

B U D D H I S M.

LECTURE I.

Introductory. Buddhism in relation to Brāhmanism.

IN my recent work¹ on Brāhmanism I have traced the progress of Indian religious thought through three successive stages—called by me Vedism, Brāhmanism, and Hindūism—the last including the three subdivisions of Śaivism, Vaishṇavism, and Śāktism. Furthermore I have attempted to prove that these systems are not really separated by sharp lines, but that each almost imperceptibly shades off into the other.

I have striven also to show that a true Hindū of the orthodox school is able quite conscientiously to accept all these developments of religious belief. He holds that they have their authoritative exponents in the successive bibles of the Hindū religion, namely, (1) the four Vedas—R̥g-veda, Yajur-veda, Sāma-veda, Atharva-veda—and the Brāhmaṇas; (2) the Upanishads; (3) the Law-books—especially that of Manu; (4) the Bhakti-śāstras, including the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahā-bhārata, the Purāṇas—especially the Bhāgavata-purāṇa—and the Bhagavad-gītā; (5) the Tantras.

¹ 'Brāhmanism and Hindūism.' Third Edition. John Murray, Albemarle Street.

The chief works under these five heads represent the principal periods of religious development through which the Hindū mind has passed.

Thus, in the first place, the hymns of the Vedas and the ritualism of the Brāhmaṇas represent physiolatry or the worship of the personified forces of nature—a form of religion which ultimately became saturated with sacrificial ideas and with ceremonialism and asceticism. Secondly, the Upanishads represent the pantheistic conceptions which terminated in philosophical Brāhmanism. Thirdly, the Law-books represent caste-rules and domestic usages. Fourthly, the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahā-bhārata, and Purāṇas represent the principle of personal devotion to the personal gods, Śiva, Viṣṇu, and their manifestations; and fifthly, the Tantras represent the perversion of the principle of love to polluting and degrading practices disguised under the name of religious rites. Of these five phases of the Hindū religion probably the first three only prevailed when Buddhism arose; but I shall try to make clear hereafter that Buddhism, as it developed, accommodated itself to the fourth and even ultimately to the fifth phase, admitting the Hindū gods into its own creed, while Hindūism also received ideas from Buddhism.

At any rate it is clear that the so-called orthodox Brāhman admits all five series of works as progressive exponents of the Hindū system—although he scarcely likes to confess openly to any adoption of the fifth. Hence his opinions are of necessity Protean and multiform.

The root ideas of his creed are of course Pantheistic, in the sense of being grounded on the identification of

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the whole external world—which he believes to be a mere illusory appearance—with one eternal, impersonal, spiritual Essence ; but his religion is capable of presenting so many phases, according to the stand-point from which it is viewed, that its pantheism appears to be continually sliding into forms of monotheism and polytheism, and even into the lowest types of animism and fetishism.

We must not, moreover, forget—as I have pointed out in my recent work—that a large body of the Hindūs are unorthodox in respect of their interpretation of the leading doctrine of true Brāhmanism.

Such unorthodox persons may be described as sectarians or dissenters. That is to say, they dissent from the orthodox pantheistic doctrine that all gods and men, all divine and human souls, and all material appearances are mere illusory manifestations of one impersonal spiritual Entity—called Ātman or Purusha or Brahman—and they believe in one supreme personal god—either Śiva or Viṣṇu or Kṛiṣṇa or Rāma—who is not liable (as orthodox Brāhman say he is) to lose his personality by subjection to the universal law of dissolution and re-absorption into the one eternal impersonal Essence, but exists in a heaven of his own, to the bliss of which his worshippers are admitted¹.

And it must be borne in mind that these sectarians are very far from resting their belief on the Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas, and Upanishads.

Their creed is based entirely on the Bhakti-sāstras

¹ The heaven of Śiva is Kailāsa, of Viṣṇu is Vaikuṅṭha, of Kṛiṣṇa is Goloka.

—that is, on the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahā-bhārata, and Purāṇas (especially on the Bhāgavata-purāṇa) and the Bhagavad-gītā, to the exclusion of the other scriptures of Hindūism.

Then again it must always be borne in mind that the terms ‘orthodox’ and ‘unorthodox’ have really little or no application to the great majority of the inhabitants of India, who in truth are wholly innocent of any theological opinions at all, and are far too apathetic to trouble themselves about any form of religion other than that which has belonged for centuries to their families and to the localities in which they live, and far too ignorant and dull of intellect to be capable of inquiring for themselves whether that religion is likely to be true or false.

To classify the masses under any one definite denomination, either as Pantheists or Polytheists or Monotheists, or as simple idol-worshippers, or fetish-worshippers, would be wholly misleading.

Their faculties are so enfeebled by the debilitating effect of early marriages, and so deadened by the drudgery of daily toil and the dire necessity of keeping body and soul together, that they can scarcely be said to be capable of holding any definite theological creed at all.

It would be nearer the truth to say that the religion of an ordinary Hindū consists in observing caste-customs, local usages, and family observances, in holding what may be called the Folk-legends of his neighbourhood, in propitiating evil spirits and in worshipping the image and superscription of the Empress of India, impressed on the current coin of the country.

As a rule such a man gives himself no uneasiness

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whatever about his prospects of happiness or misery in the world to come.

He is quite content to commit his interests in a future life to the care and custody of the Brāhmins; while, if he thinks about the nature of a Supreme Being at all, he assumes His benevolence and expects His good will as a matter of course.

What he really troubles himself about is the necessity for securing the present favour of the inhabitants of the unseen world, supposed to occupy the atmosphere everywhere around him—of the good and evil demons and spirits of the soil—generally represented by rude and grotesque images, and artfully identified by village priests and Brāhmins with alleged forms of Vishṇu or Śiva.

It follows that the mind of the ordinary Hindū, though indifferent about all definite dogmatic religion, is steeped in the kind of religiousness best expressed by the word *δεισιδαιμονία*. He lives in perpetual dread of invisible beings who are thought to be exerting their mysterious influences above, below, around, in the immediate vicinity of his own dwelling. The very winds which sweep across his homestead are believed to swarm with spirits, who unless duly propitiated will blight the produce of his fields, or bring down upon him injury, disease, and death.

Then again, besides the orthodox and besides the sectarian Hindū and besides the great demon-worshipping, idolatrous, and superstitious majority, another class of the Indian community must also be taken into account—the class of rationalists and free-thinkers.

These have been common in India from the earliest times.

First came a class of conscientious doubters, who strove to solve the riddle of life by microscopic self-introspection and sincere searchings after truth, and these did their best not to break with the Veda, Vedic revelation, and the authority of the Brāhmins.

Earnestly and reverently such men applied themselves to the difficult task of trying to answer such questions as — What am I? Whence have I come? Whither am I going? How can I explain my consciousness of personal existence? Have I an immaterial spirit distinct from, and independent of, my material frame? Of what nature is the world in which I find myself? Did an all-powerful Being create it out of nothing? or did it evolve itself out of an eternal protoplasmic germ? or did it come together by the combination of eternal atoms? or is it a mere illusion? If created by a Being of infinite wisdom and love, how can I account for the co-existence in it of good and evil, happiness and misery? Has the Creator form, or is He formless? Has He qualities and affections, or has He none?

It was in the effort to solve such insoluble enigmas by their own unaided intuitions and in a manner not too subversive of traditional dogma, that the systems of philosophy founded on the Upanishads originated.

These have been described in my book on Brāhmanism. They were gradually excogitated by independent thinkers, who claimed to be Brāhmins or twice-born men, and nominally accepted the Veda with its Brāhmaṇas,

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while they covertly attacked it, or at least abstained from denouncing it as absolutely untrue. Such men tacitly submitted to sacerdotal authority, though they really propounded a way of salvation based entirely on self-evolved knowledge, and quite independent of all Vedic sacrifices and sacrificing priests. The most noteworthy and orthodox of the systems propounded by them was the Vedānta¹, which, as I have shown, was simply spiritual Pantheism, and asserted that the one Spirit was the only real Being in the Universe.

But the origin of the more unorthodox systems, which denied the authority of both the Veda and the Brāhmanas, must also be traced to the influence of the Upanishads. For it is undeniable that a spirit of atheistic infidelity grew up in India almost *pari passu* with dogmatic Brāhmanism, and has always been prevalent there. In fact it would be easy to show that periodical outbursts of unbelief and agnosticism have taken place in India very much in the same way as in Europe; but the tendency to run into extremes has always been greater on Indian soil and beneath the glow and glamour of Eastern skies. On the one side, a far more unthinking respect than in any other country has been paid to the authority of priests, who have declared their supernatural revelation to be the very breath of God, sacrificial rites to be the sole instruments of salvation,

¹ The Sāṅkhya system, as I have shown, was closely connected with the Vedānta, though it recognized the separate existence of countless individual Purushas or spirits instead of the one (called Ātman). Both had much in common with Buddhism, though the latter substituted *Śūnya* 'a void' for Purusha and Ātman.

and themselves the sole mediators between earth and heaven; on the other, far greater latitude than in any other country has been conceded to infidels and atheists who have poured contempt on all sacerdotal dogmas, have denied all supernatural revelation, have made no secret of their disbelief in a personal God, and have maintained that even if a Supreme Being and a spiritual world exist they are unknowable by man and beyond the cognizance of his faculties.

We learn indeed from certain passages of the Veda (Ṛig-veda II. 12. 5; VIII. 100. 3, 4) that even in the Vedic age some denied the existence of the god Indra.

We know, too, that Yāska, the well-known Vedic commentator, who is believed to have lived before the grammarian Pāṇini (probably in the fourth century B. C.), found himself obliged to refute the sceptical arguments of Kautsa and others who pronounced the Veda a tissue of nonsense (Nirukta I. 15, 16).

Again, Manu—whose law-book, according to Dr. Bühler, was composed between the second century B. C. and the second A. D., and, in my opinion, possibly earlier—has the following remark directed against sceptics:—

‘The twice-born man who depending on rationalistic treatises (hetu-sāstra) contemns the two roots of law (śruti and smṛiti), is to be excommunicated (vahish-kāryah) by the righteous as an atheist (nāstika) and despiser of the Veda’ (Manu II. 11).

Furthermore, the Mahā-bhārata, a poem which contains many ancient legends quite as ancient as those of early Buddhism, relates (Śānti-parvan 1410, etc.) the story of the infidel Ārvāka, who in the disguise of a

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mendicant Brāhman uttered sentiments dangerously heretical.

This Ārvāka was the supposed founder of a materialistic school of thought called Lokāyata. Rejecting all instruments of knowledge (pramāṇa) except perception by the senses (pratyaksha), he affirmed that the soul did not exist separately from the body, and that all the phenomena of the world were spontaneously produced.

The following abbreviation of a passage in the Sarva-darśana-saṅgraha¹ will give some idea of this school's infidel doctrines, the very name of which (Lokāyata, 'generally current in the world') is an evidence of the popularity they enjoyed :—

No heaven exists, no final liberation,
 No soul, no other world, no rites of caste,
 No recompense for acts; let life be spent,
 In merriment²; let a man borrow money
 And live at ease and feast on melted butter.
 How can this body when reduced to dust
 Revisit earth? and if a ghost can pass
 To other worlds, why does not strong affection
 For those he leaves behind attract him back?
 Oblations, funeral rites, and sacrifices
 Are a mere means of livelihood devised
 By sacerdotal cunning—nothing more.
 The three composers of the triple Veda
 Were rogues, or evil spirits, or buffoons.
 The recitation of mysterious words
 And jabber of the priests is simple nonsense.

Then again, the continued prevalence of sceptical opinions may be shown by extracts from other portions

¹ Freely translated by me in *Indian Wisdom*, p. 133, and literally translated by Prof. E. B. Cowell.

² 'Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die.' 1 Cor. xv. 32.

of the later literature. For example, in the Rāmāyaṇa (II. 108) the infidel Brāhman Jāvālī gives utterance to similar sentiments thus:—

‘The books composed by theologians, in which men are enjoined to worship, give gifts, offer sacrifice, practise austerities, abandon the world, are mere artifices to draw forth donations. Make up your mind that no one exists hereafter. Have regard only to what is visible and perceptible by the senses (pratyaksham). Cast everything beyond this behind your back.’

Furthermore, in a parallel passage from the Viṣṇu-purāṇa, it is declared that the great Deceiver, practising illusion, beguiled other demon-like beings to embrace many sorts of heresy; some reviling the Vedas, others the gods, others the ceremonial of sacrifice, and others the Brāhmins¹. These were called Nāstikas.

Such extracts prove that the worst forms of scepticism prevailed in both early and mediæval times. But all phases and varieties of heretical thought were not equally offensive, and it would certainly be unfair and misleading to place Buddhism and Jainism on the same level with the reckless Pyrrhonism of the Ārvākas who had no code of morality.

And indeed it was for this very reason, that when Buddhism and Jainism began to make their presence felt in the fifth century B. C. they became far more formidable than any other phase of scepticism.

Whether, however, Buddhism or Jainism be entitled to chronological precedence is still an open question,

¹ See Dr. John Muir’s Article on Indian Materialists, *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, N. S. xix, p. 302.