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THE HINDU DHARMA.

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FROM the time the history of the Aryans in India commenced up till to-day, it has been the privilege or the misfortune of India to be faced with serious racial and religious crises. In a special sense, India has been a small edition of the world, serving as a laboratory where experiments of racial and religious syntheses relevant to the problems of the world are undertaken and worked out. If it be true that every people has its own distinctive note and brings out one particular aspect of the divine manifestation, India seems to have been selected, in the economy of things, for the purpose of offering solutions for racial and religious conflicts.

In the long history of the Hindu religion with all its cross currents and backwaters, with the windings of the stream and the barren expanses of sand, it is possible to discern a general tendency, a spiritual direction which has continued the same in spite of varying expressions. The central principles of the ancient Hindu *dharma* are not dead shells, but living powers full of strength and suggestiveness. Even if it be not so, it is not altogether without interest to understand the principles of the Hindu faith which has more than two hundred million followers to-day.

The term "*dharma*" is one of complex significance. It stands for all those ideals and purposes, influences and institutions that shape the character of man both as an indi-

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vidual and as a member of society. It is the law of right living, the observance of which secures the double object of happiness on earth and salvation.¹ It is ethics and religion combined. The life of a Hindu is regulated, to a very detailed extent, by the laws of *dharma*. His fasts and feasts, his social and family ties, his personal habits and tastes are all considered by it.

Moksha or spiritual freedom is the aim of all human life. It is the destiny of man to reach the summits of spirit and attain immortality. We are the children of God, *Amritasya putrāh*. The eternal dream of the human heart, the aspiration of the soul to come to its own is the basis of the Hindu *dharma*. It assumes that the fundamental reality is the soul of man. All desires of the heart, all discussions of logic presuppose the reality of the *Ātman*. It is something unprovable by reason, though no proof is possible without it. Nor is it a mere matter of faith, since it is the faith which underlies all reason. If the self of man is open to doubt, then nothing on earth is free from it. If anything can be, then the soul *is*. It is the ultimate truth which is above all change, the unseen reality which is the basis of all life and logic. It is the mystery which silently affirms itself. What our minds think is not of much importance beside the truth that we are. The fears of man are due to the imperfections which shut him from his destiny, the darkness which hides the light within. If we take refuge in the self, the only fixed point of our being, we shall know that we are not alone in the apparently endless road of life or *saṃsāra* and that we can overcome the world and defy death. "Greater is he that is within you than he that is in the world."²

While the spiritual perfection of man is the aim of all endeavor, the Hindu *dharma* does not insist on any religious belief or form of worship. The utmost latitude is allowed in the matter of addressing and approaching the supreme. The Hindu thinkers were good students of philosophy and

¹ *Abhyudaya* and *Niḥśreyasa*.

² I, John, V, 21.

sociology and never felt called upon to enforce religious belief. Misunderstandings and antagonisms in religious matters arise, when we put forward excessive claims on behalf of our own views of God. Besides, religion implies freedom and it is the greatest injury that we can inflict on man to compel him to accept what he cannot understand. Again, it is difficult to classify the ways of man to God. The heart of man has written, in its blood, its pathway to God. A Sanskrit verse says, "As the birds float in the air and the fish swim in the sea leaving no traces behind, even so are the paths traversed by the spiritual." Christ spoke of the mystery of the divine life revealing itself in the finite soul, "The wind bloweth where it listeth; thou hearest the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the spirit." God reveals himself now by a flash of lightning, now by a tremor in the soul. To a Hindu who has understood the spirit of his religion all faiths are sacred. In Rabindranath's school at Bolpur, where the one Invisible God is worshipped, abuse of others' faiths is disallowed. Gandhi is most tolerant in his religious views. Regarding the attitude of the Brahman thinkers to other religions, Wilson writes, "The Brahmans who compiled a code of Hindu law, by command of Warren Hastings, preface their performance by affirming the equal merit of every form of religious worship. Contrarities of belief, and diversities of religion, they say, are in fact part of the scheme of providence; for as a painter gives beauty to a picture by a variety of colors, or as a gardener embellishes his garden with flowers of every hue, so God appointed to every tribe its own religion that man might glorify him in diverse modes, all having the same end and being equally acceptable in his sight."³

This does not, however, mean that the Hindu thinkers have no right ideas of God and consider all beliefs to be equally true. They have a sure perception of the highest truth, though they do not insist on a universal acceptance

³ H. H. Wilson: *Essays and Lectures*, Vol. II, p. 8.

of it. They believe that if the mind is enlightened the truth will be spontaneously perceived. Every religion is an expression of the mental and social evolution of the people who adopt it. It is therefore mischievous to attempt any sudden supplanting of existing beliefs by new ones. The cruder conceptions will give way before the rising rational reflection and the true reformer tries to improve the mental and moral nature of men. Truth is not so much the result of theological faith as the experience of a deeper moral life. So the Hindu thinkers pay more attention to the discipline than to the doctrine. The religion of the Hindus is not a theology as a scheme of life. Whether one is an orthodox Hindu or not depends, not on whether one believes this or that view of God, but on whether one accepts or rejects the *dharma*.⁴

The highest life enjoined by the *dharma* is what follows naturally from vital faith in the reality of God. If the indwelling of God in man is the highest truth, conduct which translates it into practice is ideal conduct. The several virtues are forms of the truth, *satyākāras*.⁵ Truth, beauty and goodness are a part of the life stuff of the ideal man. He will be an embodiment of the virtues of self-denial, humility, fraternal love and purity. By the mastery of soul over sense, clouds of hate and mists of passion dissolve and he will be filled with *śānti* or serenity and will remain absolutely calm in moments of great peril, personal loss or public calamity. With tranquility of soul, a steady pulse and a clear eye he will do the right thing at the right moment. He does not belong to this country or that, but is in a true sense the citizen of the world. The quality of *sattva* with its ideals of joy and love predominates over those of *rajas* with its craving for power and pride and *tamas*, with its dullness and inertia. For the perfect men, the *dharma* is an inspiration from within; for others it is an external command, what custom and public opinion demand.

The ideal which requires us to refrain from anger and

⁴ See Manu II, 11.

⁵ See *Mahabharata*. *Anuśasana parva* 162 and *Śanti parva* 33.

covetousness, to be pure and loving in thought, word and deed is much too high for those passing through the storm and stress of a life of sin and suffering. It seems to demand of life what it possibly cannot give. It kills all the constituent conditions of life. If renunciation of all were necessary for salvation, many may not care to be saved. The world is so organized that those who practice the Divine rule do not have much chance of success or survival. We are familiar with the way in which the Sermon on the Mount is dismissed as impossible idealism. We cannot be turning cheeks to smiters to receive blows when it is so tempting to give blows on both the cheeks. It may be divine to rejoice in suffering, but the flesh is weak for all that. Christendom consoles itself in the belief that even Jesus nodded once or twice. "O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Those who pride themselves on their practical spirit reduce the ideals to the level of ordinary human nature, subject to the temptations of power and profit, the flesh and the devil. The modern wordly reformer says, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but I say unto you, 'Thou shalt not kill except animals for food, birds for sport and men in battle.' It hath been said, 'Thou shalt not covet.' But I say unto you, 'Thou shalt not covet except on a large scale as in trade and imperialism.' Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not hate,' but I say unto you, 'Thou shalt not hate except the backward races, the enemy nations and the weak of the world.'" Alarmed at the sacrifices exacted by a religious life which tells us that happiness does not depend on power or wealth but on love and peace, our advanced reformers make so many reservations to the divine law that they completely destroy the force of the latter and justify our modern practice that violence, abundance of possessions and armaments are the final end of man's life. They conveniently forget the story of that friend of ours who planned to build great storehouses to provide an abundance for many years but

was cheated of his chance by the blow of death, which came overnight.

The Hindu thinkers are conscious of the great gulf that separates the actual nature of man which is bad from the ideal which seems to be well-nigh impossible. The consciousness of the great distance between the actual and the ideal does not tempt them to distort the ideal itself. It would be a blasphemy against the spirit in us that shall not be forgiven. They therefore attempt to develop the infinitely precious ideal from out of the apparently refractory stuff of life. The nature of man and his habits of judgment change rather slowly. We must have patience in the striving after perfection. The law of Karma tells us that millions of lives are consumed before one perfect life is produced. For thought to reach the highest plane we must plan, toil and agonize a lot. For our heart to pulse with joy, countless hearts must be burned out by suffering. Many strivings and sacrifices are needed to generate a holy character. Most men climb up the ladder to the spiritual heights only rung by rung. Few can fly from the bottom to the top at one bound. The *varnāśrama dharma* or the discipline of the classes and stages of life is the Hindu's device for the gradual improvement of human nature. It is intended to make all the Lord's people prophets. Its principles are those of a kingdom of spirit, not a civil commonwealth, of a universal institution, not a national organization. If morality is that which conscience imposes, and law that which state commands, the *dharma* is neither the one nor the other. It is the tradition sustained by the conviction of countless generations of men, which helps to build the soul of truth in us. It corresponds to the *Sittlichkeit* of the Germans and is independent of both the individual conscience and the-laws of the state. That is why dynastic feuds and imperialist aggressions have not touched the life of India which has continued the same for nearly fifty centuries. Successive storms of conquest have passed over the changeless millions as wind over reeds.

Moksha or liberation is the ideal towards which humanity

has to move. All life is set to the music of this ideal. All men are equal in that they are born of God. They are equal since they are to rise to the same divine destiny. But men differ with regard to their actual equipment for the ideal. They have varying amounts of darkness and evil to eliminate and have to put forth varying efforts to illumine their life with light and love. The education of the individual spirit is arranged through the scheme of *āśramas* or stages of life and *varnas* or classes of men. It takes into account the different sides of human nature. The life of man is rooted in desires or *kāma*. Man is a bundle of desires. Manu says, "It is not good that the soul should be enslaved by desire, yet nowhere is to be found desirelessness (*akāmatā*)."⁶ Since our activities are impelled by our desires, the right regulation of our desires is also a part of *dharma*. So *kāma* or enjoyment is recognized as a valid pursuit. It is not mere satisfaction of animal impulses but is the expression of the freedom of the self. This is not possible, until we escape from the tyranny of the senses. The life of man is not a mere succession of sensations but is the manifestation of an eternal idea developing itself through temporary forms. The desires of men are directed into the channels of family life and public duty. The emotional or artistic life of man is also a part of life's integral good. But art cannot flourish in an atmosphere of asceticism. We must have wealth or *artha*. The economic needs of the community should be satisfied, if the creative impulses of men are to be liberated for the higher cultural life. Rules are laid down regarding the interests of the community in the matter of the wealth earned by individual members. The liberty of each is restricted by the needs of all. Self-denial is the only way to gain wealth and enjoyment. *Dharma* or duty controls the pursuit of both pleasure and profit, *kāma* and *artha*. Those in whom *dharma* predominates are of *sattvik* nature, while the seekers of wealth are mere *rājasik* and those of pleasure *tamasik*.⁷ The indi-

⁶ II, 2-3.

⁷ Manu. XII, 38.

vidual who observes the laws of *dharma* automatically attains *moksha*, and so is it said that, *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *moksha* form the ends of life.

Whoever may have made the world or not, whatever be the truth about the origin of life and the universe, the supremacy of the moral end is admitted by all. In Hindu thought, man is said to come into being for a divine purpose. The unextinguished passions of our vanished lives bring about our birth on earth. It is through suffering that our weakness can be converted into strength, our ignorance into illumination. The evil of existence is expiated only by the suffering and self-restraint of life. The word "*āśrama*" comes from a root which means "to suffer." Without suffering, there is no progress; without death, no resurrection. Our life from beginning to end is a kind of death which means a larger life. The more we die to ourselves, the more do we live to God. Living and dying are inextricably blended and the perfect life is the crown of a complete death. Four stages are distinguished in the life of every Hindu, of which the first two are those of *Brahmachari* or student, *Grihastha* or householder. The last two stages deal with the retirement from life when the individual becomes a servant of God and of humanity.⁸

The first period opens with the sacramental symbol of initiation into a spiritual birth. It is intended to build up the psychophysical constitution of man. The building of the body and the training of the mind are the principal aims of this stage. The student is taught the habits of cleanliness, chastity, good manners and godliness.⁹ Social sympathies are cultivated by the insistence on poverty for all students whether they are sons of princes or of peasants. Every student is required to beg for his food and this training in poverty impresses on the mind of the student that wealth is not an essential condition of a good life. The students are not allowed to become laws unto themselves; nor are they delivered into the hands of an ignorant and blind

⁸ Manu VI, 87.

⁹ Manu II, 69.

fanaticism. They are not allowed to build altars and idols in their own imagination or fall a prey to superstitions and creeds. Loyalty to truth and respect for tradition are insisted on. The kind of education depends on the needs and capacities of the boys. The task was not so complex as it is to-day since the future vocations of boys were roughly settled. In the programme of education, secular as well as religious, no distinction is made between boys and girls. Only coeducation was not encouraged.

When the stage of apprenticeship is over, the student becomes responsible for a family: "The man is not man alone, but his wife and children also."¹⁰ He becomes the breadwinner of the family and thus the mainstay of the community. Family life and social duty help towards the ultimate goal and presuppose self-restraint. Every man is expected to do his work for the world. He should not, out of mere selfish pleasure, abstain from social service.¹¹ We are pledged to one another and should live for one another, the individual for the family, the family for the community, the community for the nation and the nation for the world. The caste system, valid in the second stage of the householder, assumes the unity and the interdependence of humanity. It takes into account the needs of the society as well as the interests of the individual. It sustains personality in that it helps the individual to transcend himself by giving his devotion to something beyond himself. By focusing his energies at a particular point in the environment, he tries to actualize his potentialities. It is an illustration of Hegel's harmony of opposites, a point of view which reconciles the apparently conflicting claims of the individual and the society. Not the good of self as a thing apart, or the good of society by itself, but a higher good to promote which constant self-renewal and social service are means is the governing principle of the caste system. Taking into account the variety of human nature, it lays down ways and means by which each man can attain full self-

¹⁰ Manu IX, 45.

¹¹ *The Bhagavadgīta* III, 16.

expression. It works up to the ideal of equality by recognizing the actual differences. It is an attempt to co-operate with the forces of nature and not flout them. Those who criticize the institution from the platform of modern knowledge do not remember that in no other country were peoples belonging to stocks of very unequal value thrown together. The prevedic peoples with whom the Aryans had to mingle were of a lower grade of civilization and culture. They were constituted into the fourth estate of the unregenerate, the once-born, the *ekajāti*, in whom no quality of intellect, emotion, or will is particularly developed. The twice-born or the regenerate are divided into three classes according as their intellect, emotion or will is more dominant than the others. Those who are strongly endowed with the powers of thought and reflection are the *Brahmans*; those gifted with heroism and love are the *Kshatriyas* or the warriors; those strongly inclined towards the practical business of life are the *Vaiśyas* or the traders. The four classes correspond to the intellectual, the militant, the industrial and the unskilled workers. All of them serve God's creation, by their own capacities, the *Brahmans* by their spirituality, the *Kshatriyas* by their heroism, the *Vaiśyas* by their skill and the *Śūdras* by their service.¹² All of them place the common good above that of their party or class. Claims of egoism and ambition are subordinated to those of conscience and justice, the enduring values that are confided to our keeping. When the different classes fulfil their respective functions, the society is considered to be just or in accordance with *dharma*.

The true interests of the unskilled workers were not neglected. The *Vaiśyas* pursue trade and love wealth and comfort though they are required to interpret them in terms of life and welfare. This caste is an association of men united by an economic nexus. Commercialism, however, was checked since the members of this class were called upon to hold the goods of life in the bonds of love. The *Ksha-*

¹² *Sūkrānti* I, 38-42.

triyas were the defenders of society from external aggression and internal disorder. The military organisation of the state was entrusted to them. They were in charge of the political arrangements. It was not the intention of the Hindu *dharma* to make the body of the people act as a general militia. Efficiency is everywhere gained through specialisation. Those whose business it is to make war and resist wrong by force must possess the proper aptitude for it and get the necessary training. The art of government cannot be practised by all. It is increasingly felt that amateur politicians keen on satisfying their constituencies and with no other training than what could be got from the hurly-burly of popular elections are incapable of doing justice to the task of administration. One particular class was devoted to the military and the administrative purposes, and the people as a whole were not possessed by a passion for government, for domination and power. Today, the great wars are fought for the government of the world and for the possession of its markets and not for the moral elevation of the people or the pursuit of good. The political obsession is the cause for the drifting of the world in deep confusion to unseen issues. It may be said that when there is a professional ruling class, there is no guarantee that the rule will be unselfish. The training to which they are subjected is a sufficient security for the right discharge of their functions. Besides, the rulers are not allowed to annul or alter *dharma*, but are only to administer it. The changes in the *dharma* are introduced by the Brahman thinkers, who possess no vested interests, but lead a life of spirit in compulsory poverty. They interpret the *dharma* in cases of doubt and difficulty.

The organisation of the society is essentially aristocratic in the best sense of the term, since only the philosophically minded men with detachment of view lay down the laws. The priests were the lawgivers even among the Jews, the Iranians and the Celts. The qualifications of the true Brahmans, wisdom, self-control and disinterestedness, made selfish legislation difficult. The Brahmans engaged in the

pursuit of knowledge and the beautifying of life were regarded as superior to the officers and administrators, and were not obliged to do what is congenial to the latter. They were freed from all material cares and subordination in spiritual matters to earthly authorities.¹³ The institution recognises that all good reforms start in the mind of one man and at first repel the world at large. Society cannot progress if all forward steps should first obtain the sanction of the majority. Absolute freedom for the creative thinkers is the first condition of culture and progress. Mr. Bertrand Russell, in a brilliant article in the *Century*, observes "without freedom, the man who is ahead of his age is rendered impotent." The considered conviction of one wise man is more worthy than the opinions of a myriad fools, according to Manu.¹⁴

The moral codes are adapted to the different stages of the unfolding of the life of spirit. The trader hoards up life zealously for material ends; the warrior flings it away for order and organisation and resists evil by the employment of force. The Brahman lives the life of *ahimsā* or non-violence with zeal and determination. His nonviolence is not a sign of weakness or cowardice, but the natural expression of spiritual strength and divine love. He has passed through the stage of a warrior and has found it unworthy of a true believer in God. Centuries of hereditary training and the influence of environment have made the Hindu a mild passive meditative being, a worshipper of the ideal of the Brahmin *sannyāsi*. Even to-day he is willing to pay his profound admiration to an emaciated saint like Gandhi.

The existence of orders lower than the Brahman, the dedication of one class to the business of war, have misled many students of Hinduism into thinking that the Hindu *dharma* is not based on the principle of nonviolence. The simple explanation that we have to pass through the lower stages in order to transcend them is forgotten. The higher we rise, the more austere should our life be. The legend of

¹³ Manu IV, 11.

¹⁴ XII, 113.

St. Christopher, who undertook to carry the Christ-child on his shoulders across a stream, is applicable to us all. The deeper he entered into the water, the heavier became the burden. By a slow conquest of the passions, by a rising knowledge of the spiritual basis of the world, all men who are born *sūdras* gradually rise in the scale till they become Brahmans. The load becomes heavier the higher we rise, and our strength will have to increase in proportion to the rise in the weight of the load. While the *Kshatriya* in view of his limitations may employ force, though without hatred and with a clean conscience, the Brahman should refrain altogether from the use of force and the cherishing of hatred or ill feeling for any.

The relativity of the stages leading up to the absolute ideal may also be illustrated from another case. Modern evolution is confirming the Hindu theory of the continuity of the animal and the human worlds. The Hindu *dharma* inculcates respect for life and tenderness towards all forms of animal creation. "Thou shalt not kill" applies to the animals as well. It is also believed that animal diet clogs the finer sensibilities of human life. More than what it adds to the physical it takes away from the psychical. Jesus himself is quite clear that even animals are objects of sacredness, and that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the notice of God. Yet the peoples of India were accustomed to animal diet, and so regulations were laid down restricting the use of animal diet for the fourth class and prohibiting it as a rule for the other classes, with the result that the Hindus as a whole are tending to give it up more and more.

Caste has economic implications. Many of the modern castes are only occupational divisions. Every man is not fit for all things and does not feel that he can begin any trade as he pleases. Nor do individuals go about in search of work, but they serve society by filling the station in which they happen to be placed. Unlimited competition and selfish individualism are checked. A religious character is impressed on every kind of work and form of indus-

try. The bricklayer and the carpenter, the blacksmith and the milkman believe that they glorify God by the right performance of their work. In these days of large-scale production and factory labor, we tend to forget that when a man is cut off from his family and made to work in a large factory, the work becomes joyless and mechanical. The caste on the other hand puts all men working the same profession in their natural surroundings, instead of tearing them away from their homes and working them for long hours and small wages. The fulness of communal life with its living associations of beauty, love and social obligations helps to make the worker happy. The members of his family who share in his work introduce sweetness and humanity into it. If women and children are to be worked, it is better that they work in the atmosphere of a home where it is possible to embody their creative impulses in what they turn out. There is a finer stimulus to right action than mere success in competition or satisfaction of customers can supply. Those who practice the same craft develop corporate feeling and professional honour. The young acquire from the plastic influences of the environment the right kind of vocational training. They absorb unconsciously the tradition of the trade and the economic pursuit happens to be the free self-expression of their soul. It is true that modern conditions are working against cottage industries and small-scale production. But it is not everywhere the case. Fine arts, decorative industries, even spinning and weaving as supplementary interests of the agriculturists may be confined to homes and we can have small factories worked by electricity or oil engines. Caste as trade guilds is not yet out of date. While the suggestion of a definite programme of life at the very beginning is not undesirable, still its stereotyping without the least regard to the natural endowment and special aptitudes is likely to result in an enslavement of life which finds it difficult to adjust itself to the complex conditions of the modern world.

Strictly speaking, the caste of a man is determined by the predominance of reason, emotion or will in him which corre-

spond roughly to the three *gunas* or qualities of *saltva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.¹⁵ Manu mentions three principles as governing the caste of a man which are *tapas* or individual effort, *śrutam* or the cultural environment and *yonī* or heredity. The first is a vague test and is not available for objective use. The second depends on the home influences, which in their turn depend on the third consideration of birth. The only practicable test is birth, and this view is in consonance with the principles of rebirth and *Karma* accepted by the Hindus. "The soul that rises with our life's star hath had elsewhere its setting and cometh from afar." Peoples with different racial heritages can live together in amity and fellowship only on the basis of caste. The formulators of the institution felt that though birth was the only available test, spiritual character was the real basis of the divisions of the society. Manu allows that if an individual practices the ways of the good and leads a pure life, he overcomes the effects of heredity.¹⁶ According to the *Mahābhārata*, the test of regeneracy is "not birth, not learning, but only conduct."¹⁷ We have ignored all factors other than birth, with the result that the system has rigidly confined people for all time to particular compartments, enslaved successive generations of men and proved well nigh fatal to the free growth of social polity. The natural plasticity and fluidity of life are not taken into account by the unflexible moulds and barriers of the system. We have reached a condition of society where the disorganisation of social life is so great that the principle of birth should be subordinated. Referring to a similar state of affairs, the *Mahābhārata* says, "There has been so much mixture in marriages that the test of *jāti* or birth is no good. The governing consideration should be *śīla* or conduct, and the first Manu has declared that there is no point in distinctions of caste, if character is not considered."¹⁸

¹⁵ See *Bhaviṣya Purāna* III, IV, 23.

¹⁶ See also *Mahābhārata*. *Vanaparva*, Ch. 216.

¹⁷ *Vṛttam eva*, M. B. *Vanaparva*, Ch. 314.

¹⁸ *Vanaparva*, Ch. 182. See Manu IV, 224 and 225.

Since the distinction of functions among the different classes is likely to generate pride and exclusiveness, in spite of the training during the student period, the general laws of the equal treatment of all are insisted on. Highest virtue consists in doing to others as we would be done by. *Vishnu Purāna* says, "Everywhere ye should perceive the equal; for the realisation of equality or *samatva* is the worship of God."¹⁹ There are duties which men of all castes are required to obey, such as non-injury to life, truth, integrity, cleanliness and self-control.²⁰ After all, the caste divisions are incidental to our imperfections and should not therefore constitute a source of pride. The one Eternal has no caste. The rules of caste are applicable only in the stage of the householder. Even here, they are not superior to the claims of humanity. What is necessary at the present day is an acceptance of the aims of caste and the cultivation of a more truly social spirit. The blighting bigotries and the rigid restrictions about the amenities of life are inconsistent with humanity and fellowship and therefore are to be given up. *Manu* does not encourage them. "The ploughman, the friend of the family, the cowherd, the servant, the barber and the poor stranger offering his service—from the hands of such *śūdras* may food be taken."²¹

The caste rules were not rigid until the advent of the Mohammedans into India. The social laws were fluid and elastic and the mutability of growth was not sacrificed to the strait waistcoat of a legal formula. We read in the *Purānas* stories of individuals and of families who changed from lower to higher castes. *Manu* admits the possibility of ascent and descent.²² Rules for change of caste by gradual purification are also mentioned.²³ The higher strata were accessible to merit from below. When Hindu India lost political freedom and the new rulers adopted a policy of

¹⁹ XVII.

²⁰ *Manu* X, 63; VI, 91-92.

²¹ *Manu* IV, 253.

²² See X, 42; IX, 335.

²³ *Manu* X, 57-65.

proselytism, social initiative disappeared and law and custom became fetishes, with disastrous results for national solidarity. We have to recover the original spirit of the *dharma*, which was not limited to particular forms, but manifested itself in fresh ones, changing the old and developing the new. The exaggerated value given to caste in times of political insecurity is no more necessary. Caste has a future only if it is confined to social matters. In every society, people enter into marriage relations only with those who are near to them in habits of mind and action. Since a common cultural tradition is better developed among those who pursue the same vocation, marriages among members of the same profession become the order of the day. Even in ancient India, intermarriages among members of different castes were not forbidden, though they were not encouraged. *Anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriages are not usual, though they are not invalid according to Hindu law.²⁴ If such marriages are not common, it is because they tend to disturb the intimate industrial, social and spiritual life of the community. Caste as a basis of intimate social relations does not interfere with the larger life of the nation. As the emperor Asoka said to his Hindu minister, "Caste may be considered when it is a question of marriage or invitation, but not of the *dharma*; for the *dharma* is concerned with virtues and virtues have nothing to do with caste."²⁵

It is a bold affirmation of an untruth to argue that social service is unknown to the Hindus. Much capital is made out of the treatment of the untouchables. It is not remembered that a free India rendered them much greater service than what other free countries even in recent times have done for their backward classes. How have the superior nations civilized the Tasmanian and the Australian aborigines, certain Maori peoples and North American Indian tribes? We generally refine them into extinction and where that is not possible, we sink them into the slough

²⁴ See *Bombay Law Reporter*. *Bai Gulab vs. Jivanlal Harilal* vol. XXIV.

²⁵ *Indian Social Reformer*, June 4, 1922.

of vice and crime worse than any normal expressions of savage life. If the Kaffir has multiplied under the British protection and the Javanese under the Dutch, if the populations of Straits Settlements and British India have not vanished before their civilizers, it is because a good God has put in a climate unfavourable to the civilizers. The tropics can never become their habitat. They can be held but not peopled by the Europeans. But for the limits set by nature, the history of the tropical regions would have been different. From the time the Aryans met the peoples of a lower grade of civilization, they devised ways and means by which the different portions of the population could develop in social, spiritual directions. The Aryans even accepted a non-Aryan representative of the "black" peoples and made him deliver the message of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. *Krishna's* conduct scandalised society and provoked the Vedic gods of *Indra* and *Brahma*. To-day the Aryan worshippers of these gods look upon *Krishna* as an avatar of God. *Krishna*, however, had great respect for the Aryan thinkers, and it is said that he washed the feet of the Brahman guests at the *Rajasūyayāga* of king *Yudhis-thira*. The Aryans took to the non-Aryan gods very kindly, improved them where possible, subordinated them where necessary. The worshippers of *Mahisha* (buffalo-demon) were told that the Cosmic Spirit was greater than the *Mahisha*. The worshippers of serpents were instructed that there was a greater than the serpents, the Lord of serpents, *Nāgeśwara* or *Krishna*, who danced over the head of *Kāliya*. The marks of the gradual civilizing of the lower classes are visible throughout the cultural history of India. Whenever there was a tendency to overlook the common humanity of men, a *Buddha* or a *Śankara* arose, emphasising the common doom of all high and low. The extent of the country 2,000 miles long and 1,500 miles broad is not similar to that from Dan to Beersheeba. The means of communication that we have at the present day were not available till recently. If the work of civilising the backward classes had not been undertaken and carried on with zeal and suc-

cess by the ancient Indians, we would have had not merely fifty millions of these "depressed" classes, but a much larger number. When the outside invaders came into the country, the Hindu felt nervous and as a sheer act of self-preservation stereotyped the existing divisions, and some were left outside the pale of the caste order. Though Manu says that "there is no fifth class anywhere,"²⁶ the tribes who were not influenced by the *dharma* formed themselves into the fifth class. "He who has abandoned his duties is cruel and pitiless, and oppresses others who is passionate and full of destructiveness is a *mleccha*."²⁷ No words are too strong for the deplorable condition of these people. To disregard the claims of man simply because he happens to be low or belongs to another race is against the religious spirit of Hinduism. Now that things are in a more settled condition, the Hindu leaders are reiterating the central truth that the least of all men has a soul and need not be considered past all power to save.

The last two stages of *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyāsa*, which may be taken as one for our purposes, treat of those who have retired from the competitive struggle for life. The *Sannyāsi* represents the highest type of Indian manhood. From selfishness, the individual has progressed to self-annihilation through the extinction of all prejudice, hatred and ambition. He has passed through all institutions and is now above them. His emotional life expresses itself in the love of the divine or *bhakti* and not in animal lusts or personal likes. He perceives the oneness and wholeness of humanity, and his mind is freed from all superstition and unreason. His active energies are devoted to the service of humanity, knowing as he does that God is in all beings and is all of them.²⁸ He who has the vision of all in one, in whom the impersonal predominates over the personal, cannot sin.²⁹ He is the superman of the *Bhagavadgīta*, the

²⁶ X, 4.

²⁷ *Sukranīti* I, 44.

²⁸ *Sarva bhutamayam harim. Vishnu Purāna* I, 19, 9.

²⁹ Manu XII, 118.

awakened of Buddhism, the true Brahman who glories in his poverty, rejoices in suffering, and is finely balanced in mind, with peace and joy at heart. He loves all, men, birds and beasts, and resists not evil but overcomes it by love. In him the soul of man is at its highest stretch. The ideal of the *Sannyāsi* has dominated the life of India from the time of the *Rishis* of the *Upanishads*. To follow this ideal, kings lay down their crowns and sceptres and assume the garb of poverty, fighting heroes forget the pride of victory and break their weapons, and skilled traders and workmen pursue their toil with steadfast mind surrendering to God the fruits thereof.

These *sannyāsis* as a rule are the helpers of humanity. The greatest of them, like Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja, Rānānanda and Kabir, have entered into the lifeblood of the nation and laid the foundations of its religion. It is, however, true, that in India, as in Mediæval Europe, many ascetics made the mistake of escaping into the wilderness from the worries of the world. These hermits of the cloister and monks of the desert are voices astray in the dark. Their perpetual consciousness of incitement to sin, their preoccupation with their selfish salvation show that they have lost their lives in their anxiety to save them. As the tide of monasticism which swept over Europe in the middle ages is not true to the teaching of Jesus, who asks us to look upon ourselves as servants trusted by the master, porters bidden to watch, stewards to whom much is committed, sons to whom the father confides his affairs, so the deserters from the battle of life are not the true *sannyāsis* who rage to suffer for mankind, with intense humility, glowing faith, sincere love and sober joy.

To reach the highest state, it is not always necessary to adhere literally to the rules of *dharma*. There are cases of sudden conversion, uprushes of the spirit from seemingly commonplace souls, astonishing moral elevations among men who have not learned the highest lesson of existence. The rules of *dharma*, however, represent the normal growth of spirit. The freed souls sometimes smile at the irrele-

vance of the painful scrupulosities and anxious questionings about ceremonial propriety which worry those in the lower stages of life. The order of *sannyāsis* is open to men of all castes. No man, however, should desire liberation without paying his three debts,³⁰ to the gods by means of hymns and prayers, to the *pitris* or the fathers by gifts and charity, help and service to men and rearing up of progeny, and to the *Rishis* by passing on to others the instruction received by himself.

The Hindu *dharma* has room for all kinds of men, the dispassionate old who have retired from the business of life and the eager pushful young keen on worldly success. The four castes and orders are not intended to be special moulds into which the Indian people are thrown, but forms capable of embracing the whole of humanity. Without the employment of force or eagerness for exploitation, Hinduism has been able to civilize a large part of Asia. What has attracted it is not imperialist expansion, but the cultural conquest, the peaceful penetration of the thought and mind of the peoples to which it comes by its own spirituality. From the kingdom of Khotan in Central Asia to the island of Java, which lies on the way between India and Australia, the creative urge of the Hindu genius found its expression in life and art. Java had Hindu settlers in as far back as the second century A.D. and she has remained since then predominantly Hindu and Buddhist. To-day, Japan, China and Burma look to India as their spiritual home even as Christians look to Palestine. Wherever we go from Russia to China, at Samarkand, at Tibet, we can trace the influence of the Indian civilization. All these pale into insignificance when we remember that there are records of Indian culture in Western Asia, in the plains of Mesopotamia, in the regions watered by the rivers Tigris and Euphrates. Inscribed tablets discovered at Boghaz-koi, assigned by competent scholars to 1400 B.C., speak to us of people who were worshipping the Hindu gods. This influence of India

³⁰ See Manu VI, 35.

is not because her religion is old or her empires are great, not because she developed weapons of destruction or exercised force on a large scale, but because she had an intelligent understanding of the deeper unity in the midst of all diversity. Wherever she went, the deep and silent influence of her vision of the unity of all things in God pervaded. All the mighty impulses that entered into India were synthesized on the same plan. All religions she welcomed since she realized from the cloudy heights of contemplation that the spiritual landscape at the hilltop is the same though the pathways from the valley are different. To those who were wandering at random in the plains without suspecting that all roads lead to the same top, she says: Raise your eyes. Things in the valley separate us. Up yonder, high above us, we are all one. The variety of ways has meaning at the foot of the hill, but if we understand what they signify on the snowy summits, we shall know that all are reaching out for God. It may be that India with her assimilative genius may yet succeed in harmonising the mighty currents of the world's great religions that have met on her soil.

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