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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

INDIAN INHERITANCE

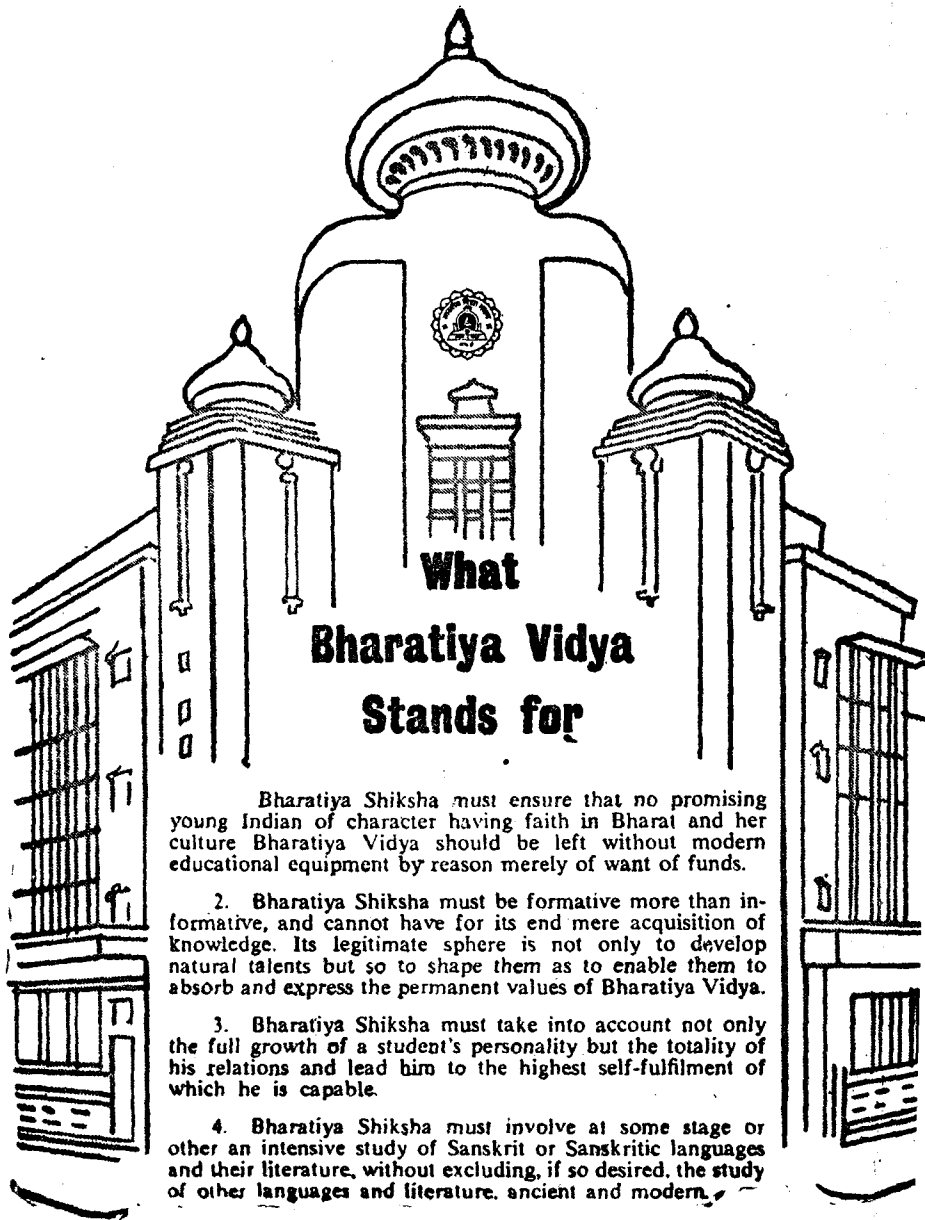
**LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY
AND
RELIGION**

GENERAL EDITORS

**K. M. MUNSHI
R. R. DIWAKAR**



BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY



**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, ideoas, 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 क्रत्वोयन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side
—*Rigveda, I-89-i*

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K. M. MUNSHI

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34

INDIAN INHERITANCE

VOL. I

LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

AND

RELIGION

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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

INDIAN INHERITANCE

VOL. I ↓

LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY

AND

RELIGION



1965

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within

the framework of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some

who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life; a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI.

K. M. MUNSHI

3rd October, 1951.

FOREWORD

I HAVE, on several occasions, noted the fact that the study of Indian history and culture is being neglected in our Universities. I equally consider it a part of the equipment of our educated men that not only should they be emotionally aware of the cultural heritage of our land, but should also develop a spiritual kinship with it.

Article 5 of the basic objective of the Bhavan runs as follows:

“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.”

The Vice-Chancellors' conference of U.P. Universities also made a recommendation that arrangements should be made in the Universities and the affiliated Colleges to start a regular course of lectures on Indian Culture. The principal difficulty in prescribing these courses was the lack of any book dealing with the different aspects on the Indian inheritance as viewed by leading modern writers, available at a price within the means of teacher or student.

The preparation and publication of such a book was a difficult task which, I am glad to say, the Bhavan willingly agreed to undertake.

I am greatly indebted to my co-Editor of the Book University, Sri N. Chandrasekhara Aiyar, and to my friends

Sri Humayun Kabir, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Dr. K.M. Panikkar, Dr. Radha Kamal Mukerjee, Professor Abdul Majeed of the Jamia Millia, Dr. A. D. Pusalker, Asst. Director and Head of the Dept. of Ancient Indian History in Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and Dr. Asoke Majumdar, Professor of History in the Bhavan's College, for helping me in making the selections for such a book. Dr. Radha Kamal Mukerjee rendered continuous assistance in preparing the volumes. The burden of going through all the selected passages and editing them to fit into the plan of the book fell on Dr. Asoke Majumdar. Dr. A. D. Pusalker was also good enough to help in preparing the volume.

On behalf of the Bhavan, I gratefully acknowledge the debt it owes to the learned authors, among whom it has the honour to include such distinguished authors as Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Radhakrishnan and Sri Rajagopalachari. Our acknowledgments are also due to several publishers who have given the Bhavan permission to include in this work extracts from books published by them.

The Bhavan is also indebted to the Ramakrishna Mission and Sri Aurobindo Ashram for their permission to publish extracts from the works of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo respectively.

RAJ BHAVAN,
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July 1, 1955.

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SECTION I
LITERATURE

•

OUR INHERITANCE—SANSKRIT

THE study of Sanskrit is not a luxury and should not be looked upon as such. When we consider that the ideas, the literary forms and even themes of the literature of our great regional languages are predominantly derived from Sanskrit, that for proper use of a large percentage of words even in Dravidian languages, an understanding of Sanskrit is necessary, that the great classics of India, not only the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, but the masterpieces from which everyone in India draws his inspiration from the simple *Panchatantra* to *Shakuntala*, are in Sanskrit, and it is on their translations and their vulgarisations that our minds are fed and nourished from childhood, it will, I am sure, be conceded that a knowledge of Sanskrit, however imperfect, is a necessity and not a luxury. That it is so to the literary man, to the thinker and to the scholar would seem to be axiomatic. It may be asked why it should be so for the politician, for the man of affairs, for anyone who claims to be educated. The answer is that apart from Sanskrit being our greatest single national inheritance, the roots of our national behaviour, the pattern of our thought and the source of all our ideas being embedded in Sanskrit, a familiarity with it is necessary for anyone who claims to be a true Indian.

I do not say that a study of Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* or Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* is necessary for every one. Indeed I deprecate greatly the emphasis on grammar which has been the ruin of Sanskrit studies. Many of you would remember the story of Gunadhyā's *Brihatkatha* quoted in Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara*, how a new grammar, the *Katantra*, had to be composed in order to make the study of Sanskrit easy for the King. Whether true or not, it represents a very major issue even today. To equate know-

SANSKRIT LITERATURE

THE Sanskrit language took form in North-West India during the second millennium before our era. It is a detached branch of the linguistic group which has been given the name Indo-Iranian, which in its turn derives from the mother-language Indo-European. In a distinctly archaic form, rich in noun and verb structures which are yet ill co-ordinated, Sanskrit was first used for literary expression in the Veda.

The Vedas: The Veda or "knowledge" consists of a body of texts which, though extending over many centuries (roughly from the 15th to the 6th century B.C.), relate to a single religious system, the religion called Vedic. The most ancient documents are the Samhitas (collections), which contain principally versified praises addressed to the chief deities of the cult, but also isolated formulae assigned for recitation in the course of the ceremonies, stanzas or groups of stanzas intended to be sung, incantations, and finally prose passages expounding ritual. They are divided into the *Rig-Veda* (Veda of hymns), *Yajur-Veda* (Veda of sacrificial formulae) and *Sama-Veda* (Veda of chants). To these three Vedas was later added the *Atharva-Veda*.

As opposed to this group of works, which constitute Shruti (Revelations) stands Smriti (Human tradition), which includes among other things the six Vedangas "additional members or limbs" of the Veda: phonetics (Shiksha), ritual (Kalpa), grammar (Vyakarana), etymology, (Nirukta), prosody (Chhandas), astronomy (Jyotisha).

Each of these texts is attached to one or other of the four Vedas; and within its Veda, to one of the schools, which increased in number as time went on, and became the guardians of particular interpretations of the sacred texts and of special liturgical practices. By reason of its antiquity, and of the richness of its mythology and ritual,

III

VEDAS

THE Vedas are four in number—the *Rig-Veda*, consisting of 10,552 *mantras*, the *Sama-Veda* of 1,875, the *Yajur-Veda* (the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* text), of 2,086 (some of the *mantras* being in prose) and the *Atharva-Veda* of 5,987 (a few of them in prose). In all, the Vedic Samhitas (collection of the texts, as distinguished from the literature based on the Vedas—*Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas*, *Upanishads*, etc.) consist of 20,500 *mantras*. These, however, include repetitions, specially of a number of Rig-Vedic verses in the other Vedas.

The first thing to note about the Vedas is that they are in the form of poetry, except for some prose passages, which again, are what is called rhythmic prose. The Vedas contain the earliest recorded poetry and prose literature of the human race.

The religion and culture of the Hindus are rooted in the Vedas which no specialist, either eastern or western, has placed much later than 1500 B.C. Some have placed them very much earlier.

It is usual to describe Vedic poetry as primitive. If, by “primitive poetry” is meant tribal song or folk ballad, then nothing could be farther from the fact. No primitive poet ever sang:

Thought was the pillow of her couch,
sight was the unguent of her eyes. (R. X. 85.7)

If we should call Vedic poetry primitive, we should do so with reference to its pristine purity and its freedom from the *malaise* of the later civilization. (Our people have got a better name for the Vedic age—*Krita* or *Satya Yuga*). It takes life in its fullness, no maladjustment being caused by the loss of balance between the primary biological instincts (search for food, fighting for safety, conjugal love), or between the active and contemplative faculties of the mind (a perfect harmony between *brahma*, spiritual power, and, *kshatra*, political power, being sought) or between matter and spirit. We do not find in the Vedas any evidence

IV

THE RAMAYANA

(i) THE IMMORTAL EPIC

AMONG our great festivals, which spread joy and comradeship amongst all our people, there is none which is so popular, more especially in Northern India, than the celebration of the story of Rama and Sita. Valmiki wrote his immortal epic and, in later days, Tulsidas, writing in homely language, made this story a part of the texture of the lives of our people. A story and a book which has had this powerful influence on millions of people, during some millenniums of our changing history, must have peculiar virtue in it.

Ever since my boyhood, I have been fascinated by this India of ours. It has been a mystery often, a revelation sometimes, and the more I have sought to understand her the more I have been impressed by her powerful personality which has endured through the ages. In a sense, my life has been a quest, an attempt to understand this great motherland of ours with its infinite variety and its basic unity. No one who sees a part of India only and not rest, can have a full picture of her. No one who sees the present only and has no realisation of the panorama of her past, can understand her, for our roots go deep down into the past of the history of man. Innumerable weeds have grown up from time to time. But they have never succeeded in uprooting those deep roots which have fashioned our destiny for good or ill. Out of that distant past, which is history, and the present, which is the burden of today, the future of India is gradually taking shape.

We must have an intellectual understanding of these mighty processes of history. We must have even more, an emotional awareness of our past and present, in order to try

THE MAHABHARATA

(i) VEDA VYASA, THE AUTHOR

ACCORDING to certain scholars, Vyasa lived 3,800 years ago. But recent excavations at Hastinapur indicate that he was born after the Vedic age had come to an end, about B.C. 950.

The rolling Sarasvati, on the banks of which the *rishis* had composed and chanted the Vedic *Mantras*, had already dried up. Its waters now flowed westward and the current had come to be called Yamuna. The holy river only lived in the memory of men as the goddess of learning. For centuries now the Aryan and non-Aryan blood had been freely mixed. Indian culture, the result of Aryo-Dravidian impact, was at its post-natal vigour.

In the hey-day of Vedic life, the Vashishthas—the Pure—were a great family of Vedic *rishis*, whose sacred chants survive today in a section of the *Rig-Veda*. The most outstanding of the Vashishthas was revered as one of the fathers of the race. It was he who had led the armies of the Aryan king Sudas against ten Aryan and non-Aryan kings headed by Vishwamitra, and who finally vanquished them in the Battle of the Ten Kings, *Dasharajna*.

Sahasrarjuna had come from the half-explored banks of the Narmada; had spread terror in Sapta-sindhu, the Vedic Punjab; devastated the Aryan settlements and the sacred *ashramas* and brought the Vedic Age to a close. Parashurama, the great Bhrigu, had risen, however, in irresistible might, destroyed the wicked kings and saved Aryan society. The memory of his mighty exploits was still an unflinching source of strength.

Aryan conquerors had now founded fresh kingdoms on the banks of the Ganga and the Yamuna, the most notable of which was ruled by the Bharatas from Hastinapur and

VI

THE PURANAS

(i) THE BHAGAVATA

THE *Bhagavata Purana* is one among the eighteen principal Puranas. It is a most popular work and is regarded by the Hindus with the utmost reverence. It occupies the same pedestal as the *Ramayana* and is considered so sacred that it is read and recited daily in many orthodox Hindu homes as a holy text. It is replete with sublime lessons of philosophy and devotion; and its study is regarded as a blessing or benediction.

The age and the authorship of the Puranas is still a subject of debate. According to orthodox tradition, they were all composed by the great Veda Vyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata*; and the traditional date would be some centuries before Christ. This view is not however accepted by our historians and research scholars. According to them, it is difficult to believe that all of them came into existence at such an early date or simultaneously and that they were the productions of one and the same author. All the Puranas have got the *panchalakshanas* or the five principal characteristics or topics—cosmogony, secondary creation, genealogy of gods and patriarchs, the reigns of the several Manus, and the histories of the solar and lunar dynasties. But their style varies greatly; while it is easy and flows freely in some, in the others, it is difficult, stilted and abstruse. The subjects dealt with are widely different and sometimes conflicting. While one deity is extolled in one, another is praised in a different Purana, even to the detriment of the first. There are variations too in the Puranas as regards the *panchalakshanas*. Scholars trained in historical research incline, for such reasons, to the belief that the Puranas are the works of different authors and

VII

SANSKRIT KAVYA

(i) VALMIKI, VYASA AND KALIDASA

VALMIKI, Vyasa and Kalidasa are the essence of the history of ancient India; if all else were lost, they would still be its sole and sufficient cultural history. Their poems are types and exponents of three periods in the development of the human soul, types and exponents also of the three great powers which dispute and clash in the imperfect and half-formed temperament and harmonise in the formed and perfect. At the same time, their works are pictures at once minute and grandiose of three moods of our Aryan civilization, of which the first was predominatingly moral, the second predominatingly intellectual, the third predominatingly material. The fourth power of the soul, the spiritual, which can alone govern and harmonise the others by fusion with them, had not, though it pervaded and powerfully influenced each successive development, any separate age of predominance, and did not like the others possess the whole race with a dominating obsession.

It is because, conjoining in themselves the highest and most varied poetical gifts, they at the same time represent and mirror their age and humanity by their interpretative largeness and power, that our three chief poets hold their supreme place and bear comparison with the great world names, Homer, Shakespeare and Dante.

It has been said, truly, that the *Ramayana* represents an ideal society and assumed, illogically, that it must therefore represent an altogether imaginary one. The argument ignores the alternative of a real society idealised. No poet could evolve entirely out of his own imagination a picture at once so colossal, so minute and so consistent in every detail. No number of poets could do it without stumbling

VIII

EARLY TAMIL LITERATURE

ANTIQUITY:—The Dravidian group of languages comprises Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam, besides dialects like Tulu, Kodagu, Gondi and some others including Brahui spoken in Baluchistan. Tamil, however, leads the rest chronologically as well as in respect of its recorded achievement. It is also the representative language of the family, and its vocabulary and systematized grammar inspired the other languages of the Dravidian group. For example, Tamil developed a mature literature at least 1000 years before Kannada, which possesses the earliest literature in the Dravidian group after Tamil. Telugu literature developed even later than Kannada by about three centuries, and as for Malayalam, before the tenth century it was Sentamil or pure Tamil.

Sangams:—Tamil literature historically begins with the Sangams. "Sangam" means society or academy to which authors submitted their writings for approval. According to tradition, there were three Sangams, all of which flourished under the patronage of the Pandya or the Pallava kings, and mythological stories about the activities of the Sangams are recorded. It is stated that the first Sangam was held in old Madura and the second in Kapatapuram or Alaivai and the sage Agastya presided over both; the third Sangam was held in north Madura. The underlying historical fact seems to be that the venue of the Sangam changed with the capital, which is known to have shifted from old Madura to Kapatapuram, and from there to north Madura.

The traditional accounts of the first two Sangams where gods and mortals freely exchanged ideas have no historical value. Equally useless are the traditional dates which go back to thousands of years. It is therefore reasonable to

SECTION II
PHILOSOPHY

IX

INDIAN AND IONIAN PHILOSOPHY

THE Earliest Sources of Philosophy:—A basic question that arises in this connection is that of the beginnings of philosophy. Where should we start the story? In Greece or in India? In other words, which country contains the traces of the earliest developments of philosophy?

So far as Greek philosophy is concerned, we are aware of some of its earliest phases. It has been generally recognized that philosophical speculations in Greece cannot be traced earlier than the sixth century B.C. The first Greek rethinker, whom we can appropriately describe as a philosopher, was Thales. A specific incident has helped us to determine his chronology. It is said that he had predicted through his calculations the correct time of an eclipse which took place in B.C. 585. Two men who after Thales gave a new turn to the development of philosophical thought in Greece were Pythagoras and Socrates. Pythagoras lived about B.C. 532 and the death of Socrates took place in B.C. 399.

When, however, we look at India of the sixth century B.C., we see a completely different picture. This period in India witnessed not the beginnings but the development of philosophical thought. It was not a case of the dawn of philosophy as in Greece but what may be described as the full glow of philosophical day. It was not the first faltering steps of the human intellect along the long and arduous way of philosophical quest but it marked a stage which could have been reached only after a considerable journey.

Two facts are inevitably forced upon our attention in any discussion of this period:

(i) The emergence of Buddhism and Jainism took place in this epoch.

(ii) Before the advent of the Buddha and Mahavira, there had already been a considerable development of philo-

X

VEDANTA

THE Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita are the source-books of Vedanta. It is a remarkable achievement of intellectual imagination—it would not be incorrect to call it inspiration—that the rule of law in science was anticipated in the ancient Hindu scriptures. The God of Vedanta is not an anthropomorphic creation with human capriciousness—a conception against which the veriest tyro in modern science can launch a successful attack. Divine sovereignty is explained in the *Bhagavad-Gita* in a language which anticipates and meets the difficulties that modern science raises against religious cosmology. According to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the sovereignty of God is exercised in and through the unchangeable law of cause and effect, that is, through what we call the laws of nature.

“All this world is pervaded by Me in form unmanifest; all things abide in Me, but I stand apart from them. And yet beings are not rooted in Me. Behold the scheme of My sovereignty! Myself the origin and the support of beings, yet standing apart from them. Using nature which is Mine own, I create again and again all this multitude of beings, keeping them dependent on nature. In the scheme of My sovereignty, nature brings forth the moving and the unmoving, and in consequence of this the world evolves.”

A study of the Upanishads will show that Vedanta postulates that the universe is the result of a gradual unfolding of the creative power inherent in the primordial substance. In fact, it may be said that the philosophy of Hinduism anticipated the basic theories of biology and physics. The very approach to things in the Upanishads, the insistence on adherence to truth and on tireless investigation is remarkably in the nature of an anticipation of the methods of science.

Just as Vedanta appears to have anticipated science and

XII

THE WEB OF LIFE

INDIA is the heart of Asia. Hinduism is a convenient name for the nexus of Indian thought. It would appear that it takes some thousand to fifteen hundred years to work out a single rhythm of its great pulsation. For this is about the period that divides the war of the *Mahabharata* from Buddha, Buddha from Shankaracharya, and Shankaracharya from Ramakrishna, in whom the immense pile reaches the crowning self-consciousness. Of the long prehistoric evolution that went to the building up of *Mahabharata*, Great India, the heroic age, we can say little, for nothing is left to us, save the legend of Sita and Rama, out of the night of time. Yet we know that this period must have been long. Three thousand years seems not too much, if enough, to allow. Behind this again loom up the millennia spent on the tableland of Central Asia, that headwater of world-civilization where Aryan man entered the patriarchate, and closed the account of his first combat with Nature, having tamed the beasts, learned the use of tools, domesticated corn and fire, produced the fruit-trees, and divided the week. Of the sublime dreams, the poetry and song with which he consoled himself during those ages of Herculean struggle, the fragments known as the *Rig-Veda* still remain. And we learn therein how broad was his outlook upon Nature, even as that of the mind that declared "and the evening and the morning were the first day." How long did it last? Was it ten thousand years? Were there another five thousand before the war of *Mahabharata*? However this be, the enthusiasm of succeeding periods strikes us as extraordinary.

There is no question that the characteristic product of the civilization that succeeded the Great War was the Forest-universities, notes of whose sessions have become the *sutras*

SECTION III
RELIGION

XIII

LIFE OF BUDDHA

THE BUDDHA as a Man: We may now attempt an estimate of the greatness of the Buddha as a man, and not as the founder of a religion followed by more than a fifth of the human race. We can make an estimate of that greatness on the basis of some of the sayings attributed to him, or anecdotes told about him in the texts compiled after his death.

Stages in His Life: The Buddha was married at sixteen. His only son was born after more than twelve years of married life. He renounced the world when he was enjoying it most, at twenty-nine. He spent six years in a life of uttermost austerities, achieving Buddhahood or Enlightenment at thirty-five. From thirty-five up to his death, at eighty, for a period of forty-five years, he gave himself completely to active social service and ministry.

Initial Weaknesses: The Buddha, like the lotus, blossomed into perfection out of the ordinary conditions of life. He was not initially above the ills which flesh is heir to. He did not, like ordinary men, find renunciation and asceticism at all easy. He himself confessed: "I also, ye monks, before I had attained Enlightenment... myself subject to birth, growth and decay, sickness and death, pain and impurity, sought after what also is subject to these, viz. wife and children, slaves, male and female, goats and sheep, fowls and swine, elephants, cattle, horses, mares, gold and silver... How if I seek the birthless, ageless, diseaseless, deathless, and the stainless incomparable surety, the extinction of illusion! And, ye monks, after some time, while still in my first bloom, shining, dark-haired, in the enjoyment of happy youth, in the first years of manhood, against the wish of weeping and wailing parents, with shorn hair and beard, clothed in ragged raiment, I

XIV

SHANKARACHARYA

TODAY those fundamentals of science and of life, space and time which were supposed to be the basic principles of the Universe—space, time, causality—all these have assumed new shapes. Space is supposed to be a function of time, space is supposed to be infinite, yet limited. The fourth dimension is mathematically proved to exist. All phenomena are relative and are functions of consciousness. Nothing is real, and it is not only the maxims of the Vedanta, but of Sir James Jeans which postulate that the teaching of modern science amounted to a realisation that all phenomena and events are a function of the mind. In other words, space does not exist by itself and time does not exist by itself. The doctrine of relativity which we owe to Einstein had been preached 2500 years ago, or even earlier, by the great Upanishad Kartas, and they affirmed that everything is imaginary but that there is one Immanent Mind of Supreme Consciousness whose *maya* manifestations are the physical causations and appearances. So, as a result of laboratory experiments and mathematical calculations, the earlier materialistic theories and hypotheses have vanished and we have come back to the Vedanta, according to which the only thing that exists is the Supreme Mind of which all minds, all phenomena, are a part and which is the summation, embodiment and integration of the Universe and its evolution. That is the present state of modern science. In other words, modern science—European and American science—the science that we owe to people like Einstein and Niels Bohr has led to this conclusion, that those firm foundations on which life and the problems and phenomena of life were accepted to be based and understood to rest are shifting, and that a new philosophy, a new conspectus, a new appraisal of those phenomena is

KABIR

THE fifteenth century, which covers the main period of Kabir's life, was marked by disorder and great social agitation.

Mohammad bin Tuglak (1325-1351) left the Moslem Empire in India in a state of chaos. Reducing the people to a state of great poverty and misery through his mal-administration and fanatical religious intolerance, he left behind him a country in the grip of famine, plague and rebellion.

In 1398 Timur invaded India and put to the sword thousands of innocent men, women and children, and carried away most of the wealth of the country that he could lay his hands on. The beautiful city of Delhi was reduced to ruins; Meerut was sacked and everywhere in the north of India, through which the Moslem conqueror passed, there was nothing but ruin and chaos.

Hindu India was not shown the beautiful side of Islam. The great personality of the prophet of Arabia remained a sealed book to them. It can be imagined what they thought of Islam.

F. E. Keay gives the following account of India under Moselm rule, immediately before the birth of Kabir: "During the period of the Sultanate of Delhi, the Hindu religion had been exposed to constant danger. The more ruthless sovereigns, or governors of provinces, often carried out wholesale massacres and destroyed Hindu shrines, while even milder rulers often used force to bring about their people's conversion. The *Jiziya*, a tax on non-Mohammedans, was generally enforced.... Yet in spite of persecution, Hinduism flourished...."

The destruction of their temples and the outrages on their sacred traditions by the north-western invaders did

XVII

TULSIDAS

THERE can be no comparison between the polished phraseology of classical Sanskrit and the rough colloquial idiom of Tulsidas's vernacular; while the antiquity of Valmiki's poem further invests it with an adventitious interest for the student of Indian history. But, on the other hand, the Hindi poem is the best and most trustworthy guide to the popular living faith of the Hindu race at the present day—a matter of not less practical interest than the creed of their remote ancestors—and its language, which in the course of three centuries has contracted a tinge of archaism, is a study of much importance to the philologist, as helping to bridge the chasm between the modern tongue and the mediaeval. It is also less wordy and diffuse than the Sanskrit original and, probably in consequence of its modern date, is less disfigured by wearisome interpolations and repetition; while if it never soars so high as Valmiki in some of his best passages, it maintains a more equable level of poetic diction, and seldom sinks with him into such dreary depths of unmitigated prose. It must also be noted that it is in no sense a translation of the earlier work: the general plan and the management of the incidents are necessarily much the same, but there is a difference in the touch in every detail; and the two poems vary as widely as any two dramas on the same mythological subject by two different Greek tragedians. Even the coincidence of name is an accident; for Tulsidas himself called his poem, the *Ram-charit-manas*, and the shorter title, corresponding in character to the "Iliad" or "Aeneid", has only been substituted by his admirers as a handier designation for a popular favourite.

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The earliest notice of our author, as indeed, of all the other celebrated Vaishnava writers who flourished about

XVIII

SHAIKH NIZAMUDDIN AULIYA*

SHAIKH NIZAMUDDIN'S paternal grandfather, Khwaja Syed Ali, had emigrated from Bokhara and settled in Badaun, where the Shaikh was born in A.D. 1238. While he was yet a child, his father, Syed Ahmad, fell ill and his mother, Bibi Zulaikha, dreamt that a voice was asking her to choose between her husband and her son. With the eternal instinct of the Indian mother, Bibi Zulaikha preferred to save her son, and as destiny would have it, Syed Ahmad died soon after. Bibi Zulaikha was a lady of fervent piety, and her character left a deep impression on the son, whom she adored and managed to educate in conditions of appalling poverty. Mother and son had no means of livelihood except what their neighbours brought to them unasked, and their maid-servant ran away from the starving household. Nevertheless, the Shaikh, who was remarkable for his diligence, learnt all that Badaun had to teach, and, at the age of sixteen, went with his mother and sister to complete his studies at Delhi. The great capital was at that time full of scholars and men of learning; education was practically free; and a student so intelligent as the Shaikh had access to the best teachers. His principal tutor, Maulana Kamaluddin Zahid, was distinguished by a remarkable independence of character. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Balban, having heard of Maulana Zahid's piety, invited him to the court and offered him the post of Head Imam. "Our prayer is all that is left to us," the Maulana replied, "does the Sultan wish to seize that also?" Balban was struck dumb, and, after offering a brief apology, allowed the Maulana to depart. From such a

*Popular usage nowadays divides Indian Mussalmans into Syeds, Moghuls, Pathans and a fourth, extensive and nondescript class designated Shaikhs. In mediaeval India, a Shaikh meant an eminent mystic or saint. I have used the term in its mediaeval significance.

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Indian culture is the eternal bed-rock of India's life, of its proud past, its fateful present and its glorious future. A knowledge of the various aspects of this culture is, therefore, indispensable for our national growth. But mere knowledge of this culture is not enough; what is necessary is to have an emotional awareness of it.

The present volume seeks to fulfil a long-felt want; for it is prepared with a view not only to generating an emotional awareness of India's culture but also to providing spiritual kinship with our glorious heritage.

In this volume selections from the works of distinguished authors on different aspects of Indian culture have been included. Among them are Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sri Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri C. Rajagopalachari, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sister Nivedita, Prof. Louis Renou and Mr. F. S. Growse.

This book is being issued in three volumes: Volume I covers Literature, Philosophy and Religion; Volume II Arts, History and Culture and Volume III Science and Society.