It influenced the personal lives of the rulers of Rajasthan who also issued general orders for eradicating some of the social evils. Maharana Sajjan Singh developed a hatred against prostitutes and 'nautch girls' (dancing girls) and kept himself aloof from them.³⁷ Maharaja Jasant Singh of Jodhpur who was much under the influence of the Arya Samaj issued orders to prohibit alcoholic drinks in his kingdom.³⁸ The Maharana of Udaipur too followed suit, and similar orders were issued in Mewar as well. Along with it the customary post-funeral dinners were prohibited in Jodhpur.³⁹ Sir Partap Singh of Jodhpur went a

step forward by performing the post-funeral ceremony of his wife in an unostentatious and inexpensive manner, and resolved to spend the money thus saved for some humanitarian purpose.⁴⁰ This was a worthy example to be emulated by all, especially by the people of Jodhpur. Similarly during the reign of Maharao Ummed Singh a law against 'Nuktas' (post-funeral dinners) was enforced in Kota resulting in the curtailment of expenses on this score.⁴¹ Thus under the influence of the Arya Samaj the rulers of Rajasthan became conscious of their social obligations, gave up the evil practices in their personal lives and tried to eradicate these from the life of the community by enacting necessary legislations.

V

The Arya Samaj then took up the more acute problems facing the Rajasthan society. As social reforms in the twentieth century centred more or less round the improvement of the status of women, the Arya Samaj also included it in its programme. Though the Widow-marriage Act had been enacted in British India in 1856 A.D., it remained a dead letter in Rajasthan for almost about a decade till the Arya Samaj came into the field.⁴² The problem of widow-marriage had become all the more important with the abolition of Sati in all the states of Rajasthan by 1861. The British rulers were hesitating to take the initiative in this matter and were inclined to treat the question as a purely social matter to be decided by the Rajasthanis themselves. The Arya Samaj unhesitatingly picked up the gauntlet and threw its whole weight in favour of introduction of widow-marriage.

In pursuance of the aforesaid objective the Dayanand Orphanage was established at Ajmer as early as 1895 A.D. by the local Arya Samaj in memory of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.⁴³ The institution not only brought up the orphans and provided facilities for their education but also sponsored widow-marriages. Though marriages of the orphans began to take place from 1895⁴⁴ A.D., widow-marriages in this institution did not take place before 1926. In that year two of the five widows maintained by the institution were married.⁴⁵ Similar marriages of widows were solemnised in the years to follow, as is evident from its annual reports. Taking the clue from this institution, the Rajasthan Vanita Ashrama was established at Ajmer on April 1, 1926, and Ganga Ram Vidhava Bhavan came into existence in the thirties. The latter institution could arrange for six to seven widow-marriages a month,⁴⁶ and during the seven months ending in November, 1930, it arranged for as many as forty widow-marriages.⁴⁷ The Rajasthan Vanita Ashram in its first year of existence got seven widow-marriages solemnised.⁴⁸ Ajmer, the centre of the Arya Samaj activities, became a rescue house for the widows, and to co-ordinate the work initiated by Dayanand Saraswati the All India Widow Marriage Conference was held there in 1933.⁴⁹ The Rajputana Ladies' Conference also made an appeal that the right of widow-marriage be granted. Similar activities were also witnessed in the other states of Rajputana. During the thirties a widow-house named Shri Maharaniji Vanita Ashram was opened at Jodhpur with a donation of one lakh of rupees from Ram Gopal Mohitta and Rao Bahadur Shivratana who were members of the Arya Samaj at Jodhpur.⁵⁰ At Bikaner the Vanita Ashram was established in February, 1928, and two of its widows were married on April 10, 1929. It was an institu-

tion run by the members of the Arya Samaj along with the traditionalists.⁵¹ Immediately following it, the Bikaner Durbar passed a law by which widow-marriage was included under the definition of marriage.⁵² In Kota, under the influence of the Arya Samaj, a number of widow-marriages were celebrated, primarily among the Vaishyas and the Rajputs.⁵³ The Maharao of Kota, seeing the enlightenment among the Vaishya community, ordered that the properties of the unclaimed Vaishyas be made over to the Vaishya Sudharak Mandal for the uplift and betterment of the widows.⁵⁴ Widow-marriage was declared legal in Bharatpur in 1926.⁵⁵ Thus the endeavours of the Arya Samaj were amply rewarded. Though it is true that widow-marriage did not still form an essential part of the Rajasthan society, as it is not even to-day, still the numerous marriages of widows under the influence of the Arya Samaj speak highly of its achievements in this field of social reform.

VI

The Arya Samaj also disapproved of child-marriage and unequal marriage. The Samaj fixed 16 years as the minimum age of marriage for girls and 25 years as that for young men.⁵⁶ The Samaj conducted a fiery crusade against child and unequal marriages, and built up a public opinion against them. The passage of the Sarada Bill in the Indian Legislative Assembly could not satisfy the radical section of the Arya Samajists, but voices were heard from all corners of Rajasthan that for the time being the Act should be adopted there too. Devi Chand Visharad of Jodhpur published a pamphlet addressing the youth of Marwar to adopt the Sarada Act, and requested the Maharaja to bring

it into force.⁵⁷ Jai Narayan Modi, President, Arya Samaj, Sojat Road, requested the Maharaja of Jodhpur that the parties concerned in all child-marriages be legally punished.⁵⁸ Laws were actually passed in several states for preventing child-marriages. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1928 of Bikaner, the Dungarpur Act of 1935, the Dholepur Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1937, the Shahpura Bal Vivaha Act of 1939 and the Social Reform Act of 1940 of Karauli are enough to substantiate that the rulers of Rajasthan had become quite conscious of the social malady. Practically all the states in Rajasthan were ruled by people who had Arya Samajist leanings. This is, however, not to undermine the activities and influences of the other social reform organizations in the field.

VII

The Arya Samaj in Rajasthan also strived for the spread of education among girls,⁵⁹ and for the uplift of the depressed and the down-trodden through education. It believed that so long as the depressed classes remained where they were, there was no hope for any social improvement.

The untouchables were refused admission in any of the schools of Jodhpur as late as 1922 A.D. So Laxman Arya started a school for the untouchables in the Arya Samaj building in the same year.⁶⁰ Similarly, Shyam Sunder Lal worked earnestly in Bandikui for starting a school for the untouchables there in 1925.⁶¹ These attempts served as eye-openers for the other states of Rajasthan, so much so that not only schools were opened for the untouchables in different parts of the country, but the Raj Rana of

Jhalawar also threw open a state temple to the 'Harijans', and appointed them to several posts.⁶² In Rajasthan it was a bit surprising in those days to witness the Harijans being taught along with the upper classes, and the credit for it, before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi, goes to the Arya Samaj.

VIII

What matters is that in an age of blind adherence to tradition, the Arya Samaj had the courage to chalk out a programme of its own. What it achieved was not so important as what it strived for. The Samaj prepared the mental climate for the change, so that it became readily acceptable to the society and was not imposed upon it from above. This is not to sidetrack other social factors working towards that end, but there is no doubt that the Arya Samaj played a definite role in opening an era of reform in Rajasthan. The work was often slow, but it was steady and probably better organised than that of more virile organisations engaged in social and religious reform among the Hindus of Rajasthan. We can conclude with the observation of Charles H. Heimsath :⁶³

"In the all-India scene the Arya Samaj's influence was unobtrusive, particularly in the main centres of modern Indian life...The ground work was being laid, however, for the most successful unification of religious and social reforms with nationalism that was to be found in Pre-Gandhian India."

R E F E R E N C E S

- ¹ L. S. S. O. 'Malley (ed.), *Modern India And The West* (1968), p. 354.
- ² P. S. Chowdhary, *Rajasthan Between Two World Wars*, p. 69.
- ³ Infanticide was virtually stopped before the advent of the Arya samaj by the judicious policy adopted by the Political Agents deputed in the Residencies of Rajasthan from time to time.
- ⁴ BA: (a) Kota Records, Bhandar No. 3, Khata Billadaron dated Baisakh Sudhi 4, 1899 VS.
(b) *Ibid.*, Khata Billadaron dated Ashoj Sudhi 6, 1923 VS.
- ⁵ BA: Kota Records, Bhandar No. 3, Talik Bahi, Basta No. 13, dated Bhadra Budi 6, 1868 VS.
- ⁶ Bishop Heber, *Narrative Of A Journey Through The Upper Provinces Of India In 1824-25 A. D.*, p. 368 (second edition).
- ⁷ Kota Records, Bhandar No. 3, Khata Billadaron, dated First Jaiseth Sudhi 5, 1895 VS. Bolia Chamar was fined for getting a temple constructed.
- ⁸ BA: Kota Records, Bhandar No. 3, Talik Bahi, dated Magh 1913 VS.
- ⁹ Jats, Gujars, Ahirs, Malis, etc., practised widow-marriage.
- ¹⁰ A. C. Bancijee, *The Rajput States and the East India Company* (1951), p. 279.
- ¹¹ BA: Kota Records, Bhandar No. 3, Talik Bahi, Baisakh 1913 VS.
- ¹² BA: Kota Records, Bhandar No. 3, Khata Billadaron, dated Posh 1888 VS and Bhadra Sudhi 9, 1927 VS.
- ¹³ The *Tarun Rajasthan*, dated May 27, 1922.
Nawab Hyder Ali introduced a rule that whosoever got married his widowed sister or daughter, the whole amount of money that might be paid to the legal heirs of the widow would be deposited in the state treasury.
- ¹⁴ BA: (a) Jodhpur Cuttings, File No. C4J/10 (1928-33).
(b) The *Bombay Chronicle*, dated January 1, 1931.
- ¹⁵ The *Dayanand Commemoration Volume*, p. 251.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ H. B. Sarda, *Life of Dayanand Saraswati*, p. 46.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- ¹⁹ Bhagwat Dutt, *Dayanand Saraswati Patra and Vigyapan*, pp. 332 and 446.
- ²⁰ B. C. Pal, *Memories of My Life And Times*, Vol. 1, p. 425.
- ²¹ Bhagwat Dutt, *op. cit.*, letter No. 238.
- ²² Devendra Nath Upadhyaya, *Life of Dayanand Saraswati*, Part II, p. 422.
- ²³ S. P. Sen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. I, p. 407.
- ²⁴ H. B. Sarda, *Dayanand Commemoration Volume*, p. 368.

SWAMI DAYANANDA AND THE SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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SWAMI Dayananda 'Saraswati' was a great Hindu social reformer of the later nineteenth century, probably the last in the line of the Buddha and Sankara. Dayananda possessed the humanity of the Buddha, but he combined it with the preservative complex of Sankara. According to Dr. K. P. Jaiswal, "The Buddha denounced the whole social structure as based on false notions of birth and caste inequality and preached a revolution. Swami Dayananda emphasized, on the other hand, the traditional conservative regard for the Vedas and Vedic Culture, but he did not have the limitation of Sankara and rose above it and pronounced that the theory of caste was false, un-Vedic and un-Hindu."

Swami Dayananda proved to be a super-man. He overpowered the mystic professional Guru, the Sectarian,

Known in early life as Mula Sankara, Dayananda was born in 1824 in an orthodox Brahman family living in the small town of Tankara in the old Morvi state in Gujarat. At the age of fourteen his father took him to a temple on the Sivaratri night in order to observe the custom of worshipping and keeping vigil the whole night. Both Dayananda's father and the priest of the temple fell asleep after midnight, but the young boy kept himself awake If the deity, thought he, could not protect himself from the impertinence of a mouse, he could not be Siva, the almighty God, and the image was evidently a helpless inanimate object.

the Upholder of Avataras, the Worshipper of Gods and stones, of places and pilgrimages. He installed the man in the street in his true position in the society. He put him in direct worship of one true God, and his God was One to whom man never becomes a helpless slave. Swami Dayananda gave freedom to the soul of the Hindu as Martin Luther did unto the soul of the Christian.

He established the falsity of caste from the orthodox national standpoint and asserted that the True Vedic Hinduism implied equality by birth. One becomes an 'Arya' or 'the noble soul' by one's deeds, and not by birth. He gave only one slogan to his countrymen :

“Convert the whole world as noble souls.”

II

Dayananda received his education at the feet of Swami Birajananda Saraswati. When he completed his studies and took leave of his 'Guru', the latter urged him to take a pledge to devote his life to the dissemination of truth and the waging of an incessant warfare against the falsehoods of the prevailing Puranic faith or orthodox Hinduism. For long fifteen years, from 1845 to 1860 A.D., he toured all over India. He practised Yoga all the while, and lived on milk and fruits for days together. He gained a lot of experience by coming in contact with all shades of people. In Calcutta Dayananda's association with the leaders of the Brahma Samaj produced one good result. Keshab Chandra Sen suggested to him to carry on his propaganda in the language of the people ; he gladly accepted it, and made Hindi the vehicle of his teaching. After spending two years in preaching his doctrines from place to place he

proceeded to Bombay where the first Arya Samaj was established on the 10th of April, 1875, with the following principles and rules representing both its creed and its constitution :

That the Arya Samaj shall regard the Vedas alone as independently and absolutely authoritative.

That the Vedas are the Books of True knowledge which the members should study.

That its social ideals shall be based on the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, the equality of the sexes, absolute justice and fair play between men and men and nations and nations, equal opportunities to all according to their nature, action and virtue, and love and charity towards all.

Ordinarily, the Arya Samaj used to have congregational service once a week, which consisted generally in the performance of *yajna* (burning of sacrificial fire), singing of hymns, prayer, sermon and a lecture. The service could be conducted by any member of the Samaj who might be chosen for this purpose, irrespective of his caste and position.

The Arya Samaj wanted to provide equal opportunities for all persons, men and women, to acquire knowledge and to qualify themselves for whatever position in life they would like to fill. It admitted the right of every person to choose his or her environment, to fight it out and rise as high in the scale of humanity as he or she could. The Arya Samaj believed that in the Vedic times there was no hereditary caste in India, though the Vedas recognized the division of human race into four classes according to their qualifications and attainments.

Swami Dayananda thus taught that the "Society should be built on merit and not on colour and creed." In order to propagate this idea and to abolish the caste system, he toured far and wide in India, holding religious meetings and addressing learned gatherings on this subject. Ultimately he succeeded by defeating the arguments advanced by the supporters of *Varnashrama Dharma* in convincing a considerable section of his co-religionists of the inequality and injustice involved in the traditional social organization.

III

One of the greatest services rendered by the Arya Samaj to the cause of social reform among the Hindus was the emphasis it laid upon the work of "Shuddhi". This meant the reconversion of those Hindus, millions in number, who had once been willingly or forcibly converted into other religions like Islam or Christianity, but were now willing to come back to the fold of Hinduism. "Orthodox Hinduism has always barred its doors against them, the Arya Samaj threw it wide open. As a matter of fact, this aspect of the Arya Samaj excited the greatest interest in it among the people outside its own ranks." It was strongly opposed by the Muslims and became a source of constant conflict between the two. The preachings of Swami Dayananda influenced many social workers of the Punjab, such as Pandit Ram Bhuj Dutta Chaudhuri, Lala Ram Kishan, Roshan Lall, Lala Hansraj, Mahatma Munshi Ram and Lala Lajpat Rai.

Once Lala Lajpat Rai discussed the problem of the depressed classes from three standpoints, e.g., from the

point of view of the Hindu Community, as a question of all-India importance and in its humanitarian bearing. He feelingly expressed his views, when he observed, "If we Indians desire to achieve national self-respect and dignity, we should open our arms to our unfortunate brothers and sisters of the depressed classes and help to build up in them the vital spirit of human dignity. So long as we have these large classes of untouchables in this country, we can make no real progress in our national affairs." "No Slavery", Lajpat Raj held, "was more harmful than that of mind and no sin was greater than to keep human beings in perpetual bondage."

The Samaj met with a great success in reclaiming the Hindus converted to other faiths. The process of 'Shuddhi' was a simple affair. The untouchables were administered the 'Gayatri' *mantra* and invested with the sacred thread, which conferred upon them the right of performing 'Homa' or religious sacrifice. This also led to inter-dining, and in a few cases to inter-marriage. On June 14, 1903, a Muslim named Abdul Gaffor was converted to the Arya Dharma at Gujranwala. This was a memorable event in the history of the Arya Samaj. He was the first Muslim to be converted to the Arya Dharma. The purification ceremony of Munshi Abdul Kadir Khan took place in the temple of the Meerut Arya Samaj on January 31, 1904.

IV

Besides the 'Shuddhi' movement, the Arya Samaj organized orphanages and widows' homes. The first Hindu orphanage was established by the Samaj at Ferozepur. A

large number of orphans, girls as well as boys, rescued from starvation and death were being sheltered, fed, clothed and looked after by an earnest group of workers depending almost entirely on the generosity of the public. On September 3rd, 1912, Pandit Ram Bhuj Dutta Chaudhuri, with the co-operation of his wife, reclaimed several thousands of these people for the Arya Samaj of Gurdaspur. He established a Central School and several primary schools in Lahore and Gurdaspur. In the United Provinces also a large number of Domes (Sweepers) and Chamars were reclaimed by the Arya Samaj and schools were started for them.

Swami Dayananda revolutionized the intellectual and social thought of the Hindus to a great extent. He died in 1883. His death cast a deep gloom over his followers but the latter's mood of despair proved to be a passing one.

V

On 9th November, 1883, the Lahore Arya Samaj adopted a resolution unanimously, that the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic College must be established in the Punjab to perpetuate the memory of Swamiji in the best befitting manner. At first the D. A. V. School was founded in 1886 in Lahore, and the College was started in June, 1889. The objects of this institution as recorded in the registered Memorandum of Association were the following:

- (a) To encourage, improve and enforce the study of Hindu Literature.
- (b) To encourage and enforce the study of classical Sanskrit and of the Vedas.
- (c) To encourage and enforce the study of English

Literature and sciences, both theoretical and applied.

Lala Hansraj, a young man, had just graduated from the Punjab University, having a brilliant result to his credit. He offered his honorary services to this college and remained associated with it for full twenty-eight years. It is simply impossible to think of the D. A. V. College without Lala Hansraj who dedicated his whole life to the cause of higher education. His personality was unique in the history of Modern Punjab. Later on, D. A. V. Colleges were founded at Ferozepur, Jullundur, Multan, Kanpur, Ajmer, Sewan (Bihar) and many other towns of Northern India. Gradually it was observed that the authorities of the different D. A. V. Colleges cared more for University results than for sound national education. The fact that such colleges were affiliated to different Universities with rigid rules framed by the Government prevented them from making radical changes in the curriculum of studies or in the method of teaching.

The Gurukul Kangri was established in 1902 mainly through the untiring efforts of its first Governor Lala Munshi Ram who was a successful pleader of Jullundur. He became a member of the Arya Samaj in 1885. The Gurukul was started as a School. Its primary aim was to develop a strong religious character in the students on the basis of pure Vedic instruction. Munshi Ram realised two great drawbacks of the society; it lacked men of character and well-organised religious units. Students were given here the best moral and ethical training. Gradually the school was raised up to College status. The atmosphere of the Gurukul was saturated with the Vedas, Upanishads and other ancient literature of the Hindus. The use of Hindi

as the medium of instruction was one of the important features of this institution, and this was regarded as exceedingly important. After completing their education at the College most of the scholars went out as missionaries to propagate the doctrines of the Arya Samaj throughout India. The influence of such institutions in the moulding of the Indian life and character could not be over-emphasised. Sir James Meston, Lt. Governor of U.P. who paid a visit to this institution on 6th March, 1913, declared it to be an "ideal educational institution" and paid a high tribute to Lala Munshi Ram, its founder.

VI

Besides the D. A. V. Colleges and the Gurukul, which were meant for boys, the Arya Samaj started a good number of educational institutions for imparting education to girls. The Kanya Mahavidyalaya was founded by Lala Dev Raj in Jullundur in 1896. Here the girls were imparted education on the pattern of the traditional national curriculum. An orphanage and a widows' home were also attached to it. It maintained a very large boarding house under the supervision of devoted lady teachers. It was a pioneer institution imparting higher education, based both on national and University curricula in the Punjab. It was a very successful institution and a great monument of the public spirit and zeal of its founder, Lala Dev Raj.

The Kanya Gurukul at Dehradun was founded by Mahadevi, wife of Babu Jyoti Swarup, on the lines of the Gurukul Kangri. Its degrees were recognised only by the Gurukul Kangri University at Haridwar. Besides these two institutions the Arya Samaj opened the Hans Raj Mahila

Mahavidyalaya in Jullundur, and the D. A. V. Colleges for women at Amritsar, Batala and many other towns. Thus the Arya Samaj made a remarkable contribution in the field of women's education.

The Arya Samaj conducted a fiery crusade against child marriage and induced the Government to fix the minimum marriageable age at sixteen for girls and twenty-five for boys on the principles laid down by Swami Dayananda. In the matter of introducing widow-marriage also the Arya Samaj achieved a great success.

VII

The Swadeshi Movement was popularised in Western India by some of the leaders of the Arya Samaj like Lala Lajpat Rai. The movement acquired a national character almost immediately after its birth. "The fire that burnt in the hearts of Lala Lajpat Rai, Swami Shraddhanand, Mahatma Hansraj and others, was lit up by Swami Dayananda. In his name they incessantly worked for the country and lifted the Indian Nation to the position in which it is to be found today."

Thus Swami Dayananda will be known in history not only as a religious reformer but also as one of the Fathers of the great Indian Renaissance and the founder of the modern Punjab.

RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA MOVEMENT

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THE HISTORY of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement can be traced from the later half of the seventies of the nineteenth century, when after twelve years of spiritual practice, Sri Ramakrishna, realising the essential unity of all religions, decided to preach this message of harmony for the benefit of humanity. The Sayings of Ramakrishna soon attracted people from all strata of life ; his somewhat rustic Bengali vibrating with spirituality impressed the Indian mind. People came to visit him at the temple-garden of Dakshineswar, near Calcutta ; sometimes he himself went to meet the celebrities of his time. Thus he went to meet Devendranath Tagore, Vidyasagar and Keshabchandra Sen. Some of his later disciples were at first members of the Brahma Samaj, and from the Samaj they imbibed the spirit of religious inquiry and high moral standard. Swami Saradananda, in his famous biography of Sri Ramakrishna, namely, *Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga*, has frankly admitted this.¹ Still it was at this time that the Samaj was being divided in yet another part.

From the original or Adi Brahma Samaj came out the followers of Keshabchandra and formed the Bharatbarshiya Brahma Samaj, which was later again bifurcated and the latest development was the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Sri Ramakrishna had cordial relations with many members of the last two groups.

Shivnath Shastri, a leader of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, in his *History of the Brahma Samaj* wrote, "The Brahma Samaj rose with Keshab Chandra Sen, with him perhaps it has gone down in public regard."² But we can look at this phenomenon from another viewpoint. If it is admitted that the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and similar other movements of nineteenth century India came from within the Hindu or Aryan tradition of civilization, then we must remember that the Brahma movement in Bengal was essentially a precursor of the Hindu movement, although the latter was by mistake labelled as "Hindu Revivalism." In fact, starting from Raja Rammohan Ray, the query was what constituted the essence of Hinduism. In answering this question, one can find from Rammohan to Vivekananda and Rabindranath the only answer, the essential unity of religions expressed beautifully in our oldest scripture Rig Veda : 'Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Badanti' (Truth is one, sages express it in many ways), and again in the unparalleled collection of spiritual talks of Sri Ramakrishna, namely, *Ramakrishna Kathamrita* : 'Yata Mat Tata Path' 'All the religions of the world are but different ways of reaching God.'

Shivnath Shastri has characterised the years between 1870 to 1879 as the years of the declining influence of the Brahma Samaj and the beginning of the 'revival of Hinduism.' Such a characterization may lead to the belief that once upon a time Brahmoism had its all-pervading influence on the people of Bengal. But the fact remains that the Brahma-movement remained within the fold of Hinduism and was confined to the upper middle and middle class intelligentsia of Bengal.

Considering the vast multitude of Hindus following their own way of religious and social ideas, the impact of the followers of Keshabchandra, Shivnath Shastri and others

on the people of Bengal must be regarded as minimal. Brahma movement gradually recoiled itself to a small sect and lost the role of spiritual leadership, although even after this many Brahma-believers had individual contributions towards the Society as a whole. The force as a movement lost most of its attraction from Keshabchandra's time and under the leadership of Ananda Mohan Basu and Surendranath Banerjea what attracted the younger generation more was national struggle for independence and other activities of political overtone.

Here we can look for some root causes of the Brahma Samaja's gradual decline and the beginning of the Hindu Movement : (i) In the very name 'Brahma', derived from Vedic Literature, Brahma Samaj or Dharma proved itself to be of Hindu tradition. (ii) Brahmaism had no particular philosophical system of its own, like the Advaitins, Visistadvaitins or Gaudja Vaishnavites. It depended more on personality than on any expounded philosophy. (iii) From Rammohan to Devendranath Tagore there was a big leap when the essential emphasis on Sankarite philosophy by the former was discarded by the latter. With the aesthetic and poetic touch of Devendranath's devotion Brahmaism was going soon to face the problem of worshipping a God of personal love. (iv) In spite of Akshoy Kumar Datta's contention to prove even the Veda as fallible, there remained a scope for personal intuitive perception of infallible Truth as was evidenced by Devendranath's book *Brahma Dharma*. (v) With the rise of Keshabchandra the conflict of Brahmin and non-Brahmin supremacy naturally came out, although it was Devendranath who appointed Keshabchandra, a Vaidya by caste, as the Acharya of the Brahma Samaj. Besides that Keshab was influenced by his family tradition of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, by the liberal education he received

and by Christianity which was the rulers' religion at that time. So with all his energy and emotion Keshab was turning to be a mystic, with respect for all other religions of the world. It is interesting to note that Ramakrishna thought highly about Keshab's spirituality. On the other hand it was Keshabchandra who, after meeting Sri Ramakrishna on the 15th March of 1875, wrote and preached about him to the people of Calcutta and India as a whole. (vi) Keshabchandra's followers turned against him mainly for their differences of opinion regarding social matters. One of such disciples was Vijaykrishna Goswami, who later returned to the faith of worshipping God with form and himself became a founder of the new devotional group of Vaishnavites.

Thus it can be safely assumed that the rise of Hinduism during the seventies of nineteenth century Bengal was heralded by the Brahma movement in many ways. The famous lecture delivered by Rajnarayan Basu in 1871, "The Superiority of Hindu Religion" (Hindudharmer Sreshthata), was another forerunner of what was going to be within a decade a great assertion of the Hindu spirit. Right from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Hindu consciousness was so conspicuous that the foreign Government considered it wiser not to meddle with the religion and religious customs of India. Radhakanta Deb, Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar, Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay and many others were stalwarts in their own field, and judging from popular support the scale was on their side. But by mere assertion and interpretation no religious movement can survive.

In the intellectual field of Bengal this movement of dynamic Hinduism started in two ways. On one side were

Sasadhar Tarkachuramoni, Krishna Prasanna Sen and later on a much superior level Bankimchandra. On the other side was the twin force of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda who actually realised what was said in the scriptures in their life and by this realisation perceived the Mother of All Religions.

Born in 1836, in a remote village, Kamarpukur, nearly 100 miles from Calcutta, Gadadhar, the youngest son of Kshudiram Chattopadhyay and Chandramani Devi, an ideal pious couple of old Brahminic tradition, was from his early childhood a seeker of God. He did not care for the money-earning education ('Chal Kala Bandha Vidya'—in his own Bengali), and as soon as chance came, in the form of a post of the priest of Kali at Dakshineswar, he devoted all his mind and energy to realise the Divine Mother.

After the realisation in this particular way of worship Ramakrishna tried with other forms of Sakta, Vaishnava, Ramayet and other paths of worship including Islam and Christianity. The final realisation came when following the path of Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna attained the state of Advaita, but unlike ordinary Advaitins he returned to this world to preach among humanity his gospel of God realisation.

During his sadhana period Ramakrishna was married to a very young girl. But this marriage turned to be a new form of companionship of the soul, in which these two partners helped each other in their way of supreme realisation. In a way, Ramakrishna remained outwardly the ideal householder, but in his heart of hearts he remained completely unattached to money and lust, which were the two things which he thought as primary hind-

rances on the way to God. Naturally, later the young people who gathered round him were inspired by his ideal of renunciation and through the monks of Ramakrishna Order a new movement of Sannyasins made an impact on Bengal and India as a whole.

During his Vedanta-sadhana period, Ramakrishna took the vow of renunciation in the traditional Hindu way by performing Viraja Homa before his Guru of Vedanta-sadhana, Totapuri. From this association the monks of Ramakrishna order are considered as members of the Puri sect of Sannyasins. This aspect of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is quite different from the Brahma movement, which emphasised on the ideal of 'Brahmanishta Grihastha' (Brahma-worshiping householders) and did not encourage the emphasis on Sannyasa as was preached by Buddha and particularly Sankara (vide the autobiography of Devendranath Tagore). Sri Ramakrishna prescribed the ideal of Sannyasa for a chosen few, while most of his disciples remained in household life. Still those chosen few became leaders of the Ramakrishna movement.

The last five years of Sri Ramakrishna's life saw the gradual formation of a group of young God-seekers round this mystic holy man. In the later half of 1881 came Narendranath Datta (Swami Vivekananda), on whom Sri Ramakrishna trusted the future of his followers.

Sarada Devi (known as Holy Mother), after the demise of her consort Ramakrishna, became a guardian angel to those spiritual sons. Whenever there was any dirth of spirit, any overwhelming difficulty, she instructed her spiritual sons to the rightful path by virtue of her simple purity and spiritual depth.

Sri Ramakrishna propounded a new philosophical out-

look when he said that there is something beyond Jnana (Knowledge) in the spiritual world and that is Vijnana. By Vijnana he meant realising Brahman in every being, to see this world as the manifestation of Divinity. When a man looks at the world in this way, he cannot pity (Daya) anybody, he can only serve the 'Narayana' (God) in every being.

The young College student Narendranath with all his Western education had great difficulty in accepting Sri Ramakrishna's ideas and experiences. But gradually he accepted all the steps of realisation as true, because Sri Ramakrishna made him realise that man is not going from error to truth, but from lower truth to higher truth. So, starting from Kali and going up to Brahma is but turning the same medal from one side to the other. To realise God, it was not necessary to go to forests or caves, though for some people that may be quite helpful. Man can remain in his own place of work and make that particular job his way of realisation.

Sister Nivedita summed up the views of Swami Vivekananda in the following words :

"If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are parts of realisation. No distinction henceforth between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid." (Preface to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* : Sister Nivedita : July 4, 1907).

In the history of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement we should remember that the Ramakrishna Order was not founded by Swami Vivekananda, but by Ramakrishna him-

self. As Swami Shivananda, another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once explained,

“We did not found this Order. It was the Master who brought it into being during his illness. At that time he instructed Swamiji (Vivekananda) and others as to how this Order was to be organised and conducted.” (‘Mahapurush Shivananda’ : Swami Apurvananda : in Bengali : quoted by translation in ‘History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission’ : Swami Gambhirananda).

Still it was Vivekananda who gave the Ramakrishna Order a concrete shape. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement comprises all those people who were influenced by and worked for this movement in various ways. Among the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who later took the vow of renunciation, we can mention here some other names, apart from Vivekananda. The first one to note is Swami Brahmananda, who became the Head of the Order after Vivekananda’s untimely demise, whom Sri Ramakrishna thought as ‘King’ of the spiritual world ; next Swami Shivananda, the second President of the Ramakrishna Order, who inspired thousands of people in the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ; Swami Saradananda who was appointed as Secretary of the Order by Vivekananda, and who served the Order life-long remaining in this post ; Swami Akhandananda, who first started the missionary work of the Order by serving the famine-stricken people of Murshidabad in Bengal and was the third President of the Order ; Swami Abhedananda, who was a yogi by nature and who took the charge of preaching Vedanta in the West from Vivekananda ; Swami Turiyananda and Swami Trigunatitananda who by their selfless work and sadhana served the Order in India and abroad ;

Swami Adbhutananda, that amazing personality, who came as a personal servant of Ramakrishna and was later to be turned to one of the highest spiritual authorities of the Order ; Swami Ramakrishnananda, a staunch devotee, who preached the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in South India and a few others.

Among the devotees who were householders, Sri M (Mahendra Nath Gupta), author of the *Ramakrishna Kaihaviita* (translated as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), is immortal because of his Boswellian work in Bengali literature. Girish Chandra Ghosh, the great dramatist of Bengal, was a completely transformed religious personality since he met Sri Ramakrishna. Through the influence of Sri Ramakrishna on Girish Chandra Bengali stage came very near to the common people. Knowing that drama has a great part to play in mass education, Ramakrishna asked Girish Chandra to continue his writing and Girish preached the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda through his dramas. Ramachandra Datta, a pathologist by profession and a near relation of Narendranath, who wrote on Ramakrishna during the latter's lifetime, was an ardent preacher of Ramakrishna's ideal. Balaram Basu made his house at Baghbazar the Calcutta parlour of Ramakrishna and after the Master's demise his house became a centre of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in its initial stage. Special mention should be made here of Durgacharan Nag, then known as Nag Mahasay, hailing from Dacca in East Bengal, whom the Master asked to show the ideal of a householder to the world and who propagated the ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in East Bengal by his living example.

Among the women-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, apart from Saradadevi, who was his first disciple, the name of

Gouri 'Mata' comes first. She was already a nun before she met Ramakrishna. With a gift of leadership this pious lady organised one of the best institutions for education of women in Calcutta and thus propagated the man-making ideal of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Gopal's Mother was another saintly woman who realised Lord Krishna as child Gopala and whose life inspired Sister Nivedita. Yogindra Mohini Debi and Golapsundari Debi, both highly gifted religious personalities in later life, helped Saradadevi in her spiritual work. Thus the nucleus of a nunnery was formed centering round Saradadevi which later got impetus by the joining of Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine. In the birth-centenary year of Saradadevi (1953), a nunnery of the Ramakrishna Order was formed and at present it is a completely separate organisation.

The Beginning of the Ramakrishna Order

After Swami Vivekananda's return from the U.S.A. in 1897, a meeting was called by him at the Calcutta residence of Balaram Basu on May 1, 1897. Hitherto the Ramakrishna Order was more or less an informal organisation. It was first started at Barahanagar, Calcutta, in September, 1886; then the monastery moved to nearby Alambazar area in November 1891; finally it was shifted to Belur, a small village on the river Ganges near Calcutta, on 9th December, 1898. In the meeting of 1897 the following were the main points stressed by Vivekananda :

1. An association is to be founded under the name of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.
2. Its aim is to preach the truths which Ramakrishna, for the good of humanity, preached and taught by the example of his own life, and to help others to put them into

practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual benefit.

3. Its duty is to direct in a fitting spirit the activities of this movement, inaugurated by Ramakrishna "for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be only so many forms of one undying Eternal Religion."

4. Its methods of action are : (i) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses ; (ii) to promote and encourage arts and industries ; and (iii) to introduce among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas as elucidated in the life of Ramakrishna.

5. It was to have two branches of action ; The first was to be Indian Maths (Monasteries) and Ashrama (Convents for retreat) which were to be established in the different parts of India for the education of Sannyasins and lay brethren (householders) "as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others". The second was to send members of the Order to countries outside India for founding spiritual centres and for creating a close relationship and spirit of mutual help between the foreign and Indian centres.

6. The Aims and Ideals of the Mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it would have no connection with politics.'

This preamble of the Mission's work was being mooted even in the preliminary days of the Sangha, when the disciples of Ramakrishna, both householders and Sannyasins, were spreading the message of the Master in their personal capacity. Most of the Sannyasins, particularly Swami Vivekananda, went from one part of India to the other mixing with the highest nobles and lowest pariahs and

feeling the pulse of India, which he found in religion. Thus he was a missionary first in India, then in the West. During this period he came in contact with some of the finest intellectual and energetic young men of the South, who were the forerunners of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement there.

In India, the first work of the Mission started with relief work done by Swami Akhandananda in Murshidabad, where a terrible famine was raging. From among the destitutes of this famine some orphan boys and girls, both Hindu and Muslim, were picked up by Akhandananda and looked after as the embodiment of God. Vivekananda gave his whole-hearted support to Akhandananda, and from then on relief work during famine, pestilence, flood and other natural and social calamities has become a routine work of the Mission.

In a poor country like India, medical help is a primary necessity. In Vivekananda's life-time when there was an outbreak of plague in Calcutta in 1898, he was determined to serve his countrymen, even if it meant selling of the Belur Math. Sister Nivedita, Swami Sadananda and other monks of the Order along with the young men of Calcutta joined Vivekananda in this great humanitarian venture.

Inspired by Vivekananda's ideal of service hospitals and medical centres were established at Benares, Kankhal, Allahabad and Vrindaban. In later years the Sannyasins of the Mission started one institution for Maternity Care (Shishu Mangal) in South Calcutta which has turned to be a General Hospital in recent time, namely, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratisthan (1932, 1970); one Tuberculosis Sanatorium at Ranchi, and one of the biggest polyclinics in India, Vivekananda Polyclinic at Lucknow (1970). Along with this almost in all the centres run by the Mission, the

authorities try to serve the local people with as much free medical aid as possible.

“Education is the panacea of all evils”—thought Vivekananda. In fact, throughout his life he tried to give a new direction to the then existing system of education, which he thought should be man-making, instead of clerk-making. He even thought that the Monastery in Belur would one day turn into a University—teaching science, arts, literature, technical education along with the basis of India’s religious background.

At present by the side of the Central Monastery at Belur, there is a big institution, namely, Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, which may be considered as the nucleus of that future University, dreamt by Vivekananda, where there is a college of General Arts and Science, an Institute of Technical education, one B. T. College, one adult education centre, and one Industrial School, all with an emphasis on Indian Culture.

The educational institutions run by the Mission are spread all over India with schools, colleges, student’s homes, training centres, which can be easily distinguished by their sense of discipline, national outlook and ideal of all-round development of personality. Some of the important educational centres of Ramakrishna Mission are as follows :

1. The first educational project of the Mission, however, was started by Sister Nivedita in a narrow lane of Calcutta, which was meant only for girls. This school was blessed by Saradadevi and inspired by Vivekananda. At present this is one of the best schools of Calcutta. This school was started in 1898 and is at present under the management of Ramakrishna-Sarada Mission, a separate body of Nunnery which was started in 1953.

2. R. K. Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, Bihar : School

and Hostel : one of the earliest educational institutions (1922) of the Mission.

3. R. K. Mission Vidyalaya at Coimbatore, Madras : College, School, Rural Institution, Industrial Institute, B. T. College and other institutions.

4. R. K. Mission Boys' Home, Rahara, Bengal : Starting as an orphanage (1943), it at present consists of School, College, Social Education Centre, Basic Training College, etc.

5. R. K. Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, Bengal : Starting as a hostel for college students at Calcutta (1943), it at present consists of College, School, Gramsevak Training Centre, Junior Polytechnic, Social Education Centre, etc.

6. R. K. Mission Vivekananda College, Madras : one of the best educational institutions of the South.

7. R. K. Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji, Khasi Hills, Meghalaya : with a pioneer high school in the area, the Mission is conducting a dozen centres of education throughout the tribal area.

These are only a few of the more than thirty educational centres run by the R.K. Mission throughout the country.

The R. K. Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta is another centre of education, where very learned discussions are held regularly with a good library, a School of languages, International Scholars' residence, etc. The aims of the Institute are : (a) a proper interpretation and appraisal of Indian Culture ; (b) the promotion of mutual knowledge and understanding between India and other countries ; and (c) the promotion of the study of the cultural heritage of mankind as a whole. Studying the objectives of the Institute of Culture, and the way it is run by the Mission up to this day, one can safely conclude that it is one of the best examples

of the Universalism of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement put into practice.

Although gradually the emphasis on intellectual activity is on the increase, the ideal of Seva in the material field is still the main item of work done by the Mission, as can be surmised from the following list of Mission's relief works in various places in different years—

1. Famine and Distress Relief : in 1896 and 26 subsequent years in altogether 72 districts. In the devastating famine of Bengal (1943), the Mission played the saviour of millions, and has been doing so in subsequent years whenever necessary. 2. Flood Relief : In 1899 and 29 subsequent years, in altogether 78 districts. 3. Sanitary Relief : (a) Plague : In 1899-1900 and 3 subsequent years. (b) Cholera : In 1913 and 10 other years. (c) Smallpox (1936-37), Influenza (1918-19), Malaria (1943), (d) Gangasagar Mela, Kumbhamela, etc. 4. Tornado and Cyclone Relief. 5. Fire Relief. 6. Earthquake and Landslide Relief. 7. Riot Relief (1930, 1941, 1946-47). 8. Coolie Relief (1921). 9. Evacuee and Refugee Rehabilitation (1942-44, 1947-48). 10. Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation (1947-51, 1964, 1971). Besides these works in the past we can particularly remember the relief works by R.K. Mission during recent past in the following cases—(a) Koyna earthquake, (b) Bihar famine, (c) Bangladesh refugee problem, (d) West Bengal flood.

In the field of literature and journalism also the mission has some distinct contributions. Starting from Bengali, the mother tongue of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and in English in which the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda was preached throughout the world, almost all the principal languages of India have been benefited by the publications.

of R.K. Mission in various languages on the cultural heritage of India in the light of the lives and teachings of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

The Mission has to its credit three English periodicals in India—1. *Brahmavadin* (1895). 2. *Prabuddha Bharata* (1896). 3. *Vedanta Keshari* (1914). The first one, although of high standard, was closed during the Swamiji's life time. But the second one has a circulation all over the world and is running in full force uptill now. It is considered to be one of the best periodicals in the religious and philosophical fields. Both these magazines were conceived and named by Vivekananda, although they were first published from Madras, while he was in the U.S.A.

Another such periodical in Bengali *Udbodhan* (1899) came out after Swamiji's first return from the West. *Udbodhan* started as a fortnightly periodical and was later turned into a monthly, which is still running as one of the oldest periodicals in Bengali towards its 80th year. *Vedanta Keshari* was started 12 years after Vivekananda's demise and remains the torchbearer of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in Southern India. It is interesting to note that a Hindi magazine *Samanvay* came out from Belur Math, in the editorial staff of which one important member was the poet Nirala (Suryakanta Tripathi). There are other periodicals in various languages published from India and America of which we mention a few—*Vedanta and the West* (1938) from Hollywood Centre of America, *Jivan Vikash* in Marathi from Nagpur (1967), *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, a monthly in Tamil (1921), and *Sri Ramakrishna Prabha*, a monthly in Telugu (1944), both from Madras, *Vivekijyoti* in Hindi from Raipur.

Apart from these periodicals mention should be made of numerous religious literature published in the various

languages of India, although the bulk of them came out in English and Bengali. Sri Ramakrishna's sayings were ably collected by his disciple Mahendra Nath Gupta who published these sayings after more than a decade, first in English and then elaborately in Bengali. These sayings—simple, picturesque, full of deepest wisdom yet bereft of all artificial pedantry at once caught the imagination of the Bengali reader. *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in five volumes has become a very popular classic in Bengali literature.

Swami Vivekananda was a great orator and his oratory was another part of his writer-self. He could write in a perfect classical style, and he has created a style of his own by following his Master, in a lucid and fiery manner. He is one of the makers of modern Bengali prose (Chalita Bhasha)—his travelogue *Paribrajaka*, his comparative study of Eastern and Western Civilization : *Pracya O Paschatya*, his collection of essays *Bhabbar Katha* all bear testimony to this. His *Modern India* (Bartaman Bharata) is a good work on the philosophy of Indian History.

A rich harvest of biographical literature is the outcome of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement. We may mention here only a few : 1. *Ramakrishna : His Life and Sayings* : Max Muller. 2. *Life of Ramakrishna* : Advaita Ashrama. 3. *Life of Vivekananda* : Eastern and Western Disciples. 4. *Life of Ramakrishna and Life of Vivekananda* (in two volumes) : Romain Rolland. 5. *Sri Ramakrishna Lila Prasanga* (Bengali) : Swami Saradananda. 6. *Sarada Devi* (Bengali) : Br. Akshay Chaitanya. 7. *Sri Ma Sarada Devi* (Bengali) : Swami Gambhirananda. 8. *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* : Christopher Isherwood. There are separate biographies on most of the important disciples of Ramakrishna, each distinct in its own way.

Two important publications are (a) *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in eight volumes, published from Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta (translated in the various languages of India on the occasion of Vivekananda's Birth Centenary, 1963). (b) *The Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda* in ten volumes, published from Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashrama, Calcutta. Although imbued with religious overtones, Vivekananda and Abhedananda's books played a great role in our political and social awakening. The same can be said of the other publications of the Ramakrishna Order.

As we know, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in their lives tried to realise the age-old spiritual tradition of India in all its aspects—Dvaita, Vishistadvaita, and Advaita along with the four paths of Aryan tradition—Jnana, Bhakti, Karma and Yoga. Bearing this ideal in his mind, Vivekananda encouraged the establishment of such centres where there would be no form of external worship but only the realisation of this pure concept of Advaita. One such centre was established at Mayavati, Almora, on 19th March, 1899. Later another centre was established at Calcutta, which became the main Advaita Institution and one of the English publication centres of the Ramakrishna Order of Belur. Throughout his life Vivekananda tried to rise above all sectarian ideas. It was for this reason that he emphasised on the preaching of Vedanta. According to him the message of Vedanta is 'Abhiih'—'I have no fear', the Vedanta is above all ritualistic concepts of religion.

This Vedantic doctrine on the one side and the Kali worship on the other inspired the Nationalist movement of India in the first quarter of the twentieth century. From the intelligence report of the British Government it appears

that *Gita*, *Chandi* and the books of Vivekananda were to be found in the possession of young revolutionaries. It is quite natural that Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Arabinda Ghosh and a host of others have openly admitted the influence of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda in their thought-world and as one of the main sources of inspiration in the Nationalist Movement.

The message of Vivekananda has found a deeper relevance in the post-independence days. Gandhi, Subhash Chandra, Jawaharlal Nehru and many others have all acknowledged their indebtedness to this patriot-saint of India and although not a politician by profession or thinking, Vivekananda was one of the greatest sources of inspiration to the Indian Freedom Movement. But in another aspect it was Vivekananda who prepared our mind for the coming age of the Proletariat or the 'Age of the Sudras' (Sudra-Yuga) as he called it. Coming from a so-called bourgeois family, Vivekananda actually 'declassed' himself in a way, by holding the begging bowl of a Sannyasin. That was the secret of his love for the common toiling masses of the world. Time and again, in his speeches, writings and conversation he has reminded us about the inevitable rising of the common people and asked the so-called upper class educated people to share their wealth and knowledge with them, so that instead of a bloody revolution India could become a haven of co-operation between the different classes. In a letter from London dated 1.11.1896 Vivekananda wrote : "Human society is in turn governed by the four castes—the priests, the soldiers, the traders, and the labourers. Each state has its glories, as well as its defects. ..Last will come the labourer (Sudra) rule. ... If it is possible to form a state in which the knowledge of priesthood, the

culture of the military, the distributive spirit of the commercial, and the ideal of the equality of the last can be kept intact, minus their evils, it will be an ideal state. But is it possible? In this letter Vivekananda called himself a Socialist, not because he thought it was a perfect system, but as he quoted—'half a loaf is better than no bread'.

Vivekananda was always conscious of the economic background of civilization. He did hear from his Guru, "An empty stomach is no good for religion". But he also knew that the highest aim of human life is, as his Guru used to say,—'Realisation of God'. Bearing fully this in mind he wrote in the same letter—

"A country where millions of people live on flowers of the Mohua plant, and a million or two of Sadhus and a hundred million or so of Brahmins suck the blood out of these people, without even the least effort for their amelioration—is that a country or hell? Is that a religion or devil's dance."

And again he reminded us—

"O India! Forget not that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget not that the God thou worshippesst is the great Ascetic of ascetics the all-renouncing Sankar, the Lord of Uma; forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense-pleasure, are not for thy individual personal happiness; forget not that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar;.....forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood thy brothers"—Modern India : *Complete Works* : Vol. IV, Centenary edn., pp. 479-480).

So in the humanist and in the socialist ideas of Rama-

krishna-Vivekananda movement, we find an approach of synthesis between the material and spiritual aspects of Indian civilization. Some people mistook this movement as purely reactionary against the Western impact in the nineteenth century, but on closer analysis it will be found that in the religion of harmony, as explained by Ramakrishna and in the religion of acceptance of all the best aspects of World Culture as propounded by Vivekananda the emphasis was always on the positive aspect of assimilation, at the same time preserving the national identity.

Although basically a Hindu movement, this organisation did not practise any conversion which was quite novel for a religious movement. Believing in the Vedantic ideal Vivekananda asked every man to remain within the orbit of his religion and society and perform his particular duty, through which everyone should work out his own salvation. In the post-independence India the general tendency towards religious catholicism is a direct result of the RK-V movement. 'Vedantic brain with Islamic body'—was Vivekananda's ideal of future India ; along with this we can add his appreciation for Western practical method minus its mainly materialist approach towards life. The East and the West were no more aliens, but an understanding between the two henceforth became imperative.

The Vedantic background of Vivekananda's intellectual world found it a necessity to accept modern science and technology. In spite of the Hindu theological aspect of this movement, where Sri Ramakrishna is an incarnation of God and along with Sarada Devi and Vivekananda forms a holy trinity, a follower of the RK-V movement can easily dispense with this cult and worship any other deity or adhere to the pure Advaita concept. But a follower of the RK-V movement

should accept the service of suffering humanity as his primary concern. Little by little this ideal of service has gained ground. In the temples of RK-V followers people of all religious faiths and castes are freely allowed.

One can find in the architecture of Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math, contemplated by Swami Vivekananda, a blending of Hindu temple, Muslim mosque and Christian church. The architecture of this temple has been more or less imitated in the Ramakrishna Temples all over India and in the Vivekananda Temple at Kanyakumari.

In the revival of Indian Art the inspiration of the RK-V Movement found particular medium through Sister Nivedita's appreciation of Indian Art Movement sponsored by Abanindranath, Nandalal, Asit Halder and others. In the House of Tagores, at Calcutta, the meeting of Rabindranath, Sister Nivedita, Ananda Coomaraswamy, Abanindranath was a turning point in Indian Art Movement. Particularly Nandalal Bose was deeply influenced by the RK-V movement which was the main source of the spiritual quality of his drawings.

In India and in countries like Burma, Singapore, Ceylon and Bangladesh, the RK-V Movement has been more or less confined to humanitarian activities with stress on religious culture, while in far off countries like America, England, France, etc., the Movement is wholly intellectual and spiritual. From the time of Vivekananda, America has been the most important centre of cultural activity of the RK-V Movement, although it was from England that this Movement received its finest response in the personality of Sister Nivedita. But among the foreigners who follow the RK-V ideal, Americans are foremost in number. At present there are Vedanta Centres of the R.K. Mission in Gretz (France),

London, Berkeley, Boston, Chicago, Hollywood, New York, Portland, Providence, San Francisco, Seattle, St Louis (U.S.) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). These centres are silently preaching the culture and spirituality of India and due to their acceptance of all religious faiths are gradually having wider appreciation among the intelligentsia. As a global Movement the RK-V Movement is next to the Buddhist Movement of Indian History.

Among the Swamis who are at present representing the RK-V Movement in America, two names are outstanding in the field of religious literature. The name of Swami Pravabananda with whom three distinguished writers came in contact—Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham and Christopher Isherwood—is well known. Books like *Perennial Philosophy*, *The Razor's Edge* and the biography *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* are proofs of this contact. In the field of translating Indian Scriptures Pravabananda and Swami Nikhilananda have distinct contributions. The latter has to his credit the translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and three remarkable biographies of Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Vivekananda.

A few other examples of the Movement :

So far the R.K. Math and Mission have been the main torchbearers of the RK-V Movement. From this parent organisation two separate organisations came up. Swami Abhedananda, after returning from America, found it a necessity to establish a separate centre in Calcutta and accordingly in September, 1923, the Vedanta Society was founded and later it developed into Ramakrishna Vedanta Math (1934) with a few branches. The activity of this

Math is very much alike that of its parent body. In the year 1929 there was a serious breach within the R.K. Mission body and as a result another institution was formed in Calcutta.

Apart from these two institutions we can mention another centre of RK-V Movement at Kankurgachi, Calcutta, established by Ramachandra Datta, a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna, namely, Ramakrishna Yogodyan. The activities of this centre are purely devotional and intellectual and it has merged itself with the R.K. Math and Mission.

Vivekananda Society (1902), another Youth centre, which was patronised by Sister Nivedita and at present by the Ramakrishna Order, was established for working among the Young generation of Bengal and was a source of inspiration to many in the first half of this century. The Society is well established now at Vivekananda Road, Calcutta, and is carrying on its philanthropic works silently.

In the field of journalism, a daily paper was published, namely, the *Basumati* in Bengali, by Upendra Nath Mukherjee, a disciple of Ramakrishna. This paper has distinct contributions in the field of the RK-V Movement. Later a monthly bearing the same name came out and was very popular. Particularly memorable is Basumati publications' contribution towards cheap editions of Sanskrit and Bengali Classics. Upendranath was inspired personally by Swami Vivekananda in his publication venture. The fabulous wealth accumulated by the Basumati concern was later one of the main sources of finance of an Orphanage of the R.K. Mission at Rahara, West Bengal.

Apart from the Swadeshi Movement and the Nationalist Movement of the Congress, there is another semi-political organisation of recent times, which claims itself as the follo-

wer of Vivekananda. The Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha, a highly organised body of youngmen all over India, stressed particularly on Militant Hindu Tradition. Recently mainly due to their effort a memorial temple of Vivekananda has been raised at Kanyakumari, where Vivekananda visualised his future plan of work in his parivrajaka days.

RK-V Movement in retrospect :

If we trace the RK-V movement from the middle of the eighties of nineteenth-century India, it is going to fulfil its hundredth year in the next decade. As a movement of spiritual significance for India and the World at large the importance of this movement lies in its broad universal outlook with stress on direct communion with the Eternal Truth, as initiated by Shri Ramakrishna. Although its leaders have so far been Sannyasins, still from the national viewpoint this movement has tremendous social significance. So long spirituality in India meant the realisation of one's own salvation which Ramakrishna placed in a much lower order than the ideal of the liberation of Humanity. Freedom from hunger was given the first priority. Serving the poor of all races as 'Daridra Narayana' became the ideal of karmayoga for Young India.

But when considered as an organisation of the Ramakrishna Order, this movement had to bound itself within some limits. Ramakrishna was both a householder and a Sannyasin par excellence. But later the movement centred round the Sannyasins and thus it had to sever connection with all sorts of political and social problems.

Both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were ready to adapt themselves with the changing needs of society. The monastic order established by them is also modern in their

acceptance of scientific, technical and humanist standpoints of modern civilization. Most of the recruits in this organisation are well educated, coming from cultured families, trained both in the ancient scriptures and the modern system of education. Acting as a spiritual leaven these noble souls are silently revitalising the moral force of the society.

The problem of the limits of the organisation first came in the forefront with Sister Nivedita's dissociation with it after Vivekananda's demise (July, 1902). It should be remembered that she remained to the last days of her life (in her own language) 'Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda'. It was only a technical necessity which set Nivedita free to take up the social, political, economic and other problems of India with much more direct responsibility than was possible if she had remained in the order.

Unlike the followers of Bankimchandra and other socio-political thinkers, who wished to make politics a form of religion, this RK-V movement never identified itself with any political programme or party, and never thought of making any use of religion for the sake of politics. But by making people self-respectful, fearless and independent-minded this movement has contributed greatly to our political struggle. However, the best contribution of the movement is the rejuvenation of India's spiritual heritage, by affirming this Eternal Truth—"God Is. The aim of man's life is to realise God."

Caste-system, which seems to be a bane to the Hindus of India, was bitterly denounced by Vivekananda. Yet, his Guru thought that this system would naturally wither away; we should not be in a hurry to drive it out. Judging from the trend of rapid changes in Modern India, it seems that

the latter was more correct in his approach. The Order of Ramakrishna accepts people of all castes as its members and refrains from interfering with the usual customs of the society.

Ramakrishna Mission has also proved its worth in the field of higher education. But the fact remains that it was mass education which Vivekananda thought to be the primary need of India. The re-orientation of National education is a much-wanted theme of Vivekananda-literature. In both these fields the RK-V Movement has not shown as yet the necessary involvement which was expected.

The question of a future Socialist India comes next. As a Vedantin Vivekananda was against all ideas of privilege. We may remember in this respect that Dr. Bhupendra Nath Datta, the youngest brother of Vivekananda, was one of those revolutionaries who started the leftist political struggle in India. But as it is difficult for an essentially spiritual movement to merge itself with any of the contemporary political or social struggles, the RK-V Movement has not evolved any particular policy towards reaching the socialist goal of the country. Still as an initiator of service of the 'Daridra Narayana' the RK-V Movement in its natural course fulfils some of the socialist objectives.

Last of all, we should remember that the RK-V movement is a growing, living movement with a great future before it. It is true that after Buddha no other Indian saint has such a tremendous impact upon the World. We can sincerely hope that Indian Civilization will occupy the central position among the Nations of the World, by assimilating what is best both in the East and in the West, following the foot-steps of two great World-Masters, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

THE PARAMHAMSA SABHA

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It was initially a policy of the East India Company not to allow the missionaries to carry on their activities in India. The Company had to give up the policy because of the missionary pressure at home. By the Charter Act of 1813 the missionaries were allowed to come to India. Actually, Dr. Taylor, a missionary had come to Bombay in 1807 but the Government of Bombay forced him to go back.¹

The American Marathi Mission was established in 1813 at Ahmadnagar. In 1827 was founded the Scottish Presbyterian Mission at Bombay. It became very active with the arrival of the Reverend John Wilson in 1829. The aim of the missionaries was "that the language of the Marathas, as well as the people themselves must be Christianized."² Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay, opposed the move of the missionaries to teach the Bible in their schools. In his minute he wrote "the only effect of introducing Christianity in our schools would be to sound the alarm, and to warn the Brahmins of the approaching danger...and in this instance the danger involves not the failure of our plans of education, but the dissolution of our empire."³ The successors of Elphinstone did not follow his policy.

Reverend Wilson started giving public lectures about Christianity in which he would attack the Hindu beliefs and practices. Morbhat Dandekar replied to his charges,⁴ to which Wilson gave a counter reply in his book,

*Exposure of the Hindu Religion.*⁵ The controversy was carried further in the next decade by Vishnubuwa Brahmachari.⁶ At the request of Sokar Bapuji Trilokekar⁷ he gave weekly lectures at the Prabhu Seminary⁸ about the superiority of the Hindu religion. The first lecture was delivered on September 28, 1856. In all, he gave fifty lectures on the topic. He had a public debate with the missionaries on Chaupadi sands. These were published later under the caption *Samudra-kinaricha Vad Vivad* (debate at the sea-shore).⁹

Though the missionaries' aim was to spread the message of Christianity, their attacks on Hinduism had one healthy effect. The Hindus, or at least the Western-educated amongst them, became introspective. Dadoba Pandurang,¹⁰ a young man from Bombay, had his early training under the missionaries. He had started looking at the Hindu religious institutions with an inquisitive eye. He soon discovered that the idol worship was a later interpolation. He also abhorred the caste system based on inequality. He was a school teacher at Surat. There he came in contact with Durgaram Mancharam,¹¹ the noted social reformer from Gujarat. Together they established "Manav Dharna Sabha"¹² (an assembly for human religion) on June 22, 1844. The members of this body were committed to the following principles : (1) God is one and He alone shall be worshipped ; (2) religion is the same for all human beings ; (3) morality is the basis of religion ; (4) freedom of conscience ; (5) equal opportunities for all. The assembly had a small but intellectual membership.

After about four years he returned to Bombay. There he met Ram Balkrishna¹¹ who was also thinking on similar lines. With the help of R.G. Bhandarkar¹⁴ they established

the Paramhansa Sabha in 1850¹⁵ (an assembly of religious thinkers). Ram Balkrishna was the president of the Sabha and Dadoba Pandurang was its secretary. The Sabha was a secret association. They did not want the orthodoxy to go against them until they were well organized. This was the reason why they kept their deliberations closed for the non-members¹⁶

Their main target was the caste system. They appreciated very well that the caste system had artificially divided the Hindu fold. It was the main cause of the Hindu debacle before the onward march of Islam. The Sabha believed in practice rather than precept. To show its desire to abolish the caste differences, they followed a ritual at the beginning of every meeting. As soon as the meeting was called to order, every member took a little water in the hollow of his palm and poured it down. This is the Hindu symbol for discarding something. They meant to discard the caste system. They went still further, a glass of milk was brought in and every member took a sip of milk from the same glass. Then a piece of loaf baked by a Christian was shared by all the members.¹⁷ The sipping of milk and partaking of a piece of bread was clearly an imitation of the Catholic mass.

The Sabha soon had branches at Poona, Ahmadnagar, Satara, Belgaum, and other places.¹⁸ The aim of a caste-less society soon found favour with a number of educated men. At Poona, Lokahitwadi,¹⁹ and Jotiba Phooley²⁰ joined the society. They were the pioneers who started a school for the lower-caste Hindus.

Though the ritual of the Sabha mentioned above was anti-caste, the Sabha was essentially for religious reforms. The Hindu social institutions were so much interwoven with religious rites that it was difficult to separate them. Hence

the anti-caste stance of the Sabha was in reality an attempt to reform the Hindu religious practices. The members were pledged to monotheism and absolute religious toleration. They also stood for complete equality of man. It is true that they were inspired somewhat by the missionaries. But it would be wrong to say that they followed the Christian doctrines. They took whatever good they found in Christianity. The fact of the matter is that taking inspiration from Western learning, they tried to put their own house in order. They were out to cleanse the Hindu religious and social institutions of the blemishes that had accumulated during the past centuries. An undertaking of this type was sure to provoke the wrath of the advocates of *status quo*. This explains the early death of the Sabha.

Perhaps the ideology of the Sabha was a little premature. The members were certainly far ahead of their times. The Hindu society, bound by shackles of traditional beliefs, was not yet ready to go in for so sweeping a change. However, the fact remains that the Paramhansa Sabha was the first to break the ice. They gave a momentum to the stagnated Hindu social order and paved the way for the next generation.

One of the members proved a traitor to the group and published the list of members of the head office at Bombay. This event, coupled with the death of President Ram Balakrishna in 1866, brought about the disintegration of the Sabha.²¹ The Sabha was now defunct, but its ideology did not die. Some of its members established the Prarthana Samaj (an assembly for prayer) within a very short time on March 31, 1869.

R E F E R E N C E S

- 1 G.N. Magdgaonkar, *Mumbai Varhan*, Bombay 1861, p. 374.
- 2 Rev. Bruce, *The Literary Work of the American Marathi Missions*, p. 13.
- 3 Colebrook, *Life of Mount Stuart Elphinstone*, p. 156.
- 4 Dr. George Smith, *The Life of John Wilson*, p. 67
- 5 Dr. R. S. Walimbe, *Maharashtrachi Samajik Punarghatana*, pp. 181-182.
- 6 Vishnu Bhikaji Gokhale, popularly known as Vishnubhuwa Brahmachari (1825-1871), was a social and religious reformer. In 1867 he published a Marathi book on the Ideal State. Copies of the English translation of this book were sent to the Queen and the members of the British Parliament. He gave a number of lectures about the real nature of the Hindu religion at the Prabhu Seminary. He had a public debate with Dr. John Wilson on the Chaupaty sands at Bombay. It is published in a book form under the title *Samudraktnaricha vad vicad*, (Debate on the seashore).
- 7 Sokar Bapuji Trilokekar (1836-1908) was a playwright of great erudition. He has written seven Marathi and four Gujarati plays. He was the first to introduce music on the Marathi stage.
- 8 Prabhu Seminary is the first private school in Bombay. It was established in 1848 by the members of the Pathare Prabhu caste. The aim of the founder, Saklaram Laxmanji, was to keep the Hindu students away from the missionaries.
- 9 C. B. Sardar, *Maharashtrache Upekshit Mankari*, pp. 87-89.
- 10 Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhad (1814-1882) belonged to the early batch of Hindu social reformers. He was an educationist and a literary figure.
- 11 Durgaram Mancharam (1809-1878) was one of the earliest social reformers from Gujarat. He took an enlightened interest in the Hindu religious and social practices.
- 12 Mahipatram Rupram, *Durgaram Charitra*, p. 25.
- 13 Ram Balkrishna Jaykar (1826-1866) was the collector of Bombay Customs. He was the founder President of the Paramhamsa Sabha and an ardent social reformer.
- 14 Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1832-1925) was one of the early social reformers. He was the founder of the Prarthana Samaj and took great interest in Hindu religious reforms. A professor of Sanskrit at the Deccan College, Poona, he soon rose to be the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bombay.
- 15 Baba Padmanji, *Arunodaya*, p. 408. Some Indian books give the date as 1840. The founder president of the Sabha, Ram Balkrishna was born in 1826. In 1840 he would be only fourteen years old. It is evidently wrong to expect a boy of that age to found a religious

organization.

- ¹⁶ Shivanath Shastri, *Histry of the Brahma Samaj*, Vol. II, p. 411.
- ¹⁷ Baba Padmanji, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- ¹⁸ R.N. Chavan, 'Paramhansa Sabhecha Itihas', *Maharashtra Times*, June 4, 1972.
- ¹⁹ Gopal Hari Desmukh (1823-1892) who wrote under the pen-name *Lokahitawadi* published one hundred articles in a Marathi magazine called *Prabhakar* (the Sun) during 1848-1850. These are called *Shatapatre* (one hundred letters). He made a vitriolic attack on the orthodoxy exposing its hypocrisy.
- ²⁰ Jyotirao Phooley (1827-1890) came from the Malis (gardeners)—one of the lower castes amongst the Hindus. He had his early education under the missionaries. He wrote a number of books in which he claimed to expose the machinations of the higher castes. A typical humanist, he roundly condemned injustice wherever it was, may be with reference to the castes or the position of women. His book captioned *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) published in 1871 contains a relentless onslaught on the antiquated views of the orthodoxy.
- ²¹ Chavan, *op. cit.*

THE THEOSOPHY MOVEMENT IN INDIA, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MAHARASHTRA

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THE THEOSOPHY movement started in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century as a result of the growing interest in America and Europe in psychical phenomena and spiritualism. The movement was spearheaded by Madame H. P. Blavatsky who seems to have had real “spiritual and psychical” powers. She claimed to have received her teachings psychically from a ‘Master’ of Eastern origin—probably from the Himalayan-Tibetan region. Her aim was not to make personal gains through her extra-ordinary powers, but to prove the existence of a universal spirit and promote universal brotherhood. She was trying to show a path to spiritual progress, individual and collective, of human beings.¹

She gradually won over a group in New York to her teachings, and in 1875 an organisation called the Theosophical Society came into existence. It had three declared objectives. They were :

- (1) to form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour ;
- (2) the study of ancient and modern religious philoso-

phies, science and the demonstration of the importance of such study ; and

(3) the investigation of the unexplained laws of Nature and the psychical powers latent in the man.

Madame Blavatsky's 'Masters were, she claimed, living in Indian bodies and much of her spiritual philosophy was culled from Vedantic sources. She looked upon India as her 'home', and left New York for Bombay in December, 1878, with her co-founder Col. Olcott.

II

Their aim was to lay the foundations of the Theosophical Society in India where Madame Blavatsky had great hopes of its success. Already from their New York and London headquarters contacts had been established with India through the Arya Samaj of Bombay.² The first contact with the Arya Samaj was made through Mulji Thakersey and Harichand Chintaman, the President of the Bombay Branch of the Samaj. Through them correspondence was initiated with Swami Dayanand Saraswati. To Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott the Samaj looked like a Hindu Theosophical Society, and they decided at once that an alliance must be made with it. In 1878 Col. Olcott sent a diploma and charter to Harichand Chintaman and Mulji Thakersey to form a Bombay Branch of the Theosophical Society.³ Correspondence ensued between the two groups, and since the objects of the two societies seemed to be the same, Harichand Chintaman proposed an amalgamation of the two societies.⁴

A letter was addressed to Swami Dayanand by Col. Olcott proposing this. The latter wrote ; "A number of

American and other students who earnestly seek after spiritual knowledge place themselves at your feet and pray you to enlighten them... Finding the Christianity nothing that satisfied either their reason or their institution... beholding crime concealed and condoned, and virtue and wisdom put aside as obnoxious to existing conditions of society in Christendom. They stood apart from the world, turned to the east for light and openly proclaimed themselves the foes of Christianity."⁵

On the 22nd of May, 1878, the Theosophical Society head-quarters accepted the proposals of the Arya Samaj and changed the name of their society to 'The Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of India.'⁶ They also declared that the "Theosophical Society and all its branches hereby recognise Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Pandit, Founder of the Arya Samaj, as its lawful Director and Chief."⁷ Madame Blavatsky herself wrote to Harichandon on 30th May, 1878, that she was "officially and personally" subject to the Swami's wishes."⁸ She endorsed fully the Swamiji's view that the Vedas were the oldest books of antiquity, and that they contained nothing but the truth in unmutated state." She also made it quite clear that she was entirely against the Christian missionaries and that, like other Indian reform societies, was determined to save the Indians from their influence. Swami Dayanand was regarded by the Theosophists as an adept of the 'Himalayan Brotherhood', masters of Madame Blavatsky, and he was announced to the American and European public as the 'supreme chief' of the Vedic section of the Eastern Division of the Theosophical Society.¹⁰

Within a few short months, the membership of the new 'joint' society plummeted to, in Madame Blavatsky's words, "hundreds and thousands". Unfortunately, the unity was

premature. On a closer scrutiny of the rules of the Arya Samaj, the Theosophists found that the Samaj was too sectarian and contrary to their original purposes. The union was quietly dissolved, but a connection was maintained through a 'link society' which was supposed to be a bridge between the two groups. This group had a very small membership, and by 1880 died out. Henceforth the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society reverted to separate existence under their own respective heads. As time went on, the two groups became more divergent, and in 1882 there was a total severance of the two societies when Swami Dayanand described the theosophist leadership as "atheists, liars and selfish persons", and warned all Arya Samajists against them. Ties with the Arya Samaj, however, were shortly renewed, and we find that Gopal Hari Deshmukh was President both of the Bombay Arya Samaj and of the Blavatsky Lodge during the eighteen nineties.

III

This initial association of the Theosophical Society with the Arya Samaj and its leading personalities was very important to the Indian social reform movement. Apart from the spiritual values of theosophy, its broadly liberal and free outlook on social problems, its emphasis on the 'brotherhood' of humanity definitely helped to strengthen the hands of social reformers and added to their fold.

The Arya Samaj movement was one of the prominent social reform movements at the end of the nineteenth century in western and northern India, and, as already mentioned, in philosophical terms they came close to the Theosophists. The Arya Samajists sought to purify the beliefs as

well as practices of the Hindus according to their interpretation of the Vedas. They were prepared to meet the challenge to the Hindu faith embodied in Christianity, Islam and Western knowledge. They set up a systematic creed that could accommodate scientific knowledge, and this appealed to the English-educated men and women. Swami Dayanand had a universal religion in mind through the unification and strengthening of what he called the 'Aryan Nation'. Dayanand opposed the distinctions of caste and child marriage, and advocated equality of men and women in educational, social and family spheres. He also advocated widow-marriage. All these were ideals, propagated by the Theosophists too. Obviously, the two movements supported and strengthened one another in the field of social reform.

In this field of social reform Madame Blavatsky was implacable and did not fear loss of even her followers for the sake of her principles. At the time of establishing the Prayag Theosophical Society she encountered many difficulties due to the discontent of the Prayag Brahmins. The latter felt that they were "the flower of India's scholarship and learning" and were being ignored by the 'Masters' who were giving messages to 'low-caste' persons and 'melechhas' such as Sinnett (Editor, the *Pioneer*) and Hume and other "beef-eating, wine drinking, Englishmen".¹⁹ The reply to this complaint, written down by Madame Blavatsky, at her Master's dictation, was sent to the Prayag Society. The message was blunt to the point, saying that one could not receive grace till one was prepared to become a thorough theosophist, give up entirely caste, and old superstitions and show oneself a true reformer.

These ideas of reform hit at the basis of Hindu social customs, and strengthened the hands of the reformers who

took the support of the Theosophists in their arguments. Great public debates on social issues went on in the vernacular press during this period. One of the foremost advocates of social reform was Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as 'Lokahitawadi'. His critical writings on social matters began to appear in the Marathi press from the middle of the nineteenth century. His words were often bitter outbursts against almost everything traditional in the Indian life,—the caste system, child marriage, treatment of widows, etc. Like Rammohan Roy he supported English education and urged that this education be based on English-language texts and used to impart scientific and not Brahmanical learning.¹³

Another movement in Maharashtra which had a great social impact in Western India was the Prarthana Samaj. In doctrines the Prarthana Samaj closely resembled Keshav Chandra Sen's branch of the Brahma Samaj, both believing in a single all powerful, all-loving, God and salvation through His worship, and both being opposed to the ideas of priest-craft and idolatry. With the coming of the Theosophists to Bombay we find that the foremost members of this Samaj were attracted to it. Justice Kashinath Trimbak Telang became a regular contributor to the *Theosophist*¹⁴ along with Dadoba Pandurang, Nilkanth Chatre, Dinanath Atmaram Dalvi, Rao Bahadur Janardhan Sakharam Gadgil and many others with affiliation to the Prarthana Samaj.

Apart from thus indirectly supporting the reform movements, members of the Theosophical Society in Bombay took bold steps in their personal lives by repudiating age-old customs and traditions. Foremost among the latter was Damodar Mavlankar who joined the inner group of the Society at the age of twenty-two and became a devoted

follower of Madame Blavatsky. He was so convinced of the Theosophical argument against caste that he gave up his caste. Writing about this in the *Theosophist*, he states ".....If I wish to place my humble service at the disposal of the world, I must first begin by working for my country. And this I could not do by remaining in my caste. I found that instead of a love for his own countrymen, the observance of caste distinction leads one to hate even his neighbours. I respect a man for his qualities and not for his birth."¹⁵

Another field in which the Theosophical society helped the course of social reform was in encouraging the equal participation of women in society, and thereby promoting their social uplift. They also encouraged and fostered women's education. The first batch of Indian women joined the Society in 1880 in Bombay. The Women's Indian Association was started at Adyar in 1917 with Annie Besant as President and Margaret Cousins as Honorary General Secretary to organise women for the purposes of self-development, education and social service. A branch of this organization was started in Bombay. This proved to be the nucleus of the All India Women's Conference which was brought into existence through the efforts of Margaret Cousins in 1927. This gave to women's societies a degree of national co-ordination on questions of reform. Efforts had already started in 1895 under the leadership of Mrs. Annie Besant for spreading free education among Indian women.

The Boy Scout movement in India was also started by Mrs. Annie Besant in 1918 and she became the first Hon. Commissioner for all India.¹⁷ This movement proved very useful in channelling the energies of the youth and

encouraging them towards higher ideals.

The Theosophy movement helped to revive interest in Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. During the early years of their organisation in Bombay, learned speakers of the Theosophical Society enlightened the public on those religions. Zoroastrianism was found to have many common concepts with Theosophy. Both found that they could support each other and join hands to disseminate the spirit of brotherhood and co-operation with other communities and religions.

IV

The Theosophical Society also brought together the Europeans and the Indians who had never mixed socially before.¹⁸ The Europeans in positions of authority seemed to know so little of the Indians and were astonished to find "so much culture and intelligence among them". The Theosophical Society, under Dr. Annie Besant's leadership, also played a very prominent part in our freedom struggle in the early twentieth century.

Dr. Annie Besant became the President of the Theosophical Society after Olcott's death. Unfortunately, before this a drift had started in the Theosophical Society, and a break occurred between the parent society in America and its various branches. Annie Besant and Col. Olcott made Adyar their headquarters, and the Los Angeles group came to be known as the United Lodge of Theosophists. In India, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, it was Annie Besant and Adyar which primarily influenced the Indian life.

Politically, many of the original members of the

Bombay and other Theosophical Societies took an active part in the organisation of the Indian National Congress in 1885. Madame Blavatsky had unequivocally shown her regards and sympathy for the Indians. According to her, the Hindus were "spiritually immensely higher" than the Europeans and she also stated that the former were spiritually a millenium ahead of the latter.¹⁹ She fully supported the formation of the Congress which was planned by some Anglo-Indian and Indian members of the Theosophical Society. She claimed that she had raised the dormant spirit of the Indians and warmed the Aryan blood of the Hindus. A. O. Hume, a prominent colleague of Madame Blavatsky, was the first General Secretary of the Congress and came to be known as the 'Father of the Congress'.

The Theosophists therefore naturally claimed that they amongst others had sown the seeds of nationalism in this country.²⁰ In 1905, Dr. Annie Besant, who originally had upheld orthodox Hinduism, turned to social and political reforms. In 1908 she founded the 'Sons of India' movement with the idea of training up men and women as "noble citizens and of building up the coming generation in true piety and patriotism." The pledge of the society was to promise to treat as brothers Indians of every religion and province and to make service the dominant ideal in life.²¹ There was a similar pledge for the 'Daughters of India'. She also maintained a close contact with the Government officials and discussed with them political, social and educational developments in India. By 1914, she progressed much further along political path, and was talking of building up a system of 'Self-Government' from village councils upwards to a National Parliament.²² She began to claim India's place among the nations, and defined her aim as liberty for India but within the British Federation.²³ She

expressed her views clearly before the Congress during these years and began to get the support of the younger elements led by Tilak.

In the Congress convention of December, 1914, Dr. Besant concerned herself with drawing all parties together to a united demand for Home Rule. In the 1915 convention the Congress was given a mandate to prepare a scheme for the attainment of Self-Government. It was freely admitted that Mrs. Besant's influence and power were real. At the same time she established a separate Home Rule League to educate public opinion. She made it clear that Home Rule was the birthright of the Indian people and that it was not a 'reward' for their service for the British Empire. She supported India's right as a Nation, to justice among the people of the Empire.

Under her and Tilak's leadership the Home Rule movement reached its height in 1917. The Government now took strong action against the movement and Mrs. Annie Besant was interned. There was a lot of agitation for her release. Tilak threatened to start passive resistance, and the whole Indian atmosphere was surcharged with enthusiasm.²⁴ Thus, under Mrs. Besant, the Theosophists gave form and strength to our new nationalism. With the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi and the new strategy of Satyagraha and non-co-operation started by him, the Home Rule movement died out.

It is obvious that both in the social and political fields members of the Theosophical Society played a significant role in the last part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. They helped, along with many other associations, to foster a class of Indians that had been liberated from traditional social bonds and were shortly to assume a dominant role in a politically advancing country.

They took part, at the turn of the century, in the changes taking place in the Indian society. Nearly all the social reforms advocated in the nineteenth century form, in part, the ethical and social ideals of modern Indians. Their minds were imperceptibly altered by the words and deeds of reformers such as these and the spirit of modern India came into existence, as one recognises it today.

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- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
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- ¹² *The Theosophical Movement*, pp. 254-256.
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- ¹⁶ K. J. B. Wadia, *Fifty Years of Theosophy in Bombay* (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, India, 1931), p. 14.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- ¹⁸ Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
- ¹⁹ *The Theosophical Movement*, p. 112.
- ²⁰ Ransom, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

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THE NON-BRAHMIN MOVEMENT IN SOUTH INDIA

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It is generally believed that the ancestors of Brahmins in South India all came from North India. This is not quite true. While a large number of Brahmins came from the north, some were indigenous people, elevated socially in order to occupy the position of Brahmins. Among the Brahmins of the south, it is significant that some are known as *Vadamar* (those hailing from the north), while others are known as *Ashtasahasram* (those belonging to the group of 8000) and *Brihatcharavanam* (group roving from place to place). If all had come from North India, these distinctions would have been meaningless. Further, it is known that the great Vaishnava reformer, Ramanujacharya, deliberately converted many people of the lower castes as Brahmins.

However, in early times the number of Brahmin immigrants must have been small and they mixed freely with the indigenous people and lived amicably with them. Although the *Ramayana* stresses the hostility to the introduction of Aryan religion, early Tamil literature—the oldest evidence extant in the South—indicates that the new influences were welcomed and embraced with alacrity, and that the changes were effected peacefully and in an orderly manner.¹ In the Sangam age (early centuries of the Christian Era), Brahmins are known to have taken to the Tamil language with enthusiasm. Some Brahmins became poets

in Tamil and their contributions have enriched the Sangam literature.

But it is undeniable that the germs of the northern caste system were sown by the incoming Brahmins. In the Sangam age itself the Varnashrama Dharma had been planted, though it assumed a Tamilised form. Thus there were the antanar (Brahmins), arasar (kings or Kshatriyas), Vaisyar (Vaisyas) and Vellalar (Sudras) according to Tolkappiyar, the earliest grammarian of Tamil. It is pertinent to remember that before the advent of the Aryans the Tamils had their own social classification based on occupations. But it had not become rigidly hereditary. In the Sangam age itself we see the beginning of the fusion between the indigenous and exotic social stratifications.

Beginning from the age of the Pallavas there appeared a large inflow of Brahmins into Tamilaham. The Pallavas themselves are said to have been Brahmins of the Bharadwaja gotra. In reality they were Kshatriyas. However, it is a fact that they were enthusiastic patrons of Brahmins. By this time, the Brahmins were considered in South India, too, as the custodians of Vedic religion, rites and ceremonies.

Gradually there appeared a process of Sanskritisation and Aryanisation of the religion in the South. Several Tamilian gods and goddesses were given Sanskrit names and assimilated into the fold of Hinduism. For instance, the worship of Siva and of the mother goddess was pre-Aryan and non-Aryan. However, the transformed Hindu religion became a tool of social control in the hands of Brahmins.

This tendency received a marked impetus in the age of the Imperial Cholas and still later under the Vijayanagar

rulers. They were all enthusiastic builders of temples and organizers of temple rituals and ceremonies. Brahmins from outside were invited and settled in villages and patronised. All facilities were provided for them and Brahmins occupied the highest social position.

Basking under royal patronage, they became exclusive in due course and constituted, in the words of Sir Charles Eliot, not an *imperium in Imperio* but an *Imperium super imperium*. They continued their devotion to learning, spiritual and temporal. Naturally their intellectual powers became sharpened. But some evils like vanity and intrigue also appeared among them. Vemana, a Vijayanagar poet of the seventeenth century, observes : "The Lords of the earth (i. e., the Brahmins) say we are pure ; we are learned in the scriptures; they scorn all who are in their natural state. Truly the poorest palmer is better than such boasters." They were often considered untrustworthy. 'Par-pane Nambakoodatu' (Trust not the Brahmin) has become a saying widespread among the villagers of Tamilnad.³

Neither the Brahmins, nor the kings, their temporal masters, cared for the education of the rest of the community, though some traditional patterns of education continued to be in vogue among the higher sections of the non-Brahmins.

Western Education and the Brahmins

No wonder when Western education was introduced, Brahmins came to the forefront and took the fullest advantage of it. With their keen intellect and powerful memory, cultivated over centuries, they benefited immensely from the new system of Western education. Statistical data show how Brahmins made a rapid progress in Western

education in comparison with others. In the late nineteenth century, Brahmins constituting only about 3% of the population of the Madras Presidency, formed the majority of the University educated persons. It appears that during the period from 1858 to 1894, Brahmins formed 69% of the graduates while other Hindus were only 19%.³

Domination of Brahmins in the Civil Service

Naturally Brahmins were recruited in remarkably large numbers to Government service. The Government required numerous clerks, secretaries and officials for the discharge of routine administrative duties, and no wonder they absorbed multitudes of Western-educated Brahmins. By 1886, Brahmins occupied about 40% of the higher posts open to Indians.

H. E. Stokes, a Secretary to the Government of Madras, wrote in 1886 thus : "The Government are unable to regard this increasing share of administration in the hands of a single class with entire approval. In certain departments (Settlement, Registration, Education and Revenue), the Brahmins must be considered excessive. The Government, however, are most unwilling by these observations, to create the impression that they are hostile to the admission of Brahmins into the public service. The large share of public employment which that class had obtained is beyond doubt due to its own energy and ability, and it is impossible to ignore its manifest superiority in considering the recruiting of the public service." It was found that in 1912, out of the total 140 Deputy Collectors, 77 (55%) were Brahmins, and out of the total 128 District Munsiffs, 93 (72.6%) were Brahmins.⁵

Brahmins in the Politics of the State

Brahmins dominated not only in the Government services, but also in the politics of the Madras Presidency. Ever since 1893 Brahmin lawyers formed the preponderant element in the Legislative Council. Between 1893 and 1909 there were six official members of whom four were Brahmins and two were non-Brahmins. The same phenomenon persisted between 1909 and 1920 when the Council under the Minto-Morley Act functioned. Nine Indians were official members of whom eight were Brahmins. One-fifth of the total membership belonged to Brahmins. In political organisations like the Madras Standing Congress Committee and the Madras Mahajana Sabha, the preponderance of Brahmins was remarkable.

For a considerable time this domination of Brahmins in Government service and politics did not receive any special notice. But from the second decade of the present century there was an awakening in the minds of certain prominent non-Brahmins. The educated non-Brahmins became jealous of the preponderance of the Brahmins in the coveted walks of life. Moreover, some of the fiery non-Brahmins pointed their finger of scorn at the dominance of rituals, the caste exclusiveness and subtle communalism of the Brahmins.

The Dravidian Association

The urban-based intellectuals woke up to the reality of the situation and founded in 1912 an organisation called the Dravidian Association. The Raja of Panagal was elected as its President; Dr. T. M. Nair was chosen as its Vice-President and G. Natesa Mudaliar its Secretary. These leaders felt that non-Brahmins should co-operate with the

British in India for securing redress of their grievances. They expected to gain concessions from the British rulers and thereby improve the position of non-Brahmins. Their ultimate aim was to safeguard the political, social and economic interests of the Dravidian people⁶ and its aspiration was the establishment of a Dravidian State under British supremacy, a government of, by and for the non-Brahmins. But the Dravidian Association did not flourish for long. The fundamental weakness of the organisation lay in its urban-centred elite character ; it did not evoke the support of the masses. Moreover, there appeared rivalry between the two prominent non-Brahmin leaders of the day, Theagaraya Chetty and Dr. T. M. Nair.

Meanwhile, in 1914, Natesa Mudaliar opened a hostel for non-Brahmin students and called it "the Dravidian Home". It was in order to provide residential facilities for non-Brahmin students, who experienced great difficulty in securing accommodation in hostels, that this move was undertaken. However, the "Dravidian Home" functioned only for a couple of years.

The South Indian People's Association

A political step undertaken in 1917 was the establishment of what was called "The South Indian People's Association". It was a joint-stock Company with the aim of publishing newspapers for voicing the grievances of non-Brahmins and fighting for their cause. The Association started publishing newspapers in both the English and Dravidian languages. The three prominent newspapers were the *Justice* in English, the *Dravidian* in Tamil and the *Andhra Prakasini* in Telugu.

The Non-Brahmin Manifesto

Meanwhile, Sir P. Theagaraya Chetty, the Secretary of the South Indian People's Association, issued the famous 'Non-Brahmin Manifesto'. It laid down the grievances of non-Brahmins and urged the need of non-Brahmins to organize themselves in order to appeal to the Government and to the people to improve their position. Besides repeating the need for redressing the grievance of inadequate representation in the services, it stressed the need for reserving seats for non-Brahmins in the Legislative Council so that they might have more facility to represent their grievances. It appealed to the non-Brahmins to maintain and elevate their self-respect.

Another important objective of the Manifesto was to oppose the demand of the nationalists for independence. The Manifesto urged that this demand for Home Rule would really lead to the establishment of Brahmin overlordship. Moreover, it stressed the need for organizing a political party called the South Indian Liberal Federation.

The Manifesto was naturally condemned by the leaders of the Congress in Madras urging that it was engineered by the British and that the non-Brahmin leaders of the South Indian Liberal Federation were puppets in the hands of the British.

The Justice Party : The South Indian Liberal Federation

In order to safeguard the interests of non-Brahmins, it was decided in August 1917 to organise a party called the South Indian Liberal Federation. The immediate circumstance that led to the foundation of this party, popularly known as the Justice Party, was the defeat of a powerful

non-Brahmin candidate, in the provincial elections in Madras, held under the Minto-Morley scheme of 1909. The Brahmins in the constituency had not supported the non-Brahmin candidate and this feeling of antagonism was responsible for the rise of this new political party.

As mentioned earlier, the *Justice* was the newspaper supported by the new party, and it gained considerable popularity. It is undeniable that some tangible benefits to non-Brahmins accrued from the labours of the Party. The statutory reservation of a percentage of posts in the Government service for non-Brahmins was a substantial gain. A ratio for each of the particular communities in the matter of recruitment to service was fixed through what is known as the Communal G. O.

The influence of the Justice Party became marked with the capture of political power in the elections held under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme of 1919. In the first election to the Legislative Council held in 1920 under this scheme, the Justice Party was returned with a majority because the Congress had boycotted the elections. The Justice Party elected its ministers to work the Dyarchical scheme. In 1923 there appeared the second election in which also the Justicites won, defeating the Swarajists. In the third elections held in 1926, the Justicites were defeated by the Swarajists, but since the latter refused to form a ministry an Independent Cabinet led by Dr. P. Subbarayan took up office.

By 1934 the position changed. The Congress decided to withdraw its boycott of Council elections, and it routed the Justicites in the elections of 1934. From this time onwards the Justice Party as a political force declined. It was never a mass-oriented party. Moreover, bickerings among the leaders weakened their position. Besides the

Communal G. O., one of the achievements of the Justice Party was that it succeeded in obtaining separate electorate for non-Brahmins in the Provincial Legislative Council; of the 98 elected seats, 28 were to be reserved for non-Brahmins.

The Self-Respect Movement

Meanwhile in 1925, there emerged the Self-Respect Movement under E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker, now commonly known as Periyar (the great man). The aim of this new movement was to appeal to the masses to get rid of caste. The basic idea was that the people had been exploited all along in the name of religion and that the authority of the Brahmins had thereby been established, controlling all spheres of Hindu life.⁶ This authority had to be smashed if the non-Brahmins were to recover their self respect. The Self-Respect movement was a mass movement as compared with the urban-centred elite organisation of the 'Justice' Party.

E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker was eminently fitted to play the role of the inspirer and leader of this movement. Early in life he had become disgusted with the traditions and practices in the Hindu temples, and in his nineteenth year (1898) toured the whole of India visiting numerous temples. Having been convinced that the masses had been misled through the centuries, he made a fervent appeal for thorough social change. Soon he became a popular hero and was elected Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. True to his convictions he started the famous Satyagraha at Vaikom (in Travancore) in favour of the Harijan entry to temples. This was disliked by the Brahmins. However, the relentless E. V. Ramaswami Naicker denounced the

Epics and Puranas of Hinduism and advocated the burning of the *Ramayana* and Manu's Code. He also made a fervent plea for widow-marriage. All these were naturally obnoxious to the Brahmins and even to some of the orthodox high caste non-Brahmins. Nevertheless, in order to achieve his aims he introduced resolutions in the various conferences of the Congress. But in the face of strong oppositions, the resolutions were not passed. Thoroughly disgusted with these developments he resigned from the Congress, denouncing it as an organisation controlled by Brahmins.

It was in this temper that E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker began the Self-Respect Movement. Many non-Brahmins, particularly youths, joined the movement. In 1929, the first Self Respect Conference was held at Chingleput. C. N. Annadurai, the future organizer of the Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (D. M. K.), played an important part in this Conference. The movement gathered momentum as years rolled on. The newspapers, *Kudiarasu* (Republic), *Pagutharivu* (Rationalism), *Viduta'ai* (Liberation) and *Puratchi* (Revolt), were started. Through them trenchant attacks were made against caste, superstitions, religious beliefs and practices, child marriage and enforced widowhood.

The Anti-Hindi Agitation

In 1938 Rajagopalachari, as Chief Minister of Madras, introduced the compulsory teaching of Hindi in schools as part of the national programme. This gave a handle to the Self-Respect Movement, which identified itself with the anti-Hindi agitation. Rajaji's move was construed to be a well planned design aimed at the weakening of Tamil literature and culture. The agitation spread like wild fire. Many

of the Justicites also joined the agitation. E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker and several other leaders were imprisoned. The Madras Government was, however, constrained to tone down its Hindi programme.

At the Justice Party convention of 1938, as a result of the anti-Hindi agitation, a resolution for having 'Tamil Nadu for the Tamils' was adopted. This resolution, however, did not aim at setting up an independent sovereign state but a state working under the Secretary of State for India. But in the next year another resolution appeared which demanded the creation of a separate, sovereign and federal republic of Dravidanadu, consisting of the four southern States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Mysore. But except in Tamil Nadu the move did not create much enthusiasm; in fact, the Dravidanadu movement became a Tamil movement.

Thus the radical element in the Justice Party identified itself with the Self-Respect and Dravidanadu movements. In 1944 there took place a Conference of the Justicites at Salem. Here the youths and radicals urged the need for making the Justice Party broad-based depending upon mass support. They clamoured for such changes as the abandonment of titles and awards from the British and the dropping of caste suffixes and personal names. Amadurai played a leading part in the deliberations of the Conference. The Salem Conference really resulted in the transformation of the Justice party into the Dravida Kalagam Party. It led to the triumph of E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker assisted by his lieutenant, Amadurai.

Practically the old Justice Party became defunct, though it continued in name for some time more still clinging to ideas like adequate representation to the various castes in public services, legislatures and educational institutions until

the ultimate objective of a 'casteless society' was achieved.

The popularity of the Dravida Kalagam increased remarkably and in 1945 it held a Conference at Tiruchi. There they adopted the black flag with a red circle in the centre as their symbol. In this Conference besides reiterating the need for certain actions to protect the non-Brahmin interests, the Dravida Kalagam party expressed itself clearly in favour of the establishment of an independent sovereign Dravidanadu as its ultimate aim. The antagonism to the North was also unmistakably noticed. The anti-Hindi, the anti-Brahmin and anti-caste feelings were clearly pronounced. On the positive side, intercaste marriage, reform marriage and widow-marriage were enthusiastically advocated. The traditional caste marks worn by the Hindus were decried and the sacred literature of the Hindus was condemned. Side by side there developed a feverish enthusiasm for the development of classical Tamil literature. Emphasis was laid on the use of pure and de-Sanskritised Tamil.

The Rift in the Dravida Kalagam

However, soon there appeared among the younger members discontent with the authoritarian ways of E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker. Differences arose between him and Annadurai over the party uniform. It was declared by E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker that all the party members must wear the Black Shirt. Annadurai objected to this. The Dravida Kalagam Conference, held at Madurai in 1946, declared by a majority against the Black Shirt uniform and the Conference itself ended in confusion. Meanwhile, the Congress Government in Madras declared the Black Shirt organisation as illegal.

With the attainment of Indian independence in 1947,

the rift between Periyar and Annadurai became wider. Periyar contended that independence would result only in Brahmin Raj. He urged that it was necessary to wreck the triple alliance of the British, the Brahmin and the Bania. Annadurai, on the other hand, welcomed the national independence which, he held, was the accomplishment of India as a whole and not merely of the Aryan north.

When the breach between Periyar and Annadurai was widening, the 72 year-old Periyar's second marriage in 1949 with the 26 year-old Maniyammai made the tension acute. Apart from the match being unequal, it raised suspicions about Periyar's successor in politics. Earlier E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker had declared in favour of Annadurai succeeding him. But now Annadurai was disillusioned and he started on September 17, 1949, the new party known as the Dravida Munnetra Kalagam. Many Dravida Kalagam members too joined the Dravida Munnetra Kalagam (D. M. K.).

The D. M. K.

The D. M. K. was also against the Brahmins but was more opposed to the Aryan dominance. Hence the establishment of an independent Dravidanadu became an article of faith with them. The Government of India, after due deliberation, introduced the 16th amendment to the Constitution which called upon allegiance to the Constitution as fundamental. The cry for independence of the North later resolved itself into a demand for greater powers for the States.

The D. M. K. is distinctly opposed to Hindi and is in favour of the two languages-formula in the scheme of education. Though there is opposition to exploitation by the

North, the D. M. K. is, like the Central Government, in favour of Socialism as a creed.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the non-Brahmin movement, beginning from the early part of the present century, has done considerable service to the non-Brahmins. Many non-Brahmins, including those of the Backward Classes, have been recruited to Government service and many have taken to higher education. But these have benefited only a small section of the population. The more fundamental aim of establishing a casteless society is as far away as ever before. True, there have occurred a few inter-caste marriages and some abandonment of the traditional rituals and ceremonies; however, they influence but a microscopic minority. In fact, the achievement of the non-Brahmin movement so far has been more conspicuous on the negative side than on the positive or constructive one. On the other hand, it has created a considerable illwill on the part of the Brahmins towards non-Brahmins. It is subtle and covert but none the less real. Particularly in the field of higher studies and research, most Brahmins are intent on belittling the achievement of non-Brahmins. The intellectual progress of non-Brahmins is hardly ever encouraged; on the other hand, it is looked down upon with contempt. The Brahmins, who were always communal in their outlook, have become much more so as a result of the non-Brahmin movement. It is time they reconciled themselves to the changing times.

Though very difficult of achievement, the goal must be the establishment of a casteless society. If social democracy is to be established, the hereditary caste differences must be banished. Now some of the higher castes among the non-

Brahmins must take a lead in the matter.⁷ Inter-dining is more common among the non-Brahmins than what it was a few decades ago. That is not enough. Inter-caste marriages must become much more popular than at present. The award of special concessions to the children of inter-caste marriages by the Government may prove helpful. Leaders of society must concentrate on making inter-caste marriages popular on a large scale. Once it succeeds among the non-Brahmins the Brahmins will follow suit. The future alone will show how far a caste-less society will be achieved.

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- ³ University of Madras Calendar for 1893-4, Vol. 1, pp. 405-418.
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- ⁵ E. F. Ischick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India* (Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1969), p. 14.
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- ⁷ In this connection it must be noted that the high caste non-Brahmins have proved themselves to be extremely caste-conscious and socially arrogant. The non-Brahmin movement has not done much to reduce much less remove these evils, though some of the leading reformers realise that the canker of hatred is due to the caste system introduced by the northerners centuries ago.

SREE NARAYANA EPOCH OF RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN MODERN KERALA

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Religious and Social Conditions of Kerala on the eve of the Sree Narayana Epoch

KERALA is the narrow coastal strip of land bounded by the Western Ghats in the east and the Arabian sea in the west in the south-western part of the Indian sub-continent. Historically it has been more a "geographical expression" than a political entity until the Kerala state was created by the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. But the land, known in history as Kerala, had developed a distinctive culture of its own which has a significant place in the cultural heritage of India. The Sree Narayana epoch of religious movement, which covered the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, forms the most memorable chapter in the socio-religious history of Kerala. A full perspective of the significance of this epoch will be obtained only if we get a picture of the deplorable religious and social conditions of Kerala on the eve of this epoch.

The earliest civilised people in Kerala, as in South India in general, were the Dravidians. Their religion was a mixture of animism and ancestor worship. Jainism and Buddhism entered Kerala in the pre-Christian era. In a lesser degree Brahminism had also infiltrated into Kerala during the same period. Both Buddhism and Jainism flouri-

shed in Kerala till the eighth century A. D. But after that there was a steady decline of both. This was due to the Aryanisation of Kerala, by the influx of Vedic Brahmins which reached its climax in the eighth and ninth centuries. The Brahmin colonists, who came from the coasts of the rivers Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery and settled permanently in Kerala during this period, are known as the Namboodiri Brahmins. Under the intellectual leadership of Brahmin scholars like Prabhakara, the great *Mimasaka*, Sankaracharya (788-820 A. D.), the propounder of Adwaita Vedanta, and Kulasekhara Alwar, the great exponent of the Bhakti cult, Brahminical Hinduism displaced Buddhism and Jainism and established its undisputed sway. Thus the Brahminical Hinduism of the Aryan emigrants foisted the caste system based on *Chaturvarna* on a casteless society. The result was that the toiling classes who had occupied a high status in society till then were degraded as low castes.

The rigours of such a caste system became stronger and stronger with the passage of time so that Hindu society in medieval Kerala presented the dismal picture of invidious segregation between caste-Hindu and non-caste Hindus, the former based on *Chaturvarna* in which the Brahmin reigned supreme, and the latter being practically out-castes outside the pale of *Chaturvarna*. The domination of the Namboodiri Brahmin was complete and all-pervasive. It was religious social, intellectual and even political. The caste Hindus had temples of their own which were pantheons of refined Gods mostly of Aryan extraction. The non-caste Hindus were denied entry into these temples. Priesthood in these temples was the monopoly of Brahmins. The temples of non-caste Hindus were degraded like their abodes

and their religion was the most primitive form of animism, spirit worship, fetish worship, tree and plant worship and animal worship. Education was the monopoly of the Brahmins. They alone were entitled to be teachers.

The social order displayed the worst features of the caste system in which the Brahminical caste had its stranglehold on all other castes. The most odious aspects of the caste system were untouchability and unapproachability. Foreign travellers who visited Kerala in the sixteenth and succeeding centuries have given vivid accounts of this. When people of higher castes like Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Nairs walked through the public road, they would be shouting "go ! go !", which was an alarm for the low caste people to move away. If any low caste man polluted the high caste man by trespassing the distance prescribed by custom, the latter had the right to kill the former.¹

Thevenot, a French traveller, who visited Kerala in the sixteenth century, testifies to the custom according to which if a Pulaya (a low caste) pollutes a Nair (upper caste), the latter should kill the former, failing which the ruler may either kill the Nair or sell him as a slave. This deplorable system continued through centuries. The Rev. Mateer of the London Missionary society, writing in the nineteenth century says : "The use of the public roads was forbidden to the low castes and anyone daring to pass on within polluting distance of a Nair would be cut down at once. To secure immediate recognition of such classes they were required to be uncovered above waist ; shoes, umbrellas, fine clothes and costly ornaments were interdicted to them. The holding of umbrellas was prohibited to all castes except Brahmins on public occasions, though the rains were pouring upon them. The proper salutation from a female to persons of rank was to uncover the bosom."² Politically the

Brahmins enjoyed virtual sovereignty in the so-called "San-
ketams" which were tracts of territory assigned to Namboodiri
Brahmins. The Brahmins exercised in Sanketams a real
"imperium in imperio".

The economic system was based upon the religio-social
structure. It was feudalistic, but the upper classes of
Hindus, such as the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Nairs were
the land-owning class and they were the feudal over lords.
The Ezhavas and other low caste Hindus were the tenants.
The tenants were oppressed in many ways. The upper
castes were exempt from the payment of land tax, while
innumerable oppressive taxes were extorted from the low
castes. For example, taxes had to be paid for maintaining
looms, oil mills, boats, nets, palanquins, etc.

The Sree Narayana Epoch—What it was

An epoch is an extended period of time characterised
by a distinctive development or by a memorable series of
events. The Sree Narayana epoch was a period which ex-
tended from the last two decades of the nineteenth century
till the end of the third decade in the twentieth century, in
which the distinctive development was a socio-religious
movement within the Hindu society in Kerala which trans-
formed the Hindu religion and Hindu social structure from
their moribund condition. The radiating centre of this
movement was the personality and teachings of Sree Nara-
yana Guru. So it would not be inappropriate to call this
movement "the Sree Narayana Movement". The full im-
port of this movement can be grasped only by getting an
idea of the life and teachings of Sree Narayana Guru.

Sree Narayana Guru was born on 28th August 1854 (or
1855) in a humble cottage in the village of Chempazhanthi

near Trivandrum, the capital of the present Kerala state. He hailed from a middle class family of the Ezhava community. The Ezhavas, or Thiyyas as they were called in north Kerala, were the highest and the largest among the untouchable castes in Kerala. According to the Rev. Samuel Mateer, the Ilavars (Ezhavas) were³ "a branch of a great and widespread race of people that occupies South Tinnevely, Travancore and the Malabar coast as far as the Tulu country. They are a pleasant looking, intelligent and respectable people, the highest of the so-called low-castes, but very bigoted in their superstitions, and strongly attached to their caste usages and high pretensions. ...Demon worship, especially that of Bhadrakali, a female demon described as a mixture of mischief and cruelty, is the customary culture of this caste, with sacrifices and offerings and evil dancing like Shanars. Shastavu and Vecrabhadran are also venerated and the ghosts of ancestors. Groves of trees stand near the temples, and serpent images are common, these creatures being accounted favourites of Kali. They carry their superstitions and fear of the demons into every department and incident of life". Such were the people among whom Sree Narayana was born and lived. Naturally, the Ezhava community was the medium through which he wrought the great religious and social revolution that created a new and enlightened Kerala.

After his elementary education in the neighbouring school of the old "Gurukula" model, he learnt Sanskrit under an eminent scholar and became well versed in Sanskrit classic. After that he functioned for some time as a teacher of infant pupils. But from his boyhood he had an ascetic bent of mind.

When he grew older, his mind was constantly agitated by a spiritual urge which induced him, along with a fellow

spiritualist subsequently renowned as Chattampi Swami, to become the disciple of a man named Ayyavu in Tri-vandrum in the 'Yoga' cult.

At the age of twenty-three he left his family and renouncing the pleasures of this world, wandered about as an "avadhutha" or mendicant, keeping his body and soul together by the alms he received from all sorts of people. Soon he went into seclusion and was immersed in *Tapas* or meditation, absolutely immune from contact with the human world. The caves of "Maruthwamala" and "Aruvippuram" hills in South Travancore were his abodes during this period. The ascetic was, however, soon discovered by the people and devotees began to crowd on him at Aruvipuram, and to participate in his prayers and spiritual recitals. In due course, the sage emerged from his retreat and came out to shed light into a world of darkness. Thus began his crusade against the religious and social evils which had corroded the Hindu society in Kerala. A large number of disciples gathered around him, and people looked upon him as a great "Guru" or Acharya. Hereafter he was known as Sree Narayana Guru.

The consecration of a Hindu temple was hitherto the exclusive right of the Brahmins. Sree Narayana's first revolutionary act was the consecration of a temple dedicated to Siva at Aruvipuram in 1887 A.D. The consecration of a Siva temple by a non-Brahmin belonging to the caste of untouchables was a bombshell thrown against the citadel of Brahmin monopoly.

The consecration of the Siva temple at Aruvipuram in 1887 for the worship of non-caste Hindus can be said to have inaugurated a religious Renaissance and Reformation in Kerala. Hitherto, only caste Hindus could worship in

temples dedicated to Aryan gods like Siva and Vishnu and non-caste Hindus could worship only demonic gods like Chamundi and goddesses like Kali. If at all they wished to worship caste Hindu Gods, they could do so only standing at a respectable distance from the temple premises. Sree Narayana Guru consecrated temples where Ezhavas and other low caste Hindus were privileged to worship Aryan Gods like Siva, Vishnu, Subramania and Ganapathi and Goddesses like Saraswati. This was indeed a great revolution in Hindu religion.

Within a few years starting from 1887 Sree Narayana established not less than sixty temples spread all over Kerala, and even in places like Mangalore outside Kerala. The history of the founding of these temples marks an important stage in slowly preparing the minds of the masses in the progressive realisation of more and more revolutionary ideas. First he consecrated temples dedicated to Siva, in the traditional caste-Hindu pattern. Then in 1912 he made a great departure when the temple dedicated to Sarada, the goddess of learning, was founded at Varkala, thereby inculcating the ideal of the worship of knowledge. Revolutionary changes were also introduced in the traditional rituals and ceremonials to be observed in temples.

The next milestone was the consecration of a temple in Murukkumpuzha near Trivandrum in 1922, in which in the place of a deity a bright light revealing the words, "Truth, Duty, Kindness, Love" was installed. The climax of this campaign of reform of worship in temples was the installation of a mirror for worship in the temple at Kalavancode, Shertallai in North Travancore. The mirror is symbolic of Sree Narayana's teaching that man should find his salvation not by worshipping lifeless images but by the development and sublimation of his inner self.

The temples consecrated by Sree Narayana, though apparently intended to fulfil the spiritual needs of the Ezhavas and other low-caste Hindus, were the radiating centres of his great message. "One caste, one Religion, one God for mankind." In 1936, was issued the epochmaking Temple Entry Proclamation of the Maharaja of Travancore whereby Government temples—hitherto open for worship by caste-Hindus alone—were thrown open to all Hindus irrespective of caste. But long before this, the temples established by Sree Narayana Guru were open for the worship of all—whether Hindus or non-Hindus—and there was no discrimination on the ground of caste or creed. The temples founded by him are models of sanctity and cleanliness. He insisted that educational institutions, libraries, bathrooms with shower baths and gardens should be attached to temples.

Sree Narayana never went about preaching or sermonising. He never spoke in a public meeting. But wherever he went, the words of wisdom which he spoke, and his deeds of self-less service for the downtrodden and the suffering masses, enlightened, inspired and ennobled his disciples. He travelled throughout Kerala and also outside. He visited Bangalore, Chidambaram, Madurai, Coimbatore, Nilgiris, Madras, Tinnevely and Canjeevaram. He also went to Ceylon. Wherever he went, he got disciples and devotees in large numbers. He established ashrams and mutts, not only in Kerala, but also in other places of South India like Canjeevaram and Madras. They were centres of light and learning and his disciples, who were residents of these ashrams and mutts, disseminated his message and teachings, The most famous of his Ashrams are the one at Varkala in the Trivandrum District and the

other at Alwaye in the Ernakulam District of Kerala State. In 1923 he founded the "Dharma Sangha", an order of Sanyasins who were expected to be his spiritual disciples. The members of this order were to propagate and perpetuate the teachings of the Guru. Early in 1921 an All-Kerala Fraternity Conference was held at Alwaye, and in this conference was delivered his great message of far-reaching import: "One caste, One Religion, One God for mankind".

Few men have their greatness recognised in their life-time. Sree Narayana Guru was one of the rare exceptions. He was revered by millions in his life-time and even worshipped as a divine personality by many. Great men like Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Sraddhanandaji visited him in his Ashram at Varkala and paid respects to him. Tagore, when he visited Kerala in 1922, interviewed the Guru, and was so deeply impressed that he remarked: "Among the 'Paramahansas' alive in India now, there is none who has lived such a life of purity as Swami Sree Narayana."

Nataraja Guru, one of the greatest of the living disciples of Sree Narayana, says of his Guru: "...Today his words are recognised as a most modern echo of the most ancient wisdom of the Orient. In him we had, combined once again, a bard who sang about the aspirations of the soul of man, a philanthropist, whose one aim in life, night and day, was to devise ways to minimise human suffering, and a seer whose daily food and drink was the highest form of Truth".⁴ Speaking of Sree Narayana Guru Sri A.S.P. Ayyar I.C.S. wrote in 1953: "Once in a while, a unique being arises in this world, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, filled with compassion for all, by the Grace of God, and he is born in the community and country which need him most. Such a unique being was Sree Narayana

Guru, the prophet of Kerala".⁵ As Swamy Sivanand, President, Divine Life Society, Ananda Kutir (Himalayas) wrote in 1954 "He was serene, kind, and humourous. He possessed a keen intelligence and an indomitable will. He was the essence of Vedanta personified. Through dedicated action he won the hearts of millions of followers in Malabar."⁶

The great Samadhi of Sree Narayana took place at Varkala in September 1924.

Teachings of Sree Narayana Guru

Like Sree Sankara, Sree Narayana was a profound thinker, a great seer and a gifted poet. He was born a Hindu and remained so in the conventional sense throughout his life. But he was the exponent and propounder of a new religious outlook—an eclectism, which brought about a Renaissance in the Hindu religion and a revolution in the social structure of Kerala. But today his teachings have transcended the limits of Kerala, and spread not only to other parts of India, but to countries outside India, like Ceylon, Singapore, Malaya, Switzerland, France, Germany, and America.

It is through his messages, his dialogues and above all, his poems that he has revealed his teachings to the world. He is the author of many poetical works in Malayalam and Sanskrit, which are not only gems of poetry but also embody the kernel of his philosophy. Among his works of eternal value are *Atmopadesa Sathakam* and *Darsanamala* which are brilliant epitomes of his great moral and spiritual precepts. His works contain a superb exposition of the "Adwaita" philosophy. Adwaita stands for Supreme Synthesis which is the goal of philosophical idealism.

Like Sree Sankara, the essence of his religious outlook was Advaitism. But his Advaitism, was not confined to the perceptual world alone. Unlike Sree Sankara's Advaitism, his was applied Vedanta, as different from the purely intellectual and idealistic aspect of it. He was a Vedantin who, while living mentally withdrawn from worldly affairs, kept himself alive to the material and moral needs of the people. "He combined serenity of inner life with a rare capacity to turn out a large amount of useful work for the people with whom he came into contact"—His great precept "One Religion for Mankind" was a subtle denouncement of the futility of organised religions. "When the true direction of Righteousness dawns, then the apparent divergencies in religions melt and mingle." Thus he emphasised the essential Unity of Religions and wanted that religion should be a matter of individual conscience. One of his great messages was

"Whichever the religion
It suffices
If it makes a better man."

In *Atmopadesa Satakam* (verse 45) he says

"To an outsider's view
A certain faith is low ;
The Cardinal doctrine of one
In another's measure, iacks.
Confusion in the world shall be
While the unitive secret herein
Remains undiscovered." 7

The Guru clearly explains his religious outlook in his message given to the Fraternal Conference (anniversary of the Association for Universal Brotherhood) at Alwaye in 1921, which runs thus :

"It is precipitate thought that makes man try to proc-

laim his own opinion as the best. No one opinion, however loudly proclaimed, can justly represent the whole. It is like the story of the blind men who went to examine the elephant. It is only waste of breath to argue vociferously to establish any one religion. It is impossible in the nature of things that only one opinion should prevail. Without realising this simple fact, men divide themselves into rival camps, and fight for the mere words that seem to divide them..... A man's religion is a matter of his personal conviction, which is bound to be at varying stages of mutual evolution in different people. Each man, therefore, may be supposed to belong to a different religion, and no two people belong to the same religion. On the other hand, all the religions of the world agree in *spirit*, the most essential part of the religion. All religions represent values of Truth or Duty. The goal is common. Why should man fight for his faith? It is an unwise act—one should not be swayed by the conflict of opinions, but should remain tranquil, knowing the unity in all human effort, which is Happiness."

"Acts that one performs
For One's own sake,
Should also aim the good
Of other men"

was indeed his greatest teaching. This maxim may be said to form the keystone of his whole life. The life of the Guru was in every detail an example of the principle which he enunciated.

Sree Narayana Guru condemned all imaginary distinctions between man and man which is the root of much unhappiness and unrest among mankind. In the Fraternal Conference at Alwaye in 1921, he delivered his great

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message written in his own hand, "Whatever be the differences in men's creeds, dress, language, etc.—because they belong all to the same kind of creation, there is no harm at all in their dining together, or having marital relations with one another" (translation by Nataraja Guru).⁹ This message had far-reaching impact in the society of Kerala for the eradication of caste-system by the twin weapons of inter-dining and intermarriage.

Impact of Sree Narayana Movement on Social Life in Kerala

In the words of a Western writer, George Woodcock, Sree Narayana Guru was at once a holy man and a social reformer, "one of the Malayali saints ranking beside Sankara and Kulasekhara Alwar in the popular imagination".¹⁰ But he achieved much more for the mass than Sankara or Kulasekhara Alwar. He was the architect of a bloodless revolution rooted in "Ahimsa", for the creation of an egalitarian society—wherein "devoid of the dividing walls of caste or race, or hatred of rival faith, all lived in brotherhood". The socio-religious movement launched by him stemmed the tide of conversions to Christianity by low-caste Hindus, and it gave to the Ezhavas a sense of their own worth which transformed them from passive underlings and an insignificant force in the history of Kerala up to the nineteenth century into a community which took the lead in all radical movements for the emancipation of the down-trodden. He conducted a veritable crusade against the superstitious and barbarous customs which had corroded the moral and material strength of the Ezhava community. His teachings stirred the innermost recesses of the hearts of his disciples and inspired them to fight against the forces of conservatism and reaction. Under his inspiration the *Sree Narayana*

Dharma Paripalana Yogam (S.N.D.P. Yogam) was started at Aruvipuram in 1903. As its name indicates, the object of this association was the propagation of the *Dharma* (The Law of Righteousness) of Sree Narayana. The person mainly responsible for the establishment of this association was Dr. Palpu, one of the pioneers in the Social Renaissance in modern Kerala. He had to seek employment in the Medical Department of the Mysore Government as he was denied employment under the Government of Travancore on the ground of being an untouchable. He was one of the most redoubtable crusaders against caste system in Kerala. He was a close associate of Sree Narayana Guru in the social reform movement of the Guru. Another principal organiser of the S. N. D. P. Yogam was the great poet Kumaran Asan who was one of the greatest disciples of Sree Narayana Guru. He was the first General Secretary of the Association and continued as such for about fourteen years. The first fifty years of the history of the S.N.D.P. Yogam is the history of the most important social reform movement in Kerala. The achievement of the Yogam during this period was the popularisation of the message of Sree Narayana Guru and the spiritual and social regeneration of the Ezhavas and other "untouchable" communities. Many schools and hospitals were started under the auspices of the Yogam and it has made invaluable contribution to liberal education among the depressed classes in the country. Even today the Association is functioning as the vital organisation of the Ezhava community.

The *Sree Narayana Trust*, which is an offshoot of the S.N.D.P. Yogam, is one of the biggest educational corporations in Kerala with eleven arts and science Colleges, one training College and one Polytechnic under its management. Another organisation which had its birth as a child

of the Sree Narayana movement was the *Sahodara Sangham* (Association of Brotherhood) founded by K. Ayyappan, one of the leading disciples of Sree Narayana Guru, at Cherai, in the Cochin State in 1917. It started the revolutionary movement of interdining between the Ezhavas and people belonging to castes inferior to them like the Pulayas and Pariahs. The movement aroused a hornet's nest of opposition from the conservative sections of the Ezhavas, and Ayyappan and his co-workers had to suffer a great deal of persecution in their hands. But confronting the fiery ordeal of these persecutions, the movement gained momentum and the cumulative effect of its assiduous efforts is that today the taboo against interdining between the highest and the lowest castes has become a thing of the past.

Among other disciples of the Guru, who conducted campaigns against the caste system, were Paravur Kesavan Asan, C. V. Kunjuraman, C. Krishnan and T. K. Madhavan. All of them made remarkable contributions, through their journalistic and other activities, to the cause of the epic fight against the Demon of Caste system. Kesavan Asan started "Sujanandini" in Paravur in 1891 and C.V. Kunjuraman started in 1911 from Mayyanad the *Kerala Kaumudi* which is today one of the premier Malayalam dailies. The *Desabhimani* was started by T.K. Madhavan, and the *Mitavadi* by C. Krishnan from Calicut. All these journals played a prominent part to spread Sree Narayana Guru's message of social reform among the masses. C. Krishnan was a fire-brand who, in November 1917, openly and successfully defied the order of the Malabar District Collector denying the right to Thiyyas and other low caste Hindus to walk along the approach roads to the Tali Temple in Calicut. T. K. Madhavan was another fiery leader whose passion for social justice was unrivalled. He organised a dynamic movement to get

the approach roads to temples opened to the untouchables as a prelude to the bigger campaign for temple entry. At the Coconada Congress of 1923 he enlisted the support of Mahatma Gandhi for his movement and the Anti-Untouchability resolution was passed in that Congress session. T. K. Madhavan was the architect and organiser of the epoch-making Vaikom movement (1924-5) aimed at getting the approach road to the Vaikom Temple opened to the "Avarnas". A band of stalwart leaders like K.P. Kesava Menon, Mannath Padmnabhan, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, C. V. Kunjuraman and K. Kelappan actively participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha. It received the blessings and support of Sree Narayana Guru and Mahatma Gandhi. As a result of the Satyagraha, the approach roads to the Vaikom temple were formally opened to all Hindus. This was followed by similar movements, and by 1928 approach roads to all temples were thrown open to all Hindus throughout Travancore. In 1931-32 took place the Guruvayur Satyagraha to get the famous Guruvayur temple thrown open to all Hindus. K. Kelappan was the leader of this Satyagraha. Though the Satyagraha failed to achieve its immediate objective, it succeeded in mobilising strong public opinion in favour of the Temple Entry movement.

The fruition of the Sree Narayana movement was evident in the Temple Entry Proclamation issued by the Maharaja of Travancore on November 12, 1936. It is a historic document which was hailed by Mahatma Gandhi as a "miracle of modern times". The Proclamation ordained that "there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering and worshipping at the temples controlled by us (the Maharaja) and Our Government". However, the people of Cochin and Malabar had

to wait for one more decade for the reform to be introduced there. The Temple Entry Authorisation Proclamation V of 1947-48 issued by the Maharaja of Cochin and the Madras Temple Entry Act of 1947 opened the Government controlled temples in Cochin and Malabar respectively to all Hindus irrespective of caste.

The inter-marriage movement, which had its genesis in the Sree Narayana movement, has effectively attacked the foundations of caste system. We have already seen how Sree Narayana Guru advocated inter-dining and inter-marriage as weapons for the eradication of the caste system and how his great disciple K. Ayyappan conducted a campaign not only for inter-dining, but also for inter-marriage between the high castes and the low castes.

Another organisation, which arose as a child of the Sree Narayana movement, was the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Yogam founded in 1907 for the uplift of Harijans. Its founder was Ayyankali, the reputed Pulaya leader (1866-1941). He dedicated himself to the cause of emancipation of the Harijans and in this he received all blessings and support from Sree Narayana Guru. He gave dynamic leadership to the movement started by the Pulayas and other Harijans for their social advancement.

The *Inter-marriage Society*, started lately for promoting and popularising inter-communal marriages to cut at the root of the caste system and communalism, and to realise Sree Narayana Guru's ideal of "One caste for mankind", is a product of the Sree Narayana movement.

Largely as the cumulative effect of the various movements, organisations, institutions and agitations, which have emanated from the Sree Narayana movement, untouchability has been eradicated, inter-caste dining has become

as common as intra-caste dining, the taboo against inter-caste marriages has disappeared, numerous social customs and superstitions which had sapped the vitality of Hindu society have disappeared and above all, there has been a regeneration of Hinduism based on equality.

Influence of Other Modern Religious Movements on Social Conditions in Kerala

Apart from the far-reaching influence of the Sree Narayana movement on religion and society in Kerala, a few other religious movements had also exercised their influence on the social Renaissance in Kerala. The most important of them were the Theosophical movement, the Brahma Samaj, the Ananda Sabha, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Arya Samaj.

The Theosophical Movement

The Theosophical Society started functioning in Kerala as early as 1882 when a branch of the Society was established at Palghat. Some branches were established at Trivandrum, Tirur and Ernakulam. Swami Vivekananda was received at Ernakulam by the members of the Theosophical Society, and they made arrangements for his sojourn to Kerala in 1892. The main activity of the Society during this period was holding discussions on passages from the religious books of Hindus and Christians apart from conducting lectures and classes on the principles of Theosophy. The society was at that time spreading the message of universal brotherhood, transcending the limits of caste, creed and religion.

Between 1902 and 1914 nearly fifty-eight branches of the society were established in places like Tellicherry, Bada-

gara, Kozhikode, Mancheri, Nilambur, Trichur, Cochin, Alleppey, Kottayam, Quilon, etc. Eminent personalities like C. Krishnan, Moorkoth Kumaran, Kottiath Ramunny, Mancheri Rama Iyer, Mancheri Ramakrishna Iyer and V. Karunakaran Nair joined its ranks and they worked for the removal of untouchability in their respective areas. The society was working in close co-operation with Sree Narayana Movement and it was Mrs. Annie Besant who laid the foundation stone of the Sreekanteswaram Temple at Kozhikode in 1909, one of the temples consecrated by Sree Narayana Guru.

From 1914 onwards, the society had chalked out a vigorous plan for the removal of untouchability under the leadership of Mrs. Besant. Inter-dining between the members of untouchable castes and upper castes was part of such programme. The programme of inter-dining was continued as a routine item after every meeting of the society held at Annie Hall, Kozhikode.

The branch at Palghat also had organised several activities for the removal of untouchability. Brata C. Sesha Ayya, the Secretary of the Palghat Branch, organised an elementary school and a night-school for educating members of the untouchable castes, during the period from 1914 to 1920. Along with Vedabandhu, an Arya Samajist, he organised a procession of untouchables through Kalpathi, a Brahmin centre at Palghat. The leaders of the procession were severely manhandled by the orthodox Brahmins. The accused in the case were convicted by the court, and this enabled the untouchables to gain the right for walking through Brahmin streets.

At Trivandrum, the members of the society were campaigning against animal sacrifices in Kali temples. Ultimately, the Regent Queen of Travancore issued proclamation in 1925, prohibiting animal sacrifices in the temples in

the state.

Thus, during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of this century, the Theosophical society was an active agent promoting social reform activities in Kerala.

Brahma Samaj

Brahma Samaj was another important organisation that inhaled a new spirit into the degenerated social life of Kerala. A Brahma Samaj was organised at Kozhikode in 1898 on the initiative of Dr. Ayyathan Gopalan. The main activity of the Brahma Samaj was reciting hymns in praise of a Single God who is Almighty and All-pervading. God had no distinction of caste or creed. During the early period of the Samaj, they were reciting Tamil hymns, as there were no Malayalam hymns at that time. But, soon this deficiency was made good by the translations of hymns composed by Devendranath Tagore, and by new songs composed by Karat Govinda Menon (who later on became the progenitor of Ananda Sabha) and by Ayyathan Gopalan.

The Brahma Samaj had its branches in places like Telli-cherry and Palghat. In all these places song-recital was the main programme conducted by the Samaj. The songs glorified the brotherhood of mankind, and virtues like truthfulness, love and dedication to noble purpose in life, and deprecated caste-distinctions and religious hatred.

Ananda Sabha

Ananda Sabha was another religious movement that tried to rejuvenate social life in Kerala. Karat Govinda Menon, who was a scholar in Sanskrit and was serving as a

Sanskrit teacher in schools at Kozhikode and Palghat, took to the life of a Sanyasin in 1907 and assumed the name Brahmananda Siva Yogi. Even as a teacher he had composed a book called *Moksha Pradeepam* (the Light of Eternity). This was a book sharply criticising the practices of caste, untouchability and animal sacrifice in the temples of Kerala. Brahmananda Siva Yogi organised an Ashram at Alatur near Palghat and taught disciples belonging to caste-Hindu as well as non-caste Hindu communities at his Ashram. He was a great logician and rationalist and he wanted his disciples to question every custom, practice and belief before they were accepted. He opposed idol-worship, caste distinctions and other meaningless customs, such as Tirandu Kuli (Menstruation ceremony) and Tali Kettu Kalyanam (ceremonial of tying a trinket around the neck of the bride by the bride-groom). According to him the three great principles that contributed to man's success in life were : (i) Acquiring knowledge, (ii) Rational Thinking, and (iii) Manly Action. The highest ideal in life was to achieve eternal peace of mind which was the greatest bliss to strive for. Hence he called his religion Ananda Religion. He wrote several books, such as *Ananda Sutra*, *Ananda Vimana*, *Anantadarsa*, etc., enunciating and elucidating the ideals set out by him. Among his disciples were Kuttappan Ashan of Vala or Fisherman community, Krishnan of Ezhava community, Siva Ramakrishna Iyer of Brahmin community and Parameswaran Pillai of Nair community: All stayed in his Ashram and lived together. This was a novel feature in the life of Kerala at that time. Vagbhadananda Gurukkal was one of his best disciples. Thus Ananda Religion played a noteworthy role during the first quarter of the twentieth century in transforming the traditional Kerala Society into a modern society.

Sree Ramakrishna Mission

Sree Ramakrishna Mission started its activities in Kerala from 1911 onwards. The first Ashram to be established under the Mission was at Haripad and it was inaugurated in May 1913. All people without distinction of caste were allowed to enter the Ashram and participate in common prayer. It is to be noted that the first inter-dining between caste-Hindus and untouchables in Kerala took place in this Ashram in the year 1913. Tiruvalla Ashram was established in the year 1914. There were several other Ashrams established in places like Quilandy, Alleppey, Palai Moovattupuzha, Trivandrum, Kalady and Kozhikode. Sree Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala had been running a news magazine called *Prabuddha Kerala* from 1915 onwards, which had contributed to a new thinking in Kerala.

Arya Samaj

Arya Samaj was the last of the modern religious movements that affected Kerala. It came in 1921 with a purely philanthropic mission in order to render relief to Hindus who were overwhelmed with distress during the Malabar Rebellion. On November 29, 1921 an Arya Samaj Camp was opened at Kozhikode for distributing rice doles and clothes to Hindu refugees. In March 1922, another camp was opened at Mayanad where 5,000 persons, men, women and children—were given daily doles. By August 1922, the Samaj opened additional relief camps at Nilambur, Tirunangadi, Neeralamukh and Puthiyara at Calicut.

Along with relief work, the Samaj took up other activities, such as re-conversion of those who had adopted an alien religion and raising the status of the depressed classes.

The Arya Samaj claim that they were successful in re-converting nearly 1,800 Hindus who were, according to them, forcibly converted to Islam during the rebellion. But the most important activity of the Arya Samaj was its anti-untouchability campaign. In Kozhikode town, Tali was a locality where caste-Hindus alone lived. The scavenging of the area was being done through Christian scavengers brought from Tamil Nad, because Hindu scavengers were unapproachables. The Samaj opposed the practice in order to expose the meaninglessness of the custom of unapproachability and its disappearance the moment a Hindu scavenger became a Christian convert.

Arya Samaj opened its centre at Palghat early in 1925. There was trouble in 1924 when some Ezhavas claimed the right to be present at the Car-festival at Kalpathi. The trouble revived in 1925 in a somewhat different form. On 31 October, a party of Arya Samajists tried to go through the Kalpathi Agraharam, a locality exclusively occupied by orthodox Brahmins. The Arya Samajists were prevented by the Brahmins on the ground that they were Ezhavas. A struggle ensued and there was stabbing also. In view of further anticipated trouble in connection with the Car-festival in November, orders were issued under section 144 Cr. P. C. prohibiting untouchables from entering the locality. Arya Samaj leaders waited in a deputation on the Governor of Madras and urged the Government to withdraw the prohibition order. It was withdrawn and a special one-man Commission was sent to Palghat to study the situation, and on the basis of the Commission's Report a communique was issued by the Government stating that the aggrieved party should go to court and that the Government did not take sides. After some time an Arya Samajist was waylaid while passing through Kalpathi and the offenders

were convicted by court. On a revision petition by the Brahmins, the High Court decreed that the Ezhava convert had a right to pass through the road at Kalpathi. This incident and the decree by the High Court had won great prestige for the Arya Samaj in Kerala.

The Arya Samaj had also co-operated in the Vaikom Satyagraha movement of 1924-25, and the Guruvayur Satyagraha of 1931, both intended to establish certain rights of untouchables.

Impact of the Various Reform Movements

All these movements, which aimed at reforming the antiquated customs of orthodox Hinduism and thus at regenerating the society, had influenced some sections of people in Kerala and created in them a desire to bring about changes in out-dated institutions like caste and untouchability. All the same, they were small streams compared to the mighty current of the Sree Narayana Movement which swept Kerala from one end to the other.

THE MISSIONARY LITERATURE OF THE WAHHABIS—ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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THE WAHHABI Movement in India,¹ in the course of its operation, produced a considerable volume of theological and missionary literature. Prominent among the former group are such works as the *Sirat-i-Mustaqim*² and the *Taqwiatul Iman*.³ Additionally, we have a large collection of the correspondence of Sayyid Ahmad Baralwi and the works of some of his chief disciples such as Ismail Shahid, Wialyat Ali and others in which the aims and objectives of the movement have been explained and defended against the criticisms of the *muqallid*,⁴ Hanafi, sections. These writings are mainly theological and are meant for the educated persons well-versed in religious sciences.

The other group, with which the present paper is concerned, consists of missionary tracts written by a number of known and unknown Wahhabi preachers during the early and mid-nineteenth century. The two groups are by no means mutually exclusive but the second group is thematically more varied and historically more important. The missionary tracts were written and compiled with the object of propagating the Wahhabi tenets, explaining, and inviting the people to join the Muhammadi Order,⁵ criticising the *Bidat*⁶ current in the Indo-Muslim society, exposing the sinfulness and socially harmful effects of certain customs and

ceremonies, teaching the common unlettered persons how to perform *namaz* (prayers) and *wuzu* (ablutions before prayers), etc. This group of Wahhabi missionary tracts, virtually unnoticed in English, has a literary as well as a historical significance. The tracts are valuable as early specimens of Urdu prose-writing in eastern India. They also provide us with a new perspective to examine the working of the movement on a popular level and a clue on the thinking of the Wahhabi leaders. In them we find some vivid glimpses of the socio-religious life of Indian Muslims during the early nineteenth century. They neutralize somewhat the picture of the Wahhabis as merely anti-government conspirators presented by government records.

A very large number of such pamphlets and tracts were written and published during the period. Wilayat Ali,⁷ a prolific writer himself, says that 'thousands' of *risalas* (pamphlets) were written⁸ and giving due allowance for exaggeration, the number must have been considerable. However, much of it has been lost. From after 1880s when the Wahhabi movement was largely suppressed and its leaders convicted, Wahhabi-baiting became popular⁹ and many people, afraid to be found in possession of Wahhabi pamphlets, destroyed them. Many of them were proscribed and confiscated by the government.¹⁰

Copies of many such pamphlets and other Wahhabi papers found their way to London too, because some of the British officers connected with the investigation and trial of Wahhabi cases took the books and papers home. Act XXV of 1867, which provided for the registration and preservation of books and tracts printed in British India, also helped the building up of collections of periodicals in the India Office Library and the British Museum.¹¹ That is how these two public offices came to have a rich collection of Wahhabi

pamphlets.¹²

Many of the pamphlets were reprinted several times and also copied by hand for circulation. Some were printed anonymously and surreptitiously, without the name of the press or the place of publication. One such work, *Radd-i-Tuhfa-i-Muhabbat*, refuting an earlier anti-Wahhabi work, *Tuhfa-i-Muhabbat*, was suspected by the government to have been written by the 'chief moulati of Phulwaree' and the government announced that any one giving information about the author or the press would receive a reward of half the amount of Rs. 1000/- which would be levied on the persons concerned under Act XXV of 1867.

These tracts supplemented the work of the itinerant Wahhabi preachers so graphically described by Hunter.¹³ The momentary impact of the roadside preacher was sought to be reinforced by these pamphlets which the people could read at leisure and ponder upon.

Addressed mainly to the common people, the manner of presentation of the pamphlets is geared to their mental level. The narrative is simple and conversational. It is in sharp contrast to the ornamental rhymed prose which is generally in use. Arguments are backed with quotations from the Quran and Hadith translated into Urdu. Didactic stories and similes are used to illustrate the points. The similes used, though homely, indicate an alert and lively imagination. The tenor is often polemical and indicative of an one-track mind. Evidence and arguments, adduced in support of their own points of view, are regarded as final and irrefutable.

The Wahhabi pamphlets were mostly written in Urdu prose, and a few copies in Hindi too are extant.¹⁴ Such works as were originally written in Arabic or Persian were

translated into simple Urdu. Both the original text and Urdu translation were printed side by side on each page. To realise the significance of the use of Urdu, it is to be noted that Persian was still the chief medium of expression and communication. Urdu prose was sparingly used not only for literary purposes but also for correspondence by the elite. The linguistic significance of the Wahhabi pamphlets has been emphasised by competent scholars¹⁵ who compare it with the Puritan literature of seventeenth century England and who claim that it prepared the ground for the development of the simple prose style of the Delhi College and the works of Sir Sayyid.

Historically more significant is the repeated emphasis by Wahhabis on the translation of the Quran and Hadith into vernacular languages so that the people might read them directly. This is a cardinal doctrinaire point with the Wahhabis. They urged the necessity and utility of people reading the scriptures directly and called for translation of the Quran and Hadith into Hindi. This did not mean Hindi in the Devanagiri script : the term was very often used for Urdu.¹⁶ However, the fact that the Wahhabis also used Hindi in the Devanagiri script for carrying their ideas to the people is evident from the existence of some Wahhabi pamphlets in Hindi.¹⁷

It may be of interest to mention here that the Dacca Museum has a manuscript written in *Bengali language in Arabic script*. I do not have its full particulars but it deals with some theological matters and was probably written in the nineteenth century. Bengal was one of the important areas of operation of the Wahhabis and I will not be surprised if it turns out to be a Wahhabi tract.¹⁸

A related point on which the pamphlets provide fresh evidence is the question of adopting new techniques of war.

We find no less a person than Wilayat Ali (whose family members were uncompromisingly opposed to English education and all that it stood for) advocating and defending the use of guns and cannons, instead of catapults used during the time of Prophet Muhammad, against the 'cannon-firing infidels'¹⁹ (English).

As stated above, the number of Wahhabi pamphlets is very large and their contents are sometimes repetitive. For our present purpose, I have selected two *risalas*—*Risala-i-Da'wat* (pamphlet of Call to Islam) and *Risala-Tibyanu's Shirk* (pamphlet of Exposition of Polytheism). Both were written in Urdu by Wilayat Ali and are included in the *Risail-i-Tisai*,²⁰ the most well-known and widely circulated Wahhabi pamphlet. Both the *risalas* are not only typical specimens but have some individual significance too. The exact date of their publication is not known but they were probably written during 1830s or early 1840s.

The *Risala-i-Da'wat* is divided into several sections addressed specifically to the Ulama, the Sufis, the lay gentry, the professionals, the Shi'as, etc., and invites all of them to join the Muhammadi Order. It thus gives us an idea of the dominant sections of Indo-Muslim society.

It may also be noted that in addressing the different sections it adopts arguments particularly attractive to such groups. Thus while criticising the commercialisation of the system of *muridi* by some Sufi saints, it also tries to attract them with prospects of more *murids* (and hence more income!) if they reformed themselves along the lines of the Muhammadi Order. Similarly, in addressing the Shi'as, the fact of Sayyid Ahmad being a Sayyid and a descendant of *Ahl-i-Bait*²¹ was emphasised.

All this may well be criticised on grounds of mutual

contradiction and a deviation from the Wahhabi tenets, but the tracts were a sort of a popular propaganda literature and their main purpose was to increase the number of adherents. The writers had to take recourse to popular, often even puerile, arguments which were sometimes not in conformity with their own theoretical formulations.

*Risala-i-Da'wat*²²

Explaining his objective, Wilayat Ali writes that some people would not listen to or accept the oral pleadings of a preacher; so he was writing this tract to enable such persons to read it at leisure and if they found anything worthwhile in it they should accept it and act accordingly.

The section addressed to the Maulavis observes that some Maulavis acquired religious learning in order to earn their livelihood. They were faced with a dilemma; if they asked people to go to the original sources (Quran and Hadith), people would ask as to why they did not do so earlier. If, on the other hand, they joined the Wahhabis and took *Bai'at*²³ in the Muhammadi Order they thought they would lose face among the people. It warns them that religion was no more the monopoly of the Maulavis, the people could think for themselves on such matters as *Shirk* (Polytheism) and *Bid'at*, *Bai'at* and *Imamat* because the Quran and Hadith had been translated in the 'Hindi' language. If they forbade people to read the Quran and Hadith then too they would be criticised. Moreover, there were Maulavis (Alims) among the Wahhabis too who had the Quran and Hadith on their side and rationality too. Wouldn't the people with common sense go to them rather than to the *Maulavis*?

Another section is addressed to the *Mashaikh*, the heads

of *khanqahs* who earned their living by *muridi* (initiation of disciples). They were of two kinds. Firstly, those whose income did not depend on writing *Shajras*²⁴ but on grants of lands. Since their living was protected by *jagir*, why should they demean themselves by engaging in the usual clap trap of *khanqahs*? Secondly, there were those whose earnings depended on the preaching of all kinds of *Bida'ts*. Such persons made their *murids* touch their feet, did not initiate people without taking money or sweets, did not write *Shajra* without a fee, did not urge strictly the observance of *namaz* and prohibition of intoxicants, considered musical sessions²⁵ as a form of prayer and did not hesitate to take fee from the ill-gotten money of prostitutes, etc. They could not befool the people for all time, because thousands of *risalas* had been written explaining to the people about *shirk* and *bid'at*. Formerly, the people did not have any choice; having no access to the Quran and Hadith, they had to go willy nilly to them (*Mashaikh*) whether they were good or bad. Now the curtain of ignorance was being raised, people had developed a taste for acquiring knowledge and they would not take any steps without enquiry. It may come to this that their *murids* would argue with them and throw the *Shajras* on their face.

The Muhammadi Order was there to tell them of the right path and it was being talked about in streets and lanes. The Wahhabis were gaining adherents and a time would come when the *Mashaikh* would be left with only a few *murids*. The position of such *Mashaikh* was like that of a soldier who had obtained service by fraud and kept a wooden sword in the scabbard but was always apprehensive that he might be caught one day and lose his service. If they could afford a steel sword (right knowledge, as preached by Wahhabis), why carry a wooden one (of pretences

and frauds)? They should join the Muhammadij Order, it would add to their knowledge and position and bring in more *murids*.

The appeal to *Shias* begins by observing that although the *Shias* had differed on the question of *Khilafat*²⁶ and *Imamat*,²⁷ they were united on the question of *Tauhid* (monotheism) and *Rasalat* (prophethood of Muhammad). The Wahhabis and *Shias* were united so far as the question of polytheism was concerned ; let them concentrate on that for the time being, the other matters could be attended to later on. It appeals to their sentimental attachment to the *Ahl-i-Bait* and points out that Sayyid Ahmad was a Sayyid, and that opposition of the venerable Sayyids and enmity with *Ahl-i-Bait* was the way of Yazid.²⁸

One section is addressed to such persons who were the disciples, pupils or relatives of those opposed to the Wahhabis. Such persons hesitated to join the Wahhabis out of deference to their elders and teachers. It warns them that one should respect the teacher so far as studies were concerned but not in matters of faith. Many persons (Muslims) went to the Kayasthas for being taught but they did not become Kayasthas.²⁹

Another section is addressed to rich Muslims who thought it beneath their dignity to accept the guidance of 'poor' Wahhabis. They should not be proud of their riches ; God was the richest and most powerful. Did they not reward a poor man if he brought them news about an approaching enemy ? The Wahhabis were giving them similar warning and giving them a chance to improve their lives hereafter.

Similarly, the soldiers were proud of their profession and hated the appeal of the Wahhabis. They should heed that only God was the most powerful. If one dashed his head

against a mountain who would be smashed—the man or the mountain? They should not let false pride stand in the way of accepting the Muhammadi Order. If they were true soldiers, they should rather exert in the path of God and in suppressing their ego.

It may be pointed out that these two last sections are particularly significant. There are some references that the majority of the adherents of the Wahhabi movement belonged either to the agricultural or professional classes, such as weavers and tailors. Interestingly enough, an anonymous Wahhabi tract³⁰ emphasises the merit of earning one's living and refutes with the help of Hadithes the idea that certain professions were lowly. All professions were equal before God. This defence of what was regarded as the lowly professions, as also the emphasis on the emancipation of common people from the clutches of the unscrupulous heads of *khan-qahs*, indicates the social base of the Wahhabi movement.

Risala-i-Tibiyanu's Shirk

It deals with the questions of *Shirk* and *Bidat* both of which occupy a key position in Wahhabi thinking. They are unsparing critics of *Bidat*. However, Wilayat Ali points out that *Bidat* did not mean any and everything new since the time of the Prophet.

He points out that there were two sorts of actions. Firstly those for which the Prophet was not divinely commissioned, such as the construction of houses, cooking of food, etc. Such works were left to the intellect of the people and *Bidat* had nothing to do with it. Secondly, those works for which the Prophet was divinely commissioned; these again were of two kinds. Those for the performance or achievement of which no limits of actions were laid down; for

instance, *jihad*. The object of the follower of the *Shara* was to achieve victory, whether one fought with swords or guns. Inventing new things which may prove helpful in gaining the objective (victory) cannot be regarded as *Bidat* (The Prophet is quoted to the effect that he who chalks out a beneficial course of action shall get his rewards and they too who follow it). In the time of Prophet there were catapults, not guns. Now if someone, considering the catapults as useless against 'cannon-firing infidels' (English), used similar guns and cannons it certainly would not be *Bidat*.

Similarly, the true object of the follower of the *Shara* is the obtaining of divine knowledge and purity of heart. If he studied some works of grammar and prosody or took to some *shughl*³¹ as was done by some Sufis, it is not *Bidat* even though such practices did not exist in the time of the Prophet.

But if one made a fetish of these things, so much so that one who fought with swords and not guns was not regarded as a *mujahid* or one who studied the Quran without studying grammar and prosody or one who achieved purity of heart without the guidance of Sufis was not regarded as a *Wali*, then it becomes a *Bidat*.

There were other works for which the Prophet had laid down the limits of behaviour. To deviate from these is certainly *Bidat*. For example, if one thought that he could perform his *namaz* lying down or say that since the burial of dead body had been ordered without specifying the manner of carrying the body to the cemetery he could get the body dragged there or argue that since the performance of *Nikah* only was compulsory he could indulge in wasteful expenses on the occasion he would be wrong. One should not transgress the limits laid down in such cases.

It would be evident from the extracts presented above that the Wahhabi missionary literature presents interesting glimpses of the nineteenth century Indo-Muslim society and broadens our understanding of the working and nature of the Wahhabi Movement. The advocacy of the translation of scriptures in the regional languages and of the use of modern methods of warfare deserves attention. It is in marked contrast to the revivalist nature of the movement in some other respects.

R E F E R E N C E S

- ¹ For an historical account of the movement see my *Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1966.
 - ² Based on the utterances and observations of Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi and compiled in Persian by his two chief disciples Ismail Shahid and Abdul Hai, the work embodies the tenets of Wuhhabism. First printed at Calcutta in 1822, it was reprinted several times and translated into Urdu too.
 - ³ A well-known Wahhabi treatise in Urdu by Ismail Shahid in condemnation of Shirk (polytheism) and *Bidat* (innovations). It was supplemented and completed after Ismail's death by Sultan Muhammad Khan in 1834. The first three editions (uptill 1888) were published by Nawalkishore Press and it has been reprinted more than a dozen times since then. An English translation was made by Mir Shahamat Ali in the *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. XIII, 1852, pp. 310-72.
 - ⁴ Literally, a conformist or follower; technically a follower of one of four *mudhhabs* or schools of law of Islamic jurisprudence.
 - ⁵ Sayyid Ahmad followed a rather novel method of initiating his followers first in the current Sufi Orders (Chishtia, Qadria, Naqshhaudia) and then in the Muhammadi Order which he claimed to have developed himself. He explained that the *Shariat* had two aspects, internal and external. While the Sufi Orders looked after the former the Muhammadi Order looked after the latter and provided a code of conduct for the daily life. Initiating people in both these methods encompassed both their internal and external lives.
- Another explanation for this procedure suggested by an ardent Wahhabi

himself (Jafar Thanewari, *Sawanih Ahmadi*, Delhi, A.H. 1309, p. 30) is that the people were used to initiation in the Sufi Orders, even though these had become devoid of their earlier zeal and purity and any sudden abandonment of these would have been unpopular.

For a discussion of the 'Tasawwuf-ridden base' of Indian Wahhabism see S. A. A. Rizvi's 'Ideological Background of the Wahhabi Movement in India in the XVIII and XIX Centuries', *Ideas in History*, Ed. B. Prasad, Delhi.

- ⁶ Literally, an innovation; technically, such customs and practices which had been introduced among the Muslims after the period of Orthodox Caliphate (632-660) and which were not sanctioned by the Quran and Hadith. For a detailed exposition of the Wahhabi concept of *Bidat* see *Sirat-i-Mustaqim*, and *infra*, pp. 13-14.
- ⁷ For a biographical account see *Wahabi Movement in India*, pp. 99 ff.
- ⁸ *Infra*, p. 10.
- ⁹ During the period a spate of anti-Wahhabi writings were produced by sycophants, and many Wahhabis too wrote apologetically, denying that there was anything inherently anti-government in Wahhabism.
- ¹⁰ I found a group of such confiscated pamphlets in a government record room in Patna.
- ¹¹ For a very informative account of the periodicals literature in Indian languages available in the India Office Library and British Museum see G. Barrier's article, 'South Asia in Vernacular Publications. .'. *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. XXVIII, no. 4 (August, 1969), pp. 803-10.
- ¹² For a list of these see K. A. Faruqi, *Urdu men Wahhabi Adab* (Urdu), Delhi University Publication, 1969, pp. 42-51.
- ¹³ W. W. Hunter, *Our Indian Mussalmans*, p. 72.
- ¹⁴ K. A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 25, 38, 50.
- ¹⁵ K. A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, K. Ahmad's article, 'Apni Talash Men' in the Urdu monthly, *Ahang*, Gaya, November 1971, pp. 7-28.
- ¹⁶ Shah Abdul Qadir who first translated the Quran in Urdu in 1790-1 calls it in the preface a translation in 'Hindi language. Ismail Shahid in the preface of his *Taqwiatul Iman* writes that he had translated Quranic verses and Hadithes in 'Hindi' so that people could understand them.
- ¹⁷ K. A. Faruqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 25, 38 and 50. Dr. Faruqi also mentions the interesting case of Beni Narain, poetically surnamed Jahan, a khatri of Delhi who translated into Urdu the Persian work of Shah Rafi-ud-Din, *Tanbihul Ghafilin*. Adopting the conventional phraseology of Wahhabi writers he writes that he had translated the work into 'Hindi' (Urdu) so that people, young and old, who had become immersed in worldly affairs may be warned and may take to the precepts of Prophet Muhammad.
- ¹⁸ Even otherwise it deserves attention because of its linguistic peculiarity.
- ¹⁹ *Infra*, p. 13.

- ²⁰ Published in Matba 'i-Faruqi, Delhi, no date, pp. 63-78, and 142-56. The booklet contains nine *risalas*, seven of which were written by Wilayat Ali, one by Enayat Ali and one by Fayyaz Ali, all of the Sadiqpur family of Patna (for details see *Wahabi Movement in India*, pp. 360-61). Many of these are available singly too, both in print and in manuscript.
- ²¹ Members of the 'house' of Prophet Muhammad, descended from Ali and Fatima. The Shias lay special emphasis on their belonging to this group.
- ²² Only a summarised English version of the relevant portions is given below.
- ²³ *Baiat* is a formula of fealty and signifies the acceptance of one's spiritual guide. It is done by placing one's hands in the hands of the preceptor.
- ²⁴ A document recording the name of the *murid* and enumerating the chain of religious preceptors with whom he was linked by the process of *Baiat*.
- ²⁵ Some Sufis believed in the efficacy of musical sessions (*sama*) in bringing about a trance during which one had a feeling of nearness to God. Other Sufis, and much more so the Wahhabis, regarded such sessions as sinful.
- ^{26, 27} The arrangement devised by the Muslims after the death of Prophet to select a successor to guide their affairs brought into existence the institution of *Khilafat*. The Sunnis regard the *Khilafat* as a temporal, non-dynastic institution.
- On the other hand, the Shia's concept of the office of the successor of Muhammad, the *Imamat*, is spiritual and dynastic. They regard the Imam as their spiritual and temporal head (the kings are theoretically regarded as the deputies of the Twelfth and last Imam who 'disappeared' and who is expected to reappear). The Shias believe that the office should belong only to the successors of Muhammad and Ali. This created the first division in the ranks of Muslims.
- ²⁸ The Umayyad Khalifa who ordered the fight against Imam Husain at Karbala.
- ²⁹ This is a very interesting piece of information. The proficiency of Kayasthas in Persian and Urdu is well-known. It appears that many Muslims had Kayastha tutors.
- ³⁰ *The Wahabi Movement in India*, p. 362.
- ³¹ Certain practices performed by Sufis, such as meditation, concentration, counting of beads, etc.

THE IMPACT OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN INDIA

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CHRISTIANITY was introduced into India probably in the first century of the Christian era itself or subsequently by the Nestorian Church, an offshoot of the Greek Orthodox or Eastern Church which took the religion to Russia and East European countries, and it remained as a distinct religion in the Malabar region of Kerala when in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese identified it in the ocean of Hinduism and tried to transform it into their contemporary Western version of Christianity under the control of the Latin Church in Rome. To this day, the followers of this early Christian Church in Malabar—called the Syrian Christians—stick firmly to their ancient belief that they received their religion directly from St. Thomas, one of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, who is believed to have visited India in 52 A.D.

Much discussion has been taking place among academic researchers, Christian theologians and propagandists since the sixteenth century as to whether the Malabar tradition could be true,—some holding the view that there could be nothing improbable in the Apostle's visit, as there was a regular commercial contact between the west coast of the southern peninsula of India and the countries in the Mediterranean region at that time, and the Apostle could have easily found his way into India following one of those trade-routes of the sea-going merchants, and others denying this

possibility on the ground that if he had actually visited India, the early Christian writers would have mentioned this important fact which they did not do during the first two centuries of the Christian era and that the few stray references about the visit of one Thomas to the Malabar region in the third and fourth century writings could have been to any Thomas and need not necessarily be to the St. Thomas, the Apostle himself.

While the Roman Catholic Church closed the debate on this subject amongst its followers with a declaration from the Vatican in favour of the former theory, the Protestant writers continue to doubt the Apostolic visit, saying that this legend owes its existence probably "to the natural desire of the Syrian Christians to connect their history with Apostolic origin and sanction."

Whatever might be the truth in the Malabar Christian claims, the important fact to note is the existence of this ancient Christian group in Kerala which attracted the attention of both the Catholic Church and the Protestants of various denominations when they began their evangelical work in India. Not much is known about the socio-economic condition or even the religious practices of Syrian Christians in the pre-Portuguese period, except that, as Professor Ananthakrishna Iyer says in his *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, many of them were politically influential and militarily strong, enjoying a high social status and vast landed estates in the Kingdoms of the Kerala region.² The discovery of this ancient Christian group in Kerala has also led to several interesting speculations, particularly among the Christian scholars, on the possible influences that it might have exerted on the evolution of Hindu religious thought. One such speculation is that some of the major systems of Hindu religious philosophy expounded by the saints like

Sankara and Ramanuja and the entire growth of the Bhakti cult in India from the fifteenth century onwards, owed a great deal to the Christian doctrines that flourished on the West Coast. For example, according to P. Thomas, the author of *The Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan*, "The Christian legends and teachings are discernible in the ancient and medieval Hindu literature, including the *Mahabaratha*, in the theistic movements among the Shaivites and Vaishnavites and particularly in the eleventh century Tamil Vaishnavite poet Manickavasagar's devotional songs, as well as in the soul-stirring theistic writings of Ramanuja and his disciple, Ramananda, and a host of other scholars and teachers like Kabir, Madhava, Chaitanya, and Vallabha who hastened the spread of the new faith." Admitting that he has no positive evidence to prove any of the interesting speculations he has made on the subject, he says, "interpolation is the besetting sin of all Hindu writers, and any Christian ideas that might have been borrowed (by the Hindus) were incorporated in the Hindu system with no acknowledgment."⁴

Another interesting speculation, coming from a Tamil novelist, Ka na Subramaniam, is that Thiruvalluvar, a low-caste Vallala poet of Mylapore, Madras, might have met St. Thomas when he visited his village in the first century A. D. and was probably considerably influenced by the Apostle's teachings, as much of his ethical ideas contained in his famous *Thirukural* resemble those of Christianity.⁵ This view was in fact held by several earlier Christian writers, like the Rev. H. A. Popley who claimed that *Thirukural* had a Christian outlook, and Father Beschi who declared that *Thirukural* is an echo of the Sermon on the mount.⁶

Such speculations on the possible early Christian influ-

ences on the evolution of Hindu religious thought are no less interesting than those held by some Hindu scholars that Jesus Christ spent nearly twenty years of his life in India, the period in his life which is not accounted in Jerusalem by the Christian sources and that he developed his religious ideas from the Hindu sources, probably in Kashmir.

Turning to the Malabar or Syrian Christians, the Portuguese were certainly happy to see them when they arrived on the Malabar coast, and accepted them as Christians, even though they owed their allegiance to the Patriarch of Antioch and not to the Pope in Rome as they themselves did. But after the Portuguese power was firmly established on the West Coast of India, the Syrian Christians were compelled by the methods of inquisition to shift their allegiance to the Pope and to accept their Bishops from Rome, instead of from Antioch or Alexandria, as they had been doing at least from the fifth century onwards.

An open defiance of the Papal authority by a section of Syrian Christians in the last years of Portuguese rule in India, and especially after the arrival of a Syrian Bishop named Bishop Mar Gregorius in Kerala in 1665, led to the first major split among Syrian Christians, followed by further dissensions in their community on questions of property, local autonomy and patriarchal authority.

Another schism among the Syrian Christians, dating from 1887, led to the formation of the Mar Thoma Church, now numbering about 350,000. The efforts of the Protestant missionaries from the time of their arrival in the nineteenth century to save this ancient Christian community from what they considered the trinity of evils, ignorance, ceremonialism and superstition, led to another split in their community, bringing some converts to the Protestant Church

Missionary Society. Though this once united community of Christians of Kerala are now divided into a number of factions on account of the religious, social, and political forces coming from outside in the past four centuries, a considerable body of them continue to be prosperous and influential, deriving their wealth and status from modern education which they unhesitatingly accepted, as well as from the landed estates which they inherited from their ancestors. The leaders of the World Council of Churches and of the Roman Catholic Church are expecting that "with their adventurous spirit, their Christian culture of many centuries and their newly-awakened missionary passion," the Syrian Christians of Kerala, now numbering well over two million, "can do more than any other single church to win this nation to Christ."

The history of the Roman Catholic Church in India has passed through three stages, of which the first, covering a greater part of the period of the Portuguese rule in India, is probably the most dramatic when the Kings of Portugal made a determined effort to secure a large number of converts in India for the Roman Catholic Church, using their political and military power in their settlements in western India, and by patronising the individual efforts of enterprising Jesuits outside their own dominions, like those of Francis Xavier who baptised about 60,000 south coast fishermen when they sought Portuguese protection against pirates in return for change of faith, and De Nobili who tried to bring the very pillars of Hinduism, the Brahmins, to the fold of the Catholic Church, by claiming himself to be a Brahmin from the West and introducing among them his own Sanskrit translation of the Bible as the 'Fifth Veda' at Madura.

With the decline of the Portuguese power in India, the

Roman Catholic efforts towards conversion eclipsed for a while, leaving behind nearly a million of its followers in the country when it was being conquered by the Protestant Britain. This second period of the Roman Catholic connection with India is marked only by a natural increase in the Catholic population, rather than by any major conversion movements, except those undertaken by the French at Pondicherry, but there was a resurgence of Catholic activity in the third period, beginning 1861, when under British rule the guarantee of religious freedom was utilised by the Roman Catholic Church for its evangelical work in the country. According to one estimate, there were 1,017,969 Roman Catholics in India in 1861, but by 1911 their number had more than doubled.⁸ Their population continued to increase in the following period also and today, they constitute 1.5% of the total population of India. According to the *Catholic Directory of India* for the year 1969, there were in that year 84 ecclesiastical units, 3,513 Parishes, 10,025 Mission Stations, 53 Major and Minor Seminaries, 5,367 primary schools, 1854 middle and high schools, 96 university colleges, 172 technical schools and colleges, 96 training schools and colleges, 602 hostels, 307 hospitals and 637 orphanages, all run under the ultimate control of the Pope, by 35,648 religious priests, Brothers and Sisters, of whom 3,145 were foreign.⁹

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church which was able to take concerted action in its evangelical work under the centralised control of the international authority of the Pope, the Protestant nations were beset, almost from the time of their appearance on the Indian soil, by their denominational struggles and national rivalries. This handicap was, however, overcome in time by the promotion of ecumenical

activity by the Protestant missions which resulted in the formation of co-ordinating agencies, such as the Church of South India, having its beginnings in 1905 and its official constitution in 1947, the United Church of North India, the National Missionary Council (1914) and its successor, the National Christian Council of India, founded in 1923. Even though the Protestant evangelical efforts in India are of comparatively recent origin, commencing in an organised way only from 1813, the presence of Protestant Britain as the ruling power in India, the freedom enjoyed in India by all religious denominations to practise and preach peacefully their respective religions, the unofficial patronage extended to their missions by several British officials, the flow of funds from several Protestant nations and the zeal of the missionaries, facilitated a fairly rapid success which is evidenced by the fact that the number of Protestants in the country rose from a few hundred in 1814 to more than a million by 1914. Today, the non-Catholic Christian population of India number about four and a half millions and their missions maintain 45 colleges with a student body of 23,757 (1953 statistics) and approximately, 15,000 elementary schools, 500 middle schools, 250 high schools, 250 hospitals, and dispensaries, eight T. B. Sanatoria, three medical colleges, 80 agricultural settlements, 50 co-operative societies, 165 industrial schools and 50 printing presses.¹⁰

The most significant outcome of the efforts towards evangelisation in India by the Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, since the beginning of the sixteenth century is the emergence of an Indian Christian community, numbering more than ten million persons, of whom roughly half are Roman Catholics. The Christian population of India today is larger than the entire population of Sweden,

Norway, Denmark and Finland and is equal to that of Canada or Australia, and on the Asian continent, India has the largest number of Christians. About the year 1800, the number of Christians was about 0.7% of the total population of India. A hundred years later, it increased to only 1.1%, but in 1961 the Christians constituted 2.4% of the total population of the country. Seventy per cent of the Indian Christians live in the four southern states, and the remaining 30% are dispersed in north India. Among the southern states, Kerala has the largest Christian population (26%), followed by Tamil Nadu (5%), Andhra (4%) and Karnataka (2%). Elsewhere, the concentration of Christian population is found in the former Portuguese colonies of Goa, Diu and Daman (36.25%) and in the tribal areas like Nagaland (52.98%), Manipur (19.25%) and tribal belts in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

The material condition of the bulk of Christians, both in the rural and urban areas, continues to be poor as in their pre-conversion days. Whenever possible, the well-to-do Christians give employment to their poor Christian brethren in their own farms in the rural areas and in the educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages, etc., which they control in the urban areas. It seems possible that the minority condition of the entire community and the general discrimination that the poor Christians experience in the non-Christian world in employment and in social relations draw them closer to the well-to-do Christians. Nevertheless, several educated young Christians and Christian workers and peasants have supported the communist movement in Kerala while the Churches, in combination with non-communist parties, have provided a solid front against communism in the State. On the other hand, in the rural areas especially of Andhra and Tamil Nadu, the poor and uneducated Christians continue to observe their former caste practices and Hindu

religious rituals and festivals.

The problems of Indian Christian leadership today are three-fold : first, to maintain, and whenever possible, to improve their connections with the Christian communities of other nations and with other national and international Christian organisations from which they receive funds and directive for their evangelical work in India, without giving any room for suspicion within India about their loyalty to the country ; secondly, to identify themselves with the national goals of India without losing their own identity as a distinct religious group ; and thirdly, to maintain the present level of loyalty of the vast body of poor Christians in the country in the face of counter-ideologies like communism which could cut across religious frontiers and draw the poor people of various religions into a common cause. While the Indian Christian leaders are aware of these three problems, and are devising plans and strategies to meet the challenge, the restrictions by the Government of India on their foreign visits on foreign missionary visits and work in India and on the receipt of foreign funds for their work in India, have caused a considerable amount of anxiety among them. Such restrictions, they are afraid, might retard whatever progress they are making in their efforts to develop an Indian Christian personality with an international outlook and in strengthening the cohesion in their community by promoting the material condition of the poor Christians with the resources available to them from within and outside India.

While the emergence of an Indian Christian community is the most indisputable contribution of the four centuries of Christian missionary efforts in India, the question of the impact of Christian missionary work on the non-Christian population of India, particularly on the religious philosophy,

beliefs and institutions of Hindus and on their social structure and ethical standards, has become a controversial one in modern Indian history. Ranging from the extreme claims made by the most ardent of the Christian missionaries that almost all the major improvements that had occurred in Indian life and thought in the last two or three centuries are due to Christian influences, to the other extreme position held by the most devout of the Hindus, denying any Christian influence in the resurgence of Hindu religion and society in modern times, the discussions on this question raged in their most intense form during the critical period of India's struggle for freedom when some Christian missionaries tended to identify Indian nationalism with Hindu religious revivalism and when some Hindu scholars and leaders accused the Christian missionaries of collusion with the imperial regime.

The persistence of the belief in the Hindu mind, even after the advent of freedom, that the Christian missionary work is harmful to India's interests is probably nowhere more clearly evident than in the Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee of Madhya Pradesh, commonly called the Niyogi Committee Report of 1956.¹¹ On the basis of its investigations of Christian Missionary activities, particularly in the tribal areas of the State, this Committee recommended to the Government of Madhya Pradesh a number of restrictions on Christian missionary work, not only in the field of conversion, but also in their educational and social welfare programmes. Enraged by the serious allegations made by this Committee of their mission, a group of eminent Catholics brought out in the following year a booklet under the title, *Truth Shall Prevail*, in which its authors, besides refuting the allegations made by the Committee, gave an exhaustive account of the various services rendered by the Christians to the development of

the country.¹²

In the entire mass of such documents coming from the two sides in the past few decades, one could see the religious passions and prejudices, and even bigotry and fanaticism on both sides clearly on their surface, but behind them all one could also see the sincerity of the Christian missionaries in their faith and in their missions and the tenacity of the Hindus in defending their faith even in the midst of the most difficult challenges.

The Christian missionaries were driven by their faith in the truth of their own religion to attack what they considered to be the falsehood in other religions. There was no vindictiveness or pride in them when they desired to destroy the non-Christian faiths. On the other hand, in their crusade against idolatry, polytheism, and superstitious ritualism as well as the social evils like Sati, suppression of women and caste system, they were motivated by a genuine Christian concern for their fellowmen. They felt it their duty to purge the Indian society of its evils, social as well as religious. "The Hindus err" wrote Charles Grant in 1793, "because they are ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them." "The communication of our light and knowledge to them", he added, "would prove the best remedy for their disorder."¹³ Similar was the concern expressed by William Wilberforce when he wrote.

"The course we are recommending (for the introduction of Christianity into India) tends no less to promote their temporal well-being than their eternal welfare ; for such is their real condition that we are prompted to endeavour to communicate to them the benefits of Christian instruction scarcely less by religious principles than by the feeling of common humanity."¹⁴

However, what the early Christian Missionaries did not

realise was their own ignorance of the sophisticated and philosophical side of Hinduism and the tremendous built-in capacity of the Hindu religion to survive in the face of challenge, either by withdrawal, as it did at the time of the Islamic challenge in the earlier period, or by internal reform, as it was doing after the advent of Christian missionary challenge. In consequence, the missionaries were baffled not only by the stubborn refusal of the upper caste Hindus to be drawn towards their religion, but also to see the rise of a spontaneous response to the challenge of their religion emerging in the form of reformist and revivalist movements among the Hindus in many parts of India in the nineteenth century. Since the pioneers of such movements claimed that the main contents of the reforms they were advocating in the contemporary Hindu religion and society were drawn from the indigenous sources of the remote past, the missionaries spent considerable time examining such sources in order to prove that they could not be superior to Christianity. It took quite a long time for the missionaries to discover that the model that the Hindu reformers of the nineteenth century had fixed was in its fundamentals not very different from the one that they themselves upheld, though the arguments for such a model were drawn by the reformers from indigenous sources. As Dr. S. Radhakrishnan observed,

“As a result (of contact with Christianity) Hinduism has become an ethical religion with a social gospel. The influence of the West here is considerable.....the less noteworthy elements in the popular religion are being gradually eliminated and the sublime thoughts of the Upanishads and the Gita are receiving emphasis. It is no small achievement to help a great religion purify itself and this work of purification cannot be estimated by statistics.”¹⁵

In vain were the missionaries looking for numbers in measuring the success of their evangelical work in India, while the lead in reforming Hindu society and religion, exactly as they had desired, had passed quietly into the hands of Hindu reformers. Now that the eminent Christian writers like Raymond Panikkar in his *Unknown Christ of Hinduism* and M. M. Thomas in his *Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, have explained lucidly how this revolution has occurred, the Indian Christians, instead of feeling desperate about their minority condition in the country, must with confidence and a sense of justifiable pride co-operate closely with their non-Christian brethren in carrying forward the great revolution which the early missionaries had spearheaded in order to free the country fully from ignorance and poverty and thus pave the way for building an enlightened and progressive Indian society.¹⁶

No area is perhaps better suited for the Indian Christians to perform this noble function than education which the missionaries had once pioneered, and for which they remain even today adequately trained and prepared, more than any other single community in India. The contributions that the missionaries have made in this area have been duly acknowledged by several eminent men. As Kenneth Ingham has observed, "When indigenous education was both inadequate in quantity and of an exceptionally low standard, when the Company was unable to undertake the promotion of educational schemes and when private individuals, both Indian and European, lacked the organisation to take responsibility upon themselves, the missionaries provided education of a relatively high quality at all levels for a considerable number of Indians, both Christian and non-Christian."¹⁷ Bringing out the unique features of the Christian Missionary educational institutions, the Sadler

Commission observed earlier with reference to Bengal,

“The influence which had been exercised by the missionary colleges upon the development of education in Bengal has been of the highest value and importance. No colleges wield deeper influence over the minds of their students. None have a stronger corporate spirit. The strength of the Mission colleges is very largely due to the fact that they can command the services of a group of men of ability and devotion, who have given themselves up for a long term of years specifically to the service of their college... The influence of the missionary teachers over the minds of their students is, doubtless, further deepened by the fact that they have obviously undertaken their work from no motive of self-interest. Even though they represent a foreign faith and must be for that reason in some degree suspect, they approach more nearly to the spirit of the old Hindu Guru than many college teachers in Bengal.”¹⁸

As Cardinal Gracias, the Archbishop of Bombay, observed, the Christian missionaries have often been pioneers in educational programmes and practices which have raised the standard of education not only in their own institutions, but have stimulated others to raise theirs, and gradually have induced the Government itself to introduce reform. The admission of students from various castes and religious groups facilitated the promotion of inter-caste and inter-communal amity in the Christian institutions. Further, the involvement of students in extra-curricular programmes, especially in the social service programmes in the missionary institutions, widened their perspectives and increased their sense of responsibility to their society.

The missionaries were pioneers in the field of women's

education also, which they entered with the conviction that education was "the one means by which Indian women could come to realise the unnaturalness of their position."¹⁹ "Few attempts to do good", wrote William Carey in 1866, "appear more hedged up with obstacles than the mental instruction of the poor females of India, and yet evident progress has been made and beneficial results witnessed."²⁰ At Madras, where strong opposition was originally encountered, 600 girls had been taught in the London Missionary Society Free Schools before 1833. In the neighbourhood of Calcutta, Miss Cook, the first English lady teacher sent from England, had under her superintendence 15 schools with 600 pupils after a little more than a year's activity. What is significant in the missionary contribution to women's education is not the number of their schools and colleges for girls, for it was always small, but the fact that their initiative in this regard brought to the fore the entire question of the condition of Indian women for public discussion and debate, and thereby facilitated a change in Hindu attitude towards the status of women, resulting ultimately in reformist legislation towards recognition of equality of sexes in civic rights.

Printing, a major tool in the promotion of education, is another field where the missionaries made pioneering efforts, as they did in the study of Indian languages and dialects, and in translations, keeping their evangelical work constantly in mind as the ultimate objective to be attained through these media. As Pandit Nehru observed,

"The printing of books and newspapers broke the hold of the classics and immediately prose literatures in the provincial languages began to develop. The early Christian missionaries, especially the Baptist mission at Serampore, helped in this process greatly.....there was

no difficulty in dealing with the well-known and established languages, but the missionaries went further and tackled some of the minor and undeveloped languages and gave them shape and form, compiling grammars and dictionaries for them. They even laboured at the dialects of primitive hill and forest tribes and reduced them to writing. In this respect, as well as in the collection of folklore, it has undoubtedly been of great service to India."²¹

The Serampore missionaries were the pioneers in this field also. Within fifteen months of his arrival in India, William Carey had translated into Bengali the Book of Genesis and 20 Chapters of the Exodus. By 1821, they announced the translation of the whole Bible into five languages. In 1819, the London Missionary Society published its Telugu Bible. The Gujarati New Testament was printed at Surat in 1823, a Kanarese translation appeared in 1831. The Syrian Church translated the Bible into Malayalam in 1807. At the same time, Henry Martin, the East India Company's Chaplain, translated the Bible into Hindustani. Besides the publication of text-books for schools and colleges, the missionaries undertook major work in the compilation of dictionaries and grammar for the provincial languages. The Tamil grammar and Tamil-English and English-Tamil dictionaries were produced in Madras in 1783. The first edition of Carey's Bengali grammar appeared in 1801. By 1813, he had completed a grammar of Telugu. His Punjabi grammar was ready in the same year, and almost immediately he started collecting materials for the grammar of Kashmiri, Pushtu, Baluchi and Oriya.

The first periodical in Bengali to gain steady circulation was the monthly *Dig Darshan* (the Signpost), published by the Baptists at Serampore, in 1818. It contained articles of

general information and gave notice of local events. Then, in the same year, the missionaries started a weekly newspaper in Bengali called *Samachar Darpan* (Mirror of the News), which aroused the Bengalis to an appreciation of the power of the press. First to react was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who started a publication called *Sambad Kaumadi* in order to defend Hinduism against the attacks made by the *Samachar Darpan*, and also to expound his own plans for the reform of Hinduism. Outlining the main contributions made by the missionaries to the development of languages and literature, Kenneth Ingham has observed,

“At a time when Indian languages were in their infancy, the missionaries were the chief agencies in their systematisation. With their grammars and dictionaries they established these languages upon a firm basis. They enriched them with new expressions, new words, and new ideas. Their numerous printing presses ensured a far wider circulation of books than had ever been known before. Fresh with learning and technical devices from the West, and fired up with the spirit of evangelism, the missionaries gave an impetus to the development of Indian vernacular literature which no indigenous movement could have supplied and which no other European body attempted....Whatever there is of value in Indian literature and journalism today is generally admitted to have been virtually non-existent at the end of the 18th Century. The most important factor in its growth in the earlier part of the 19th Century was the contribution of the Christian missionaries.”⁷²²

Education, in the modern context, especially in the developing regions of the modern world, ought to be a preparation of the individual for service to society. In the past, apart from the direct service that the missionaries had rende-

red to the poor and the weak, particularly in the backward and tribal areas, the products of Christian missionary institutions have served the nation well in various fields. Some among them participated in the national effort to free the country from foreign rule, while others who entered the administrative services at this time kept up the political and administrative stability of the country when power passed from the foreign into Indian hands ; and a third group has served the people directly through professions like journalism, law, teaching, medicine, engineering, etc. It would have been hard for the missionaries to anticipate the mighty revolution that their educational efforts had unleashed in the country which they wanted to evangelise; it would have been harder still at least to some of them to face the challenge that came to their work through this revolution in the form of the Hindu-oriented social service agencies like the Ramakrishna Mission and the secular social service agencies like the Servants of India Society and above all the Gandhian programme for social reconstruction. However, the missionaries should note with satisfaction that it was through them that this idea of organised social work has spread to others in the country. All over the country, through the diffusion of education, formal as well as informal, a mighty revolution which may be called a revolution of the rising expectations is sweeping the society today, and unless these expectations of the masses who have remained dormant and apathetic all these centuries are met adequately and in time, the establishments, secular as well as spiritual, will sooner or later be swept aside. The most enlightened among the Christian leaders have realised that their problem is not how to survive as a community in times of such revolutionary changes, but what new visions they can develop to lead the society that is now filled with a new spirit that the earlier missionaries

had infused into it. No new visions seem to have emerged in the Christian circles thus far, but when we examine the various consultations of the various Christian educational conferences in the post-Independence period, like the one held at Tambaram in Dec.-Jan. 1966-67, new visions seem to be in the process of emergence among them.

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THE IMPACT OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN BENGAL, 1793-1833

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THE FIRST forty years (1793-1833) of Protestant Missionary activities in Bengal were a failure. This was pronounced even by the missionaries themselves. W. Carey (J) of the B.M.S. wrote from Cutwa in 1822 that. "It is more, I think, than 12 years that I have been labouring here, but alas not one brought to the truth through my instrumentality".¹

The Secretary of the B.M.S. had complained that their missionaries in India were backward in correspondence. Pearce explained that "when the success of missionary labours in the East and West Indies is compared, our tardiness may easily be accounted for. It is no pleasing thing to be always telling you of our discouragements".²

The L.M.S. missionaries at Calcutta, "seriously and painfully impressed with little success which hitherto attended their labours", decided in 1820 to set apart "the first Monday of this month as a day of humiliation, fasting and prayer".³

Hill from Berhampore wrote to the Society in 1831, "My greatest reason yet remains, viz.—want of success..."⁴

Jetter reported to the C.M.S. Secretary in 1821, that "with regard to the effect.....I am not able to give you such cheering and encouraging accounts, as you are frequently favoured with from your missionaries in other parts of the globe".⁵

The W.M.M.S. missionary, Hodson, in a letter to the Society in 1833, acknowledged that "India has not yielded to us fruit in proportion to the money and men bestowed upon it".⁶

Although the missionaries failed in their main object of conversion, their activities made an impact—both direct and indirect—on the Bengali Society.

This impact may conveniently be studied under three heads, viz., impact on (i) socio-religious reforms, (ii) on the growth of education, and (iii) on the growth of Bengali Literature.

(1) *The Impact on Socio-religious Reforms*

The vigorous missionary attack was mainly directed against Hindu idol-worship and the rite of Sati. It caused two kinds of reaction—the reformative and the conservative, both trying to defend Hinduism against the onslaught of Christianity, the former by reforming it and the latter by preserving it in all its prevailing forms.

In 1803 the Baptist Missionaries, headed by the famous trio of William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, stationed at Serampore, a Danish Settlement about thirteen miles away from Calcutta, deputed some Indians to collect information about Sati from the vicinity of Calcutta. In 1804 they again stationed ten agents at different places in the same area for six months in order to obtain more accurate information. About the same time Carey collected from the Pandits of Fort William College the various texts of the Hindu Shastras on which Sati practice was based. The statistics collected by the Serampore missionaries were used frequently in subsequent missionary writings against Sati.

In attacking Sati, the missionaries were the first to show that the cruel rite was not sanctioned even by the Hindu Shastras. The same arguments were also advanced by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar (a Fort William College Pandit) in 1817 and Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1818-20 (two tracts).

Having shown that Sati was not sanctioned by the Hindu Shastras, the missionaries continued to demand its total abolition through their periodicals.⁷

When Sati was abolished in 1829, "the orthodox Hindoos comprising the great majority of the Upper Classes,...were astounded and enraged".⁸ A meeting of the conservatives was held at Sanskrit College in 1830, and a Society called Dharma Sabha was formed. The main objects of the Society were : (i) to restore the rite of Sati, and (ii) to protect the general interest of the Hindus.⁹

The missionaries were highly delighted at the abolition. The conservatives furiously assailed both Ram Mohan Roy and the missionaries because of their support of the abolition of Sati. The question was kept alive by the conservatives, and the struggle for and against the Regulation continued till the Sati appeal was rejected in 1832.

Ram Mohan was the first to set in motion a chain of movements to reform "popular Hinduism". Regarding popular religious belief he said in 1804.¹⁰ "in the present age in India, belief in supernatural and miraculous things has grown". He was confident that after an impartial enquiry, man would surely "turn to one Being who is the fountain of the harmonious organisation of the universe".¹¹

There was an apparent similarity in the approaches of Ram Mohan and the Missionaries towards popular Hinduism. The idea of one God was developed systematically by Ram Mohan when he came to settle permanently in Calcutta

in 1815. He decided to attack the abuses of Hinduism and purify it by referring to the main Hindu Scriptures and translating them into Bengali and English. This he considered to be the most effective means to rouse his countrymen to appreciate the original beauty and monotheistic creed of the Hindu Scriptures.

Ram Mohan gathered round him a small circle of intelligent friends and in 1815 started a Society called the *Atmiya Sabha*. This was an association for the dissemination of religious truth and the promotion of free discussion of theological subjects. Although started mainly for religious discussion, in one of its meetings in 1819, the Sabha criticised the practices of polygamy, Sati, caste and food restrictions in Hindu Society.¹³

Because of this similarity of approach towards popular Hinduism the missionaries in the beginning approved of the activities of Ram Mohan and his followers. The missionaries, who had pinned their hopes on the ultimate conversion of the Raja to Christianity,¹³ found to their utter disappointment that the Raja had rejected the Divinity and Atonement of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the miracles and the divine authority of the Holy Scripture. Hence the Serampore missionaries, in their *The Friend of India*, attacked the Raja's views on Christianity and the Raja replied and counter-attacked the missionaries through his "Appeals". Ram Mohan's "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness" published in 1820, which excludes the miracles of Christ, was criticised in *The Friend of India* as greatly injurious to "the cause of truth".¹⁴ Ram Mohan, in his "An Appeal to the Christian public in 1820", explained that his object was to introduce simple truths of Christianity to his countrymen in such a form that they could understand them. In reply to Marshman's further criticism, he published

his "Second Appeal" in 1821. Towards the close of the controversy, "A Christian" appealing to the "Christian Readers" asked, "are you so far degraded by Asiatic effeminacy as to behold with indifference Your holy and immaculate Religion thus degraded by having it placed on equality with Hinduism with rank idolatry—with disgraceful ignorance and shameful superstition?"¹⁵ Ram Mohan replied, "Before a Christian indulged in a tirade about persons being degraded by Asiatic effeminacy, he should have recollected that almost all ancient prophets and patriarchs venerated by Christians, nay even Jesus Christ himself, were Asiatics, so that if a Christian thinks it degrading to be born or to reside in Asia, he directly reflects upon them."¹⁶

During the same period Ram Mohan was also defending the essentials of Hinduism against missionary attack. Thus when the six Hindu doctrines (of Vedanta, Nyaya, Mimansa, Sankhya, Puranas, and Tantras) were attacked by the Serampore missionaries in one of the issues of *Samachar Darpan* in 1821,¹⁷ Ram Mohan vindicated Hinduism in his *The Brahmanical Magazine*. He denounced the attempt of the missionaries to introduce Christianity in Bengal, "by means of abuse and insult, or by affording the hope of worldly gain", as "totally inconsistent with reason and justice."¹⁸

During this controversy, Bishop Middleton tried to convert Ram Mohan Roy to Christianity with an assurance that after conversion he would "be honoured in life and lamented in death; honoured in England as well as in India, his name would descend to posterity as that of the modern Apostle of India".¹⁹ This repelled and disgusted Ram Mohan.

Ram Mohan's desire to reform Hinduism culminated in the establishment of a "Theistic Church" in 1828. In the beginning the Society was called Brahma Sabha, but soon

changed its name to Brahma Samaj. His attempt to reform Hinduism by attacking popular idol-worship, rituals and ceremonies, aroused the opposition of the orthodox section of the Hindu Community. They vigorously launched a crusade against both the reformist Brahma Samaj and the Christian Missionaries.

In spite of the great difference between the Reformists and the Conservatists in their approach towards Hinduism, they both condemned almost in identical terms the missionary methods of conversion.

H. H. Wilson, in a letter to a missionary in 1832, explained the Indian attitude towards the missionaries. He wrote that Indians regard the missionary preachings "to an idle and ignorant mob" and their "indiscriminate distribution of tracts" as a "violation of decorum".²⁰ The Indians "ascribe the conversion of the low and indigent people" to some "interested motives" and "charge the missionaries with misrepresenting the number and respectability of the converts".²¹ The Indians also charge the missionaries "with uncharitableness in judging of the national character, and with exaggeration and untruth in the printed statements or the reported speeches addressed to the Christian public".²² Wilson concluded his letter saying, "These are the practices which,.....are imputed to the missionaries generally,..... which...have lowered the Missionary character in the opinion of the most respectable Natives of Bengal".²³

(2) *The Growth of Education*

The general system of education, initiated by the missionaries at Serampore and Chinsurah, attracted great attention from the people. The Calcutta School Society, formed by the co-operation of Indians and Europeans, appre-

ciated and recognised the usefulness of the missionary system of general education. The eagerness among the people and the "spirit of establishing and maintaining schools, especially charity schools", writes Carey in 1822, "is to me a matter of great encouragement."⁴

The most important of these institutions, that helped to spread education in Bengal and played an outstanding part in the regeneration of ideas, was the Hindu College, established in 1817. "The Leading Hindoos", who met at Sir Edward Hyde East's house in 1816 with the object of establishing a College "for the education of their children in a liberal manner as practised by Europeans", were "composed of various castes" and of "most distinguished Pandits".⁵

The establishment of the Hindu College attracted the attention of the missionaries from the very beginning. The interest of the missionaries in the growth of English education was underlined with a great expectation. After giving a full account of the Hindu College, the London Missionary Society expressed a firm belief that the diffusion of Western learning would surely "prepare the way for...future reception of Christianity."⁶

The appointment of H.V.L. Derozio as an assistant master in the Senior department of the College brought "a new era in the annals of the College".⁷ Derozio was a gifted and powerful writer, a scholar, a poet and a patriot and above all a radical thinker. He encouraged free thinking among his students, who gathered round him even after the college hours for discussing social, moral and religious subjects. Derozio and his students started the first debating club ever conducted by Indians, in 1828, called the Academic Association. With the utmost freedom students discussed topics

like "free will", fore-ordination, fate, faith, the sacredness of truth, the high duty of cultivating virtue, and the meanness of vice, the nobility of patriotism, the attributes of God, and the arguments for and against the existence of Deity".²⁸ Under Derozio's guidance, his students started the first English paper conducted by Indians, called *Parthenon*, in 1830.

The effect of this "search for knowledge" under Derozio was tremendous among the students. A great revolution took place in their world of ideas, particularly in their ideas of religion. "From implicit faith in the religion of their forefathers, they rushed into blank scepticism. They began to reason, to question, to doubt. The Hindu mind..... had suddenly become not only liberal but ultra radical."²⁹ The condition of the Hindus and Hinduism formed the main topic of many of their debates. "The Hindu religion was denounced as vile and corrupt and unworthy of regard of rational beings".³⁰ Thus writes the Rev. L. V. De, "The Young Lion of the Academy roared out, week after week ! Down with Hinduism ! Down with orthodoxy !"³¹ The spirit of this revolt was not confined to debates only, it began, to be manifested in the behaviour of some of the students also. Some of them freely indulged in the forbidden food and drink.

Thus the orthodox Hindu Society, having been scandalised beyond measure, tried to put down the "heresy" in every possible way. The Committee for the College took the drastic step of dismissing Derozio, who was considered "the root of all evils."³² But Derozio continued to attract students even after his dismissal. He, however, died shortly afterwards, in 1831.

The search for "truth" among the Derozians even alarmed the missionaries. The students ridiculed Chris-

tianity in terms similar to the ones used against Hinduism. The L.M.S. missionaries regarded the Hindu College as "likely to prove the instruments of raising up the strongest enemies of the Gospel. The students of the Hindoo College are everyday becoming more advanced in a knowledge of general literature and science, and in proportion as they rise in these respects they become the more powerful in argument and are altogether too subtle as antagonists for the uneducated native assistants hitherto employed by the different missionaries."³³

The missionaries discovered the source of this state of mind among the educated youngmen in the system of education itself. They believed that the "exclusion of Christianity" was the reason for all those "evils". As a remedy, the Rev. Dr. Alexander Duff decided to establish his higher Christian institute at Calcutta. The Hindus also, with the intention of remedying the "evils", started establishing new educational institutions both in and outside Calcutta. The growth of education thus became a cause as well as a consequence of the great popular agitation which was to take place in future.

(3) *The Growth of Bengali Literature*

The works of Carey and their publication by the Serampore Press gave birth to what may be called modern Bengali Literature. The Serampore Press published, for the first time, many of the classics edited by learned pundits. Soon the people, inspired by the Serampore example, started to establish Presses and turn out printed books. Commenting on the operation of the Indian Press, *The Friend of India* wrote in 1820 that "within the last ten years, native works have been printed by Natives themselves and sold among

the Hindoo population with astonishing rapidity."⁸⁴ Most of the books were religious books printed from old manuscripts.

With the increase of publications, there arose some societies whose main object was to cultivate the Bengali language and literature.

Although all these served the cause of the growth of Bengali language and literature, their rapid development was made possible only by the publication of Bengali periodicals. Here also *Dig-Darshan* and *Samachar Darpan* of Serampore Mission showed the way. There were altogether about twenty seven Bengali periodicals of different types between 1818 and 1829, and fifteen between 1830 and 1833. Most of these periodicals were very short-lived. The majority followed a conservative policy.

The birth of so many periodicals within such a short time clearly indicates a thirst for knowledge and a taste for reading among the public. Greater attention was paid to the refinement of the language.

The missionaries observed a slow change among the people under Western impact. The S.P.C.K. reported in 1819, "A new era of things appears to be rising in the Eastern world, light is emerging out of darkness, long rooted prejudices seem, by a slow yet perceptible progress, to be wearing away."⁸⁵ Thomas Robertson, a C.M.S. Committee member, in a report about their Burdwan Schools wrote in 1819, "an era seems to be dawning upon India, similar to that which prepared the way for the Reformation in Europe."⁸⁶

Commenting on the development of the Indian Press, the Serampore missionaries opined in 1820 that "The era of improvement and of civilisation has already dawned on this

country. We may fairly expect a similar regeneration in India (as in Europe)".³⁷

From all these observations the Religious Tract Society concluded confidently in 1832, "That Christianity is advancing in India, appears to be generally admitted by all."³⁸ Other missionaries pronounced that, "That temple of God has not yet been erected in this part of the world, but the mighty fabric of Hindooism is tottering and many anticipate its fall".³⁹

The missionaries were right in their observations but entirely wrong in their prediction. The impact of the old and new ideas gave birth to an awakening among the people, which paved the way for a Renaissance in Bengal. The missionaries in Bengal played a significant role in preparing the background of this Renaissance and were deeply connected with it in the beginning. In conclusion, it may be said that in spite of the failure of the missionaries to gain their main object, they made a lasting contribution towards social progress in Bengal. The socio-religious reforms were the last thing that the missionaries wanted but they were what followed from their activities in Bengal.

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THE EFFECTS OF THE PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN WESTERN MAHARASHTRA (1813-1858)

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THIS paper makes an effort to show the social consequences of the Protestant Christian Missionary movement in Western Maharashtra under the rule of the East India Company. The Charter Act of 1813 gave a free hand to missionaries in any part of India under the East India Company.¹ The American missionaries came to Bombay in the same year.² The English and Scottish missionaries came to Maharashtra in 1820 and 1822 respectively. Throughout the period from 1814 to 1858, the American, the English and Scottish missionaries gave full co-operation to each other in their avowed work, i.e., the spread of Christianity. But the Roman Catholic missionaries were quite inactive up to 1854.³ Hence in the period under review, the Protestant missionaries were the only group engaged in spreading Christianity in Western Maharashtra.

The foundation of the rule of the East India Company was not then strong enough, hence the shrewd politician-administrator Mountstuart Elphinstone refused to co-operate with the missionaries from the authoritative level.⁴

The people in general in Maharashtra did not like the arrival of the missionaries. They had bitter experiences about the ways of the Portuguese to convert the people to Christianity. Besides, the yoke of foreign rule and the

missionary movement came hand in hand in Maharashtra. A missionary was an unwelcome quantity to them.⁵ Even then, because of peoples' tolerance, missionaries were able to carry on their work.

The ways of Protestant missionaries were different from those of the Portuguese. The Protestant missionaries insisted on the path of Evangelisation, i.e., to convert a person by conversion of his mind, unlike the way of proselytisation, i.e., the fair or foul means to make a person give up his own religion for Christianity.⁶ The Protestant missionaries had no support from the rulers. To fulfil their avowed object, they became preachers and teachers, authors, printers and publishers. They ran asylums for orphans and helpless adults. They tried their best to contact the people from all walks of life, youngsters and elders, men and women, educated and uneducated, city-dwellers and villagers. Their main stations were Bombay, Poona, Ahmednagar and Nasik and the adjoining rural area. By all these means the missionary movement had overall effects on the people of Maharashtra.

In the history of Maharashtra this was the period of transition. The slow process of the transformation of society from the medieval stage to the modern one was going on. The forces which were helping the process were the new system of alien administration, the new techniques of trade and commerce, and the new system of education. This meant imparting knowledge only of secular subjects on a higher level, unknown to the indigenous system of education. The missionary movement also lent a helping hand to the other forces.

The society as such was rural and static. Predominance of religion, which insisted only on rituals and not on doctri-

nes, involved the common man in a chain of customs. To break these rules of behaviour was as good as giving up religion. The caste system had a strong hand not only in the religious and social life but also in the economic and educational life. The caste system was a suitable structure of the society for rural, self-sufficient village life. Naturally the priestly caste had always an upper hand to lead and guide the society.

In this condition, the young generation from the higher castes like Brahmin, Prabhu, and Shenavi came forward to learn in the Government and Mission Schools, with the hope of better chances in life. The missionaries realised that this was the class to lead the society in future, because from this class only the subordinate Government staff was to be selected, who could have direct contacts with the common people. Again this was the class where new values, new concepts were introduced by the new education and from which the leaders with new visions were to emerge to lead the society. Hence to attract the young and sensitive students, the missionaries opened high schools in Bombay, Poona, Ahmednagar and Nasik. Secular as well as religious subjects were taught in these schools, which were free to prepare students as preachers for Christianity.

The people in general did not like to attend the mission schools, but in the hope of a better life through education, they joined these schools. At the same time a large section of the young generation was learning in Government Schools and from the view point of the missionaries they were bound to be atheist. The missionaries resented this class of people, because the strongest opposition to them would have come through this class. Hence, to contact these people the missionaries organised extension lectures on religious and non-religious subjects, competitions of debating and essay-

writing on social and religious reforms.

The educated youth of those days like Balshastri Jambhekar, Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar, Nana Shankershet, Bhau Mahajan and Bhau Daji, Jamshetji Jeejibhai, Framji Cawasji from Bombay and Gopal Hari Deshmukh alias 'Lokhitwadi' and Jotiba Phule from Poona came into some kind of contact with the missionaries. The seeds of new thought had already been sown in their minds and the missionaries added to them in their own way. This class of people gradually came to accept these new thoughts on principle but were unable to carry them into practice because of socio-religious pressures. One can see how the whole society was aroused in one way or other in the case of the "Shreepat Sheshadri affair."

Shreepat Sheshadri was a Brahmin boy of twelve years. He stayed with his brother Narayan for some days after Narayan's baptism in 1843. When their father came to know of this, he came to Bombay from Marathwada to take charge of his minor son. After an effort of five days, the father was convinced that he would not get his son back. He went to Court with the help of Nana Shankershet and Balshastri Jambhekar. The Court ordered the missionaries to hand over Shreepat to his father.⁷ As the boy had been staying with the missionaries for some days and had taken food with them, the orthodox people did not allow the boy to be readmitted into the caste. The boy insisted that he wanted to be a Christian. His relatives and others persuaded him with great efforts and he was willing to get "Prayschitta". Balshastri Jambhekar took the lead, the boy was sent to Banaras for *Bhagirathisnan* after "Poorwang Prayschitta". After the thread-ceremony, the boy and his father returned to Bombay. By this time the orthodox party was in strong opposition to this "Shuddhikaran" and refused to take back

the boy into the caste. The boy remained an outcaste for his whole life, neither did he become a Christian.⁸

In the case of Shreepat Sheshadri one can see how the whole society was excited and what were the currents and crosscurrents of religious thought in the society. The orthodox party was not willing to move an inch from traditions. The reformists like Balshastri Jambhekar collected letters of consent for Shuddhikaran from the learned Brahmins of Bombay, Poona, Nasik and Banaras.⁹ He got consent from the Shankaracharya of Kolhapur also.¹⁰ The reformist group, which was very small in number, stood behind Balshastri and periodicals like the *Prabhakar* and the *Upadeshchandrika* wrote articles after articles to explain the views of the reformists. The orthodox party felt that, once "Shuddhikaran" was established, people would accept Christianity and come back to Hinduism for selfish purpose, which would destroy Hinduism.¹¹ They collected letters of opposition to "Shuddhi" from Brahmins all over Maharashtra¹² and took the decision to excommunicate the reformists who performed "Shuddhikaran Vidhi" for Shreepat.¹³ The opposition was so strong that one after another, the reformists bowed down to the orthodox party and to prevent strife in the society, Balshastri also performed the "Prayaschitta Vidhi".¹⁴

There were also some rumours to back or to oppose both the parties. One was that the missionaries had given a bribe to the orthodox party so that they would get the boy back for baptism. Another rumour was that the Government had given a bribe to the reformists for Shuddhi, so that once the boy was readmitted into the caste, the whole caste would be "Ashuddha", and would have to get converted to Christianity. It was believed that, that was the Government's way to help the missionaries.¹⁵ The missionaries, on the other

hand, stated that the Brahmins of Banaras would not perform "Shuddhi" without a lot of bribe.¹⁶

As the missionaries were working for twenty years in the various parts of Maharashtra, the people of many castes and other than Hindus took interest in this case. The triangular struggle of the orthodox, the reformists and the missionaries was going on for about two years. The whole affair shows how the society was churned because of the activities of the missionaries.

By this time the first generation had come out of Government and Mission Schools. The reformists emerged from this group. There were many shades in the reformist thought. Sometimes there were changes in thoughts and deeds due to the pressure of social and religious conditions. People like Balshastri Jambhekar fully realised the correctness of missionary criticism on Hindu social customs. They also supported the thought of religious reforms and protection of Hinduism by way of 'Shuddhi', but this group was small in number and lacked in courage to put reforms into practice.¹⁷ G. N. Madgaonkar represents a group which was in the company of the missionaries for a long time. This group was convinced of Christian doctrines but was not willing to accept Christianity, as they wanted to remain Hindus, but they were for social reforms on Christian lines.

Jotiba Phule and Dadoba Pandurang Tarkhadkar were attracted in their early years to the thoughts and ways of missionaries, but after studying other religions also, they preferred to found new sects like "Satyashodhak Samaj" and "Prarthana Samaj" in the second half of the nineteenth century. Reformists like Bhau Mahajan, the editor of the *Prabhakar*, welcomed the acceptable part of missionaries' criticism but at the same time they criticised the missionaries in a number of ways and opposed them. Persons like

Vishnubawa Brahmachari tried to explain Hinduism from a rationalistic point of view and exhorted the youth to break the chains of outdated and unjustifiable social conventions.¹⁸ His was an unique method to protect Hinduism and oppose the missionaries.

Besides these small groups there was a group which had no faith in any religion. The orthodox group included this group also amongst the reformists. All these various trends in the reformist group were not so clear in those days, but they show how society got the impetus for a new way of thinking about religious and social life.

There was a group of converts to Christianity—the fruit of missionary labour. This group was small in number, but its very appearance angered the orthodox party and made the reformists question them. There was also a group of hidden Christians which had not openly accepted Christianity because of the fear of society.¹⁹

During the course of its development, Hinduism produced, in every aspect of life, one or other guise of religious convention. Society forgot to change these conventions in the context of changing conditions. Hence the whole life of society was entangled in the strong threads of conventions. Missionaries consistently attacked Hindu Society, and created a sort of awareness in the young minds of that day. The role of religion was a constant theme for them to think over; "What is true religion? What are its characteristics? Is it God-made or man made? If it is man-made, what is the touch-stone to test the truth in it? If true religion is only for a particular group, what is the future of other groups? If all the religions are true, why do men blame each others' religions?"²⁰ These questions clearly show how the propaganda of the missionaries and their attacks on various

and Hindu Society. But a more powerful agency like schools was not used at all in this period by the reformists for their purpose. Vishnubawa Brahmachari's preachings were powerful enough to keep the missionaries on their toes²⁴.

The reformists tried to found new organisations to reform Hinduism. One such notable effort was the foundation of the "Paramhansasabha". The members of this society used to get together secretly and take the oath of not observing any rules of caste, having faith in only one God. They insisted on morality, freedom of thought and deed and education for all.²⁵ All these efforts, either by the orthodox or by the reformists, had no organisational or monetary backing; hence their efforts were neither continuous nor co-ordinated. They were not powerful enough to resist the organised, planned and dedicated efforts of the missionaries. The other point was that while resisting the missionaries, both the parties attacked each other. In the view of the orthodox, to say a single word against traditions was tantamount to accepting Christianity. This notion was harmful to the cause of social reformists, because they were branded as Christians by the orthodox.²⁶

The missionary movement made the educated persons aware that the social and religious lives were distinct from each other. The targets of missionary attacks were mostly the Sati System, Child-marriage and Caste System. These social conventions were persisting in the name of religion. Hence the reformists started thinking on new lines for social reforms, irrespective of religion.

The uplift of women was a new direction of social reforms, pioneered by the missionaries. Education of women was the first step to break the chains of tradition. The first

school for native girls was established in 1824 in Bombay by the American missionaries.²⁷ By 1858 the number of mission schools had increased in Bombay to about seventeen. Four were in Poona, four in Ahmednagar and its vicinity and in Nasik there were two schools. In Bankote and Harnai area in the coastal region of Konkan, many girls' schools were established by the Scottish missionaries.

The responsibility of girls' education was not taken at all by the Government. The indigenous system did not recognise women's education. Hence girls' education was the child of missionaries only in those days. The successful working of girls' schools by the missionaries was noticed by the students of the Elphinstone Institution, who got inspiration to establish schools for their own sisters and daughters. The Students' Literary and Scientific Society was established by these Elphinstonians, who opened three Marathi and three Gujarati Schools for girls in Bombay in 1849.²⁸ Jotiba Phule established a girls' school in Poona in 1851. He himself admitted that he took inspiration to start such schools after visiting Synthia Farrar's Girls' Schools in Ahmednagar, which were conducted by the American Mission.²⁹ "Kalyanonnayak Mandali" established schools for girls in Ahmednagar. The significant fact to note is that, wherever girls' schools were established by the missionaries, they were followed by girls' schools established in the same area by the social reformers.

The other field of social reform was the education of the masses. The Government accepted the principle of imparting education for all, but in practice only the high caste pupils attended schools. People like Dhackji Dadaji threatened the Government to take back the support for Government educational institutions, if low caste pupils were

allowed to attend them.³¹ The Missionaries imparted education to all pupils on an equal level and this was the beginning of mass education in Maharashtra. Jotiba Phule opened schools for low-caste pupils and here also he proved his courage to put reforms into practice.

With the seeds of social reform the seeds of social disunity were also sown by the missionaries. In the course of their activities, the first target of their attack was the caste-system and the other was the position of Brahmins. The political power was taken away from the Brahmins by the East India Company, but at the same time Elphinstone took care to retain the nominal throne of the Maratha Chatrapati at Satara.³² The solidarity of British rule depended on the disunity of society. Missionary activities helped the rulers by creating scorn in the minds of low caste people against the high castes and particularly against the Brahmins.

The missionaries were mostly successful in their avowed work among the lower castes. It was good that the lower castes became aware of the injustice done to them. But instead of starting the process of eradication of the evils of the caste system, the process of disunity of society was started by creating inimical sentiments between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, which played and are still playing a destructive role in the history of Maharashtra. However, one must admit that to break the medieval social system was a necessity of the time and the missionary movement extended its hand to fulfil it, along with the new administration and new education.

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SHRIMAN NRISINHACHARYA AND SHRI SHREYA SADHAK ADHIKARI VARGA

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REPORTING in 1921 Census of India, Vol. XVII, Baroda State, Part I, the Census Commissioner had this to say on religious condition in Gujarat as a whole.

“In Gujarat, few sects have any chance, at least among the lettered classes, which attempt to interfere to any extent with the caste arrangements” (p. 126).

And he felt that was the reason why neither Brahma Samaj, nor Arya Samaj, nor Prarthana Samaj could make any deep impression. There is some truth in this observation. Here only such movements of reform that were touched with modern influences and yet remained within the fold had greater chance of success.

The people of Gujarat were not against reform so much but when new societies like the Brahma Samaj consistently set their face against what they considered ‘extravagant *laudator temporis acti* (meaning thereby ‘those who prefer the good old days’), the people reviled them as pro-Christian and denationalised. As against movements of comprehensive reforms like Brahma Samaj or Prarthana Samaj, Shri Shreya Sadhak Adhikari Varga was identified “as a movement checked by defence of orthodoxy” by the above-mentioned Census Commissioner. However, it will be truer to say that the Varga was something like the Counter-Reformation of the

Jesuits, particularly in its effort to reinterpret the ancient gospel and rehabilitate it without its abusive accretions. To understand better the significance of the whole movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and early part of the present century, along with the character of its founder-propagator, the movement should be seen from a proper historical perspective.

Social and Religious Conditions in Gujarat in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century

Caught between the political influence resulting from the suppression of the Revolt of 1857 and varied flow of social reform, the Indian people were trying to preserve their cultural identity. The peaceful process of reform was suddenly interrupted by violent events. In the thick air of uncertainty, imitation and impatience loomed large. The radical reformists were busy furiously downgrading the entire spectrum of the ancient religion, while they really attacked the later accretions and abusive practices found in religious and social life. Under the magic spell of the West, the very foundation of Indian culture was shaking. On the other hand, the staunch element in orthodoxy had increased its grip over the unsuspecting and credulous people and encouraged blind faith and belief in traditional *Sanatan Dharma* and its supposed sanction to several immoral and inhuman social practices. Idol-worship was reduced to a meaningless ritualistic mechanism and it appeared ludicrous to non-Hindus. The Vaishnavas in their daily worship of the deity, Krishna and Radha or Vishnu and his consort Laxmi, used to wake them up, bathe and dress them in silken attire, feed them with sweets and fruits, burn incense and offer flowers, rest them on flower-bedecked swings and put

them after the twilight in their beds to rest and sleep. Several Dharmacharyas, to whom simple folks turned for advice and guidance, were illiterate and uneducated and so could hardly give proper guidance. Thus, at a critical time, the priesthood of the Hindus was found wanting in their capacity and equipment to sustain *Sanatan Dharma* in all its pristine purity and utility.

To meet this challenge, several reformers in Gujarat came forward. Poet Narmadashanker, Dalapatram Dahyabhai, Nandshanker, Navalram, Durgaram, Mahipatram, Karsandas Mulji were reformers in their own way. They did not join any all-India movement, but furthered the cause of reform in accordance with their taste, calibre and convenience. But the later course of reforming zeal tended to become lop-sided and lose its balance, giving rise to unrestrained and indiscriminate extremism. Several social reformers like Narmadashanker and Navalram dissociated themselves from such reform activities that tended solely to decry religion. They now tried intelligently to follow the "Aryan Path."

Many who favoured reforms, advocated by Brahmo Samaj, found it leaning more to 'Samaj' than 'Brahmo'. And when it turned its face against the widely-accepted concepts of *Avatar*, reincarnation and imagery, despite their belief in one, indivisible God, the larger section of society could not go on subscribing its way,

The reforming families of Bholanath Sarabhai Divetia and Mahipatram Rupram Nilkantha lent their powerful support to the Prarthana Samaj in Ahmedabad and once Nrisinhacharya himself presided over its branch at Surat. But as he did not fully subscribe to its regulation and the Prarthana Samaj became more 'sophisticated', he left it.

This 'exclusiveness' of the Prarthana Samaj prevented it from becoming a mass movement in Gujarat. Similarly, the puritanical attitude and militancy of the Arya Samaj could not find a following in Gujarat. The Theosophical Society too was found having its own superstitions and dogmas, and its 'secretiveness' and foreign origin were not likely to win over people on a large scale.

In this background, when a section of the intelligentsia wished to steer clear, without losing its moorings, that Nrisinhacharya appeared. Narmadashanker Mehta, the veteran scholar of the Varga, rightly observes : "When Pauranic Hinduism degenerated itself into idle idolatry and Western India even under University education could get no inspiration either from the orthodox Saivism of Smarta or Pashupat school or from the Sakta cult of the Tantric school or from the Vaishnavism of Ramanuj or Vallabhacharya or Swaminarayan or from the religious reform movements of Arya Samaj or Prarthana Samaj, the province of Gujarat produced both a saint and a genius in the person of Shriman Nrisinhacharya, who brought about a wonderful revival of the Vedic religion in its three forms of ritual, worship and knowledge." He founded Shri Shreya Sadhak Adhikari Varga in Baroda. Beginning as a distinct Baroda movement, it spread out and came into prominence in 1890s, 1901s and 1920s.

Shri Shreya Sadhak Adhikari Varga or the Society of Seekers of Spiritual Bliss did not claim to be a sect, though it had known 2,003 members in 1921. Its founder, Shriman Nrisinhacharya, was a Nagar Brahman born in 1853. In his early youth, he led a successful secular life in Government service and in that period came under the influence of a sadhu named Mohan Swami. This Swami initiated him

into a deeper spiritual insight. He gave up the Government service and devoted all his time in 'contemplation of the Divine'. Now a large number of pupils and devotees, followers and admirers from different walks of life, surrounded him. In this motley crowd were zamindars, cultivators, mechanics, merchants, teachers, lawyers, professors and administrators, both men and women, high and low, princes and paupers. It was by the force of his character as an exemplary householder rather than by mere lectures and sermons that he exercised his influence. There seems to be another reason also for his commanding confidence. "In him all his pupils found not only a unique religious teacher but a loving parent, an intimate friend and an infallible guide in all matters—earthly, divine and spiritual." After Nrisinhacharya's death in 1897, the work of the Varga was looked after on behalf of his minor son Upendracharya by Chootalal Master, the chief disciple.

Does it Differ Theologically with Current Hinduism?

Looking to the mass of literature of the Varga, one feels that it was essentially a purifying movement, attempting to reinterpret *Sanatan Hindu Dharma* with a view to striking a harmonious balance between the three well known paths, viz., emotive *Bhakti Marga*, rational *Jnan Marga* and ritualistic *Yoga Marga*. Hence, not unnaturally, one notices more areas of agreement than disagreement in its main philosophical thinking. It does not overemphasise any one of the Paths but speaks of blending them together. It was against the dry bones of Shankaracharya's Vedantic knowledge that Ramanuj and Vallabhacharya propagated the more moving emotional approach of *Bhagvat Bhav* or intense love for the deity.

But this total submission, without acquiring adequate knowledge of *Tapas* or penance and *Tyag* or renunciation, proved equally barren and later sank into seeking a life full of pleasures of all kinds.

It was as a protest against this pleasure seeking of Pushti Margi Vaishnavas of Vallabhacharya sect that Swami Sahajanand, later called Swami Narayan, had founded a sect after that name in the latter half of the eighteenth century, with its emphasis on *Tyag* and *Vairagya*. Swami Sahajanand reformed the predatory tribes of Kathis in Kathiawad. Most of the followers of this sect belong to the lower strata of society. However, too much emphasis on *Bhakti* and a total ban on women entering their temples, continue to plague it.

On such concepts as *Brahma*, *Maya*, *Jagat*, *Ishwar* and *Moksha* of current Hinduism, the interpretation of the Varga conformed to those as expounded in the *Shruti* as well as in the *Smriti* but insisted that they might not be accepted without being satisfied by *Praman* or standards contained in logic and one's own experience. It also insists on *Sva Dosh Nirikshan* or introspection, *Sanyam* or restrained life, *Sad Vichar* or noble thoughts and *Sarva Dharma Samabhav* or respect for all religions. For final *Shreya* or spiritual well-being, the Seeker or *Sadhak* has to become worthy of it or acquire *Adhikar* or eligibility and work thereafter under the guidance of the *Sadguru* or the Master.

It is only after intense soul-stirring inside and conscious *Sadachar* outside that the ultimate *Chiti Swaroop* could be attained. It is implied in the Varga teaching that breaking the social system, based on *Varnashram*, without properly understanding the spirit behind it would create chaos. Despite this support to the traditional social system, the

Varga was liberal enough to admit within its fold all without reference to caste, creed or sex and guided them according to their *Adhikar* ascertained on the basis of their equipment and acuteness of desire.

According to Nrisinhacharya, *Tyag* and *Sanyas* were not the recourse of timid escapism but it is for those who have overcome the usual compulsions of desires. For him *Grihastha Sanyasi* or ascetic householder was a practicable proposition, the requirements being following of *Aparigrah* or not to store goods beyond one's real necessity, and going on to perform one's duty or *Svadharmā*.

Finally, it may be said that the Varga did not oppose image worship but considered it not an end in itself but a means to an end. The leading Varga followers, therefore, were not blind worshippers of idols or symbols of the ordinary Vaishnava or Shaiva cult. They were also not 'mere speculators of the modern Vedantic type.' They were practical religious men. Their occult teaching consisted of four forms of Yoga, i.e., *Hatha*, *Laya*, *Mantra* and *Raj*.

In short, the theistic view of the Varga is more allied to *Saguna Brahmanvad* of Shankar's school of Vedant. As the aim of the Varga was subordination of mundane to spiritual bliss, its teaching had both an individual and a general bias. There was thus an esoteric as well as an 'Open Circle'. The Guru required devotion and action on the part of his disciple but as subsequent to thought.

The Varga as a Protest Movement

As the significance of western ideas, innovations and education became clear, there were those who went with open arms to welcome them as against those who closed their eyes, withdrew and looked to the past for inspiration.

Between these two types of response on the Indian side, there was the third one that desired to chart a middle course. The enlightenment and rationalism, fostered by the West, made them ponder over their religious system and social institutions with a view to finding out where they went wrong in the past and why they failed. They did not think that the *Sanatan Dharma* had lost its vitality and relevance in modern times. But they did accept that over the past centuries its bright image had been vitiated, and taking advantage of weaker moments in its existence, the selfish and vested interests had twisted it to suit their ends.

This could happen because those who were responsible for its preservation had become lazy, did not study intelligently and failed to give dynamic leadership at critical junctures. In short, they did not perform their duty or *Svadharma* and failed to live up to expectation. So Nrisinhacharya protested against uneducated, illiterate and ill-equipped priesthood. Their failure became all the more glaring when they could not give satisfactory replies to severe criticism made of the *Sanatan Dharma* by Christian Missionaries and scholars.

The Varga protested against the lack of well-synchronised teaching and guidance of contemporary sects. It lamented the want of liberalism in several of them. It objected to the deadweight of long and arduous ritualistic practices that obstructed progressive ideologies based on rationalism and humanism.

It protested against a system of education completely divested of native ingenuity, culture and moral science. To it, English education appeared entirely based on foreign ideas and modes. It was also expensive and examination-oriented and the British devised it to meet their require-

ments. It therefore did not impart proper knowledge or build character. The Varga therefore had founded what was called *Charitra Mandir* to avoid the pitfalls of English education.

The Varga was unhappy with the condition of women in Hindu society. It protested against denial of education to them or absence of opportunities to prove their worth in a changing society. In the Varga, they not only organised their exclusive activities but also fully participated in the general programmes.

In the writings of the Varga and pronouncements of its Gurus, one notices its protest against the dearth of nation-building activities, such as promotion of cottage-industries with its emphasis on Swadeshi.

Along with its attacks on entrenched priesthood, exploitation of Christian Missionaries and foreign government, the Varga also considered several activities of either the Brahmo Samaj or Prarthana Samaj as more in tune with the tenets of Christianity than of the *Sanatan Dharma*. Hence, the Varga was a protest movement with a difference and in a limited sense.

Its Social Objectives

By the time the Varga came into existence in 1882, the Western ideas and ideologies had made a deep impact on Indian society. To a contemporary of Nrisinhacharya, it appeared almost as if the young generation of the time "would break away from their allegiance to the mother culture and pledge its allegiance to an alien way of life." Perhaps Swami Shivanand of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh was voicing in these words genuine fears of many

an Indian of his time. So a call went out from such noble souls as Dayanand Saraswati, Ramakrishna Paramhans, Shri Raman Maharshi and Shriman Nrisinhacharyaji to revive vigorously the Vedic religion and purify the society of its superstitions and corruptions. They awakened the Hindus to the true grandeur and glory of their mother culture.

In keeping with this ideal, the Varga too called for physical, mental and spiritual progress of man, drawing its sustenance from the *Sanatan Dharma* under the guidance of a capable Guru or guide. The Varga, therefore, laid great stress on the ancient *Guru-Shishya* tradition. As the Varga admitted within its fold all, irrespective of birth and other accidental circumstances, in quest of spiritual bliss, the later *Guru-Shishya* relationship depended much on their mutual 'clicking'. The Varga followers were expected to lead an exemplary life properly regulated by discipline.

The happy conjugal life of a pious householder, prepared to turn the material means of pleasure into means of moral and spiritual uplift, was another ideal placed before the society by Nrisinhacharyaji.

To spread the message of the Varga in society, various means were adopted. Preaching and propagandist literature, periodic congregations and festivals, mass singing or *Sankirtan*—all found place in the Varga activities.

The Varga was conscious of problems facing children, women and the youth of the land. Its concern for balanced education has already been hinted at. Questions of balanced diet and hygiene also interested it. When Shri Upendracharya succeeded his father as a Guru, he added aesthetic elements into the worship. His wife Jayantidevi trained a good number of women and children in the different fine arts.

Its Direct and Indirect Effects on Contemporary Society

The hypnotic personality of Shriman Nrisinhacharyaji attracted specially the spiritually-minded, intelligent, English-educated people but his society included other types as well. Apart from some of the leading scholars, thinkers and writers of Gujarat then, the Varga had the orthodox, traditionalist Nagindas Sanghavi, the liberal and saintly Chhotalal Jivanlal Master, a great Sanskrit scholar and noted administrator Narmadashanker Mehta, the eminent jurist and Professor Jekishandas Kania, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of independent India Justice Harilal Kania, an ideal teacher of the time Kaushikram Mehta and several other men and women with greater or lesser distinction within its fold. The Varga tolerance attracted a few non-Hindus like Mohammad Ali Khoja and Professor Maula Baksha, the latter an eminent musician, and Irach J. S. Taraporewala. The individual contribution of such renowned followers in their respective fields was noteworthy.

The Varga maintained some successful periodicals like *Mahakal*, *Bhakta*, *Pratahkal*, *Yamdandu*, *Dharmadhvaj*, *Swadharma Jagriti*, *Vidyarthi Jivan*, *Jivanodaya*, *Bhagyodaya*, *Hunnar Udyoga*, *Dampati Mitra*, *Atmoddhar* and *Shreyas Sadhak*. Nrisinhacharya himself was a prolific writer and so were many other doyens of the Varga. As such, the Varga as a whole has produced a rather voluminous literature. An eminent critic has considered the Varga literature from the point of view of simplicity of language, its vigour, precision and richness as a forerunner of Gandhian literature. Even children's literature did not escape their pen.

The Varga held five annual festivals with a view to gathering its members at one place for fraternisation as well

as exchange of thoughts and for individual contact with the Guru and mass participation in its programmes. One of them, called *Devotional Festival* or *Sadhya Samarambha* lasting for one week, became very popular in Baroda. Poet Rabindranath Tagore once attended it and admired its arrangements and usefulness. In *Sankirtan* style of singing, the Varga not only made it popular but contributed a number of its own compositions.

Usually two programmes at such festivals drew heavy crowds. Under the direct guidance of the ladies of the Guru's family, a demonstration of culinary art was held. Women also competed in *Sathia* drawing, designs with lighted lamps, painting and sculpture. The exclusive programmes for women, like *Sahachari Sammelan* and *Mahila Kala Mandir*, proved very interesting and beneficial for women. The second programme that drew big crowds was in the evening when entertainment included Gujarati *Ras* and *Gaithas*, music, dance and dramas, though in them the elements of quality and decency were always kept in mind.

Wholesome education was considered an essential ingredient in man's mental make-up. In Surat, as long ago as 1874, Nrisinhacharya had started *Dharmik Vidyashala* and in its teaching programme the principles of moral science had been cleverly incorporated. Art and music too were included. No fees were charged from students and teachers worked in their leisure time. In all there were fifty students. But when the spirit of self-sacrifice and service disappeared among a few of its teachers, the school was closed. Later, in Baroda the Varga opened only a hostel called *Charitra Mandir* wherein the hostelites were initiated in early rising, prayer, physical exercise, games, manual labour, some craft, gardening and many other activities inculcating the virtues

of self-help, restrained and moral behaviour, good use of time and social service.

Two institutions in Gujarat bear the stamp of the Varga. Realising the miserable condition of widows, specially child widows, the Varga requested two of its widowed lady members, Bajigauri Munshi and Naniben Gajjar, to start *Vanita Vishram* or Women's Shelter Home. First it was started in Surat and later in the cities of Bombay, Baroda, Ahmedabad and Rajkot and admitted in them not only widowed but other destitute women as well. They were given training so that they could earn their livelihood and become independent.

The Deaf and Dumb School of Ahmedabad was also started by a member of the Varga, one Pranshanker Lallubhai Master.

All these institutions are still running in an efficient manner. The women members of the Varga also conducted a periodical called *Vanita Vigyan*. The Varga had planned to open a third institution called *Udyog Gih*, imparting technical education but could not succeed. However, the whole plan was later incorporated by the Baroda State when it established *Kala Bhavan* with the aid of the famous scientist T. K. Gajjar.

The tolerant approach of the Varga has been admired by such men as Col. Olcot of Theosophical Society, Rabin-dranath Tagore, the famous Jain pandit Lalan, and such an orthodox Hatha Yogi as Upasani Baba.

In short, the Varga watered down the radicalism of reformists, cooled the militancy of the Arya Samaj, advocated the social service of the Prarthana Samaj and appreciated study, comparative study of religions and spirit of accommodation of Theosophy. And in its own way it worked for cultural reform, intelligent study of ancient

scriptures and tolerance of other opinions as required in the *Sanatan Dharma*. Thus it rekindled the sagging faith of the intelligentsia in their religion and culture and helped in striking a balance between the old and the new; ancient and modern.

Its Place in the History of Social Changes in India

The Varga came into being at a time when the claims of superiority in almost every field of human activity by the West dazzled India. The Christian Missionary propaganda had still not given up its hope of spreading its gospel. The scientific and technological advances of the West had strengthened its material base and its search for material and mundane comforts had yielded very good results. It had been able to devise its political and social institutions to ensure equal opportunity and social justice in due course of time. The question before India was: Is there no other way but the Christian way and the Western way to keep with the times to secure freedom, equality, justice, fairplay, and plenty? In other words, have the time-honoured *Sanatan Dharma* and traditional social set-up outlived their utility and their eternal springs dried up? Have they lost their power to adapt themselves to the changing times without getting up-rooted?

Men like Nrisinhacharya came to reassure the bewildered and disheartened Indians and pleaded not to sell away their souls "for the brass and tinsel of a gaudy externalised civilisation based upon earthly objects and sensual enjoyments." He was to show that the revival of Vedic religion could purify the hearts of men and rid society of its evils. *Sanatan Dharma* can still be the beacon light for future progress and prosperity.

The very fact that the Census authorities in 1921 took note of this Varga in the Baroda volume and also included an exclusive Note as Appendix III in that volume, speaks volumes about it. But as Narmadashanker Mehta, the writer of this Note, observed—the Varga was feeling the want of full-time devotees at the centre at Baroda. Till Upendracharya was there, the spirit of self-sacrifice of the Guru family ensured the success of the Varga. But after 1936, when he passed away, the mantle fell on Sureshwaracharya, his brother, in whose time the attraction of the Varga, though dimmed, was still there. But thereafter, the Varga seemed to be deviating from the path of *Shreyā* and leaning more towards *Pīcyā* and there was no more of self-sacrifice of the Guru with an exemplary life to inspire the Varga following. Today it is almost dormant, if not defunct.