

ON HINDUISM

Bhagni Nivedita

The Swami was constantly preoccupied with the thought of Hinduism as a whole, and this fact found recurring expression in references to Vaishnavism. As a Sannyasin, his own imagination was perhaps dominated by the conceptions of Shaivism. But Vaishnavism offered him a subject of perpetual interest and analysis. The thing he knew by experience was the truth of the doctrine of Advaita. The symbols under which he would seek to convey this were the monastic ideal and the Worship of the Terrible. But these were truths for heroes. By their means, one might gather an army. The bulk of mankind would always think of God as a Divine Providence, a tender Preserver, and the question of questions was how to deepen the popular knowledge of the connection between this type of belief and the highest philosophy. With regard to the West, indeed, the bridges had actually to be built. Advaita had to be explained and preached. But in India, all this had been done long ago. The facts were universally admitted. It was only necessary to renew realisation, to remind the nation of the interrelation of all parts of its own faith, and to go again and again over the ground, in order to see that no weak point remained in the argument by which Vaishnavism was demonstrated to be as essential to the highest philosophy, as that philosophy was acknowledged to be, to it.

THE SANKHYA PHILOSOPHY

Thus he loved to dwell on the spectacle of the historical emergence of Hinduism. He sought constantly for the great force behind the evolution of any given phenomenon. Where was the thinker behind the founder of a religion? And where, on the other hand was the heart to complete the thought? Buddha had received his philosophy of the five categories-form, feeling, sensation, motion, knowledge-from Kapila. But Buddha had brought the love that made the philosophy live. Of no one of these, Kapila had said, can anything be declared. For each is not. It but was, and is gone. "Each is but the ripple on the waters. Know, Oh man! thou art the sea!"

Krishna, in his turn, as the preacher and creative centre of popular Hinduism, awoke in the Swami a feeling which was scarcely second to his passionate personal adoration of Buddha. Compared to His many-sidedness, the Sannyas of Buddha was almost a weakness. How wonderful was the Gita! Reading it, as a boy, he would be stopped every now and then by some great sentence, which would go throbbing through his brain for days and nights. "They who find pleasure and pain the same, heat and cold the same, friend and foe the same!" And that description of the battle-a spirited battle too! - with the opening words of Krishna, "Ill doth it befit

thee, Arjuna, thus to yield to unmanliness!" How strong! But besides this, there was the beauty of it. The Gita, after the Buddhist writings, was such a relief! Buddha had constantly said "I am for the People!" And they had crushed, in his name, the vanity of art and learning. The great mistake committed by Buddhism lay in the destruction of the old.

For the Buddhist books were torture to read. Having been written for the ignorant, one would find only one or two thoughts in a huge volume.* It was to meet the

need thus roused, that the Puranas were intended. There had been only one mind in India that had foreseen this need, that of Krishna, probably the greatest man who ever lived. He recognises at once the need of the People, and the desirability of preserving all that had already been gained. Nor are the Gopi story and the Gita (which speaks again and again of women and Shudras) the only forms in which he reached the ignorant. For the whole Mahabharata is his, carried out by his worshippers, and it begins with the declaration that it is for the People.

LIFE REVEALS GOD

"Thus is created a religion that ends in the worship of Vishnu, as the preservation and enjoyment of life, leading to the realisation of God. Our last movement, Chaitanyism, you remember, was for enjoyment.* At the same time, Jainism represents the other extreme, the slow destruction of the body by self-torture. Hence Buddhism, you see, is reformed Jainism, and this is the real meaning of Buddha's leaving the company of the five ascetics. In India, in every age, there is a cycle of sects which represents every gradation of physical practice, from the extreme of self-torture to the extreme of excess. And during the same period will always be developed a metaphysical cycle, which represents the realisation of God as taking place by every gradation of means, from that of using the senses as an instrument, to that of the annihilation of the senses. Thus Hinduism always consists, as it were, of two counter- spirals, completing each other, round a single axis.

"Yes! Vaishnavism says, 'It is all right! this tremendous love for father, for mother, for brother, husband, or child! It is all right, if only you will think that Krishna is the child, and when you give him food, that you are feeding Krishna!' This was the cry of Chaitanya, 'Worship God through the senses!' as against the Vedantic cry, 'Control the senses! suppress the senses!'

"At the present moment, we may see three different positions of the national religion-the orthodox, the Arya Samaj, and the Brahmo Samaj. The orthodox covers the ground taken by the Vedic Hindus of the Mahabharata epoch. The Arya Samaj corresponds with Jainism, and the Brahmo Samaj with the Buddhists."

INDIA NOT EFFETE

"I see that India is a young and living organism. Europe also is young and living. Neither has arrived at such a stage of development that we can safely criticise its institutions. They are two great experiments, neither of which is yet complete. In India, we have social communism, with

the light of Advaita-that is, spiritual individualism-playing on and around it; in Europe, you are socially individualists, but your thought is dualistic, which is spiritual communism. Thus the one consists of socialist institutions, hedged in by individualistic thought, while the other is made up of individualist institutions, within the hedge of communistic thought.

"Now we must help the Indian experiment as it is. Movements which do not attempt to help things as they are, are, from that point of view, no good. In Europe for instance, I respect marriage as highly as non-marriage. Never forget that a man is made great and perfect as much by his faults as by his virtues. So we must not seek to rob a nation of its character, even if it could be proved that that character was all faults."

THE WORSHIP OF HUMANITY

His mind was extraordinarily clear on the subject of what he meant by individualism. How often has he said to me "You do not yet understand India! We Indians are MAN-worshippers, after all! Our God is man!" He meant here the great individual man, the man of self-realisation -Buddha, Krishna, the Guru, the Maha-Purusha. But on another occasion, using the same word in an entirely different sense, he said, "This idea of man-worship* exists in nucleus in India, but it has never been expanded. You must develop it. Make poetry, make art, of it. Establish the worship of the feet of beggars, as you had it in Mediaeval Europe. Make man-worshippers."

He was equally clear, again, about the value of the image. "You may always say," he said, "that the image is God. The error you have to avoid, is to think God the image." He was appealed to, on one occasion, to condemn the fetichism of the Hottentot. "I do not know," he answered, "what fetichism is!"

A lurid picture was hastily put before him, of the object alternately worshipped, beaten, thanked. "I do that!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see," he went on, a moment later, in hot resentment of injustice done to the lowly and absent, "Don't you see that there is no fetichism? Oh, your hearts are steeled, that you cannot see that the child is right! The child sees person everywhere. Knowledge robs us of the child's vision. But at last, through higher knowledge, we win back to it. He connects a living power with rocks, sticks, trees, and the rest. And is there not a living Power behind them? It is symbolism, not fetichism! Can you not see?"

THE MIMANSAKAS

But while every sincere ejaculation was thus sacred to him, he never forgot for a moment the importance of the philosophy of Hinduism. And he would throw perpetual flashes of poetry into the illustration of such arguments as are known to lawyers. How lovingly he would dwell upon the Mimansaka philosophy! With what pride he would remind the listener that according to Hindu savants, "the whole universe is only the meaning of words. After the word comes the thing. Therefore, the idea is all!" And indeed, as he expounded it, the daring of the Mimansaka

argument, the fearlessness of its admissions and the firmness of its inferences, appeared as the very glory of Hinduism. There is assuredly no evasion of the logical issue in a people who can say, even while they worship the image, that the image is nothing but the idea made objective; that prayer is powerful in proportion to the concentration it represents; that the gods exist only in the mind, and yet the more assuredly exist. The whole train of thought sounded like the most destructive attack of the iconoclast, yet it was being used for the exposition of a faith! One day, he told the story of Satyabhama's sacrifice and how the word "Krishna," written on a piece of paper, and thrown into the balances, made Krishna himself, on the other side, kick the beam, "Orthodox Hinduism," he began, "makes Sruti, the sound, everything. The thing is but a feeble manifestation of the pre-existing and eternal idea. So the name of God is everything; God Himself is merely the objectification of that idea in the eternal mind. Your own name is infinitely more perfect than the person, you! The name of God is greater than God. Guard you your speech!" Surely there has never been another religious system so fearless of truth! As he talked, one saw that the whole turned on the unspoken conviction, self-apparent to the Oriental mind, that religion is not a creed but an experience; a process, as the Swami himself has elsewhere said, of being and becoming. If it be true that this process leads inevitably from the apprehension of the manifold to the realisation of the One, then it must also be true that everything is in the mind, and that the material is nothing more than the concretising of ideas.

Thus the Greek philosophy of Plato is included within the Hindu philosophy of the Mimansakas, and a doctrine that sounds merely empiric on the lips of Europe, finds reason and necessity, on those of India. In the same way, as one declaring a truth self-evident, he exclaimed, on one occasion, "I would not worship even the Greek gods, for they were separate from humanity! Only those should be worshipped who are like ourselves, but greater. The difference between the gods and me must be a difference only of degree."

INDIAN LOGIC

But his references to philosophy did not by any means always consist of these epicurean tit-bits. He was merciless, as a rule, in the demand for intellectual effort, and would hold a group of unlearned listeners through an analysis of early systems, for a couple of hours at a stretch, without suspecting them, of weariness or difficulty. It was evident, too, at such times, that his mind was following the train of argument in another language, for his translations of technical terms would vary from time to time.

In this way he would run over the six objects with which the mind has to deal, in making up the universe according to the Vaisheshik formulation. These were substance, quality, action, togetherness, classification or differentiation, and inseparable inherence as between cause and effect, parts and the whole. With this he would compare the five categories of Buddhism, - form, feeling, consciousness, reaction [i.e. the resultant of all previous impressions], and Vidya, or judgment. The Buddhist made form the resultant of all the others, and nothing by itself; the goal

therefore, for Buddhism, was beyond Vidya [which Buddhism called Prajna], and outside the five categories. Side by side with this, he would place the three illusive categories of the Vedanta (and of Kant)- time, space, and causation [Kala-Desh-Nimitta] appearing as name-and-form, which is Maya, that is say, neither existence nor non-existence. It was clear, then, that the seen was not, according to this, a being. Rather is it an eternal, changeful process. Being is one, but process makes this being appear as many. Evolution and involution are both alike in Maya. They are certainly not in Being [Sat], which remains eternally the same.

Nor would western speculations pass forgotten, in this great restoration of the path the race had come by. For this was a mind which saw only the seeking, pursuing, enquiry of man, making no arbitrary distinctions as between ancient and modern. The analysis of the modern syllogism-under the old Indian title of "the five limbs of the argument" - would be followed by the four proofs of the Nyayas. These were, (1) direct perception; (2) inference; (3) analogy; (4) testimony. According to this logic, the induction and deduction of the moderns were not recognised; inference was regarded as always from the more known to the less known, or from the less to the more. The inference from direct perception was divided into three different kinds; first, that in which the effect is inferred from the cause; second, that in which cause is inferred from effect, and thirdly, the case in which inference is determined by concomitant circumstances. Methods of inference, again, were fivefold; by agreement, by difference, by double method of agreement and difference, by partial method of agreement, and by partial method of difference. The two last were sometimes classed together as the method of the residuum. It was quite clear that only the third of these could furnish a perfect inference; that is to say, proof is only complete when the negative has been proved, as well as the affirmative. Thus God can never be proved to be the cause of the Universe.

ALL IS INFERENCE

"There is, again, the fact of pervasiveness. A stone falls, and crushes a worm. Hence we infer that all stones, falling, crush worms. Why do we thus immediately reapply a perception? Experience, says some one. But it happens, let us suppose, for the first time. Throw a baby into the air, and it cries. Experience from past lives? But why applied to the future? Because there is a real connection between certain things, a pervasiveness, only it lies with us to see that the quality neither overlaps, nor falls short of, the instance. On this discrimination depends all human knowledge.

"With regard to fallacies, it must be remembered that direct perception itself can only be a proof, provided the instrument, the method, and the persistence of the perception, are all maintained purè. Disease, or emotion, will have the effect of disturbing the observation. Therefore direct perception itself is but a mode of inference. Therefore all human knowledge is uncertain, and may be erroneous. Who is a true witness? He is a true witness to whom the things said is a direct perception. Therefore the Vedas are true, because they consist of the evidence of competent

persons. But is this power of perception peculiar to any? No! The Rishi, the Aryan, and the Mlechha all alike have it.

"Modern Bengal holds that evidence is only a special case of direct perception, and that analogy and parity of reasoning are only bad inferences. Therefore of actual proofs there are only two, direct perception and inference.

"One set of persons, you see, gives priority to the external manifestation, the other to the internal idea. Which is prior, the bird to the egg, or the egg to the bird? Does the oil hold the cup or the cup the oil? This is a problem of which there is no solution. Give it up! Escape from Maya!"

(यह लेख भगिनी निवेदिता की पुस्तक "The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita" से लिया गया है।)