

RUPEE SERIES



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**ASPECTS
OF
OUR RELIGION**

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati

GENERAL EDITORS

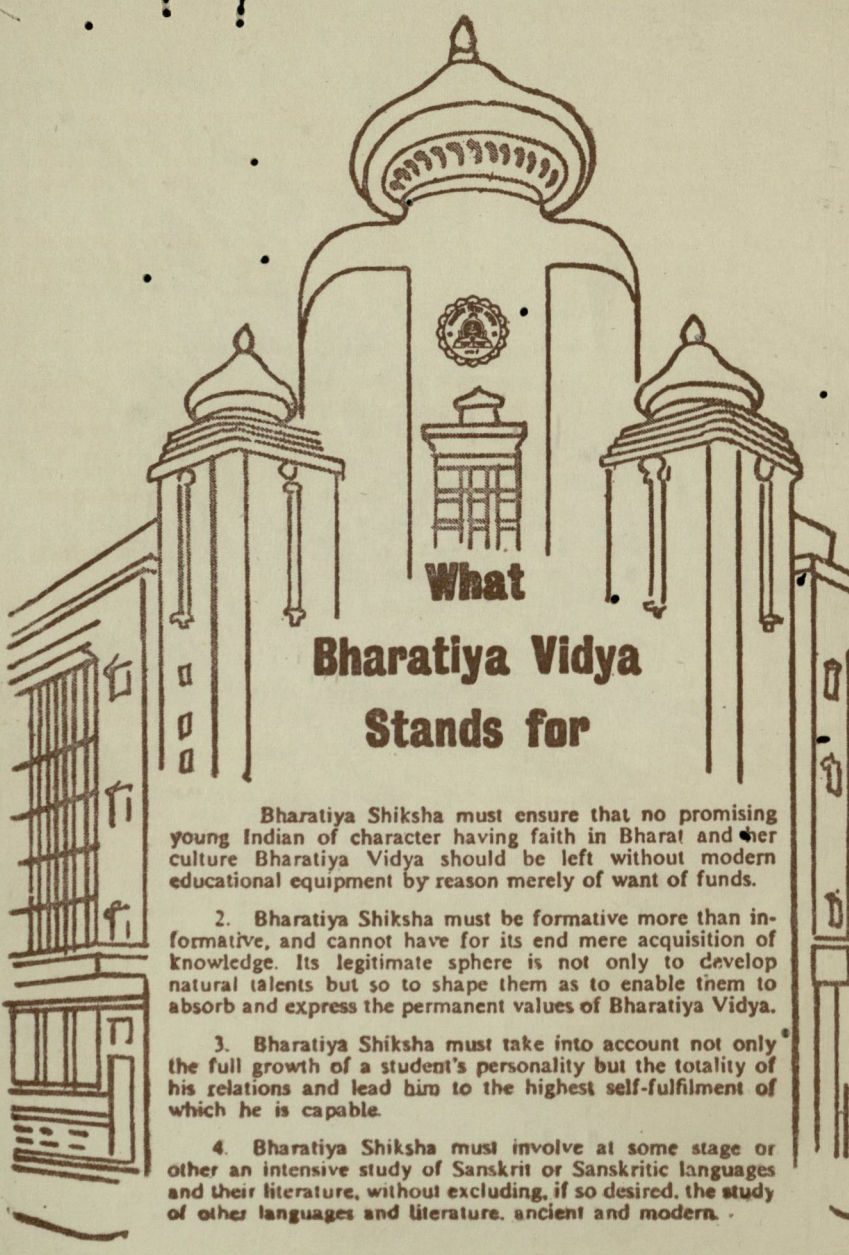
K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

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**What
Bharatiya Vidya
Stands for**

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

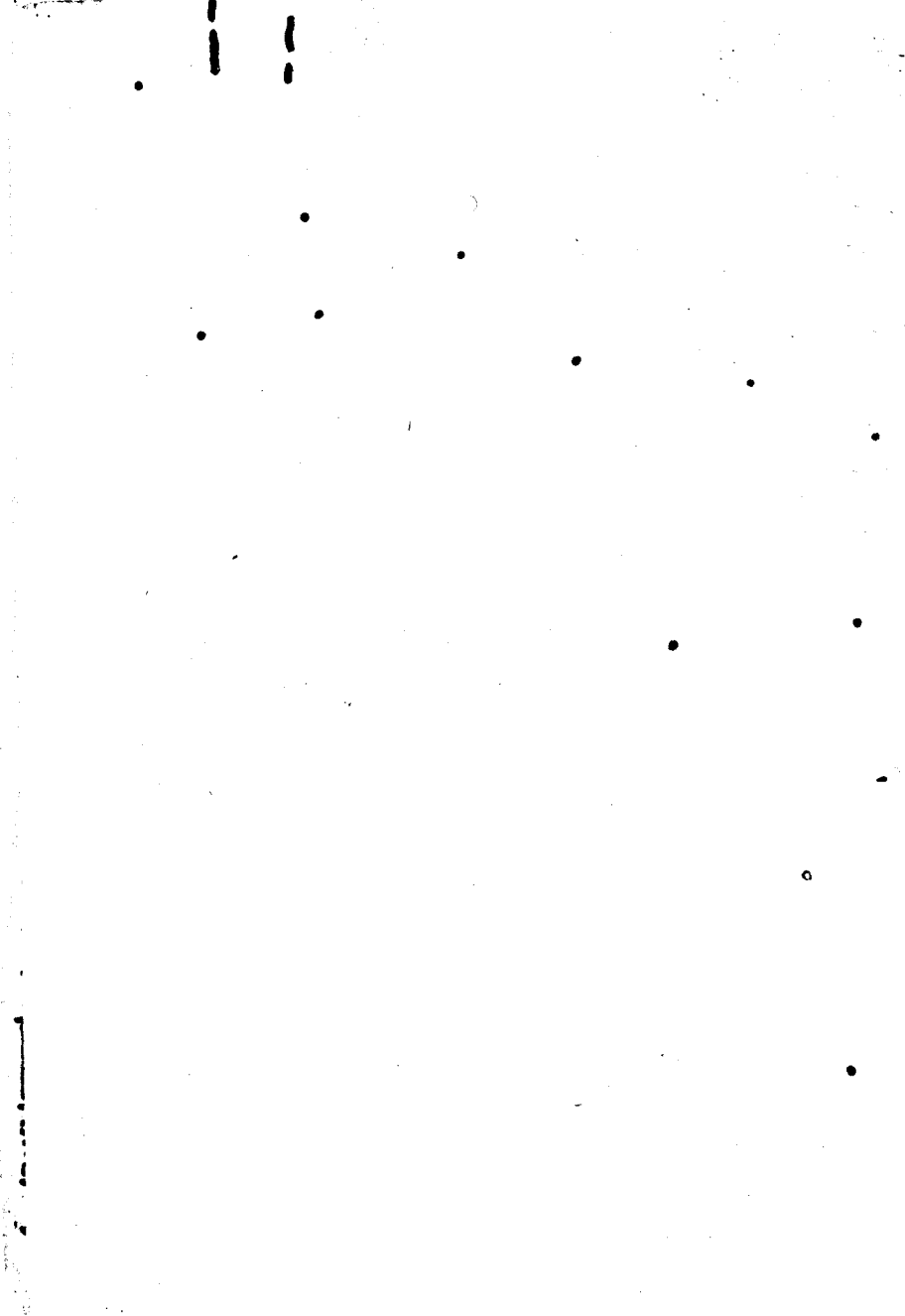
(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world





आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I.89.i

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General Editors

K. M. MUNSHI

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42

ASPECTS

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By

SRI CHANDRASEKHARENDRA SARASWATI

(Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham)

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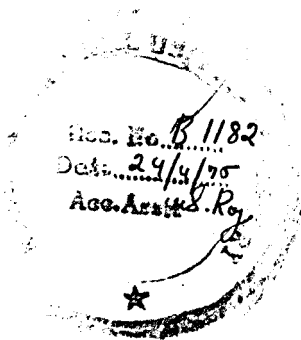
BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
CHOWPATTY : BOMBAY

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First Edition, March 1966

PC
294.5
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Price: Re. 1.00



PRINTED IN INDIA

By P. H. Raman at Associated Advertisers & Printers, 505, Tardeo
Arthur Road, Bombay-34, and Published by S. Ramakrishnan,
Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bhavan's Book University volumes had rare success. About a million and a quarter volumes have been sold in about eleven years. However, there is an insistent demand for the stray volumes which the Bhavan has issued from time to time at a lower price. In order to meet this demand, it has been decided to issue the new One-Rupee Book University Series side by side with the Book University Series.

I hope this new One-Rupee Series will have the same good fortune which the other Series had, of being useful to those who are interested in the fundamental values of Indian Culture, and of reaching out to a wider audience.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
Chowpatty Road, Bombay-7.

Vijaya Dashami

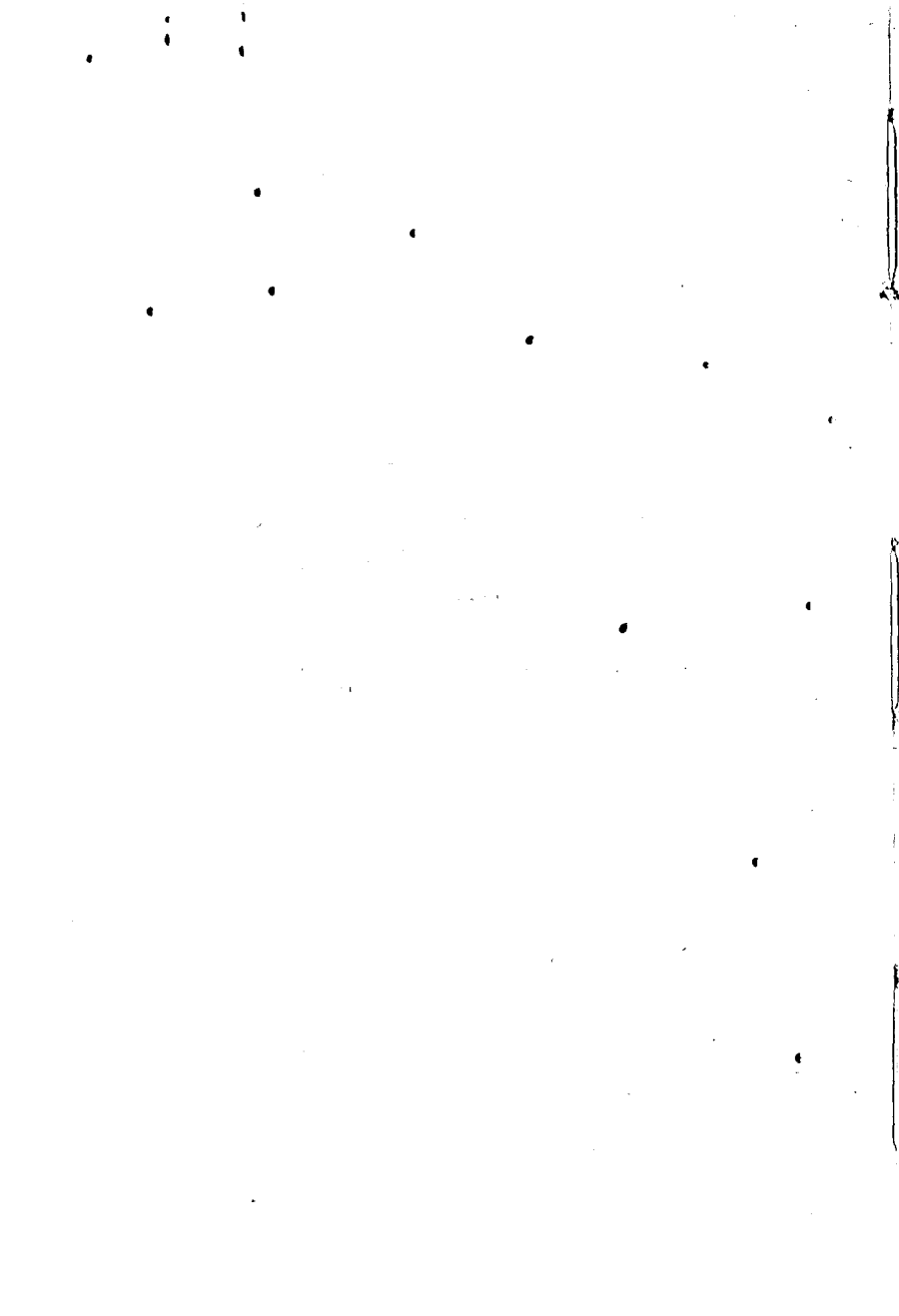
September 28, 1963

K. M. MUNSHI



PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book has been compiled out of the published English translations of the discourses delivered in Tamil by His Holiness the Sankaracharya, Sri Chandras kharendra Saraswati of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetha in Madras during His Holiness's visits to that city in 1932 and in 1957 to 1959, and from material gathered during privileged interviews with His Holiness.



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I. OUR RELIGION

There are many religions in the world today. Each has a name of its own. These names are personal and indicate the founders of the respective faiths. Buddhism, Jainism, Mahomedanism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism are examples. They are all founded religions. They were founded each at a certain time in the history of the world. The founders of these religions were personages of great holiness. They had the power to attract many men to their way of thinking. They acquired a large following.

If an English-educated youth belonging to our religion is asked what his religion is, he would reply that he professes the 'Hindu' religion. Go to a village and ask a peasant what his religion is. He will not be able to give a name to his religion. The name 'Hinduism' which is used now to denote our religion was unknown to our ancestors and is also unknown to the common man among us.

What then is the name that is given to our religion? The fact is that our religion has no name. This may appear to be strange. But there is nothing strange about it. Just consider. When and why is a name given to a thing? We give a name to a thing when there are more than one of the same kind and to distinguish one from the other or others. If there is one only of a thing, there is no need to give it a name.

The same is the case with our religion. Other religions did not exist before the time of their founders. Ours is a religion which existed long before the founded religions. Obviously, it

II. OURS—A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

We said that the Vedic religion was the earliest religion of mankind. All other religions arose only after it. There are evidences to conclude that it was prevalent all over the globe. We shall mention a few of them.

An inscription unearthed in Egypt and dated 1280 B.C., contains the terms of a treaty between Rameses II and the Hittites. In this treaty, *Maitravaruna*, a Vedic dual deity has been cited as a witness. (Vide: H. R. Hall's "Ancient History of the Near East" pp. 364 *et seq.*). Ancient Egyptian kings bore names like Rameses I, Rameses II, Rameses III etc., resembling the name of Rama who was the incarnation of God Vishnu.

In the island of Madagascar off the eastern coast of South Africa, most of the place names have affinities with that of Rama.

In regard to the Sahara desert in North Africa, geologists advance the theory that it is the dried-up bed of an ocean. Ocean in Sanskrit is *Saagara*. May it not be that the modern name *Sahaara* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *Saagara*? It is also said that when Sahara was under water, there were people all round its shores whose names were mostly Sanskritic. Some of them were said to be related to the lord of Kosala. (Vide Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. XXIII, under *Sahara*).

In far off Mexico, they celebrate a festival called *Rama Sita*. The time of the festival corresponds to our Dussara or Navaraatri period. (Vide p. 56

III. "AGE" OF THE VEDAS

It is customary to speak of the 'Age' of the Vedas. The sacred books of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam have dates assigned to them by the votaries of the respective religions. The Buddhist *Tripitakas* are said to have been written about the time of Asoka, though according to certain authorities, Buddha's age can be carried to many centuries earlier. The *New Testament* originated about 2,000 years ago. The Koran which is the Word of God conveyed to the Prophet was written about 1,200 years ago. All these holy books have historical dates assigned to them. But it is different with the Vedas. No one can say with any certainty when they came into being. Yet, Orientalists are anxious to discover when they were 'composed'. Some of them say it was in 1,500 B. C. Others say, 3,000 B. C. Lokmanya Tilak fixed it at 6,000 B. C. and some Orientalists agree with him and others differ from him. Modern Orientalists are inclined to bring the date further down.

Buddhism revolted against the Vedas and the Buddhists criticised them. They themselves did not know when the Vedas 'began'. Buddha was born 2,500 years ago, and he too did not know when the Vedas 'came to be'. The Vedas are *anaadi* and *nitya* (beginningless and eternal). Sound (*sabda*) which is the framework of the Vedas is eternal. According to us, creation and dissolution of the universe, *srishti* and *pralaya* alternate. At a fresh creation after a *pralaya*, the eternal sound is caught

IV. CONTENTS OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas represent what should be *known* and acted upon to enable a man to attain liberation. It is a cardinal principle of our religion that suffering and sorrow of every one should be overcome by realising one's true nature, by a knowledge of one's true self, namely God. Our scriptures provide such knowledge in various ways suited to the status and capacity of the person seeking it. The sources of such knowledge are called *Vidyaasthaanas*. Says a verse:

*angaani vedaascatvaarah meemamsaa nyaaya vistaarah
puraanam dharmasaastram cha vidyaa hyetaaschaturdasa*

Another verse says:

*puraana nyayameemamsaa dharmasastraangamisritaah
vedaah sthaanaani vidyaanaam dharmasya cha chaturdasa*

These fourteen sacred books or *Vidyaasthaanas* are:

- 1 to 4 The four Vedas
- 5 to 10 The six Vedaangas
- 11 Meemaamsaa
- 12 Nyaaya
- 13 The Puraanas

and 14 The Dharma Saastras.

The Tamil Tevaaram praises God by saying: He became the Vedas and the six angas; (*Vedamodu aarangam aayinaanai*).

The most important of these scriptural texts are the Vedas, They are said to be infinite (*anantaavai Vedaah*). About 5,000 years ago, at the conjunction of the Dvaapara Yuga and the Kali Yuga, the sage Vyaasa is said to have classified the

V. THE SPIRITUAL PATH

1. KARMAANUSHTHANA

The entire course of a Hindu's spiritual life has been succinctly stated in the Pentad of Instruction known as the *Upadesa Panchaka* of Sri Sankara. It is a cardinal tenet of our faith that the present life of any man should be the last in the succession of infinite lives that he has had in the history of his soul. The soul by itself is incorporeal; its association with the body is due to the operation of *avidya*, or nescience which itself is beginningless. The present life of every man is a glorious opportunity to be used in such a manner that there will be no more lives hereafter. The death that will come inevitably at the end of this life must be the last, and the soul surviving that should not thereafter enter into another body by the operation of the Law of Karma. Since residual karma brings the soul in conjunction with the body, all karma should be liquidated, burnt out, with the body of the present life. It is to this end that every man must strive.

For this purpose, says Sankara, following the Vedas every one must go through certain disciplines. They refer to work, worship and wisdom, Karma, Bhakti and Jnaana. All spirituality must be firmly established on a high moral code, which involves the doing of what is prescribed and the avoidance of what is prohibited. Frequently in the context of our daily life, we have to determine the nature of our duties. Kumarila Bhatta, the great

VI. THE GITA WAY

The Lord instructs Arjuna in different ways and concludes: 'Therefore fight, Oh! Bharata. 'Fight for this reason; and for this reason.' Thus, he gives him many reasons why he should fight. 'To fight is your dharma; so go and fight. Do your karma', says Krishna. Thus Krishna instructs Arjuna that to fight is the appointed karma of Arjuna. He speaks in praise of him who does his karma:

*yajnaarthaat karmanaanyatra lokoyam karmabandhanah
tadartham karma kaunteya muktasanghah samaachara.*

The karma should be done in a spirit of dedication to God. 'Do your karma and offer it to God'. Every person should perform the karmas prescribed for him. The Lord describes the karmas appropriate to each person. The criterion to determine one's proper karma is provided, says the Lord, by *saastra*

*tasmaat saastrani pramaanam te
kaaryaakaarya vyavasthitau*

'Consult the saastras if you would know what is proper for you to do. You should do what is ordained in the saastras. You are a kshatriya. To fight is the ordained karma of a kshatriya.'

From this it would appear that the main teaching of Krishna is the performance of karma. Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak has expounded the Gita as the Gospel of Work. The Lord's words also seem to support this view. He says again and

VII. THE STRENGTH OF OUR RELIGION

Our religion is usually criticised and ridiculed for its so-called polytheism. 'What a host of gods and goddesses you worship!' is a gibe flung at us. All old religions were said to be polytheistic before the advent of the 'reformed' religion. Mohamed abolished the 'many gods' whom his tribesmen worshipped and established 'One God'.

To know the truth about anything, one must turn to the great Poets. They see farther and better than ordinary mortals. Baana and Kaalidaasa are two great poets of our land. Let us see what they say about our 'gods'. Speaking of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, Baana says that they are in essence the One God appearing in three forms for a threefold purpose, namely, creation, protection and dissolution determined respectively by the qualities of *rajas*, *sattva* and *tamas*. The One unborn (*aja*) takes a threefold shape for a threefold purpose. The three, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, are ultimately and essentially one only. Kaalidaasa says to the same effect, that one *moorti* appears as three and there is no distinction of superior or inferior among them. If the three, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are one in essence, by the same token, all gods of our pantheon are also one in the ultimate analysis.

But why do people wrangle saying that one deity is superior to the rest, that the deity whom they worship alone is the highest? A bridge across a river has a number of arches. To a man standing under one arch, all other arches will appear smaller than

VIII. SOME OF OUR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

We shall consider some institutions with which our religion is closely connected. One is the caste system and the other is temple worship. It is necessary to understand the nature of these institutions and get rid of certain false notions respecting them.

Foreigners criticise us for our caste system. Among ourselves, there is a strong and persistent move supported even by our Government to put an end to it. Of course, in the context of modern life, the rules of caste are not practised as before. But, whatever the position, it will be useful to spend some thought on the caste system and determine if it is so bad and injurious as it is said to be.

The main argument against caste is that it has led to conflicts. But it is forgotten that conflicts of caste are of comparatively recent origin. The system has been in vogue for thousands of years. That it has survived all through shows that it is not so bad after all. If it were really injurious to society, our ancestors would have abolished it long ago. But they did not do it. The fact is that conflicts have not *occurred* on the basis of caste; they have been *promoted* by interested persons. More violent than caste hatred has been religious hatred. Religious animosities have a long history. There have been clashes, not only between different religions, but also between different sects and sections of the same religion. This has led some people to conclude that caste and religion lead to fighting and blood-

IX. MOORTI PUJA OR IMAGE WORSHIP

Every object in the world, animate or inanimate is a manifestation of the One God. If one realises this truth one will do nothing evil. One will not feel anger or disgust or hatred for any thing or person. One will have no desire for anything in particular. One may indeed develop faith of a kind through the study of scriptures. But if a person is unable to eschew the mental distractions and agonies arising from anger and desire, he cannot be said to have realized God in everything around him.

The realisation and experiencing of this fundamental truth is the true goal of life. And until a person achieves this Supreme consciousness of God in all objects, he should keep striving prayerfully. He should begin by seeking to see God at least in one object through concentration upon that particular object as God—which is one hundred percent true by itself. The grace of God resulting from such intense concentration will enable him to go further and see God manifest in all that is and thereupon he will be free from the limitations arising from non-experiencing of the truth that God is in all things. This is the fundamental basis of Moorti upaasana (sagunopaasana). This upaasana unfortunately is nowadays derided as “Idol-worship”. It is a misnomer to regard Moorti upaasana as Idol worship. The true worshipper of a Moorti never feels that he is worshipping a stone or a

X. THE CURRENCY OF DHARMA

Imagine a hill which divides two kingdoms each having a different system of currency, the coins and notes of either of which is not legal tender in the other. Suppose that a citizen of one of these kingdoms has amassed through the years a large amount of wealth which he keeps in cash and currency notes. Suppose again that the state of affairs in one kingdom gets so disturbed as to make it unsafe for this man to retain all his hoarded wealth in that kingdom. Naturally he would try to run away from his country and seek safety in the neighbouring kingdom on the other side of the hill. But he cannot carry all his wealth with him on account of their sheer weight. He will have to take with him only so much as he can conveniently carry leaving the large number of coins and notes of small denomination behind. Suppose again in this predicament, a good man comes to him and offers to give him currency notes of large denomination which are legal tender in the neighbouring country in exchange for the notes of the first kingdom. He would gladly clutch at the offer; and, relieving himself of the untransportable wealth of his native land, he would obtain in return lighter currency which he could easily carry across to the hill top to the country on the other side.

Even so, every one of us lives in perpetual danger of having to go at any moment from the world in which we are born and to live in another world into which we shall be ushered after death.

XI. SECRET OF HAPPINESS

Nara and Naaraayana were doing penance. Narayana is God Himself. Nara is a part of the divine nature. His was the highest stage among men. Hence was he called Nara. These two Nara and Naaraayana are spoken of as having incarnated as Arjuna and Krishna.

Nara and Naaraayana were doing penance. Indra is the lord of the world of gods. Being Indra is the most exalted status. The Puraanas say that whoever does a large number of sacrifices will get that status at the end and the reigning Indra will lose it. Hence, the reigning Indra used to place obstacles before all who do such tapas. But if, undaunted by them, one continues one's penance, one will succeed to that state. That is the Puraanic idea.

The same thing happens even in our modern world. If a man disciplines himself, lives an austere life and makes sacrifice for a cause acclaimed to be good, he gains exaltation above others and is accepted as leader. He holds this position till another makes a greater sacrifice and attains the leadership. The Puraanic desire for lordship was of the same kind. But it did not stop with this world. It extended to celestial regions also, to *devaloka*.

So, when Nara and Naaraayana were doing tapas, Indra got nervous if he would lose his exalted position. He began to devise means to disturb their tapas by frightening them or tempting them by damsels, arousing lust which is the enemy of tapas. These are his methods to throw obstacles in the

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His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati is the Sankaracharya who adorns the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha in the Madras State. His Holiness is the 68th in the succession of the occupants of the Pitha. He is devoutly adored by his disciples and held in reverential esteem by numerous others for his scholarship in the Saastras and knowledge of modern developments, for his saintliness and for his inclusive universality of outlook and attitude. His gracious eyes which beam a benediction and his inviting smile which casts a spell of intimacy are unforgettable experience of every one who has had the good fortune to stand in his presence.

An itinerant ascetic that he is, traversing the country on foot, His Holiness holds large audiences in thrall by the discourses that he delivers in Tamil in such sweet simple words which are the despair of the pedant and the delight of the innocent. His expositions of Hindu religion, some of which are reproduced here, have a classical fidelity which one misses in modern 'liberal' treatments. The reader will be amply rewarded by a careful study of its contents which show the *raison d'etre* of many doctrines and tenets of Hindu religion not generally understood in their proper import.