

WHAT EVERY HINDU OUGHT TO KNOW

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side!

—RIG VEDA

by

A HINDU MONK

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The sorry spectacle of the Hindu youth being unable to face up to the challenges thrown by people of other faiths who are bent upon destructive criticism and malicious propaganda, is the main motive force behind this attempt. It is mainly intended for this youth though other Hindus can also make good use of the same. If it provides them with shields of defence, weapons of offence when necessary and food for serious thought and introspection, we deem our object in writing this booklet to be fulfilled. Our only request is that this booklet should be carefully studied and then circulated as widely as possible.

Several friends and well-wishers have contributed liberally to the success of this small project. Our grateful thanks to them all.

Mysore
10-7-1968

THE AUTHOR

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

It is a remarkable tribute to the awakened Hindu consciousness that 8,500 copies of this booklet have been sold out in two and a half years and the demand for it is still increasing.

I wish and pray that this slightly revised third edition also will meet with the same enthusiasm.

I offer my hearty thanks to Prakashana: Sahitya Sindhu for bringing out this edition and to Rashtrottana Sahitya for taking upon themselves the task of sole distribution.

Calcutta
Sankranti, 15-1-1972

THE AUTHOR

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

We deem it an honour to publish the third edition of this small, compact booklet which has already proved quite popular among the Hindu youth, for whom it is mainly intended. Here in a nutshell is what every Hindu ought to know goading him to do what he ought to do.

Words fail us in thanking the author - 'A Hindu Monk', who has in simple but scorching words tried to rouse the conscience of the Hindus at large - for permitting us to publish this edition.

Sankranti

15-1-1972

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The Eternal Religion

The correct name of Hinduism is Sanātana Dharma, 'The Eternal Religion.' Being based on the Vedas and practised by the ancient Aryan race, it is also called the Vaidika Dharma. 'The Vedic Religion' and the Ārya Dharma, 'The Religion of the Āryans'. As regards the origin and evolution of the word 'Hindu', Swami Vivekananda says: "This word 'Hindu' was the name that the ancient Persians used to apply to the river Sindhu. Wherever in Sanskrit there is an 'S', in ancient Persian it changes into 'H', so that 'Sindhu' became 'Hindu', and you are all aware how the Greeks found it hard to pronounce 'H' and dropped it altogether, so that we became known as Indians."¹ Some modern scholars, however, are of the opinion that this word also originated in our own country and is very ancient.

¹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, p. 228

The Propagators of Hinduism

Unlike most world religions, Hinduism has no founder. It is not based on the spiritual experiences of a single individual, but on the intuitions and experiences of a large number of seers, saints and mystics called 'Rishis.' These ancient Rishis were only propagating this Eternal Religion and were not the founders in the sense that is normally understood and applied to other religions. Their experiences have been systematised and handed down as a great tradition. Religious men of countless generations have borne testimony to the truth and validity of the teachings contained in them. Even today these spiritual truths can be experimented on and verified in the laboratories of our souls, just as the statement about natural laws found in text-books of science can be tested and verified in the laboratory of science.

None the less, Hinduism is as much a revelation as any other religion of the world. It goes even a step further and says that it is a continuous revelation. Hence, according to it, a single revelation or the revelations of a single individual do not exhaust the whole of the Truth. That is why it contemplates the advent of new Avatars, the introduction of new codes of law

(Dharmashāstras) and the production of new editions of scriptures.

The greatest strength of Hinduism lies in the fact of its being based upon certain eternal truths, rather than on a personality however exalted he may be. These truths are such that they can be verified by anybody at any time.

The Basic Scriptures of Hinduism

Hinduism is based primarily on the Vedas. 'Veda' literally means knowledge or wisdom. It is also called 'Shruti' which means 'what is heard or revealed'. All other scriptures go under the omnibus term of 'Smriti' ('what is remembered'). Shruti being divinely revealed to the great Rishis of yore in the depths of their mystical experience, its authority is supreme. Smritis are the secondary scriptures which derive their authority from the Shruti. Their business is to explain, elaborate and illustrate the fundamental teachings of the Shruti.

However, according to the Hindu view, revelations are not limited to any individual, time or place. Just as there have been revelations in the past, they can occur at present or in future also. The seer is only a medium to transmit to posterity the insight which he receives. Hence he is no more the inventor of the Veda than Newton is the generator of the law of gravity.

The Vedas are four in number—the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sāma Veda and the Atharva Veda. The Rig Veda is the most ancient scripture of the world. Lokamanya Tilak, on the strength of astronomical evidences, concludes that it is at least 8,000 years old.

The Rig Veda consists of hymns which are mostly prayers. The Yajur Veda deals mainly with sacrificial rites. The Sāma Veda contains a portion of the Rig Vedic hymns set to music. These have to be sung at appropriate stages during a sacrifice. The Atharva Veda, which is a later composition, consists mostly of morals and ethical codes as also a few worldly sciences.

Each Veda is usually divided into four parts: the Samhitas, the Brāhmanas, the Āranyakas and the Upanishads. The Samhitas contain prayers and Mantras used in sacrifices. Whereas the Brāhmanas give the 'know-how' of sacrificial rites, Āranyakas teach the art of certain types of meditation, based mostly on well-known sacrifices. The Upanishads contain the highest philosophical flights of the Vedic sages which can be the pride of the whole human race for all time. Schopenhauer, the famous German savant, has declared: "In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death."²

Then comes the Bhagavad Gita, the most popular of all the Hindu scriptures. The Gita, as it is shortly called is so well-known all over the world that it has been the second most-translated

² Quoted in the *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 1, p. 1xi

work. Though the Bible ranks first in this regard it should be remembered that its translations were sponsored by the mighty machinery of the Church with the enormous material resources at its command. As for the Gita, its beauty, sublimity and universality prompted its admirers to translate it into different languages of the world.

There is a verse in Sanskrit which compares the Upanishads to a milch-cow and the Gita to its milk. In other words, the Gita gives the essence of the Upanishadic philosophy in a simple and practicable form. It is an integral part of the Mahābhārata and is in the form of a dialogue between Sri Krishna, the great incarnation of God, and Arjuna, the great warrior prince. The battlefield was the place of its origination; and serious problems concerning life and death, duty and devotion, knowledge and meditation were discussed, and sensible solutions offered which hold good even to this day. Manliness and selfless devotion to duty are the keynotes of this great little scripture.

Any list of the Hindu scriptures is incomplete without the two great epics, the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. Though these two great books deal primarily with the story of Sri Rāma and that of the Kuru race respectively, they can more rightly be called the encyclopedia of Hindu religion and culture. These two popular works have influenced and inspired the Hindu

nation for thousands of years. They are technically called 'Itihāsa' (history) since they contain the history of the two most important dynasties that ruled and shaped the destinies of our motherland.

The Smritis of Manu, Yājñavalkya and Parāshara the Purānas including the famous Bhāgavata, the Āgamas and the treatises on the Darshanas are the other scriptures forming the magnificent edifice of Hinduism built upon the foundation of the Vedas. The Smritis are mostly codes of law intended to regulate Hindu society from time to time, according to the principles of the Veda.³ The Purānas are imaginative works woven round some historical matters. They aim at teaching religious truths through concrete examples. The Āgamas are sectarian scriptures dealing with the worship of a particular aspect of God and prescribing detailed courses of discipline for the worshipper. The Darshanas are schools of philosophy. The orthodox schools among them try to develop, systematise and correlate the various parts of the Veda, each in its own way.

³ They are mostly of historical importance now, as our society has changed and cannot subject itself to the laws made centuries ago. It is the duty of the present day religious leaders to formulate new codes and laws to fit in with the changed circumstances.

The Philosophical Systems of Hinduism

Ever since the beginning of civilization, the innate curiosity of man has been urging him to delve into the mysteries of the universe. Who created this universe? Who am I? Where did I come from? Where do I go after death? These were the fundamental questions posed by him. The relentless search for an answer to these basic questions has led to the origin and evolution of philosophy.

If the West sought in the external world for a solution, the Hindu sages turned their gaze inwards and discovered their own answers through meditation and mysticism. The 'Shaddarshanas' (six systems of Hindu philosophy) were the result.⁴ Darshana means vision of truth. Unlike the West, where philosophy based on pure intellectualism and religion based on a few dogmas of the Church are at loggerheads, philosophy in Hinduism has been, a 'philosophy of religion' and religion is based on the findings of philosophy.

The six Darshanas are: (1) Nyāya of Gautama (2) Vaisheshika of Kanāda (3) Sāṅkhya of

⁴ The three heterodox systems—Charvaka, Jaina and Bouddha—are also included sometimes under the banner of Hindu Philosophy.

Kapila (4) Yoga of Patanjali (5) Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini and (6) Vedānta of Bādarāyana or Vyāsa.

The Nyāya and Vaisheshika advance the atomic theory of creation. Sāṅkhya propounds the theory of the animate souls and inanimate matter as the basic factors in creation. Yoga deals mainly with the control of the mind. Mīmāṃsā is more interested in upholding Vedic ritualism.

Last but not the least is the Vedānta, the pinnacle of all these systems. It can easily be called 'The Philosophy of Hinduism.' Vedānta means culmination of the Vedas. It is based on the Upanishads, the Gīta and the Brahma Sūtras of Vyāsa,⁵ and gives the most rational solution to the fundamental problems posed by philosophy.

Vedānta calls that Supreme Power which projects this universe, sustains it and withdraws it into itself as Brahman. It holds the individual soul (Atman) to be birthless and deathless, eternal and immortal. Attainment of liberation is possible through the knowledge of Brahman, by being devoted to this Brahman. A liberated soul will never again return to mundane existence. These are its teachings in a nutshell.

⁵ Incidentally, these three are known as the Prasthānatraya or 'the three basic scriptures leading to the highest goal.'

Ethical and Moral Principles in Hinduism

To 'love thy neighbour as thyself' is supposed to be the 'golden rule.' But to the Hindu who believes in the oneness of creation, there is nothing extraordinary in this. 'I love my neighbour because in the ultimate analysis, my neighbour is also myself'—that is his line of argument. In fact the sole mission of his life is to realise this 'oneness.' To him, spiritual life is impossible without a moral and ethical life. Therefore very great stress is laid on the latter.

The wonderful Hindu mind has condensed the whole gamut of ethical and moral principles in two simple words: Yama and Niyama. Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya and Aparigraha—these constitute Yama. Niyama consists of Shaucha, Santosha, Tapas, Svadhyaya and Ishvaraprani-dhāna.

Not to harm others whether in thought, word or deed is Ahimsa. But it is a virtue to be practised by the strong and the brave, and not by the weak and the cowardly.

Consonance of thoughts, words and deeds is Satya or truth. It goes without saying that these must be right and good.

Asteya is non-stealing, non-covetousness included.

Chastity in thought, word and deed is the core of Brahmacharya.

Not to accept anything from others, more than what is absolutely necessary for sustenance is Aparigraha.

Shaucha is purity and cleanliness.

Contentment, absence of greed and cheerfulness constitute Santhosha.

Austerity in the form of service, control of speech and mind—these are designated as Tapas.

Study of sacred literature as also repetition of sacred Mantras and prayers are termed Svādhyāya.

Surrender of the fruits of one's actions, nay, the surrender of one's very self, is Īshvarapraṇḍhāna.

These are *the ten cardinal principles* of Hinduism.

The Individual and the Society in Hinduism

According to Hinduism, spiritual freedom or Moksha is the ultimate goal of life. But desires and passions which obstruct this do exist in man, ever struggling to find an outlet. It is not very easy to get rid of them overnight. Realising this, the great Hindu sages have provided us with right avenues for directing and guiding them. Looked at from this angle the conception of the four Purushārthas (ends to be striven for, by man) viz, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksha—is a unique contribution made by Hinduism. Acquisition and enjoyment of material wealth (Artha) and satisfaction of desires (Kāma) should always be within the limits allowed by Dharma or righteousness. This helps their attenuation and man will become fit for Moksha or liberation in due course.

With this Moksha in view, Hinduism requires every man to pass through the four stages of life, technically called the Ashramas, viz, Brahmacharya (studenthood), Garhasthya (the stage of the householder), Vānaprastha (retired life in forest) and Sannyāsa (life of complete renunciation).

Study of sciences (spiritual and temporal) and a life of strict discipline characterised by self-control are the essential features of the first stage. Acquisition, enjoyment and distribution of

the good things of life within the framework of Dharma, mark the second stage. The five daily sacrifices known as Pancha Yajnas viz, Devayajna or sacrifice to gods, Pitriyajna or obsequial oblation to the departed manes, Brahmayajna or study of the Vedas, Nriyajna or serving fellow beings and Bhūtayajna or feeding the dumb creatures, are obligatory on the householder during this stage. The third stage wherein introspection is very important is only a stepping-stone to the final stage of Sannyāsa. This last stage which is the acme of life is distinguished by its total renunciation of worldly desires and a complete dedication to the attainment of Moksha.

Every rule has an exception. The ascent from Brahmacharya to Sannyāsa need not always be gradual. So the scriptures allowed double or even treble promotion to qualified aspirants. They could embrace Sannyāsa from any stage.

Just as the individual's life has been divided into four stages to facilitate spiritual evolution, the society also has been divided into four groups (Brāhmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shūdras) to facilitate smooth working.

The Brāhmanas were the custodians of spiritual knowledge. Simple living and high thinking as also acquisition and propagation of spiritual knowledge—these were their primary duties. The Kshatriyas protected the society with

the strength of their arms and were responsible for the maintenance of law and order as also justice. It was given to the Vaishyas to produce wealth and distribute it without being greedy. Those who lived by manual labour and service to others were categorised as Shūdras.

There has been a good lot of criticism against this Varna system, as this fourfold division is often called. It is to be remembered that this grouping was based upon the mental make-up and aptitudes of the individuals and as recognition of the division of labour that already existed in the society and *not* upon birth. However it is impossible to examine each individual determine what his aptitudes are and then fix his calling. And so heredity is made to serve *as a sort of working principle*. Normally the son inherits the trade of his father as he shares some of his traits. *But this principle was never intended to be applied with an iron-hand. It was flexible and violable.* There is a lot of evidence in the scriptures to show that man's Varna depends upon his mental make-up and the calling he chooses. There have been several cases where people born in lower castes have risen higher by their virtues and those born in the higher ones have been degraded due to their vices. Hence it is obvious that the present-day caste system, with its water-tight compartments and mutual animosity is nothing but a gross degeneration of the once sublime idea that formed the basis of this division.

Women in Hindu Society

No bird can ever fly on only one of its wings. Women being the 'other-wing' of the society it is but proper that their role be discussed here.

Ideals constitute the very heart and soul of a nation. Hence a real understanding of the Hindu nation and its womanhood would essentially depend on that of its ideals. As already stated, Hinduism considers Moksha or spiritual freedom as the *summum bonum* of life, whether for man or for woman. Consequently the disciplines described and the paths prescribed for the attainment of this Moksha are almost identical. Purity, self-control, devotion and austerity are as much necessary for woman as for man. However Hinduism does not shut its eyes to the differences that do exist between man and woman, biological as well as temperamental. That is why it has defined their areas of activity depending upon their Svadharma or special characteristics and prescribed slightly different modes of life and discipline.

The strength and the soundness of a society are sustained by those of the family; and woman is the central figure in a family. Just imagine the tremendous responsibility that is placed on her! A Griha or home is no home but for the Grihini (the mistress of the family). Hence the ideal placed

before the Hindu woman is that of the ideal Grihini, who again is an ideal wife, an ideal friend and an ideal mother—all rolled into one. It is Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayanti and Gāndhāri—the songs of the Hindu soil—that have inspired the lives of millions of Hindu women for aeons, and *not* Helens or Juliets.

Women had plenty of freedom in the Vedic and Epic age. They had equal opportunities and scope, especially in the religious and spiritual fields. They could undergo the Upanayana sacrament, study the Vedas, become teachers or even ascetics if they wished. But during the middle ages there was a criminal neglect of their welfare.

With the advent of modern education, the impact of science and Western civilization, things have changed no doubt, but the remedy seems to be worse than the disease! Now woman seems to want to 'out-man' man himself! Getting discontented with her role of childbearing and home-making she wishes to devote herself to some other 'higher' activity! Consequently homes are slowly being replaced by hotels! In the name of economic independence, life is tending to become more and more hectic, irregular and even vagrant! By engaging herself in activities which prejudice the work of preservation, the modern Hindu woman is coming into conflict with her own inner

nature. By blindly imitating man, she cannot be the giver of joy, the inspirer of activity and the consoler in distress that she has all along been. This is what the world famous scientist Dr. Alexis Carrel says: "The differences existing between man and woman ... are of a fundamental nature. Ignorance of these fundamental facts has led promoters of feminism to believe that both sexes should have the same education, the same powers and the same responsibilities. In reality woman differs profoundly from man. Every one of the cells of her body bears the mark of her sex Physiological laws are as inexorable as those of the sidereal world. They cannot be replaced by human wishes."⁶

What then is the solution? "But now female education is to be spread with religion as its centre. All other training should be secondary to religion,"⁷ says Swami Vivekananda. Mahatma Gandhi exhorts our women not to ape the West but apply methods suitable to the Indian genius and Indian environment. Says he: "Theirs must be the strong controlling, purifying, steadying hand, conserving what is best in our culture and unhesitatingly rejecting what is base and degrading. This is the work of Sītās, Draupadis,

⁶ *Man the Unknown*, Chapter III, Section 9.

⁷ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, p. 218.

Sāvitris, and Damayantis, not of amazons and proudes."⁸

Will our mothers and sisters heed this advice?

⁸ *Hindu Dharma*, p. 382-383

Hindu Sādhanas

Spiritual disciplines are called Sādhanas. They are paths to perfection, roads to realisation of the truth. Since there are temperamental differences among the individual seekers of truth, Hinduism recognises the need for a variety of spiritual disciplines or Sādhanas. These Sādhanas can be brought under four broad categories called Yogas: the Karma Yoga, the Bhakti Yoga, the Rāja Yoga and the Jñāna Yoga. Karma Yoga is the path of disinterested action suited to the active type. Bhakti Yoga, the path of love of God, is most suitable to the emotional type. Rāja Yoga, the path of psychic control, is meant for the introspectives. Jñāna Yoga, the path of discrimination and knowledge is ideal for those endowed with a sharp intellect and a keen power of discrimination. However the four qualities of activity, emotion, introspection and intellect are found in everyone though in varying degrees. Hence a balanced combination of all the Yogas, with more of one and less of others depending upon one's temperament, is desirable for quick results.

Do your work, the duties that fall to your lot, nicely and efficiently. But be alert; never get attached, either to the work or to the fruits thereof. This is the essence of Karma Yoga.

Love God with all your heart and soul. Cultivate an intimate loving relationship with Him. Surrender yourself completely to Him. Desire for Him alone and for nothing else. This is the core of Bhakti Yoga.

Rāja Yoga prescribes an eight-fold discipline leading to the perfect control of the mind and culminating in the vision of the Truth. Yama and Niyama, the moral and ethical disciplines already described, are the first two steps. Āsana (steady and comfortable posture), Prāṇāyāma (rhythmic breathing and breath-control), Pratyāhāra (withdrawal of the senses from their objects), Dhāraṇa (fixing the attention on the ideal), Dhyāna (steady flow of the mind-stuff towards the ideal) and Samādhi (perfect concentration on the ideal)—these are the subsequent steps in that order.

Discriminate between the real (the Self) and the unreal (the world-appearance). Give up the unreal mercilessly. Cling to the Self, the eternal and immortal reality. Hear about It, brood over It and meditate over It. Become one with It. This is the sum and substance of Jñāna Yoga.

Place of Rituals, Temples and Festivals in Hinduism

Philosophy without religion becomes meaningless. Religion without rituals becomes insipid. The rituals of a religion, like the husk of a seed, preserve its life and make it germinate. It is only when the rituals are separated from the faith and assumes an independent existence that they become mechanical and lifeless.

Human beings have not yet reached those heights where they can dispense with all sorts of symbols and rituals and devote themselves to purely abstract principles. A flag-hoisting, an oath-taking or a convocation is as much a ritual as worship or sacrifice. To give a concrete shape to the abstract spiritual ideals and to add colour and zest to life, Hinduism recommends the performance of several rituals. Out of these, a few are obligatory and the rest are optional.

Practice of meditation at sunrise, noon and sunset with the repetition of the famous Gayatri Mantra,⁹ worship of God through symbols and

⁹ The Gāyatri Mantra is actually a short prayer addressed to the Supreme God in the orb of the sun. Its meaning is: "We meditate upon the effulgence of God Savita. May He enlighten our intellects!" There is a popular saying that the three G's - the Gītā, the Ganga and the Gāyatri - form the three legs of the tripod upon which Hinduism stands.

images, offering oblations into specially consecrated sacrificial fires—these were some of the rituals obligatory on almost all the Hindus during the ancient days. Even to this day, these have been kept up though in a modified form, and with lesser intensity. A wisely planned and solemnly conducted ritual prepares the ground, creates the atmosphere, suggests the mood and predisposes the mind so that the spiritual aspirant may easily detach himself from the world and feel the mysterious presence of the Supreme Power called God.

Hinduism considers religion and spirituality to be purely a personal affair. It concerns with the eternal relationship between the Eternal Soul and the Eternal God. Hence the Hindu is obliged neither to build a temple nor pay a visit to it on any particular day. To him his own body is the temple, the abode of the Lord. However, for the sake of the ordinary people who are incapable of comprehending this truth, who always need an external support for the practice of their religion, temples are recommended. Even the temple is only an external symbol of this body. In fact, many of the technical names of the various parts of a temple are identical with the names of the various parts of the body. Actually the temple represents the Lord and His creation (the universe) in all its aspects.

Usually the gateway to a temple will be a massive and magnificent construction. When we stand in front of it we are made to feel so insignificant before the Lord of the universe! As we proceed inwards leaving behind the grand carvings and decorations of the outside, we notice that the *sanctum sanctorum* itself is small and dark. We can have the *darshan* of the Lord only when a light is lit up and waved before Him. This indicates that we have to leave the grand external world outside, direct our minds inward, light up the lamp of knowledge there and behold the Lord within the *sanctum sanctorum* of our hearts.

Ours has been a land of temples. There is no town or village without a temple, be that of Shiva or Vishnu, Devi or Hanuman, Ganesha or Subrahmanya. They are standing monuments to the continuing spiritual traditions of our country. And they have played a very significant part in the community life of our country, helping to preserve and enrich our religion and culture, arts and crafts through *jātras*, *rathotsavas* and festivals.

Festivals connected with certain sacred days and associated with certain temples or rivers or places of pilgrimage, have been another potent factor in the religious life of our society. Though the rules and regulations of a festival introduce an amount of austerity in personal life, they also lighten this burden and elevate the mind when

performed properly. A *rathotsava* (temple-car festival) or a *mela* (religious fair) has its own story to tell and lessons to teach. The former seems to signify that if you are too busy to go to the Lord, He Himself will come to you! The latter provides an opportunity for like-minded devotees to congregate in a place and strengthen one another's spiritual vibrations. That is why they have become part and parcel of our life, for centuries.

A Few Rituals and Sacraments of Hinduism

It will not be out of place here to dilate a little upon a few of the more important rituals and sacraments that have embellished Hinduism since ages.

Sandhyā, Pūja and Homa are the most important rituals still in vogue. Jātakarma and Nāmakaraṇa, Annaprāshāna, Upanayana, Vivāha and Antyeshti including Shrāddha are the more common Samskāras or sacraments prevalent even today.

Sandhyā is the ritual practised at dawn, noon and dusk. Ceremonial sipping of water (Āchamana), rhythmic breathing (Prāṇāyāma), expiation of sin (Aghamarshaṇa), offering water to Sun-god (Arghyapradāna), repetition of the Gāyatri Mantra coupled with meditation on Sun-god and obeisance to Sun-god (Upasthāna)—these comprise the ritual.

The mode of Pūja or worship is a replica of the services that are usually rendered to a beloved guest or an honoured king. Only, the King of kings is the recipient here! After invoking the presence of the Deity (Āvāhana), a seat is offered (Āsana); the feet are washed (Pādya); a respectful offering of water mixed with sandalwood paste and rice is made (Arghya); sandalwood paste is smeared

(Chandana) ; flowers are offered (Pushpa) ; incense is burned (Dhūpa); lighted lamp is waved (Dīpa) and food offering is made (Naivedya) along with drinking water (Pāniya). Finally the Deity is given a farewell (Visarjana).

Homa is actually Vedic sacrifice adapted to Āgamic requirements. It is nothing but Pūja offered to the Deity invoked into the sacrificial fire. Except in some details it is almost identical with Pūja.

Samskāra literally means a purificatory rite. It is socio-religious in character. By performing it, the life of the Hindu is sanctified.

Though the Samskāras are sixteen in number, only the principal ones mentioned above, will be dealt with here.

Jātakarma is the rite performed immediately after the birth of the child. Repetition of a Mantra for the generation of talent (Medhā-janana) and wishing the baby longevity and strength are the main items involved.

Nāmakaraṇa or name-giving ceremony is performed usually on the tenth or the twelfth day. The choice of the name for the child is generally associated with religious ideas.

Anna-prāshana is the first feeding of the child with solid food which has been previously consecrated by offering it to various deities.

Upanayana or the sacrament of initiation into higher life stands for taking the child to a teacher for education. From the cultural point of view this is the most important sacrament. The most striking feature of the Upanayana lies in the belief that by its performance the initiate is given a cultural and spiritual rebirth. It is a great advance over the primitive types of initiation like the endurance test, temporary seclusion or mutilation of the body still current among many religious communities.

Receiving the loin-cloth (Kaupīna) and the girdle (Mekhala), investiture with the sacred thread (Yajñopavīta-dhāraṇa), initiation with the Sāvitrī Mantra (better known as the Gāyatri) and going round for alms—these constitute the most essential aspects of the ritual. The first symbolises the beginning of a life of self-control. The Yajñopavīta suggests that from now on, his life is a continuous sacrifice. The Gāyatri is particularly apt for a celibate student seeking intellectual development in the right direction. It marks the beginning of a life-long spiritual struggle. Going round for alms reminds him of his dependence on society whose debts he has to discharge throughout his life.

Of all the Hindu sacraments, Vivāha or marriage is considered to be the most central one. Hinduism rightly emphasizes the importance of the life of the householder. The sacrament of

marriage impresses upon a person that earthly life is not to be despised; rather it should be consciously accepted and elevated to the level of spiritual experience. Marriage is not a license for indulgence, but a human institution aiming at moderation in conjugal life leading ultimately to the conquest of self. It is essentially a fellowship between a man and a woman who seek to live creatively in a partnership for the pursuit of the four Purushārthas. Besides the two parties to a marriage—the bride and the bridegroom—there is the third party, Dharma, (their joint religious duty) *through which only they have been united. Consequently a Hindu marriage is considered to be too sacred to be dissolved.*

The most important steps of this sacrament are: Kanyādāna (gift of the bride to the bridegroom by the legitimate guardian), Vivāha-homa (marriage offerings in sacred fire), Pāṇi-grahaṇa (clasping the hand of the bride by the bridegroom), Saptapadi (walking seven steps), Ashmārohana (mounting the stone), Sūryalokana (looking at the sun) and Dhruva-darshana (gazing at the Pole-star).

Pāṇigrahaṇa symbolises that the bridegroom has taken over her responsibility here-afterwards. Saptapadi is symbolic of prosperity and felicity. At the end of this ceremony the bride passes into the family of the bridegroom. Marriage is regarded as

complete with it. Sūryalokana indicates that the sun is a witness to the sacrament. Ashmārohana and Dhruva-Arundhati-darshana represent stability and constancy.

The last sacrament in the life of the Hindu is Antyeshti. Since a Hindu consecrates his entire life through the performance of various sacraments at suitable stages, at his death, his survivors consecrate the event by death-rites for his future good and spiritual felicity. Though performed after a man's death, this sacrament is no less important, because for a Hindu, the value of the next world is higher than that of the present.

It is customary to drop Ganga-water and Tulasi leaves into the mouth of the dying person. The body is carried on a bier by the nearest relatives and friends of the deceased. It is then either cremated or buried according to the custom of the community. If cremated, the ashes and the bones are later on collected and immersed in the sacred waters of the nearest river. If buried, a mound is raised over the remains as a mark of remembrance. Shrāddha or offering to the dead also forms an important item of the last rites. It is performed on the eleventh or the thirteenth day after death and consists of Homa, Pinḍa-pradāna (obsequial offering of rice balls) and feeding the Brāhmaṇas.

Reform Movements in Hinduism

Hinduism is like the 'centre-of-gravity doll' which regains its equilibrium howsoever it be disturbed. Wave after wave of alien invasions have come and gone upon this sacred land but none of them really succeeded in uprooting it. That is because the basis of Hinduism is strong and sound. Standing firmly on this, it has always shown a remarkable dynamism, a unique capacity for change and adjustment whenever circumstances have demanded it.

Whenever the essential core was forgotten and too much fuss was made over the non-essential crust, there has always been a reaction and a rebellion from its own ranks to put things in their proper perspective and show a better way in conformity with the times. When the simple Rig Vedic religion was developed in course of time into a highly complicated labyrinth of sacrifices, there arose the dynamic sages of the Upanishads condemning it in no uncertain terms and preaching the direct method of realising the truth through contemplation and knowledge. This was the first reform movement.

This was further supplemented by the next movement started by the Gītāchārya Sri Krishna who reconciled the warring groups of his times, who were advocating either action or knowledge

or contemplation or devotion. He provided a place in his system for every one of these in such a way that one need not be in conflict with the others.

Then came Buddha, the compassionate, who was more interested in the greatest good of the largest number than in the philosophies of the privileged few. Teaching simple moral and spiritual principles bearing more directly on the life here than on the life hereafter, he captured the hearts of millions and set a dynamic spiritual revolution into motion.

Buddha's apparent condemnation of the Vedic religion and his discreet silence on the life hereafter were thoroughly misunderstood and even misrepresented by his later followers. It was given to Shankara, the first missionary Hindu monk, to make a whirlwind tour of the country, expose their fallacies and re-establish the pristine glory of Hinduism. By admitting Buddha into the galaxy of incarnations the Post-Buddhistic Hinduism sealed the fate for Buddhism in India once for all.

Then followed an era of invasion and conquest by foreigners and it looked as though the Eternal Religion would just collapse. However, the task of keeping it very much alive was admirably fulfilled by the various Bhakti-movements started by Rāmānuja, Madhva, Basaveshwara, Chaitanya, Rāmānanda, Kabīr, Nānak, Mirābāi, Tulasīdās,

Tukārām, Purandaradās and a host of others. Special mention must be made of the Sikhism of Nānak, which effectively prevented large number of people from being forcibly converted into Islam. No less important was the movement started by Rāmānuja to broaden the outlook of Brāhmin orthodoxy.

The British conquest as also the impact of Western civilization with its science, technology and Christianity gave another shaking to the native religion and culture. Bang came the reply in the form of several reform movements each trying in its own way to set things right. If the Brahma Samāj and its offshoot, the Prārthana Samāj tried to give a 'Christian look' to Hinduism, the Ārya Samāj tried to bring back the pure Vedic religion. The Theosophical Society too tried to do its bit with its mystical and esoteric doctrines. However it was Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda who struck a perfect balance between the past and the present, the East and the West by showing the people how to combine the best of both. This regeneration is still continuing through the work of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and other organisations drawing inspiration from them.

A very recent attempt at uniting the Hindu society, protecting and spreading its religion and culture, is the formation of the Vishva Hindu Parishad which is steadily gaining ground.

Vishva Hindu Parishad

Since this latest attempt at bringing together and organizing the Hindus from all over the world augurs well for the future of Hinduism it is worthwhile devoting some attention to it.

The Hindu society has held in its bosom adherents of directly opposite dogmas, and embraces besides Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, the reforming sects of different epochs as also those worshipping several gods and goddesses and professing different creeds.

In spite of a unique and universal philosophy of life, catholicity and tolerance taught by all sects and religions and the affluence of culture and civilization, the Hindu society has fallen into deplorable conditions. The Hindus in India and abroad need a reawakening of their essential unity and be consolidated into one strong and indivisible people. It is necessary to infuse pride, devotion and loyalty in respect of our Dharma and Samskriti.

In the Hindus of the world a sense of duty and obligation to the society which of late is fast disappearing requires to be regenerated on the basis of our Dharma.

The Hindus who live in distant lands need not only inspiration but effective aid to rejoin the

bond of love and regain their faith in the practice of the Hindu ways of life, which have been gradually weakening.

With the aspiration of fulfilling these objectives the Vishva Hindu Parishad was founded on the 30 August 1964 (the auspicious Sri Krishna Janmāshthami day) at Bombay. Its objects are:

1. To take steps to consolidate and strengthen the Hindu society;
2. To protect, develop and spread the Hindu values of life ;
3. To establish and reinforce contacts with and help all Hindus living abroad.

Between the 22nd and the 24th of January 1966 the Parishad held its first momentous conference of Hindus from all over the world at Prayāg which was a tremendous success.

The Parishad is now busy establishing branches all over the country and also the world. It has already made a marked progress.

This is perhaps the very first serious attempt after Emperor Sriharsha at bringing together the various heterogeneous elements in Hinduism and bind them with a cord of common ideals. Hence it is the sacred duty of every Hindu, irrespective of his caste or creed, to co-operate wholeheartedly with this Movement and make it a grand success.

Special Contribution of Hinduism to World Thought

Hinduism has made a very significant contribution to world thought in propounding the three doctrines of Karma and Rebirth, Adhikāra Bheda and Avatāra Vāda.

The doctrine of Karma is nothing but the extension of the well-known principle, 'As you sow, so you reap', to the moral and spiritual field. We have to reap the consequences of our actions sooner or later. The present is the result of the past and the future will be the result of the present.

The doctrine of rebirth is a logical corollary of this theory of Karma. We may burn our finger in fire for only a few seconds but it takes a couple of weeks (=12 million seconds!) to be cured of it completely. Similarly since it is not possible to experience the result of all the actions that we do in one short life, it is reasonable to admit of our future lives. The wide variety and differences among human beings which have no logical connection with the present life, force us to hypothesise about their causes existing in past lives and resulting in the present ones. Since Hinduism posits the soul as eternal and immortal, the theory of Karma and Rebirth fits in admirably with it. This is the best hypothesis that the human

mind can conceive of, to solve the problem of good and evil, to explain the variety and diversity in the universe.

The doctrine of Adhikāra Bheda is a recognition of the simple fact that the same cap cannot fit everybody. In any field especially in the spiritual field, capacity and necessity should be the deciding factors and not merely the desire or ambition. A blind man is certainly unfit to become a pilot and the lame should never attempt mountain-climbing, however intense their desires may be! That is why like a loving mother catering to her children with a variety of dishes depending upon their digestive capacities, Hinduism has opened up manifold spiritual paths to suit a variety of tastes and temperaments. If the intellectual is recommended Jñāna Yoga, the active person finds an outlet for his energies in Karma Yoga. If the emotional type finds a solace in Bhakti Yoga, the introspective one finds his peace in Rāja Yoga. Thus no one need be disappointed.

The Avatāra Vāda—the doctrine of descent of God on earth—declares that the Supreme Power descends on this earth *wherever and whenever necessary* to restore the spiritual balance and to help genuine religious aspirants in their struggle for perfection. This is truly a marvellous doctrine filling the hearts of millions of aspirants with

tremendous hope. An unbiased study of the spiritual history of mankind proves this beyond all doubt. It is foolish to limit the powers and capacities of the Almighty God by arguing that *He descended only once in a particular chosen land and that He will never come again*. Regimentation in religion and proselytisation with political motives which are doing immense harm to humanity have their origin in such bigotry.

Hinduism : The Religion Universal

Any religion to be universally acceptable, must appeal both to the head and to the heart of the maximum number of people. And Hinduism does it. The dizzy heights of its Advaita philosophy can easily slake the thirst of the brainiest of philosophers. Its conception of the Personal God can more than satisfy the refined theologians. The modes of Bhakti enunciated as well as the rituals recommended soothe the hearts of the emotional types. The advocates of activism are easily accommodated by the doctrine of selfless action. And the mystics can always count upon Yoga.

Hinduism considers that man is potentially divine and not a sinner. Hence even the worst of 'sinners' finds a place in its bosom. He has not committed any sin but only *mistakes*, says Hinduism, because he had forgotten his essentially divine nature! What a wonderful doctrine! What a marvellous psychology!

By declaring that the whole universe is but the projection of the Cosmic Mind, and that a fundamental thread of unity passes through the innumerable and diverse manifestations in it, Hinduism carries conviction to the modern scientists also.

Even the agnostics and the atheists find a place in it because Hinduism preaches that to be good and to do good is the whole of religion, all other things being secondary.

Gross materialists, instead of being condemned, are advised to be a little less selfish while enjoying the good things of life!

If this is not the Religion Universal which other one can be? In fact Hinduism being more a way of life than a dogmatic creed, the whole of humanity ever struggling from lower truths to higher truths come under its protective wings whether they accept it or not!

Ubiquitous Hindu Culture

It is this very universality of Hinduism that carried it far and wide into the world beyond the borders of Bhārat. Along with its civilization and culture, philosophies, arts and sciences, mythology and rituals, Hinduism has practically inundated all the major cultural regions of the world. It is a well-known historical fact that the countries of South East Asia, Ceylon, West Asia, part of the African continent, Europe and America are full of the impress of Hindu culture and civilization. The Sanskrit language, the two great Epics, temples dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and Ganapati, and a few of the rituals and sacraments are to be found even today in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Cambodia and the Philippines. There is overwhelming evidence to show that the great sage Agastya journeyed to those lands, spreading the unfailing message of the Eternal Religion. Shustery says in his *Outlines of Islamic Culture* that the Haj pilgrim while approaching the great Mosque at Mecca had to wear the *dhoti* and the *uttariya* (upper cloth)! As regards the teaching of the Christian missionaries like Plotinus, Clement, Gregory, Augustine and others Dean Inge was obliged to declare: "It is the ancient religion of the Brāhmins (that is) masquerading in the clothes borrowed from the Jewish, Gnostic, Manichæan

and Neo-Platonic allegories." Diwan Chamanlal has accumulated unassailable mass of evidence in his *Hindu America* to show that the Hindus migrated to the American continent long before Columbus. The effect of Hindu culture is evident even to this day, especially in Mexico.

Should we not be proud of this?

Hindus Outside India

This takes us to the next topic, that of the Hindus living outside their Motherland. In proportion to the spiritual and cultural debt that is cast upon the world by Hinduism, the number of Hindus that live outside India is rather small. Though this is a glorious tribute to its non-aggressiveness and cultural refinement—Hinduism certainly did not try to spread by force or fraud—it is also a sad commentary on the strength, wisdom and foresight of the Hindus living here!

The fourteen million Hindus living outside and scattered over several countries are today badly in need of our help. They want religious institutions to bring them together and inspire them. They want preachers to educate them in our Dharma. They are eager to learn the more tangible rituals and sacraments to purify and sustain themselves.

Any further delay and neglect on our part will hasten their decay. And, the grave 'sin' will be squarely ours!

Should we not hurry up to offer them what they are hankering for?

Criticisms Galore

In spite of its most sublime theories, universal doctrines and an unlimited capacity for tolerance and adjustment, no religion on earth has perhaps been so much misunderstood, deliberately distorted and mercilessly criticised as this 'Mother of all religions'. Brushing aside all unjust criticism based more on spite than on solid truths, it is still worthwhile considering some of the more common, apparently reasonable and sometimes genuine, criticisms in the spirit of an honest enquiry after truth.

FIRST OBJECTION: There are innumerable gods and goddesses in Hinduism as also countless religious works leading its adherents to utter confusion and bewilderment.

Well, this may appear so to one who has not understood the spirit of Hinduism. But to one who has understood that it is one and the same God that has manifested Himself through all these forms, there is no problem, no confusion, much less any bewilderment. One who has known the nature of water will never be confused or bewildered if he encounters ice, bubble or steam. Rig Veda itself has unequivocally declared that the Truth is one and the sages call it by various names. As regards the countless religious works, they are meant for different types of people who

are in various stages of intellectual and spiritual evolution. A post-graduate student and a higher secondary student are not supposed to exchange their text-books and thereby get bewildered! It is here that a correct understanding and appreciation of the doctrine of Adhikāra Bheda comes to our aid.

SECOND OBJECTION: Hinduism preaches rank idolatry and encourages superstition.

Idolatry means worship of idols considering that they themselves are God. No Hindu ever worships a stone or a metal image with this attitude. He always worships God *through* them. If an objection is raised even against this, then there is no reason why the Christians who worship the image of Jesus and the Bible or the Mohammedans who kiss the Kaaba stone or the patriots who salute the national flag, should not be dubbed as idolaters!

Even Hinduism considers image-worship as only the primary step—like using an abacus to teach arithmetic to children—and exhorts its votaries to rise gradually to the highest level wherein they will have the direct experience of the all-pervading Supreme Power.

As for superstition, the less we talk the better. The merciless witch-hunting carried on in Europe during the middle ages or the considering of number thirteen as unlucky even during this

twentieth century by the Western society, are just two concrete examples which reveal who is really more superstitious. Actually most of the Hindu practices dubbed as superstitions have deeper philosophical and psychological truths behind them than meets the eye. Even granting that superstitions do exist, they are all harmless. It is for better to have harmless superstitions than nurture such ones which have been responsible for the reckless killing of old women or chameleons!

Lastly, the blind belief of the modern man in science and technology, as if they are omnipotent, forgetting that they have miserably failed to give him peace of mind (which alone is the aim of life) is the greatest superstition of all!

THIRD OBJECTION: The caste system has divided the Hindu society into numberless groups engaged in mutual hatred and fighting. A religion which shelters such a system is no good.

The caste system is a logical extension of the Varṇa system whose underlying philosophy has already been explained. There is no country, no race or society in this world which is free from caste system in some form or the other. Even in the so-called socialistic countries, where all are supposed to be equal, it is an open secret that some are more equal than others! A society based on the division of labour is far superior to a society divided on the basis of wealth or colour of the

skin. What is to be condemned is not the caste system as such, but the claim to privileges by certain castes or the hatred and ill-will towards the other groups. The division of an office into several departments is only a matter of administrative convenience. That does not mean that these departments should fight one another. If it is remembered that there is no bar on practice of true religion by any member of any caste, all this fuss becomes meaningless. Hence a religion that has invented such a wonderful social institution is not only good but has also rendered signal service to mankind by showing the right path.

It is interesting to note that both Swami Vivekananda¹⁰ and Mahatma Gandhi¹¹ who themselves did not belong to the highest caste, have upheld and admired the caste system in its true form.

FOURTH OBJECTION: The doctrine of Karma has introduced fatalism and lethargy, and has killed the initiative among the Hindus.

The alternatives to the doctrine of Karma and Rebirth are: the positing of a partial and unjust God or to accept the theory that the origin of this universe lies in an accident or chaos. These alternatives satisfy neither the theologian nor the

¹⁰ *India and Her Problems*, Chapter vi.

¹¹ *Harijan*, Feb. 2, 1934.

logician and much less a scientist. As already pointed out, this theory of Karma is the most sensible and reasonable hypothesis which helps not only explaining the gradation and variety in the universe but also in leading a good life.

As regards the objection as such, we say that quite the opposite effect will be produced if the doctrine is properly understood and applied. 'If my present state is the result of my previous actions, that gives me a tremendous hope and opportunity for shaping my future by my present action'—this is the Hindu attitude. Consequently a Hindu who has understood the spirit of the Karma theory is a dynamic believer in himself. Of course, fatalism and lethargy have often crept in to the detriment of the Hindus. But this is solely due to the misunderstanding of the Karma theory. Ignorant and half-baked people who misunderstand and misapply even sublime theories are not confined to the Hindu society alone but will be found all over the world.

FIFTH OBJECTION: In the name of the doctrine of Adhikāra Bheda, Hinduism has meted out very unequal treatment to its adherents and has done great injustice to them.

Whenever understood properly and practised sincerely this doctrine has always helped, and not hindered, the material and spiritual progress of the Hindus. To say that all

men are born equal or made equal, is a blatant denial of facts and experience. But this does not mean that people should not be given equal opportunity and scope for self-development. In fact Hinduism has been more liberal and generous towards the weaker sections of the society. As in every other society, there have of course been a small minority of black sheep who have exploited and wronged the masses. However, taking the Hindu religion and society as a whole and comparing it with others, this doctrine has worked more as a blessing than as a curse.

SIXTH OBJECTION: A religion which confers the status of the highest incarnation of God on a mythical and immoral person like Sri Krishna is paving the way for the whole society to become likewise.

Bitter criticism and ridicule of Hinduism as also malicious propaganda against it, very often centres round the life, personality and doings of Lord Sri Krishna. A dispassionate study and analysis will however reveal the hollowness of these arguments.

At the very outset, let it be known that Sri Krishna's historicity has been established beyond doubt by several scholars including Sri Aurobindo. On the other hand it is the historicity of Jesus himself—upon whose personality the mighty Churchian empire rests—that has been called in

question by several European scholars.¹² This mighty Churchian empire will collapse like a house of cards, the moment the historicity of Jesus is conclusively disproved, whereas the mightier river of Hinduism will continue to flow on irrespective of the historicity of Rāmas and Krishnas (who are just ripples in this river) because it is based on eternal principles and not on personalities.

The earliest reference to Sri Krishna and an unfoldment of his true personality occurs in the great epic and history of the Hindus viz., the Mahābhārata. Curiously enough, this epic has always treated him as a Kshatriya King. Not even his bitterest enemies like Shishupāla, who figure in this great book, ever allude to his so-called immorality. In fact, Duryodhana, another critic of his, has all admiration for his wonderful personality and even admits of his divinity! It passes one's understanding how a genius like Sri Krishna who bequeathed a most wonderful bunch of universal spiritual teachings could ever have been a moral wreck.

The secondary scriptures like the *Bhāgavatam* which deal with Sri Krishna's story in greater detail, were actually written several centuries later and hence need not be taken as

¹² See *Of Man and God* by Alfred Pomerantz, Philosophical Library Inc., New York. Also *Quest of the Historical Jesus* by Albert Schweitzer.

literally true. Even according to these scriptures, Sri Krishna was a small boy at the time of the Brindāvan Lila. Again, the tradition of considering oneself as the hand-maid of God and love Him as one's husband (whereby the baser instincts are sublimated) is not peculiar to Hinduism alone. It exists among the Christians and the Sufis also. The reference to brides of God in the Bible or the Christian nuns considering themselves as brides of God does not certainly warrant us to brand either God or Christ as polygamous or immoral!

Moreover, the very same scriptures that describe his Rāsakrīda also describe the innumerable miracles performed by him. Why don't then, these wise critics, accept these miracles also as true? If these are accepted, it will be established that Sri Krishna was God Himself, since no ordinary being can ever perform them. And God's actions are above all human logic and comprehension!

The critics often jeer at Sri Krishna because he had sixteen thousand wives. Perhaps, it is more due to jealousy than any moral sense because he could manage sixteen thousand wives whereas they can hardly manage one! Since these poor girls had been deserted by their own people just because they had been in the captivity of the demon Narakāsura, Krishna the rescuer, had no option but to legally accept them as his wives so

that he could shelter them. This is one explanation.

Then there is the other, the real explanation, which describes the esoteric significance of this. Sixteen thousand really represents Sixteen. The mind, the five senses of cognition, the five organs of action and the five fundamental elements (like the earth etc.)—these are the Sixteen. The zeros signify the numberless products, variations and manifestations of these sixteen. Sri Krishna is the Purusha or the Self who liberates them from hellish ignorance (Naraka) and redirects them unto Himself.

Contrary to the objectors' contention, Lord Krishna has been the unseen dynamic power guiding the Hindu religion and society in the right direction through his *Gītā* ever ringing its message for thousands of years. He is the greatest national hero and guides, and it is a pity that the sons of our own soil often disown Him!

People Living in Glass Houses Should Not Throw Stones!

Most of these objectors rise from the ranks of either the bigoted Christians or the more fanatical section of the Muslims. Without understanding the true spirit of their own religions—for, no true religion ever exhorts its adherents to be cruel to others—and much less the 'Eternal Religion', they resort to mudslinging. They seem to forget that the old adage 'People living in glass houses should not throw stones' applies to them admirably!

Every religion has two forms: the higher and the lower. The former is meant for the few highly evolved souls who are really the 'salt of the earth'. The latter is only a concession to the ignorance of the masses, who will thus be led gently from lower truths to higher truths. It is always easy for any intelligent crook to compare the higher form of his faith with the lower ones of others and get away with the conclusion that all religions except his are Paganism and hence false! It is this crooked chauvinism that the Hindu abhors and never the higher forms of any religion or its truly great votaries.

The heart of the true Hindu goes out to the Man on the cross, who exclaimed even at that hour, 'Father! Forgive them; for they know not

what they do!¹³ The true Hindu is all admiration for the great Prophet of Arabia who literally transformed a barbaric People into a well-knit moral society. But he can never tolerate the small-minded fanatics who try to poohpooh every other faith.

Swami Abhedananda, a brother-disciple of Swami Vivekananda clearly draws a distinction between the Christianity of Jesus and the Churchianity of the fathers. He declares that whereas the Hindu has no hesitation to accept the former which is a true religion of the heart, he can never accept the latter which is nothing but organised dogmatism.¹⁴

It is interesting to note that an almost similar distinction is drawn between Islam and Mohammedanism by Sir Ahmed Hussain: "I make a difference between Islam and Mohammedanism. The latter is not pure Islam. It has forgotten the spirit of Islam and remembers only the letter of the law,"¹⁵ He continues: "Please remember that there are many men and many minds and there are likely to be as many religions, as many

¹³ *St. Luke* xxiii, 34

¹⁴ *Why a Hindu Accepts Christ and Rejects Churchianity.*

¹⁵ *Notes on Islam*—by Sir Ahmed Hussain, Ed. by Khan Bahadur Hajee Khaja Mohammad Hussain, Govt. Central Press, Hyderabad, p. 12.

conceptions of God, as many notions of His attributes and as many ideas of the beginning or end of things as there are thinking minds."¹⁶ What a catholic approach!

Just read this passage from the Quran: "Sight perceives Him not, but He perceives men's sights; for He is the knower of secrets, the Aware" (*Sura vi. 104*). It appears like a perfect echo of the statement in the *Kenopanishad!* (1.7)

However, the generality of the Christian missionaries and the bigots among the Muslims fail to understand these higher sentiments and take to the tactics of hitting below the belt. They seem to be alienating themselves from the main current of our country, its culture and tradition, and misleading the ignorant masses into fantastic ways of thinking, ultimately leading to de-nationalisation and disintegration. The following observation of Dr. Radhakrishnan is very pertinent in the present context: "Latterly, however, a curious notion has got hold of our, strange to say, educated Mohammedan brethren, that by transferring their allegiance to the faith of Islam, they become the descendants of the Moors of Spain and the Caliphs of Baghdad. They regard themselves as culturally and socially distinct from their Hindu fellow countrymen. We do not change

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24.

our whole mental make-up, simply because we change our intellectual beliefs or religious convictions. To change one's creed is not to cut oneself off from the past of one's country or its ideals."¹⁷ If at all, this is an understatement.

It is an undeniable historical fact—and Prof. Arnold Toynbee himself subscribes to this view¹⁸-- that Christianity and Islam have seldom been content to follow the practice of 'live and let live' and that both of them have been responsible for some of the bitterest conflicts and the cruellest atrocities that have disgraced history. V. O. Ogt in his *Cult and Culture* condemns the unbending arrogance of Muslims and Christian missionaries in their claims of revealed authority and laments that religion will meet with disaster unless it universalizes its own conception of Revelation to embrace the future as well as the past (p. 70).

The Bible and its doctrines have received a very rough treatment at the hands of the Biblical scholars. Summing up the results of such criticism, Vivan Phelips says¹⁹ that: (1) The creation story of the Old Testament is a myth; (2) The concept of virgin-birth of Jesus is a late interpolation and that Joseph was his real father; (3) Jesus was a

¹⁷ *The Heart of Hindusthan*, p. 66.

¹⁸ *East and West*, p. 49,

¹⁹ *The Churches and Modern Thought*, Thinker's Library, No. 20, pp. 54-64.

man who was gradually raised to god-hood; (4) The resurrection of Jesus is a concoction and even St. Paul is silent on it; (5) The Gospels are not credible and trustworthy narratives. Thus we see that the main foundations of Christianity as propounded by the Church have been demolished! It is significant that Vivian Phelips warns his readers by saying: "These criticisms are, I repeat, the work not of anti-Christians, but of Christians who have devoted themselves to Biblical research and who are among the greatest living experts in that sphere of knowledge."²⁰ The author has rendered signal service to us by providing in this very book the grudging admissions by orthodox church leaders, of this criticism!²¹ J. M, Robertson's book *Christianity and Mythology* clearly admits that some of the Gospel stories were borrowed from the incidents in the lives of Krishna and Buddha.²²

Often, the god-hood of Jesus is sought to be proved on the basis of the miracles he was supposed to have performed. If Jesus is to be accepted as divine just because of his miracles, why not accept Rasputin 'the rascal monk' also as equally divine? In fact these miracles are

²⁰ *Ibid*, 64.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 67-71.

²² *Ibid*, p.97.

dismissed as artificial delusions of magic by Johan Gottifried Eichhorn.²³

According to the Old Testament, God created man out of earth and woman out of man's rib! People are born and die only once. However, their souls will be patiently waiting in the graves for the final day of Judgement. On this day God will weigh the sins and merits of each and every individual in a balance and put them into heaven or hell-fire eternally depending upon their 'balance' amount of merit or sin! Not even twentieth century science has succeeded in making these 'discoveries'!

No rational being will ever accept such theories. An unbiased comparison of these with the Hindu ideas on the same topics will clearly show up who is superstitious and who is scientific and rational. "I am no Hindu, but I hold the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future state to be incomparably more rational, more pious and more likely to deter men from vice, than the horrid opinions, inculcated by Christians on punishments without end."²⁴ -thus wrote Sri William Jones to Earl Spencer.

Now, let us turn to Islam. The doctrine that Islam is the only true religion, Allah is the only true God and that Muhammad is the last and the

²³ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ninth Edn. Vol. vii, p. 789.

²⁴ *Asiatic Jones* by Arberry.

best of prophets is as ridiculous as saying to a thirsty man. "If, and only if, you draw water from this particular well, call it as *pani* and drink it, your thirst will be quenched and not otherwise!" In fact, broad-minded intellectuals like Sir Ahamed Hussain who were devout Muslims, rebelled against such narrow bigotry and candidly declared: "(There is) one and only one God who is Infinite and Absolute, who hath neither beginning nor end and who is not conditioned or limited by anything whatever. Yezdan, Ishvara, Jehovah, God, Allah are the names in different languages of the same Infinite and Absolute God."²⁵ What a beautiful echo of the Rig Vedic statement, "Truth is One, sages call it by various names!"

Islam has staged a mighty rebellion against idolatry and worship of man. However, a glance at the place occupied by the stone of Kaaba and the prophet Muhammad in Islam would suffice, to convince anyone that what was driven out of the front door has come back through the back door! It will be interesting and instructive to quote Will Durant here: "Many of its worshippers believe that this stone (of Kaaba) was sent down from heaven--and perhaps it was a meteorite Within the Kaaba, in pre-Moslem days, were several idols representing gods. One was called Allah, and was probably the tribal god of the Quraish; three

²⁵ Quoted in *The Heart of Hindusthan*, p. 77.

others were Allah's daughters Mohammed destroyed the idols in and around the Kaaba, but spared the Black Stone, and sanctioned the kissing of it."²⁶ He continues: "... Pious pagan Arabs, long before Mohammed, had trekked to the Kaaba. Mohammed accepted the old custom because he knew that ritual is less easily changed than belief; and perhaps because he himself hankered after the Black Stone; by yielding to the old rite he opened a wide door to the acceptance of Islam by all Arabia.... As Islam spread to distant lands only a minority of Moslems performed the pilgrimage; even in Mecca there are Moslems who have never made a ritual visit to the Kaaba."²⁷

The conclusion is obvious!

Thus we can go on multiplying our criticisms of other religions. Maharshi Dayānanda Saraswati has already done it in a much more devastating way in his *Satyārtha Prakāsha*. But such an approach may not help anyone. What is of importance is a serious and sincere attempt to emulate the great ones, be he a Christ or a Mohammed, a Rāma or a Krishna or a Buddha, and make our lives blessed.

²⁶ The Story of Civilization—Vol. iv, The Age of Faith, pp. 161-171.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 215.

External Dangers Facing the Hindu Society

Though the Hindu religion has soared to Himalayan heights, the present-day Hindu society needs a lot of invigorating treatment. This cannot be done without first understanding the forces, pressures and dangers that are trying to erode and corrode it.

These dangers can be classified as external and internal. The dogmatic churchianity, the intolerant and fanatical sections from among the Muslims and unscrupulous communists form the three prongs of the trident aimed at the heart of Hindu society. These are the external dangers.

The mighty church, with its men and money, women and politics, often raises the doubt in the minds of honest observers whether what they are preaching is Christianity or Churchianity! There seems to be very little in common between that great Son of Man who had 'no place to lay his head' preaching wonderful sermons on the mount and the power-mad, money-mad crooked politicians masquerading as his priestly followers.

Most of our Hindu brothers—and for that matter our Christian brethren too—may not be aware of the history of the church and its Popes. A religion which was essentially simple, being based on the twin ideals of renunciation and love of

mankind, came under the influence of Constantine, the Roman emperor in 324 A.D. and was obliged to compromise on its most fundamental principles. Though it became better organised, more rich and powerful in the worldly sense, the moral and spiritual fibres began to give way leading to disastrous results. During the darkest period of papal history "Twenty Popes succeeded each other in what became generally known as the 'Rule of the Harlots.' The Lateran palace became a resort of orgies and degradation. The mistresses of the 'celibate' Popes made their sons successors to the papacy. Murder, assassination, fighting, prostitution and bribery were the order of the day."²⁸

Our church leaders who are the disciples of such Popes are leaving no stone unturned to convert the whole world into their brand of Christianity. India with its teeming millions, ignorant masses and a 'secular' government—and in the dictionary of the government the word 'secular' seems to mean 'anti-Hindu'—is their special target. Their schools are designed to subvert the young minds. Their hospitals are designed to exploit the sick and the infirm, who are advised and coaxed to surrender their ancestral religion. Intolerance towards and

²⁸ *Religions of the World*, by Gerald L. Berry. Barnes & Noble, New York, p. 83.

deliberate distortion of other religions is their favourite pastime. Soaked in hatred, they go to any length, use any language including the filthiest possible one, take to any unscrupulous method, to achieve their aim. Their policy of 'divide and control' by putting one caste against another, one group against another group, their 'inducements' (or bribes?) camouflaged as 'service', 'gifts' and 'mercy missions' are nothing but parts of a perfect plan to sabotage, dismember and disintegrate the Hindu society. The Christian missionary in the garb of the Hindu *sannyasin*, the naming of churches as 'Christa-rājamandiram', the adoption of Hindu methods of worship, meals and Harikathas—every one of these, is a time-bomb being planted in the structure of Hindu religion and society. Every Hindu, especially the educated and intellectual group, ought to be dismayed and roused into immediate constructive dynamic action.

Next comes the problem of and created by the Indian Muslims. Though Islam means spreading peace and a Muslim is one who lives in peace with Allah and His creation it is an ironical fact that "there has not been a religion which has shed so much blood and been so cruel to other men."²⁹ The story of Islam in Bhārat has been one continuous story of invasions and wars, arson and plunder, rape and wanton destruction. Though almost all

²⁹ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. 3, p. 350

Muslims here are converts from Hinduism and hence the same blood of the ancient Rishis is flowing through them, their hostility towards Hinduism does not seem to have abated in the least. The main reason for this seems to be the strangle-hold that the Moulvis and Maulanas are having over the Muslim masses. It is interesting to note here the observations of Sri Abdul Majid Khan, an enlightened and cultured Muslim leader. "It appears very strange, indeed, that only a few learned and wise souls among Muslims, have done truly great service to the Indian Muslims. But a vast majority of the Moulvis and Maulanas who claimed to be the champions of Islam, having sole monopoly of the teachings of Quran, considered Muslim leadership as their inherited profession and easy source of income....They always played on their emotions and sentiments. They held them in their grip, and swayed them at will. These learned Moulvis or Maulanas in their hypocritical pursuits, were emptied of real spiritual mission. They could not therefore impart real teachings of Islam. Nor did they allow the Muslim masses to grasp the real import ofIslam Perhaps Quran is the first Book an average Indian Muslim begins with, and recites it throughout his life and perhaps, it is the last Book which he understands even till the fag end of his life. It is a very crude fact; but it is a very grim X-ray of the Muslim mass psychology in India. Ignorance of Islam is the chief cause of

fanaticism....The dawn of deep communalism proved to be the dusk of patriotism. It has drawn a curtain over the sublime sentiments of love for the Motherland, the land of their origin and birth. They forget, in their madness, that along with the sense of community, they have to love the Indian soil, where they are born, brought up, fed for existence and made to flourish in life."³⁰ A wonderful analysis indeed! While writing about polygamy in Islam Dr. S. Jeelany remarks: "In Muslim countries such as Pakistan, the U.A.R., Iran, Iraq, Syria and Algeria, where people are better Muslims—in that at least they know more about their religion—the last of polygamy has been seen. It is only in Bharat that communal Muslims seek to establish a fortress of bogus Islam by masticating the word Shariah and refusing a uniform civil code, by insisting on the Islamic *burqa* for Aligarh and exploiting the Wakfs as their close preserve when in the U.A.R. Wakfs were abolished long ago. If we follow their reasoning, we find that such countries as Pakistan, Iran and the U.A.R. are no longer Islamic and that Bharat is the only citadel of Islam in the world!"³¹ However, until enlightened Muslims like the above gentlemen take over the leadership of their

³⁰ Quoted from the *Voice of Man*, a fortnightly published from Delhi, dated June 1, 1968.

³¹ Quoted from the *Organiser* dated Aug. 3, 1968, p. 14.

society, the Hindu society cannot afford to shut its eyes to the dangers from this quarter.

The last but not the least, is communism, 'the God that failed' in Russia. Since it combines in itself both the subtle deceptions of the Christian church and the creed of violence of the misguided among the Muslims, it is doubly dangerous. This doctrine, caring more for the end than for the means, wants to uproot everything—good or bad—first, before taking its roots. The economic boons it offers are a myth; because even in Russia which professed and practised this doctrine for fifty years the economic condition of the ordinary man can in no way compare with that in the capitalistic countries. In fact the disparity of income there, between the higher and lower income groups, is in some cases as high as 62:1 and there are no ceilings on income!³²

Being an alien and atheistic theory it has tried to destroy the ancient religion and culture of the people on whom it is foisted. China and Tibet are glaring examples of this. Russia itself is slowly moving back to find solace through religion. Its churches are drawing larger and larger crowds most of whom belong to the younger generation!

³² *The Democratic Alternative* by Miss M. A. Devaki, published by The Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom, Bombay, in 1959, p. 16.

A country like ours with poor and ignorant masses offers a fertile field for communism. Once it is allowed to take hold of us, we will become the absolute slaves of an absolute dictatorship which knows absolutely no scruples!

The attempts being made to counteract communism through economic policies alone, will not succeed, though they are of primary importance. Man does not live by bread alone. He must have some principles to live by, to be inspired with. And, once he gets them and be inspired by them, he works a miracle in any field. This is exactly what Hinduism did and can still do even today. The empires of Sri Rāma, the Pāṇḍavas, Chandragupta, Ashoka, Samudragupta and the Vijayanagara Empire are but a few important examples that illustrate this point. An unprejudiced study of our history shows that more of real communism—in the sense of the greatest good of the largest number *coupled with plenty of freedom*—existed during these periods than in modern communist counties.

The Menace of Materialism

At this juncture it is necessary to pinpoint the menace of materialism also. Hinduism has never forbidden the acquisition and enjoyment of material wealth, comforts and pleasures. It has only introduced the 'safety-valve' of Dharma, that is all. If Artha and Kāma become the sole aims of life and Dharma is totally neglected, then it becomes gross materialism, which is another name for the law of the jungle. Now-a-days the tendency towards such materialism is increasing to the detriment of our nation. Hence comes the necessity to recognize and check this menace.

A glance at the so-called advanced and civilized countries of the world will reveal what havoc has been brought about by materialism. Incidence of the most heinous crimes and awful mental illnesses is increasing at an alarming rate. According to a report put up by the police department of the U.S.A., the average rate of crimes per hour is as follows: one murder, theft of forty cars and ten robberies! That is why many of the Western savants and scientists are fast turning towards religion for solace and succour.

Atheism, the counterpart of materialism, is another evil that is trying to sway the minds of men. Even a little of serious thinking will convince us how hollow the arguments of atheism are. That

the universe was formed by a fortuitous course of atoms, can no more be believed than that the accidental jumbling of the letters of a word-making set would fall into a most wonderful treatise of philosophy! Actually the sciences are maps of universal laws; the universal laws are channels of universal power; and the universal power is but the outgoing of a Supreme Universal Mind.

Every nation has its special characteristic trait. In our country it is religion. If it goes "India will die in spite of politics, in spite of reforms, in spite of Kubera's wealth poured upon the head of every one of her children."³³

³³ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.3, p. 146.

Secular State or Insecure State?

Secularism is the chief weakness of our age. It might have given us some means but it has certainly denied us the ends. Civilization is a way of life, a movement of the human spirit. Its character is derived from its conception of the nature of man and his destiny.

Secularism which replaces man with money or the spirit with the State, has paved the way for incalculable destruction through the lust for power, the joy of cruelty and the pride of dominance. The two world-wars have amply demonstrated this.

Our leaders time and again proclaim at the top of their voice that ours is a Secular State and that our brand of Secularism is a very special one: The State will have nothing to do with any religion. But in practice it always so happens that the State has everything to do with Hinduism and absolutely nothing at all with other religions! These leaders were in a tremendous hurry to push through an unfortunate legislation viz. The Hindu Code Bill³⁴ in an *ad hoc* Parliament, whose

³⁴ Many are not aware that Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of our Republic was bitterly opposed to this legislation. For the correspondence that ensued between him and Pandit Nehru see *Bhavan's Journal* Feb. 25 and March 10, 1968.

business was over with constitution-making and which was not expected to transact any legislative business, much less a radical one. A legislation of such a fundamental character which uproots at one stroke the laws and traditions of thousands of years of millions of Hindus is to say the least, a reflection of the 'I-know-everything-you-shut-up'—attitude! Even supposing many of these reforms were desirable, leaders of various strata in the society whom they are going to affect should have been consulted. On the other hand the very same leaders and their 'illustrious' successors dare not make a single change in the personal laws of other religious communities! As if they are too perfect to need reforms! If our State is truly 'secular', there should be *one uniform civil code* governing *all* the citizens of our country irrespective of their caste, creed or religious denomination.

To give another example of this perverted secularism: Temples and their properties are being controlled by the Government through the Religious Endowments departments, but neither the Wakfs nor the Churches are within the purview of these departments!

Then again: Family planning has been taken as a policy on a priority basis. The loops and the pills whose dangers are being exposed by scientific journals of the West³⁵ are being thrust upon an

³⁵ *Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1967.

innocent society. And the victims are once again the Hindus, who are falling a prey to the subtle and deceptive propaganda which has no scruples to bring in the names of Sri Rāmachandra or Kunti! The G. O. I. wants the citizens to have not more than three off-springs but fails to specify whether it is per husband or per wife! The Indian Muslims are openly against it—though Pakistan is vigorously executing it—and the Christians have received the Pope's directive the other day, not to take to it! No wonder if the Hindus become a minority in their own country within the next two or three decades!

Nor has this Congress Government been successful in integrating our nation. Cooperating with a political party that was primarily responsible for the crime of partition of our dear Motherland and giving leniency to another which is ever ready to sell away the country itself to fulfill its nefarious ends is certainly not the way to integration! Whatever great work that Iron-man of India, Sardar Patel, did is being undone by the G. O. I. by its policy of helplessly looking at or even conniving at the creation of Pakistans and Padristans just to appease the aggrandizing minorities.

We do admit that managing a big country with millions of people and hundreds of problems is not a joke. But what distresses every

conscientious patriot is the failure of those in power to learn the bitter lessons of past history and continue in the beaten track of blunders !

Is this a Secular State or is it fast becoming an Insecure State?

Will our leaders and the people wake up?

The Internal Dangers

Now let us turn our attention inwards and find out what exactly ails our society from within.

The most serious defect of an average Hindu is his physical weakness and consequent cowardice, often clothed in high-sounding words like Ahimsa! Swami Vivekananda called weakness as sin and death. He exhorted our young men to develop 'muscles of iron and nerves of steel'. Gandhiji, the greatest apostle of Ahimsa in the modern days, advised the fleeing Malabar Hindus before the rioting Moplas in 1923 'to cultivate the art of killing and being killed.' He averred that it did not constitute violence. Even the Upanishads declare that there is no salvation for the weak! There is a lot of truth in that saying of Darwin, 'survival of the fittest'.

Two Hindus cannot join together and work. Obedience and cooperation are allergic to our constitution! Jealousy seems to be in our blood! We seem to forget that this has been the greatest single factor for our downfall over the centuries. Unless we learn to put away our petty jealousies, subjugate our ego and organise ourselves unitedly under a proper leader, there is no hope for us. It is our good fortune that there are still a few truly Bharatiya organizations like the Ramakrishna Mission, the Rashtreeya Swayamsevak Sangha, the

Ārya Samāj and the Vishva Hindu Parishad which are striving hard to unite us in the field of Dharma and culture. Let us rally round them.

Neglect of intellectual life seems to be another disease ailing us. The great Rishis, our forefathers, astonished the world with their wonderful discoveries in several fields of knowledge through hard work and deep thinking. In our generation, even a small boy must have readymade notes to pass his examination! *There is no short-cut to knowledge.* Let there be no illusion about it! Unless we—especially the younger generation—wake up and cultivate a real thirst for knowledge, develop the capacity to think deeply and intensely, we just cannot compete with the other nations of the world!

Lethargy is yet another disease which is eating into our vitals. 'A Hindu thinks but rarely acts'—thus remarked an English officer once. When Rome was burning, Nero was at least active in playing on the violin. When our Motherland is burning we are just sleeping! Let us throw off this lethargy and start rebuilding our nation on truly Bharatiya ideals.³⁶

³⁶ A reverent and intelligent study of our Dharma culture and history will reveal what these ideals are: Spirit of sacrifice and service in personal life, strength and magnanimity in the national life.

The last but not least of our weaknesses is our ignorance of our own religion. An average Christian or an average Muslim is better informed about his religion than an average Hindu. Whereas they have a positive and dynamic faith in their religion, most of us not only lack such faith but even go to the extent of deriding our own Dharma! It seems to have become a fashion to do so, especially among our students going abroad!

A Hindu child learns very little about our Dharma and culture either at home or at school. Parents and teachers, most of whom are themselves ignorant in this respect, cannot guide the youngsters. Or, if they try to guide, it is like the blind leading the blind! No wonder that these youngsters are fast falling an easy prey to alien influences! It is the foremost duty of the parents and elders to learn a little more about our glorious Dharma and culture, and to impart it *effectively* to their children and wards. On the negative side, let them take all the necessary steps in counteracting the mischievous and malicious propaganda of the enemies of our Dharma.

Some Problems and Possible Solutions

Every nation, every society, has its own problems. We too have ours. Let us consider a few of the more important ones and discuss the possible solutions.

The first problem that often agitates the minds of the enlightened Hindus is that of caste. The rigidity of the caste system, the consequent social inequalities, the hatred and animosity it has bred, are threatening our society with disintegration and destruction. In fact this is also the biggest obstacle to reconversion of those Christians and Muslims who genuinely want to come back. "Hindus have not only to prepare themselves for remedying the ills of Hindu society in caste system, not accepting others into their fold etc., they have to strive to take back all renegade Muslims (originally Hindus) into Hinduism. Crores of Muslims in India would be happy to return to Hinduism. But do the Hindus take any initiative in assuring that anyone embracing Hinduism would be welcome and given a place in equivalent caste in the Hindu society? Why cannot an intensive propaganda be carried out to bring out repeatedly that the ancestors of 95 per cent Muslims in India and Pakistan were Hindus who embraced Islam under duress of Muslim rulers or due to rigidity of Hindu

society?"³⁷—these are the bitter comments of an enlightened Muslim, Sri Mujibur Rahman.

Well, this problem has been made sufficiently complex that there cannot be an immediate readymade solution. Economic upliftment of the masses, a proper type of education enlightening them in the fundamental principles underlying our Dharma and culture—these will help to a great extent in levelling and cementing our society. In addition, a sincere spirit of give and take must be infused among the various caste groups. The more educated and cultured groups of our society (from any caste), especially the Brāhmins, must recharge their own lives with the high spiritual ideals that once guided them and take up their spiritual mission through *simple living and high thinking*. Swami Vivekananda who was not a Brāhmin himself by birth, makes an impassioned appeal for the restoration of the original four Varṇa system by merging all the sub-castes in the respective major caste.³⁸

In this connection, the treatment meted out to the Harijans by the so-called caste-Hindus, deserves special mention. For centuries together these poor people have been given a treatment

³⁷ Quoted from the article *Muslims Must be Assured of Equivalent Caste in Hindu Society* which appeared in *Organiser* dated 29th June 1968.

³⁸ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.5, p. 322.

which even the brutes do not deserve! It is a wonder how they have continued to remain as part of the Hindu society in spite of the crimes and atrocities committed against them! It is very urgent that the efforts of great men from Rāmānuja to Gandhi should not go in vain. If the Hindu society does not wake up to their problems and try for their upliftment through education and improvement of economy, they will all be absorbed one day into the folds of alien faiths! Let us remember that whoever goes out of the Hindu Dharma is not only lost to us, but also we have in him one more enemy!

The second problem we have to face is that of conversion. The overt and covert methods of the Christian missionaries in perverting the faith of our people are well-known. How to stop this? It is very pertinent to point out here that these brave missionaries are damn afraid to try their hand at the Muslims. Why? The unity, fanaticism and militancy of that community are the obvious factors to reckon with! Let us take a lesson from them. Let us try our best to Hinduise the Hindus first by a proper dissemination of our Dharma. At the same time let us keep an eternal vigil over the nefarious designs of others to convert our people. It is high time that our Government drives out all the foreign missionaries—as did China and Burma—from our soil and puts restrictions on the local

ones that they do not convert by coercion and cheating but only by conviction if they can!

And now about reconversion, which is closely linked with the problem of conversion. According to Ferishta, the oldest Mohammedan historian, we were six hundred millions. The total population of the present day India and Pakistan is about the same. Only, the ratio of Hindus to non-Hindus has changed from 1:0 to 3:2! The one-sided family planning of a vacillating and weak-kneed government is making matters worse. Hence we have to make vigorous efforts not only for sheer survival but also for winning back our erstwhile co-religionists by making proper adjustments in our society. Let us remember that the doctrine that a Hindu is born and not made *is absolutely false*. For hundreds of years our Dharma has quietly absorbed people of alien faiths without fuss. As regards the question of reabsorption, Swami Vivekananda's observations are interesting and instructive: "Returning converts will gain their own castes of course. And new people will make theirs."³⁹ The advanced sections of our society can render signal service to the new converts by voluntarily coming forward to absorb them into their own fold. Shivaji Maharaja set a noble example in this respect by marrying his daughter

³⁹ See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. 5, pp. 163-164

to a Muslim youth brought back into the Hindu fold.

It is here that the orthodox traditional monasteries can play a major part. In the earlier years they have done a wonderful job of keeping aloft the burning torch of our Dharma. However with the accumulation of wealth their men decayed. Pelf, prestige and power became their primary concern. Even today if they wake up to realities, give up their fossilised ways of thinking and acting and move with the changing society, all the while sticking to the eternal values in our Dharma, they can achieve still greater wonders what with their learning, wealth and prestige. They should make vigorous efforts for the propagation of the core of our Dharma, simplify the rituals, draw up a code of conduct *practicable for all the Hindus*, make the four sacraments of Jātakarma, Upanayana, Vivāha and Antyeshti simple and obligatory on all the Hindus and issue injunctions to their respective followers to reabsorb and rehabilitate the reconverts. This will go a long way in making the Hindu society more homogeneous and united.

Another problem which has caught the imagination of the Hindu public in recent time is that of cow-protection. 'Mother' cow has been held in high esteem ever since the Vedic times. She has become a part and parcel of the Hindu society to

such an extent that the three G's of Hinduism are often raised to five by including 'Go' (the cow) and 'Govinda' (the protector of cows, Lord Sri Krishna). Apart from the religious sentiment involved, cow-protection is important from the economic standpoint also, especially since our country is primarily agriculture-oriented. Moreover, this is one item on which the whole Hindu society is united. Hence it is but in the fitness of things that every Hindu should support this movement. According to Dr. Jeelany (a great scholar of Islamic culture), even in Islam cow-slaughter is prohibited and cow-protection enjoined by no less a person than the Prophet himself and also the 4th Caliph. So, if our Muslim brethren understand their own religion properly, this problem can be easily solved. What more, they will have conquered the hearts of millions of their Hindu brethren at one stroke! Of course, it goes without saying that looking after the cows well is even more important.

And now a word about our temples and priests. Though the temples should be the holiest of the holy places, they are usually kept awfully dirty with the pilgrims and visitors adding their share! The noise and disorder in temple far exceed our devotion! The nuisance and harassment that the poor pilgrims have to put up with at the hands of the greedy and ignorant priests is disgusting.

What is the solution? Apart from renovating old temples and building new ones, we have also to take the trouble of keeping them clean. Our public has to be vigorously educated in this.

As regards the priests, colleges for training them should be established and only such qualified priests should be employed in the temples with decent salaries.

What Every Hindu Ought to Do

After thus touching upon the glories, the maladies and the remedies of our religion and society let us now dilate a little upon what every Hindu ought to do, with himself, his family and the society.

The first and foremost thing that every Hindu ought to do is to cultivate tremendous faith in himself. Development of brawn and brain along with the conviction that we are essentially divine—this is the way to achieve it.

Equally important is the nurturing of even greater faith in that Supreme power whose sparks we are. A reverent study of the lives and teachings of men of God is a great aid in this direction.

Next, we must have abundant *abhimāna*, a sense of dignified pride that we are the descendants of the great Rishis of yore. Their wonderful achievements in various fields are our proud heritage. Let us be worthy of them, nay, let us try to excel them! It is here that a devout study of our scriptures helps us greatly. Every Hindu must at least be familiar with the *Bhagavad Gita* and the great characters of the two Epics.

Cultivation of the ten virtues listed under Yama and Niyama is a must.

The importance of silent meditation which calms the mind and soothes the nerves cannot be over-emphasized. Meditation is to be practised at least twice a day after learning about it from a proper preceptor.

The family is the fundamental unit of society. Again, the strength of the society and that of the family depends upon the character of the individuals who constitute them. Hence a very great responsibility is cast upon the head of the family. It is his duty to pay special attention to bring up the people under his care, especially on the moral and spiritual side. This can be achieved by his leading group meditations and chanting as also the observance of sacred festivals (with greater stress on the side of austerities) in his household. Occasional or regular visits to temples and pilgrimages to important Kshetras should also be undertaken.

Contact and cooperation with Mathas, Ashramas and other religious institutions is another essential thing. It is obvious that we can do better service if we work through an organization. For the last thousand years or more, Dharma has been understood and practised only in its personal aspect to the exclusion of the social aspect. This has resulted in tragic developments such as (i) 'good and pious religious men' joining hands with foreign aggressors without their

'religious conscience' being in the least troubled; (ii) the performance of rites only with a view to acquiring personal religious merit without caring for its social effects; (iii) the wrong interpretation of the Shāstras (e.g. refusal by the Kāshi Pandits to take back the Kashmir Muslims into the Hindu fold); and so on. Hence every Hindu must remember this social aspect of our Dharma constantly and emphasize it as the supreme need of the hour.

Since our religion and culture are intimately connected with the Sanskrit language, it is the bounden duty of all educated Hindus to try to learn, encourage and propagate it.

Finally, every Hindu has to cultivate equal respect for all other religions too, because Hinduism preaches that these also lead to the same goal. However, it goes without saying that his relationship with his own religion should be considered as very special.

Conclusion

Though religions are many, the Religion is only one. It is the 'Religion of Man'. Man is essentially divine and not a sinner. The goal of all religions is to help him realize his inner divinity. Hence the Hindu has no quarrel with anybody. He concedes that there can be as many paths as there are persons. *Ultimately, every man has his own religion.* What suits one may not and need not suit another. That is why he shows a remarkable spirit, not only of tolerance but even positive respect, towards other faiths. What has gone on for thousands of years can go on for thousands of years more.

However, when others attack his religion he has no option but to fight back, at least in self-defence. Some of the observations made in this booklet are to be understood only in this light. It is only to prove that none is perfect.

It is the duty of all religious groups to find out the areas of agreement and cooperate in them. Where we differ let us agree to differ honestly; let us live and let others also live *peacefully*. In fact, if all understand and practise the essence and the spirit of their own religions properly, peace will certainly reign on this earth!

Let us humbly pray for it!