

A Young Muslim's  
Guide to Religions  
in the World

Dr. Syed Sajjad Husain



Bangladesh Institute of  
Islamic Thought (BIIT)

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First edition 1992

Second edition 2003

ISBN-984-8203-33-4

Printed By :

Chowkash Printers Ltd.

131, D.I.T Ext. Road, Dhaka-1000

Phone : 9336679

Price : ~~Taka 200.00 (White)~~\*

Taka 250.00 (Offset)

US \$ 20

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FOR MOHSENA, RASHEDA, NAIMA, NAFISA

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# PUBLISHER'S NOTE

A YOUNG MUSLIM'S GUIDE TO RELIGIONS IN THE WORLD is the first in a projected series of books which the Institute of Islamic Thought in Bangladesh intends to publish as educational aids to the young who have to rely on publications by non-Muslims for knowledge about culture and civilisation. These publications discuss matters from an angle which is often anti-Islamic and sometimes distort history, by suppressing facts about Islamic society in order to justify their assertions. A Muslim student who reads them unthinkingly is apt to develop attitudes towards his own culture which at best can be described as apologetic.

The programme that we have embarked upon in concert with the International Institute of Islamic Thought in the USA, is designed to provide an alternative. What Dr Syed Sajjad Husain has attempted in the present book is to analyse different religious cultures in an Islamic perspective, focusing on the differences and affinities, if any, between Islam and other religions. We hope the book will prove a useful primer to those interested in comparative religion and help correct many errors.

The Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought is a small body of people dedicated to Islam whose principal mission is to see to it that the Muslims might understand their own religion and culture and not be influenced by alien attacks and non-Muslims be enabled to acquaint themselves with the Muslim point of view. They believe that the preservation of the Islamic heritage as well as intercommunal peace and harmony depends upon the rational understanding of the truth.

The Bangladesh Institute takes this opportunity to acknowledge its gratitude to its counterpart in the USA for the encouragement it has received from it. We are also grateful to Dr Syed Sajjad Husain for agreeing to cooperate with us in our programme.

It gives us immense pleasure that we are presenting the second edition of the book to the readers.

**M. Zohurul Islam FCA**  
**Secretary General**

Dhaka 2003

**Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was Mr Shah Abdul Hannan and Mr Ahmad Fariduddin, both members of the Bangladesh Civil Service and old acquaintances of mine, the latter from his student days in the University of Dacca when I taught in the Department of English, who persuaded me to undertake to write this book. I agreed with considerable diffidence and told them that what I could at best produce would be a book for the lay man and the general reader. But having worked for two years on this project, I feel grateful to them for obliging me to put on record thoughts which had been stirring in my mind for years.

I am also indebted to the late Dr Ismail Rajhi, the renowned Arab scholar, whose book on Islamisation of knowledge alerted most of us to the dangers faced by the younger generation of Muslims who live in daily contact with non-Muslim communities and have to read books written by non-Muslims in which Islam is often distorted. It was also Mr Shah Hannan and Mr Ahmad Fariduddin who drew my attention to the programme suggested by the late Dr Rajhi as a measure designed to remedy the situation.

My friend Mr P. A. Nazeer, a retired civil servant himself, placed me in his debt by arranging for the entire MS to be retyped for the press.

Dr. M.R. Hilali of London, a former student and colleague, read some of the chapters and suggested many improvements. Parts of the manuscript were also read by Mr Abdul Hannan, Mr Ahmad Fariduddin and Mr Ahmadul Haque Khan of Rajshahi University. Their comments helped me to organise my ideas and their encouragement gave me the strength to continue.

Finally, I express my gratitude to the Institute of Islamic Thought, Bangladesh for agreeing to publish the book.

**Syed Sajjad Husain**

# PREFACE

There are numerous works on comparative religion, anthropology, history and sociology from which Muslim students like others can derive knowledge about ancient cults, but none or very few which tell them exactly where their own beliefs differ from theirs. There are subtle points of both similarity and divergence which it is not easy for the young to distinguish. Most of the books written by non-Muslims portray Islam as either a Christian heresy — this because of the many affinities between the two faiths — or as a barbarous religion whose practices are indefensible on rational grounds. Scholars who find it possible to present the doctrines of incarnation and rebirth as perfectly valid philosophically do not hesitate to condemn Islam as a tissue of superstitions.

The greatest intellectual danger that the young Muslim faces is the prevalent assumption that religion has become irrelevant. Educated Western man, whose representatives he encounters in the colleges and universities, professes a kind of agnosticism which is regarded as the hallmark of modernity. He is apt to conclude from this that religion has really ceased to count as a factor governing the world's cultural climate. He too is tempted to adopt toward life an attitude which is a mixture of contempt for his predecessors and admiration for what he believes to be the products of secular culture. This frequently leads him to be fascinated and puzzled by an artistic or scientific achievement in modern times and to imagine that their creators belong to a much superior cultural background. Finding Islam under attack on every front, either in open denunciations or in subtle innuendoes, he learns to be apologetic about it when he does not feel ashamed of it.



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Now the idea that religion has ceased to matter is one of those myths which can circulate only because it is not challenged often enough. The secularism of the West for instance is found on analysis to be only a veneer disguising attitudes which can be traced to religious faith. To give a concrete example, the Islamic law which permits limited polygamy is ridiculed as a relic of barbarism but adultery which means unlimited polygamy in practice is widely accepted as an integral feature of civilised life. If a person tried to take a second wife anywhere in the Western world he is bound to be charged with bigamy and jailed, but the same man can live in sin with as many as he likes. This is not thought to be illogical.

We often hear Christian values being defended, even by people who describe themselves as agnostics, on the ground that these values are universal. There is no doubt that some of them are universal, but the suggestion that the history of Christianity has always been a history of enlightened ideas in opposition to Islam's alleged backwardness conceals its mediaeval past when it perpetrated in the name of religion some of the most hideous barbarities of which the world has any record. Islam has no tradition of witch burning; it never recommended the breaking of the bones of heretics on wheels, nor any ordeal by fire to test men's faith. A modern Christian who personally recoils from these horrors introduces himself as the representative of a superior tradition. Similarly, in the Indian subcontinent the personal literary or artistic achievements of a man or woman belonging to a pagan cult lead the Muslims sometimes to suppose that paganism itself must be something of greater value than their own monotheism.

There are those among Muslims who imagine that the best insurance against this kind of risk is to shut one's mind off and refuse to take notice of others. This is not only not possible but

may expose a young Muslim so insulated to greater danger. If he is encouraged to inhabit an ivory tower of ignorance, the moment he is thrown into contact with outsiders, his defences collapse. Insulation is made impossible also by the fact that there is hardly any country or society which can today be totally independent of others. And for Muslims living in countries dominated demographically by non-Muslim populations the question of insulation does not arise at all. In the classroom, in business houses, in the market place, on trains, buses and aeroplanes, the Muslims have to mingle with people who profess different faiths and subscribe to different cultural values. They have to deal with them, listen to them and read what they write.

The general backwardness of Muslims in some countries (in most cases economic, in others cultural) is one important reason why a feeling of inferiority is often a Muslim's response when he confronts someone who seems to represent a more advanced culture, or a more prosperous level of economic well-being. He may despair of being able to extricate himself from this backwardness except by accepting wholesale the ways of those who appear so far ahead of him. This is a common phenomenon in Western countries with Muslim minorities.

The real antidote is knowledge at first-hand of the history and culture of those the Muslims encounter and of his own culture and faith. What led me to undertake to write this book is the idea that an analysis of non-Muslim faiths in a Muslim perspective might be of use to many young students. My purpose is not to provide exhaustive surveys, but to offer an examination of facts central to each of them from the angle of a Muslim. I have tried to be objective, but not to pretend that I am a neutral observer, I have refrained as far as possible from unsympathetic criticism. Facts, I thought, must be set forth as

lucidly as practicable and allowed to speak for themselves. But I write from the point of view of a man belonging to the twentieth century who while fully attached to Islam does not think that nothing outside of Islam could be of any importance. Many of the real Islamic values, especially the emphasis on knowledge as the key to salvation, find greater adherents outside Islam today than within it.

The book deals with all principal religions, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and some minor religious groups such as the Sikhs in India and Jains. I have attempted a discussion on the attitude to religion in the modern West and sought an answer to the question whether the West is really irreligious. My thesis throughout is that deeply ingrained religious attitudes are almost impossible to overcome. Even when a man tried consciously to transcend customary religious habits, beliefs assimilated over many generations cannot be shaken off; they assume new disguises and are presented in a new context as rational deductions from experience. I have already cited the Western attitude to polygamous marriage. Dietary laws are another instance.

Muslims are often dismissed as reactionary because of their abhorrence of pork, but few in the West would go as far as the Chinese or Japanese or Koreans who have a taste for canine flesh. Nor would they eat python or snake or monkey, which some ethnic groups regard as perfectly edible. The irreligious cosmopolitanism of the West is thus a limited enfranchisement from ancient prejudice, and the person who objects to dog meat has really no justification for criticising the Muslims for their avoidance of pork.

A Muslim who kept his eyes and ears open would likely be struck by a double standard applied in the evaluation of Muslim

and non-Muslim behaviour. The Jews avoid pork with the same scrupulousness as the Muslims. They observe dietary laws which are called kosher rules with a punctiliousness which few Muslims could beat. On most Western airlines, kosher food is available. But seldom are the Jews criticised for adhering to a religious code so strictly. What, therefore, passes for irreproachable conduct among the Jews earns the condemnation of Western observers as an instance of obscurantism among the Muslims.

Instances of this kind can be multiplied almost ad infinitum. To give one more example, Muslims have the reputation or notoriety of being intolerant, despite the fact that the Quran specifically commands them to regard Jesus and Moses both as God's prophets, and it is part of a Muslim's belief that Islam rests on foundations laid by the earlier prophets. To show any disrespect toward them is to commit a sin by defying the Quran itself. Yet strangely, it is they who are believed to be intolerant, not those who summarily reject Islam's right to exist as a faith. The most supposedly fanatical of Indian emperors, Aurangzeb, paid for the construction and maintenance of temples, but there is no instance on record of any Hindu or Christian ruler's sanctioning money for a mosque.

My purpose in this book has not been to refute this and other charges against Islam directly but to give a young educated Muslim an idea of the religious attitudes and beliefs, either open or concealed, of those whom he will encounter in his life.

There are two ways in which a Muslim reacts to non-Muslim societies. Either he develops an inferiority complex when confronted with evidence of a superior material culture, or he seeks refuge in the theory that all infidels must necessarily be

condemned as a group from whom we have nothing to learn. There are extremists who go to the length of asserting that Western science and technology like everything else from the West must be discarded or Islamised, an assertion which evokes a welcome from those who see the West as the source of such evils as colonialism and imperialism. The distinction between what is really evil in the West and what is really a continuation of that quest for knowledge of which Islam in the Middle Ages was the principal champion is in this emotional outburst totally blurred. To reject knowledge, whatever its source, is to repudiate one of the vital principles enunciated by Islam itself. But only those who know what is real knowledge and what is a smoke-screen of non Islamic values can borrow without losing their sense of identity.

It is easy indeed to condemn modern science and technology in vague and abstract terms by associating every modern evil with them. But the equating of evil with science and technology rests on false premises which only an appeal to the concrete can expose. The advocates of a total boycott of modern civilisation refuse to descend to the concrete or examine the contradictions in their own conduct.

Of all the religious systems current in the present day world, Islam goes furthest in its assertion that renunciation is no answer to any problem, and that life needs to be organised in accordance with a code which makes a clear distinction between good and evil instead of confusing them philosophically. The theory that good and evil are both appearances and that reality embraces both is used in many societies to justify what in human terms is positively evil, Pain and pleasure, for instance, may in a sense be illusory, but the Muslim code would not on that account let you inflict pain, nor would any other code. It is here that the Shariah of a Muslim

insists on realism and opposes vague philosophical quibblings. The Shariah's prescriptions vague philosophical quibblings. The Shariah's prescriptions are often criticised by outsiders as so many restrictions on freedom, but as soon as a Muslim compares what passes for freedom in certain societies with the kind of security from anarchy that the Shariah offers he should have no problem shaking off the feeling that he belongs to a backward culture.

I have devoted more space to Christianity and Hinduism than to others, because it seems to me that Christians and Hindus constitute a majority among those whom the Muslim encounters, Christians almost everywhere and Hindus in India and Bangladesh.

Buddhism presents some difficulties. It has a history independent of Hinduism but like Jainism it shares a common approach to life with Hinduism, or so it seems to a Muslim. The doctrines of rebirth and Karma are as integral to it as to Hinduism, and this completely outweighs the absence of a Supreme Deity in Buddhism. Besides in Mahayana Buddhism the Buddha has for all practical purposes been elevated to the status of God.

The most puzzling phenomenon is the way the Chinese and Japanese have built the edifice of their ethical life on foundations which eschew conventional religion. Neither Confucianism and Taoism in China nor Shintoism in Japan are religions in the sense in which we are accustomed to understand the word. Yet it is impossible to categorise either country as irreligious. Communist repression has not succeeded in effacing from Chinese life the influence of Confucianism and Taoism. With them have mingled Christian, Islamic and other traditions, and the outlook of a Chinese is

impossible to grasp without reference to all these creeds. Japan similarly continues its attachment to some forms of Shintoism at the same time that many Japanese profess Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity and even Islam.

The last chapter calls for an explanation. It deals with ancient cults long dead. I include a discussion on them from the feeling that although these cults are extinct and have no adherents, they have not ceased to count as a layer in the subconscious of many peoples. Besides, they, at least some of them, evidence an evolution in the growth of ethics and religion which needs to be reckoned with. Actually, as anthropology warns us, nothing in the history of religion is wholly superannuated. What is discarded survives as a dimly perceptible aura. Again from this point of view Islam's theory of religious history is undoubtedly the best guide to the appreciation of the truth. Islam disclaims any title to being something new and original; it is the last in a line. The Quranic statement that no people has been without a religious guide has wide implications.

Modern anthropology and psychoanalysis have brought to light many facets of human emotion and sensibility which in ancient myths were given colourful names. It is not without significance that such terms as Narcissism and the Oedipus complex, to mention an example, derive from tales which for ages amused us as fictions but now appear in the light of modern interpretations to have meanings previously unsuspected. Whether we accept those interpretations as totally correct or not, it can no longer be denied that primitive man with his love of the concrete often clothed his reactions to his environment, human as well as natural, in the language of stories about supernatural gods and spirits. We have left the stories behind, but we retain basically the same emotions and

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sensibilities, as members of the human race. This underscores the necessity of taking myths into account as a clue to many supposedly modern attitudes.

I have of course limited myself to those myths which are concerned with religion, or to put it differently, discussed those aspects of myths which help towards a clearer understanding of the sources of religion and ethics.

The book is aimed at the general reader, not at the specialist who naturally will look for more exhaustive and detailed analysis, and for more information. It is also as an average Muslim that I have written. I am not a theologian nor am I a trained anthropologist. I felt that the way in which an average Muslim with some education judges matters might prove of greater interest to students in modern universities than the views of a theologian who might interpret things with greater precision but display a greater degree of rigidity in his outlook or those of an anthropologist who may have lost his faith in religion altogether. What I have attacked is the impression that anybody is really irreligious. It is that impression which misleads Muslim students in college and university in daily contact with people who seem to be indifferent to religious values.





# CHAPTER ONE

## CHRISTIANITY

Of the principal religions of the world, Christianity claims the largest number of adherents diffused over the entire globe, from the farthest corners of Europe to the remotest parts of Africa. Thanks to the efforts of missionaries and the influence of European colonialism, there is hardly a country on earth where the Christians do not form a sizeable group in the population. In spite of the decay of faith in modern times in the West, Christianity continues to be professed by the majority of people in both Western Europe and North and South America. People who have abandoned orthodox religion still subscribe to what they call Christian values, and it is consequently in terms of what Christianity means or what it has come to mean that one can expect to understand the basic patterns of conduct which are reflected in the West's approach to many apparently secular problems.

Christianity is also the religion which has been continuously in contact with Islam ever since the latter emerged. They have challenged each other as adversaries sometimes: the historic confrontation between the two religions which is known as the Crusades does not exhaust the history of this rivalry. For centuries in Spain and in Eastern Europe they were locked in a struggle for political and spiritual supremacy, and to this day, it is feared by many, a modern secular West finds it difficult to view Islam with an objectivity freed from the traces of past

conflicts. Nowhere in the history of culture and religion outside of the chronicle of Islam and Christianity will one find a parallel to the rivalry and interaction of these two faiths.

This rivalry seems the greater and more astonishing in the light of the fact that both derive from a common Semitic source. The three Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have much in common; they share a common eschatology; they are monotheistic and they sprang from the same geographical background. Their common ancestry is acknowledged by the Quran which calls upon Muslims to honour Moses and Jesus as authentic prophets whom it would be a sin for them to repudiate. Muhammad (May God bless him) is declared the last in a continuous chain of prophets who preached the same truth. This attitude is not however reciprocated by either Judaism or Christianity. It is not until very recent times that Judaism in a part of the Middle East presented itself as a threat to Islam, especially the Arabs, but the rivalry with Christianity predates the Crusades and has dominated the world in one form or another down the ages. Muslim preachers find themselves opposed by Christian missionaries in Africa, Asia, Europe and America.

In asking himself what is Christianity, a Muslim discovers that the question is not easy to answer. He may start from the premise that since there are so many references to Christ in the Quran it would be comparatively easier to understand Christianity than other religions. That is not so in fact.

One of the first things by which a Muslim is struck is that although the Bible is spoken of as the Holy Book or scripture of the Christians, it differs in character and authority from the Muslim Quran. It is in two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, and neither part is available in an authentic

text whose accuracy is beyond dispute. The Old Testament consists of a number of prophetic books composed at different periods by a succession of teachers or prophets in a number of Middle Eastern languages including Hebrew. The New Testament which records the teachings of Christ is again a series of books written by Christ's disciples. The four most important among them are called the Four Gospels recorded by Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. The word gospel lexically means God's word, but the gospels give accounts of Christ's teachings as each of these four remembered them. They differ in matters of detail, and even the direct quotations attributed to Christ vary from gospel to gospel slightly, as does the writers' understanding of the role of Christ. This is different from the authenticity of the Quran whose Arabic text has remained wholly unaltered and uncorrupted since the days of the Prophet. The Bible such as it is was translated into Greek in Alexandria in the third century, but the translation known as the Septuagint was limited to the Old Testament. The Latin translation of the entire Bible, known as the Vulgate, was made in the fourth century and is still in use in the Catholic Church. The original language employed by Christ in his teachings was Aramaic, but the gospels by his disciples were in Greek which was the dominant cultural medium of their time.

These facts are well worth bearing in mind in any comparison between Islam and Christianity.

A fact even more baffling to the Muslim is doubt among a section of Christian scholars themselves about the historicity of Christ. Whereas the Muslims accept Christ as an authentic person on the basis of references in the Quran and the Prophet's sayings the Christians are not agreed that there was a historical person clearly identifiable with Christ, nor are they agreed that if such a person actually existed he was born in the

first year of the era named after him. Some now believe that he may have been born in the third or fourth year of the first century. Thanks to anthropology there is also a tendency to regard Christ as a mythical figure modelled on pagan gods, and many Christian festivals are said to be nothing other than sanitized versions of ancient fertility cults.

This by no means exhausts a Muslim's confusion. The monotheism of Christianity is complicated by the doctrine of the Trinity, according to which Christ is three in one, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. The majority of Christians believe in the Incarnation as one of the central premises of their faith. This belief postulates that the man Christ was also in some sense a divine being, in fact God Himself who had descended to earth for the sake of the salvation of the human race. One of the early Christian sects, Arians, were denounced as heretics for thinking that God the Son was not coeternal with God the Father. Incarnation is one of the beliefs specifically repudiated in the Quran. Christ according to Muslim belief was a man, an apostle, the child of a virgin, Mary. But even the Christian idea of immaculate conception differs from the Muslim. For the Christians believe Mary to have been a married woman with Joseph for her husband, although at the same time they hold that Joseph did not have a part in Christ's birth. The paradox of a woman being both a virgin and a wife is difficult for Muslims to understand.

Crucifixion which is so central to Christianity is also understood by Muslims differently. The Quran states emphatically that Jesus did not die on the cross. He was saved and lifted by God. Crucifixion is also bound up in Christian theology with another basic Christian doctrine, the doctrine of atonement. The majority of Christians believe that

Christ's mission was to redeem man from the taint of sin which he carried from Adam. Adam's transgression in Eden which led to his expulsion from it is believed to have been the Original Sin whose taint every child inherits; redemption from it is made possible by acceptance of Christ's grace. The doctrine of atonement postulates that God sent down His only son Christ who was in fact Himself in human form in order that He might by dying on the cross and thus partaking of suffering help man recover from the original sin of his ancestor. Those therefore who refuse to accept Christ are destined to be denied salvation.

The Muslim view is different. They do not accept the doctrine of original sin at all. The Quran states clearly that every child is born in a state of innocence without any taint of sin; he learns to sin because of his upbringing. This lays upon the parents and society in general the responsibility of giving each new-born child an education or training which would help him to differentiate between right and wrong. The Christians, on the other hand, emphasise that regardless of what an individual can do or fail to do he can never hope for salvation without grace, that is, without a surrender to Christ. Every child is potentially a sinner according to Christianity; sin is inherent in him; born in sin he has to be aware that his personal efforts, unaided by Christ, will not avail to save him.

A number of important corollaries follow from this. The doctrine of atonement is responsible for the position that the Christian Church and its priesthood have in the Christian religion. The church as an organised body and the individual priest on its behalf can promise a Christian deliverance in a manner which has no parallel in Islam, Muhammad (May Allah bless him) is thought of only as a guide and intercessor; he has no power to grant absolution from sin. Every man, we are told

repeatedly in the Quran, must pay for his sins exactly as he may expect to be rewarded for the good he does; no one comes between him and his Maker. Islam has no priesthood. This is true both literally and metaphorically. The fact that for congregational prayers an Imam or leader is chosen to lead the service does not confer upon him any special sanctity or privilege. Any Muslim who knows the rules and fulfils certain requirements can be appointed an Imam. The requirements are not esoteric. The Imam does not need to be initiated into any special order; he has to know how prayers are conducted, and when there is a choice among two or three the man chosen should be one who is felt to be superior to the others in learning and piety. The appointment in modern times of paid Imams attached to mosques sometimes creates among outsiders the false notion that they are comparable to the Christian clergy. Such appointments are a convenient device adopted with a view to the systematic administration of mosques, but this is in no way to be equated with what is called ordination in Christianity. Ordination is a ceremony whereby a person ordained acquires special religious rights. He is set apart from the rest of the community. Among the Catholics he has to take the vow of celibacy; he alone can conduct services in church; he officiates at marriages; he receives confessions; he can grant absolution. At births, marriages, deaths, baptisms he performs duties which in Muslim society can be performed by any Muslim provided he is familiar with the rules. A Muslim wedding incidentally is entirely a secular affair; no religious ceremony is involved; the only requirement is that the man and woman marrying should declare in the presence of two adult male witnesses their intention of living together as husband and wife.

The absence of ordination in Islam is a fundamental deference characterising the Muslim conception of religion. The

Christian priest is Christ's understudy in the church; he is indispensable. No service can be valid without him. A deviationist priest can be unfrocked deprived of the right to conduct services in church or officiate at weddings, baptisms, and burials. Without the support of the established church an unfrocked priest loses all authority.

Islam has regulations about apostasy, but that is a different matter. An apostate in Islam is a person who has publicly repudiated one or other of the basic tenets of the faith; what he loses is the right to call himself a Muslim. The unfrocked priest on the other hand may remain a good Christian but on account of his refusal to obey orthodoxy as it is interpreted by his church he forfeits the privilege of presiding at religious rituals.

A word on the confusion created by the use of the term Mullah in the West may not be out of place at this point. Indiscriminate use has led many in the West to suppose that the Mullah like the Imam in Islam occupies a position corresponding to the position of the clergy in Christianity. In the first place the term Mullah has no religious sanction; it is employed loosely to designate people in Muslim societies who claim to have made a special study of the Quran and other religious literature. In places they also wear a form of dress which they think is in greater conformity with Islamic ideas of decency, but which again has no sanction in any thing stated in the Quran or the Prophet's teachings. But such persons do not enjoy any special religious privilege beyond the respect that any scholar in any area of knowledge would command on account of his learning.

The greatest difficulty that the Muslim faces in trying to extrapolate the cardinal doctrines of Christianity from the Bible is that neither this book nor the earlier teachings of Christ's



disciples provide adequate clues to what is nowadays accepted as the basis of the Christian religion. The Quran refers to the book given to Christ as the Injil. Of this no trace remains. There is no book which is claimed to contain the teachings of Christ exclusively, the exact authentic words in which his message was delivered. The Four gospels reproduce some direct quotations from him, but they are mostly second person narratives giving the disciples version of what he taught. None of the words and passages command the authority—textual authority—which Muslims attach to the Quran.

The other problem is that except for the Fatherhood of God, not however in the literal sense which later Christians ascribe to the words, the important doctrines of atonement and immaculate conception are not mentioned. Jesus as he is presented in the Gospels does not claim to have been anything but a Jew who conceived his mission to be to rid the Jewish religion of accretions which had corrupted it. He insists that the law be followed, and condemn those who were lax in their observance of the traditional teachings, offering his followers a cleaner interpretation freed of what according to him could not be defended.

It has been said by Christian scholars themselves that Jesus did not claim to have brought the world a new religion. His teachings as they were understood to be by his immediate disciples can best be construed in the perspective of Judaism. The central beliefs which Jesus reiterated consisted of the following :

- a) Belief in the sovereignty of God as the sole Creator and Originator of the universe ;
- b) Belief in man's accountability, from which it followed that those who lived in accordance with God's commandments

were to be rewarded with eternal life in Heaven, and those who transgressed were to be punished in Hell;

- c) Belief in the immortality of the soul and the after-life ;
- d) Belief in Resurrection and Judgment Day when all men will be called upon to render an account of whatever they did on earth.

The second, third and fourth beliefs are bound up with one another. Jesus added to these beliefs his own idea of god as a loving and forgiving deity, the Supreme Father in the sense of Creator, whose principal attribute is mercy, who does not discriminate in the distribution of His bounty between sinners and the virtuous. The Gospels repeatedly speak of Jesus' belief in the kingdom of God which he says he had come to establish and his insistence that the destruction of the world was imminent. It followed that men would be foolish to waste any time worrying about the future, for there was in fact no future. Take no thought for the morrow, he said.

According to some Christian scholars, the absence of an elaborate code of ethics in the Gospels, any elaborate regulations as to diet and cleanliness, marriage or social relationships, is due to belief in the imminent destruction of the world. Besides, Jesus did not present himself to his people as a new law-maker but only as a reformer. He took the Jewish law for granted as the norm which his community must follow, concerned only to denounce what was sinful and calling the faithful back to the true faith.

The growth of Christianity as a distinct religion and even some of the basic beliefs which today are understood to be of the essence of Christianity are acknowledged to be the work of later men, especially of such disciples as Paul. Three

authoritative formulations of the Christian faith, namely, the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athenasian came long after the death of Christ. To an outsider they seem to differ fundamentally from whatever doctrine is found in the Gospels.

It almost goes without saying that neither in the Gospels nor in the three creeds mentioned is there any reference to what the Muslims believe to have been the Book given to Christ, the Injil, which is named in the Quran along with the Zabur or Torah as a revealed Book. Unlike Islam, Christianity seems to Muslims to have been the result of an anthropological process, with its basic tenets and doctrines gradually crystallising and taking shape.

On this account the best approach to it is a historical one. One runs less risk of misunderstanding Christianity by following the processes which have shaped it than by attempting to find all its meaning in the authentic teachings of one single person as in the case of Islam.

If we accept the traditional date of Christ's birth, his appearance in the first century of the Christian era coincides with important developments in the history of both the West and the East, which at once facilitated the spread of the religion and created for it obstacles which it overcame slowly. Shortly before the advent of Christ, the Roman Republic gave way in 30 B.C. to a new imperial system of government. The official pagan cult had also been weakened by the infiltration of extraneous forms of paganism, especially Mithraism, a cult in which the Sun god played an important part. It is said to have penetrated the Empire to such an extent that but for the emergence of Christianity it might have become established as the official religion of Rome. Jerusalem where Jesus was born was parts to the Empire, ruled by a Roman governor. The

Jews were not reconciled to the conquest of Jerusalem by the Romans, but their attempts to throw off the Roman yoke failed repeatedly, and they had to submit to Roman law. The rulers in Rome were not much concerned about the religions practices of their subjects provided the officially installed gods were not openly challenged; they were particular about the allegiance to be shown to the emperor. As long as the subjects conformed in this matter Rome did not bother about what cult they followed.

Jesus is said to have been born in 3 AD to lowly parents, Joseph and Mary, who lived in Nazareth. His birth was attended by many miraculous signs, according to legend, one of them being the appearance of a bright star in the sky. Joseph was so poor that Jesus had to share space with animals in a manger, where he was visited by Three Wise Men from the east who had concluded from the omens seen at his birth that the child was God Incarnate. He spoke to those around him from his cradle and this confirmed in their eyes his holiness. The first thirty years of his life Jesus spent in Galilee, following the trade of a carpenter like his so-called father. He had little formal education but was believed to have studied the Jewish scriptures well.

Jesus' emergence as a preacher was predicted by John the Baptist who is said to have announced that someone greater than he would soon appear. About 28 AD Jesus began his mission as a preacher, confining himself to the reiteration of what he considered the essence of his ancestral religion. The novelty of his ministry consisted in the repeated emphasis he placed on the coming of a new order, the imminence of the Last Day, and the need for love and mercy. He denounced the priests who had become selfish and self-righteous. This gradually earned him the enmity of the Jewish priesthood.

Jesus' preaching was accompanied by miracles, healing the sick and in some cases bringing the dead back to life. He acquired a wide following and also began to be looked upon as a threat to the Jewish church. He was condemned by the Supreme Jewish Council called the Sanhedrin and turned over to the Roman authorities. He was tried by the Roman Governor Pilate and sentenced to death on the cross like a common criminal.

According to Christian belief, Jesus died on the cross and would have been forgotten but for his miraculous resurrection from the grave. He manifested himself to some of his followers and commanded them to carry on his mission. Those who accepted Christ believed him to have been the promised Messiah. The movement they initiated had more success outside Jerusalem than in the place of his birth. Nor were the adherents interested in spreading Jesus's message to people other than Jews, who are called gentiles.

When the movement gained more adherents and was seen to diverge more and more from the traditional forms of Judaism, it attracted notice and began to be persecuted by the orthodox Jews. Paul who later became the greatest figure in Christianity was a persecutor himself, but he underwent a miraculous conversion in about 35 AD. He is reported to have seen a vision of the Cross in the sky, an experience which immediately changed the whole course of his life. From being a critic and persecutor, he became a firm adherent of the new faith and has been responsible more than anybody else for its transformation into a world religion.

Paul was responsible not only for the diffusion of Christianity but also for the form it took. He was a scholar who knew both Hebrew and Greek; he was well versed in the

Jewish law. He never met Jesus personally. One of the things he did after his conversion was to insist that the message of Christ was meant for not Jews exclusively. He addressed his appeal as a missionary to gentiles; he abolished the Jewish dietary laws, dispensed with circumcision as a necessary rite for entry into the Christian community, and wrote a series of letters to new converts which now form part of the New Testament as Epistles. These have acquired a sacred character as integral elements in Christian scripture.

To Paul Christianity owes the most important of its cardinal beliefs, namely, that Christ was the Son of God who had died to atone for the sins of mankind and that acceptance of this belief guaranteed salvation after death to all.

Paul is said to have travelled widely on his religious mission to such places as Salonika, Antioch, Athens, Corinth and Rome. It was in Rome that he was beheaded about 65 AD during the reign of Nero.

The concept of incarnation and belief in the resurrection of Christ led to belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is three in one, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Disputes have arisen as to whether the Son is coeval with the Father or is a separate being. Though these disputes have not been finally resolved, the orthodox believe that it is sinful to think of the three aspects of the Trinity as distinguishable from one another. For this reason prayers can be addressed among some sections of Christians to the Son. Needless to say, Jesus in the eyes of the Christians is more than a prophet, which is the appellation given to him in Islam.

In the course of time, the mother of Jesus also acquired a distinct position as a holy person who, according to orthodox Catholic belief, was bodily assumed into Heaven. The cult of

the Virgin was, however, unknown in the early ages of Christianity. It took shape especially in the Middle Ages.

The monotheism of Christianity is thus seen to be different from the monotheism of Islam, in which associating anyone with God or Allah is regarded as the worst of sins, Allah is no begetter nor has He been begotten by any one.

Christians believe in an after-life like the Muslims, which means that both religions hold that the soul is immortal. But here again there are important differences. Salvation in Christianity depends entirely upon grace, not on whether the man or woman has led a virtuous life in the conventional sense.

The word Christ incidentally is a Greek term meaning Messiah; it is used invariably to refer to Jesus and has become interchangeable with his real name.

The Christian clergy and the manner of their life were not a creation of Christ. The distinction made today between laity and clergy was not known even in Paul's day. Nor was the church then an organised body. As time passed however, and the number of adherents increased it became customary to refer to those particularly concerned with the work of evangelism as elders or presbyters. The forms of Christian worship had also by this time begun to assume a distinct individuality. Christians prayed in groups and gathered together to celebrate the main events in Christ's life and mission, such as his birth, his resurrection after crucifixion and the last supper at which he told his disciples that those who partook of it were identifying themselves both physically and spiritually with him. These rites are not mentioned either in the Gospels or in Paul's Epistles. The chief person officiating at these ceremonies came to be designated as a Bishop, It is after the establishment of Christianity in Rome and the general recognition of the primacy

of the Bishop of Rome, that a hierarchical order among the Christian clergy evolved. The Bishop of Rome is known as the Pope, and the first occupant of this office was St. Peter.

But not all Christian sects were equally willing to accept the primacy of Rome. The church of Byzantium did not yield to Rome and this led to the emergence of the Eastern Orthodox Church as a separate division. What is called the Reformation Movement which was initiated in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries, gave rise to the other great division in Christianity, namely, Protestantism. There are many sects and subsets among them, but it is safe to speak of the three main branches of Christianity as the Catholic Church of Rome, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the various Protestant churches.

The doctrinal differences between these divisions are far greater than those between the four principal sects of Sunni Islam, namely Hanafi, Shafi, Hanbali and Maliki, so called after the leaders of the four schools, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Imam Hanbal and Imam Malik, but also between Sunnis and Shias. Acceptance of Jesus Christ as the founder of the religion they follow is of course common but they differ in their interpretation of the nature of Christ and in the emphasis they place on various rites and rituals.

The main Christian festivals which with varying emphasis the different churches observe are the following :

Christmas, the celebration of Christ's birth day, fixed traditionally for 25 December;

Easter, which commemorates the Resurrection of Christ after crucifixion;

Pentecost, marking the descent of Christ or rather the Holy Ghost on the Apostles fifty days after Easter;



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Epiphany in observance of Jesus's baptism and the visit of the Magi to the cradle in which child Jesus lay;

Ascension Day, or Holy Thursday forty days after Easter commemorating Christ's ascension into heaven;

Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, a period from Ash Wednesday to Easter Eve, of which the 40 week-days but not the Sundays, should be observed as days of fasting. In the church of England the extent to which Lent is observed is left to the individual, but in general one meal a day is permitted.

Christ taught no special form of worship other than what he inherited from his ancestral Jewish faith. The services held in Christian churches are all later growths, and as the names of the chief Christian festivals indicate they are centred on celebrations commemorating the events of Christ's life as it is believed to have been, his birth, his last Supper with his disciples, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his ascent to heaven. The main ritual observed by all sections of Christians with slight variations is Communion or Eucharist, which is a re-enactment of the Last Supper which he partook of on the night that he was betrayed by one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot. It consists of a repetition of certain verses from the Gospels followed by the consecration of bread and wine; the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine into the cup; the delivery and distribution of the "elements" as the bread and wine are now termed among the faithful; the declaration that this is done in memory of Christ's sacrifice; and lastly, the actual partaking of the elements.

Catholics are required to believe that as soon as the bread and wine are consecrated they undergo a mysterious change into the body and blood of Christ. This is known as transubstantiation. Whoever consumes the substances thus

changed receives into his body the flesh and blood of Christ and is in the process made one with him. Similar ceremonies have long been common among pagan religions, and this similarity between a central Christian ritual and a pagan practice is responsible for the view held by anthropologists that Christianity is a modern version of ancient cults.

Some Christian sects, mainly Protestant, do not believe in the actual transformation of bread and wine into flesh and blood; they think the ritual is commemorative; but they too attach the highest importance to it. Only the Quakers, a Protestant sect founded in England by George Fox in the 17th century, do not accept the doctrine of transubstantiation either metaphorically or actually.

But communion, whatever the interpretation put on it, is the most important ritual in the Christian church. It is said to create a fellowship among all Christians dead and alive whom it binds into an intimacy founded on faith in Christ.

It is this ritual which is daily repeated in all churches, Catholic, Eastern and Protestant and can be thought to be the foundation of Christian worship. Catholics celebrate it with greater colour than the Protestants. This elaboration often takes forms to which Protestants object strongly on the ground that it introduces into Christianity elements of paganism directly, but the importance of the observance itself is not questioned.

The daily or weekly services held in Christian churches as they have traditionally been observed, cannot be referred back to any rituals taught by Christ. Unlike the prayers said by Muslims for which definite times were fixed by the Prophet of Islam, five times a day according to formulae taught by him, Christian worship varies according to the traditions of each individual branch of Christianity. Verses from the New

Testament are read, but except in the Catholic Church which retains Latin, the language of the Vulgate, services are held in vernacular languages, English, French, German and so on. The Lord's prayer from the New Testament which is repeated in almost every church and corresponds in some respects to Surah al-Fatiha in the Quran without which no Muslim prayer would be complete, cannot thus evoke the same linguistic appeal; the substance is the same in every translation, but the words are necessarily different.

Unlike congregational prayers among Muslims, in which the congregation listens silently to verses recited loudly in the morning and also in the two prayers said after sunset, a church congregation is expected to repeat audibly the words of the Lord's prayer as the priest intones them. There is nothing corresponding to the physical movements which accompany prayer in Islam. The church congregation remains seated throughout a service, joining in the repetition of certain verses when called upon to do so by the priest officiating.

Another feature of a Christian service is a sermon by the priest on a text chosen from the Bible, whose significance he tries to expound in an elaboration. This has some likeness to the sermon which is delivered in mosques on Fridays.

Hymn singing is also a part of formal Christian service, without an analogy in Islam. Hymns are sung to the accompaniment of music. This is said to be traceable to the example set by Christ who sang a hymn after the institution of the Lord's prayer. Whether this tradition is authentic or not, hymn-singing began early in Christian history, and some of the oldest Latin hymns are the work of St. Hilary who died in the 4th century.

Although services are held in churches every day, morning and evening, it is not obligatory for Christians to attend them. It is only the Sunday service which is insisted upon. Devout Christian however, especially among Catholics, attend Mass which is another name for Eucharist, every day of the week.

Sunday has a significance for Christians far exceeding the significance of Friday in the Muslim Calendar. Sunday is referred to as the Lord's Day when worldly occupations are to be avoided, and till recently shops and businesses in Christian societies remained closed on that day. The restrictions were only slightly less rigid than those attached to the Sabbath among Jews who consider even cooking sinful on Sabbath day. But they were strict enough compared to the fact that Friday was or is not any different from any other weekday except for the compulsory congregational prayers.

Special church services are customary at Christmas and Easter which are the two most important festivals in the Christian Calendar, but again these services are different in character from the two main Muslim festivals, Id-ul-Fitr and Id-ul-Azha when open-air congregational prayers are recommended. Open-air Mass can be held at any time when the Pope among the Catholics or a dignitary of equal rank among the Protestants visits any area; but open-air Mass is more common among the Catholics than among the Protestants. As a matter of fact the word Mass to describe the Sacrament is used exclusively by the Catholics; this has been so since the Reformation.

It is interesting to observe that whereas Muhammad (God bless him) is never prayed to directly or indirectly (indeed to do so would be to be guilty of flouting one of the basic principles of Islam), Christian worship is addressed to Christ himself. Transubstantiation which is the highest object in Mass and

Eucharist, that is the identification of the worshipper with the blood and flesh of Christ, has no parallel in Islam.

Christian cosmogony and eschatology are both based on the Old Testamen. Christians accept the creation story given in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, where it is stated that the first thing god created was light and that the sun and planets were created in the course of the following six days, and that God rested on the seventh day. The Quran does not mention any time-table of this kind, and does not refer to the order in which the sun, moon and planets on the one hand and animals on the other were created. The story of Adam and Eve, the first couple, given in the Quran is similar in some respects to the Biblical story, but there are important differences. Eve is nowhere mentioned by name in the Quran; she is referred to as Adam's wife. The explanation of their exit from Eden is almost the same but the Quran emphasises that man having been created as God's vicegerent on earth was in any case destined to leave Paradise. The seducer was Satan who had according to the Quran refused to bow to Adam. Of this first sin by Satan there is no mention in the Bible. The Bible does not refer to the existence of the class of beings called Jinns to which group Satan belonged. He had been elevated to the status of an angel because of his piety.

Another difference between the Bible and the Quran in this respect is that whereas it is possible to locate Eden on this planet itself, as many theologians among Christians do, no such inference about Eden's location is possible on the basis of the Quran. Milton's great epic Paradise Lost which deals with the fall of Adam would be difficult to understand except on the assumption that Eden was located somewhere on the newly created planet called Earth outside of Heaven. Muslims are surprised to hear the Christians identifying Eden with a place

situated between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates in modern Iraq.

As regards eschatology, Christians believe that there is an after-life and that the pious and the sinful would be sorted out and sent either to an eternal Heaven or an eternal Hell. A role is assigned to Christ and his mother in Heaven. This is an addition to what is found in the Gospels. The mother of Jesus is nowhere mentioned in the Gospels as a holy person with any role in the after-life. The elevation of Mary to the status of a semidivine being is a later development.

## **History of the Christian Church**

The new Testament which consists of the four Gospels and a number of Epistles written by Christ's disciples gives little idea of the elaborate doctrines which both in the Catholic Church and among the Protestants constitute the principles of Christianity as they are understood today. The first three Gospels, by Mark, Matthew and Luke portray Christ as a missionary who took upon himself the task of purifying the Old Jewish faith which Jesus inherited as his patrimony. The writer of the fourth Gospel, John, introduces an element of mystery by identifying Jesus with the Logos of the Greek philosophers, the Word of God incarnate. It is from this source that the theory of the divinity of Christ is derived.

As Christianity spread, the need was felt to formulate its creed more precisely. The three most important formulations, as already mentioned, are the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian creeds.

The Nicene creed is the clearest. It was framed at the Council held at Nicaea (Nice), a city in Asia Minor, under the

presidency of Emperor Constantine in 325. It asserts the orthodox view of the nature of Christ as being of the same substance as the Father. Jesus the son and the Father were declared to be two aspects of the same Being. At the Council of Constantinople in 381 the addition was made of the tenet of the divinity of the Holy Ghost.

The Oldest statement of the Christian creed is the Apostles Creed. It is so called because it is said to be based on Apostolic teaching, that is, as the creed was understood by the Apostles in Jerusalem. It does not differ in essentials from the Nicene creed, except that the latter is more precisely formulated.

The Athanasian creed owes its name to St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, and like the other two is concerned with the three Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It begins with the statement "whoever will be saved before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith, which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled. without doubt he shall perish everlastingly."

The Athanasian creed was challenged by Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria who refused to accept that the Second Person of the Trinity namely, the Son is of the same substance as the Father. Arius declared that the Son is not coeternal with the Father; He was begotten by the Father, and before He was begotten did not exist. Arius was however denounced as a heretic first at Nicaea in 325 and again at Constantinople in 381. Those who embraced the belief were regarded as a sect outside of the church, but occasionally one hears of people subscribing to views which can be seen to be close to those of Arius. Milton who wrote Paradise Lost to justify the ways of God to man has been accused of being sympathetic to Arianism. Arianism gave rise to Unitarianism in the 18th century.

The Unitarian church is an important Protestant church, though its adherents are not as numerous as those in other branches of Christianity.

The early history of Christianity is marked by terrible persecutions. The Christians were regarded by Rome and its emperors as a threat to the state. This was due to the refusal of the community, as it became gradually more and more organised, to take part in state religious ceremonies and to engage in military service. Rome did not object to the content of the Christian creed, but as stated earlier it expected all Roman citizens to conform to practices which were thought to unify all the citizenry into a single body loyal to the emperor. Hence the persecutions. The aloofness of the Christians, their tendency to think that they alone had a monopoly of truth and wisdom attracted the fury of the rulers and at the same time strengthened the sense of cohesion among themselves. The persecutions continued for the first three centuries of the Christian era. Emperor Marcus Aurelius, a liberal emperor himself, was inflexible in his attitude towards these nonconformists. The last of the emperors to persecute the Christians systematically was Diocletian. In 311 finally Emperor Galerius issued an edict of toleration, and two years later by the Edict of Milan. Emperor Constantine legalised Christianity and put it on a par with all pagan cults.

The successors of Constantine continued his policy towards the Christians. Emperor Julian was an exception, but during the latter part of the fourth century the government transferred state support to Christianity and ceased to support the pagan temples. In 395 Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the sole and official religion of the state of Rome. This was a signal triumph for a cult which began its history as a persecuted minority religion. It was the fortunes of the pagan



cults which were now reversed. In the fifth century they were being extirpated by force. There remained no danger of Christianity's being again exposed to the ridicule of the Roman population.

The organisation of the church into the complex structure that it is today, among the Catholics as well as the protestants, came about gradually as a result of a silent evolution which took several centuries. To begin with, there were no priests as such, and no distinction was made between clergy and laity as in Islam. But as the religion spread to far-flung areas and as the number of Christians increased, there emerged a group of men who devoted themselves exclusively to the service of religion. They could however marry and lead a life which differed but little from the life of ordinary men. Gradually the feeling arose that they ought to forswear marriage and take the vow of celibacy. This is the practice still adhered to in the Catholic Church, but Protestants allow their priests to marry and have families.

These religious elders were at first known, as has been stated, as presbyters or simply elders. They were also referred to as bishops, and by the second century the offices of presbyters and bishops had become distinct. The bishop earned the right to expect obedience from presbyters and other subordinates. An administrative division under the bishop came to be known as a diocese. The bishop of an important city like Rome or Alexandria was called a patriarch. Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, and Constantinople each had a patriarch presiding over it and there was at first no question of anyone of them being recognised as superior to the others. The bishops of Rome were also known as Popes. The term Pope was derived from the Latin word *papa* meaning father. Innocent I was the first Pope of Rome to claim superiority over Western

Christendom in the fifth century : Leo 1 (440-461) maintained the same claim; and finally Gregory the Great (590-604) firmly established the papal position.

The claim was never accepted by the Christians of the East, that is, those in such centres as Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. The Eastern Christians also refused to agree to the Nicene creed according to which the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son as well as the Father; they objected to sacerdotal celibacy as well. Attempts were made from time to time to arrange for a compromise, but the rupture between the two churches was completed in 1204 when an army of crusaders sacked the Christian metropolis of Constantinople with the encouragement of the Pope of Rome.

Since this period the two main divisions among orthodox Christians have been the Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The next split in Christianity occurred as a result of the rise of the movement known as Protestantism. As the word implies, it originated as a protest against certain practices which were felt by some sections to be contrary to true Christian teaching. Martin Luther in Germany in the 16th century was one of the first to revolt against Rome. About the same time movements of a similar nature arose in Switzerland, Scotland and England. Calvin in Switzerland (1509-1564) and John Knox (1505-1572) in Scotland repudiated the overlordship of the Pope in Rome and like Martin Luther claimed that each individual Christian had the right to interpret the scriptures in the light of his own reason. The Protestant movement in England goes further back in history, to Wycliffe who was the first to translate the Bible into English. A formal breach between the English Church and

Rome came about as the result of a dispute between Henry VIII and the Pope over the dissolution of one of his marriages.

The main branches of Protestantism are Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism and Presbyterianism. Each represents an independent church. Anglicanism is the official religion of the English Establishment, with the Archbishop of Canterbury at its head, spiritually, though nominally it is the monarch who is recognised as the Supreme Head of the Anglican Church.

Down the centuries, many other sects outside of Catholicism have sprung up. Among the more important are the following :

**The Baptist Church :** Its origins are sometimes traced back to the 16th century. The main rite on which baptists insist is complete immersion in Holy Water as a sign of admission to the church.

**The Quakers :** A branch of Christianity which arose in England in the 17th century through the efforts of a certain George Fox who emphasised belief in the Inner Light. The Quakers have no ministers to conduct any service and believe that the Holy Spirit descends on worshippers when two or three are gathered together. They also reject sacramental practices. Stress is laid on the individual's right to approach scripture and god on his own.

**The Adventists, also called Seventh Day Adventists** who believe strongly in the Second coming of Jesus Christ at an early date. The dead sleep until the day of Last Judgment when the heavens will be opened, Christ will come in glory, the wicked will be annihilated, or sent to hell and the redeemed will live with Christ in glory. The Adventist church in America was organised by William Miller (1782 — 1849).

**Christian Scientists** : The sect owes its genesis to the teachings of a certain Mrs. Eddy who was miraculously healed from a serious accident after reading the story of the man sick of the palsy in the Gospel of Matthew. Mrs. Eddy organised the first church on the basis of her experience in Boston in America. Christian Scientists believe that all that God has created is good.

There are many other sects. A Korean, Reverend Moon, has established a new church with many adherents. They are known as Moonites.

Considering that the Christians claim to be the most numerous religious group in the world, it is not surprising that deviations in their interpretation of Christianity would occur. But their claim to be recognised as Christians rests on their common acceptance of Christ as the source of their faith.

The total population of Christians in the world is estimated to exceed 800 million. Some put the figure higher.

### **Evolution of Christian doctrine**

Three distinct stages can be identified in the gradual evolution of Christian doctrine, which are associated with three groups of men. The first group consists of the Apostles, the actual companions of Christ, who were responsible for the writing of the Gospels and the Epistles. The Gospels are four in number, and the Epistles twenty-four. Fourteen of them were written by St. Paul. The Epistles, like the Gospels, form part of the New Testament. They are, as the word Epistle implies, in the form of letters addressed by church leaders to various Groups in distant areas and contain instructions on how to conduct services and explain the meaning of those things in the Gospel which called for clarification.. The fact that these writings

could be regarded as part of scriptures is likely to surprise Muslims who do not and are forbidden to attribute any scriptural authority even to those sayings of the Prophet which are known as Hadith. It will help to bear in mind that the term scripture does not convey the same sense to the Christians as to the Muslims.

What the writers of the Gospels and Epistles left unclear or unelaborated about Christian doctrine crystallised in course of the following centuries in the writings of a second group of men known as the Fathers. The term Fathers is applied to a large number of eminent teachers who flourished from the first to the seventh century, a period of six hundred years. Those who came before the Council of Nicae (325) are called ante-Nicene Fathers; and those who appeared after Nicae form another group. Among the eminent Fathers; mention may be made of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Julian the Martyr, Origen, Tertullian; they all belong to the ante-Nicene period. Post-Nicene Fathers, that is, those who belong to the period after the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, include such figures as Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Ambrose of Milan, Augustine, Pope Leo 1, Boethrus, Jerome, Pope Gregory the Great and Bede.

If parallels are sought in Islamic history, the apostles are somewhat comparable to the four leaders, Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Hanbal, Imam Shafi, and Imam Malik who codified Islamic law and whose followers are called Sunnis. The Shias have their own Imams. But neither among the Sunnis nor among the Shias are the writings of the Imams given scriptural authority. This is a vital difference which must not be lost sight of in any evaluation of their role in the development of Islamic law.

The third group of people to whom the evolution of doctrine is due consists of those philosophers in the Middle Ages who attempted to arrive at a reconciliation of Christianity and Aristotle. Exposed to the Greek philosopher who dominated the thought of the Middle Ages many Christian theologians tried to discover a *via media* between his ideas and Christian doctrine. The greatest among them is Thomas Aquinas whose *Summa Theological* remains unsurpassed to this day as an exposition of how philosophy can be synthesised with religion. It is his interpretation and theories which form the foundation of Christian education, especially in Catholic schools. Aquinas belonged to the 13th century; his achievement is widely held to represent the acme of orthodox Christian thought.

Philosophers like Aquinas who reinterpreted Christianity in the light of Aristotle are called Schoolmen. Their chief task lay in the examination of the relation between reason and revelation. Aquinas had several predecessors and successors. Anselm, Abelard, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham are the most famous among them.

The assimilation of Aristotle's philosophy by Christian thinkers presented initially many difficulties. The polarities between the pagan view of the universe in which man was given an importance far exceeding that of anything else and the Christian view in which everything was traced to God had to be bridged before it could be shown that reason and revelation were not necessarily contradictory. Thomas Aquinas's works were at first banned; but early in the 14th century they came to be recognised as an acceptable synthesis which did not threaten the foundations of Christian faith. Later Thomas Aquinas was canonised—that is, declared a saint.

The Schoolmen grappled with such questions as whether the existence of God was capable of proof or whether predestination excludes freedom altogether. These issues, it may be remembered, also form the staple of early Islamic philosophy.

The kind of philosophy the Schoolmen developed is called in histories of thought Scholasticism. As a matter of fact Scholasticism owes its genesis to the influence of Muslim thinkers, particularly Averroes, or Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) whose commentaries on Aristotle brought Western thinkers into contact with the Greek philosopher who had been neglected for centuries in the West.

Scholasticism as an influential trend in Christian philosophy practically exhausted itself by the end of the 14th century. It is the Schoolmen who built the edifice of doctrine and thought which has since passed for authentic Christianity. There is no reason why this authenticity should be questioned by outsiders, but the enormous distance between the simple doctrines in the Gospels and the elaborate metaphysical structure of modern Christianity is a salutary reminder of how the simple faith taught by Christ has grown into a complex system of beliefs and tenets.

Since the decline of Scholasticism there has been no comparable body of men in Christianity who have exercised the same degree of influence over the Christian world as a whole. There have been great individual thinkers of course. The rise of Protestantism in the 16th century was marked or rather followed by the emergence of other thinkers who offered their own interpretations of the faith, but no school similar to Scholasticism grew. Among these writers Calvin, founder of Calvinism, is well-known. He is the author of *The Institutes of*

the Christian Religion which in tone and substance is very different from the works of Thomas Aquinas. Calvinists reject Catholic beliefs totally and appear to go furthest in their repudiation of orthodoxy as it was understood in the past.

The split in the Christian world brought about by protestantism set in motion far-reaching changes in the history of the faith and was responsible for conflicts between the Catholic Church and the new sects on the one hand and also between Catholic and protestant nations.

The movements launched by Luther and Calvin and others are referred to collectively as the Reformation. It was perceived by the Church of Rome to be a threat to its existence, and under Pope Paul III who acceded to the papal throne in 1534 a reaction began. Steps were taken to halt dissent and secession and also to initiate internal reforms calculated to cure the weaknesses which had triggered protestantism. Of these measures, the most important historically was the establishment of the Council of Trent between 1545 and 1563. It set forth a clear enunciation of doctrines and reiterated firmly the position that the traditions of the church must be accepted as the only acceptable basis of Christianity. Those who challenged them as the Protestants did were declared heretics. Wherever possible the church tried to enforce the new orthodoxy by imposing penalties on non-conformists. A tribunal of the Catholic Church known as the Inquisition, originally created in 1229 with a view to suppressing heresy, became especially active in such countries as Spain and Portugal where heretics were liable to be broken on the wheel or burnt at the stake. Many are known to have been condemned to this punishment.



Another measure adopted by the Catholic Church to arrest dissent was the use of the Index to ban books which were considered to digress from the orthodox view of matters. The Index was a list, established first in 1557, which in its first edition in 1564 issued the titles of condemned books. Catholics are supposed not to read any of these titles. The list of prohibited books has included such authors as Hobbes, Locke, Descartes, Gibbon, Voltaire, Rousseau, Flaubert and many others. The writings of the astronomers Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo were placed on the Index when they first appeared, but were removed from it later in 1835.

Yet another response to the upsurge of Protestantism was the founding in 1534 of the Company of Jesus, usually called the Jesuit Order by a Spanish ex-soldier, Ignatius Loyola. The order took a special vow of allegiance to the Pope in addition to the three vows of chastity, obedience and poverty. The Jesuits' purpose was to win back converts to the Catholic Church by means of preaching and education. They have ever since been active in the field of education. Jesuit educational institutions are found in nearly every corner of the world. They succeeded in rolling back the tide of Protestantism from many parts of Europe, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Poland and Ireland have remained predominantly Catholic. Parts of Western Europe, England, Scotland, North America are, on the other hand, predominantly Protestant. South America, which was colonised mainly by immigrants from Spain and Portugal, is also mainly Catholic.

The Eastern Orthodox Church, based in Greece, which does not either accept the supremacy of the Pope in Rome or subscribe to doctrines which the Protestants stress has adherents in Russia, south-eastern Europe, parts of the Middle East and northern Africa. The Copts in Egypt claim to belong to

the Jacobite branch of the Orthodox Church. yet, another group of Orthodox Christians is represented by the Christians in Ethiopia. They used to be affiliated to the church in Egypt but now consider themselves independent.

The Eastern Orthodox Church is much less interested in evangelism than the, Catholics and Protestants who maintain missionary services throughout the world.

There are Christians in many Asian countries, such as China, Korea, Japan, India, but the only country in Asia which is officially Christian is the Philippines. This archipelago was converted to the Catholic form of Christianity under Spanish rule from 1565 until 1898.

Although it originated in the Middle East in Asia, Christianity has since almost the time of St. Paul been looked upon as a Eurocentric faith. This has been due to the fact that after the Fathers who helped shape doctrine during the first six hundred years of its history, all the great Christian thinkers have been Europeans. There is no Eastern name which can parallel the prestige of St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas.

Among the Christian sects, the Church of Rome with its allegiance focused on the Pope presents a spectacle of religious unity far greater than anything seen among the Protestants. The latter have as many centres as there are sects, and no functionary corresponding to the Pope who can command the loyalty of all groups.

The differences between the Christian sects in respect of doctrine, ritual and organisation are likely to strike a Muslim as being far grater than anything in Islam as far as the two divisions in the Muslim world, namely, Sunnis and Shias are concerned. The Unitarians are the closest to the Muslims from

the standpoint of monotheism. They, like the Muslims, believe in the unity of the Godhead and are opposed to the Trinity. Some Protestant groups such as the Presbyterians insists on the avoidance of colourful ceremonies in the worship. The Catholic Church demands celibacy of its priesthood; the Protestants do not.

In the Middle Ages before the rise of Protestantism, there came into being in the Roman Catholic Church a number of Mendicant Orders—that is, orders who were licensed to preach the faith and depend on public charity for their maintenance. The members of these orders are known as friars, and the four most important groups who have played a part in European history are Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, and Augustinians. The Franciscan Order was founded in 1208 by St. Francis; the Dominicans trace their ancestry to St. Dominic who established this order in 1215; the Carmelities claim to be descended from a sect founded by Elijah on Mt. Carmel in Palestine, but historically it was St. Berthold who organised this order in or about 1150; finally, as their name suggests, the Augustinians derive their origins from St. Augustine. The friars were an active force in Christian evangelism in the Middle Ages and are frequently mentioned in mediaeval literature.

Another important group of Christians consists of the monks. A monk meant a person who lived apart from the world with a view to the development of the religious life by meditation and contemplation, devotional exercises and ascetic practices. A monk's establishment is known as a monastery . Like the mendicant orders, monasteries also played a part in European history. They became a powerful institution. Henry Vill's decision to dissolve the English monasterless in England marks the beginning of English Protestantism in the 16th

century. Monasteries which catered for men had a counterpart in nunneries for women; their ideals were the same.

The most famous monastic orders are the Cluniacs founded in 910; the Carthusians (1084); Cistercians (1098); Premonstratensians (1120); and the Gilbertines (1148); A branch of the Cistercians are known as Trappists; they are required to observe the rule of perpetual silence save in times of necessity. Trappist monasteries and nunneries are found even today in both Europe and America.

All monastic orders like the orders of friars are affiliated to the Catholic Church.

Although individuals here and there among the Muslims may renounce the world and live a celibate life, monasticism as such is not only discouraged but forbidden in Islam. The nearest parallel in Islam in the Sufi orders founded by great religious teachers. But Sufis do not have to take the vow of celibacy or perpetual silence. The parallelism must not be stretched too far.

While not disputing the right of any of the numerous sects and orders to be the rightful followers of Christ, the non-Christian student or religion would do well to remember that he would find little direct support for either their doctrines or their practices in the Bible. Christianity appears from this point of view to have undergone greater and more far-reaching changes in the hands of its followers than Islam. Muslim scripture has sometimes been interpreted in widely differing ways, but except in the case of those sects which have been universally denounced as heretical none of these interpretations approximate to the divergence that seems to an outsider to exist between the original teachings of Christ and what is accepted as valid by most Christians today. Unless this fact is borne in mind misunderstanding and confusion are likely.

The organisation of Christian churches has also acquired in the course of history great complexity. With the exception of a few like the Friends, each church is governed by a hierarchy of officers. The most typical of these categories is the hierarchy of which the apex is the Pope in the Church of Rome. He is assisted by a body of priests known as cardinals who are members of the sacred College of Cardinals, one of whose duties is to elect a new Pope when a vacancy occurs. The total number of cardinals is 70; a proportion of them must live in Rome to be available for constant consultation; the others are scattered throughout the world and meet when the College of Cardinals is called into session. Next to them come the archbishops and bishops. Probationary priests are called deacons.

Canons are clergymen who live with others in a house within the precinct of a cathedral.

The Catholic Church confers the honour of sainthood on great Christians after their deaths if they are reliably believed to have performed miracles. The process by which sainthood is conferred is known as canonisation.

The governing body of the orthodox Church is the Holy Synod. At the head of the Anglican Church of England is the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop is assisted by a Synod consisting of Bishops under him. The Church of Scotland is governed by a General Assembly which meets annually at Edinburgh. The General Assembly crowns a pyramid comprising kirk-sessions, presbyteries and synods. The Assembly is presided over by an elected Moderator.

The Salvation Army, a Protestant church organisation founded by William Booth in 1865 in London for missionary work among the poor, has a hierarchical structure like the military

consisting of soldiers, lieutenants, captains, majors, colonels, brigadiers. It is headed by a General.

The nomenclature of the offices in different churches varies, but they all have a hierarchical structure unlike anything in Islam. The general name for prayer leaders in Islam is Imam, but this is an office which can be discharged by anyone; and secondly there are no grades among the Imams. People versed in religious learning are venerated by the Muslim community, but this veneration does not endow them with any special status as priests.



## CHAPTER TWO

# RELIGION IN THE MODERN WEST

The term modern West embraces not only Western and Northern Europe but also North and South America and Australia and New Zealand. In spite of the existence of non-white populations in these countries the dominant pattern of life and value system have a European ancestry. Undeniable differences notwithstanding, it is the legacy of the Graeco-Roman civilization and the Christian religion which best explains the nature of the moral values which they respect and to which lip-service is paid even when they are fluted.

To understand the religious currents which influence this huge area one must also take account first of the changes and transformations which the Industrial Revolution and the civilization it created have brought about; secondly of how continued contact over several centuries between East and West, particularly during the colonial era, has forced the white races to shed some of the prejudices Europe used to entertain about ancient Eastern religions. The process has been considerably expedited by the influx of non-white populations into Europe, America and Australia. Thirdly, the effect of modern communications on life. Radio and television, the cinema and jet travel continually expose the world's populations, no matter where they live, to new ideas.

The greatest single factor behind the changes which the West has undergone in the past three hundred years has been



the emergence of science as the main arbiter and determiner of life. In the extent of its impact science has surpassed all past challenges to the old basis of traditional religion as it was understood and practised. Science of course is not anything new, and has existed side by side with religion and philosophy for ages. But having been tolerated as a handmaid to religion for many centuries it embarked on a new life in the 17th century. The greatest influence exerted on the sudden acceleration in its pace was Newton, the English mathematician.

The main protagonists of the scientific outlook in the Middle Ages had been not the Europeans but the Muslims. It is the latter who, at a period when the whole of Europe lay sunk in superstition, and observation and experiment were thought to conflict with the teachings of Christianity, were busy advancing the frontiers of knowledge. No history of modern science would be complete without reference to the work of such men as Avicenna, Averroes, Al-hazen and many others whose identity is sometimes obscured by the corruption their names have suffered in the mouths of European speakers. These Muslim scholars were however deeply religious men who perceived no conflict between science and religion. What science revealed seemed to them to be a manifestation of the wonders of God's creation. They were enabled to uphold this view by the fact that there are few dogmatic statements about the universe in the Quran which the sciences of their time contradicted. The Quran does not speak of the universe as being either geocentric or heliocentric. Nor is it said anywhere that what man sees on this earth exhausts all the possibilities latent in God's creative powers.

Mediaeval Christianity, on the other hand, put an interpretation on both the New and Old Testaments which made it difficult for the scientists to make discoveries without

coming upon phenomena which appeared at odds with Biblical assertion. The Catholic Church was so firmly committed to this interpretation that it seemed initially to regard new scientific findings as a challenge to its authority. Such findings were condemned outright as heresies punishable and deserving of suppression. When such men as Copernicus, Kepler and Tycho Brahe announced findings which seemed to have no support in the Bible or the writings of Christian philosophers, they were denounced, Galileo was obliged to recant. Even Francis Bacon in England in the 16th century was regarded as an enemy to established religion.

The rebirth of the scientific spirit in the 16th century was widely felt to be a challenge to the Church. That spirit witnessed the emergence of rationalism in philosophy as the dominant trend in European thought. Unlike the mediaeval Schoolmen who believed that the purpose of philosophy was to justify faith by logic as Aquinas had done, men like Descartes emphasised that independent enquiry must not be shackled by dogma. The movement of thought which led to a re-examination of doctrine in a new light is known as the Renaissance. It is believed by historians to have been spurred by renewed contact with the works of the Greeks after 1496 when a large number of Greek scholars fled from Byzantium to Italy. By insisting that reason must be accepted as the ultimate criterion of validity, the Renaissance considerably weakened the foundations of the mediaeval church. The revolt against the authority of the Catholic Priesthood which began in the 16th century and which is known collectively as the Reformation owed its inspiration to ideas which were diffused by the Renaissance. Neither Martin Luther nor Calvin nor John Knox can be fully understood without reference to the profound change in men's attitude to

religious authority which resulted from the Renaissance, particularly from the resurgence of science which it stimulated.

The splitting of the Catholic Church into a number of independent churches did not lead immediately to changes in basic beliefs. But as men began to exercise the right to read the Bible on their own and apply their judgment to the interpretation of its teachings instead of accepting what was passed down from the church, old doctrines came under attack.

The mediaeval church reacted by cracking down on deviationism wherever it could. The answer to the Reformation was the Counter-Reformation which relied on the Inquisition to stamp out heresy, to punish new thought, sternly oppose departures from officially approved interpretations of doctrine. Slight deviations were sometimes punished with death. The general belief among church authorities was that it was preferable to destroy the body rather than allow the soul to be doomed eternally to hell. People judged to be heretical were given the choice of recanting or being broken on the wheel or burnt at the stake. Fear of death forced many to recant but there were thousands who perished on the wheel or at the stake. Latimer and Ridley in England are famous. They were burnt at the stake on account of their refusal to accept the Pope's authority. These punishments continued throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

However disconcerting this fact may appear today, most orthodox Christians saw nothing evil in the suppression of heresy by force. What is regarded as horros did not arouse then the revulsion that they evoke today. But as the climate of opinion changed gradually as a result of the work of the philosophers and scientists the authority of the church diminished, till by the end of the 17th century and the beginning

of the 18th, it became possible to denounce ecclesiastical authority openly. This process culminated in what is called the Enlightenment, a term which by itself signifies a judgement on the past. The period when men obeyed the church blindly began to be seen as an age of darkness and superstition. One of the great representative figures of the Enlightenment was Voltaire who dominated France in the 18th century.

The men who called themselves enlightened were by no means atheists. They did not repudiate religion. What they refused to accept was the right of the church to dictate the manner in which the Bible was to be understood. Loyalty to Christianity went hand in hand with rebellion against established church authority. Some like the great English mathematician Isaac Newton (1642-1727) attempted a reconciliation between science and the Bible. Newton believed that contrary to what mediaeval schoolmen said the heliocentric theory was known to Moses.

Nor will it do to assume that the increasing influence of science made any appreciable change to the pattern of social life in general. People attended church as usual; church laws on marriage were respected in general; expressions of heresy in literature were condemned; and conformity was considered a virtue. What was eroded was the belief that the Bible contained answers to all the problems of life.

The Enlightenment originated in France but it was really a European phenomenon. Its influence was felt everywhere. The men whose writings and preachings brought this new rationalism into being are known as philosophes. This term is applied to such thinkers as Voltaire (1694-1778), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), Rousseau (1712-1778), and Montesquieu (1689-1755), who were all in different ways defenders of freedom on

belief. Thier powerful advocacy drew men away in increasing numbers from orthodoxy towards the worship of reason.

This trend in England gave birth to a new form of religion or religious attitude called Deism. The Deists dispensed with God as He had been understood for ages, and instead conceived of a deity who was the first cause, the master clock-winder of the universe. They thought it useless to invoke the intercession of God in order to cause the laws of Nature to deviate from their ordered course. Men must tely on reason to slove the problems of society. Although the Deists dispensed with God in the traditional sense and did not think it necessary to worship Him formally, they did not openly reject the doctrine of immortality and believed that man had to atone for sin. The aim of religion, they thought, was virtue or sensible living; some of them however had no place in their theology for Chirist's redemptive mission; some were doubtful of immortality. Deism came to mean at certain stages a belief in a personal deity who is distinct from the world, and not very intimately interested in its concerns. The universe is expected to run in conformity with the laws that He originally framed. Deism is an interesting stage in the evolution of the religious life of the West, but unlike other sects it never became a church with formal rituals.

The father of English Deism was Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648). The famous historian Gibbon was also a supporter of Deism. One well-known Deist Rev. Thomas Woolston (1669-1733) was so openly critical of the belief in miracles that he was imprisoned for blasphemy and died in the King's Bench prison.

Confined to the upper strata of society, Deism was never a popular cult. The hostility it aroused as evidenced by such cases as that of Woolston testifies to the fact that in spite of

rationalism's being in the air, traditional Christianity had not lost its hold on the public either in England or elsewhere.

But emphasis was shifting from formal worship to such things as practical charity and philanthropy which were believed to reflect the real spirit of Christ's teachings. This tendency was strongest in France. The rumblings which became increasingly more and more strident as the century advanced finally exploded into the upsurge known in history as the French Revolution.

It is impossible to ignore the French Revolution in any account of European history, whether religious or political or social. Apparently triggered by political and economic discontent, it also represented a conscious break with tradition and was led and dominated by rationalists who wanted to do away with everything including Christianity which savoured of past oppression and tyranny. They even inaugurated a new calendar, gave new names to the months of the year and disestablished the church. The Revolution can be seen as the climax of philosophical trends which began with the philosophes. Those responsible for it sincerely desired to create an age of reason freed from superstition of all kinds. But as developments which its outbreak in 1789 set in motion showed, this was easier said than done. While the Revolution did away with the monarchy and granted rights to the workers and peasantry, persecution against the supporters of the Old Regime led to a widespread reign of terror, which eventually devoured some of the leaders of the Revolution itself. One famous victim was Robespierre who himself had ordered the execution of many on the ground that they were opposed to Revolutionary principles. Another equally famous leader who fell prey to Revolutionary fervour was Danton.

The worst phase in the Revolution's course was the period from August 1792 to July 1794, which is known as the period of the Jacobin Republic. The Jacobins were an extreme group among the revolutionaries who wanted to install not only a new political order but also a new religion. They closed the churches and destroyed religious images. The anti-Christian movement reached a climax in the Festival of Reason held in Paris in November 1793 when a number of deputies wearing red liberty caps marched to the Cathedral of Notre Dame to enthrone an actress as Goddess of Reason. The Cult of Reason was considered to go too far in its rejection of religion and Robespierre, himself a Jacobin, replaced it by a creed based upon belief in a Supreme Being and immortality of the soul. A number of festivals were provided for in the name of the Supreme Being, Life and Liberty, the Human Race and other idealistic concepts. One of the festivals was dedicated to la Maternite, a forerunner of Mother's Day in the U.S.A.

The Republican religion did not last long and was practically discarded after Napoleon became emperor early in the following century. Napoleon himself was not a religious person but he realised that the Jacobins had created deep popular resentments by repudiating the Catholic Church. The church was restored in France by means of a Concordat that he signed with the Pope. The state agreed once again to pay the salaries of the clergy. In spite of the restoration of the church, the secularist tendencies, strengthened by the French Revolution, were destined to have an enduring effect on the outlook of Europe and America. Some of the men who played a leading role in the Revolution had also influenced the American Revolution which predated it by a few years. It is to their influence that the strict separation of church and state which the American Constitution insists on is due.

The main intellectual legacy of the Revolution can be said to be the general belief that there must be no direct intrusion of religion into state affairs. Christian values were sought to be detached from state functions in the sense that legislation was not to be allowed to be influenced by anything said or emphasised in the Bible. The line of distinction drawn between the two things is not always clear to outsiders. The observance of the Sabbath continued down to the first half of the 20th century, but both religious and anti-religious elements defended it on grounds which were said to be secular. No one approved of George Eliot's defiance of Christian morality by maintaining an open liaison with a man not her wedded husband. Lord Nelson to whom England owed its famous naval victory at Trafalgar and many others had mistresses, but bigamy as the Christians call it is still illegal. King Edward VII of England had what nowadays is called a stable relationship with a woman with the tacit approval of his Queen Alexandra. In France adultery went farthest. The Royal family who were supporters of the established church so flouted the Christian law on marriage that at Versailles adultery acquired a respectable venter. French fiction by such writers as Balzac, Flaubert, Stendhal and Zola paints a society which would not approve of attacks on the church but accepted extramarital relationships as perfectly normal. At the same time polygamous societies in the East continued to earn criticism as centres of vice.

The fact is that the gap between profession and practice kept growing. Few in their personal lives would care to abide by the laws framed by the mediaeval Church Fathers. They realised that the edifice erected by them was in danger of collapsing owing to the pressure exerted on it by science and modern philosophy. But a kind of emotional nostalgic



attachment to the church was substituted for conformity to orthodoxy.

The 18th and 19th centuries are marked by considerable ambiguity in respect of the religious beliefs and practices of Europeans and Americans. It would be wrong to say that science had altogether shoved religion into a side ally. Although church going as a regular habit lost some of its popularity as a measure of social respectability, there was no open repudiation of Christianity by any group. The philosophers could say what they liked, but the public would not have tolerated the banishment of established religion by formal legislation.

In the middle of the century came the works of Darwin which propounded the theory that man is the end-product of a long process of evolution. Although Darwin did not claim to offer anything but a hypothesis, his *Origin of Species* (1859) was regarded by many as a bombshell. It seemed to throw the Biblical story of creation completely out of gear. The events which the Bible had compressed into seven days appeared now to have taken millions of years. Secondly, the assumption that each species was created separately was shown the lack support in science. That taken at its face value the Darwinian hypothesis substituted a deeper unity embracing the universe as a whole was lost sight of.

Darwin convulsed the foundations of traditional religion as they had never been convulsed. The last half of the century is dominated by debate about his acceptability. While men like T. H. Huxley defended him, others denounced him equally vehemently. Indeed the debate cannot be said to have ended yet. There are large groups who still think that evolutionism is not a satisfactory answer to the riddle of the universe. In the

USA a group which calls itself creationists insists that evolutionism is only a hypothesis; it cannot be claimed to have greater validity than the Genesis story.

While debate over the hypothesis of Darwin were agitating the minds of the educated classes, other trends also appeared in their approach to the Bible. The Germans led the vanguard in their approach to the Bible. The Germans led the vanguard in what is called the higher criticism of scripture, which means the application of modern methods to questions of authorship, dates, and accuracy of the present day texts of the Bible. Scholars were able to throw light on the relation between book and book, the nature of the changes which they had undergone, interpolations and the historical accuracy of the facts stated as far as they could be judged with reference to indisputable historical data available elsewhere. While people gained as a result of these investigations of greater insight into the contents of the Bible, they also weakened its authority as an unassailable guide to ethics and morality. For it was shown that gradations could be perceived in the formulation of ideas which ultimately came to be accepted as the bedrock of Christianity.

Ernest Renan (1823-92), a devout Catholic scholar, was influenced by German criticism to write his *Vie de Jesus* (Life of Jesus) in which while he did not repudiate Christianity as such, he cast doubt on the historicity of the person called Christ. Christ seemed more a composite figure, a name given to the idea of a religious teacher who represented a succession of preachers in the Middle East than a single historical character. His teachings could be explained as the crystallisation of a long line of ethical and religious beliefs, reformed and reshaped under the impact of historical factors.

Anthropology, a modern science developed towards the second half of the 19th century, brought to light fresh evidence about how religious ideas and practices had evolved age by age. Lecky in his *History of European Morals* and particularly Sir James Frazer in his monumental *The Golden Bough*, arrayed an enormous mass of facts collected from different societies and in the case of Lecky from different ages to demonstrate the fragility of standards which from time immemorial had been taken to be unchallengeable. Frazer also showed that rituals and practices regarded as peculiar to Christianity had many parallels elsewhere. At the same time that these studies led to a broader understanding of the bases of religion, they could not but cause serious cracks in the edifice of the established church. Bigotry was dealt a death blow. It was no longer possible to defend orthodoxy by blind adherence to old beliefs. One needed the support of logic and history to ward off attacks on tenets hitherto accepted without question.

The rise of the Salvation Army founded by General Booth in 1865 seemed in this context to revitalise Christianity by emphasis on love and service and by encouraging Christians to engage in practical social work. The Salvation Army which is still active became a tremendous force towards the end of the century but it did nothing to arrest the erosion of the intellectual basis of some of the beliefs handed down from the past.

Yet another challenge to orthodox religion came from geology, the earth science which by an examination of geological strata was able to determine the age of rocks with greater accuracy. New facts emerged about the formation of mountains and seas. They demonstrated how unreal was the assumption of old Christian theologians that the earth was just

about four thousand years old. What astronomy had done in the 16th and 17th centuries about the size of the universe, by revealing the existence of stars and planetary systems enormously larger than the solar system (as it is now called) was now done by geology about the earth itself.

The cumulative effect of modern geology, astronomy, biology and anthropology was to pose a serious challenge to theories deduced by theologians from the Bible and naturally to the value system erected on that basis.

It is not to be supposed that new intellectual ideas transformed society immediately, or that the established churches, Protestant or Catholic, collapsed in ruins. The general public continued to cherish the same beliefs as before, but the climate of educated opinion changed slowly and orthodoxy lost the support of science in its defence of traditional morality. Secondly, there grew up a more tolerant attitude towards creeds other than Christianity. New scholarly studies of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Chinese and Japanese systems of religious belief helped mitigate some of the hostility which they used to provoke. Prophet Muhammad (God bless him), painted in mediaeval Christian writing as Mahound, a demon, was now seen to have been a historical figure. The elements of similarity between Islam and Christianity led many missionaries to condemn him as a heretic who had deliberately corrupted the religion, and this belief has been dying hard. It is still repeated in many circles and some exceptions apart even scholars who seem fair-minded cannot altogether banish from their minds the suspicion that the similarities must be due to deliberate borrowings coupled with a refusal to accept the truth of Christianity as the real religion.

The studies of the German scholar Max Muller on Hinduism and Buddhism in the 1860's initiated a similar revision of established opinion about these ancient faiths. Cults which had been dismissed as unworthy of notice were now perceived to be the outcome of slow crystallisations of religious attitudes.

The later half of the 19th century is a period marked by diverse tendencies. On the one hand Christianity was faced with an intellectual threat emanating from science; on the other hand the application of scholarship to the understanding of non-Christian systems of belief contributed to the growth of a more tolerant attitude towards them. The old prejudice did not disappear wholly but the tendency to condemn everything outside of Christianity as vile received a setback as a result of new discoveries.

One interesting aspect of the changes which the West was undergoing was a new surge of interest in Catholicism among a class of intellectuals in such a citadel of Protestantism as England. Cardinal Newman (1801-90) who was born a Protestant and was the founder of the Oxford Tractarian Movement eventually resigned from the Anglican church and embraced Catholicism. His *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, an autobiographical explanation of his conversion, moved many others to similar emotions. Catholicism was popular among the poets of the 1890s. The best known among them was Francis Thompson whose *Hound of Heaven* is a passionate statement of the need for belief in God. G.K. Chesterton and his friend Hilaire Belloc whose lives span the two centuries courageously defended Catholicism in intellectual terms. This however, did not blossom into a popular movement. The temper of the times is better represented by the Fabian movement of the end of the century dominated by such men as Sidney Webb and George

Barnard Shaw who believed in the practical application of socialism in the solution of economic problems.

These tendencies spilled over into the first decade of the 20th century. One must also remember that the altitude to religion was not the same all over Western Europe and North America. France was in the peculiar position of having no established church but with the Catholic establishment maintaining its grip on the educational system. State secularism flourished along with a degree of influence exerted by the church which was not paralleled by anything in Britain where the head of state continued to be the head of the Anglican Church. Italy, the seat of the Pope, had to contend with the Papal State as a political power until the signing of the Lateran Treaty in 1929 which recognised the Vatican in Rome as a state within the Italian state enjoying a kind of sovereignty without detriment to the sovereignty of Italy as a whole. Germany had seen in the 19th century several philosophical movements led by such men as Schopenhaur and Nietzsche which undermined the foundations of Christianity and represented a trend away from it. It was the cumulative influence of these philosophies that prepared the ground for the rise of Nazism after the First World War. The Nazis stood for a return to primitive Nordic gods.

The First World War was a turning point in the religious and political history of Western Europe. The devastation it caused, the horrors it created, the widespread sufferings it generated completely shattered old morality and wrecked the foundation of family life. Pessimism about the future was accentuated by the failure of the established order to prevent the catastrophe or to restrain the cruelties each side inflicted on the other. Sociologists and historians note in the post-war world a weariness, an indifference to values which people associated

with the system that had given rise to the conflict. Hope seemed illusive, a mirage, and the only thing that mattered was instant satisfaction of crude appetites.

In Russia a communist revolution made short work of the old political order and abolished the church in an effort to inaugurate an era of freedom unshackled by moral laws derived from Christianity. Although the rest of Europe escaped a similar catastrophic change, the early successes of Communism persuaded many among the working classes and also some intellectuals that the future of civilisation lay in Marxism. This belief percolated even into such strongholds of orthodoxy as Spain. This became evident in the Spanish Civil War of the late thirties. The issues in the Civil War were confused. The Republicans who wanted a system modelled on Russia were able to attract much sympathy by championing the cause of freedom. General Franco's forces who ultimately won the war espoused political orthodoxy as well as religious conservatism. They were helped by the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy, and their victory meant a triumph for the Catholic Church over forces which had tried in the name of freedom to abolish it in Spain.

On the intellectual front the researches of Freud into workings of the human mind contributed considerably, along with Marxism and other factors, to the weakening of the bases of orthodox belief. Dr Sigmund Freud, an Austrian Jew, a pioneer in modern psychoanalysis, was concerned with the way the subconscious worked, and maintained that the concept of God lord and protector was nothing but a sublimation of the influence of the father on the family, People who resisted Marxism found it difficult to resist

Freud. Those who did not embrace Marxist atheism outright increasingly favoured an attitude of agnosticism to religious belief. Agnostics do not reject religion straightway but refuse to commit themselves to theories about the unknown for which no material evidence can be produced. This was typical of thousands of educated people all over the Western world, in Europe as well as North America.

The general decay of religious faith among the Christians was reflected most strikingly in social legislation. It came to be held that morality was a private business, to be determined by each person according to his wishes. Again we notice some contradictions. Plural marriage continued to be condemned and to be punishable, but adultery and homosexuality were treated as matters on which society should not seek to impose legal restrictions. In America especially this attitude has gone furthest. Men who have what is called a homosexual orientation have been known to be ordained as priests. The law which penalised homosexuality has in many countries been abolished, provided it is practised between consenting adults, men or women. It should not be supposed that Christian society approves of this laxity, but by and large restrictions on homosexuals in the matter of appointment and promotion are now viewed as an infringement of minority rights.

Group marriage is another thing which the Muslims find it difficult to reconcile with the continuing Western disapproval of limited polygamy in Muslim society. This practice involves a number of men and women being declared married to one another with the right (as it is called) to have sexual relations with anyone in the group marriage but occasionally one hears of Churchmen officiating at such unions. An equally interesting practice is the legal recognition of homosexual partnerships as the equivalent of marriage for purposes of inheritance and



maintenance. Whatever social stigma once attached to sexual aberrations has virtually disappeared in parts of America.

Artificial insemination of wives by men other than husbands is not considered sinful or socially harmful, Orthodox Muslims find it difficult to understand the difference between adultery and artificial insemination where the donor is not the legal spouse of the woman who receives the seed. Again it must be remembered that everybody in the Christian world does not approve though most do.

The Catholic Church does not approve of either artificial insemination or premarital sex or promiscuity or abortion but a majority of Catholics do not in practice obey the Church's opinions in these matters. The same attitude is noticeable in matters of divorce. Catholic marriages are theoretically indissoluble but the ban on divorce is circumvented in various ways and in certain circumstances dissolutions are granted to permit men and women to marry again. Divorce is also disapproved in Protestant society but Protestant churches lifted the ban on divorce long ago and no religious stigma attaches to divorced couples.

The greatest evidence of the decay of religious faith is provided by the general acceptance of extra-marital sex and its consequence, namely, illegitimacy as a normal feature of social life, which can be talked about openly. The recognition of the rights of illegitimate children is an advance in social legislation which Islam anticipated more than fifteen hundred years ago. For although adultery is punishable, children born of such unions are fully entitled to claim a share of parental property once their paternity or maternity is recognised.

Another sign of indifference to religion is the growing tendency among people to form unions and live together as man and wife without formal marriage. What used to be called living in sin has lost its horror.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the concept of marriage as such has undergone a profound change in the West. The majority still regard marriage as a union sanctioned in accordance with formal rites, but this has ceased to have any effect on actual social relationships.

Private and social morality is now thought to be not a matter to be regulated by laws laid down in scripture but in accordance with a gradually evolving pattern of ethical beliefs. Christianity is more and more being sought to be interpreted as a cosmic philosophy rather than as a code of moral conduct.

Again it would be highly misleading to assume that religion in the old-fashioned sense has died in what is described as the post-Christian world. The emergence of such thinkers in the 20th century as Pastor Martin Niemöller in Germany who courted imprisonment rather than connive at Nazism, Reinhold Niebuhr in the USA, Chardin de Teilhard in France, who attempted a reconciliation of modern biology with the theory of Immaculate Conception, C.S. Lewis, the British literary critic and scholar who also wrote movingly on Christian doctrine and many others testifies to the vitality of the Christian tradition. The stark atheism of Marxism coupled with disenchantment with the actual practices of the communists in Russia led in the 30s and 40s to the conversion of many intellectuals to Catholicism. The God That Failed, a collection of statements by a number of former supporters of the communist party, The Opium of the Intellectuals by the French thinker Raymond Aron. I Believed by Douglas Hyde, a former secretary of the British Communist

Party, and *The Outsider* by Colin Wilson represent a trend towards mystical forms of Christianity, usually Catholic, providing a marked contrast to Marxism. All these books appeared in the third, fourth and fifth decades of the present century when the influence of Communism as a philosophy and a supposed panacea for all political and economic ills was running strong.

The reasons which led some intellectuals to recoil from Communism were also responsible for the popularity of Esatern, mystical cults in both Europe and America. Zen Buddhism, an atheistic school of Mahayana Buddhism in which great importance was attached to the value of meditation and non-attachment acquired a large following, Islamic Sufism also had its admirers. Particularly interesting was the rise in America of the Hare Krishna movement, a cult founded on devotion to the Hindu god, Krishna. Its adherents would try to conform to tradition by shaving their heads and wearing saffron robes in the manner of Hindu Sanyasis or religious mendicants. A number of Hindus set up Ashrams in America which attracted hundreds. These persons claimed to be incarnations of Krishna or some other Hindu god, preached the doctrine of complete freedom including free and promiscuous sex, and rivalled in their influence many of the older sects. A parallel manifestation of the same fascination for unconventional mysticism was T. M. or Transcendental Meditation, a cult founded by a Hindu preacher who claimed to have power to solve all problems, not excepting the problem of international peace. Advertisements in newspapers in his name—he was generally known as Maharishi—threw out an open invitation to governments to submit their disputes and worries to him and he asserted that no problems could go unsolved under the methods he had discovered. T. M's popularity can be gauged from the fact that

there have been demands that it should be put on the British Health Service as a valid system of therapy. The revival of belief in incarnation in the modern West—to be distinguished from the doctrine of incarnation which forms the basis of Christianity— sometimes encourages some Christians themselves to claim to be God incarnate. One Rev. Jones was able at the beginning of the 80s to establish a new cult with himself as a divine being. After being driven out of America he moved to Latin America and organised mass suicide involving over nine hundred men and women and children who swallowed poison in the belief that death meant an immediate transition to heaven.

These phenomena symptomatised a great deal of confusion about religious values, showed that atheism was not necessarily a component of industrialism and at the same time indicated how a new wave of eclecticism in religious matters was inspiring a search for beliefs and doctrines from which the Christian community as a whole had moved away.

That Christianity is still a living force was demonstrated in the late eighties of the century by the role the Catholic Church played in the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe; in Poland in particular the Church became the main focus of opposition to communist totalitarianism. Elsewhere too, it exercised an influence on developments which culminated in the re-establishment of democratic Government and political pluralism. The same forces led to the relaxation of the ban on religion in Russia. This may not result in the return of orthodoxy of a mediaeval character but the political and social revolutions of 1989 and 1990 are a warning against the assumption that religion has ceased to matter in the West.



## CHAPTER THREE

### JUDAISM

The adherents of Judaism who are called Jews are far fewer in number than either Christians or Muslims or Buddhists and Hindus, but they exert in world affairs an influence far in excess of their numerical strength. They are perhaps the best organised of the three monotheistic groups—Jews, Christians and Muslims. Scattered throughout Europe and America for centuries, the Jews have had since the founding of Israel in 1948 what they call a national home in territory forcibly wrested from the Arabs. But the number of Jews in countries outside Israel, in Europe and the USA exceeds the Jewish population of Israel. A state of war has existed since the forties between Israel and most of the Arab states, and its relations with the Muslim world in general are marked by antipathy and tension. But Jewish enmity towards Islam dates back to the very inception of Islam's history. The Jewish community in Medina was involved in conflict with the Prophet (May God bless him) himself, and in spite of many affinities in belief and ritual and in spite of the fact that the Quran recognises Abraham as the immediate source of the monotheism which is the core of Islam, there have been few periods in history when the two groups have not been at loggerheads.

Although conversion to Judaism is possible and takes place from time to time, the Jews have not actively pursued

proselytisation like the Christians and Muslims. Many Jews regard themselves more as a race than as a religious group, and a distinction is made between those who claim to be descended from the ancient Jewish people and those who embraced Judaism later. The term anti-Semitism which implies an attitude of hostility towards the Jews in European countries presupposes that all Jews are Semitic in origin. Although this is not factually true, even the converts from groups other than Semitic identify themselves so closely with those who are Semitic by birth that it is not possible to distinguish them from the latter. They all share the same world view and consider themselves as a people apart in the same way.

Like Christianity and Islam, Judaism is a Middle Eastern religion, the oldest of the three monotheistic faiths. Unlike them, however, its origins are lost in antiquity, and the Old Testament which is said to contain the essence of the Jewish faith is not a single book like the Quran, but a collection of several scriptural texts, some manifestly older than others. The two books particularly associated with Judaism are the Torah, which is part of the section of the Bible known as the Pentateuch, and a supplementary book called the Talmud which is not in the Bible.

The most characteristic feature of the Jewish faith is the belief that the Jews are a Chosen People, or rather the Chosen People bound to God by a special covenant. They believe themselves to be under the special protection of Jehovah, as the Jews call God; all religions other than Judaism are false; the Gentiles as the Jews call non-Jews are said to lack this special protection. The Jews are consequently conscious of a special sense of mission on earth much stronger than any analogous sentiment among Christians and Muslims.

It is impossible to explain the Jewish religion without reference to Jewish history. The ancient Israelites who used to live in the area, called Palestine later, were first displaced from their homeland by Babylonians. This dispersion took place in the 6th century B.C. and the period the Israelites spent in Babylonian Captivity. Those who came back were again dispersed by the fall of Jerusalem in 73 A.d. to the Romans. This was preceded by a long siege by the Roman army, which forced the Jews inside Jerusalem to resort to cannibalism for the sake of physical survival. The grim story of Jerusalem's sufferings during the siege have been recorded by Josephus, the historian.

The dispersion or diaspora which followed the Roman conquest scattered the Jews through Europe and Asia and northern Africa. There was no European country which did not have a Jewish population, large or small. Some became completely assimilated to the local populations, both linguistically and socially; others resisted total assimilation by insisting on treating themselves as a people apart, living in special quarters of the cities they inhabited which in many places came to be called ghettos. Throughout the Middle Ages one hears of occasional outbursts of anti-Semitism in the course of which the Jews were persecuted and sought to be exterminated. Such campaigns were known as pogroms. Systematic pogroms from time to time characterised the history of mediaeval Russia, Poland and even France and England. The nature of this persecution has been encapsulated with remarkable realism in Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*. The community apparently attracted hatred and jealousy on account of their relative economic prosperity vis-a-vis the Christians; their love of usury as a means of making money, and their tendency to look down upon the Christians as



an inferior class. Jewish arrogance was repaid by an intensity of hatred from the Christians which sometimes bordered on the barbarous.

Ironically, it was in Muslim Spain and in countries in north Africa such as Morocco and Egypt that the Jews were safest. One of the greatest Jewish theologians of the mediaeval period, Maimonides (1135-1204), was a Spaniard. The fall of the Muslims in Spain also coincided with the beginning of persecution against the Jews in that country.

It is in the light of the feeling of insecurity that the Jews suffered from all over Europe that the genesis of Zionism, the movement which succeeded in establishing the Jewish state of Israel, can be understood. It began in the 19th century and the term Zionism is said to have been coined by Nathan Birnbaum in 1886. Another early leader was Theodor Herzl. The movement gathered strength during the First world War under the leadership of Chaim Weismann who was able to extract from the British Government a promise that the Jews would be provided with a National Home in Palestine. The promise is contained in the famous Balfour Declaration and was given in return for Jewish cooperation in the prosecution of war, but it was so ambiguously worded as not to offend the sentiments of the Arabs who had been collaborating with the British on the basis of assurances which ran counter to the promise made to the Jews. The story of the Arab revolt against Turkey, the suzerain power in the Middle East, is given in detail in T.E. Lawrence's *The seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Lawrence was the man who engineered the revolt by promising the Arabs deliverance from the Turkish yoke. The Arabs were so indifferent to Zionism's ultimate aims that initially some of them offered to help the displaced Jews to settle in Palestine. When

they were undeceived it was too late to reverse the trend of events, and at the end of the First World War Turkish territories in the Near East had been partitioned between Britain and France. Palestine fell to the British government and as the mandatory power Britain continued to allow increasingly large numbers of European Jews to immigrate.

When British forces withdrew from Palestine in 1948 the Jews proclaimed the establishment of Israel as an independent state founded on the principles of Judaism and consecrated to the achievement of a policy which was to help realise the aspirations of the Jews as a nation. Israel is technically the home of all the Jews in the world and under their Law of Return every Jew, wherever he may be, is entitled to emigrate to it and is assured of immediate citizenship.

The revivalistic temper of the state can be judged from the fact that not only have the Rabbis, the Jewish priests, a strong say in the formulation of state policy, but even the ancient Jewish language, Hebrew, has been revived and declared the state language of Israel.

The Jewish religion as it is practised today is the outcome of the experience of the Jewish people in ancient Israel before their dispersion and also during the diaspora.

A strong distinction is made between the two main groups of Jews, Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The first term is the appellation of Jews in Germany and Poland, the second that of the Jews in Spain and Portugal and also those who live in Africa and Asia. Sephardim has come to signify Oriental Jewry in general, many of them indistinguishable in colour and racial characteristics from other Oriental peoples.

Regardless of their origin all Jews worship a Supreme Deity called Jehovah, a transcendent being who is stern and just. In the earlier books of the Old Testament Jehovah is painted as a terrible God who is unforgiving in His chastisement of sinners, but gradually the Jewish conception of God is said to have undergone a change in the direction of a Supreme Being who embodies mercy and forgiveness. It was these qualities that Jesus emphasised in his revolt against orthodox Judaism which he said he had appeared to reform. The growth of Christianity as a separate religion was owing to the fact that the Jews were not prepared to accept Jesus's reforms.

The Old Testament makes mention of an exceedingly long hierarchy of prophets who are all part of the Jewish tradition, but the man whose teachings constitute the core of Judaism is Moses. He is believed to have brought the community some Divine Tablets, laws directly given to him for the conduct of the communal and personal life of the Jewish people. Mosaic law as these are called is a stern code, emphasising cleanliness, purity, right conduct, right food and of course right belief. Jewish dietary laws are stricter than those among Muslims. They are forbidden to eat pork and religion requires them not to eat fish and meat off the same vessels. Animals must be slaughtered, when needed for food, by cutting the windpipe in the way Muslims slaughter animals, and milk and meat must not be cooked together. The Jewish term Kosher is the equivalent of Halal in Muslim society, and implies purified food. Orthodox Jews wherever they are, in Europe or America, follow these laws and Kosher food is insisted upon.

The keeping of the Sabbath is another institution which distinguishes the Jews from the Muslims and even from the Christians. The Jewish Sabbath, demands abstention from all

wordly work including such things as cooking or plate washing. The day which is Saturday is to be devoted entirely to worship. When Israel launched an airline of its own there were objections from orthodox Rabbis to the operation of air services on Saturday; similarly the operation of public transport in Israeli cities had initially to overcome protests from the orthodox. The Christian Sabbath, observed on Sundays, does not go half as far, but until very recently shops and cinemas in European and American countries had to remain closed on Sundays. Muslims have no Sabbath, in this sense. The congregational prayers on Friday do not entail any cessation of work except during the prayer service itself for those participating in them. Once the prayers are over Friday is not any different from other week days.

Although the whole of Jewish law or religion is not to be equated with the famous Ten Commandments—for there have been many developments and interpretations by Jewish scholars and philosophers—they provide a good guide, an essential one, to the understanding of the Jewish mind. The Commandments as recorded in Exodus and believed to have been given directly by Jehovah to Moses, are as follows :

- 1) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- 2) Thou shalt not make any graven image.
- 3) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.
- 4) Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
- 5) Honour thy father and thy mother.
- 6) Thou shalt not kill.
- 7) Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- 8) Thou shalt not steal.
- 9) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

10) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, wife, manservant, maidservant, ox, ass, etc.

Except for the fourth commandment about the Sabbath, there is nothing in this list to which Muslims object, and which is not part of Muslim law. The fact that in actual truth the Jews and Muslims have regarded themselves as each other's enemies is a paradox explainable only in the light of their history.

It may not be out of place at this point to mention that the Quran lists both Jews and Christians as People of the Book or Ahlul Kitab, with whom the Muslims are permitted to interdine and intermarry. That attitude cannot be said to be reciprocated by either group who regard the adherents of Islam as either heretics or a misguided community.

An important difference between Jewish and Islamic law which is worth bearing in mind is that there is no truly historical person among the Jewish prophets like Prophets Muhammad in Islam to whose life we can refer for guidance as to how the Commandments are to be interpreted. The twin sources of Islamic law are the Quran and the Sunnah or the sayings and traditions of the Prophet (May God bless him). The Hadith as these traditions are called supplement the Quran and are regarded as an authoritative commentary on it. For anything analogous in Judaism one must turn to commentaries written by Jewish scholars down the ages.

Moses is not the only prophet with a claim on the allegiance of the Jewish community. But none of them belongs to history in the same sense as Prophet Muhammad (May God bless him).

It is the Talmud rather than the Old Testament which provides the best guide to Jewish civil and canonical law. It consists of two parts : the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah is written in classical Hebrew and was codified by Simon who died in 166 A.D and his son Jehudah Hannasi and his disciples. The scholars are known collectively as the Tannaim. The code they compiled deals with a wide and comprehensive range of activities such as agriculture, festivals, women, marriage and divorce, civil and criminal law, Temple services and ritual cleanliness. The Gemara is a commentary on the Mishnah, made necessary, it is said, by changing conditions of time and place. Written partly in Aramaic and other Middle Eastern languages, it continued to be added to and revised until the end of the 4th century. Maimonides, the Spanish scholar earlier mentioned, made an abstract of the Talmud in the 8th century which is still in general use. The whole Talmud is available in English.

The equivalent of the church in Christianity and the mosque in Islam is the synagogue in Judaism. The term means a place of assembly where the Jews gather for common prayer and worship. Synagogues were established after the Jewish Exile and do not rank in prestige with the Temple in Jerusalem which is venerated as the holiest of holies in Judaism. The first Temple is believed to have been raised by King Solomon about 1000 B.C. And was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The Second Temple, the Temple of Zerubbabel, was built about 516 B.C. and was replaced by the third and last Temple, that of Herod which was completed in 64 A. D. But six years later the Romans under Titus burnt it to the ground.

Another term heard in connexion with Judaism is Tabernacle. It refers to the sanctuary, a portable tent, which the

Children of Israel carried about with them in the Wilderness during the forty years they are believed to have spent on their return or escape from Egypt.

The main external symbol on a synagogue is the Star of David, a seven-pointed star which also appears on Israel's flag and other Jewish property. Men entering the synagogue for worship are expected to cover their heads. Men and women sit apart. The synagogue building is so orientated as to face Jerusalem. Furnishings include the Ark, (a replica of Noah's Ark), which shelters the Scrolls of the Law, the decorated curtain (Parochet), pulpit (Bima), candlestick (Menorach), reading desk and charity chest.

Services in synagogues are held on Monday and Friday evenings and on Saturday. In Orthodox Judaism women are not eligible for office in the synagogue, but the rule has been relaxed among modernised Jews.

Orthodox Jews also practise circumcision like Muslims. They hold that it was ordained by Jehovah in the covenant with Abraham.

The main Jewish festivals commemorate important landmarks in their history. The most important is Yom Kippur. The day is kept as a strict fast; no food or drink is allowed except to small children and the sick from the evening of ninth Tishri, a Jewish month, until that of the tenth. No work is permitted. The whole period must be devoted to worship. The central portion of the service in the synagogue is the recital of the service of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. At the end of the Day the ram's horn is blown as a sign of liberation from sin and reconciliation with God.

Next to it in importance is the Passover which commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people from their

Egyptian bondage. One of the rituals observed is the eating of the Matzah or unleavened bread.

In the same way the Seder, the most sacred domestic ceremony in Judaism, is a commemoration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It is performed on the first and second night of Passover and comprises the recounting of ancient Israel's liberation; a festive meal preceded by kiddush which means formal benediction; the partaking of bitter herbs and unleavened bread; the singing of hymns and psalms; and the partaking of four cups of wine at certain intervals.

The Jews have a religious calendar of 12 months of 29 and 30 days alternatively and add a 13th month every third year. Like Muslim festivals which follow the Hegira calendar Jewish festivals are kept according to their religious calendar.

All three of the festivals mentioned above derive their sanction from Jewish history and cannot be understood in isolation from it. In this respect they are unlike the Muslim festivals or institutions like the Ids, Ramadhan, or Hajj which are not a reflection of or a response to Islamic history. For a true correspondence between Islamic and Jewish institutions mention may be made of such observances as the ceremonies kept on the birth anniversary of the Prophet (May God bless him) and the custom that has arisen of celebrating important days in the Islamic calendar, such as the Miraj Day or the Lailatul Qadr. These celebrations, it will be worth emphasising, have no sanction in Islam in the same sense as the observance of the Ramadhan fast or the Hajj. Nor does Islam prescribe the eating of any special kind of food in any festival.

The part that history has played in the growth of Jewish festivals points to an essential difference between Islam and Judaism. Judaism is or has been an evolution.



Throughout the centuries since they were dispersed by the Romans in 73 A. D, the Jews have kept alive the dream of a return to their ancient homeland in Palestine with a tenacity which is astonishing. Exiled from the area for over 19 centuries, and even though Palestine itself came to be occupied by the Jewish people as outsiders from other places in the Middle East where they had been wandering for ages, they still claim that Israel belongs to them by right. The period of exile the ancient Israelites spent in Egypt, their wanderings in the desert, the Babylonian Captivity, the destruction of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem on three occasions, and the final dispersal of the Jews after the conquest and occupation of Jerusalem by the Romans—these are stages in their history which have left a deep and indelible impress in their history which have left a deep and indelible impress on their collective consciousness, shaped their response to the outside world and moulded their religious practices. If the experiences recorded in the Old Testament are considered to be historical, those writings can be said to be the first historical records produced by any ancient people, predating the achievements of the Greek historians. Not only this. Unlike Greek historical literature which does not appear to project any intervention by supernatural forces in human events, Jewish historical writing looks upon history as an unfolding of the Divine Will on earth with the Jewish people at the centre of the entire chain of events. The Jews also believe that there is an afterlife in which men will be submitted to God's Judgement and either rewarded for virtue or punished for transgressions in hell, Jewish eschatology has strong affinities with both Christian and Muslim concepts on the subject.

As has been stated earlier, the Jews believe in prophecy as a means by which God makes His will known to men.

Orthodox Jews implicitly believe in the promise said to have been given to the Jewish people by God through the prophets who arose after their Babylonian Captivity that they will one day be enabled to return to their ancestral lands. Modern Jews see in the founding of Israel in 1948 a fulfilment of that Divine promise. Along with this goes the belief that their sufferings down the ages have all been due to their failure to live up to Divine commandments. Their dispersal itself, it is said, was intended to purify them by punishment.

It is against this background that one can best understand the role that Rabbis play in Israeli politics by claiming that Israel has been made possible not by secular manoeuvres but God Himself in fulfilment of His promise.

The pride which is generated by the Jewish conviction that they are the Chosen People of God derives considerable strength from Jewish achievements in the last 19 centuries since the Diaspora began. The ancient Jews have little other than their literature to boast of but Jewish groups and individuals in the countries where they have lived, in Europe and America, have many things to their credit, in art, literature, music, science, technology, industry and finance. Einstein, Freud, Chagall, Thomas Mann, the Rothschilds, to give some examples, were all Jews. Jewish influence in American industry and finance is so great that no American political party can afford to propound or initiate a policy which is disapproved by the Jewish community.

World Jewry today are divided broadly between two groups; Orthodox Jews who demand that all ancient rites and rituals must be strictly observed and a second group who are satisfied with allegiance to the Jewish faith without insisting on strict conformity. Many have become assimilated to the modern

Christians in their style of living. The same division is also noticed in their attitude to the question of the eventual return of all Jewish people to Israel. There are many—but they are a minority among Jews—who oppose the forcible annexation of territory from the Arabs and believe that the creation of Israel has created more problems than it has solved. The supporters of Israel are usually called Zionists. Zionism is not to be confused with Judaism. Many sensible Jews themselves strongly denounce Zionism as an aberration which is giving the community as a whole a bad name.

The campaign against Jews by Hitler and his attempt to exterminate them all have stiffened the Jews' resolve to seek safety at any cost. They allege that Hitler slew over 6 million Jews. This massacre is referred to as the Holocaust and although some people question whether the number of Jews killed was really 6 million or less, the experience has left a traumatic effect on the Jewish psyche and influences all their decisions, political and social and economic. It has generated a bitterness which has further fuelled the exclusiveness for which the Jews have been noted down the ages.

To understand modern Jewry one must always remember their history, their exile in Egypt, their captivity in Babylonia, the diaspora, the anti-Semitism which characterised the attitude of the Christian communities to them, and finally the Holocaust of the 40s of the present century. What views other take of these events is much less important than how the Jews themselves perceive them. They are using their wealth and political influence in modern times, their worldwide organisations, to promote their interests as they understand them regardless of whether their policies involve any injustice to others. They are so positioned that no Western power and few Third World powers dare deflect them from their courses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# RELIGION IN INDIA : HINDUISM

The Indian Peninsula is really a subcontinent more than 1500 miles long and about the same size in width at its broadest. It narrows towards the south and tapers off to the area in which Coromandel is situated. There are countries larger in size in both Asia and Africa, but no comparable tract exhibits the same variety in its history and culture. This variety is a reflection of its racial diversity.

Who the original inhabitants of the Peninsula were we do not know for certain.

Dark-skinned Dravidians are believed to have been the first to colonise the territory. Their descendants are now concentrated in the south, but the evidence unearthed by archaeologists at Mohenjo Daro in modern Sind and Harappa in Panjab points to the fact that the Dravidians once occupied the whole of the subcontinent. The ancient civilizations whose ruins have been uncovered in those places are said to be Dravidian; they were contemporaneous with the civilization of ancient Egypt and are over four thousand years old. They had a city-based culture and had established well-planned towns. Some statues and images discovered form the basis of the assumption that they worshipped a god not unlike the Siva of the Hindus, but beyond this it is impossible to go. One strong

reason for this is that their script has not to this day been deciphered. Until this clue is recovered theories about the people of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa will continue to belong to the realm of guesswork.

About 1500 B.C. a wave of Indo-Europeans entered India. These are called Aryans. They were able to oust the Dravidians from the north, but not before their own culture had been coloured by contact with the dark-skinned people whom they describe in their literature as uncivilised barbarians or dasyus. It appears that the Dravidians were less powerful than the Aryans and withdrew to the South and South-East as the Aryans advanced. The latter also succeeded in imposing their religion and culture on the Dravidians to an extent which cannot be calculated exactly.

It is gradually on Indian soil that the religion we call Hinduism at present took shape. Hinduism is a modern term; so is the word Hindu. Both were coined by foreigners to describe the religion and people found in the peninsula. The Muslims are believed to have been the first to use the term Hindu to designate the ancient Indians. Hindu is Persian and means dark. The original Aryans must have been light-skinned but by the time the Muslims started coming to this area—that is, by the 7th century A.D. intermingling with the local population must have had an effect on their pigment. In any case what is important is that until very recent times there was no generic name for the varied religious practices of the different racial groups who inhabited the Peninsula. There is no mention of Hindus in the earliest religious literature now called Hindu. The Vedas, the Puranas, the Upanishads do not mention the word; nor do we find it used in the two epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, which are today regarded as providing an authentic picture of life in ancient India.

The philosophical thought developed by ancient Indians is sometimes—nowadays almost universally—termed Hindu philosophy, but this too is misleading. Anyone trying to deduce clear ideas about the religious life of Hindu masses from a study of Hindu philosophy will have the most unrealistic notions about their beliefs and practices. On the other hand, to ignore this philosophy will also be a mistake. The rerefied and abstruse speculations of the Hindu scholars seem in many of their aspects to be either deductions from or intellectualisations of popular concepts. A distinction must be made between popular and philosophical Hinduism, although few could with any certainty draw a line between the two. They overlap.

Hinduism is often employed nowadays as a description of all religious practices in the subcontinent other than those of people who belong to creeds recognised as distinct religions such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and so on. On this account some people, including some Hindu scholars, speak of Hinduism as an anthropological process embracing a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices, some very crude and primitive, a continuation of rites dating from prehistoric times, some local without being applicable to all classes of Hindus all over the subcontinent, and others which lend some support to the view that Hinduism represents a religious attitude shared by millions.

Whatever view one takes of Hinduism, the most important fact which must not be lost sight of is that unlike such religions as Islam and Christianity which believe in proselytisation, Hinduism does not accept converts. One is either born a Hindu or is not a Hindu at all.

The religion is indigenous to India. The only country outside where some forms of Hinduism are practised is Nepal. The

inhabitants of Bali in Indonesia are also said to be Hindu; they are reputed to be the descendants of a group who long ago migrated to the island. In modern times Hindu migrants are to be found in most of the countries of the world. A very large number are found in the West Indies, in Mauritius and also Britain. But they are outsiders on alien soil.

If there is a single feature common to all varieties of Hinduism, it is the caste system, a system which divides all adherents of the Hindu creed into four groups, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The Brahmins, the priestly caste, stand at the top of the scale; they alone are thought to be qualified by virtue of their birth to hold religious office; they are entitled to the veneration of all subordinate castes. The Kshatriyas are the warrior caste fit to rule and join armies. The Vaishyas represent the mercantile caste; they are free to man professions other than those reserved for the Brahmins and Kshatriyas. At the bottom of the social ladder come the Shudras, the untouchables. They are thought to be unclean; their touch pollutes every body else. They must step aside when the Brahmins walk; they are not allowed to draw water from the same wells. Down the ages they have performed such menial offices as those of scavengers, cleaners, and sweepers; carpenters, potters, day labourers are also recruited from this caste. Interdining and intermarriage are strictly forbidden between the castes.

How a system which seems to outsiders to epitomise social injustice of the worst kind and is inhuman in its operation has survived for centuries often puzzles non-Hindus, particularly Muslims. Underlying it and sustaining it is a belief in the doctrine of rebirth deriving its justification from the twin doctrine of Karma.

Karma bears a superficial resemblance to the Greek concept of Nemesis and presupposes that there is a cosmic force which causes human beings and all animals to pay for what they do on earth, not by being punished in hell or rewarded with the joys of heaven eternally as in Christianity or Islam, but by being sent back to the earth after death in a fresh incarnation. What the human being or animal will be in the next birth depends on the nature of his actions in the previous birth. If he has led a blameless or virtuous life he may be reborn into a higher caste or a higher category in the case of animals. A human who is guilty of sins may find himself reborn as a dog or cat or mouse. His liberation from animal existence will depend on what he does as an animal. Or the sinner may be reborn into a lower caste, a Brahmin as a Shudra and so on. On the other hand, a good Vaishya or Shudra can always hope to be reincarnated as a Brahmin.

The process is almost endless, but not quite. At the end of a long succession of births in the course of which all sins have been atoned for, the soul will find release in Moksha when reincarnation will cease. The Buddhists who took over the doctrine of Karma use the term Nirvana to describe this release.

Belief in Karma and the transmigration of souls has embedded in the Hindu mind the conviction that a man's status in life is the result of a cosmic process and has nothing to do with the social system. A Shudra will not consequently blame the Brahmin for his sufferings. He regards them as a punishment for wrongs committed by him in a previous incarnation. He must live as carefully as he can in order to obtain emancipation.

Every Hindu mind is so imbued with faith in Karma that it is impossible for any member of this group to think of interpreting



life differently. Karma dominates his consciousness perhaps far more subtly and pervasively than any similar doctrine or belief among other religious groups. It is the bed-rock on which the caste system rests. For nearly two thousand years now the caste system has defined social life among the Indians. Modern legislation designed to mitigate the cruelties which are incident to it has had some effect on educated classes, but by and large the caste system remains intact.

The Brahmin who considers the Shudra untouchable feels perfectly justified in doing so in the conviction that the latter's lowly status is an outcome of past sins. Conversely, the Shudra yields to the Brahmin out of a corresponding belief about the Brahmin's superiority. The laws prescribed for violations of untouchability are severe on both sides. A higher caste man who allows himself to be polluted by a Shudra intentionally or unintentionally must do penance; the Shudra may in certain circumstances be slain with impunity. To serve the Brahmin is in itself an act of piety for a Shudra or a Vaishya or Kshatriya.

The caste system and all its laws, penances, expiations, the transmigration of souls, rules of diet, the duties and functions of different castes, and the final state of the blessed that is Moksha derive from the code given by a mythical law-giver called Manu. Nothing is known about his ancestry or life. He may even be a convenient fiction used for the purpose of streamlining social practices of long standing, but all that is important in popular Hinduism must be referred to him.

The doctrine of Karma postulates a cosmic force behind all visible and invisible phenomena, so powerful that even the gods are subject to it. It is problematic whether this force can be equated with God in the sense in which the monotheistic

religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam understand God. While the pagan Hindu would not deny the existence of a Supreme God variously called Iswara, Bhagwana, or Siva he also believes in the reality of a hierarchy of lesser deities who are credited with the power of influencing human life as well as the course of nature. Whether Iswara is the right description of the Hindu Supreme God seems to outsiders open to doubt. For the Hindu sometimes speaks of Parama Brahma as the correct way of referring to this Being. He is said to be nameless, out of reach of human language, devoid of qualities which human beings can comprehend. But Parama Brahma as a concept plays a less important role in the consciousness of an ordinary Hindu than Iswara or Bhagwana. He is seldom mentioned except by the educated.

Parama Brahma is not very different in conception from Allah among Muslims or God among Christians, even though both Christians and Muslims attribute to God such qualities as mercy and kindness and God is also sought to be described in linguistic terms. But essentially the concept of God is the concept of a Being who is not susceptible of comprehension in full by human beings, and in that sense a likeness can be perceived between god and Parama Brahma. But to stretch the likeness too far would be to invite confusion.

Without the slightest sense of inconsistency, the Hindu who thinks of parama Brahma as a Being who defies human understanding believes in a hierarchy of gods or goddesses whom he worships. In one respect Parama Brahma is utterly unlike Allah or God. Not being susceptible of definition he lacks personality. He cannot be prayed to. He is at best only an idea. But the popular mind among Hindus has sought to fill the void which the absence of a God with personality creates by

postulating an Iswara who has personality and also numerous deities among whom the attributes Christians and Muslims attribute to God are distributed.

It is these smaller deities who are worshipped in temples. They range from some who are supposed to have all embracing powers and others whose jurisdiction is limited. The multiplicity of these deities or powers and the fact that few of them command universal reverence in all parts of the subcontinent give rise to the question whether Hinduism can be regarded as a religion in the same sense in which Judaism, Christianity and Islam are regarded as religions with a recognisable physiognomy. The utmost that can be said is that all Hindus share a common pantheon, but each locality or each sect chooses from this pantheon the particular god or goddess whom to adore. Rama and his consort, for instance, enjoy a much higher degree of reverence in northern and southern India than in Bengal and Assam which lie in the South-East. Durga is popular in Bengal and the deep south but is seldom worshipped in the north. Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune, are Bengali goddesses more than they are universal in their appeal. Ganesh, who has the features of an elephant with a longish trunk or snout, is on the whole more popular among non-Bengali businessmen than in Bengala and Assam. Hanuman, the monkey god, is almost an object of ridicule in Bengal and eastern India but he is venerated in the north and south of the subcontinent. Siva belongs to a higher order among the gods and is worshiped all over the subcontinent, but the degree of veneration he commands varies from province to province. He is a much more important figure in the north and south than in Bengal and eastern India. Temples dedicated to him are found everywhere but the cult of the Siva phallus is more popular in

parts of India other than Bengal and Assam. In Madras—that is, Tamilnadu and also in Telegu speaking Andhra, it is common among males to have the word lingam meaning phallus added to their names as a sign of piety. Such names and the likeness of the phallus carved in stone to which worship is offered openly by both men and women offend against conventional ideas of decency among Muslims, but of this the Hindus seem oblivious. The concept of Siva as the god of sexual energy is carried to great lengths which to outsiders appear to cross the limits of propriety in Hindu sculpture where Siva and his consort Parvati are depicted in various explicit poses of the sexual act.

The same indifference to conventional ideas of decency and propriety is also noticeable in the Hindu attitude to Krishna. He is mentioned in the epic Mahabharata as the avatar or incarnation of Vishnu; he is like Christ in Christianity both man and God. One of the most sacred texts in Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita, is a record of what he said to Arjuna on the battle-field. Much in this text could appeal to outsiders as a guide to right action and right conduct, but as a popular god, and his popularity like that of Siva transcends provincial boundaries, Krishna is the lover of Radha, a milk-maid, the wife of someone else. But Krishna's amours, and these extend to a large number of milk-maids besides Radha, are regarded by the devout Hindu as an expression of universal love, not as acts of adultery or unlawful love.

It is necessary to mention that the Bhagavad Gita does not contain any account of these amours; nor does Radha figure in it. Both Radha and Krishna's dalliances with milk-maids are part of the legend of Krishna as a popular god, but this legend cannot be wholly ignored in one's estimate of the influence Krishna exerts. He is spoken of as the god of love per se

whereas the Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita is not concerned with love as such.

Krishna like Siva has adherents among all sections of Hindus. A whole group of Hindus who call themselves Vaishnavas and follow the teachings of a Bengali Hindu reformer of the 15th century, Sri Caitanya, identify him with God in the Christian sense, an embodiment of love and mercy who for the sake of humanity caused himself to be incarnated in human form.

Such deities as Siva, also called Mahadeva, and Krishna have more than a local appeal but while Siva represents the legacy of the ancient pantheon which is associated with the first Aryan immigrants, Krishna is a later accretion. The older gods such as Indra and Varuna are mentioned in books but they have ceased to be worshipped. Vishnu whose ancestry is less ancient than Indra's is still remembered. Temples are erected in his honour but for centuries the practice has been, in northern India at least, to honour him by proxy, by worshipping Rama, his incarnation. Direct worship can be offered in Hinduism to any object which is believed to be holy, whether it is directly connected with any god or not. For popular Hinduism, and also certain schools of philosophical Hindu thought are strongly attached to the idea of pantheism. All visible and invisible phenomena are manifestations of one Being; there is nothing outside of him. On this theory even the inanimate objects such as rocks, mountains and trees are divine in nature and deserve worship. The distinction which is made in Western thought between pantheism and panentheism is to Hinduism. Like those Sufi mystics who advocate the doctrine of wahdatul-wajud or unity of all beings, the Hindus believe in the identity of God and the universe and dismiss the phenomenal world as an

illusion or Maya. The concept of Maya is widely held, and even ordinary Hindus who have no education speak of the world as a Maya. This to outsiders seems to make nonsense of the concepts of virtue and vice, but in Hindu thought the belief in Maya and the belief in virtue and vice coexist.

Hindus with some education emphasise the triune aspects of the universe embodied in the concepts of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Brahma is the creator; Vishnu, the preserver and Siva, the destroyer. They reflect the three processes of growth, continuity and decay discernible in nature. This Brahma incidentally is different from Parama Brahma, the supreme Being who embraces all aspects of existence.

One of the curious features of paganism in Hinduism is that it comprehends within its fold many varied beliefs which strike outsiders as incompatible with each other. But the average educated Hindu is content to tolerate these inconsistencies by declaring that reality is many-sided. The Hindu is at one and the same time a believer in the unity of God and in the existence of a large number of forces which are operative in nature, directive forces which cannot be ignored and must be sought to be placated.

This belief is best mirrored in Hindu mythology which is one of the most elaborate systems of its kind, comparable in certain respects to the mythology of the ancient Greeks, but more comprehensive. Having grown slowly over hundreds of years this mythology exhibits traces of original Aryan beliefs grafted on Dravidian deities, with many accretions, local and possessed of no significance outside of small regions as well as many additions which have a more than local significance.

Starting with cosmogony designed like the creation myths in ancient Babylonia, to account for the genesis of the universe,

Hindu mythology offers an elaborate and complex picture of innumerable forces and agencies which compete for dominion. Creation began with a decisive act by Parama Brahma by which he set the whole process in motion. Parama Brahma in this aspect is also known as Prajapati. He is the Lord and Father of all beings, His original progeny consisted of three classes of being, gods, Asuras, and Rishis. The gods were given the upper heavens as their abode, the Asuras the underworld and the Rishis become the progenitors of men. Rivalry between gods or Devas and Asuras lasted for many eons but it ultimately ended in the triumph of the former.

The main source for the creation story is the Puranas, but the epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, also provide much information not only about the origin of the universe but also about the miraculous power of the Rishis who in some instances appear mightier than the gods. The gods were afraid of their penances, and are sometimes seen to panic when these exercises seemed to topple them. The usual method they adopted to distract the attention of the Rishis engaged in penances was to lure them into sexual temptation. On occasions the gods sought the intervention of the Rishis in their disputes with one another. The Rishis could countermand their orders and courses, ride to heaven when they so desired, and return to the earth at convenient moments. They would sometimes live with beautiful women and breed children.

The gods for their part were vulnerable to the charms of mortal women. Like their Greek counterparts they had their favourites among the female sex, and the progeny of mixed unions remained, like Achilles, semi-divine capable of seeking the help of their divine parents in crisis. The Indian epics mention many men and women of semi-divine origin, children of

river gods, earth gods, tree gods and sky gods who were content to live like ordinary mortals but were apt to disappear suddenly when the ordeal of mortal life became intolerable. To give an example, when Sita, the consort of Rama, found that her husband was made unhappy by false rumours about her chastity during her abduction, even after she had undergone several tests, including an ordeal by fire, she begged her earth god-parent to receive her back. The ground clove immediately and she vanished.

Such myths testify to the Hindu belief that the rigid boundaries that other communities draw between the human and the divine are really unreal and that not only are gods incarnated from time to time in human form but men can also rise to divine status by virtue of penances. This belief is responsible for the attribution of the appellation Bhagwan or God to great men even in modern times. Thus Ramakrishna, a Hindu saint (1836-86), is usually referred to as an avatar, His followers believe in this implicitly.

Hindu scripture consists of several things. First in sacredness come the Vedas, which are considered so holy that low-caste men have no right to touch or read them. High caste Brahmins alone enjoy the exclusive privilege of studying and interpreting them. Almost as holy are the Upanishads. They too are regarded as divine revelations. Written in prose the Upanishads explore the mystery of the universe, the character of the godhead, the nature of the human soul and the reciprocal relationship of matter and spirit. The next category of scripture is the Puranas. They are less sacred than the other two and deal with mythical history if the term is permissible. The main theme of the Puranas is the genealogy of the gods.



There are some who attribute a semi-divine character to the epics. But while the educated classes would not share this view, the Bhagavad Gita which is embodied in the Mahabharata is universally regarded by all classes of Hindus as a revelation.

No single scripture has had in modern times the same popularity as the Gita as a document holding the key to Hindu religious thought. It has been written about, commented upon, and interpreted by scholars and laymen alike; its tenets are believed to be an infallible guide to action. The Gita purports to consist of the admonitions addressed to Arjuna by Krishna on the battlefield when the former felt unsure whether it would be right for him to take up arms against his own kith and kin. Krishna explains to him that war in the cause of truth and justice was not only justified but a moral imperative. To avoid it or shirk it was to shirk a duty and incur the displeasure of God. Krishna spoke as an avatar. He persuaded Arjuna that man who does not know the whole truth must not desist from doing what morality and ethics teach him to do, no matter what the apparent consequences. God alone can judge whether an action is right or wrong; man's duty is to carry out the divine commands.

From this Krishna passes on to an exposition of the Hindu theory of incarnation. He tells Arjuna that he who was God in man causes himself to be reborn in human form whenever wrong and injustice deflect man from the path of virtue. For without this direct intervention by deity man is apt to go astray. He has been born before and will assume other incarnations in later ages whenever the need would arise.

In the course of this address Krishna also throws light of the ideals than man must have in view in life. Human perfection, he

says, consists in the capacity to overcome weaknesses incident to mortal life by achieving full control over the passions so as to be able to see that the phenomenal world is only an appearance, a Maya; those who do not understand this are deluded, and delusion causes man to stray.

Hindus who believe in reading the scriptures as a daily religious exercise use the Gita as a vade mecum. Its teachings are susceptible of varied interpretations and have been known to appeal equally to religious men, politicians, political terrorists and ordinary men.

Neither the Gita nor the Vedas, nor the Upanishads or Puranas advocate the stratification of society into four castes. It is in the epics, especially the Mahabharata, that one comes across references to caste division. Nor does any of these scriptures identify the people for whom they are meant as Hindus. The concept stressed in all of them is the concept of Dharma, a word loosely translated as religion in English but possessing much wider implications. Dharma stands for morality, ethics, good conduct; it is also employed to refer to Manu's laws and the observance of rites and ceremonies which are prescribed by Manu and other teachers. Dharma in certain senses connotes good as distinguished from evil, and the pious Hindu who wishes to protest against any wrong will invoke Dharma to make his point. In a narrower sense it can be equated with what Muslims mean by the term Shariah but it is also interchangeable with Deen. Although the worship of images in modern Hinduism is regarded by the masses as part of Dharma, Dharma by itself has no connexion with idol worship.

Another interesting feature of Hinduism is that although nowadays it is identified with polytheism, the Upanishadic concept of religion seems monotheistic. It is, however, a

monotheism much less uncompromising than the stern monotheism of Islam, but the idea that there is one Supreme Being who governs the universe is not absent. It is in the Puranas and the epics that polytheism is taken for granted, and here too behind the hierarchy of gods and goddesses the notion that all phenomena, despite their variety and multiety, are manifestations of one single reality is seldom lost sight of.

It is impossible to say when idol worship began in India. Idols are not mentioned in any of the sacred books. Some believe that it was only after the ancient Indians came into contact with the Greeks following Alexander's invasion that Idol worship began. This theory is however weakened, if not completely disproved, by the discovery of some statues of gods at Mohenjodaro. One of these gods has been identified with Siva. If this is correct, idol worship seems to have a long ancestry. Others think that the practice of making images of gods was inspired by the Buddhist practice of venerating the images of Lord Buddha. But whatever its origins, idol worship is regarded by the Hindu masses today as an inseparable feature of their religion. A Hindu temple invariably means a structure enshrining one or other of their numerous gods and goddesses, or sometimes, as in the case of Siva, his lingam or phallus. The lingam is usually exhibited along with a female symbol and the two together are said to represent Nature's generative power. Non-Hindus are apt to find the symbolism as well as its sculptural representation shocking but the average Hindu is not conscious of anything gross or vulgar in this.

While popular Hinduism as a mass of paganistic rites and practices, varying from place to place, with an enormous pantheon of gods and goddesses, seems à puzzling phenomenon, scarcely describable like Islam or Christianity as

a religion in the sense in which the term is understood among others, there is a philosophical aspect to it which is very different. It is doubtful whether the schools of speculative thought which are known as Hindu philosophic systems are an outgrowth of paganism or owe their origin to independent attempts to arrive at an intellectual understanding of the world and the universe.

The six classical systems are Sankhya and Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta, and Vaisesika and Nyaya. In some points they contradict one another, propound beliefs which are difficult to reconcile; some appear frankly atheistic, while others endorse the idea of a Supreme Being deserving of worship; some are too rarefied to be concerned with any code of practical life; others deal in detail with man's duties on earth and methods of worship, including rites designed to propitiate the gods or other cosmic forces. Irrespective of their character they display a subtlety which amazes those who approach the study of Hinduism without preconceived ideas. They are also remarkable as betraying no alien influence such as can be documented or proved. These systems sprang from Indian soil and at higher levels have continued to fascinate and influence the Indian mind.

The systems cannot be dated with precision, but none goes beyond the fourth century. They are mainly concerned to elaborate and expound the intellectual basis of the ancient scriptures, vedas, Upanishads, the Gita and Puranas and formulate in logical terms their implications. They go in pairs, Sankhya with Yoga, Mimamsa with Vedanta, and Vaisesika with Nyaya. The two systems in each pair complement each other, and in some cases one is a commentary on the other.

Sankhya and Yoga are the most abstruse and deal rather with abstract theories than with ritual. Sankhya whose origins

are not known is found expounded in a poem by Isvara Krishna believed to have belonged to the 4th century. He proceeds from the premise that since nothing can be produced out of nothing, there must exist something which is eternal. This eternal entity is given the name of Prakriti or Nature which possesses three Gunas or essences. These essences are Sattva or goodness, Rajas or energy, and Tamas or darkness. The Sankhya trinity constitutes the raw material of all that is and the substances that emanate from Prakriti. There are twenty-three Sattvas or entities which derive from Prakriti and form the visible and sensible world. Prakriti is the eternal primordial germ. For the edification of those who do not appreciate pure abstract thought, Prakriti is explained in the Puranas as a female principle whose union with Purusha, the primeval male, has led to the origination of the world. Yoga is regarded as a branch of Sankhya and is said to have been founded by Patanjali who belonged to the 4th century. Yoga accepts the principles postulated by Sankhya but adds an additional principle : namely, Isvara, the lord or the Universal Soul. It aims at teaching man how to achieve union with the Supreme Spirit of Soul who is eternal and omniscient, not subject of Karma or transmigration. The suppression of all physical activity and mental concentration are recommended as the best means of achieving union with the Supreme Soul, and eight different physical postures or disciplines are insisted upon as methods of achieving mental concentration. Yoga is indifferent to the caste system. There has been in modern times a general revival of interest in Yoga, outside the Hindu fold, on account of the belief that the physical exercises it advocates have an efficacious effect on health.

Mimamsa is not so much a philosophy in the conventional sense as a method prescribed for the study of the Vedas which

are regarded as the unquestionable basis of all truth. Also called Purva Mimamsa it is concerned with incantations and Mantras and seems addressed exclusively to the priestly class, the Brahmins. The system's founder is one Jaimini (4th to 5th century). It differs in one interesting respect from other system in that it posits no Supreme God. It calls upon its adherents to aim at realising the truth of Dharma as propounded in the Vedas. The system is popularly known as Vedanta.

A distinction can however be drawn between Mimamsa proper and Vedanta by attending to the fact that whereas Mimamsa deals with the Vedas, Vedanta, also called Uttara Mimamsa, has for its object the exposition of the inner meaning of the Puranas.

Vedanta or Purva Mimamsa as a distinct system of thought is believed to have been founded by Badarayana (4th of 5th century) and elaborated by three principal exponents, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva. All three belonged to south India and of them again Sankara is the most famous and is sometimes likened to Thomas Aquinas in Christianity or Ghazzali in Islam as the author of a commentary on the Gita which is regarded as authoritative. Sankara is a believer in monism called Advaita Vedanta among the Hindus. Reality is one and indivisible, according to him. Brahma—that is, the ultimate reality is without attributes. Sankara taught that man superimposes the universe on the Reality which is the eternal substratum. The literal meaning of the term Advaita is non-dualism.

The position of Ramanuja and Madhva is slightly different. They upheld what is designated as qualified monism. Ramanuja postulates a loving God who produces, sustains and reabsorbs the universe. Madhva Acarya (13th century?)

held that the individual soul is not to be identified with the Supreme Soul. He classified souls into three categories, those doomed to eternal suffering, those who will revolve for ever in transmigration, and those who are destined to eternal bliss in the presence of God. This last idea is not unlike the concept of heaven in Christianity and Islam. Islam also believes in eternal punishment for sinners, but there is no question in Islam of revolving eternally in transmigration. The doctrines of Madhva also predicated salvation on the mercy of Vayu, the son of Vishnu, a belief which bears some resemblance to the Christian doctrine of grace. Madhva himself is believed by his followers to have been an incarnation of Vayu.

Vaiseshika is attributed to another southern philosopher, Kanad Kasyapa. His system is called atomistic realism. The universe consists, according to his belief, of atoms which are eternal. There is no mention of a Supreme Being; everything proceeds from Adrishta or Destiny, an unknown and unknowable force. Kanada distinguishes in nature five or six categories which are Dravya or substance, Guna or quality, Karma or movement, Samanya or association, Vishesha or difference and Samavaya or inherence. To know the categories and understand them is to obtain release from the chain of rebirths.

The last of the six classical systems is Nyaya which is more a system of logical reasoning than philosophy proper. It lays down the methods to be employed in the understanding of the world and lists sixteen topics which should be subjected to analysis and investigation. These include things to be proved, doubt, motive, sophistry, fallacious reasoning and so on. A complete Nyaya or syllogism comprises five stages: proposition; the reason; the instance; the application and the conclusion. The system is attributed to a man named Gotama.

The method prescribed in Nyaya is applied to the investigation of truths which lead to bliss and deliverance from the round of lives.

It will be noticed that all six systems take Karma and transmigration for granted. It is in their attitude to the nature of ultimate reality that they differ from one another. In one respect they seem to agree; they offer a very inadequate clue to the actual practices and rituals which pass for Hinduism among the masses.

There is yet another body of literature in the sacred Hindu language, Sanskrit, which offers a mixture of philosophy, religious doctrine and mythology. This literature is called Tantras. They grew up slowly over a period of several centuries from the 7th onwards until the 15th or later, and aim at explaining how to obtain union with the Divine and are also concerned with such mundane objects as success in love and business, prevention of disease, and punishment of enemies. The Tantras form the basis of witchcraft and magic in Hindu society and have been responsible for such practices as human sacrifice, extreme forms of asceticism, unrestrained promiscuity, the use of charms as a means of influencing the course of nature, and many other superstitions. Great power is supposed to inhere in certain sounds and incantations which when repeated in certain ways invest man with supernatural gifts. The principal Tantras number sixty-four and consist of conversations between Siva and his consort Kali which is another name for Parvati. Union between Siva and Kali being the source of everything in the universe, sexual union between husband and wife is taken to symbolise the blissful union of the mortals with the Divine Spirit.

Human sacrifice as a way of attaining supernatural powers was common until fairly recently and is reported to have been



practised far into the 19th century. The Tantriks or followers of Tantras, especially the class known as Kapaliks, were a dreaded sect who did not hesitate to abduct children and young girls with a view to using them as victims in rites which called for the propitiation of Siva and Kali by blood and skulls worn as necklaces. Stories abound in Indian literature of children being seized and fattened for sacrificial ceremonies.

Tantrikism is one of the less edifying aspects of popular Hinduism. While human sacrifice may have ceased because of administrative restrictions, the belief that Tantrass can help in the attainment of great magical power persists to the present day.

The Tantriks are also known as Saktas, worshippers of Sakti, one of the attributes of Siva. Sakti worship involves the adoration of the male and female organs of reproduction— called lingam and yoni, and although Sakti is personified in Uma or Parvati or Kali, which are the various designations of Siva's consort, Siva himself is the supreme embodiment of all reproductive energy, having on the left half of his body a female breast and on the right a prominent male organ. Saktas are divided into the right-handed ones or Dakshinacharis and Vamacharis or left-handed ones. The Vamacharis form a kind of esoteric society with secret modes of worship. They are reputed to meet in circles at midnight. Their rites require the five M's (Panchamakaras), namely madya (wine), mansa (meat), matsya, (fish), mudra (parched corn), and maithuna, (copulation). Worship consists in the offering of homage to a beautiful young girl, stripped of all clothes, or if a girl is not available, to a yantra or a drawing of the female reproductive organ or yoni placed in the centre of a circle of nine yonis and is said to be characterised by orgies of drinking and sexual

licence. Once admitted to the sect, members ceased to observe caste restrictions and considered themselves a society of initiates with exclusive access to secret knowledge and power.

Another Siva sect consists of those who are called Lingayats, so designated because they believe in worshipping the Lingam or Phallus of Siva and carrying always on their person a soapstone symbol of it, usually enclosed in a red scarf round the neck. Under no circumstances must a Lingayat part with this image. Members of the sect recognise no god other than Siva, reject the caste system at least in theory, and do not consider the Brahmins to be superior to others, and also believe in the equality of women with men.

The Vaishnavas represent an attitude different from that of the Saktas and Lingayats. They are the devotees of Vishnu, the embodiment of love and mercy; they reject the practices of the Power-worshippers or Saktas and command among the ordinary Hindus a greater following. Vaishnavas have produced great literature in which Krishna as the avatar of Vishnu is hymned. The Bhakti movements which have swept India from time to time owe their inspiration to Vaishnavism.

In addition to these three there are innumerable sects and subjects, some local and some with a following across provincial boundaries. They do not in every case propound new doctrinal interpretations, but they emphasise different aspects of the same doctrines in many cases. Some are reform movements designed to call the errant back to the fold by ridding the religion of what is considered superfluous incrustations. Three such movements deserve special notice.

The first is the Ramakrishna movement established by a Hindu mystic Gadadher Chatterji (1836-1886), a Bengali by

birth who assumed the name of Ramakrishna after his conversion to a cult based on the worship of Kali. He was a priest at a temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta and claims to have seen Kali as a living deity in a trance first and later in person. Ramakrishna was a Vedantist and taught that there was no single exclusively valid approach to the realisation of God, and that the best way of apprehending the nearness of God was by service to humanity.

His fame as a mystic, possessed of great spiritual power, attracted adherents, among the earliest and most famous of whom was Vivekananda, scholar and orator, whose writings and speeches gained for the movement admirer all over the Western world. Ramakrishna missions are a common sight all over the subcontinent, even abroad, and like the Jesuits they run schools and hospitals. The mysticism of Ramakrishna as interpreted by Vivekananda influenced the French writer, Roman Rolland who devoted a book to the exposition of his teachings.

The Arya Samaj which was established in 1875 in Bombay by Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883) was by and large a reform movement aiming to purify Hinduism of those elements which according to Dayanand Saraswati had corrupted it. He preached a return to the Vedas as the purest form of revelation and rejected idolatry for which there is no sanction in the Vedas, opposed caste stratification, and advocated widow remarriage and tried to introduce communal worship.

One important aim that the Arya Samaj had in view was to arrest the spread of Christianity and Islam, especially Islam. Its attitude towards the Muslims was militant and aggressive. It sought to counter the appeal of Islam by offering the Hindus what it believed to be an alternative available in pristine

Hinduism. The Samajists have often been involved in conflict with Muslim groups. The Samaj also believes in proselytisation and has championed Shuddhi or Purification movements intended to reconvert Muslims and Christians back to Hinduism. It maintains missions both inside and outside India.

The earliest of the Hindu reform movements under the stimulus of Western thought after the establishment of British rule in India was the Brahma Samaj. It also betrayed in its doctrines a strong Islamic flavour. Founded by Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), a Bengali Hindu who knew both English and the Islamic languages, Arabic and Persian, it emphasised monotheism as the core of Vedic thought and regarded idol worship and other pagan practices as aberrations which must be discarded. Ram Mohan Roy wrote a book in defence of monotheism and during a visit he paid to Britain where he died suddenly, he was much lionised by the Unitarians among the Christians who perceived affinities between his beliefs and theirs. The Brahmos later gravitated away from the Vedas when they discovered that the Vedas were in essence polytheistic. Henceforth under the leadership of Devendra Nath Tagore, father of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, progressive Brahmos went for their inspiration to all world religions. They accepted the doctrine of one Supreme God with a personality, rejected the theory of incarnation, maintained that the soul is immortal and that salvation could be obtained by repentance and good work.

The Brahmos split into two groups early on. One dissident group was led by another Bengali, Keshab Chandra Sen who renamed his sect the Church of the New Dispensation. The two groups are also known as the Adi or Original Brahma Samaj and the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

Although the Brahmos began by renouncing all customary Hindu rites and thus earned the hostility of the Hindu public who looked down upon them as renegades, they have for all practical purposes lost their identity except in name. They are no longer active as a separate religious group with a distinct attitude to things mundane and spiritual.

Perhaps the most influential movement in the present century with an intellectual appeal has been the Krishna cult as reinterpreted by Sri Aurobindo of Pondicherry. He was educated from his early boyhood of Pondicherry. He was educated from his early boyhood in England and was so thoroughly Anglicised as to consider English his first language. But failure to enter the Indian Civil Service changed the course of his life. He returned to India a nationalist, and organised in the first decade of the century a terrorist party with a view to wresting freedom from the British, and after a period of incarceration fled to Pondicherry, a French colony in those days, for asylum. Here he turned from terrorism to mysticism. His Pondicherry centre on Ashram became a place of pilgrimage for people attracted by the philosophy of Yoga. He preached an esoteric doctrine of union with the Divine through Krishna as the incarnation of Vishnu. In such works as *Essays on the Gita and Life Divine* Aurobindo elaborated what he believed to be the essence of Yoga in terms calculated to appeal to modern minds. His followers included a French lady who settled permanently at Pondicherry and several Englishmen. To the Hindu concept *Parama Purusha* he gave the name of *Overmind* in Western terminology, a Being who is the fons et origo of all that is. Meditation and non-attachment are according to him the means whereby knowledge of the Supreme Being can be attained. This was not however monotheism in the Islamic sense, for Aurobindo retained his belief in the reality of a

hierarchy of lesser Saktis or powers who influence the world. Among these Saktis is Kali, usually represented in popular Hinduism as a ten-armed goddess, an embodiment like her consort Siva of universal energy.

But neither the six classical systems of Hindu philosophy nor the modern reform movements provide an adequate understanding of Hinduism as it is daily practised by millions in the towns and villages of India. They are frankly and visibly polytheistic; they worship the cow as a sacred animal which must be protected at all costs; they regard every object on earth as a manifestation of deity and will consequently bow before a large mountain or even a tree with the same reverence with which they approach a temple; they consider certain rivers and springs to be sacred, among which the Ganges ranks supreme. An annual visit to the confluence of the Ganges and Jamuna at Allahabad in northern India is one of the greatest Hindu festivals which attracts more than a million pilgrims. The Ganges is sacred everywhere. The pious Hindu wishes his ashes after cremation to be scattered over its waters, and wherever possible a dip in the Ganges in the early morning is an auspicious beginning of the day. Cow dung mixed with water is one of the means a Hindu adopts of purifying his home. In cases where a Hindu is believed to have committed an act of sacrilege, he is required by his priests to swallow the same mixture with the cow's urine added to it. No Hindu will be convinced that these substances are filth. In the vegetable world the most sacred plant, at least in Bengal, is the basil or Tulsi as it called locally. It is said to be the home of over a thousand gods. In any case basil which is aromatic has wellknown medicinal proerties; basil extract is good for cough and colds. A basil plant carefully tended is a common sight in rural Hindu homes.

Although the life of a Hindu is regulated by the laws of Manu, it is difficult for an outsider to identify a well-defined mode of worship which can at sight be recognised as typically Hindu. Congregational worship is unknown. The Hindus visit their temples singly and bow individually to the god or goddess installed within. It is a duty he can perform at any hour; nor would he be considered irreligious if he does not ever visit a temple. Those living in the neighbourhood of the sacred river Ganges make a point of bathing in it first thing in the morning and repeating, as he enters the waters, the ancient Gayatri Mantra, an invocation to the gods in which the devotee prays to be led from darkness to light. Where a dip in the Ganges is not possible, a man may on rising from bed bow to the sun and offer an oblation to the gods by scattering a few drops of water on the ground and repeating the name of a god. Pious Hindus have the icon of a favourite god, Krishna or Vishnu or Siva installed in their homes, and worship is paid to him morning and evening. Another common form of worship is the Anhik usually performed in the evening at sunset. It requires the devotee to chant certain Mantras seated before an icon if possible or without it, but in a formal manner. This is the nearest equivalent to a religious service or salat in Islam.

Although communal or congregational worship is not prescribed in the Hindu code, the custom has arisen in recent times, especially in Bengal, of organising what is called Sarvajanan Puja or a communal service on the occasion of the Durga Puja in autumn. This involves the making of a large pedestal on which with the image of Kali or Durga in the centre several other figures are exhibited. These represent the various forces of evil which Durga subdues. Durga carries a bleeding blade in one hand and a severed head in the other or rather in one of the other nine hands. At her feet lie a prostrate

lion and a figure symbolising a demon. She wears a necklace of skulls. Economic changes having rendered such a service expensive, whole neighbourhoods cooperate in the erection of a Puja pedestal instead of depending on the generosity of an individual rich man. It must be remembered however that Sarvajanin Puja, although organised on a communal basis, bears no resemblance to congregational worship among Muslims of Christians.

It would not be out of place to mention here that there is another respect in which Hindu religious services such as they are differ fundamentally from Islamic prayer. While the Muslim believes that when he is at prayer he should not be distracted by anything extraneous like music or singing, temple services and Sarvajanin Puja call for the use of loud music, the ringing of bells, and the beating of cymbals. Meditation by individuals is a different thing. That too is a form of worship, and one hears of saints retiring to mountain or forest and spending years silently meditating, but normal worship invariably implies the chanting of Mantras to the accompaniment of music. Music plays so important a part in Hindu observances that it is used at cremations as well. Those who can afford to do so hire bands to accompany a corpse to the crematorium. The Hindu conception of solemnity is entirely different from the Muslim's.

There is nothing in Islamic traditions corresponding to Kirtans, the name given to devotional singing among Hindus. They have a sacred character which cannot be attributed to what Muslims in the Indian subcontinent call Qawalis, a class of lyrics sung in praise of Muslim saints. First, this has no sanction in the Quran or Hadith; secondly, no Muslim will think of regarding them as a substitute for salat of prayer.

Despite the honour the Brahmins as the highest caste enjoy, Brahmin priests do not have a role in life outside



temples. But they are needed when a Hindu marries, for Hindu marriage is sacramental and is marked by vows given before a sacred fire in the presence of a priest who officiates at the ceremony. Priests are also needed to bless children, to Chant prayers over a funeral pyre and to preside at an observance on the fortieth day of a person's death when food is offered to the spirit of the dead. The common belief among Hindus is that the soul of the dead can have no peace in the other world without this ceremony. The importance attached to an observance on the fortieth day of a death seems to have infected the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent who similarly hold a ceremony called Chehnam which however has no sanction in their religion.

The dead are invariably burnt. One of the frightening aspects of Hindu obsequies is the rule that widows must be cremated alive along with their husbands. Neither the Muslim nor the British rulers countenanced this practice, but Suttee, as it is called, continued clandestinely in most areas of India until the end of the 18th century. Lord Bentinck finally passed a law, on the initiative of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, totally prohibiting the burning of widows in 1829. Unfortunately, many modern Hindus consider the prohibition an interference with religion and since India gained independence cases of Suttee have been reported from time to time from central India. Strangely, as it seems to non-Hindus, many widows themselves regard dying on the funeral pyre of their husbands as an act of great merit. But it is only fair to state that opinion among Hindus, the educated community in particular, is wholly against Suttee.

Although cremation of the dead is the general practice, holy men, even holy women, are sometimes buried, not in trenchlike graves as in Islam, but vertically in deep holes, with their legs crossed. Over these holes, are erected a kind of mausolea,

usually a single tower tapering towards the sky. Such places attract the veneration of the faithful.

Both birth and death are said to pollute. A woman who has given birth has to live apart from the family for a part of the puerperal period; those who attend to her cannot enter a home without a purificatory bath. Likewise, when a death is about to occur the dying person is removed to a place outside. The sons of the deceased would not for a stated period, usually forty days, either shave or have a hair-cut; they would carry a mat wherever they go and would not sit on an ordinary chair or bed. They declare themselves to be in a state of pollution which ends when the forty-day period is over. They must then shave off all their hair and have a purificatory bath.

The Hindu belief in the divinity of everything on earth leads to the adoration of the father, the teacher, and the husband as gods. Children are expected to prostrate themselves before their parents and teachers; and the wife must do the same to the husband. She cannot utter the husband's name without committing a grave sin; she would be guilty of profanity if she did so. Certain sections of Indian Muslims have imbibed this sense of guilt from the Hindus and it is very unusual for a married Muslim woman to address her husband by his first name as in the West.

The teacher means anybody from whom instruction in any area of life has been received. The term embraces members of the teaching profession, priests, spiritual guides and other holy men. To strike a teacher is to commit sacrilege.

The average Hindu who is not totally illiterate speaks of life as having four stages: Brahmacharya, the period of celibacy in childhood and early youth which must be devoted to the

acquisition of knowledge; Garhastya, the period when a man must enter upon his duties as a householder, marry and raise a family; Banprasta, or retirement, when in old age a person should gradually withdraw from worldly life; and finally, Sannyasa, the period of renunciation when he should totally detach himself from the world and go to a monastery or a secluded retreat for meditation awaiting death. It is not to be supposed that the average Hindu follows this regimen, but at the back of his mind there is always this ideal as a criterion by which to measure his achievements and failures.

Corresponding to this four-fold division of life are the four concepts defining the course of human existence. These are Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha. Artha implies the pursuit of worldly gain or success; Kama the pursuit of sexual pleasure; Dharma ethics; and Moksha means deliverance from the round of births and sin. The pursuit of sexual pleasure is regarded in Hindu society as a legitimate activity and on this account sex and religion are often seen to be mixed. The eroticism of the Hindu gods, exhibited in Hindu sculpture with an astonishing frankness, sometimes baffles non-Hindus.

The attitudes, beliefs, practices and rites collectively known in the present day world as Hinduism are difficult to summarise. They seem to the Muslim to be shrouded in an unfathomable mystery. Hindu civilisation is over three thousand years old; it has great achievements to its credit in literature and philosophy, an impressive record in sculpture and painting, but little in architecture that would impress a Muslim, and surprisingly none in historiography. Sanskrit, their sacred language, is astonishingly rich in religious writing as represented by the Upanishads and Vedas; the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana are great works by any standard; the poetry of

Kalidasa and his drama can be ranked with some of the best the East has produced; the works of Panini and Patanjali on grammar and linguistics earn admiration; the subtlety of Kautilya who wrote on political science; the sophistication of Vasudeva, the argumentative faculties of the founders and exponents of the classical philosophical systems have no counterpart in architecture, and in historiography the Hindu record is a near perfect blank. Hindu notions of beauty and elegance as demonstrated in such temples in the south as have survived from the past radically different from Muslim aesthetics. The sense of spaciousness and clarity of form which Muslim buildings, both religious and secular, reflect is wholly missing in even in the most stupendous Hindu constructions such as the huge temple at Tanjore. The Hindu mind best expressed itself in sculpture as an adornment on temples, but even this is characterised by minute attention to detail rather than breadth of conception. As for historiography the ancient Hindus ignored it altogether on account of the belief that the world is all Maya, an illusion not worth chronicling.

Hinduism has a strongly entrenched priesthood in the Brahmin caste, but no Pope. No one can claim to be the authoritative head of any sect or school or branch. Of course the head of a Hindu monastery or Math is venerated, but this veneration does not correspond to the religious veneration of which the Pope in Christianity is the recipient. A monastery is a place where a number of religious band together to live as a community according to some vows. They can be both male and female. Communes of this kind are especially popular among the Vaishnavites. A Vaishnavite Akhira or commune may have a population of males and females living together. They are free to live promiscuously, this being considered no shame once a woman has entered a commune and cut her hair short in

token of her commitment to the vows of the order. This practice is popular among young widows who could not remarry, orthodox Hindu law not permitting remarriage. Vaishnavite nuns were a common sight in rural Bengal until about fifty years ago, and can still be seen in those areas which have a predominantly Hindu population. Members of such communes dress in yellow and wear symbolic marks on their foreheads to identify themselves before the public.

Unlike Islam which positively decries monasticism and renunciation as a virtue, Hinduism has always emphasised the value of complete non-attachment as the highest manifestation of a man's spiritual progress. Monks and nuns are respected for this reason. Those who go further and retire to forests or mountains, or live in a state of complete nudity under trees are viewed with sentiments verging on awe. They are believed to possess supernatural gifts and to be capable of performing miracles. Known as Sannyasis, some of them practise self-mortification and sometimes even self-flagellation or selfmutilation. They claim to be able to forgo sleep for years; some let their arms atrophy by having them held upright bound to a post by a rope and would allow their hair and nails to grow. Matted hair on the head is recognised as a sign of spiritual powers. Their feats of austerity and self-torture amaze outsiders. Those who by years of practice have achieved complete control over their senses and bodily functions would occasionally have themselves buried alive for periods of weeks, and claim to have the capacity to suspend respiration without damage to the body. The technical name for such burials is Samadhi.

If Hinduism has no Pope, it has no single holy place either like Merua or Rome for the Catholics. Of the cities in present day India the holiest is Benares, but it is not clearly known bow

and when it acquired this holiness. But if one is looking for a place where to find the largest concentration of temples and holy men of all castes, Benares ranks above all other cities. The pious Hindu considers it a great privilege to die in this place and have himself cremated on the banks of the Ganges at this point in its course down from the Himalayas.

The Himalayan mountain chain is also holy and is regarded as the abode of the gods. It is especially sacred to Mahadeva or Siva. Manas Sarovar, a lake in the Himalayan fastnesses, is another holy spot to which thousands of pilgrims travel every year. The greatest centre of pilgrimage among the Hindus in contemporary India is Triveni near Allahabad in northern India, where the Ganges and two other rivers meet. The annual pilgrimage, Kumbh mela, attracts more than a million people. A dip in the river at an auspicious hour is regarded as an infallible guarantee of salvation. Put in Orissa State is another holy city famous for its temples. Brindaban, also in northern India, is believed to have been the locale of Krishna's dalliances with Radha and draws visitors from the Vaishnava sect. Estuaries in general also enjoy the reputation of being sacred to the gods. All over India are to be found places, hills, springs, waterfalls and estuaries which for one reason or another are considered holy and are visited by the pious in search of merit.

Hinduism has innuerable facets which keep changing while retaining an inner core which enables people of different philosophical persuasions to call themselves. Hindu without any sense of inconsistency. Of not other religion can it be said with greater truth; plus ca change plus c'est la meme chose.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

# **BUDDHISM**

Of the religions which have originated on Indian soil, the most important next to Hinduism, is Buddhism, but unlike the latter it is a proselytizing faith and has adherents in every part of the world. India ceased centuries ago to be the chief sanctuary of Buddhism on account of persecution by the Hindus, and it is in Tibet, Japan, China, Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka that Buddhism has its principal bases.

Buddhism also differs from Hinduism in having a definite historical source and a founder as in Islam and Christianity, a historically identifiable person, Gautama Buddha referred to by his followers as the Tathagata or even Bhagwan or Lord. The exact details of his ministry are no longer distinguishable from legend, but his historicity cannot be questioned.

Gautama was the son of a king who ruled over a small kingdom called Kapilavastu in the foothills of the Himalayas in the sixth century B. C. The family were not any different in their beliefs and practices from the rest of the population in the surrounding areas, which means that there were Hindus in the sense in which the term came to be known later. They believed in rebirth and the caste system. But Gautama the prince is reported to have been of a meditative disposition, given to contemplation and reflection. The father sought to cure the other-worldly tendencies discernible in the youth by getting him



married early to an attractive girl. A son was born to him, but this did nothing to change his nature. He continued to be distressed by human suffering and the meaninglessness of the rules which governed society. What finally decided him to renounce the world altogether was his encounter on one of his journeys through the countryside with an old man, a sick man, a dead body and an ascetic. He hesitated no longer, and slipped away commanding his charioteer to return to the palace alone.

For the next six years Gautama wandered about, joined a band of Brahmins, practised austerities such that he was reduced to skin and bone, and sought all the time an answer to the questions which worried him. Realising at last that mortification of the flesh was not the right way of attaining the knowledge he wanted, he returned to the normal life of a religious mendicant. The five disciples who used to accompany him now deserted him in the belief that he had deviated from the path of rectitude which alone could lead to salvation. Seated under a pipal tree he meditated on the mystery of existence until enlightenment came to him one evening, and he became Buddha or the Enlightened one.

The core of the Buddha's teaching was the search for a way out of suffering. The four signs he had seen, a decrepit old man, a sick man, an ascetic, and a dead body, symbolised for him the four different forms of suffering incident to human life; the sufferings of old age, the sufferings of sickness, the sufferings of death, and the sufferings that man imposes on himself by extreme austerities. The root of all sorrow, the Buddha said, was desire, and it is by emancipating oneself from desire in all its diverse forms that one can achieve true bliss—that is, release from the round of births and rebirths. This final release is termed Nirvana, or extinction or annihilation. What ended is the curse of Karma, the law which requires each individual to be

born again and again to expiate sins and thus to be subjected repeatedly to suffering.

It will be clear even from this brief description that the doctrine the Buddha preached had its foundation in Hinduism, and accepts its basic theory or the twin principles of Karma and rebirth. Nor were his first disciples conscious of any fundamental departure from the old Dharma. The Master was giving only a fresh interpretation of the existing beliefs, trying to reform them by ridding them of unacceptable incrustations.

Legend has it that the Buddha went after his enlightenment first to the Deer Park near Benares to announce his new ideas. There he met once again his original disciples who had deserted him and explained to them how man could escape from the misery of living. He set in motion what the Buddhists call the Wheel of the Doctrine, and the five monks who accepted the new doctrine became the first members of the Buddhist monastic order called the Sangha. They fanned out to spread the good news.

The enlightenment is said to have taken place about 528 BC, and during the next 45 years until his death at the age of 80 the Buddha led the life of a wandering monk preaching his doctrine from place to place, never staying in any one place for any length of time. He visited his father's palace once and Yosodhara, his wife, became a nun under his influence. It goes without saying that he did not resume his conjugal life. When over 80 he realised that the hour of his death was approaching. A couch was prepared for him under two Sal trees in Kusinara, and there he lay surrounded by sorrowing disciples. His last words consisted of an admonition to them to strive to be true to his teaching. He then fell into trance after trance, and out of the fourth trance attained Nirvana. A great earthquake and appalling

thunder marked his passing. His mortal remains were cremated in the traditional Hindu manner, and the ashes and relics were buried in ten places under the direction of Ananda, his cousin and chief disciple. The place of the Buddha's birth has been identified, as Lumbini which was the capital of his father's kingdom, Kapilavastu. Kapilavastu was situated in what is now modern Nepal.

Another place associated with the Buddha is Bodh-Gaya in India where he first made the acquaintance of the five monks who first deserted him and later after his enlightenment became his first disciples, the founding members of the Sangha. His father's name was Suddhodhana, and the charioteer whom he dismissed when he set off from home was Channa. The devil who tried to mislead him during the final hours before he achieved enlightenment was called Mara. This episode in the traditional accounts of the Buddha's life bears a strong resemblance to the attempts made by Satan to tempt Christ before his crucifixion.

While Gautama Buddha was beyond question a historical person, it is difficult to say how much of the legend surrounding his life is based on fact. The miracles associated with his youth and the manner in which he escaped the notice of the guards when he made his decision to run away from home appear to outsiders to be attempts to reconstruct events which no one could have thought worth recording when they actually occurred. They bear a family likeness to similar miracles in the lives of preachers elsewhere. There is however no doubt that the Buddha was able to make a profound impact on his contemporaries by his personality and the quality of his life. He seems to have been viewed not as the founder of a new faith, but as a reformer who aimed at ridding the prevalent religion of unwholesome elements; at the most he was considered a rebel

who rejected distinction of cast and repudiated the supremacy of the Brahmins. Gautama, it should be remembered, was as a prince a member of the Kshatriya caste, the warrior class privileged to rule.

The relation between Hinduism and Buddhism has for a Muslim the tantalising aspect of the historical nexus between Christianity and Islam. They are from one point of view close to each other and yet so different. Muslims accept Jesus as one of the true prophets and claim that the religion he preached was essentially the same monotheism that Islam emphasises; yet it would be an obvious error to overlook the differences between the two faiths. Likewise, Buddhism, starting as a reform movement within Hinduism and on the basis of the twin doctrines of rebirth and Karma created a church which has grown independently of it and established its claim to be regarded as a separate religion. In the course of time it came on Indian soil to be seen as a threat to the stability of time it came on Indian soil to be seen as a threat to the stability of Hindu society, and to be persecuted and driven off from its home base.

Although Buddhism has no revealed book of the kind that the Quran is to Muslims, its doctrines are easier to identify than those of Hinduism. They are found embedded in the collections of the Buddha's discourses compiled by his followers, which have a sacred character in Buddhist eyes. They cannot claim to be the actual words the Buddha spoke, having been codified centuries after the Master's death, but they are the nearest we have to anything analogous to the six authentic collections of Hadith or the sayings of the Prophet (Allah bless and exalt him). The discourses were given in Pali, the vernacular of the Buddha's day in northern India, a language very different from Sanskrit but with a vocabulary derived largely from the latter.

The Pali canon is twice the size of the English Bible and consists of three Pitakas or baskets. Collectively known as the Tripitaka, they are the Vinaya, the Dhamma or Sutta, and the Abhidhamma.

Buddhism is to the best of our knowledge the only religion which does not postulate a God in any form. We cannot call it theistic; on the other hand, it is not atheism in the accepted sense. Its doctrines of Karma and Nirvana appear to suggest the existence of a cosmic law to which no personality can be attributed. It concerns itself with how man can free himself from the curse of existence and sorrow and suffering rather than with prayer and worship as they are conventionally understood. This fact has sometimes led people to question whether the term religion is applicable to it at all or whether it would be more appropriate to call it a philosophy. But unlike a mere system of thought such as the term philosophy implies, Buddhism has from the beginning concerned itself with how men should conduct themselves in real life, and it has also to be remembered that within decades of the Buddha's death the way of life he preached assumed all the paraphernalia of regular religion; the Buddha himself began to be worshipped in the same way as God in other religions is worshipped. While no branch of Buddhism would go the length of identifying the Buddha with God and usually resort to ambiguity or ambivalence on the subject, the Buddha has in the eyes of ordinary Buddhists of all classes and schools not only the semblance but the prestige of a deity to whom prayers can be addressed. This tendency is more pronounced in the branch of Buddhism called Mahayana or the Greater Vehicle which is the dominant form in Tibet, China, Korea and Japan. The other

branch called Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle has its adherents in Ceylon or Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma and the Indian subcontinent.

The differences between the two schools far exceed the differences between Sunni and Shia Islam and in some respects can be said to approximate the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. In Hinayana the emphasis is less on the adoration of the Buddha as a deity than on those aspects of Buddhahood in which the Master is seen as a guide and preceptor. Mahayana Buddhism, like Hinduism, has developed an elaborate pantheon of gods and goddesses variously described with various powers ascribed to them. Both schools refer to the Buddha as Bhagwan Buddha which means God Buddha, though the Hinayanis would excuse the use of the term which means God on the ground that it can also be applicable to holy men. The bifurcation which was responsible for the growth of the two schools arose nearly six hundred years after the religion's birth in the opening century of the Christian era. To understand how and in what circumstances the division occurred it is better to go back to Buddhism's early history.

Soon after his enlightenment the Buddha is believed to have sent his emissaries to various parts of India and also to Sri Lanka to preach the new doctrines. By the third century BC it appears to have established itself widely. The conversion of Emperor Asoka (264—223 BC) to Buddhism marks the climax in its growth, for now it became the state church and replaced Hinduism in the matter of its prestige. It was Asoka who sent his son Mahindra to Ceylon or Sri Lanka to propagate the new faith. He caused inscriptions of the Buddhist creed to be carved

on some pillars and rocks throughout his empire and became ultimately a full member of the Buddhist order. 35 of the pillars or rock carvings still survive to testify to the hold which Buddhism had gained not only on the emperor but on his subjects. But it is difficult to say what proportion of the population embraced Buddhism by following Asoka's example. That the Brahmins did not favour the new faith and were waiting for an opportunity to reassert themselves is clear from the fact that in spite of Asoka's efforts they succeeded in regaining their supremacy on Indian soil within the next few centuries. The persecution of Buddhists in northern and south eastern India led to its virtual banishment from the subcontinent and was one of the reasons why Muslim conquerors received a warm welcome in Bengal where the Senas had carried this persecution to great lengths. In contemporary Bengali literature the Muslims are referred to as saviours. It is significant that the Buddhist population in Bangladesh is concentrated in the south-east in the hilly region of Chittagong away from the centres of Brahminical Hinduism.

The Pali canon or Tripitaka deals each with a different aspect of the duties of Buddhists. The Vinaya Pitaka is concerned with the Sangha or the monastic order which one may enter only after a rigorous novitiate. A youth who announces his intention of joining the Sangha is required to repeat the formula Dhammam Sharanam Gacchami or I take refuge in the Buddha and shave off his hair and beard and don the yellow robe which consists of two pieces of cloth wound round the body. A candidate has to pass an examination before the full assembly of monks who test his assimilation of the sacred doctrines. One of the oldest sections of the Vinaya is the Patimokkha, the Words of Disbursement, which are recited by a senior monk to his brethren at full and new moon. The Patimokkha lists 72 offences which a good Buddhist must

avoid. The four cardinal sins are taking life—that is, destroying any sentient being, human or animal, sex, stealing and vaunting of supernatural powers. The prohibitions include liquor, eating at forbidden times, dancing, singing, adorning the body and receiving money. The penalty for serious offences is expulsion from the Sangha; for minor sins, different kinds of penance are prescribed.

The Dhamma or Sutta Pitaka is the chief authority for the Buddhist doctrine. This doctrine is predicated upon the acceptance of the Four Noble Truths which were discovered by the Buddha under the Bodhi tree, the Truth of suffering meaning that pain or suffering is a fact; the Truth that suffering has a cause, which is desire which leads to rebirth; the Truth that suffering can be ended by human effort; and finally, the Truth that the way out of suffering lies in the Noble Eightfold Way, a set of rules which those who accept the Buddha's teaching must try to practise. The rules are right thought, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The Buddhist must know and practise these eight truths, but it may take him several rebirth to attain to arhathood, which is a stage when he qualifies for entry into Nirvana.

The Buddha described his code as the Middle Way between extremes. He deprecated extreme asceticism and indulgence and taught that neither the one nor the other could lead to salvation. The definition of the Buddhist goal, Nirvana, is rather difficult to understand. For Nirvana is said to be unlike both existence and non-existence, though outsiders often call it annihilation of the self. The self is described as something which is constantly changing, though it is not dissolved until Nirvana is attained.



The Abhidamma, the last of the Pitakas consists of commentaries on Buddhist Suttas and are the work of Buddhist scholars in the great monasteries.

The form that Buddhism has taken in the course of centuries is the result of decisions and formulations arrived at by a succession of Buddhist Councils which after the death of the Master took upon themselves the task of interpreting his teachings correctly. The first such Council was held in 483 BC or soon thereafter at Rajagaha under the presidency of Kassapa. A second Council was held a century later in 383 BC at Vesali, and a third at Pataliputra (Patna) about 247 BC in the reign of Asoka. This third Council decided to expel from the Sangha all those who were thought guilty of corrupting the Buddhist religion and its decisions constitute the foundation of what is called the Theravada school which is the dominant form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and south-east Asia. The Theravada school is also known as Hinayana.

While Mahayana rites and practices have tended to approximate those of Hinduism with its pantheon of gods and Aspara or nymphs, and in Tibet is hardly distinguishable from Hindu Tantrism, Theravada claims to be a purer form of the creed preached by the Buddha, a claim which quite understandably is not conceded by their rivals. On the other hand, Mahayana at its profoundest offers a philosophy or metaphysic so subtle as to boggle the mind. It abolishes all distinction between being and non-being and insists that things are at the same time real and unreal, and that Buddhahood is a state in which all that creates the illusion or solidity or appearance vanishes. Theravada believes that Nirvana means the extinction of the three fires of Greed, Anger and Illusion, but Mahayana would assert that what manifests itself as fire is also an illusion.

To a Muslim the main puzzle in Buddhism seems to be the fact that while claiming to offer man a higher code by which to live it starts from the premise that existence itself is a curse. That being so, civilisation as men in different ages have understood the term is reduced to meaninglessness. Yet on the other hand some of the finest art, not to mention other things, has come from Buddhist societies.

The other aspect of Buddhist doctrine which poses a riddle to Muslims is the absence of any code, definitely attributable to the Buddha, which can be followed in life. Buddhist societies are thus free to organise their lives in different ways according to their own understanding of the Master's teaching. The result has been in the case of Mahayana especially the acceptance by Buddhists of practices and beliefs which outsiders find it difficult to regard with sympathy. In the foothills of the Himalayas a form of incest is prevalent; polygamy and polyandry are both widely practised in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan. Not only can a person marry a number of consanguineous sisters simultaneously; a wife can have any number of husbands. These practices are by no means limited to the lower social orders. The aristocracy accept them as norms. The dead in Tibet are offered as food to birds, vultures and crows and in order that no part of the body such as the bones may be wasted corpses are first crushed and pulverised to facilitate consumption by birds. The customs may be a legacy from local traditions, but they have never been declared inconsistent with Buddhism.

Even among Hinayana Buddhists relic worship is universal. Buddhist icons are an inseparable feature of pagodas in Burma, Thailand, China and Japan as in India and Sri Lanka. The paradox which strikes the outsider is that a religion which set out to be a pure metaphysic without any ritualistic

encumbrances is today scarcely capable of being differentiated from other forms of paganism.

Unlike the Muslims and Jews, Buddhists have no dietary laws. All forms of food are acceptable provided this does not involve killing. In practice few Buddhists are vegetarians. They would not themselves participate in the slaughter of animals, but some exceptions apart they do not insist on abstention from any kind of animal food, fish or meal or poultry. Such animals as dogs, cats and monkeys are widely eaten in China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam; snakes are considered a delicacy among the Chinese. Buddhist communities thus go farthest in their lack of dietary inhibitions. Muslims with their clearly defined categories of Halal and Haram find the freedom both interesting and fascinating. In this regard Buddhists bear a resemblance to modern European and American Christians who raise crocodiles on farms for food.

The Buddha did not prescribe any form of worship either. The main reason for this was the theory that worship presupposes homage to one or more supernatural beings capable of granting prayers, and the Buddha did not postulate any. The Buddhist has to achieve self-purification by adhering to the Four Noble Truths and modelling his life on the pattern laid down in the Eightfold Way in the light of his own reason. A Buddha on earth is an absurdity; for once Buddhahood is attained the round of births and rebirths is broken and there is no return to earthly existence. But a person who has arrived at the stage where he is certain of Buddhahood may voluntarily choose to be reborn in order to guide other errant brethren.

In Theravada Buddhism two stages are envisaged in the attainment of Buddhahood. The disciple aims at becoming an arhat or Pratyekabuddha in the first instance and does not

preach. In Mahayana, on the other hand, no one is expected to aim at Nirvana only for himself; the disciple should train himself to be a Buddha and aim at saving fellow sufferers. Such persons are designated as Bodhisattvas which means beings destined for enlightenment. Mahayana scriptures are full of accounts of such beings; they as well as those who have taken the final step into Buddhahood are prayed to exactly in the same manner as are gods in Hinduism and saints in Catholic Christianity. Mahayana Buddhism is indisputably polytheistic.

The most widely honoured Bodhisattva in Mahayana is Avalokiteswara or Avalokita, the embodiment of mercy and compassion. His task is to save errant souls and lead them to the Happy Land of Amitabha, the equivalent of heaven or Swarga in Hinduism. He voluntarily postpones his Buddhahood for the sake of humanity at large; those who pray to him and put their trust in him can be assured of salvation. Avalokiteswara in many Buddhist countries has assumed the features of Hindu Iswara; it is difficult for outsiders to say how in this respect Buddhism differs from one of other forms of Hinduism. The fact that in the legendary stories about the Buddha Hindu gods and sages are often invoked and that the Buddha is sometimes spoken of as an avatar of one of the many deities in the Hindu pantheon creates additional problems. But it has to be recognised that it is its rejection of the Brahminical caste system and its insistence on Dukkha or suffering being the final truth about existence which down the centuries has widened the cleavage between the two religions. The Buddha's refusal to define the nature of Ultimate Reality—a subject on which he is believed to have remained silent when questioned—is by many considered to amount to an advocacy of atheism and is also the basis for parallels drawn between

some aspects of the Hindu philosophical system known as Sankhya and the Buddha's teachings. But one must also remember that the Buddhists do not accept any of the Hindu scriptures. The Pali canon for Theravada and the numerous tomes produced by Mahayana scholars are the Buddhist equivalent to Hindu scripture.

No matter what sect or school a Buddhist belongs to, the common affirmation of faith heard on Buddhist lips everywhere is : **Buddham Saranam Gacchami, Dhammam Saranam Gacchami, Sangham Saranam Gacchami**, which means: I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Cult, I take refuge in the Order. Cult is perhaps not an exact translation of Dhamma, which really stands for the entire ethical and religious system propounded by the Buddha.

Buddhist scriptures must be grouped into two categories: the Pali Canon of the Hinayana school and the Mahayana writings. Among the latter the most important are Mahavastu, Sukhavati-Vyuha, Saddharma-Pundarika and Avatamasaka. While Mahavastu denies the reality of phenomena, and consequently refrains from offering the disciple any satisfaction of the universal human longing for a Personal Deity, the cult of Amida and Buddhisattva is developed in the others, especially in Saddharma-Pundarika. The transcendental philosophy of Avatamaska is said to have influenced Nagarjuna in the second century AD who along with Asvaghosa are the two most eminent interpreters of Mahayana doctrine. Legend attributes to Nagarjuna a feat which was miraculous. He is said to have descended into the depths of the sea and obtained sacred books from the Nagas, the mythical serpents who inhabit the underworld, a legend in which Hindu and Buddhist beliefs at the level of the masses coalesce. Asvaghosa was Nagarjuna's predecessor, a great poet in Sanskrit, author of SutralamKara.

His influence upon the development of Mahayana Buddhism has been so great that he is called by some scholars the father of Mahayana. Asvaghosa is also the author of a Life of the Buddha written, like the other work, in Sanskrit not in Pali. Nagarjuna's writings have influenced the growth of Buddhism in China; he is regarded as the founder or one of the principal founders of the Middle Doctrine or Madhyamaka school of Far Eastern Buddhism.

The most interesting developments in Buddhist doctrine have since the decay of Buddhism in India taken place either in China or Japan.

In each of the countries which have a predominant Buddhist population, the religion has taken a distinct local colouring and evolved methods of worship peculiar to it.

Ceylon or Sri Lanka, which used to be considered once the fountain-head of Theravada doctrines, is famous for two Buddhist temples or shrines, one at Anuradhapura, the old capital, which is the repository of a collar bone of the Buddha brought to the country by Sanghamitra, Emperor Asoka's daughter who followed her brother Mahindra as one of the first missionaries to arrive in Ceylon. She was also responsible for a cutting of the sacred Bo tree under which the Buddha achieved enlightenment. There is no reason to doubt, according to one authority, that this venerated growth is the oldest historical tree in existence. In the third century Ceylon received yet another relic, a tooth of the Buddha, housed in a temple at Kandy which is the most important religious shrine in Ceylon. Immense respect is paid to this relic, regarded as a national treasure. It was in Ceylon that in the first century BC the Pali Canon was written down. The first century saw the emergence of the first commentator on Buddhist doctrine in Buddhaghosa.

His Visudha-magga in Pali is the most authoritative exposition of the arhat ideal to which the Sinhalese subscribe.

Burma was converted to Buddhism by one of Asoka's missionaries. The form Buddhism took on Burmese soil is characterised by a mixture of Hinayana and Mahayana with spirit worship. These spirits are known as Nats. They are akin to the Devatas venerated in Ceylon and are feared as sources of evil who need to be propitiated. The greatest figure in Burmese Buddhism is King Anuwrabta (1044-1077 A.D) who embraced Theravada Buddhism and made it the official religion of Burma. The pagodas in Burma are famous, the greatest among them being the Shwe Dagon Pagoda in Rangoon with a towering gold plated pinnacle. It houses numerous sacred relics and attracts both worshippers and tourists.

The history of Buddhism in Thailand or Siam is rather obscure. Its conversion is usually dated from the 14th century AD and is attributed to the work of a Tehravadin Bhikku or monk from Ceylon who was so successful in his mission as to be created Sangharaja of Supreme Head of the Order. Pagodas in Thailand are more ornamental than those in Burma and betray Chinese architectural influence.

Cambodia and Laos are also Buddhist countries as is Vietnam and they are claimed by the Theravada school. But in this area there has occurred a mixture of Hindu, Mahayana and Theravada influences. Theravada is paramount in present day Cambodia, but a full understanding of religious practices in Cambodian society demands a knowledge of its past religious history as a Hindu Kingdom and its connection with Mahayana. Until the 14th century Cambodia was dominated by a blend of Hinduism and Mahayana, a fact unmistakably clear from the architecture of its most famous religious monument, the temple

complex at Angkor which is one of the most splendid religious buildings anywhere.

China's entry into the Buddhist world presents greater puzzles in the sense that China was already in possession of a high civilization based on the teachings of Confucius and Lao Tse when its first contacts with Buddhism took place, early in the Han dynasty (first century BC). Legend has it that the Emperor Ming-ti sent messengers to India for Buddhist books in A D 61. One of the Indian monks who arrived in response to the Chinese invitation translated some Buddhist scriptures of the Mahayana school into Chinese. The principal work was the Sutra of 42 Sections which was an anthology of precepts. This was followed by other translations. Among these the most influential proved to be the translations by Kumarajiva whose output was enormous and created a wave of interest in the new creed in Confucian and Taoist circles. A Chinese branch of the Sangha was soon founded with the permission of the government, but the form that Buddhism assumed gradually was profoundly modified by indigenous ethical and religious traditions, so that Chinese Buddhism has a distinct character different from the varieties seen elsewhere.

The work initiated by Kumarajiva was carried a stage further by another Indian monk from Conjeeveram near Madras named Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma departed from the emphasis laid in Mahayana on salvation by faith and concentrated on Dhyana or meditation as the central principle whereby a person might achieve enlightenment. The term Dhyana underwent a corruption on Chinese tongues into Ch'an which in its turn was changed to Zen in Japan. Ch'an Buddhism is characteristically Chinese in the amalgam it offers of the Buddhist legacy and China's own inheritance in religion and ethics from Confucian and Taoist sources.



Buddhism reached its greatest strength in China, according to scholars, in the T'ang Dynasty (620—907). The fusion of Buddhism and China's native traditions gave rise to a remarkable artistic flowering. Tang art, paintings, ceramics and sculpture are highly valued in the West and fetch enormous prices. While China assimilated Buddhism to its own roots, a reaction against foreign ideas set in under the Manchus. Confucianism triumphed eventually, though Buddhism continued and still remains, in spite of the suppression of religion after the Communist revolution, to be a perceptible strand in Chinese thought.

Mahayana, which is polytheistic, led even in China to the growth of a new pantheon of gods and goddesses. This is particularly evident in Tibet where the goddess Tara of Mahayana and Kali of Hinduism are the two principal deities worshipped in the Tibetan form of Tantrism. Even those who claim to adhere to a purer form of Mahayana have turned the cult of the Dalai Lama, the spiritual head of Tibetan Buddhism, into a religion difficult to identify with Buddhism elsewhere. The Dalai Lama is believed to be an incarnation of Chenrezi or Avalokatesvara. When he dies he is thought to be immediately reincarnated and a search is instituted for a child born at the exact hour of his death who will display signs proving that he is the same personality. The search party subjects the child to various tests and if he appears to remember his past life he is taken into their custody for training.

During the Dalai Lama's minority it is the head priests or lamas who discharge his functions. The education given him is rigorous. He may not have contact with a woman, not even his mother after the first three or four years of his life. He learns all the sacred texts and all the rituals and the belief that he is a living god is instilled into him. Until the Chinese occupation of

Tibet, the Dalai Lama used to be an example of the ancient institution of the priest-king, combining in himself religious and secular functions. Tibet was a true theocracy. The 13th Dalai Lama died in 1933 and the 14th was discovered and installed in 1939. He has since 1959 been living in exile in India after fleeing his homeland in consequence of an abortive uprising against the Chinese communist rulers. With him the centre of Tibetan Buddhism shifted to a place near the Himalayan foothills.

Korea too is a Buddhist country but its Buddhism is in the main an offshoot of the Chinese branch of the Mahayana school. The most interesting developments in the religion outside of China have taken place in Japan. The Zen school of Japan is famous and thanks to the interpretations it has received from Western scholars has influenced many in the West. The other schools among many are Nichiren and Shin. They all reflect in varying degrees the fusion of Mahayana with the ancient Japanese cult of Shinto which is principally concerned with ancestor worship. Japan, like China, has produced great Buddhist art, especially in sculpture. The ancient city of Nara has one of the most impressive Buddhist temples, enshrining a stupendous stone Buddha.

Zen, Nichiren, Shin are all mystical cults. They emphasise the value of meditation and rigorous discipline; Nichiren has for its ideal not Amida, the Buddhisattva but Buddha himself. But again it is not the historic Gautama who is adored but an eternal Buddha sitting in majestic passivity in heaven.

The mingling of Buddhist and various local cults in every country whose population underwent a conversion to Buddhism makes it difficult to say whether the religion can be said to flourish in its pristine form anywhere. Originally intended

perhaps for an exclusive few who would constitute the Sangha, a celibate order who would take upon themselves the task of acting as guides to errant humanity, never take part in mundane affairs, earn their livelihood by begging rather than engage in any occupation which might distract their minds from their religious duties, Buddhism as practised by ordinary Buddhists—that is, those who do not join the Sangha appears to be a compromise between whatever was the indigenous creed before the advent of the new religion and the teachings of the Buddha as the local population could interpret them for themselves. Outside of the Sangha no two Buddhist societies seem to follow the same pattern in the organisation of their life. It is the yellow robed monks of the Sangha, comparable in certain respects to mediaeval Christian orders, who silently roam the streets with bowls when they need food, who present a spectacle which brings home to non-Buddhists the reality of the Buddhist fraternity as a phenomenon which must be reckoned with.

Buddhist monks who are called lamas in Tibet and Bhikkus elsewhere have to be celibate like Catholic priests. They live in monasteries apart from society at large and are expected to be models of non-violence. But though as monks they are not allowed to participate in politics, they can as an organised force have great leverage in all aspects of social life. In Sri Lanka, in Vietnam, in Cambodia and in Laos Buddhist influence in politics, even where indirect, is unmistakable. It was the Buddhist revolt against the non-communist regime in Vietnam, demonstrated not only by processions but also by acts of selfimmolation by individual priests, which facilitated its overthrow. Buddhism in its heyday spread as far afield in the west as Afghanistan and central Asia. One of the greatest centres of Buddhist culture, ancient Taxila, is situated in Pakistan. Swat in northern Pakistan

was another centre and to this day carvings on mountain walls testify to the hold it once exercised on what is now a totally Muslim area.

Young men and women in Buddhist societies during the period they spend in school and college, enter a novitate and become Shramanas. The men are required to shave their head like the Bhikkus, and both sexes don yellow robes which they discard when they settle down in life as ordinary citizens; some may choose to join the Sangha permanently.

Buddhism in the West is largely a movement confined to a small intellectual class attracted by Zen and Buddhist art and literature. The English translations of Buddhist works by Arthur Waley have gone a long way to popularise Buddhism among general readers who eschew more scholarly interpretations. One of the effects flowing from the works of Buddhist societies in Europe and America is a growing tendency among some to take the doctrines of Karma and rebirth seriously. How far this would modify Christian beliefs or the general intellectual inheritance of the West in which Karma and the theory of rebirth do not play a part cannot be foreseen. That Buddhism can be, in spite of its quietistic appearance, an extremely active force is seen in the struggle between Buddhist Sinhalese and Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka which surfaced in the eighties of the present century.

Like popular Hinduism, popular Buddhism has features which have a tenuous connection with Buddhist doctrine. This can best be surmised from the fables known as Jatakas or birth stories in which the successive appearances of the Bodhisattva who ultimately attained Nirvana as the Buddha are recorded. He is said to have come again and again, lived and died and returned to earth to guide errant humanity for

millions of years. In one such story Gautama is reported to have been so anguished by the sight of a famished tiger that he lay down before the animal in order that it might devour him, convinced that he would return without fall. These fables have been given a philosophical interpretation as a history of the evolution of consciousness upon this earth. But ordinary Buddhists take them literally to signify Gautama's repeated triumphs over death in the cause of suffering humanity. But no matter what their esoteric meaning, they provide an important clue to the understanding of the Buddhist approach to the doctrines of Karma and rebirth and Nirvana which are fundamental to it.

Of religions with a definite historical source Buddhism is the oldest. But one of the interesting aspects of its history is that, unlike Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism, it has never had occasion to face any confrontation on the political plane with Islam. The main reason for this is of course the fact that it has flourished mainly in countries like Thailand, Ceylon, Burma, Japan and China where Islam has never been the religion of the ruling power. As regards Western Asia and Bengal which today have predominantly Muslim populations and were once Buddhist, Islam arrived either after Buddhism had begun to recede or as in the case of Bengal the Muslims were welcomed as saviours of a Buddhist society from the tyranny of Brahmins. Burma, the most aggressive Buddhist country among those where Buddhism is practised today, had the unfortunate distinction of being hostile to the local Muslims concentrated in Arakan and also being ambivalent in its attitude towards neighbouring Bangladesh. The intolerance shown to Arakanese Muslims who often complain of not being allowed to live peacefully in accordance with their own religious traditions is a phenomenon more reminiscent of Hindu-Muslim relations in

India than of Buddhist history elsewhere in the past. But it points to the fact that even an apparently tolerant faith like Buddhism can in certain situations assume an aggressive pose.

Like Islam, Buddhism has no single organised church corresponding to the Catholic church; nor has it any head comparable to the Pope in Rome or the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Archbishop of the Anglican Church of England. The Sangha in each Buddhist country is independent. The emphasis in Buddhism is and continues to be on individual effort towards salvation through an understanding of the Noble Truths and the pursuit of the Eight-fold Way as each man or woman comprehends them. The nearest to an organised body Buddhists have is the Mahabodhi Society founded in India in 1891 by a Sinhalese Buddhist, Anagarika Dharmapala. It has published Buddhist texts and acts as a caretaker of Buddhist shrines and holy places in the subcontinent. But the Mahabodhi Society is not a church. Similar functions are discharged by the Buddhist Society of England established in 1906.



## CHAPTER SIX

# SIKHISM, PARSEEISM, JAINISM AND SOME MINOR CULTS

### 1

Sikhism sprang from Hinduism's contact with Islamic monotheism, but like Buddhism it does not reject the doctrines of Karma and transmigration or rebirth. It is sternly monotheistic and repudiates idol worship. It is the youngest of the creeds with a large following in India concentrated in Punjab and the surrounding areas and has had from an early period in its growth a militant outlook which resulted from its confrontation with the Mughal rulers. It was historical vicissitudes rather than anything in its doctrines which were responsible for the adoption of the rules which give the Sikhs a distinctive physical appearance marking them off from others. They are required to adhere to five principles, usually referred to as five Ks because each of them is indicated by a name beginning with the letter K. Every Sikh must wear his hair long; this involves complete abstinence from the use of razors or scissors for the removal of hair anywhere on the body, head, face and other parts of a person's anatomy; a distinctive type of comb is another requirement; so is the use of iron bangles even by males; a particular kind of shorts of underwear and kirpans, short swords. Those who do not conform are declared apostates.



The founder of Sikhism was Guru Nanak (1469-c-1538). He was a Hindu of the Khatri caste born in the village of Talwandi in Punjab into a poor family. It is from his Muslim teacher that he imbibed the principles of Islam. He is believed to have had undergone a conversion about the age of 35 and to have had a vision of paradise. He heard a voice commanding him to spread the name of God. Legend has it that he travelled as far as Mecca, a story on the basis of which some people think that he had embraced Islam. His body is said to have been claimed by both Hindus and Muslims.

Another person who also played an important part in the growth of Sikhism is Kabir who was undoubtedly a Muslim. He(1488-1512) was a weaver by trade and is known as the author of hymns which celebrate the unity of God. Nanak was one of his disciples and was deeply influenced by his teachings. Kabirpanthis or the followers of Kabir today form a sect among the Vaishnavite Hindus. Among other things Kabir maintained that truth can be attained by any method, and that no particular religion should claim a monopoly of righteousness.

Nanak's teachings betray a fusion of Islam and Hinduism. He rejected not only Hindu polytheism, but also such things as pilgrimage, bathings in sacred rivers, mendicancy as a virtue, and asceticism. He is known to have inveighed against the caste system, but it was so strongly entrenched among the Hindus who accepted his teachings that something similar to it persists among the Sikhs. Nanak also denounced Suttee, the custom of burning widows alive.

The Sikhs reject the theory of incarnation and conceive God to be a merciful providence, who solaces the poor and the needy. They have no revealed book. The Adi Granth which embodies the sayings of the successive Gurus is their

counterpart of sacred scripture. It is regarded as holy and reading from it is an act of piety prescribed for the good life.

Since Sikhism represents the crystallisation of the teachings of the Gurus, it can be best understood in historical perspective.

Nanak the founder was succeeded by Angad, one of his disciples. He invented a special script for the transcription of Nanak's teachings, particularly the hymns composed by him, which were in Punjabi. The script came to be known as Guramukhi, which means the vehicle of the Guru's oral sayings. Angad was followed by the third Guru, Amar Das who was more outspoken in his denunciation of Sutee. He held office from 1552 to 1574, Amar Das was succeeded by his son-in-law Ram Das in 1574. Under him began the building of the Golden Temple in Amritsar on land granted by the Mughal emperor Akbar. The temple is a huge complex in a style not distinguishable from Mughal structures and is surrounded by an artificial lake called the Lake of Immortality. It was completed by Guru Arjun, the son of Ram Das. Guru Arjun was also the man who completed the compilation of the Adi Granth. His reign ended in 1606. He died in prison in consequence of his involvement in the politics of the day. For by this time the Sikhs had grown into a powerful sect who became a challenge to Mughal authority.

Attempts by the Mughal rulers to contain the growth of the Sikh sect had the opposite effect of unifying them into a strong body under the next Guru, Har Govind (1606-1645). Govind was able to convert the Sikhs into a political power with a principality of their own. The community acquired a distinct identity by their way of living, their abstinence from liquor and tobacco and their habit of meat eating in contrast to the Hindus.

Har Govind's successor was his grandson Har Rai (1645-1661) who in his turn was followed by his son Har Krishan, a boy of five. The boy died in 1664 but is said to have told his followers that his successor would be found in a certain village. The new Guru discovered in the village turned out to be a brother of the boy, Teg Bahadur. Teg Bahadur reigned from 1664 until 1675 and stiffened the organisation of the Sikh community further. His activities earned him the hostility of the Mughal rulers who naturally did not desire the growth of a militant sect opposed to Muslim rule. Teg Bahadur was finally arrested and executed. What the Sikhs took to be religious persecution, thought in fact it was political in colour, served to alienate the community for ever from the Muslims.

This alienation was completed under the tenth and last Guru, Govind Rai, who succeeded Teg Bahadur. He instituted the Khandadi-Pahul or the baptism of the sword and established the Khalsa, the militant brotherhood of the pure as the Sikhs called themselves. The five K's date from his time. He also sanctioned meat eating provided the animal were killed with a single stroke of the sword; the prohibitions on tobacco and alcohol were renewed. Govind Rai assumed the title of Singh or lion and called upon his followers to do the same. Every male Sikh is a Singh or lion, the title being an assertion of their commitment to militancy as a way of life. The Sikhs also wear a special kind of headgear or turban.

Govind Singh as Govind Rai is known in history appears to have owed to Islam the idea of declaring himself the final Guru in the manner that Prophet Muhammad (may God bless and exalt him) is regarded as the last in the line of prophets. Henceforth the Sikh community were to derive whatever guidance they needed from the Granth Sahib which consists of the Adi Granth and an addendum by Govind Singh himself.

The special place the Granth Sahib occupies in Sikh is again reminiscent of the honour accorded to the Quran in Islam.

Govind died in 1708. He left behind a community well organised as a martial sect which were able to establish a principality towards the end of the century which lasted until the annexation of Panjab by the British in the 19th century.

The Sikhs are divided into several sects, the most militant among them being the Akalis, a term which means immortals. The British treated them as one of the martial races from which they recruited soldiers for the British Indian army. The community was also recognised as one of the important parties with a right to a say in the framing of the future constitution of India when the British withdrew from the subcontinent in 1947.

Although the main place of worship in Sikhism is known as Mandir—or temple—a Sikh place of worship is generally called a Gurdwara or the home of the Gurus. The daily ritual prescribed for the community is: early rising, bathing in cold water, meditation on God's name, and the recitation of prayers from the Granth Sahib morning and evening.

Unlike Hinduism Sikhism is a proselytising religion. Most Hindus in Punjab allow individual members from a family to join the Sikh church and still retain ties with the parent family. Likewise, Sikhs sometimes are known to lapse into Hinduism. There is a kind of reciprocity between the two cults not paralleled by any relationship between Hinduism and other Indian cults.

The term Khalsa is used by the Sikhs in a sense corresponding to Ummah among Muslims. But it is slightly less comprehensive, for individual Sikhs can stay outside the Khalsa by not taking the necessary vows or undergoing the baptism of the sword.

The total number of Sikhs in India is estimated to be about 7 or 8 million. But in wealth and influence they far outweigh their numerical strength. Sikh colonies are to be found in Britain, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, Kuwait and East Africa. Personally religious or not, they usually adhere to the five Ks: Kesh (hair), Kara (Bangles), Kanghi (comb), Kuch (shorts) and Kirpan (short sword). In spite of the community's many links with Hinduism, the Sikhs are conscious of their individuality which has been greatly strengthened by events since India won independence in 1947. This sense of a distinct individuality is reinforced by their memory of the period of Sikh rule in Punjab, especially of the achievements of the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, who is their national hero. It was he who established the first completely independent Sikh kingdom in India in 1801 in Punjab. He later conquered Kashmir. Ranjit Singh died in 1839, and thereafter a series of defeats at the hands of the British culminated in the annexation of Punjab by the British in 1849. The Sikhs had earlier given up Kashmir, which was sold to the Dogras by the English in 1845. But that brief period of political glory from 1801 when the Sikhs were able to lord it over Muslims in north-west India has left a permanent impress on their consciousness and given to Sikhism as a creed an impetus which has preserved it from absorption by Hinduism which has been the fate of Jainism and other minor creeds on Indian soil.

Sikhism, must thus be judged as a religio-political movement. Few religions have been more influenced by the political fortunes of their adherents than Sikhism in the development of its rites and rituals. Beginning as a protest movement within Hinduism, without however renouncing the Hindu doctrines of Karma and transmigration and insisting only on monotheism which it imbibed from Islam, Sikhism soon

became a political protest against the Mughals who were Muslim, and acquired features represented by the five Ks and the concept of the Khalsa which can be fully understood only in the light of history. Whether at any future date Sikhism will be able to evolve on a different track as a purely religious creed is impossible to predict. The history of Punjab as a province in the British Indian empire was marked by conflict between Sikhs and Muslims and this, reinforced by memories of past struggles between the Sikhs and Mughals, was responsible for the decision of the Sikhs to insist on partition in 1947 rather than allow the whole province to be included in the Muslim state of Pakistan. But events in the following decades showed that their relations with Hindus also proved stormy.

## PARSEEISM

Parseeism which is the name given to the form of Zoroastrianism practised by the Parsees in India can claim to be one of the oldest religions in the world with a history of more than two or three thousand years. Muslims call them Zindiq or fire worshippers. According to some commentators, though this is disputed by others, they are included in the meaning of the term Ahl-ul Kitab, which refers to those peoples who possess divinely inspired scriptures like the Quran. Alh-ul-Kitab communities— and that embraces the Christians and Jews— have been defined in the Quran as peoples with whom Muslims can intermarry and interdine freely. The early Muslims extended this privilege to the Zindiqs in some instances, but although marriages between Parsees and Muslims on Indian soil have occurred, Muslim scholars by and large do not accept the community as Ahl-ul-Kitab.

Zoroastrianism is the religion founded by Zorosater or Zarathushtra as he was called in his homeland in ancient Persia. His historicity has been questioned, and there are great differences of opinion about the era to which to attribute him. Pliny the Elder, the Greek thinker, believed him to have lived 6000 years before Plato; Plutarch the historian thought he Hourished 5,000 years before the Trojan War. Those modern scholars who do not dismiss him as a myth put him around 1000 BC.

The core of Zoroastrianism revolves around the dualism of light and darkness. It interprets all phenomena as reflecting the constant and unceasing struggle of these two forces, the forces of Good and the forces of Evil, symbolised by Ahuramazda and Ahriman. Ahuramazda is responsible for all that is good and beautiful; Ahriman for all that is ugly and hateful. Light as the symbol of Good deserves worship; hence the honour paid to fire which produces light. Zoroastrian temples—called fire temples—always contain an altar with a perpetually burning flame.

The Zoroastrians migrated to India soon after the conquest of Persia by the Arabs. Their descendants or the Parsees are settled principally in the Bombay area in the west. Zoroastrianism has been extinct in Persia for centuries.

Zoroaster is believed to have given his followers a holy book called Zendavesta composed in a language akin to ancient Persian or Pahlavi and translated into the latter tongue after the religion spread among the inhabitants of Persia. The Parsees call it simply Avesta. The book consists of five parts as follows: the Yasna embodying liturgical matter read by Parsee priests in worship; the Vispered, consisting of invocations to Ahuramazda; the Vendidad or the Parsee priestly code; the Yashata, further invocations; the fifth book is the Khordah Avesta, a book of private devotions to be used by priest and layman alike. The other books are not allowed to be read by laymen.

The Avesta is only a fragment of the sacred literature of the Zoroastrians. Legend has it that Zoroaster composed 20 books, each consisting of 100,000 verses written on 1200 cowhides. These were, it is said, destroyed by Alexander when he conquered Persia. After the Greeks withdrew the priests



collected the remains and out of them prepared the present Avesta.

The hereditary and professional priesthood in Zoroastrianism has played a part in the development of the religion comparable to the role of the Brahmins in Hinduism and the authors of the Epistles in Christianity. The translation of the holy books into Pahlavi took place between the third and tenth centuries. The Ravayats are a collection of answers by priests given to various theological questions submitted to them; it carries great authority.

But the most important section of the sacred literature is the Gathas representing the seventeen chapters of the Yasna, which are believed to embody the actual words of Zoroaster himself. The Gathas are regarded in the same light by the Parsees as the Vedas by the Hindus.

Although the central core of Zoroastrianism is the dualism of light and darkness, it has acquired in the course of centuries many features which betray the influence of other cults, especially Mithraism which at one time spread over Persia and from Persia to the Roman empire. Mithra is the god of heavenly light whose counterpart is found in the god of heavenly Mithraism which at one time spread over Persia and from Persia to the Roman empire. Mithra is the god of heavenly light whose counterpart is found in the Vedas. In the second century AC it looked like being firmly established as the official creed of Rome. Mithra became an integral part of Zoroastrian belief. Other divinities also entered the religion. Among them were Ameshaspentas, regarded as a group of Holy immortals, resembling Christian archangels, who wait upon Ahura-Mazda and do his bidding.

Ahura-Mazda is also called Ormuzd. He is the Supreme Creator, constantly at war with Ahriman, but this ultimate victory is certain. Ormuzd created man who was endowed by him with free will. Zoroaster's three commandments were: good thoughts, good words and good deeds. Zoroastrians believe in an afterlife in which man will have to account for all he did on earth, his virtues and sins. Those who have led a virtuous life will enjoy eternal bliss in heaven and those who have sinned will be in hell forever. The soul will have to pass over a bridge, hair-thin; the souls of men who are righteous will find the passage over it easy and the sinners will be plunged into the abyss of hell. If the evil and the good in a man's life are in the same proportions, the soul will pass into a purgatory. The concept of accountability is clearly one common to Zoroastrianism and Islam, Christianity and Judaism and even Hinduism where it takes the form of the law Karma. Likewise, there are other features of Zoroastrian eschatology, such as the belief in a heaven and a hell which are similar to Muslim beliefs. The idea of the hair-thin bridge in the after world has also found a place in popular Islam.

Ormuz is thought to be incapable of being apprehended by human senses. This also is an idea not dissimilar from Muslim beliefs, but where the Zoroastrians differ sharply from Islam is in holding that Ormuz needs man's help in his struggle with Ahriman. The man who lives a life of righteousness can by his actions help defeat Ahriman; for righteousness strengthens the power of good and weakens the the power of evil. Ahriman, however, as the embodiment of evil is a concept which is not different from the notion of Satan in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Interestingly, although the idea of evil as a force is not unknown to Hinduism, it has nothing in its mythology resembling a single figure in whom evil is concentrated. It is also

fair to say that although Islam does not elevate Satan to the level of an adversary to God who needs to be assisted against him dualism-interpreted as a feature of human existence in that man is always prone to fall into the clutches of Satan unless he is vigilant—is present in the Muslim religion. Muslims believe that the licence given to Satan to tempt man is an aspect of the choice man can enjoy between good and evil on this earth.

Here the similarities between Islam and Zoroastrianism appear to end. Sometimes the Amesha-Spentas are likened to angels, but actually it is impossible to carry the apparent similarity far. Amesha-Spentas are also said to be those attributes of Ahura-Mazda which can find a place in the human soul. They are divided into two sets of three, those on the Father-side which are male, and those on the Mother-side which are female. Asha, the eternal law of God. Vohu-Mano, Love, and Kshathra, loving service are accounted male; and Armati, faith in God, Haurvatal or perfection, and Amerat or immortality are female principles. With Ahura-Mazda, the above six constitute a Heptad or aggregate of seven, all of them representing aspects of deity to which man should offer worship.

These seven are to be added to Atar of fire and Sarpasha or willing obedience to God which are also to be regarded as divinities.

These factors introduce complexities into the idea of a single God or the unity of Godhead and make it impossible to consider Zoroastrianism monotheistic.

Basically an Aryan religion, Zoroastrianism was further influenced by another Aryan creed, namely, Brahmanism, as a result of its contact with Hinduism on Indian soil. The hereditary

character that the priesthood acquired is believed to have been one of the effects of this contact. So was child marriage, a practice widely prevalent among the Hindus. Among other practices which reformers in the 19th century condemned was the practice of washing in the urine of an ox or a she-goat every morning for purification and saying masses for the dead.

The Parsee priesthood is a hierarchy. The highest class consists of the Dasturs or High Priests; the next class is represented by the Mobeds who officiate in fire temples; the Ervads are the lowest class.

Parsee temples, which are simple structures, must always have a fire-altar before which worship is offered to Ahura-Mazda. The Parsees claim that while they regard fire as sacred they do not worship fire itself, but treat it as a symbol. Their rituals are also simple. Apart from affirming their faith in Ahura-Mazda before the sacred fire, they make offerings of homa juice, sacred bread, butter oil, and holy water.

The greatest Parsee festival is the Day of Yazdegard, the day that the last Sassanian king of Parsis was dethroned by the Muslims in 640 A C. A difference of opinion over the fall of Yazdegard has led to the emergence of two sects among the Parsees, the Shahanshahis and the Kadmis. The Yazegard Day is treated in its social aspect like the Muslim festival of Idul-fitri; social visits are exchanged and reunions among families and friends take place.

Like the Muslims the Parsees can offer their prayers anywhere and are not restricted to their fire-temples for this purpose.

An important Parsee belief is that the elements, earth, fire and water are all sacred and should not be polluted. This

accounts for their custom of not burying or cremating the dead but exposing them to vultures on towers to be eaten. After the flesh has been picked clean, the bones are collected and thrown into a pit.

Belief in immortality is of course a concomitant of the belief in a heaven and a hell for the dead according to their deserts. But Parsees do not accept the theory of reincarnation.

The community numbers less than two hundred thousand in the whole of India. Centuries of endogamy and inbreeding, some exceptions notwithstanding, have given them a clearly indentifiable physiological appearance. Many use a distinctive kind of dress.

Parsee children are formally indoctrinated between the ages of seven and fifteen. They are required to repeat the creed and vow to adhere to the perfect religion given to the world by Zoroaster. The child is then invested with the Kusti, the sacred cord or girdle, which he has to have on his person all his life. He has also to promise to perform good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Daily prayer includes the repetition of this declaration three or four times every twenty-four hours.

The Parsees are one of the smallest religious communities in India. But they are well established in business and are well known for their philanthropy.

It is perhaps the only community which is entirely urban with no representation in agriculture and similar rural pursuits. Its survival on what initially was foreign soil in the face of adverse circumstances testifies to the tenacity of the faith of those few who believe in Zoroaster.

## JAINISM

Jainism as it is practised today is hardly distinguishable from Hinduism, but it claims to have older origins. Its relation to Brahmanical Hinduism is however a matter of dispute. What seems clear to outsiders is that they have many features in common including the belief in rebirth and Karma. Hindu priests can and often do officiate in Jain temples; many Jains join the Hindu fold; and Jain ascetics are venerated by both classes. The exact number of Jains in India has not been computed. But the most prominent group of Jains is the Marwaris, who dominate Indian commerce.

The most important tenet in Jainism is Ahimsa or nonviolence based on the theory that all life is sacred; the worst sin is to harm or destroy life in any form, be it never so humble. Pious Jains carry a broom with which they sweep the path before them as they walk, lest they should unwittingly kill insects; some wear a net on their faces to prevent any invisible germ being breathed in and destroyed. Even vermin and insects which are injurious to humans must be fed and protected. Well-to-do Marwaris engage poor people by the hour to sleep on bug-ridden beds in order that they themselves might be spared at night when they use the same beds. The cow is venerated and Marwaris patronise cow-protection societies in India in concert with the Hindus who regard the animal as a god.

Notwithstanding the pre-eminence of the Jains in commerce and industry in modern times, Jainism is essentially an otherworldly cult which rejects the whole concept of civilisation as it is understood by other societies. They consider dress utterly superfluous and the most orthodox among them, the Digambaras, go entirely naked. A true Jain should according to their beliefs own nothing and not even eat. It was not until the establishment of Muslim rule in India that the Jains were forced to cover their nakedness in public for decency's sake. But even now some Digambaras live apart and refuse to conform. The sect which wears clothing is called Svetambaras; they do not insist on nudity, but their beliefs are the same as those of the Digambaras. A third group which arose in the fifteenth century among the Svetambaras is known as Sthanakavasis. They maintain a belief in nonidolatrour worship in contradistinction to the other two groups who practise image-worship.

Ordinary Jains, especially the business community, adore the Hindu god Ganesha who is regarded as the patron of wealth and worldly success, but in general the images installed in Jain temples are those of the Tirthankaras, the saviours of humanity who dwell, liberated from human bondage, in the upper skies. They are perfected men who have achieved Moksha or eternal salvation. In Jain belief they are the only ones worthy of adoration.

The Jains believe in there having been a long line of Tirthankaras stretching back into prehistory. They were twenty-four in number. The first twenty-two are entirely mythical and belong to the so-called Solar Dynasty. Parsva, the twenty-third Tirthankara is semi-historical, but scholars have expressed strong doubt about his historicity. Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara, is however fully historical, a contemporary of the Buddha, with many similarities to him. He

too was the son of a prince; he renounced the world in circumstances analogous to those cited in the history of the Buddha; and the manner in which he achieved his spiritual goal is again similar. This has led some scholars to think that Mahavira and the Buddha might in fact be the same person, though neither view as to their true identities can be substantiated. The greatest point of similarity between the two consists in the fact that both religions are atheistic; neither postulates the existence of a single Supreme Being, the sovereign of all visible and invisible phenomena. The universe itself is regarded as eternal and indestructible, which has always been and will always be. It is however divided into two categories, animate and inanimate, Jiva and Ajiva. Both are equally indestructible. The Ajiva category consists of Pudgala or matter, Dharma or motion, Adharma or rest, Akasa or space and Kala or time.

The Jains assume that all living beings are at the same time matter and soul. What binds them together in a subtle nexus is the law of Karma. It is Karma which is responsible for the long chain of births that men go through, gradually working off the effects of sin, till they reach stage when soul and matter are liberated from the chain which ties them together. This stage is Moksha, but unlike the Hindu idea of Moksha the liberated soul is not absorbed into any greater soul. These liberated souls retain their individuality in an existence no longer subject to rebirth. The belief that liberated souls achieve a perennial life, freed from the bonds of death and rebirth, and still retain their identities, is an idea which differentiates Jain metaphysics from both Hindu and Buddhist metaphysical systems where absorption in a Brahma or a World Soul is postulated.

Jainism is pessimistic in outlook. Its whole philosophy is a metaphysic centred on man's struggle for liberation from a round



of births and rebirths which only strengthen our bondage. This view is partially shared by Hinduism and Buddhism, but whereas Hinduism and Buddhism prescribe laws as to how life can be lived well on the individual and the social plane, and how man can use his time on earth to create beauty, Jainism encourages him to do as little as possible to sustain what others call civilisation. Civilisation is an evil, to be eschewed as best man can. The Jaina doctrine of bondage is the most important aspect of Jainism; its metaphysics.

The Jaina rules of living make a distinction between laymen or Sravakas and Sadhus or monks. The community lays the greatest emphasis on Daya or sympathy towards all, human and animal beings. No killing is permitted for any reason. Even predatory animals should not be destroyed, flies crushed. The true Jain is expected to abstain from lying, duplicity in his conduct, sex, he may not see as many people as he likes; he must fast for long periods, sit in meditation for hours on end, absolutely motionless; he must not acquire property. He must also rid himself of his hair by force once a year. The rules are more strict for monks and nuns than for ordinary men and women. All that ordinary men and women are permitted is that they can, if necessary, engage in an occupation which does not involve any killing.

Individual Jains may be found in other parts of the world, but there are no Jain communities outside India. Nor is it possible ordinarily to differentiate between Hindus and Jains even on Indian soil. They are, unlike the Sikhs in this respect, content to be regarded for all practical purposes as Hindus politically and culturally. The Jains sometimes endow temples where Hindus worship. Jain temples follow the same architectural style as Hindu temples; the images installed are however those of the Tirthankaras, especially Mahavira.

Ahimsa, like the belief in rebirth and Karma, is common to Hinduism and Buddhism but it receives more emphasis in Jainism and Buddhism than in Hinduism.

The attitude of the Jains to Islam is not any different from that of the Hindus. Both regard the Muslims as the perpetrators of the greatest sin in their religions—that is, cow-slaughter, and when riots occur over this issue both communities react alike.

It is not to be supposed that Jains in general are really other-worldly. They abstain from meat and fish but they are not total vegetarians in that they do not object to milk which is an animal product. In dress too they are indistinguishable from the Hindu community. This is testimony to the capacity Hinduism has displayed down the ages to absorb imperceptibly any creed which subscribes to any of its major beliefs, even the faiths which as in the case of Jainism claim to antedate it. Socially it has absorbed even Christianity but not doctrinally. Jainism is thus best understood as one of the varied facts of the religious mosaic which characterises Indian society outside of Islam and Islamic subjects.

# THEOSOPHY

Whether to regard theosophy as a religious sect proper or as a philosophy is a debatable question. It has never been a cult with mass appeal. But for a short period towards the end of the 19th century it fascinated some educated sections in India and Europe, thanks largely to the personality of Madame Blavatsky, one of its founders. Mrs. Annie Besant who was involved in Indian politics was also a theosophist.

The careers of these two ladies help explain both the nature of the theosophical movement and also the reason why it won such success as it was able to achieve.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was a Russian emigre, daughter of Col. Peter Hahn, of a noble family of Mecklenburg settled in Russia. She married at 17 a husband of 60, but they soon separated. Blavatsky devoted the rest of her life to travel in Europe, America and Asia; she visited Tibet in disguise via Kashmir in 1855 and appears to have absorbed a great deal of ancient Tibetan lore, which was a mixture of Buddhism and Tantrism and other spiritualist cults prevailing in inaccessible parts of China and Mongolia. She became a naturalised American citizen and live for a long time in New York. Blavatsky was one of the chief founders of the Theosophical Society of India at Adyar in Madras in India in 1875. Her principal aide in

this venture was an Englishman, Col. Olcott. Blavatsky, who was born in 183, died in London in 1891.

The other lady, Annie Besant, was born in 1847. She was the daughter of William Page Wood, was educated privately in England, France and Germany, and married at 20 to Rev. Frank Besant whose name she bore throughout her career though the marriage did not last for more than five years. Annie Besant was involved in social work in England and upon her arrival in India became associated with the Indian struggle for freedom. She joined the Theosophical Society in 1880 and was a devoted pupil of Madame Blavatsky.

Both ladies wrote books in which they offered and exposition of their beliefs. Annie Besant was joint editor of the Theosophical Review.

Judging by the contents of their writings, Besant seems to have been more of a Hindu than Blavatsky who was more cosmopolitan in her choice of gods and deities. Blavatsky claimed to be in contact with spiritual forces rather like the enfranchised souls who are believed to lead a disembodied existence in the upper regions. She called them the Supreme Masters or greater Ones or Mahatmas who influence the course of history by guiding humanity towards the evolution of the perfect Man. Considering that the search for the Perfect Man has been a feature of both legend and history from time immemorial, evident as much in the Hindu legend about great Munis or sages who were in certain respects more powerful than gods, as in the dream of the German philosophers, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche or even in the Muslim idea of Insani-Kamil, it is not surprising that Blavatsky was able to win converts by appealing indirectly to that vein of idealism which is latent in all men. This has nothing to do with the progress of

science and technology. On the contrary, there are many who either somehow achieve a personal reconciliation between the demands of science and technology and faith in the occult, or bend purely scientific data to non-scientific uses to justify belief in demons and Mahatmas. Another source to which theosophy appeals for support is the unsolvable riddle of birth and death, the mystery of the relationship between mind and matter, soul and body. Madame Blavatsky went further in her claims than many. Instead of advancing only speculations she asserted that she had personally been in touch with some of these great spirits in Tibet in their mountain retreats. This is perhaps not very different from the claims of those who invoke spirits by means of planchets or mediums.

Quite possibly some of her ideas or ideas from similar sources were made use of by Rider Haggard in his novels, particularly *She* and *The Return of She* in which ancient Egypt and Tibet figure prominently. What Haggard presents as fantasies seems to appear in Blavatsky's writings as realities, great souls who have conquered death and assumed astral bodies which enable them to move freely across time and space.

Theosophy also accepts the theory of rebirth and thus can draw support from beliefs common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It believes like Buddhism and Hinduism that rebirth depends on Karma. The quality of every successive reincarnation is determined by a person's acts, thoughts, and desires in a previous birth. But theosophy takes the theory further by asseverating that a human being in his physical aspect is a combination of three kinds of body—a purely physical body, an invisible astral body and another invisible mental body. They interpenetrate. When a person dies, his death means only the casting aside of the physical body and

entrance into another. The soul is immortal, it has human form but is sexless; it exists surrounded by an aether of luminous matter. The physical body enables man to act, the mental body to think, and the astral body to feel. The soul's permanent habitation is the causal body.

As in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the round of births and rebirths can have an end only when all impurities have been washed away. The soul thereupon returns to its permanent habitation in the causal body in the sphere of eternal reality. It is this stage which the Hindus call Moksha but it is different from Nirvana which implies extinction in a world soul.

Theosophy is not heard of much these days, but in the last decades of the 19th century it was an influential force and to a certain extent it influenced the writings of Yeats, the Irish poet, who developed an original theory of spiritualism under the inspiration of Madame Blavatsky.

Theosophical societies existed at one time in the USA and Britain in the West while the real home of the creed was in Madras. It attracted quite a few educated people, some of whom have expounded its teachings in their writings. Among them the most prominent after Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant are A.P. Sinnet, C.W. Leadheater, George S. Arundale, Jinarajadasa, Bhagwan Das and W.Q. Judge.

One of the interesting facts about theosophy is that while its founders speak of a Wisdom Religion which is the ultimate source of Divine Truth upon which great religious teachers down the ages have drawn for inspiration, its list leaves out any reference either to the Prophet of Islam or any of the prophets mentioned in the Quran except Jesus. Those mentioned in theosophical writings include the Buddha,

Confucius, Zoroaster, Manu, the mythical Hindu law-giver, Pythagoras, the various Hindu avatars, Jesus, and even Sankaracharya, the Hindu theologian. Of course, it is said that thinkers other than those specifically listed have also at different times contributed to the understanding of Divine Truth. The theosophists claim that theirs is an ancient tradition going back to the earliest civilisation which embraces all genuine mystics, the Gnostics, the Neoplatonists, such men as Paracelsus, Bruno, Boehme, and even the English mystical poet Henry Vaughan. This claim is based on the meaning of the world theosophy, which signifies knowledge of God. It is thus a theistic creed. Its inclusion of the Buddha who avoided specific reference to God in his teachings is inspired by the theory that he believed in primordial reality's being spiritual.

Theosophy is best understood as a school of mysticism representing an amalgam of most theistic creeds except the purely monotheistic ones. Jesus owes admission to its order by virtue of the theory of incarnation which is central to Christianity as well as the doctrine of the Trinity. On both questions Islam's stand is uncompromising. It neither believes in incarnation nor does it countenance the doctrine of the Trinity. As a school of mysticism theosophy ranks as an offshoot of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism.

## **QADIANISM OR AN ISLAMIC HERESY**

All orthodox Muslims regard Qadianism or the Ahmadiyya movement as a heresy. Following Pakistan's decision in the 1970s to declare its adherents a non-Muslim group, most Muslim countries no longer recognise the right of the Qadianis to describe themselves as Muslims. They are forbidden to enter Saudi Arabia for the annual pilgrimage or Hajj. Few Muslims would knowingly intermarry with them, and in Pakistan where the heresy originated they are apt to be viewed with great suspicion.

The sect was launched by one Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889 in a town called Qadian when it was part of India. Ahmad (1835—1908) claimed that he was the recipient of divine revelation in the manner of Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless and exalt him) and that he had been sent into the world in the power and spirit of Jesus just as John the Baptist had been sent in the power and spirit of Christ. The so-called revelations were later compiled into an addendum to the Quran.

Gulam Ahmad of course insisted on calling himself a Muslim; his followers do so to this day. But in claiming to be a prophet himself, he repudiated what is considered one of the fundamentals of Islam, namely, that Muhammad (may Allah bless and exalt him) was the last of the divinely inspired



prophets, and that the Quran was the last of the divine Books. The principle of Risalat, founded on the belief that Muhammad was the last of the prophets, is as basic to Islam as Tauhid or faith in the unity of God. To reject either doctrine is to strike at the root of Islam. While there are people who would not interfere with the practice of Ahmadiyyanism as a separate cult, it is its claim to be not anything different from Islam which is challenged and has frequently led to violence. In the 1950s, soon after the establishment of Pakistan as a new state, anti-Ahmadiyya riots caused many casualties and necessitated the temporary imposition of martial law in Punjab.

The Ahmadiyya theory of prophecy turns on a subtle interpretation of a Quranic verse. The sect maintains that the verse leaves room for the appearance of prophets after Muhammad (may Allah bless and exalt him), a view which no orthodox Muslim will accept. They say that the channel of communication between Allah and man is always open for the transmission of new messages.

The Qadianis are divided into two principal sects; those who give Ghulam Ahmad the status of a full-fledged prophet, and those who believe that he was only a reformer or Mujaddid. Neither claim is countenanced by the mainstream of Islamic thought.

Not only did Ghulam Ahmad claim to have received revelations from Allah, he also advanced a new story about Jesus. He taught that Jesus did not die on the Cross, but was taken down unconscious from it and for the next 40 days continued to see his disciples in secret. When his wounds were healed he left Palestine to preach among the lost tribes of Israel, and eventually arrived in Kashmir.

Christ, the Ahmadiyyas further believe, lived to a great old age and passed away at 120. His tomb is also said to have been identified. No Muslim or Christian has accepted this story. Even those who believe in the reappearance of Jesus as the Messiah do not think that the Ahmadiyya version of the life and death of Jesus has any historical basis.

When Ghulam Ahmad died, a disciple was elected his Khalifa or successor in the same way as Abu Bakr succeeded the Prophet as his Khalifa. When the Khalifa died in 1941, the Ahmadiyyas found themselves divided into two groups. One group elected a Khalifa based at Lahore, while the other installed in the office a son of the first Khalifa at Qadian. The name of the Lahore Khalifa was Mirza Bashiruddin Mahamud Ahmad.

Doctrinally the Ahmadiyyas accept all the principal Islamic beliefs, do not reject the Quran; their forms of prayer are identical with those followed by the rest of the Muslim community. They insist on fasting as an obligatory duty and also believe in the Hajj. But quite naturally the affirmations of faith called Kalimas are differently worded and in their prayers Ghulam Ahmad is invariably invoked as intercessor.

The Ahmadiyyas subscribe to the importance of congregational prayer and hold a service on Fridays, again like the Muslims. Their mosques, as they call them, have the same architectural features as mosques proper, characterised by minarets and domes.

The Ahmadiyyas, especially the Lahore group, maintain missions abroad in Europe, America and Africa. Some have published translations of the Quran, some engage in exegesis. Nothing pleases them more than being considered good Muslims but having challenged and rejected one of Islam's

fundamental doctrines, they are not in the unanimous opinion of all Muslim theologians and scholars, entitled to claim the designation of Muslim.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad believed himself to be not only a prophet but also Jesus reincarnate. His knowledge of Arabic in which he wrote his revelations lent him in the eyes of his followers an extra claim on the loyalty of Muslims, but the orthodox counter this by saying that his use of Arabic is itself a rebuttal of his pretensions. There has been no prophet who used any language but his own to communicate his message.

The finality which Muhammad (may Allah bless and exalt him) claimed as prophet is so central to Islam that any departure from it would open the doors to religious anarchy. It would create the possibility of an endless succession of pretenders claiming the right to alter and distort the Quran and its message. It would also mean that the basic truths embodied in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet were not basic after all, that Islam could some day merge into something else. No wonder orthodox Muslims find Ahmadiyya beliefs unacceptable and intolerable.

The Ahmadiyyas are themselves conscious of a sense of guilt in advancing the claim that Ghulam Ahmad was a prophet. They try to conceal or disguise it as far as practicable in order that they might pass for good Muslims.

There has been a tendency in recent times to present Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as only a reformer, the promised Messiah to whose appearance many Muslims look forward. To this end innumerable miracles are attributed to him; the claim that the Mirza was a full-fledged prophet is either not mentioned or toned down. Stress is laid on his services in the advancement of Islam. Care is also taken to say that the revelations

communicated by the Mirza were due to Ilham, not Wahi. Wahi is the inspiration of prophets proper whereas Ilham is the inspiration of saints. But the retreat from Wahi to Ilham is interpreted by orthodox Muslims as a device whereby to lull the suspicions of the community and deceive the unwary, for no saint in Islam ever claimed the kind of status that Ghulam Ahmad claimed.

It is impossible to say with any certainty how large the Ahmadiyya community is. For in India, Bangladesh which in spite of its character as a predominantly Muslim society refuses to have the Ahmadiyyas recognised as a separate religious group, and non-Muslim countries in general, they get themselves registered as plain Muslims. The Ahmadiyya missions in Africa are known to have achieved considerable success. Ahmadiyya propaganda is usually directed at the educated whom it is easier to influence by subtle interpretations of Quranic verses concerning Risalat or the status of prophet Muhammad.

The present headquarters of the Ahmadiyya movement is in a place called Rabwa in Pakistan.

## BAHAISM

Bahatism, a cult born in the 19th century, has links to Qadianism in that it owes its origin to a new theory of prophetic inspiration. It rejects the belief that Muhammad (May God bless and exalt him) was the last of the inspired prophets, and maintains that the door of communication between man and God will always be open, with successive prophets receiving direct revelations from God. Like Qadianism again it began as a kind of reform movement within Shia Islam, its founder Mirza Ali Muhammad (1820–1850), a native of Shiraz in Iran, claiming to be the promised Imam who was to pave the way for the advent of one greater than himself. He assumed the name of Bab-ud-Din or Gate of the Faith and was initially hailed as a religious leader. The response to his preaching soon led him to announce drastic changes in Islam itself, to abrogate Islamic laws, and finally to substitute a new holy book for the Quran which he said was no longer suited to the needs and demands of the age. This produced an immediate reaction. He was denounced as a heretic and eventually shot in the public square of Tabriz on July 9, 1850. The 18 chosen disciples whom the Bab had sent out to preach his message and to proclaim the advent of the One whom God shall manifest were also executed.

The next stage in the history of the cult is marked by the appearance in 1863 of the one whose advent was predicted

by the Bab, and it was also this which led to a change in its nomenclature from Babism to Bahaism. Mirza Husain Ali (1817-1892), one of the disciples of the Bab who had been exiled to Baghdad, came forward to claim that he was the Imam who had been expected by his Master. He styled himself Baha-Ullah or Glory of God and from this time onwards Babism came to be known as Bahaism.

Bahauallah seems to have been an extremely energetic man and is reputed to be the author of several hundred books. The three basic ones which he wrote in Baghdad are: Hidden Words, Seven Valleys and The Book of Iqan. These constitute Bahai scripture and the rest are commentaries on Bahauallah's teachings. The entire corpus of Bahai scripture consists of the writings of the Bab, Bahauallah and Bahauallah's son, Sir Abdul Baha. But Bahai doctrine is actually the work of Bahauallah who after leaving Baghdad went first to Adrianople in Turkey and then to Acre in Palestine, then a Turkish principality. Here he along with his followers was confined to a penal colony for 24 years.

Bahauallah died in 1892 and was succeeded by his eldest son Abbas (1844-1921) who gave himself the title of Abdul Baha or The Servant of Baha.

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 resulted in the release of the Bahais from imprisonment. Thereupon Abdul Baha moved his headquarters to Haifa and set out on a three-year journey to Egypt, Europe and North America on an evangelical mission. He returned home on the eve of the First World War and during the war worked for the Allies. His reward was a kingship conferred on him in 1920. Upon his death he was buried on Mt Carmel. His last testament to his followers was The Divine Plan which was an exposition of his father's

teachings. Shoghi Effendi, his grandson, succeeded to the office of leader in 1921. Nominated by Sir Abdul Baha himself, he is styled the Guardian of the Bahai Cause.

While Qadianism persistently continues to claim that it is nothing but orthodox Islam, the Bahais no longer consider it necessary to preserve any link with Islam and have established themselves as a completely separate religion. They too are engaged in proselytising work, but they have not won even a fraction of the success that the Qadianis have achieved. There is a small Bahai community in Iran to this day, but they live apart from Muslims as a separate group subject to many restrictions. The administrative centre of Bahaism is in Haifa. Bahai missions are maintained in most European countries, and there is a Bahai temple on Lake Michigan near Chicago in the U.S.A. There is another temple in Russian Turkistan.

The Bahais are an influential group and have won recognition at the United Nations.

The main emphasis in Bahai teaching is on internationalism. The community looks forward to the establishment of one single world order based on Bahai principles, which will come about through the work of the Chosen Mouthpiece. Like the communists who believe in the inevitability of a communist order the Bahais also think that a unified world is inevitable. The Bahais believe in the unity of God, accept all prophets and maintain that all religions teach the same truth, and that their differences are superficial. They condemn all superstitions, subscribe to equal rights for men and women, insist on their teachings being in harmony with science. Among other things Bahaism rejects polygamy, discourages divorce, and bans asceticism and religious mendicancy. Like Islam, they do not

have a hereditary or individual priesthood, but unlike Islam they dispense with ritual altogether. One of the interesting Bahai goals is the development of an international language as a means of international understanding, and they support the cause of Esperanto.

Bahatism has won more success in the USA than elsewhere. Its appeal is directed to the urban classes rather than to the less educated classes who live in villages.

One of the reasons why Bahatism is tolerated and even encouraged in the West is that it inveighs against political rebellion and urges its followers to obey the government under which they might find themselves, a theory which is calculated to suit the interests of all governments in power.

While present day Bahatism lacks the mystical fervour of its founders it supplies an equivalent in the doctrine that Divine Revelation is a continuous process and that the Head of the Bahai church, the guardian, is in some sense a vehicle for it.

Bahatism is not a potent religious force anywhere today, but it is more in evidence in UN lobbies in New York than elsewhere, and on this account can influence decisions. Because of the persecution it suffered in Iran, a Muslim country, relations between Bahatism and Islam have always been strained, and like Qadianism it is not allowed to conduct its evangelism in any Muslim country. The exception is Bangladesh where soon after East Pakistan (Bangladesh now) broke away from Pakistan, a Bahai centre was opened at Dhaka the capital.

Bahatism is not as great a threat to Islam as Qadianism which pursues an aggressively active evangelical policy, but it is not to be discounted as a force tending to erode the



intellectual foundations of the Muslim faith. It illustrates the manner in which sects taking their rise in Islam can gradually diverge from its basic doctrines and evolve into independent religions. The vague resemblances between them are likely to obscure the fact that such sects cannot be regarded as legitimate schools of thought within Islam. That is how in many cases they present themselves to the Muslim world. Hence the risk of confusing them with Islam.

## INDIAN ANIMISM

Nearly every one of the known religions, major faiths and minor cults, are represented in India in one form or another. The total number of sects in Hinduism is impossible to compute with absolute accuracy. There are areas where Hinduism, with its mythology and its established doctrines, shades off into animistic beliefs not yet assimilated to the mainstream of Hindu thought. But Hinduism owed its growth and expansion to the fact that, unlike religions with set tenets, rigidly maintained, it has always shown the capacity to absorb and attract new elements; its hierarchy of mythical gods and goddesses expands continually with new deities added when any new group is assimilated. It is difficult on this account to draw a line between Hinduism and animism.

The main animistic groups consist of the numerous aboriginal tribes who live apart from the rest of the population and preserve a primitive way of life, some not even having learnt to wear any clothes. Or if they dress at all, it is only to cover the loins. These groups range from those who practise such cults as call for the ritual sacrifice of human beings to groups who participate in many Hindu festivals, bringing to them an extra touch of colour. They are an object of inexhaustible fascination to anthropologists.

Ethnically the aboriginals comprise a wide variety, from the Gonds in Madhya Pradesh in India to Hajongs and Murungs in

Bangladesh, from the Nagas and Mezos to even more primitive tribes which inhabit the Andamans, a small group of islands in the Bay of Bengal. Naturally they do not share a common pantheon. Since these group live close to nature the spirits they worship and seek to propitiate are associated with trees, plants, crops, streams, hills, and such other natural phenomena as they encounter.

The general animistic belief which in one form or another is found among all animistic groups is that every object in nature has an indwelling spirit which guides its soul and which, unless propitiated with appropriate rituals, might harm man, render him infertile, make his lands barren, cause his livestock to die, in a word ruin his life. No distinction is made in this respect between animate and inanimate objects. An enormous block of stone excites the same fear and veneration as a large animal. Certain hills and streams are believed to be possessed of special powers; similarly certain kinds of tree are regarded as the habitation of invisible deities. Offerings are regularly made to them.

While certain animistic beliefs are to be found in Hinduism also they are different in their impact on practical life. The animists properly so-called do not share the Hindu inhibitions regarding the consumption of meat. Nearly all are beef-eaters. Some of them eat carrion. Snakes are considered good sources of nourishment. Many wild animals which no civilised community hunts for food are also eaten. These include porcupines, iguanas, and crocodiles. Tribes in eastern India love dog flesh. It goes without saying that no animist groups consider swine flesh taboo. But particular communities may have their own sacred animals, which they would on no account harm or slaughter.

Apart from the fact that all animists believe all things to be endowed with souls and practise magic, it is difficult to deduce a common pattern from their religious rites and ceremonies such as would be applicable to all tribes and communities spread over the Indian subcontinent. These rites vary according to the degree of sophistication that each group possesses. Some subscribe to well-defined creation myths and have what might be called an eschatology. They are the nearest to Hinduism. But many do not have any theories about a definite afterworld in which the pious and the sinful are rewarded and punished. There is however a common belief in the survival of the soul after death, and it is also held that the spirits of the dead should be propitiated. There are two kinds of spirit; the spirits of ancestors and spirits such as ghosts and fairies which have existed from an unknown period and are part of the world of nature. While the animists have a sense of right and wrong, many do not understand the concept of sin. Wrong is what injures the group physically or mentally, instead of sin, they firmly adhere to the idea of taboos, which may be animals or inanimate objects, trees, stones, whatever may have been associated with a tribe's growth or history. The taboo animal is not killed; if the taboo is a tree it is avoided, never cut down, if the taboo is a metal, it must not be touched in a state of ceremonial impurity. The Agarias of Central India are iron-smelters and strongly believe in the efficacy of iron nails as an insurance against the evil eye. When a new house is built a nail is driven into the ground in front; nails are inserted into cots on which people sleep.

Most animists also believe in 'possession', Certain incantations or dance movements can cause a man or woman to be temporarily possessed by a spirit, when he or she behaves abnormally and is feared and avoided. A possessed

man (or woman) can perform miracles, cure illnesses, call down on individuals and communities the blessings or curses of the indwelling spirit. Such persons go into a trance, and whether as a result of auto-suggestion or heavy intoxication they actually lose control over their normal faculties and utter sounds, shrieks or moans suggestive of ecstasy.

Ritual dances are common. There is hardly a tribe or group which does not have its own traditions of dancing. Among some groups the dances are participated in by all members of the community, while among others, it is only the unmarried who enjoy the privilege of dancing.

Image worship is much less common among animists than among Hindus, but where a Hindu deity has a temple dedicated to it and enjoys great popularity animists would not mind paying homage to it on ceremonial occasions. This usually marks the beginning of the process whereby such groups gravitate towards popular Hinduism.

Animists do not normally observe caste distinctions, nothing like untouchability, but as they move gradually closer to Hinduism they are content to be classified as lower caste Hindus subject to the restrictions which they must not violate. This is an interesting anthropological process constantly at work.

Animists represent the oldest stock of Indian inhabitants but they are not ethnically of the same origins. Some, like the Gonds and Agariahs of Central India, are believed to be the descendants of the ancient Dravidians, some are of Mongoloid stock; some are Tibeto-Burman. They can be usually identified by their physiognomy. Such aboriginals as the Nagas and Mezos in eastern India are today largely Christian. Similarly the Garos and Santhals who live in West Bengal and Bangladesh,

and occupy parts of Bihar have converted to Christianity. The same is true of the Hajongs. But it is said that conversion has not gone far in changing the basic pattern of their lives. Those who receive education in missionary schools may change outwardly in certain respects, but as far as their beliefs concerning the power of animals and inanimate objects are concerned, these are retained underneath the superficial veneer of Christianity. A large number of tribes in south eastern Bangladesh are Buddhist in faith. Their Buddhism is also a compromise between animistic beliefs and Buddhism. There have been few conversions to Islam, but where a family or individual embraces Islam it always leads to a break with their pagan or animistic past. Kinship ties among these people being much stronger than among settled people, individual conversions to Islam which tend to cut a person off from his tribe are seldom noticed.

There is a particular class of animists who consider themselves to belong to a category apart. They are the Lallegis who perform the offices of sweepers and cleaners and handle night soil and other filth. They do not live in large groups apart on the outskirts of villages and towns or in forest areas. Instead they live in ghettos in almost every town, in an area which other communities avoid, they breed pigs, and eat whatever is available. They have no food taboos. They have their own priests who officiate at marriages, but no specific places of worship and resent being identified either with Hindus or with Muslims. Their ancestral occupation for ages past has been scavenging. They themselves are conscious of their low social status but do not attribute this to Karma. It is accepted as a fact of life which cannot be altered.

In census reports animists are classified as aboriginals. They represent a stage in the growth of societies dating back

to the earliest times. Animism is not a religion but a way of life. Naturally these primitive peoples have not formulated their beliefs into a philosophy. The nudity of Digambara Jains is a conscious rejection of civilisation; the nudity of many animistic tribes is a survival from the period of barbarism that most societies passed through in their progression from dim antiquity to modern times. What must be remembered is that no study of religion in the Indian subcontinent would be complete unless one took note of the existence of animism as a fact which lends variety to the religious scene. The Indian subcontinent is so large demographically that it is doubtful whether the animists will be assimilated into one or other of the major religions in the near future.

The best way of understanding the essence of Indian animism, and perhaps of any kind of animism, is to watch the religious rituals connected with the principal rites of passage in the life of animistic tribes, birth, puberty, marriage, and death. Each of these things is viewed with some awe, as a manifestation of those powers of Nature which man cannot control. They consequently call for the propitiation of deities and spirits, offerings of rice or other things which are designed to keep the forces of evil at bay either by prayer or by magic. Magic and religion, as Sir James Frazer points out in *The Golden Bough*, aim both at the control of nature but by different means; magic by incantations and other actions which are so effective that the forces of evil dare not contravene them. Religion, on the other hand, relies for its results on petitionary prayer. The bifurcation between them widens as societies develop, but according to Sir James, primitive man does not differentiate them, and that is the stage at which animists exist to this day. The Agaria who fears the malignity of gods also know that iron offers a protection which cannot fail. In the same

way Gonds, Santhals, Hajongs, Murungs have all evolved magical devices whereby to avert evil at the same time that they do their best to placate the spirits who dwell in trees, hills, rocks and other natural phenomena.

Belief in magic in parallel with faith in gods is particularly strong among lower caste Hindus. It is not surprising that when they enter the fold of Christianity or Islam they find it impossible to discard overnight centuries-old habits of thought. That presumably is one important reason why certain classes of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims, converts from lower caste Hindus or animists, tend to adhere to magic as a means of protecting themselves from evil, some consciously, some unconsciously, without any idea that magic and Tauhid cannot go together. Some ingenious people have invented a special species of magic supposedly based on the Quran itself. Certain, verses are read backwards, and the gibberish that results is believed to have greater potency than normal Quranic verses are thought to possess. Yet others have hit upon the theory that when certain Quranic words are repeated an odd number of times they acquire an extra power. Importance is also attached to such numerals as 70, 100 and 1000. Of these again 70 is most frequently used in Islamic magic. There is a whole elaborate system of magic of this kind whose origins must be sought in animistic practices. It is discussed in detail by Shaikh Abu Muwaiyyid in a 15th century work entitled Jawahirul Khamsa. We must, however, guard against the conclusion that all magical systems are wholly explainable by reference to primitive animism. For they sometimes undergo considerable development of which only civilised man is capable. But it is not wrong to bear in mind the origins from which all magic and all occult sciences as they are called have sprung.





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# RELIGION IN CHINA AND JAPAN

The Far East as a whole, an area which embraces China, Japan and Korea, has a cultural physiognomy so distinctive that it is impossible to understand the outlook of any of these countries in terms of the religious experience of either the Middle East of India or Europe. While the three countries must not be lumped together, it is China, territorially the largest unit of the three, which has exercised over the whole region an influence which has been pervasive and profound. Chinese culture has formed the bedrock on which the edifice of Japanese and Korean civilisations was based. Even where they seem to differ most markedly from China they remain indebted to it. The scripts they use to this day are derived from the ideographs China employs for its many languages, which on this account appear to outsiders to be one single language.

China is today the most populous country in the world with a population estimated to exceed one billion. The boundaries of present day China include areas which at one time or another have had a separate political existence. Nor is the country racially uniform, though because of the world's habit of referring to all races living on the other side of the great Himalayas as yellow races, this multiplicity is not always taken into account. The Mongolians, the Manchurians, the Hans, and there are many others who feature in the racial mosaic which is China. But they all bear the stamp of a unifying culture which is

recognisable as an entity different from the culture of India and the Middle East.

Cut off from the south-west by the Himalayan chain and from the east by the sea China has been less subject to foreign influence than other areas. Chinese culture remained for centuries a thing apart.

Buddhism, Christianity and Islam entered China at different dates. Each won large numbers of converts calculated in millions, but they did not produce on the surface of Chinese life those visible undulations which elsewhere help determine the religious identity of different groups. Whatever a Chinese's religious affiliations, he appeared little different in his social manners from neighbours who followed other religions. Chinese art and architecture, whatever the beliefs of those who created them, present no striking contrasts resembling those which mark off Hindu from Muslim architecture and painting in general. Their cuisine was the same for all classes; and so was their dress. Here again India is characterised by a pluralism which has no parallel even in Europe. One cannot speak of a common style of cookery in India nor of a common dress by which to identify the Indian per se. Nowhere in the world has culture been so divisive as in the subcontinent.

To understand this singular phenomenon, one has to reckon with two factors: on the one hand, the pervasive influence of the Indian caste system and the doctrine of untouchability which is its corollary and, on the other, the impact of Confucianism and Taoism on Chinese life irrespective of whether a Chinese follows Buddhism or Christianity or Islam.

No country or society in the world has been without class divisions, but they have all been on economic lines, the rich differentiated from the poor by social barriers. What makes the

Hindu caste system unique is the theory that such distinctions are based on the law of Karma, the status of each person being determined by the sum-total of his deeds in a previous birth, so that if a low caste individual were able to cross the hurdles of poverty he must remain content to stay at the bottom of the social scale because of birth. This created an effective obstacle to social mobility except to a limited degree within the caste system. An improvement in a man's economic position or intellectual achievements could not help him to transcend the social divide. China on the other hand had nothing of this kind. There was an aristocracy undoubtedly, a ruling class that governed for successive generations, but the absence of a rigid caste system made it possible to cross class barriers by dint of personal merit or the acquisition of wealth.

This China owes to the teachings of both Con-fucianism and Taoism. Whether to categorise them as religion in the conventional sense is an open question. Neither the one nor the other is concerned as religions are concerned with man's salvation in the after-life. They prescribe duties whose aim is to regulate social behaviour and to ensure social order. Heaven is taken for granted in both systems, but no attempt is made to define it clearly. What matters is how one conducts oneself on earth, how one contributes to the maintenance of an orderly society in which every one has his rights guaranteed.

Confucianism is the older of the two. Confucius was a contemporary of the Buddha, born in circa 551 B. C. His real Chinese name is K'ung Fu-tze, but it is by the Latinised form of it that he is known in the world outside China. According to some accounts his lineage was noble; according to other accounts he was the son of an ordinary soldier who died when he was only three. The family is said to have been thrown by this circumstance into dire poverty for some time. Confucius

was able however to receive a good education. He married at nineteen and lived until 501 B. C. on what he earned as a teacher in the state of his birth, Lu. In 501 B. C. he attracted the notice of Duke Ting who appointed him to the governorship of a small town called Chung-tu. His service won him renown as an efficient and honest official capable of enforcing the law impartially and controlling all subversive elements. Promotion followed; he was made a minister. In this post also he achieved great fame as a just man, adored by all alike. But there were also enemies who procured his fall from grace by offering the Duke of Lu bribes in the form of 80 dancing girls and 120 fine horses. Confucius was dismissed. He spent the next twelve years as a wandering scholar with a small band of friends. Offers of employment came sometimes, but he would not accept anything which would not assure him a free hand in the discharge of his duties, but no one would agree to his terms. In 483 B. C. when he was seventy he was invited back to Lu by a new Duke. Confucius was now too old to accept any new post and devoted his time to the revision of the ancient Chinese classics. He died in 479 B. C. and was given a public funeral. His tomb is a place of national pilgrimage.

The dates about Confucius's birth and death are conjectural. Some scholars also contest the accuracy of the facts about his career and question whether he at all held any important positions. But these disputes about the truth or otherwise of achievements attributed to Confucius do not affect his importance in the ethical and moral history of the Chinese people. For over two thousand years it has been the Confucian code which has regulated life in China, especially among the classes who dominated society, the bureaucracy, the rulers and any one who wished to rise to a higher rank. He has been responsible for whatever happened. If he

contributed to the country's progress in certain respect he was also condemned for the inertia which in later centuries led people to turn their faces away from new ideas. It is significant that after the Communist revolution in 1949 deliberate efforts were made to wean the Chinese from what they called the enervating influences of Confucian teachings.

Confucianism such as it is based on the five King or the five classics. They are Shu King which deals with history; Shi King, a collection of ancient poems; Yi King, a book of mystical diagrams used in divination. Li King, which deals with rites and ceremonies; and Ch'un Chu'iu, a chronicle of events in Lu, confucius claimed to have written the last book; the others he edited and revised.

The Confucian canon includes in addition to the five King Four Shu. The first Shu, which is called Lun Shu, consists of the Analects of Confucius, a series of aphoristic sayings attributed to him. The other Shu are Ta Hsias; Chung Yung; and the works of Mencius, Confucius' successor, Chung Young, believed to be the work of a grandson of Confucius, Tzu Szu, elaborates the doctrine of the Mean and underscores the need for Harmony and Equilibrium.

To the Five King and Four Shu the Chinese owe their ideas of social order, their notions of morality, and all those concepts and theories which for several thousand years have constituted the foundation of Chinese life, supplying the equivalent of a supernaturally inspired scripture. They were studied by the educated classes, the rulers, the bureaucrats; it is in their light that conduct was judged, policies framed, relations with the outside world determined.

The philosophy these books outline or elaborate is in its essence a philosophy concerned with life on this earth. It is

said that Confucius took heaven for granted without defining what it meant. He sacrificed to the ancestors but he refused to talk about spirits. He held that the cultured gentleman should follow the Middle Way and aim at moderation in all things. His ideal was the Superior Man who lives in harmony with nature and honours heaven. Although he refrained from defining his idea of heaven, it is clear that he did not believe visible phenomena to be the whole truth about existence. There is something beyond the visible which must not be ignored. But there is no reference to a Supreme Deity who must be adored and prayed to.

Ancestor worship, a custom Confucius conformed to and thereby helped to legitimise, is today regarded as an integral part of the Master's teachings. Ancestor worship is an aspect of respect towards the elderly which Chinese ethics emphasises. It takes two forms: the ritual burning of incense before altars in temples and the offering of food and drink beside their graves. Confucius is said to have discouraged the custom of offering worship to all ancestors of the Chinese people; each family was asked to limit its adoration to its own forbears. To forget one's ancestors was, according to him, the worst form of ingratitude.

Confucius himself became gradually an object of worship as a national idol. The custom of offering sacrifices to him is said to have begun with the Hans in the second century B. C. Elaborate rites were evolved in course of time. A Confucian temple contains tablets dedicated not only to Confucius but also to his four associates, Yen Hui, Mencius, Tseng Ts'an, and Tzu Szu. In addition, such a temple houses the tablets of the 12 Sages, the ancestors of Confucius, 70 worthies and 60 Confucian scholars. Dedicatory offerings are made twice a year in spring and autumn and include grain, incense, wine, and the

ceremonies are rounded off with the sacrifice of a sheep, an ox and a pig, to the accompaniment of solemn music and dancing.

Although Confucius did not reject the idea of heaven, it is not to be equated with the concept of god as we understand it. Confucian thought is neither theistic nor mystical. Its chief strength lies in its emphasis on man's perfectibility. Confucius believed that every man has in him the four principles of benevolence, justice, propriety, and wisdom, and he has only to obey the law within himself to be perfect. This is the opposite of the Christian doctrine of original sin, but it is not the same thing as the Islamic theory that every child is born in a state of innocence. While Islam believes that man is potentially capable of achieving the highest good, it postulates that he can do so only by submitting himself to the discipline and faith received from Revelation. For this there is no place in Confucian teachings.

Confucianism may be said to bear a resemblance to Islam in one respect. Islam lays down that salvation is to be won not by renunciation, not by withdrawal from society, but by the active pursuit of one's social duties as defined in the code known as the Shariah. The Shariah is however meaningless without faith, for virtue as a concept is according to Islam unsustainable without the basis that faith in God provides.

The influence of Confucianism in Chinese life is attributable partly to the fact that the Chinese are by temperament not given to mysticism. They ascribe to ethics, practical ethics as reflected in social conduct, much greater importance than other communities do. Filial piety, a concept Confucius both inherited from the past and elaborated by his own teachings, occupies a greater place in the Chinese scale of values than it does elsewhere.



Although, according to the best authorities, Confucius never regarded himself as the founder of a religion, he himself was elevated by his followers in later centuries to the rank of a god or prophet to be adored and worshipped with the same veneration as is paid to God or a Prophet.

Next to Confucianism, the most important ethical code is that of Taoism. The word Tao means something like 'way', and the teachings which have been given the generic name of Taoism are popularly ascribed to a man called Lao Tsu whose historicity has been questioned. He is said to have been born in the 6th century B. C. and is regarded as the author of Tao Te Ching, the classic from which the principles of Taosim are derived.

It Confucianism is concerned mainly with man's duties in the present world, so is Taoism in a different way. It too eschews any attempt to define or postulate a heaven or an after-life, but it is more renunciatory in its approach to life. It does not prescribe any rules as to how to live in harmony with the world. The greatest virtue is humility. Man must avoid getting entangled in things; leave politics alone, be contented, and not be anxious to run after innovations. Effort and striving are deprecated as wasteful of energy. The power of Tao is like water; it flows incessantly, pervades everything and wears down even the hardest rocks. The less government and education people have the better, for education, if carried beyond a certain stage, breeds discontent which is undesirable. The ideal person is he who stays at home and refrains from efforts to improve his surroundings; he submits to things as they are as gracefully as possible.

The five important precepts are: not to kill; not to drink alcohol; not to tell lies; not to commit adultery and not to steal. Parallel to them are the ten Virtues: filial piety; loyalty to

teachers and rulers; kindness to all creatures; patience and reproof of all wrong-doing; self-sacrifice in the cause of the poor; manumission of slaves; free planting; digging wells and making roads; promoting welfare and teaching the ignorant; studying the scriptures and making offerings to the gods. Who the gods are is however left undefined.

The Taoist canon consists, apart from Tao Te Ching, of two other books: Tai-shang Kan-ying Pien by Li Ch'ang-ling and an anonymous work Yin-chih Wen.

While theoretical Taoism is mostly silent about spiritual matters, popular Taoism which has exercised a powerful influence on Chinese masses concerns itself with such things as black magic, divination and alchemy. It was Chang Tao-ling, a man who belonged to the second century AD, who elaborated the rules which constitute the foundation of Taoist practices. He founded monasteries and nunneries, built temples, and established the Taoist church. He prescribed also the worship of a large number of gods and was responsible for Taoism's recognition by the state. His descendants continued until very recent times to fill the position of Taoist Pope.

Chang Tao-ling was followed by three other teachers who helped in the evolution or formulation of Taoist doctrines. They were Wei Po-yang and Ko Hung who belonged to the third and fourth centuries and K'ou Ch'ien-chih of the fifth century. The first two borrowed heavily from Confucianism and also expounded the theory that there are two cosmic forces, the Yin and the Yang, negative and positive, which govern everything in the universe including the human body.

To K'ou Ch'ien-chih are attributed the numerous doctrines which together form a kind of theology, including names of deities to be worshipped, and which bring Taoism structurally

closer to other theocentric religions. But there are important differences. There is, for instance, nothing like monotheism requiring belief in one supreme God. The Taoist pantheon is an elaborate system comparable in its plurality to Hinduism. A good Taoist must pay homage to many divinities, those who control the seasonal changes and spirits of the emperors. Among these the most important is a trinity consisting of the deified Lao Tzu, the Jade Emperor, the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and the Primordial Heaven-honoured one. One of the divinities is empress of heaven. All are powerful forces which need to be propitiated for the individual's well-being.

Taoism became gradually so powerful that in 666 Lao Tzu was officially ranked above Confucius and the Buddha. His disciples also received posthumous titles of honour. But it is said to have lost this privileged position later.

Until the Communist revolution of 1949 Taoist temples dotted the Chinese landscape. Taoist priests were particularly popular among country folk who consulted them for auspicious dates and hours for the performance of many duties. The priests who were believed to be well-versed in the working of Yang and Yin could advise on where to build houses, how to win success in love and business, where to bury the dead so that the corpses could be protected from the depredations of evil spirits, and what charms to wear as a protection against illness. Such priests belonged to two classes; Taoshins or regular priests who lived in monasteries and village priests who lived the same life as ordinary peasants but attended temples for religious duties.

Although historically they were rivals, there were areas where Taoism and Confucianism overlapped, because of the influence they exerted on each other. The comparative absence of bigotry in China made it possible for the same

people to be adherents of both creeds at the same time. Taoism was more quietistic, while Confucianism provided more explicit guidance on how to conduct public life. The Confucian classics formed the basis of the public examinations which regulated entry into the bureaucracy.

In spite of the fact that both Taoism and Confucianism developed in course of time features bearing a strong resemblance to pagan religions elsewhere, it is their influence as ethical systems which has counted most in Chinese history.

For a fuller understanding of religious life in China it also needs to be borne in mind that Buddhism, Islam and Christianity had numerous adherents in pre-revolutionary China. The Muslim community numbered several millions; one of the earliest mosques in the history of Islam was founded in Peking. China also adapted Buddhism to its own traditions. evolving in Tibet a curious mixture of Buddhism, Hinduism of the Tantric variety and elements of spirit worship derived from Shamanism which was popular among the Mongols. Modern China includes Sinkiang which was predominantly Muslim, and Tibet until its incorporation into the People's Republic in the fifties enjoyed an autonomous status. Neither of these areas was directly influenced by Confucianism or Taoism. Buddhism had followers throughout the land. It was Mahayana Buddhism which appealed to the Chinese. Like Confucianism it exerted a profound influence on the development of literature and art. From China Buddhism spread to Japan, giving rise to a mystical school called Zen. But Mahayana Buddhism as practised on Chinese soil was tinged with Confucian thought.

The cultural history of China and Japan has been so interlocked down the ages that one is led inevitably step by step into a consideration of Japanese religious beliefs in tracing the movement of Confucian and Buddhist ideas in China.

Cultural intercourse between the two countries has been continuous, and many scholars think that Japan owes to China even its system of writing. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that it was from the mainland that Buddhism and Confucianism travelled to the Japanese islands. Zen as a separate Buddhist sect is characteristically Japanese but it is said to have developed out of ideas carried to Japan from China by Eisai, a Japanese scholar.

Zen in recent times has gained a following in the West and is difficult to define or describe. It is said to be a system which teaches the initiate to transcend the intellect and arrive at an understanding of things by means which are neither rational nor non-rational. Pure knowledge is what is achieved, a knowledge which clears all mist away and gives the practitioner a sense of serenity and certainty. This enlightenment is called Satori in Japanese. Zen exposes all systems as vain and fallacious; it does not prescribe meditation, nor does it discourage it. It uses laughter as a device whereby the initiate rises above the categories which ordinary mortals employ to classify reality. Nirvana, the enlightenment which is beyond the world of the senses and Samsara, the phenomenal world, are both said to be one. The initiate discovers that things are equally real and unreal, equally important, equally part of himself.

Satori is achieved in a flash of illumination. It may be won suddenly and may elude the seeker after years of effort. It has two branches: Rinzai and Soto. Rinzai recommends two devices which facilitate the achievement of Satori. One is the Mondo, a form of rapid question-answer between Master and pupil calculated to accelerate the process of thought so that it transcends the intellect, and the other is the Koan, a compressed form of Mondo. An illustration is the story of the pupil who cries after having vainly waited seven days in the

snow before gaining admission to the Master's room: 'Pacify my mind'. 'Show me your mind', says the Master. 'I cannot produce it' replies the pupil. 'So then I have pacified your mind' was the Master's comment.

Zen satisfies for many people the mind's search for enfranchisement from the numerous bonds by which man seems imprisoned. It is said to enable the initiate to arrive at that condition of consciousness wherein, as Christmas Humphreys puts it, the pendulum of the Opposites has come to rest, where both sides of the coin are equally valued and equally seen. It is likened to the reaction of the aesthete to the presence of beauty, a reaction which is immediate and spontaneous.

The exponents of Zen use an idiom which would sound familiar to those who know the writings of mystics who have down the ages spoken of sensations beyond words, ecstasies which are inexpressible in language, a state of consciousness which lifts man to a level where all limitations of time and space are transcended. This is as true of Muslim mystics as of Hindu and Christian. What is peculiar to Zen as an offshoot of Buddhism is that it is atheistic, whereas in Islam, Hinduism and Christianity the basis of mysticism is the effort to achieve a consciousness of the Divine.

Zen however is by no means the only Buddhist cult which flourished in Japan. Two others which are of equal importance in the religious history of the country are Shingon founded by Kobo Daishi (774-835) and the one named after Nichiren (1222-82). Nichiren was opposed to both Zen and Shingon. Shingon is regarded by many as a Buddhist heresy, for while claiming to be a development of both Zen and Shingon. Shingon is regarded by many as a Buddhist heresy, for while claiming to be a development of Buddhist thought it proceeds to supplant

the Buddha himself by one of his adherents, Amida. It is to Amida that Shingonites direct their prayer. Amida is said to have postponed his own Buddhahood from a feeling of deep compassion for lesser men whom he promised the Buddha-land of Sukhavati, a paradise not unlike the conventional paradise which features in other religions. Here Amida presides to await the coming of all men. Nichiren held that the real focus of a Buddhist's devotion must be the Buddha himself, not Amida.

Zen apart the other branches of Mahayana Buddhism virtually turn the religion into a theistic faith, with the Buddha or Amida substituted for God, a regular heaven and hell and numerous minor deities. They all speak of Nirvana as their ideal, but the concept of Nirvana varies greatly from cult to cult. Belief in Karma and rebirth is however common to all.

Buddhism has influenced and been influenced by the ancient Japanese cult of Shintoism to which the imperial family adheres. It is also looked upon sometimes as a rival, an outsider to be viewed with suspicion. But Shinto and Buddhism coexist along with such other faiths as Christianity and Islam.

Shinto means the way of the gods and is believed to have been imported from China like almost everything else in Japan. It postulates no God but the number of divinities it encourages its followers to worship is uncountable. The Shinto pantheon includes all past emperors, all ancestors, trees, mountains, wells, villages, cities, streams, houses and gates. There are no scriptures. The most important thing in Shinto is ancestor worship. Only born Japanese may join the Shinto church. From this point of view it seems to bear a resemblance to Hinduism in being an exclusively nationalistic faith.

There are two types of Shinto: State Shinto and Sect Shinto. State Shinto is adoration of the emperor as a divine being. He is believed to be a direct descendant of the sun-goddess Amaterasu-Omikami who in the divine source of the Japanese people. She was the daughter of the primaeval divinities Izanagi and Isanami who in this sense correspond to the Greek deities, Uranus and Gaea, the parents of the Titans. The sun-goddess is believed to have been the great-great-great-grandmother of Jimmu, the first emperor of Japan. Her principal shrine is the Grand Imperial Shrine at Ise to which all emperors must report when they succeed to the imperial office. Before the de-establishment of the Shinto church after the Second World War, the number of shrines dedicated to the sun-goddess was estimated to be 110,500 and the number of priests to be 15,800; they were maintained by the state. These shrines attracted thousands on festival days. Worship required hand-clapping, silent prayer and gifts. The divinities were prayed to for success in life, good harvests, profits in business enterprises, domestic peace and so on.

Although the emperor is no longer regarded officially as divine, there are sections in Japanese society who still believe him to be so. The imperial family has not ceased to pay homage to Shinto shrines and reporting to the ancestral spirits is still a part of the many rituals which it follows.

Sect Shinto is different from State Shinto in that it is the religion of the people as people and not as state subjects. It has numerous branches and before the Second World War had 18 million adherents. They were served by 121 priests working in 16,000 churches. While it was mandatory for every Japanese to subscribe to State Shinto, membership of Sect Shinto was voluntary. New branches are likely to grow according as new interpretations are sought to be placed on



ancient rituals. Thus Shishino Nakaba who died in 1884 and was a Shinto priest founded what has become known as Fuso Kyo in which Mt Fuji features as a divinity. Similarly Mrs Nakayamas (1798-1887) who after an ordinary marriage had a vision of herself as the embodiment of the god Tenri founded a sect in the name of that god. The writings of these two form the scriptures of the sects they founded.

Tenri Kyo is often compared to Christian Science in that it maintains that the root of all sickness and suffering is in the mind. A person who succeeds in ridding himself of the mind's ailments, such as anger, covetousness, jealousy, may live free from illness to a great age.

As in China Christianity and Islam are represented in Japan. But both societies differ from the south Asian subcontinent and the Middle East in attaching more importance to nationalistic values or ethics than to religion as it is understood elsewhere. Modern Japan, one of the most industrialised countries with an outward life-style little different from the life-style of the West, finds it still possible to cherish Shintoism with its elaborate pantheon of gods of various kinds. Even Zen does not regard the other cults as false or unnecessary. It is owing to this that religious riots which are still a feature of public life in India and Pakistan are unknown in China as well as Japan; rarely does one hear of religious or theological disputes. Their approach to these issues has always been different regardless of their political fortunes.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# SOME IMPORTANT ANCIENT PAGAN CULTS

History is littered with vestiges of many ancient faiths and cults which have disappeared more or less completely. Some survive, if they can be said to survive at all, only in name; some as memories, and some have been found by anthropologists to form a stage in the evolution of Judaism and Christianity. Traces of both are of course noticeable in Islam which avowedly is a prophetic religion, the last in a succession which goes back according to the Quranic theory of prophethood to the very first man on earth. The Quran also upholds the view that truth being indivisible, the similarities seen between one ancient religion and another only point to the fact that they represented the same search for reality and sprang from the same realisation, sometimes rather dim, that behind the diversity of phenomena there existed a unity of being which alone was worthy of worship and adoration. Islam thus claims to be a timeless legacy from time immemorial. In Quranic terms the monotheism that Prophet Muhammad preached is the same truth to which Solomon, Moses and Jesus bore testimony, and many others before them. But like the followers of Moses who in his absence turned to idol worship and fashioned a golden calf for adoration, man has not always been able to resist the lure of error; many societies failed to penetrate to the unity behind the world's diversity and multiplicity.

Islam rejects the purely anthropological view that monotheism has been achieved as a result of a slow and long evolution. Support for this opinion can be found in the fact that even the most polytheistic creeds presuppose the existence behind all the pluralistic gods and goddesses of a god to whom the others, the lesser ones, must pay court. Their conceptions of this Deity differed. Some postulate a Being who does not seem very different from God as modern man conceives Him; some are less clear; but in various degrees their pantheons, even when very confusing, appear to be founded on the premise that at the top the hierarchy there was a god mightier than all the rest. Parama Brahma in Hinduism and Zeus in Hellenic polytheism possess attributes some of which can without much difficulty be likened to those of God. It would be a mistake however to equate them with God, but it can be said without much risk that those who conceived of these divinities represented either a corrupt form of monotheism or a stage where they had begun to approach it.

Considering that few of the ancient faiths had well-defined boundaries which distinguished them from neighbouring cults and that many rituals were common to more than a few, it is safer to discuss them with reference to the chief deities who were worshipped.

Certain ideas and beliefs seem to have prevailed over wide areas in the Near East and ancient Egypt. There is the idea that although the body decays and perishes, the soul is immortal and survives death into an after-life where it has to appear before the judgement of a god. Its deeds on earth are weighed in scales and it is either rewarded with eternal heavenly bliss or consigned to the flames of hell. Interest in immortality and resurrection was widespread in ancient Egypt and is responsible for the practice of mummifying the body after death and furnishing tombs with food and all such materials as the occupant might need on being resurrected. The more

eminent the person the more elaborate the funeral. The kings—that is, the Pharaohs were buried in the huge pyramids along with slaves, so that on reawakening they might find nothing missing. No people, ancient or modern, has organised funerals on such a scale or taken such care to have the body preserved. Thousands of mummies have been recovered from the sands, for king and commoner all believed in immortality and resurrection.

The Egyptian cult of the dead is based on the theory that man is a combination of several things: Khat or body, Ka or self, sekhem or vital power, Ab or material heart, Khaibit or shadow and Ba or soul proper. When a man dies he is translated to the Elysian fields or Aahlu if he has to his credit good deeds or cast into the lower world which is called Amenti. The god who presides over the scales in which his earthly deeds are weighed is Anubis.

Anubis has the head of a jackal and is one among a large community of gods with animal heads. Some of the most prominent are Hathor who wears a cow-head; Horus is falcon-headed; Munt hawk-headed; Mekhet vulture-headed; Sekhet lioness-headed; Set pig-headed; Khnum ram-headed; Thoth ibis-headed; Sebek crocodile-headed; and Bast calf-headed.

Horus was the son of Osiris and his sister-wife Isis and together they constituted the most important of celestial triads. The other important triads are Ptah, Sekhet and their son Impotep; and Amen-ra, Mut and their son Khans. Osiris had a position in the Egyptian pantheon not unlike that of Zeus among the Greeks. He was the greatest and most powerful of the gods, king of eternity. He ruled the other world. It was he who gave men hope of resurrection, of a life beyond the grave. The general belief was that after being judged in the scales provided by Anubis, the souls of the good ones spent three thousand years in the kingdom of Osiris and were then

permitted to return to earth, re-enter the old body and live again. Hence arose the need for preserving the physical remains of the dead as carefully as possible; they were to be used again.

The wicked, on the other hand, had to go into a long cycle of transmigrations and were reborn as animals in each round till their sins were fully expiated. They could thereupon return to earth like the good men. But those whose sins were of a nature which could not be expiated were completely annihilated after being subjected to tortures.

The story of Osiris is highly complicated. He is believed to have been originally a king who ruled in the Nile Valley. He was slain by a wicked twin-brother Set who, like Hamlet's uncle Claudius, plotted to marry his wife Isis. But Isis was wholly unlike Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, in that she refused to accept Set, and recovered the dead king's body with the help of her son, Horus and by means of her magic arts had him established as the lord of the underworld. Set was challenged and slain by Horus.

Another important solar deity was Ra. He ferried souls across an underworld stream in the land of darkness. The journey was repeated each night as the sun set, and finally Ra reappeared into the light of another day with his strength renewed by the sacred beetle or Scarab, Osiris and Ra vied for the allegiance of the ancient Egyptians. Both were worshipped in their animal incarnations. The Apis bulls kept at Memphis were sacred to Osiris, while Ra had his bulls at Heliopolis. These bulls were looked upon as oracles and often consulted. If a bull licked the garments of a visitor that was a sign of good fortune.

Whereas among the Hindus of India only a few animals are regarded as sacred, namely, the cow, the monkey and the snake (not all however has), the number of sacred animals among the Egyptians was very large. Thus cats, crocodiles,

jackals, mice, antelopes, frogs, gnats, hyppopotami, hawks, apes and ibises were all sacred in one way or another. (Some localities considered the lion also sacred.) They were believed to embody the spirit of one or other god who could best be propitiated by worshipping the animal sacred to him. Queen Cleopatra is known to have venerated the cat.

The monotony of Egyptian polytheism was interrupted once by an attempt made by Akhnaton, one of the Pharaohs, to introduce a kind of monotheism based on the worship of the sun alone. The cult is known as Atonism, or worship of the sun's disk called Aton in the Egyptian language. Temples were built to Aton and the worship of other gods was forbidden. Some believe that this Pharaoh was a monotheist in the real sense. But whatever the truth the religion did not survive him. So strong was the reaction against it that as soon as the king died, the name of Aton and the Pharaoh were erased from all monuments. The revolt against Aton is said to have been led by the priests of Ra.

During the four or five thousand years that the ancient Egyptian civilisation lasted, the people of Egypt continued to worship the same deities, with slight variations here and there. The general beliefs characteristic of them can be said to be first a conviction that there is an after-life from which souls can return to the body left behind, that the dead have to render an account of their doings on earth and to submit to judgement by the gods, that rebirth is a privilege limited to the virtuous, that the gods assume incarnations as animals and that consequently they, the animals, need to be treated with veneration. There was no conception of a supreme deity greater than all the rest, but some like Osiris and Ra were more powerful than others.

In the course of intercourse between ancient Greece and ancient Egypt one Egyptian deity at least, namely, Isis, consort

Osiris and mother of Horus, was adopted by the Greeks and identified with their Demeter, the goddess of fertility. The Romans too began to worship her when Greece fell to Rome. She became the universal mother, supreme of goddesses. Sir James Frazer thinks that Isis is a prototype of the cult of the Madonna among the Christians.

The ancient Egyptians do not appear to have possessed any divinely revealed scripture. The nearest equivalent to scripture is their Book of the Dead, a prayer-book consisting of hymns and ekorcisms which the dead were to recite in course of their journey through the underworld. Copies were either buried with the corpse in the tomb or inscribed on its walls for use. The Book of the Dead contains the famous Negative Confession which gives a list of the sins which the dead must declare not to have committed when they appear before Osiris for judgement. The major sins are ill-treating servants and slaves, causing pain and hurt to people, adultery, cheating priests of their dues and use of false weights. The soul must affirm boldly that it is pure.

The idea of accountability for deeds on earth seems to be common to all religions including Islam. The Quran mentions judgement but there is nothing in it comparable to the colourful details which feature so largely in Egyptian beliefs., Nor, needless to say, do the Muslims believe in a journey through the underworld as a prelude to the soul's eventual return to the body. On the other hand, one cannot but be struck by the resemblance Egyptian beliefs bear in this respect to the idea of Karma in Hindu and Buddhist faiths. The Egyptian idea of a sojourn of three thousand years before the soul could hope to return to earth is without parallel in Hinduism and Buddhism. The soul of a Dalai Lama, for instance, is believed to enter the body of a child born at the exact moment of his death.

Although there was nothing like a Brahmanical caste in Egypt—that is, a caste with inherited privileges, the priestly class exercised in Egyptian society a special position unlike anything known in Islam. They alone could officiate at religious ceremonies and tend the gods.

Whether the Egyptians did at all produce a philosophical literature like the Hindus, we do not know. Although their hieroglyphics can now be deciphered, their books, written on papyri, have perished. It is also idle to speculate on the basis of our present knowledge about the influence they may have exerted on religious movements in the Middle East. Considering that political and commercial relations between Egyptians and Phoenicians and Canaanites existed at various periods, it is impossible to say that they did not know of such an important Phoenician deity as Astarte. Known variously as Ashtoreth, Ashtaroth and Ishtar, she was a goddess of fertility and reproduction, a companion to Baal, another god who represented the power of generation. This cult was associated with obscene sexual rites; it encouraged religious prostitution, an institution also favoured among certain classes of Hindus. The prostitutes attached to the temples of Astarte performed functions similar to those which are expected of Devadasis in south Indian Hindu temples. Astarte is sometimes likened to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, but the sexual orgies which her devotees practised have greater affinities with those favoured by the Vamacharis in Hinduism. But while the Vamacharis among the Hindus represent a minority cult, Astarte had a wide following in the Middle East. Indeed she was the most universally worshipped of Semitic divinities and attracted a degree of devotion shocking in its excesses. The worshippers would sometimes, under the influence of strong liquor or the stimulus of powerful religious chants, sacrifice their



genitalia to the goddess and fall back bleeding on the floor in a gesture of complete surrender. Ishtar or Astarte was the mother of mankind who ranked above all other goddesses.

Under her aspect as the goddess of fertility Ishtar is associated with Tammuz, the vegetation god whose death and renewal were annually celebrated. He disappeared in late summer and reappeared in early spring, symbolising the changes of season. Sir James Frazer is of the view that the Tammuz cult led to the grisly practice of annually slaying the chief priest of his temple before the election of a successor, to facilitate the revival of nature in the spring. He was the true son of the mother goddess, probably the first of a long line of suffering gods found in most pagan cults, who die annually or once in order to redeem their worshippers from sin and error. The flesh of the slain priest was sometimes eaten ritually in order that his virtues and potency might be assimilated by the faithful.

Tammuz was a deity common to the ancient Phoenicians and Sumerians and Akkadians. Some of the other important gods in the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon were Anu, the sky-god who was considered the king of the gods; Enlil, his son who ruled the winds and bestowed prosperity upon mankind, though he could be capricious too; Enki-Ea, the water-god, who granted civilisation to man; Nergal, the god of the nether world who caused pestilence and death; and Nanna Sin, the moon god. Nanna-Sin had his counterpart in Shamash, the sun-god who was the god of justice and source of all laws, the guide who protected the earth-born from evil.

The other nature deities include Adad, the rain-god, Ninurta, the god of irrigation and canals and Gibil, the fire-god. The fire-

god was the patron of magicians who invoked him in their struggle against evil spirits and rival sorcerers.

In addition to nature gods and fertility gods, there existed some gods who can be called national gods. Marduk was the chief god in the Babylonian pantheon and Ashur in the Assyrian.

Many of these gods were feared rather than loved; for they were believed to be hostile towards mankind. Men tried to propitiate them with worship and offerings to avert the evil which might otherwise be visited on them. The haughty aloofness which characterised the gods in Mesopotamia generated an attitude of great humility and submissiveness in the worshippers who consequently created for themselves another genre of deity, personal protectors who could be prayed to for intercession in moments of crisis. Every house had a personal deity to whom offerings were made regularly.

Sumero-Akkadian society believed widely in the existence of evil spirits who constituted a world apart from the world of the gods. They needed to be controlled by means of magic. The evil spirits caused disease and plague and misfortunes of various kinds. When a person fell ill, a priest was called in. He would fashion a likeness of the demon in clay or other material and systematically destroyed it to the accompaniment of chants, in the belief that what was done to the image would by sympathetic action affect the intended enemy. By a comparable method the evil spirit who took possession of the body of a sick person could be persuaded to leave him and enter the image; the sufferer would then be cured.

Magic and religion are inseparable in ancient religion, especially in Babylonian cults. Even the gods depended for their safety on talismans, and the story goes that when once

Zu, the birth god, stole the Tablets of Destiny from Enlil, all the deities wasted away until they were restored. When Ishtar descended into the neither world in search of her son Tammuz she wore amulets as a protection against evil spirits who dwell in the under-world.

The Babylonians and Sumerians did not believe in immortality, like the Egyptians. There was no practice of mummifying bodies to save them for the eventual return of the soul to revivify them. The graves were however supplied with food and drink because it was thought that the dead continued to have a shadowy existence for some time. Their final destination was a vast and dark underground cave where the goddess Ereshkigal and her consort Nergal reigned. The disbelief in immortality stemmed from the idea that when the gods created the world they retained everlasting life as a privilege for themselves and decreed death for man. This is not unlike the belief that the Greeks had, that physical immortality was a dangerous gift for man to seek. Eos, the Greek dawn goddess, had conferred it on her lover Tithonus, but as he gradually lost his youth and strength life became a torture and he passionately prayed her to take back her gift.

The Mesopotamians, as the Babylonians and Sumerians might be called collectively, accepted that death was the natural end of human life, and that no god could reverse this fate.

Ancient Babylonian temples, known in history as ziggurats, were lofty structures rising to a great height in stages, with an altar at the top. They towered above all other buildings and dominated the skyline. It was customary to offer sacrifices of sheep, oxen, lambs, fish, fruit, and flowers to the gods; prayer consisted in the utterance of incantations and psalms in which the worshippers sought the protection of the deities and asked

forgiveness of their sins. Many of these incantations and psalms are found recorded on clay tablets in cuneiform writing. These were looked after by the priestly class who exercised a tremendous influence in Babylonian life by virtue of the fact that they alone were educated and had access to sacred literature.

The Creation Epics which have come down from both Sumerians and Akkadians provide the best clue that the present world has to their religious beliefs. Many of the gods figure prominently in these poems which are perhaps the oldest of their kind, predating Homer's works and also the Indian epics. The most famous among them is Gilgamesh, a strangely modern poem in its treatment of man's search for the meaning of the riddle of life.

It is Akkadian in origin and its heroes are Gilgamesh, king of Uruk in southern Babylonia, and his rival and later friend, Enkidu who was created by the gods to engage Gilgamesh in combat and humble him because of his arrogance. They however became good friends when they realised that they were a perfect match for each other. Enkidu spent the first years of his life among animals, feeding with the gazelle, and had to experience love before he could claim to be fully human. His encounter and friendship with Gilgamesh followed. But he was destroyed by the gods who had created him when he together with his friend slew a divine bull. It is after Enkidu's death that Gilgamesh's quest begins. The event filled him with terror and he sought an elixir which would confer immortality on him. He goes to his ancestor Utanapishtum who has miraculously escaped death but who tells Gilgamesh that immortality was not for man. Yielding at last to his entreaties Utanapishtum reveals to him the existence of a plant at the bottom of the sea from which, if one ate it, immortality could be

obtained. But a snake swallows it when Gilgamesh left it unguarded on a poolside, and thus his search is frustrated.

Among other things Gilgamesh learns from Utanapishtum the story of the Flood, a deluge like the one described in the Bible and the Quran.

Both Gilgamesh, who is half-man and half-god, and Enkidu, a prototype of modern man's conception of his primitive ancestor, are highly interesting creations illuminating the gradual evolution of man's ethical and religious ideas. The epic mirrors a world in which man had not yet fully understood his destiny and was groping his way towards a clearer realisation of both his powers and limitations.

Another creation epic, Sumerian this time, is the story of Enki and Ninhursag, the first named the water-god and the other the goddess of vegetation whose union leads to the birth of the goddess Ninmu. Enki unites successively with his daughter and grand-daughter and great-grand-daughter and their offspring form a whole pantheon. The scene of the story is an island called Dilmun, a kind of Garden of Eden where there is no sickness, no old age and no hatred, and where all beasts live in harmony and peace with each other.

Nothing approaching a monotheistic faith can be traced in any Babylonian myth. What we encounter is a pluralistic religion peopled by many deities, nature gods, vegetation gods, and gods representing other forces, and man turns to each for protection, succour and guidance. A Muslim is apt to be reminded of Abraham's adoration of the sun and the moon and other natural phenomena before, as the Quran explains, he arrived at the truth about Allah to whom he submitted.

For a fuller appreciation of the religious experience of what is called the Middle East one must also take account of several

other gods who figured in local mythology such as Baal, who has been mentioned, Adonis, and Attis. Thile Baal's influence did not extend beyond this region, both Adonis and Attis cast their influence farther and became integrated with Greek and Roman mythology. Baal is said to be a name given to a whole series of gods, many towns having their own Baals. As the consort of Ishtar or Astarte he represented the forces of regeneration in nature manifested in the cyclic renewal of the seasons. Baal is the patron of human fecundity and was represented by upright stones which had a phallic meaning. the rites connected with his worship were marked by extreme licentiousness and Baal came to symbolise in Jewisth eyes in later ages sin and evil but his popularitiy among the phoenicians was unquestioned.

Adonis, regarded more often as a Greek god, is actually, according to Sir James Frazer, none other than Tammuz, and the name Adonis comes from the Semitic word Adon meaning Lord which the Greeks mistook for a name instead of what it is, an adjective. Once taken up by the Greeks Adonis became in Greek legend the lover of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty. He is said to have been slain by Ares, the god of war among the Greeks, in the likeness of a boar. In Asian legend Adonis or Tammuz is of course the spouse or lover of Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, and he was particularly venerated in such countries as Syria and Cyprus.

Attis, a god of the ancient Phygians, was the son of Nana, the river-god's virgin daughter who conceived him by putting a ripe almond in her bosom. He was slain by a boar—like Adonis, or according to another version of the legend he castrated himself and bled to death under a pine tree. The worship of Attis spread to Rome and the pine tree acquired a sacred character in Roman eyes. The emperor Claudius formally

introduced the worship of this tree into the state religion. The priests of Attis had to submit to emasculation like the god they venerated, and initiates were baptized with bull's blood. This was the origin of what is known as the Taurobolium.

It is difficult to contemplate the history of these pagan religions without being irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that they reflected the awe and fear which the vast reproductive forces in nature inspired, processes which involved death and decay as well as renewal, processes whose meaning man could not fully comprehend and which he connected with his own life, his own ability to survive, his reproductive process, which he thought could best be strengthened by propitiating those elemental forces outside of himself. Sacrifice is a common feature in all of them, and in the earliest stages human sacrifice was considered the most effective method of winning the favour of the gods. This practice continued even after animals began to be substituted for human victims. Fruits, flowers and cereals were also offered to the deities, for it was impossible for ancient man to think that the gods could be entirely different from human beings; they had their material needs which had to be kept in mind by the adherents. Few of these ancient societies had arrived at the conception of a universal god, though the importance attached to the mother goddess, Ishtar or someone else, seemed to point to the dim realisation that what appeared to be a diversity could conceal a unity.

It is also interesting to note that while the propitiation of the gods was considered necessary for the well-being of man, there was also a belief that they were really indifferent to humans and cared little what happened to them. The deliberate malignity of deities is as pronounced a belief as the idea that they were beneficent beings. The general notion appears to be that even when the gods were inclined to be kind to humanity

they needed to be coaxed by offers of sacrifice and prayer into granting favours. Ancient man's conception of sin is not so much the violation of moral principles, though they certainly counted, as the defiance of those laws which he believed to have been prescribed by the gods. The killing of animals supposed to be sacred was thus a grave offence punished by dire calamities visited on both the individual sinner and the community to which he belonged.

All ancient civilisations have of course their moral codes, a classification of what is permissible and virtuous and what is not. But the most outstanding contribution of the Sumero-Akkadian civilisation was the enactment of public laws. Four Mesopotamian codes have been discovered. In addition to the famous code attributed to King Hammurabi (circa 1690 B. C.), there are the Eshnunna Code (19th century B. C.), the Lipi-Ishtar Code (1860 B. C.) and the Middle Assyrian Laws (1460–1225 B. C.). They all emphasise the principle of justice and lay down that punishment should always be proportionate to the crime. This is how Hammurabi, king of Babylonia between 2100 and 1800 B. C., explains the basis of his Code.

“By the order of Shamash (the sun god), the great judge of heaven and earth, may my justice prevail in the land... Let any oppressed man who has a cause come into the presence of my statue as the king of justice, and then read my inscribed stele, and give heed to my precious words, and may my stele make the case clear to him; and may he understand his cause; and may he set his mind at ease.”

These codes, particularly the Code of Hammurabi, mark a departure from belief in the arbitrary behaviour of the gods, a fact testifying to man's gradual advance from his primitive fear of the supernatural to belief in universal principles of morality.



But both kinds of belief existed simultaneously, so that it might be a mistake to assume that the Assyrians and Babylonians had already left their confusion about the source of morality behind by the time the codes were formulated. What is worthy of note is that, unlike Hindu India, Western Asia did not propagate any doctrine like the doctrine of Maya which blurs the distinction between good and evil on the theory that these are man-made categorisations without any basis in the light of eternity. Nor do the prophetic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The ancient codes in this sense have affinities with the Ten Commandments of Judaism, the law given by Christ and the Shariah in Islam.

The civilisation which flourished in the Fertile Crescent, that is, the Tigris-Euphrates valley was a civilisation created by a number of peoples, Sumers, Akkadians, and a number of other races who at various periods invaded and occupied either the whole valley or parts of it. The Sumers and Akkadians were the founders of the civilisation we call Mesopotamian, the oldest in the world, older in fact than the Egyptian civilisation. To the west of this are lay Phoenicia, a region identifiable with modern Palestine. The Mesopotamians were the first to invent writing, the cuneiform system as it is called, which was carried a stage further by the Phoenicians who were responsible for alphabetic writing. This was a tremendous step in the evolution of civilisation whose far-reaching effects can hardly be exaggerated. The second great achievement of the Mesopotamians was in astronomy. It is to them that we owe the system of dividing the days of the year into seven-day weeks. Their monumental sculpture is also impressive; their statues are huge and gigantic in size. Babylonia, their most famous city, enjoyed in ancient times the reputation of being a city given to the pursuit of luxury and pleasure, a reputation

which testifies to the high level of their culture. The hanging gardens of Babylon have become in legend a symbol of the hedonistic ideals they cared for. But most of all they are remembered for their codification of the laws of social conduct. The codes bear witness to their ethical concerns, their anxiety to reduce the anarchy of individual behavior to regular patterns which would eliminate capricious barbarity and enable man to organise life around universally accepted principles. Their literature was also of a high order. Not even the Egyptians have bequeathed to posterity, as far as our present knowledge goes, anything like the creation epics which this area gave rise to. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a moving work both as an art and as an epitome of the ethical and moral beliefs of this ancient people.

When all this is considered it seems surprising that in religion they did not or do not appear to have advanced beyond a crude paganism to the conception of a Supreme Deity overshadowing all the lesser gods. Although Ishtar was worshipped as Universal Mother, she is not a supreme deity in the sense in which the term can be easily defined. The Mesopotamians did not produce an Akhtaton like the Egyptians conscious of the need for monothesis, even if we allow for the fact that Akhanation's monotheism was a creed centred on the sun-god.

Notwithstanding all these factors, a Muslim approaching the study of Mesopotamian civilisation cannot help being conscious that the ethical approach to life which characterised the Mesopotamians, an approach which emphasises the idea that life on earth stands in need of a code which does not dismiss evil as illusion, is a foreshadowing of Muslim ethical concepts. The Mesopotamians seem much closer in spirit to us than the ancient Hindus.

### II

Immediately before the emergence of Christianity, the entire region from Iran to Lebanon appears to have been swept by Mithraism, a cult which originated in Persia. It spread among Roman soldiers and was carried by them as far west as Britain. Mithra was a sun god in Persia and scholars identify him with the Indian Mitra who too was a sun god. While we may conclude that the Persian Mithra and the Indian Mitra are probably the same deity, he acquired in the Near East characteristics not attributed to any known Indian god. On the other hand, the Persian legend bears a remarkable similarity to the story of Christ's birth and death, especially birth, which tradition has sanctified. Mithra was born in a cave or a rock and shepherds were the first to recognise him as a god. Christ is believed to have been born in a shed for animals, and it is shepherds who offered worship to him first. In paintings he is usually shown being held by his mother near a trough with the shepherds kneeling before the holy baby. Mithra, like Christ, appears as a saviour who performs miracles. His greatest service to distressed humanity is the slaying of a bull, by whose blood the earth is fertilised. Mithra finally ascends to heaven where he dwells among the immortals ready to bless and help those who believe in him. The similarity between Christianity and Mithraism must not however be carried too far. Christians, it is needless to say, do not think of Christ as one among the immortals. Nor is there anything in Christianity like the slaying of a sacred bull.

The eschatology of Mithraism however bears a resemblance to the eschatology of Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike. Mithraists believed that there is a life after death of either eternal bliss or eternal pain. They also believed in a

Doomsday when the dead will rise from the graves at Mithra's call and will either go to heaven or to hell according to their deserts. The fact that December 25 is traditionally celebrated as Christ's birthday, though scholars agree that this is not the actual date of Christ's nativity, is another proof of similarity between Christianity and Mithraism, for Mithra has the same date of birth. The early Christians seem to have taken it over to counter the influence of Mithraism.

One of the chief attractions of Mithraism was the elaborate nature of the initiation prescribed for those who wished to enter its fold. There were seven stages through which the person seeking entry had to pass. Each had a symbolical name; Corax (raven); Cryphilus (occult), Miles (soldier), Perses (Persian), Heliodromus (the sun's courier) and Pater (father). There was a baptismal rite which required the forehead to be marked, honey to be placed on the hands and tongue, and the entire body to be washed in the blood of the bull or lamb sacrificed on the occasion. Some of the conjecture about the influence of Mithraism on Christianity is based on the similarity between Mithraic and Christian baptism.

All this is different from anything in Islam, which has no baptismal rites. Although animals are sacrificed at the end of the Hajj or Idul-Azha there is no question of regarding the animal sacrificed as sacred or of washing the body in its blood. The role of Mithra as the leader of the forces of light against the forces of darkness suggests that it was a prototype or a different version of what became Zoroastrianism with its emphasis on the conflict between light and darkness as symbols of good and evil respectively. Evil is personified in Christianity and Islam as Satan and from this point of view the dualism which characterises certain aspects of our belief may seem to echo a basic Mithraic doctrine. But it is instructive to remember that

neither Christianity nor Islam regards Satan a God's equal in power, as evil is in Zoroastrianism and Mithraism.

At the close of the 4th century, by which time Rome had embraced Christianity. Mithraism along with other pagan cults was suppressed and its adherents were forced to convert to Christianity. It may have lingered for some time in a clandestine fashion, but it did not survive for long. The caverns associated with Mithraic worship were sealed up. Like Osiris and Ra, Mithra is now a forgotten deity, and the period when it looked like establishing itself as the official faith of Rome in succession to the old paganism forms a curious chapter in Roman history.

### III

The old paganism of Rome has bequeathed to the world one of the most interesting mythologies which has coloured European literature greatly, and continues to do so even now along with its counterpart, the Greek mythology. The Roman pantheon includes many gods whose functions correspond exactly to those of Greek deities, and it is not possible to say with accuracy how far the religion of the Romans was borrowed from the Greeks. That there are strong similarities and correspondences between them far surpassing anything comparable noticeable elsewhere is a fact one must not lose sight of in any study.

There was in Rome as in Greece a dichotomy between religion and philosophy. The Roman philosophers, like the Greek (incidentally Rome did not give rise to any original philosophy but was content largely to borrow ideas from the Greeks) were conscious of there being a unifying principle in the Universe, a supreme being or power, but their pantheons did not postulate any such deity. At the head of the hierarchy of

gods in Rome stood Jupiter, designated as Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Jupiter the Best and Greatest. He was the father of the gods, a sky god, the god of thunder and lightning who ruled the heavens. But he is no supreme being. His consort was Juno, the queen of Heaven, the genius of women. She presided over every department of woman's life; she was the guardian of marriage and the saviour of women in all their perils.

Minerva was next in importance to Jupiter and Juno. She was the goddess of war and also the patroness of art, the source of wisdom and valour. She corresponded to Pallas Athene in Greek mythology, and along with Jupiter and Juno formed a triad, the most powerful in the pantheon.

Not every in Roman mythology is a god or goddess and consequently a distinction must be made between pantheon and mythology. The pantheon is only a part of the mythological edifice, concerned with those deities whom the Romans worshipped.

What is worth bearing in mind is that the ancient Romans believed in there being numerous forces ruling the world who needed to be propitiated. They did not proceed or bother, as we might say, to elaborate a religious metaphysic and were content to take things for granted. We do not hear of a Roman theory of heaven and hell, of judgement after death and so on. The gods, most of them taken over from the ancient Etruscans who inhabited Italy before the Romans appeared, or from the Greeks by whom in all aspects of their life the Romans were heavily influenced, demanded piety of which the best sign was the punctilious observance of rituals. These fell into two categories; rituals concerning household deities of which individuals took care and rituals which were publicly observed. Each Roman household had its own tutelary diety whom it

propitiated by means of offerings. The public observances, on the other hand, were the responsibility of the state and were considered a function of government. The state enforced compliance with these religious duties, irrespective of individual beliefs, and alien cults were tolerated provided they did not interfere with official religion. There was no priestly class as such, but after the establishment of the empire the emperor assumed the role of chief priest, and in course of time it came to be accepted as an official doctrine that the emperor was himself a god. Worship was paid to him. This is unlike anything noticed in Near Eastern or Egyptian or Indian religion, and underlines the thesis that the Romans regarded religion as more a practical code of conduct than as an expression of a belief in supernatural deities or forces.

The Roman pantheon included many gods and goddesses in addition to those mentioned. There was Mars, the god of war, whose functions were similar to those of Ares in Greek mythology; Neptune presided over the seas; Apollo was the god of healing who was also in control of oracles and prophecies. Ceres looked after agriculture; her daughter Proserpine was married to Pluto who ruled the underworld. Proserpine spent six months of the year with her mother on earth and her return signalled the onset of spring after a dark winter. Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto were the sons of Saturn whom they had overthrown, but Saturn continued to be honoured in the festival called Saturnalia celebrated from December 17 to December 19. Saturnalia were a time of wild merry-making when all restraints were cast to the winds, and the populace indulged in sex orgies.

Janus, usually represented in sculpture with two faces, was another important god propitiated at the beginning of all

new enterprises with a role analogous to that of Ganesh in Hindu religion.

Vesta was the health-goddess who exercised an importance which in certain respects exceeded that of many others. Her shrine stood in the Roman Forum with a perpetual flame tended by six virgins. They had the designation of Vestal Virgins. They were chosen from the best families on the basis of their character and physical perfection and were required to take a vow of inviolable chastity. If any Vestal broke it she was burned alive. Such was their prestige that a criminal who accidentally encountered a Vestal on his way to execution merited a pardon.

The College of Augurs, paid for by the state, was an important religious institution. Manned by priests recruited from the upper class it had the duty and responsibility of determining auspicious moments for enterprises. This was done by watching the movements of birds and also by examining the entrails of sacrificial beasts. The state consulted them regularly and private individuals also availed themselves of their services on important occasions. Augurs were salaried functionaries and had to wear a mantle with a violet border and carried a crook to mark out the space on which the auspices were to be taken.

The Sibyls were another religious phenomenon among the Romans. They were prophetesses who claimed to utter prophecies inspired by Apollo. The Cumaean Sibyl was the most famous and her oracles were much prized.

Roman society in its beginnings was cosmopolitan and tolerant, receptive to many cults, which could be freely practised by her citizens provided they offered a token allegiance to the native deities. Even after the introduction of



Christianity and before it was accorded the status of state religion, numerous pagan cults continued to be cultivated by sections of its citizenry. Pagan Rome persecuted the Christians when they refused to respect her gods, and Christian Rome in her turn banned all other faiths. But it must be admitted that on the whole the atmosphere in Republican Rome was more tolerant within certain limits. Her educated classes tended to be skeptical under the influence of Greek philosophers, but regardless of their private beliefs they did not question the utility of official observances of pagan festivals and rites.

In very few other civilisations has the chief city which was their centre played the part Rome played in the growth of what is called Roman civilisation. Roman citizenship conferred privileges from which non-Romans were excluded, and loyalty to Rome was almost a religious obligation and its absence punishable with death. When Rome became a great empire outsiders fought for the rare privilege of being admitted to the honour of being Roman citizens. Piety in the eyes of a Roman implied upholding the virtues of courage, fearlessness in the face of danger, honour and patriotism. These values continued to be regarded highly irrespective of whatever gods the Romans worshipped and they were considered eternal verities not affected by one's mode of worship.

The gods, especially Jupiter, were honoured with impressive temples, some of which survive to this day, but we do not hear of the values the Romans cared for being attributed to any single deity.

Republican as well as imperial Rome presented a rather puzzling spectacle of high sophistication in the manner in which the city organised its administration and codified its laws along with a taste for barbaric sports and moral laxity. The gladiatorial

bouts in which the contestants were encouraged to slay each other, the fascination with which spectators watched girls being compelled to sport in pools in the Coliseum to be devoured by crocodiles to the applause of crowds, the system of forcing criminals to face pet lions in the same arena— all this betrays a strain of cruelty in the Roman character which seems out of keeping with Rome's undoubted achievements in many fields. As Rome grew richer and her citizens grew more wealthy, the upper classes, or patricians, threw all restraint to the winds. The imperial household itself became notorious for unbelievable orgies, even the usually inviolable laws of incest were cast aside, perversions openly practised, and conjugal loyalties more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The doctrine that an emperor could regard himself as a god freed them from all obligation to pay court to morality. Nero, whose name has become a byword for barbarities, married his mother and later murdered her. That he could do so without a convulsion among the citizens is a reflection as much of the weakness of the political system in imperial Rome as of the disastrous decline of morality among the Romans. Few exceeded him in their excesses but a large number of her rulers have gone down in history as monsters of cruelty, displaying in their conduct an indifference to ethics and morals which darkens Rome's record as the centre and creator of one of the greatest ancient civilizations. The expression 'the splendour that was Rome' conceals much that was far from splendid.

There were exceptions, of course. Augustus, the first emperor, is remembered as an ideal ruler. Marcus Aurelius who ascended the throne in the second century was a philosopher whose Meditations are justly famous. He was not a Christian but he exemplified Christian virtues better than many Christian successors.

Rome did not possess any scriptures, no sacred book and consequently no code comparable to the Shariah of the Muslims. To later ages Virgil's epic, the *Aeneid*, in which all the ancient Roman virtues are celebrated came to acquire the prestige of a holy book in some senses. It was even consulted for oracles which could be distilled from the verse. The virtue which the hero Aeneas placed above all was piety, a term which embraced honour, patriotism, loyalty to one's family, and of course duty. To this love was subordinated. Aeneas did not hesitate to sacrifice his attachment to Dido, the Carthaginian queen, on the altar of duty when he felt that it had begun to interfere with his mission which was to found a new home for the Trojans defeated by the Greeks. Aeneas was a mythical figure, but this symbolised all that was best in the Roman character.

Rome's paganism is now a memory except in European literature where to this day her myths, like those of Greece, are widely used. Her pantheon has totally lost its religious value, but Rome continues to be an inseparable part of Europe's cultural legacy. Her literature, her architecture, her legal code, the roads and aqueducts Rome built, her sculpture, her open-air theatres, her town planning inspire Europe as models. Rome's military organisation is another aspect of Rome's legacy much admired in modern Europe.

By the time Islam appeared on the scene the Roman empire had become effete and its successor the Byzantine empire fell eventually to the Muslim Turks in 1453, a landmark in the history of both Europe and Islam. The Muslims were thrown into contact with Rome also in north Africa which had been colonised by the Romans. But it was the culture and philosophy of Greece which attracted them more than the civilisation of Rome.

#### IV

Ancient Greece of Hellas as its people called it is regraded by all scholars as the single most influential source of modern European civilisation. Its philosophers, dramatists, poets and scientists have for centuries dominated the European mind, and early Muslim thinkers studied Aristotle and Plato and other Greek writers and were influenced by them. They were simultaneously fascinated and repulsed by it. The paganism of Greece puzzled the Muslims; that a people so endowed as the Greeks could worship a plurality of gods and at the same time produce a philosophy which appeared to be monotheistic admitted of no easy explanation. It was not possible to condemn men like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle as polytheists; yet none of them rejected polytheism in clear terms. Socrates on his death-bed reminded his disciples to offer a sacrifice to Aesculapius on his behalf without the slightest hesitation, but one gathers from the Dialogues Plato wrote to record his conversations that he was too clear-headed a thinker to believe in the reality of any god or goddess. Aristotle goes perhaps furthest in his commitment as we might call it to a monotheistic philosophy but there is no open denunciation of paganism as such. His proof in support of there being a First Cause is still quoted in works on philosophy, but the question whether Aristotle worshipped the pagan gods as a mark of his conformity is not susceptible of a simple answer in the absence of clear historical evidence to this effect.

No ancient people displayed the same subtlety in their understanding of the multiple aspects of life as the Greeks and Modern civilisation owes more to them than to any other race or

people. They influenced the Romans, the Persians, the Indians, and the peoples of the Middle East and even Egypt in the later stages of its history, and thanks to Alexander's conquests Hellenism spread all over the civilised world outside of China and Japan and south-east Asia. It was they who laid the foundations of modern science and medicine, and the Muslims, when the Islamic civilisation in all its diverse forms began to take shape, did not shrink from borrowing from them. The system of medicine developed by the Muslims is still called Unani medicine, the word Unan being Ionia in its Arabic form, and Ionia had been colonised and settled by the Greeks.

If it is not possible to understand the origins of modern Western civilisation without reference to Greece, it is also difficult to understand certain aspects of Islamic civilisation without them. The Arabs who were the first Muslims to be thrown into contact with the Greeks were conscious of deep differences between the basis of Islam and its approach to life and the Greek way of life, and as far as the basic beliefs of Muslims are concerned, the doctrines of oneness of God and Prophethood, they owe nothing to the Greeks. But the term civilisation embraces all aspects of life, art, architecture, poetry, philosophy, engineering, medicine, science and so on. Therefore, to recognise our debt to Greece is not to belittle the achievements of the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Mughals and other peoples who built the edifice of Islamic civilisation, but only to acknowledge the facts of history.

An understanding of the Greek approach to life calls for attention to two things, as in the case of the Indian Hindus, the religion of the common man in Greece which was plainly polytheistic and the religious ideas of the Greek philosophers who were the first in the world's history as far as we know to probe the ultimate origins of things, the nature of ultimate reality,

and who attempted an analysis of such problems as the basic constituents of matter and the significance of change and renewal in the universe.

There is no term like popular Hinduism to signify the popular paganism of Greece. Hellenism means something wider and is not a religious term at all. Again, although ancient Greek history, unlike the history of the Indian Hindus, is a matter of only a few centuries it points to profound changes in the Greek conception of the role of gods and is characterised by a continuous effort to define their functions. Aeschylus, the first of the great Greek dramatists, is reverential towards Zeus and Pallas Athena; Euripides, the dramatist who came after, is frankly skeptical and does not hesitate to make fun of them.

Yet another point worth bearing in mind about the Greeks is that Greece or Hellas is a geographical expression rather than the designation of a united country with a united state. Ancient Greece as we know it was a collection of city states who fought against one another. The centre of Greek civilisation was Athens, the most advanced of the Greek cities, unrivalled for its achievements in politics, philosophy, literature and the sciences. The Greeks were however conscious of their racial unity and a common identity which was spiritual. Not only did they worship the same pantheon, but they spoke the same language and shared a common contempt for outsiders whom they called barbarians. The Olympic Games held at intervals of four years from the earliest times were an occasion when Greeks of all shades of political opinion met and took part in athletic contests.

The Greek pantheon of gods has at its head Zeus, the mightiest of the deities, who was feared by all others because of his immense strength. He was the son of Cronos whom he

overthrew. The dominions which Cronos used to rule were then divided among his sons. Zeus took possession of the upper realms, Poseidon ruled the seas, and Hades reigned over the dark underworld. The Greeks believed Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece, perpetually wreathed in snow and mist, to be the home of the gods.

The gods were frankly polygamous, and their consorts were equally famous for their habit of having numerous lovers. Indeed the modern man who tries to understand the role of Greek gods and goddesses cannot help being struck by the similarity between gods and human beings. Only the former were more powerful, had no fear of death, and could with impunity do what they pleased. Nor were they subject to pain or suffering. The Greeks conceived them in their own likeness but freed from the limitations of earthly existence. The gods were not only personifications of natural forces but also idealizations of human desires and ambitions. The Greeks loved imagining them doing what they could not do on account of the numerous restrictions which were necessarily an essential feature of life, restrictions imposed by biology and geography alike. They knew that without morality no form of organised civilised existence is possible, but the gods were not subject to any moral laws. They could be watched with fascination but not imitated. This does not however mean that the gods did not enforce any morality. They were custodians of justice, integrity, and fairness; they rewarded honesty, chastity, and hospitality, and above all they expected man to avoid hubris, a concept which embraced such vices as overweening conceit, arrogance and egotism. Any attempt by man to compare himself to the gods was punished. Niobe, a figure in Greek mythology, lost all her children because she had the audacity to think that they were as beautiful as Apollo and his sister.

Not only did the gods take a direct interest in human affairs; they sometimes patronised particular persons and fought with each other over them. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, for instance, favoured Paris who abducted Helen and triggered the Trojan war which is the theme of Homer's epics, and her rival, Hera, the consort of Zeus, was on the side of the jilted husband, Menelaus, and the enmity between the two was responsible for much suffering on either side.

Zeus himself occasionally intervened in the war, and it was his decree that Troy should be destroyed. Ares, the war god, Pallas Athena and many others were involved in the Greek-Trojan conflict.

The Greeks peopled every mountain, sea, cave, river and promontory with spirits. There were lesser deities who dwelt in them but who all the same needed to be propitiated. Whatever appeared mysterious and could not be easily explained was associated with a god or goddess.

Where the Greeks differed from other ancient peoples is in dismissing the idea of there being a heaven and a hell. All the dead went to the same dominion underground ruled by Pluto or Hades: good men and bad men alike, condemned to a perpetual existence as shades. There was no Judgement.

One of the most powerful religious ideas was the concept of Nemesis, analogous to the Hindu idea of Karma, which no one could escape. If a wrong was committed it had to be paid for in suffering sooner or later, and the sins of forefathers were apt to be visited upon their progeny. Agamemnon, who was treacherously slain by his wife, was the victim of a chain of sins which began with his ancestor Atreus. Orestes, his son, avenged the murder by killing his mother Clytemnestra and thus became a matricide. It was not until Pallas Athena, the



goddess of wisdom, decided that the law of revenge must be replaced by a higher law of justice that the nexus of sin, retribution and sin was finally broken. This is the theme of one of the greatest plays in Greek by Aeschylus and represents an evolution in Greek religious thought. Nemesis suggests a belief in an inexorable fate. It was interestingly a force which even the gods could not disregard. They were fully subject to it. They sometimes tried to forestall it by swallowing their progeny if it was thought that the latter were destined to overthrow them.

The gods were not only jealous of each other, but sometimes went to the length of participating in human conflict on different sides. Their involvement in human affairs extended to occasional amours between them and mortals upon whom they could if they so desired confer the gift of immortality.

Tithonus, the lover of Eos, is not the figure in Greek mythology to have been made immortal, but whether the Greeks actually believed in human beings being able to attain immortality is doubtful. We do not hear of any historical person's praying for it.

Another interesting Greek idea which did not appear odd even to a philosopher like Aristotle was that the planets and other heavenly bodies owed their motion to gods; there was a god behind each who pushed it.

The gods and goddesses were worshipped by chants, processions and offerings of sacrifice; bulls, sheep and pigs were the usual sacrificial animals, but human sacrifice is also heard of. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter to obtain Artemis' permission to sail with his fleet to Troy; Achilles, the hero of the Iliad slaughters several Trojan prisoners of war to appease the spirit of his friend Patroclus. But it is true that no Greek thinker advocated human sacrifice as a proper means of obtaining favours from gods.

By the time Greece attained the zenith of its intellectual advancement in 5th-century B. C. Athens under the statesman Pericles, paganism in the orthodox sense ceased to be a correct description of its religious beliefs except for the masses. Some of the thinkers were plain materialists; some considered ethics more important than religion. The free spirit of intellectual enquiry which Athens fostered led to the development of several schools of philosophy among which we can distinguish the idealists, materialists, and sophists. They were many who could no be easily categorised.

There is one important difference between Greek and Indian philosophy. Bth grew out of a pagan background, but whereas the Indian thinkers seem to have tried to find intellectual justifications of the polytheistic practices of the community, their Greek counterpart advanced ideas which struck at the root of popular paganism, and did away with the gods.

In other words, religion and philosophy in Greece as at the present day pursued two different courses. Undoubtedly the frankly agnostic or atheistic beliefs of the sophists undermined popular faith in the infallibility of religious doctrines, but the average Greek continued till the end to worship his gods, offer sacrifices, and honour the numerous spirits which according to superstition populated the landscape.

The cumulative outcom of the teachings of such men as Zeno, Protagoras, Empedocles and above all Socrates, Greece's greatest teacher, was the promotion of a spirit of free enquiry unlike anthing known in the world before. It was of Socrates that Plato provided a partially idealised portrait as a man who probed things to their roots, analysed every belief and doctrine to expose its weaknesses, questioned all popular

assumptions and became ultimately such a threat to orthodoxy that he was executed as an enemy to the state. Both Plato and his disciple Aristotle, Greece's greatest philosopher, built the structure of their systems upon the foundations of Socratic thought. Although Socrates did not fail to observe the customary religious ceremonies, he rejected the thesis that morality must be based on what was supposed to be the will of the gods. Man, he taught, must frame moral laws in the light of his own conscience on clearly defensible rational principles.

When the Muslims were first thrown into contact with the Greeks, they did not reject the Greek legacy outright. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle became household names among them in their Arabicised forms, Socrat, Aflatun, and Aristu. The Socratic methods of reasoning as reflected in Plato's Dialogues and Aristotle's logic were admired and borrowed by Muslim philosophers, but where their conclusions contradicted the teachings of the Quran, especially in regard to Revelation, they recoiled from them. Aristotle's proofs in support of the existence of a *Primus Mobile*, the Unmoved Mover, were generally thought to supply evidence for belief in God but many realised that Aristotle's God such as He is different from the Muslim conception of Allah. Aristotle however exercised so great a fascination on Muslim thinkers that they became the greatest Aristotelians of the Middle Ages. Ibn Rushd or Averroues who belonged to the 12th century was the most eminent among them.

From the Greeks the Muslims borrowed in other areas also, especially in science and medicine and in both their contributions acquired new dimensions. The Greeks were great at speculative philosophy but not very interested in practical experiment. This is the lacuna that the Muslim Arabs supplied.

Here again we face another puzzle. While some of the Greeks went so far as to predict the complete-Copernican system—Aristarchus is the most eminent name in this area—Pythagoras, a philosopher, thought that the heavenly bodies transmitted a kind of music symphonically. He was also a believer in the theory of transmigration. Aristotle attributed a soul to the vegetable world. These ideas are difficult to reconcile with the progress the Greeks made in astronomy and philosophy in broad terms.

Much importance was attached in Greek religious life to oracles. The oracle of Apollo at Delphi was consulted by men of all classes on questions of morality and policy. It is these oracular utterances that supplied the place of scripture to a certain extent. Besides, to the Greeks of historical times Homer's epics composed in the 8th century B.C. seemed possessed of the same prestige as regular scripture. They too were consulted as oracles.

The Greeks developed no eschatology proper, no theory about an after-life, or a Doomsday. Present life was all that mattered, and they concentrated all their attention on extracting from it the fullest relish of its manifold gifts. Life was to be enjoyed, but this did not mean the gratification of vulgar tastes only. The highest enjoyment lay in the development of man's artistic sensibilities. No ancient people cultivated the pursuit of beauty to the same extent as the Greeks. Alike in their literature, sculpture, painting, ceramics and architecture they were able to achieve a degree of excellence which has rarely been surpassed. Their astronomical speculations were surprising in that they anticipated many modern advances. But they avoided anything which can be likened to that mystical search for the ultimate meaning of things which characterised

Middle Eastern and Indian religions. The most typical Greek thinker from this point of view was Epicurus born in 341 B.C. He rejected both religion and philosophy and preached that the highest good consisted in the pursuit of happiness. Since man was not destined to know the final truth about the world he lives in why should he waste the few years he has on earth vainly trying to seek the unknowable? Epicureanism however did not stand for riotous living. Epicurus advocated moderation as the secret which could best yield the greatest pleasure of which life is capable.

Characteristic of the Greek approach to life is the fact that Greece produced no prophets, only philosophers. Not even Socrates was venerated as a religious teacher.

There is no single definition which covers all aspects of the Greek spiritual experience. They were believers at the same time in a plurality of gods and in there being behind all phenomena a single reality. Plato regarded all visible objects as copies of their originals in heaven, but he leaves the nature of this heaven vague. Aristotle gave the world the idea of *Primum Mobile*, an unmoved Mover, but went no further in the sense in which Islam defines the relations between man and God. Greece bred simultaneously— that is, within the limits of its history materialism, paganism, atheism, and philosophies which presuppose the existence of a single spiritual reality. It is the many-sidedness of the Greek legacy which has fascinated Europe and other parts of the modern world. They are important for Muslims also because, apart from what in common with the rest of humanity we have inherited from them, in sciences and art, we have to remember that the earliest schools of Muslim philosophers were so impressed by Plato and Aristotle that it is

in the light of their ideas that they attempted to understand the Quran. Those interpretations form part of the Islamic legacy.

How greatly the Greeks had influenced the early Muslims can be guessed from the controversy between the Mutazalites and the Asharites, the two schools which dominated the eight and ninth centuries. The former have been called Free Thinkers, because of thie refusal to believe that the Quran is eternal. The Asharities, on the other hand, defended the orthodox position that the Quran as the Word of Allah could not be anything but eternal. Both schools used methods of logical reasoning in which the influence of Aristotle could be perceived.

# A NOTE ON ISLAM

The references to Islam which are scattered throughout the book should give the non-Muslim reader an idea of the basic principles of Islam. What follows is a summary which gathers up all the essential facts.

Islam is monotheistic. Belief in the oneness of God or Allah as the Muslims call Him is so basic to Islam that associating any other being with Him is considered the worst of sins. This belief is known as Tauhid. Next to Tauhid, the most important requirement is belief in Risalat, which means acceptance of the doctrine that Muhammad was the last of the true Apostles of Allah, whose mission was to deliver the Quran to humanity and teach them, in perfected form, the moral laws which successive prophets brought them.

Islam rests on five pillars as they are called :

- a) Iman or correct belief;
- b) Salat or prayer;
- c) Siam or fasting;
- d) Zakat or poor tax;
- e) Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca.

Iman implies unqualified belief in certain articles of faith. These are stated in the Kalima or confession of Faith which a Muslim is required to learn as part of his religious training. There are several confessions of faith. The first among them is called Kalima-e Tauhid which is as follows: I believe and testify that Allah is One and Unique; there is no god but He; He has no

associates. The second Kalima asserts that Allah is One and that Muhammad in His servant and Apostle. The third Kalima calls upon the Muslim to testify to his faith in the Oneness of Allah; His angels; His Books; His Apostles; Predestination.; the Day of Judgement; and Resurrection after death.

All Muslims irrespective of their race or language have to accept these basic beliefs. They must not only accept Muhammad as the last of Allah's Rusul or Messengers, but also acknowledge their faith in all earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus. They must believe that the soul is immortal and that there is a Judgement Day when all men must account for all they did on earth. The angels are the agents employed by Allah to convey his Message to His Rusul or Messengers. Predestination implies faith in the doctrine that all power belongs to Allah who in His wisdom decides how things happen. Man has been endowed with freedom of choice but Allah knows in advance how he will exercise this choice.

Man's accountability for what he does on earth rests on the theory that after the last Judgement the virtuous will be rewarded with bliss in Heaven and the wicked punished in Hell.

In token of his submission to Allah man must pray five times a day in the manner prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad. The timings fixed by him are: at dawn before sunrise; early afternoon; late afternoon; immediately after sunset; and late in the evening before midnight, usually an hour after the sunset prayers. The names given to these prayers are Fajr; Zuhr; Asar; Maghrib; and Isha. A Muslim can pray alone but he is urged to join congregational prayers whenever possible.

Early afternoon prayers on Fridays must be congregational. The prayer service is preceded by a sermon by the prayer leader or Imam.



Muslims are required to fast for a month during the Ramadhan, which is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. The calendar being lunar, Muslim communities living in different areas in different hemispheres do not have to endure the same climatic problems year after year during the fasting period. Fasting means abstention from food, drink and sex from before dawn to sunset as an exercise in self-purification. The end of Ramadhan fasting is celebrated by the festival of Idul-fitr.

Zakat is a tax on wealth payable by all who have surpluses left at the end of a year's earning. The rate is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the surplus. The money realised from this source is to be spent on welfare programmes for the poor.

Finally, every Muslim is required to go on pilgrimage to Mecca once in his lifetime, provided he can afford the expenses and has no other claims on his wealth.

The purpose of the Hajj which takes place in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar is to give the Muslim community a sense of unity and to impress on them that they form a single brotherhood regardless of distinction of race or colour or language.

The principal sources of Islamic law are two: the Quran whose authority overrides everything else; and the Hadith, a term applied to records of the Prophet's sayings and actions. What the Prophet did or said was designed to illustrate how a Muslim was to practise the principles laid down in the Quran. His companions took careful note of whatever he said or did, and soon after he died collections of these records were produced for the use of the Ummah or Muslim community.

Differences and division in the Muslim community are all based on how the Hadith are to be interpreted. The two main divisions are the Sunnis and the Shias. The Sunnis who form

the majority in the community are again divided into four groups according as they accept and practise the interpretations of four scholars: Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik, Imam Ahmad Hanbal and Imam Malik. There are however no differences among them as to the basic beliefs.

The Quran deals not only with general moral principles, but with specific codes of conduct on food, drink, education, marriage, inheritance, burial, intracommunal relations and also on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Alcohol, carrion, pork and blood are forbidden. Muslims can accept food from any source provided it does not fall into the forbidden category.

Equality among Muslims is not a theoretical ideal. Although differences of wealth exist, absolute equality is enforced in the mosque where social and economic rank is completely disregarded.

Muslim law, although based strictly on the Quran and the Hadith, allows for evolution. If the community is faced with any problems on which they cannot find specific guidance in the Quran and the Hadith, they are required to resort first to the principle of Qiyas or analogy. This means seeking parallels to the situation they face in the Quran and the Hadith and arriving at decisions which do not run counter to their spirit. If no analogy can be found, the best minds in the community are called upon to rely on Ijtihad or consultation. The decision again has to be in harmony with the basic tenets of the faith.

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The list that follows is not a systematic bibliography on the religions and cults which I have discussed or referred to; it is only an attempt to provide a clue to what I depended upon directly or what I had read on various occasions among those books whose names I had clearly in mind when stating an opinion. I have not given footnotes in the body of the text to indicate my indebtedness, because I have made use of direct quotations in few places. Like the text the bibliography will be of interest only to general readers, not to scholars.

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Dr Husain's publications include *Crisis in Muslim Education* written in collaboration with Dr. Ashraf (Hodder and Stoughton, U.K. 1979); *Mixed Grill* (a collection of essays on religion and culture, Orient Longmans, 1963); *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts* (Asiatic Society, Dacca, 1960); an essay on Pakistani writing in English in *The Commonwealth Pen* ed. by Alan McLeod, Cornell University Press, USA, 1961; the entry on Bangladesh in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He is a contributor to the *Islamic Encyclopaedia* in process of publication in Istanbul, Turkey.

Dr. Husain has also written in Bengali a two volume history of English Literature published by the Bengali Academy, Dacca (1984, 1989).