

RELIGIONS OF INDIA

HENRY H. NESS

FAR EASTERN NO 115

DR. H. H. GOWEN.

Dec. 1948

Salvador

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Somewhere about 1500 B.C. one of the most outstanding events in the history of India took place in the invasion of a people usually described as Aryans. Not very much is known of the origin and course of this invasion, but it has its relation to the beginning of the Iranian as well as of Indian history.

It shall now be our task to describe as briefly and simply as possible the religious developments which followed the Aryan invasion of India, starting with the revelation of Aryan theology and religion given to us by the means of its earliest literature, the "Veda", and proceeding thence to the further stages. The subject we shall arrange under five heads, in their historical sequence, as follows:

1. The Vedic age.
2. The age of the Brahmanas.
3. The age of the Upanishads.
4. The age of the Great Heresies, may be divided into two, namely:
 1. Jainism.
 2. Buddhism.
5. The age of Hinduism.

First, we shall consider the Vedic religion. The Vedic religion appeared on the scene with the immergence of the Vedic Aryans through the passes of the Hindukush in Northwest of India. It is by the light of the Rig-Veda that we see them gradually advancing from the Indes valley to the valley of the Ganges. Though a fighting and aggressive people, these Vedic Aryans were by no means Barbarian or primitive. They had domesticated the cow, bull, sheep, goat, swine, horses, dogs, et cetera. They loved the work of shepherds among the flock, as well as the tilling of the ground. They were also occupied in such arts of life as spinning, weaving, plaiting, and dying, and wore woollen clothing as well as skins and furs. They had their blacksmiths and goldsmiths, and their weapons

of war were of metal as well as bone and wood. Though they had no coined money for currency, they used ornaments of all sorts for such purposes. Their literature, the "Veda" (meaning knowledge), is the oldest Aryan literature in possession, and is the only source of what we know about the people, either socially or religiously.

As the "Veda" stands, we speak of the four Vedas: namely, the Rig-veda, the Yajur-veda (a collection of sacrificial hymns into the black and white Yajur), the Sama-veda (or book of songs), and the Atharva-veda. The most important of these is the Rig-veda, a collection of 1017 hymns, known as Valakhilyas, divided into ten books or Mandalas. The theology of the Veda is a well-defined Polytheism.

Behind all the gods appears the conception of Rita, a kind of a moral law to which even the gods themselves were subject. The most powerful of all the Vedic gods was Indra, to whom are addressed 250 hymns in the Rig-veda. He is, first, the storm god, but later was India's war god. Then there was the Rudra (the Ruddy), the wild boar of the sky--the lightning flash. There were also the Maruts, the storm angels. Then again Tarjanya, the rain cloud invoked by three hymns, which nevertheless are notable for their beauty. Once again we have Vayu, the wind god, or the breath of the gods, which comes from rending the air with noise of thunder. Next in importance to Indra is Agni, the fire-god whose praises are chanted in two hundred hymns.

A god of quite unusual character is the drink god, Soma, to whom all the hymns of the ninth book of the Rig-veda are addressed. Soma was probably the deified juice of the moon-plant, a milk-weed out of which an intoxicating liquor was brewed. In course of time Soma came to represent the invigorating sap of life with which the moon was supposed to charge herself gradually during the month; hence the custom of planting seeds in full moon when nature reached her climax of vigor.

There still remain a number of lesser gods belonging to the Vedic system. There is Tushan, the sun god, and then Brihaspati, the lord of prayer. We also have the god of death called Yama and so forth.

Towards the end of the tenth book of Rig-veda it is very evident that we are passing from Polytheism towards Pantheism. The institution of Caste, which plays so important a part in the subsequent history, does not seem to have been originally Vedic.

Second, the Brahmanic period. With the ascendancy of the Brahman, we reach a stage of Indian religion which we call the Brahmanic, beginning at some rather uncertain date following the Aryan conquest, and reaching its height about the seventh century B.C. The word Brahman represents the impersonal element for which the form which the word periodically involved the word Brahma, which signifies the manifestation of Brahm as it concerns the creation, and Brahman is the prayer-man or the representative of the divine among men. As the technique of the priestly office of the Brahman became too elaborate to be retained by memory, it was finally embodied in the ritual commentaries on the Veda, and became known as Brahmanas, and it is from these commentaries that most of our knowledge concerning the Brahmanic religion is gathered.

Much of the concern of the Brahmanas is with sacrifices and the linking up of the Vedic songs with the ritual. Sacrifice was regarded not so much as an atonement for sin as a means of strengthening the exhausted gods. It was a means of gaining power entirely apart from moral consideration. The Brahmanas have much of interest apart from their character as text-books for priestly order. They give us old methods and legends such as that of the flood, for which Manu was saved through the intervention of Vishnu, and that of the Indras defeat of the demons attempt to raise a fire tower to the heavens.

It isobvious that through all these mechanical rites of the Brahman that such a conception of religion threw great power into the hands of the priestly caste, and many are the illustrations given of enormous fees earned by these priests in the performance of their responsible office.

Third, we have the Upanishadic period. A very broad distinction has been commonly made upon the Brahmanas and the Upanishadic, or the philosophic commentaries on the Veda, as though these represented two opposite schools of thought. While it is true that the Brahmanas give us the religion of "works" and the Upanishads are concerned with their religion of knowing, yet the transition is not as abrupt as has sometimes been described. The Upanishads are not so much experiments in opposition to that of the Brahmanas, but rather a continuation of Indian effort to achieve religion by way of knowledge rather than works. The word Upanishad signifies "a sitting down to a teacher", and it should be remembered that the teacher need not be a Brahman. The books of the Upanishadic period are known as Aranyakas or "forest Brahmanas". These books probably belong to a period about 600 B.C. and were very numerous. The number has been recognized from 150 to nearly 250, and some so late that there were even a Mohammedan book Upanishad. In the Upanishadic the very drift of Indian philosophy is very apparent, but there are various interpretations such as lead eventually to differing as well as antagonistic schools.

As to the six orthodox schools known as the Shad Darcanas (6 views), it is unfortunate that we can not treat them in their historic sequence. This is due to the fact that we know very little about the authors as well as the fact that early and late elements appear in every system. They may be remembered best by classing them in three series, namely, the

Nyaya and Vaiceshika, Samkhya, and Yoga, and the Purva-mimamsa (Mimamsa), and Uttara-mimamsa (Vedanta). The Nyaya is a system of logic rather than philosophy, and is based on a text-book by one Gautama (not the Buddha called the Nyaya-sutra). It was a method of philosophical inquiry into all the objects and subjects of human knowledge, including the process of reasoning their laws of thought. For example, it states a proposition as follows: The hill is fiery because it smokes. Whatever smokes is fiery. This hill smokes, therefore the hill is fiery. This was their reasoning. Salvation therefore was held to depend upon correct logic.

The Vaiceshika was so named as it emphasized the theory of atoms ascribed to one named Kanada (Atom-eater). The system extends the logic method of the "Nyaya" to a physical investigation, maintaining the reality not only of souls but also of such things as space, time and atoms. The world is supposedly formed by the aggregation of atoms, which, although eternal and innumerable are not infinite in their number. Their constant combination, disintegration, and recombination are due to the activity of the hypothetical force called Adrishta (the unseen), which is in turn the result of the accumulated Karma of all sentient beings. Though impersonal, this Adrishta became for many of the followers of Kanada a kind of blind deity.

Then we have the Samkhya which signifies synthesis, and is probably the oldest of the philosophical schools ascribed to Kapila, a semi-mythical sage whose historical reality is now being generally abandoned. Intimately related to the Sankhya philosophy is Yoga or (Yoking) with the divine. The proverb says, "No knowledge like the Sankhya--nor power like the Yoga". It is a combination of acceptance of a supreme being, and, secondly, the provision for a practical discipline whereby the soul may find union with this being. Briefly Yoga is a power for the

securing of a larger vision and powers latent in all men through which the lower self is conquered and the higher self set free for fellowship with God.

The Mimansa, meaning the earlier investigation, is ascribed to "jaimini", and like the yoga, is a practical system teaching the ceremonial duty of man in regard to sacrifice while its theological attitude is neither agnostic or polytheistic. "The supreme being might exist, but was not necessary to the system." On the other hand, the Veda was eternal.

Connected philosophically with the above is the Uttara-mimamsa or "later investigation" generally referred to as the end of the Veda. It represents a collection or gathering up of the doctrine of Upanishad, and its varied forms and formations extends over a long period of history down to the 8th century.

We wish now to cover briefly the two great heresies of Indian religion. First, that of Jainism. It will not be possible here to bring a complete account of the Jain philosophy and religion, but merely touch upon a few things. The word Jain is derived from the root word meaning to conquer and signifies a religion of those who have overcome the lust of living. Jainism was originally an intensification of the old ascetic discipline under the influence of an extreme reverence for life. Consequently, a very large part of the Jain monks' attention was directed towards using the extremist care in not injuring any living thing. Twelve years of this most severe practice was necessary for salvation. After that, if a monk did not wish to live, he was recommended to starve himself to death as a supreme example of their theory of discipline.

The Jains built many shrines, some of which are towers and some cave temples hewn out of solid rock. The numerous cupolas, obelisks,

and spires, often bright with the whitest marble, seem to pierce the sky. The shrines are laden with the weight of gorgeous offerings sent by wealthy members of the sect from almost every populous city of the empire.

Jain literature is quite extensive and includes besides the Canon and its commentaries, much in the way of poetry and moral tales, as well as a number of works on grammar. Some of their philosophies existed in their belief that things are permanent only as regards to their substance, but their accomplishments or quantities originate and perish. To explain: Any material thing continues to exist forever as matter. This matter, however, may assume any shape and quality. Thus clay, for example, may be regarded as permanent, but the form of the jar or clay or its color may come into existence and perish. Souls also are eternal and infinite in number, good Jains being ever engaged in freeing these from their association with matter along the three-fold way of right faith, right knowledge, and right contact. The monk takes five vows--not to kill, not to lie, not to steal, to abstain from sexual intercourse, and to renounce all earthly possessions. When these vows are completely fulfilled, the Jain, as before mentioned, may commit suicide by self-starvation.

In general, it may be said that the rules laid down for the Jain do not clearly differ from those laid down for the Brahmic.

Next, we have the heresy of Buddhism. First, we wish to speak of the personality of the founder. The history of Buddhism dates back to Gautama. We may be doubtful as to the precise date of Gautama's birth and death, but it is generally believed that it took place about the sixth century or later, as the soil seemed well prepared for such light and such teaching as that of Gautama. It was in this significant time that the child was born, whose personal name was Siddhartha, his family name Gautama, and the name of his clan that of the Cakyas. The actual birth

place is marked by a pillar erected by King Acoka in the third century B.C., which was first referred to by the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien 1500 years ago, and was rediscovered in December, 1896.

Siddhartha's father was much concerned whether his son's choices should lead him into the path of the ascetic rather than into that of the warrior. To influence the youth's destiny, he is married to his cousin, and so to that union a son, Rahula, is born. Further to keep the prince from brooding over the weary weight of his unintelligible world all things suggestive of misery were carefully concealed by the king's command. But destiny proved too strong. So we come to that familiar story of the "four seeings", that is, the four expeditions with his charioteers in the course of which, by the intervention of divine providence, Siddhartha beheld in sequence the spectacles of age, sickness, death, and the ascetic. With full force of Hindu conviction, of the essential sorrow of existence smote on the hitherto untroubled calm of a sheltered manhood. So came about the "great renunciation". Siddhartha was twenty-nine years old when he began to carry out his far-reaching resolution. Arising one night, leaving his sleeping wife and child, and attended by his charioteers alone, he mounted the horse, Kantaka, to forsake forever the white domes of Kapilavastu. When he had reached the end of the jungle, the future Buddha took off his royal robes, cut the long locks, which were the symbol of his freedom, and sent back chariot, horses, and servant to the deserted palace. Then facing with averted eyes the mystery of sorrow, with all of the trappings of life surrendered, Siddhartha attached himself to five ascetics from Benares, to find perchance in the accepted way, release and peace. Spending thus six years of struggle without any spiritual results, like spending the time tying air into knots, Guatama left and went forth alone to take his place beneath the Bo-tree at Buddhagaya, there to wrestle with the principalities and

and powers of evil until peace should crown his conflict. The decision of Guatema has been many times described, and in fullest detail. It sufficeth to say here that the triumphant result was the "illumination" which made the prince come forth as the "enlightened", the Buddha. The enlightenment is embodied in what is called the four noble truths, which are as follows:

1. The truth that life is sorrow--that all happiness is illusionary and vain.

2. That the cause of sorrow is desire, as to which the philosophers had already had much to say.

3. That the way out of sorrow is "nirvana" that sliding of the dew-drops into the ocean, which ends at once the illusion of personality, and the pain of consciousness, in the great city of peace and final rest.

4. "The eight-fold way" to Nirvana consists of right belief, right resolve, right speech, right behavior, right occupation, right effort, right contemplation, and right concentration.

The Buddha did not believe in a soul. Man was but a concatenation of physical and mental experience. There could be no permanent. It is difficult to see in Guatama's conclusion but the darkest pessimism. As one writer puts it, the soul is tossed about from life to life, from billow to billow in the great ocean of transmigration, and there is no escape save for the very few who during their birth as men obtain a right knowledge of the great spirit, and then enter into immortality, or be absorbed into the divine essence. The death of Buddha took place about 487 B.C.

Today the total number of Buddhists in India, including Burma and Nepal, is about 11,000,00, and most of these are outside of India proper.

Sat. 11/19

