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Hinduism and Islam

Murtahim Billah Fazlie

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PREFACE

All praise to God Almighty, Who is One, the Creator, the Sustainer and the Nourisher and the only Lord of the worlds, Who has no associate in His divinity, His names, or His attributes. Prayers and peace to Muhammad, the chief and last of His messengers, sent with divine guidance for all people of any place or time till the Day of Judgement to lead them 'out of the depths of darkness into light', and to his family, companions and followers.

God Almighty has accorded man a special position among all the creatures. Man is potentially superior to all except his Creator for Whose service he has been created. His body requires food, water, shelter and clothes but he is not only body; he is body and soul. His body has been created from clay and his soul from spirit. In order for his life to be complete and balanced, both his body and soul need to be satisfied. The natural resources meet man's material needs and religion satisfies the requirements of his soul. Religion is an ancient institution as old as human civilization. In broad sense, religion may mean a system of life which determines the fibre of life in the society. The system may derive from a divine source or may be instituted by a ruler or the tribe or the people. Since it has much bearing on cultural, social and spiritual life, every human being tends to adopt some religion from

among the existing ones, although he or she may be right or wrong in making a choice in this regard.

Hinduism and Islam are very prominent among the major religions of the world. In view of the current socio-communal situation in India, which has among its inhabitants most of the Hindu¹ population as well as a major portion of the Muslim minority of the world, the author felt it necessary to undertake a study dwelling upon the basic elements of these two religions in a concise form. The book in hand is the outcome of this endeavour. The purpose of the author is to provoke a dialogue between the followers of these two religions. Such a dialogue seems long overdue when we consider the communal situation in India where Hindus and Muslims are constantly at loggerheads with each other causing colossal losses in lives and property and tarnishing the image of the country at the global level. In a country where people have started advocating the ban of death penalty no conscience should allow such incidents to occur any more.

In the arena of the communal situation in India, Muslims are at the receiving end. The recent rise of

¹ In fact, as indicated by some eminent scholars including **M.K.** Gandhi, the term 'Hindu' includes under its fold only the Aryan Hindus (so-called caste Hindus) who constitute only 15 percent of the total population of India; and the rest, so-called low-caste people (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, etc.) who constitute 65 percent are not Hindus.

the so-called Hindutva movement² has become a dangerous threat to their very existence. Golwalkar, the chief ideologue of this movement, required Indian Muslims not only to submit to Hindu cultural hegemony but to show positive reverence for Hindu religion and culture. Vishwa *Hindu* Parishad (VHP), the social and intellectual wing of the Rashtriya *Swayamswaywak Sangh* (RSS), has a separate department to what they call 'reconvert' non-Hindus of India to Hinduism. Each of the two major communities of India, Hindus and Muslims, therefore, need to know about the religion of the other. Hindus should know what they have to offer to Muslims and what Muslims have to renounce in order to accept what they offer. Similarly, Muslims should know what Hinduism has to offer to them and what they are being asked to forsake. The author fervently hopes that this book will enable both Hindus and Muslims to have a better insight into their religions. He also hopes that the book will satisfy the honest yearning of those Hindus who would like to know the real story about their own religion and also about the religion which claims to be the universal religion chosen by God Almighty for all human beings. After all, it is knowledge which can set free those who have been subjected to their own ideas or to their ignorance.

² For details about the forces of Hindutva movement, their programmes and activities, see Fazlic, *Hindu Chauvinism and Muslims in India* (Jeddah: 1995).

In its march towards civilization and progress, the global human community has experienced many changes. Now, people in general tend to be guided by logic and reason rather than by meaningless dogmas. Of the many vile practices which were widely prevalent in many parts of the world were paganism or idol-worship and slavery. These two evils have been completely wiped out from all over the world except India. It is an amazing fact that this country which has glorious records in the history of human civilization and has already attained the status of a nuclear power could become the last resort of idol-worship (an ancient pagan practice), and slavery under the guise of caste system which was developed thousands of years ago by the Aryan invaders in order to perpetuate their supremacy over the defeated original Indians. It is time that the people of India reassess the merits or otherwise of these two phenomena of their society in the light of the modern enlightenment.

The twentieth century is drawing to a close paving way for a new era in the history of human civilization. The modern world is regarded as a global village because of the opportunities made available by what is called 'information superhighway' (television, computers, satellite communications, systems like the Internet). What yet remains to be seen is a common religion which can ensure peace for all members of the global human community of the global village for all times to come. Ishim which over fourteen centuries ago declared that all human beings belong to a

common family as descendants of the common parents, Adam and Eve, seems to be the only religion which can meet this requirement. This is because it claims to be the only ideology suited to the needs and benefits of human beings in all times. An open dialogue between Hindus and Muslims free from any bias or prejudice may open the 'door of some new direction in this regard and usher in a new era of fraternity and peace in the strife-prone South Asia as well as in the world as a whole.

May God Almighty in His infinite mercy accept this humble endeavour for breaking the walls of ignorance and prejudice and revealing the Truth to those who may be longing for it and also those who are roaming the dark world of ignorance and falsehood. If this in any way can help even a single person in getting rid of the illusion of paganism turning towards the path of Islam, the only path of real peace, I shall consider this work a grand success.

It is the publisher of the book whose inspiration prompted me to undertake this study; he has remained the guiding force behind the work. A saying of the Prophet of Islam goes like this: *He who guides to what is good will have a reward equivalent to that of him who acts upon it.*³ If in the divine judgment the work comes up as a good one, he will have his reward from God Almighty. I am deeply indebted to Br. Mofakhkhar Hussain Khan (Ph.D) who has thoroughly read the

³ Mishkdt, no. 209.

manuscript and provided important data and valuable suggestions. Br. Sulaiman Ali (Ph.D), Br. Dawood Usman Galira (P.E) and Br. Muhammad Sirajul Haq (M.A) also have gone through the manuscript and suggested improvements. Sheikh Abu Tariq Hijazi (M.A) and Br. Fazlur Rahman Khan (B.S.S) have supplied valuable data. My sincere thanks go to all of them. Throughout the work, my wife Lutfunnessa Khanam (M.A) has remained an inexhaustible source of co-operation and inspiration. Last but not the least, my younger daughter Wardah has helped me in preparing the index and younger son Saud has provided some secretarial services from time to time. May God Almighty reward them all for their contributions.

Chapter I

BASIC ELEMENTS

I. BASIC ELEMENTS OF HINDUISM

Hindu and Hinduism

The term 'Hinduism' has been derived from 'Hindu'. 'Hindu' is a Persian word which means dark.¹ The word was first used by Muslims² for the inhabitants of the 'land beyond the Indus (Sindhu) river' and later, for the ancient Indians in general. The word was never used in Indian literature or scriptures before the advent of Muslims to India.' According to Jawaharlal Nehru, the earliest reference to the word 'Hindu' can be traced to a Tantrik book of the eighth century C.E., where the word means a people, and not the followers of a particular

¹ *Finlz al-Lughat* (Lahore: n.d.), p. 615. Also see *Lughff Sa'idi* (Kanpur: 1936), p. 633.

² H.G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse Between India and the Western World*, (Cambridge: 1926), p. 20.

³ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (ERE), (New York: 1967), 6:699. Also see Swami Dharma Ibeertba, *History of Hindu Imperialism*, (Madras: 1992), p. vii.

religion. The use of the word 'Hindu' in connection with a particular religion is of very late occurrence.⁴ The Muslim rulers used the term 'Hindu' to mean Indian non-Muslims only. The *Brahmans* gladly welcomed it, as it brought all the non-Muslim Indians under a single umbrella and thus provided them with a rare opportunity to expand their social, religious and political influence over them in the name of religion. The British rulers maintained it with one modification. They excluded the converted Christians from those covered by the term 'Hindu'.

The non-Muslim people of the South Asian sub-continent called Hindu had no precise word for their religions.⁵ They were, as they are, divided into thousands of communities and tribes, each having its own religious beliefs, rituals, modes of worship, etc. Finding it difficult to get the names of the religions of these communities, the British writers gave them the word "Hinduism" to be used as a common name for all of their religions in about 1830.⁶ Thus the people called Hindus got a common element, at least in word, to be identified as a distinct, single community.

The people called Hindu have nothing common in their religious affairs. 'Hinduism', therefore, cannot give

⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (New Delhi: 1983), pp.74-75.

⁵ Benson Y. Landis, *World Religions*, (New York: n.d.), p.49-

⁶ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (NEB), 20:581.

any precise idea as to what it means. Attempts were made to define the term but could not succeed..Faced with this dilemma, Hindu scholars sometime use the word *Sanatan Dharma* (eternal religion) and sometime *Vedic Dharma* (religion of the *Veda*), etc., for their religion. But as names of their religion, these words are also untenable as they do not imply anything precise for all the people called Hindu.

Main Features

Hinduism is a bundle of many things, often mutually contradictory. It is, therefore, not easy to identify its main features. However, some elements which are generally regarded as its main features are given below.

Lack of a Common System

Hinduism is not a revealed religion and, therefore, has neither a founder nor definite teachings or common system of doctrines.⁷ It has no organization, no dogma or accepted creeds. There is no authority with recognized jurisdiction. A man, therefore, could neglect any one of the prescribed duties of his group and still be regarded as a good Hindu. "Hinduism has never prepared a body of

⁷ Richard F. Nyrof, *Area Handbook for India*, (Washington: 1975), p. 163.

canonical scriptures or a common prayer book; it has never held a general council or convocation; never defined the relation between laity and clergy; never regulated the canonization of saints or their worship; never established a single centre of religious life; never prescribed a course of training for its priests." In the words of S.V. Kelkar, "There is in fact no system of doctrines, no teacher, or school of teaching, no single god that is accepted by all the Hindus." In Hinduism, none is, therefore, regarded to have forsaken his or her religion, even if he or she deviates to any extent from the usually accepted doctrines or practices.

Caste System

Hindu society is divided into several thousands of caste and sub-caste. Caste is a highly organized social grouping. A Hindu is born in a caste and dies as a member of that caste. As caste is determined by birth, one can never move from one caste to another. Castes are not equal in status but arranged in a vertical order in which one caste is at the top and is the highest (the *Brahman*), another at the bottom and is the lowest (the Dalin and in between them there are the Kshatriya, the Vashya and the Sudra in a descending order. This inequality in status is said to be an outcome of a person's

⁸ ERE, 6:712.

⁹ Theertha, p. 177.

deeds (good or bad) accomplished in his previous life. Caste differences find their expression largely in connection with marriages and eating together. In the words of S.D. Theertha, "... the Hindu social order is simply a menace to freedom, unity and peace. The three thousands and odd castes and the larger number of sub-castes, into which the Hindus are irretrievably divided, keep nearly ninety-five per cent of the Hindus in perpetual disgrace and permanently condemned to an inferior social status."¹⁰

Superiority of the Brahman

The *Brahmans* occupy the highest position in the hierarchy of the caste system. They are said to have sprung from the mouth of Brahma (god), they are the rightful possessors of the *Veda*. They possess spiritual superiority by birth. They have the monopoly right to act as priests, conduct religious ceremonies and festivals, and accept alms. The *Brahman* is the deity on earth by his divine status,¹¹ born to fulfil *dharma*. Whatever exists in the world is his property. On account of the excellence of his origin, he is entitled to all. "Let a Brahman be ignorant or learned, still he is a great deity. To **Brahman**,

¹⁰ Ibid., p.209.

¹¹ Wilkins, *Modern Hinduism*, (London: 1975), p.239.

the three worlds and the gods owe their existence.">
(emphasis added).

Polytheism

Hindus believe in many gods and goddesses. Some of them are human (e.g. Krishna, Rama¹³), some animals (e.g. fish, monkey, rat, snake), and some others are natural phenomena (e.g. dawn, fire, sun). Their number is generally believed to be 330 million. According to Hindu belief, god incarnates, i.e., takes the form of human being and other animals and appears in this earth in that form. Gods and goddesses were born like human beings and had wives and children. No god possesses absolute power; some of the gods are weaker than the sages and some others even weaker than the monkey (e.g. Rama). Another aspect about Hindu gods is that the status of their godhood is not fixed. One finds that some gods were worshipped for a time and then abandoned and new gods and goddesses were adopted instead. The gods and goddesses worshipped now-a-days in Hindu homes and temples are not Vedic. The Vedic gods like Agni (fire), Surya (sun) Usha (dawn) are completely rejected and the gods and goddesses mentioned in the *Puranas* are worshipped by modern Hindus. Similarly,

¹² Theertha, p. 37.

¹³ Hindu zealots demolished the historic *Babari Masjid* on 6 December 1992 in order to construct a temple on its site for Rama.

Rama who is currently receiving increasing acceptance among Hindus in India because of the wide propagation of the official and other media was never worshipped as a deity until the eleventh century.

Sex and Sex-Worship

Hindu scriptures are essentially pornographic in nature, full of sexual allusion, sexual symbolism, passages of frank eroticism and stories relating to venal love. Some religious sects even introduced ritual intercourse as part of their cult and a potent aid to salvation." The rituals, festivals and ceremonies are characterized by the display of obscene portraits, sex and sex-worship. The temples, places of pilgrimage and other holy shrines are full of sculptures with all sorts of sexual postures. The sexual life of Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, is well-known for its indecency. He had illicit relations with Radha, wife of his maternal uncle, in addition to a number of milk-maids, although he had a large number of wives.¹⁵ Among Hindu gods, the most prominent ones are: Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the sustainer) and Siva (the destroyer). Brahma is found guilty of cohabiting with his own daughter, Saraswati. It is for that reason that he is

¹⁴ A.L. Basham, *The Wonders That Was India* (Calcutta: 1967), p. 172.

¹⁵ The number of his wives was sixteen thousand one hundred and eight and his children numbered one hundred and eighty thousand. See Ambedkar, *Riddle of Rama and Krishna*, (Bangalore: 1988), p.25.

deprived of being worshipped. Vishnu is guilty of deceptively ruining the chastity of a married woman, called Tulasi. Siva is not worshipped but the image of his iinga (sex-organ) is widely worshipped. This is because of the curse of some sage.¹⁶ In the sculpture, Siva and his consort Parvati are depicted in various explicit poses of the sexual act. Prostitution is encouraged in the form of religious custom of devdasi (slave-girls dedicated to temple-idols). Hindu gods and rishis (sages) are found engaged in sexual act with beautiful women and breeding illegitimate children. As for instance, in order that Rama could have strong soldiers in his army, the gods engaged themselves in begetting powerful sons. This they did by engaging themselves, in the words of Dr. Ambedkar", "in wholesale acts of fornication, not only against *apsaras*, who were prostitutes, not only against the unmarried daughters of *yakshas*¹⁸ and *nagas*, but also against the lawfully wedded wives of Ruksha, Vidhyadhar, Ghandharvas, *Kinnars*, and Vanaras (monkeys) and produced the vanaras who became the associates of Rama."¹⁹

¹⁶ See Chapter 4.

¹⁷ The first law minister of independent India and the author of its constitution.

¹⁸ Yaksha, naga, ruksha, vidhyadhar, gandharva, kinna, each of these words means demigod.

¹⁹ Ambedkar, p.7.

Authority of the Veda

It is generally believed that the *Veda* is recognized as an absolute authority in Hinduism but the so-called low-caste (non-Aryan) Hindus have no access to the scripture because they are considered impure by birth. So the *Veda* is far from being an authority for these people. The only people who are allowed to read and listen to the scripture are the Aryan Hindus. The *Brahmans*, the sole custodians of the *Veda*, too hardly benefit from it because written in Sanskrit, a dead language, 'its content has long been practically unknown to most Hindus, and it is seldom drawn upon for literal advice.^P

Reverence for the Cow

Reverence for the cow is an important feature of Hinduism. For Hindus, the killing of a cow is a serious crime. The Anhashostra" refers to the killing of cattle as a crime worthy of death.F This explains why during the Second World War, "American servicemen in Calcutta were instructed that if a traffic situation arose in which the driver had a choice of striking a cow or a

²⁰ NEB, 20:582.

²¹ Its authorship is attributed to Kautilya, the *Brahman* minister of Chandragupta, the Indian emperor of the 4th century BCE.

²² Ibid., p. 99:

human, hit the human and proceed without stopping to a police station."²³ M.K. Gandhi in his book *Hindu Dharma* says, "Cow-protection is an article of faith in Hinduism. Apart from its religious sanctity, it is an ennobling creed." (p.108). He also says, "If someone were to ask me what the most important outward manifestation of Hinduism was, I would suggest that it was the idea of cow-protection." (p.110). He further says, "No one who does not believe in cow-protection can possibly be a Hindu." (p.118). It is because of the cow's divine position that Hindus regard its urine, and dung as purifier.²⁴ Considering the divine status of the cow, some special provision has been made in the constitution of India for its protection. Moreover, slaughtering of the cow has been banned in several provinces of India.

It is, however, interesting to note that the cow used to be slaughtered by the ancient Hindus to enjoy its beef, entertain the guests and offer it as sacrifice to their deities. Gandhi himself says, "I know there are scholars who tell us that cow-sacrifice is mentioned in the Vedas. I... read a sentence in our Sanskrit text-book to the effect that Brahmins of old [period] used to eat beef."²⁵ He, however, refrained from showing enough courage in clearly speaking the truth, may be because he did not like to hurt the sentiments of the people who were the main

²³ Robert Trumbull, *As I see India*, (London: 1957), p.241.

²⁴ PDR, p. 99.

²⁵ **M.K.** Gandhi, *Hindu Dharma*, (New Delhi! 1991), p. 120.

source of his political strength. There are clear evidences in the *Rig Veda*, the most sacred Hindu scripture, that the cow used to be sacrificed by Hindus for religious purposes. For instance, Hymn CLXIX of the *Rig Veda* says: "*May the wind blow upon our cows, with healing; may they eat herbage ... Like-coloured, various-hued, or single-coloured, whose names through sacrifice are known to Agni, Whom the Angirascas produced by Ferbvour-vouchsafe to these, Pajanya, great protection. Those who have offered to the gods their bodies, whose varied forms are all well known to Soma.*" ¹¹,

In the *Rig Veda* (RV.VIII.43.11) Agni is described as "fed on ox and cow" suggesting that cattle were sacrificed and roasted in fire. Another hymn (RV.X.16.7) mentions the ritual enveloping of the corpse with cow flesh before applying the fire on it. In the *Brahmanas* at 1.15 in the Aiteriya Brahmana, the kindling of Agni on the arrival of King Some is compared to the slaughter of a bull or a barren cow on the arrival of a human king or other dignitary. Similarly, at 11.1.11.1 in the Taiteriy Brahmana and XXXI.14.5 in the Panchavinsha Brahmana, the rishi Agastya is credited with the slaughter of a hundred bulls. In verse III.1.2.21 in the *Satapatha Brahmana*, sage Yajnavalkya asserts that even though the cow is the supporter of everyone, he would eat beef "if it is luscious". At IV.5.2.1 in the same *Brahmana*, it is said

²⁶ **The Rig Veda** (RV), translated by Ralph H. Griffith, (New York: 1992), p. 647.

that a barren cow can be slaughtered in the Some sacrifice. Not only for religious purposes, but also for other purposes one could kill a cow and eat beef. Thus at II.4.2 of the same Brahmana, it is suggested that a fat bull or a fat goat should be sacrificed in honour of an important guest. Similarly, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishada (VI.4.18) advises a couple to take an evening meal of beef or veal pulao, if they desire to beget a son who is learned in the Vedas,"

As Hinduism 'defies definition' and is sometime 'regarded as a word without any content', opinions of some scholars have been cited here with a view to enabling the reader to form some idea about the religion.

Opinions of Some Scholars

- "Frankly speaking, it is not possible to say definitely who is a Hindu and what is Hinduism. These questions have been considered again and again by eminent scholars, and so far no satisfactory answer has been given. **Hinduism has within itself all types of religions such as theism, atheism, polytheism, Adwaitism, Dwaitism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, and so forth.** (emphasis added). It contains nature worship, ancestor worship, animal worship, idol worship, demon worship, symbol

²⁷ *Muslim India*, December 1983, p. 557, quoted from *Religion and Society in India* by Prof. AB. Shah.

worship, self worship, and the highest god worship. Its conflicting philosophies will confound any ordinary person. From barbarious practices and dark superstitions, up to the most mystic rites and sublime philosophies, there is place for all gradations and varieties in Hinduism. Similarly, among the Hindu population are found half barbarian wild tribes, 'and depressed classes and untouchables, along with small numbers of cultured, gentle natures and highly evolved souls."

- Swami Dharma Theertha.

- "Hinduism does not rest on the authority of one book or one prophet, nor does it possess a common creed- like the *Kalma* [sic.] of Islam -acceptable to all. That renders a common definition of Hinduism a bit difficult."

- M.K Gandhi.

- [Hinduism is] "... a name without any content...Its content, if any, has altered from age to age, from community to community. It meant one thing in the Vedic period, another in the Brahmanical, a third in the Buddhist> - one to Saivite, another to Vaishnavite and Sakta."²⁹

- Dr. Radhakrishnan, ex-President of India and an eminent interpreter of Hinduism.

²⁸ Buddhism founded by Gautama Buddha is a religion different from Hinduism but the Brahmins made Buddha an incarnation of Hindu god Vishnu in order to make Buddhism a part of Hinduism.

²⁹ Khushwant Singh, *India An Introduction*, ((New Delhi: 1990), pp. 19-20.

- "Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other.t" - Jawaharlal Nehru.

- "Hinduism defies definition... It has no specific creed."³¹ - Khushwant Singh

- "In tracing the evolution of religion in India, no problem is more difficult than that of framing a definition of Hinduism as we observe it at the present day. Many of the tests which have been proposed from time to time are obviously inadequate...The difficulty of framing a definition of Hinduism arises from the fact that under the general title 'Hindu' are included classes whose belief, ritual, and mode of life are strangely diverse, - the learned Brahman, who is a follower of the *Vedanta* philosophy; the modern theist or agnostic, trained in the learning of the West; the semi-barbarous hillman, who eats almost any kind of food without scruple, knows little of Brahmanical mythology, belief, or ritual, and in time of need bows before the stone which he supposes to be occupied by the god of his tribe or village."³²

- *Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics.*

— Nehru, p. 75.

³¹ Singh, p. 19.

³² ERE, 6:698.

- "Their (Hindus') religion is a standing travesty of ancient Hinduism, consisting as it does of rank idolatry mixed with superstition and fetishism of the most degrading type. They believe in the worship of their innumerable devas or good spirits and the propitiation of an equally large number of demons and evil spirits, both of which they assume have their resting places on earth in their idols of stone and marble, gold and silver."³³

- Ardersir Sorabjee.

- "... the religion of the non-Mohamedan population of India is a tangled jungle of disorderly superstitions, ghosts and demons, demi-gods, and deified saints, household gods, local gods, tribal gods, universal gods, with their countless shrines and temples, and the din of their discordant rites; deities who abhor a fly's death; those who still delight in human sacrifices."³⁵

- Sir Alfred Lyll.

- "Hinduism is not a religion established by a single person. It is a growth of ideas, rituals and beliefs so comprehensive as to **include anything between atheism and pantheism.** (emphasis added). Having grown out of the practices and speculations of various communities that were admitted into the Hindu fold at different times,

³³ Theertha, p. 178.

³⁴ There is no such thing as 'Mohamedan'. The name of the religion is Islam and its followers are Muslims.

³⁵ Wilkins, 1975, p. 310.

Hinduism, as it stands at present, has very few set of dogmas. A formal recognition of the *Vedas* as revealed wisdom is all that is required for a Hindu to be known as such. But the latitude permitted in interpreting the *Vedas* is so wide that the atheistic *Sankhya* philosophy of Kapila and the polytheism of the *Puranas* are both recognized as orthodox,"?

- P. Thomas

- "The more Hinduism is considered, the more difficult it becomes to define it in a single phrase... A Hindu may have any religious belief or none; he may be an atheist or an agnostic and still be an accepted Hindu... It is public opinion working through the caste system which determines whether someone shall or shall not be regarded as a Hindu."³⁷

- Percival Spear.

- "Hinduism is far more unstructured than most other religions. It has no archbishops, chief rabbis, grand *muffis*. Each Hindu decides for himself which manifestations of God are most important to him, what scriptures to accept as authentic, which holy man to follow. The one ineluctable certainty is a person's dharmav" •

- *The Economist*.

³⁶ P. Thomas, *Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners*, p.21.

³⁷ Percival Spear, *India, A Modern History*, (Michigan: 1961), p.40.

^{3&} *The Economist*, June 8th, 1991, p. 22, col. 1.

II. *BASIC ELEMENTS OF ISLAM*

Islam and Muslim

Islam is not named after a person as in the case of Christianity or Buddhism. Nor was it named after a tribe like Judaism after the tribe of Judah and Hinduism after the people called Hindu. It has got its name not from any human being but from Allah, the personal name of the one true God.³⁹ Its very name represents the principle on which it is based. The Arabic word 'Islam' means complete submission to the will and law of God. The word also implies 'peace' which is the natural consequence of total submission to the will of God. It brings peace to mankind when man commits himself to God and submits himself to His will. Submission to the will of God does not take away or curtail individual freedom but it gives freedom of a high degree in abundant measures. It frees the mind from superstitions and fills it with truth. It frees the soul from sin and endows it with purity.

Islam is a revealed religion which redeems people from the ignorance of paganism and brings them near to divine reality. It provides a complete way of life, a *dīn* in

³⁹ The Qur'an 3: 19.

Arabic, chosen by God for mankind. Ishim is not a new religion brought by Prophet Muhammad (pbuhj." In fact, it is as old as mankind. The first man on earth, Adam (pbuh), was the first prophet of God. God sent His message through His prophets to every nation or community. The essence of the divine message was the same for all the prophets. The chain of prophethood began with Adam (pbuh) and concluded with Muhammad (pbuh). Islam, therefore, is the Arabic name of the religion of all the prophets sent by God to mankind from time to time. All the prophets, known or unknown, received from God the same message for mankind. The divine message received by Muhammad (pbuh) is the most comprehensive because it is for all the people at all times to come till the end of this world. Any human being at any place or time who accepts and follows the divine message becomes Muslim. Islam is the only religion chosen by God for mankind.⁴¹

Belief in oneness of one Supreme Lord of the universe is the bed-rock of Islam. He is the only being that has created us and all other things. He and only He is the Sustainer of whatever has been created by Him. He exists without any beginning; He has no end; He and only He possesses all the excellent divine attributes *pr--*

⁴⁰ pbuh stands for "Peace be upon him." This is a prayer offered by a Muslim for a prophet of Allah when he comes across his name. The prayer is offered for the prophets in recognition of their great services to mankind.

⁴¹ See the Our'an, 3:19.

perfection. He is the only God Who is to be worshipped. Nothing other than Him deserves to be worshipped. He has no associate or partner in His divinity, His lordship, His names, and His attributes. The Our'an asserts that every prophet taught the unity of God. The doctrine of the unity of God known as *tawhîd* in Arabic is the very root and foundation of the teachings of Islam.

The Merciful and Loving Lord did not leave human beings, his beloved creation, in darkness. He sent many messengers at different times of history and at different places to deliver His message to mankind. A messenger (*rasûl* in Arabic) is a human being commissioned by God to deliver divine message to other human beings and to show them the right path. God reveals to him the way of piety and righteousness. The messengers of God were endowed with the best moral excellences. Belief in each and every messenger of God, whether known or unknown, is mandatory in Islam. Islam does not make any discrimination between the messengers of God; this has been forbidden in the Qur'an.⁴² The Our'an while mentioned 25 prophets by name, indicated that many other prophets were sent to mankind. All the prophets taught men to believe in oneness of God, obey Him, lead pious lives, accomplish good deeds and refrain from doing evil things. The divine books which were revealed earlier lost their originality and purity due to interpolation and distortion. The Our'an contains the

⁴² Ibid., 2:285.

essence of the divine message conveyed by all the earlier prophets. Muhammad (pbuh) was the last prophet of God and the office of prophethood became sealed and was made final with the revelation of the Qur'an. The chosen religion of God reached its perfection with his mission. The concept of prophethood known as risalat in Arabic is another basic doctrine of Islam.

According to Islam, death not only signals the end of a man's earthly life, it also opens to him the door of a new phase called *barzakh*. Then at the end of this world man will be given a new life on the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al-Ba'th* in Arabic). On that day there will be judgement about the deeds accomplished by him in this world. This judgement is necessary because God practices justice and justice requires that a pious person and a sinner one should not be treated equally after death. The reward given to a pious man on that day will be a permanent life in paradise with all sorts of comforts. Similarly, an evil-doer will be given punishment in hell. Of course, God will, out of His generosity, forgive many of His servants with the exception of those who in the earthly life refused to accept His message. Worship of God's creation or refusal to recognize Him as the only Supreme Lord is the greatest sin which will never be forgiven: This is because man has been created for the purpose of worshipping God Almighty alone." The

⁴³ Ibid., 51: 56.

concept of belief in the hereafter, *dkhirat* in Arabic, is a fundamental component of the religion of Islam.⁴⁴

Belief and Action

The concepts of *tawhīd*, *risālat* and *dkhirat* are the three fundamental doctrines of Islam from which accrue all of its teachings, whether belief or action. For example, belief in God and in His prophets entails belief in His angels, who generally act as His messengers to His prophets and also belief in His books (messages) sent to His prophets. Belief in God, His angels, His books, His prophets and in the hereafter are the five basic **articles of faith**.⁴⁵

The angels of God are splendid beings created of light. They are neither male nor female and require no food, no drink or sleep. They don't need any material thing. They are sinless and have no free will. They spend their time in the service of God. Among the angels, Gabriel, Michael, Azra'el and Isra'fil are the most prominent.

The message of God sent to His prophets is contained in His books. Of the divine books, four are mentioned in the Qur'an. These are *Tawīīh* (Old Testament), *Injīl*

⁴⁴ For details, see Chapter 5.

⁴⁵ For details about the articles of faith, see (1) Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*, and (2) Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam*.

(New Testament), Zabur (Psalms) and Our'an. The divine books which were revealed before the Our'an were distorted and thus lost their authenticity. The Our'an is the only divine book which has remained intact, free from any change or distortion.

A man enters the fold of Islam by making a statement and believing in its meaning. This statement is: "*Lti Ildha ilia-Allah Muhammadur Rastilulldh:*" It means: "**There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.**" This statement known as Kaliman is a testimony (shahddali in Arabic). The fundamentals of Islam are summed up in this statement which implies belief in God as He is with His names and attributes and also belief in Muhammad (pbuh) as His last messenger. Belief in God entails obeying Him and accepting His guidance and recognizing Muhammad (pbuh) as the last prophet of God enjoins on one to follow him in respect of obeying God and following His guidance.

Belief can do no good unless it is translated into practice, unless it is proven by deeds. God Almighty repeatedly said in the Our'an that His reward will be for those who believe and do righteousness. Belief, therefore, must be accompanied by righteous deeds because belief without good deed is like fire without heat. For this simple reason, Islam lays very high emphasis on action and wants to see that its followers attain the objectives for which they have become Muslims. They must accomplish good actions and refrain from evil deeds so that they may attain salvation and obtain an endless blissful life on the Day of Judgment. In fact, this earthly

life is nothing but an opportunity given by Merciful God to man to accomplish pious deeds whose fruits would be eternal life in paradise after death.

Belief in one God (Allah) and His messenger, Muhammad (pbuh), constitutes the first pillar of Islam and is followed by four others involving specific actions. These are *saldt* (ritual prayer), *sawm* (fasting), *zakdt* (compulsory charity) and *hajj* (pilgrimage). These actions are the evidences which indicate obedience of a Muslim to his Lord. These are discussed in some detail in Chapter 4. These actions are the basic minimum required from a believer to remain under the fold of Islam; without these, he or she becomes unworthy of being called Muslim.

Some Features

Islam has many features which distinguish it from other religions. Some of these are as discussed below:

Rationality

Islam awakens in human beings the faculty of reason and invites them to make use of the faculties given to them and try to acquire the fullest possible understanding of the things around them. It is the only religion which invites man to use his intellect to understand the relation between himself and his creator. Islam does not admit of

any inborn hostility between reason and religion. In fact, it exhorts man to contemplate, to think seriously, to meditate, and to fully use the power of understanding in realizing the wonders of nature. This is because the more a person understands nature the more admiration he acquires for its creator, God Almighty. In many verses of the Qur'an man has been encouraged to realize the wonders of nature." Islam is diametrically opposed to all sorts of superstitions. Irrational beliefs and meaningless rites and rituals have no place in Islam. It has, therefore, urged man to apply reason and shun all types of superstition and meaningless practices.

Complete Way of Life

Islam is not a set of dogmas and rituals but a complete way of life. Its guidance covers the whole gamut of human life stretching from pre-birth to after-death period. For example, while it forbids a pregnant woman to do anything harmful to the foetus in her womb, it also provides instructions as to how a dead person should be treated. It governs man in his individual as well as his collective life. It presents a balanced system of life attaching due importance to both the spiritual and material needs of human beings. It does not prescribe self-denial, but life-fulfillment. It does not suppress or oppress human nature but fully recognizes the natural demand of the body, mind and intellect and induces

⁴⁶ Among many verses of the Qur'an, see 2:164, 3:190, 30:20-25.

harmonious development of all the faculties of man. It provides guidance for man for all walks of his life - individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. It provides a very comprehensive and precise system of guidance for mankind as a whole. It gives every detail about its guidance so as to make it easy for any person to follow its teachings. The Qur'an makes it obligatory for man to accept Islam as the only way of life and follow the divine guidance as conveyed, demonstrated and practiced by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Universality

Islam is the true universal religion. The root of its universality lies in its basic principle which implies complete surrender to the will of God. God is one, and the nature and basic needs of human beings are fundamentally the same, irrespective of place, time, race, colour, language and nationality. Whenever a man submits himself to God realizing that He is one and distinct from His creation, he becomes Muslim. Anyone in any part of the world can become Muslim by merely rejecting the worship of God's creation and turning to Him alone. The divine message sent to Muhammad (pbuh) is for all the people of all time. As Islam is for all, its teachings are very simple so that anybody can easily perform his or her religious duty without any difficulty. The Islamic system of worship is so easy that it can be

followed in an-circumstances. For instance, salat (ritual prayer), the most important among different types of compulsory worship, can be performed anywhere on the earth, although a mosque is recommended for this purpose, if available in the neighbourhood. Islam wants to bring all the human race under one banner and make this world an abode of peace for all by ending all the territorial, racial, and other barriers and conflicts. It is in line with its universality that Islam does not recognize the institution of priesthood. The link between man and his Lord is direct and no intermediary exists between them. In several verses of the Our'an, man has been urged to approach and invoke his Lord direct.⁴⁷ Every human being has direct access to his or her Lord's guidance provided in the Our'an and the Sunnah. Of course, there are religious scholars in Islam but they are never regarded as intermediaries between man and God. **While** they are equal to ordinary human beings in the sight of God, they have a special responsibility. This responsibility is to impart knowledge to the people and guide them to the right direction.

Equality

.. In the social order of Islam, the status of human being is not determined by his or her descent, gender, financial position, profession or political power but by his personal

⁴⁷ See the Qur'iin, 2: 186, 40:60.

character.v The doctrine of tawhīd (unity of God) rejects all sense of false and artificial dignity based on colour, race, language or gender. Women get a social status equal to that of men. The human aspect of equality was so carefully nourished that the Prophet of Islam did not even tolerate any tendency of his followers to show any special preference to him or to the members of his family. Islam did not content itself with the presentation of a beautiful vision of equality alone but in practice brought about an unprecedented state of equality between all people, black, white or red, declaring that none enjoyed any special honour or status over the others except by virtue of piety. Racial apartheid which has recently been abolished in South Africa following the earlier example of the USA, was abolished by Islam fourteen centuries ago. Islam not only freed the black from slavery but also fully recognized their rights to aspire even to the highest seat of authority in the state. The Prophet declared: *"Listen and obey even if a negro slave be appointed as your superior"*⁴⁹

Well-Preserved Records of Teachings

It is only the religion of Islam whose teachings have been documented with utmost care and preserved

⁴⁸ For details see, Chapter 6.

⁴⁹ al-Nawawl, *Rijfah al-Sdlih*n, (Beirut: n.d.), p. 223.

perfectly in their original form. The Qur'an, revealed fourteen centuries ago, has been preserved without any adulteration or change. Similarly, the entire record of the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) - his sayings, actions, and all other information relating to him - have been handed down to us with unprecedented precision and authenticity in the works of *the hadith* (tradition) and the *sirat* (biography). Although every man has free and direct access to these most important sources of Islamic teachings, Muslim scholars made their best efforts to make the teachings of Islam easily available to the common people. This is done both in the form of oral system of education and compilation of books dealing with different aspects of the Islamic way of life. In the mosques and educational institutions existing in every Muslim country and community, there is provision for imparting religious teachings to Muslims, both children and adults.

Islam and Individual Freedom

As indicated earlier, Islam involves complete submission to the will of God. This may make someone wrongly feel that Islam takes away individual freedom. He who has understood the true meaning of Islam is not likely to have this feeling. According to Islam, God is the Most Merciful and Gracious, and the Most Loving and most concerned with the well-being of man. His will, accordingly, is a will of benevolence and goodness, and

whatever law he prescribes must be in the best interest of mankind.

When a man abides by the laws of his country, he is considered a good citizen and an honest member of his society. No civilized person would say that such a man loses his freedom by his obedience to the law. No rational being would think or believe for a moment that such a law-abiding man is fatalist and helpless. Similarly, the person who submits to the will of God which is a good will, and obeys His law which is the best law, is a sound and honest person. He is gaining protection of his own rights, showing genuine respect for the rights of others, and enjoying a high degree of responsible, creative freedom. Submission to the will of God, therefore, does not take away or curtail individual freedom. On the contrary, it gives freedom of a high degree in abundant measures. It frees the mind from superstitions and fills it with truth. It frees the soul from sin and wrong and enlivens it with goodness and purity. It frees the self from vanity and greed, from envy and tension, from fear and insecurity. It frees man from subjugation to false deities and low desires, and unfolds before him the beautiful horizons of goodness and excellence.

Submission to the will of God, together with obedience to His beneficial law, is the best safeguard of peace and harmony. It enables man to make peace between himself and his fellow men on the one hand, and between the human community and the Almighty Creator

on the other. It creates harmony among the elements of nature. According to Islam, everything in the world, or every phenomenon other than man is administered by the laws formulated by the Creator. This makes the entire physical world necessarily obedient to God and submissive to His laws, which, in turn, means that it is in a state of Islam or it is Muslim. The physical world has no choice of its own. It has no voluntary course to follow on its own initiative but obeys the law of the Creator, the law of Islam or submission. Man alone is singled out as being endowed with intelligence and the power of making choices. And because man possesses the qualities of intelligence and choice, he is invited to submit to the good will of God and obey His law. When he does choose the course of submission to the law of his Creator, he will be making harmony between himself and all the other elements of nature which are by necessity obedient to God. He will be consistent with the truth and in harmony with all the other elements of the universe. But if he chooses disobedience he will deviate from the right path and will be inconsistent. Besides, he will incur the displeasure and punishment of the Law-Giver.^P

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⁵⁰ See Abdalati, pp. 8-9.

Chapter 2

SACRED BOOKS

I. SACRED BOOKS OF HINDUISM

The sacred books of Hinduism include the *Vedas*, the Upanishadas, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the Puranas. All these books are of mythical origin, their authors unknown, their period of compilation unknown, and their divinity not confirmed by any logically acceptable evidence. It is an admitted fact that these books have undergone changes, distortions and interpolations over time. There is hardly any Sanskrit composition which has not been tampered with, altered or added to by the priests. There is no famous rishi (sage) or teacher in whose name they have not concocted the scriptures. There is no sacred book into which fiction and legend and imaginary history have not been interpolated. Consequently, historical unreliability has become a universal literary characteristic of the Sanskrit language. The best critic would be unable to separate the grain from the chaff, to say where facts end and fiction

begins. This is even more the case in regard to the so-called sacred literature.¹

The Vedas

The *Vedas*, considered by Hindus as the most sacred books, are four in number: the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda* and the *Atha,va Veda*. The *Rig Veda* is a collection of 1,028 hymns which were used when the Aryan sacrifices were offered. The *Yajur Veda* consists of formulae for use by the priest who performed the sacrificial actions. The *Sama Veda* is a rearranged version of some of the hymns of the *Rig Veda*. The *Atharva Veda* consists of materials like spells, charms, and chants.² The *Vedas* mostly contain hymns, addressed to Hindu deities, and texts for the sacrificial rites, and spells, incantation and charms. There is practically nothing in them to provide guidance in the matter of ordinary life and society.³ There are hymns in which not only gods or deified beings, but even a sacrificial post, weapons, etc., are considered as deity.⁴ As their teachings were transmitted orally, they underwent addition, omission,

¹ Theertha, pp. 116.

² PDR., p. 344.

³ F.M. Sandccla,Js/am, *Christianity and Hinduism*, (Delhi: 1990), pp. 4-5.

⁴ Wilkins, i 993, p. 6.

distortion and discrepancies over time and their text became a subject of dispute.

The *Vedas* are believed by Hindus themselves to have had a mythological origin, which, for all practical purposes, means unknown and unknowable. According to some account, there are 21 versions of the *Rig Veda*, 42 of the *Yajur Veda*, 12 of each of the *Sama Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. Each school believed that it possessed the true *Veda*. The existing *Rig Veda*, which is the most prominent among the four *Vedas*, is the version of one school only.⁵

The *Vedas* are not the work of a single person but a collection of different strata of thought of successive generations of thinkers of the past. They were communicated to a number of rishis or saints, who transmitted them to their disciples. They were originally composed orally and transmitted orally before being put in written form. The oral emphasis is indicated by the very use of the general title 'sruti' (that which was heard).

As to the date of the *Vedas*, there is nothing certainly known. But they are among the oldest literary works of the world. It is believed that even centuries after the art of writing was introduced in India, the *Vedas* were not committed to writing because those who could write them were threatened with the punishment of hell.⁶

⁵ Ibid., p.6.

⁶ Ibid., p.8.

The name of famous sage Krishnadaipayan is very pertinent to any discussion on the *Vedas*. He collected the *Vedas*, gave it a proper shape, and thus became known as Vedavayas. He is also believed to have composed the *Mahabharata*, all the *Puranas* and the *Upapuranas*. It was Max Muller, a German orientalist, who edited the Sanskrit text of the *Rig Veda* in six volumes.⁷

Krishnadaipayan was the son of a unwed mother named Matsyagandha. She had conceived him after having intercourse with a famous sage, named Parashor. Krishnadaipayan had a half-brother, named Bichitrabirjya. When he died leaving no son behind, his mother requested Krishnadaipayan to beget some sons after sleeping with the two widows of his dead brother- Ambika and Ambalika. Ambika gave birth to a blind baby son, named Dhritarastra. The baby was blind because at the time of intercourse Ambika had closed her eyes not to see the ugly face of Krishnadaipayan. Similarly, the baby son, Pandu, born to Ambalika was pale in colour. He was so because at the time of intercourse when she had seen the ugly and terrible face of Krishnadaipayan, she was pale out of fear. Krishnadaipayan also begot another baby son after sleeping with a slave girl.⁸

⁷ RV, p. x.

⁸ Sudirchandra Sarkar, Pauranik Avidhan [Bengali], (Calcutta: 1392 B.E.), pp. 126-27.

While reading such legends, one should keep in mind that according to Hindu belief, a man could not enter paradise if he did not leave behind a son before his death. In Hindu society, therefore, there was nothing wrong for a man to allow his wife to have intercourse with any other man, especially when he was not able to beget any son. Any son born as a result of adultery was regarded as a legitimate child of the husband of the woman involved in the action.

The *Vedas* are the spiritual property of the *Brahmans* and, therefore, only the Aryan Hindus have access to them. It is a grave offence for the non-Aryan people (Sudras, Dalits, tribal people) and the women of any caste to read or listen to the *Vedas*.

The *Upanishadas*

The *Upanishadas*, 200 in number, are the outcome of the new enquiries after the truth made by the *Kshatriyas*. They made these efforts in an attempt to prove their equality with the *Brahmans* in learning and religious culture. These sacred books speak of the Supreme Being, the All-pervading Soul, the Universal Self from whom all the manifested universe has come forth.⁹

The *Upanishadas* opened the way for intellectual freedom but they could not purify Hinduism from paganism and idolatry. Philosophy rather became a very

⁹ Theertha, p.49.

convenient and extremely useful tool to be used by the *Brahman* priests to justify things in whatever way they liked. They justified idolatry saying that god was everywhere and could be worshipped in a stone image as well as anywhere else. Caste distinctions were explained as a divine law which no human being could alter. Every meaningless ceremony was supported by some metaphysical theory. Animal sacrifices, and obscene festivals all had their place in spiritual culture because god could be approached in any way according to the faith of the worshipper. In the words of S.D. Theertha, "There is no vile practice, no injustice, no superstition, no cruelty, no immorality which could not be and has not been justified and advocated on philosophical grounds."¹⁰

The *Mahabharata*

The *Mahabharata* is one of the two great epics of Hinduism. It is about a great battle between the five sons of Pandu and the sons of Pandu's brother Dhritarastra. The battle eventually led to the destruction of the entire race except one survivor who continued the dynasty. The sons of Pandu, Yudhishthira, Bhishma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva are called Pandavas. They are the central characters in the *Mahabharata*.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 128.

Once when Pandu was out hunting, he saw two deer engaged in intercourse. He injured the male deer with his arrow. In fact, the couple were human beings and the injured deer was a saint. The saint cursed Pandu that he would die if he had intercourse with a woman.

Although fear of death kept Pandu away from his wives, Kunti and Madri, he was yearning to have some sons. So he urged Kunti to get sons for him after sleeping with any other man. She gave him three sons (Judhistir, Vhima, Arjun) as a result of intercourse with three men- Dharma, Bayu and Indra. Observing that Kunti had given birth to three sons, Madri became eager to give birth to some son. She gave birth to twin sons- Nakul and Sahadeva after sleeping with Ashvan." The five sons born to the wives of Pandu are regarded by Hindus as sons of gods because they believe that the persons who begot them were gods.

The *Mahabharata* is believed to be deeply infused with religious implications because it contains many passages in which religion is systematically treated. The epic, therefore, came to be regarded as one of the sacred books. Vedavayas is believed to have written the *Mahabharata*. But this seems to be impossible because it took several centuries for the epic to become so large in size. Most of the materials which it contains date back to the Vedic period and the rest was continually added until to the medieval period.

¹¹ *Mahabharata* (Bengali), tr. Rajshekhar Basu, (Calcutta:1394B. E.) pp. 46-51.

The *Bhagavad Gita*

The Bhagavad Gita is the most popular book of Hindu scripture, regarded as the Bible of modern Hinduism. It is a part of the *Mahabharata* whose author is believed to be Vyasa. For most Hindus, the *Gita* represents the essence of Hinduism and its ethics are regarded as very sublime. Gandhi acknowledged it as his spiritual reference book. The main message of the *Gita* is that there are many ways to salvation, of which all are valid but not all are necessarily appropriate. The teachings of *Gita*, however, have been interpreted in many ways, which are often contradictory.

The *Gita* is in the form of a long dialogue between Arjun (one of the sons of Pandu) and Krishna, his chariot-driver, friend, and adviser. Krishna was the eighth incarnation of Vishnu and is the "god-philosopher" of the *Gita*. Even a cursory glance at his character makes it difficult for one to understand how a man like him could attain godship. He stole women's clothes when they were bathing in the river and did not return it until each of them came naked before him. He had 16,000 wives but still he had affair with a large number of women including Radha, the wife of his maternal uncle.

The *Gita* strongly supported caste system, which is grossly discriminatory.¹² Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that the *Brahmans* had written this book to exploit the

¹² For details, see Singh, pp.32-37.

Untouchables (*Dalits*) and *non-Brahmans*. He observed that the main aim of the *Gita* was to defend the discriminatory caste system. It justified the caste system with the concept of "*karma*". It is full of contradictions. It legalized killing, theft, immoral life and advocated telling of lies and addiction to alcohol.¹³

The *Ramayana*

The *Ramayana*, another great epic of Hinduism, presents the story of Rama and his wife Sita. Being deprived of the kingdom, Rama was exiled to the forest with his wife and his brother Lakshmana. While in the forest, Sita was abducted by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka (present Sri Lanka). Rama recovered her with the help of Hanumana, a monkey (who later became a monkey deity). After exile, Rama returned to Ayodhya and ruled the kingdom for sixteen thousand years. On becoming king, he banished Sita, who was pregnant at that time. While in exile living in a hermitage with Valmiki,¹⁴ she bore two sons. Being insulted by Rama, she eventually died by reentering the earth from which she had been born.

¹³ Shankaranand Shastri, *My Memories and Experiences of Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar*, (Ghaziabad: 1989), pp. 79-80.

¹⁴ A sage and the author of the Sanskrit version of the *Ramayana*.

As in the case of the Mahabharata, the composition of the *Ramayana* dates back to the Vedic period. Additions continued to be made to it until the medieval period.¹⁵ The *Ramayana* has about 100 versions. Each version is accepted as authentic by its respective audience. The Buddhist version, known as *Dasaratha Jataka*, dating back to somewhere between the 4th and 2nd century BCE, is the oldest one. According to this version, Sita was the sister of Rama.¹⁶ Marriage between brothers and sisters was not uncommon in the Buddhist tradition. The system also was prevalent among Hindus. For example, the wife of Yagya, named Dakshina, was his own sister.¹⁷ Rama is said to have descended from Ikshvaku, from whom the clan of the Buddha also claims descent. In northern India, Valmiki's *Ramayana* in Sanskrit is popularly believed to be the oldest version. Tulsidas's *Ramcharitnamas*, a Hindi version, was composed in the 16th century. It is Tulsidas who elevated Rama to a divine position.

In independent India, Rama is getting wide publicity as a deity. The public media are being fully utilized to portray him as a national hero and symbol of national unity. Hindu fanatics are making every effort to use Rama's name to serve their political pursuits. They have prepared special programme to popularize his worship.

¹⁵ NEB, 20:597.

¹⁶ *The Time of India*, 28 August 1993.

¹⁷ Sarkar, p.440.

However, as Dr. Ambedkar observes, there is nothing in the story of the *Ramayana* to make Rama the object of worship. He is only a dutiful son. His birth is "miraculous and it may be that the suggestion that he was born from a *pinda* prepared by the sage Shrung is an allegorical glass to cover the naked truth that he was begotten upon Kausalya by the sage Shrung, although the two did not stand in the relationship of husband and wife."¹⁸ Rama also had some other shadow side. His killing of the monkey king, Vali, was "in violation of all rules of combat and his banishment of innocent Sita was also unbecoming of even an ordinary man. Rama also killed Sambuka, whose only fault (?) was that coming of a humble low-caste (non-Aryan) origin he had engaged himself in rigorous worship."¹⁹

The *Puranas*

The *Puranas* are compositions which treat in encyclopaedic manner the myths, legends, and genealogies of gods, heroes, and saints. The major *Puranas* are 18 in number; there are also minor *Puranas* which are also 18 in number. P The date of these books could not be determined but it is believed that none of

¹⁸ Ambedkar, p. 7.

¹⁹ Fazlie, p. 97.

~ For details, see Sarkar, pp. 297-301

them is older than the 8th century CE., although some of the legends incorporated in them may have come from much earlier times.²¹ The *Puranas* continued to be written up to the Mughal period and took Hindu idol worship and paganism to their extreme form.

Unlike the *Vedas*, which are the preserve of the *Brahmans*, the *Puranas* are available even to the so-called low-caste (non-Aryan) Hindus and also to the women. This fact has made these books the authority for nearly the whole of the popular Hinduism of the present day. Many of the *Puranas* deal with the same or similar materials. Each *Purana* is mainly concerned with some one god whose excellences are extolled and others are spoken in a depreciatory manner. The particular deity to whose praise it is devoted is declared to be supreme **and** the others its incarnations.

It is believed that the *Puranas* were written in praise of the three great Hindu gods (i.e., Brahma; Vishnu, Siva), but as the Hindu conquest extended over the sub-continent, the writers extolled their favourite local deity at the expense of the others. It is therefore no surprise that in the *Puranas*, the status of some Vedic gods has been lowered and that of some later gods elevated.

The *Puranas* are arranged in three divisions: (1) those which exalt Brahma; (2) those which exalt Vishnu; and (3) those which exalt Siva. Although written much later, the *Puranas* are believed to be the work of the great sage

²¹ Wilkins, 1993, p. 90.

Vyasa, the arranger of the *Vedas* and the *Mahabharata*.²²

The *Tantras*

The *Tantras* are in the form of a dialogue between Siva and his wife. In answer to her questions, Siva gives various instructions concerning worship. These books form the authority for the faith and ceremonies of the *Saktas*, who are the worshippers of the wife of Siva. The *Saktas* regard these books as the fifth *Veda*. The doctrines, or at least a part of the doctrines, of these sects is kept secret and communicated to those only who receive solemn initiation into the mysteries. The date of these works is not known but it is believed that it is not earlier than the 6th CE.²³

²² *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

II. SACRED BOOKS OF ISLAM

Islam is a religion of both belief and action. The rules and regulations which govern all these constitute what is called Sharl'ah, The primary sources of Islamic Sharl'ab are the Our'an and the *Sunnah*. The Our'an is a divine revelation; each and every word of it is from God Almighty. The teachings contained in the Our'an have been demonstrated, explained, **and** expounded by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through his words and actions. The *Sunnah*, also called *hadith*, refers to the Prophet's sayings, actions and information about his approvals or disapprovals of any particular thing.

The Qur'an

The word Our'an literally means 'reading'. It is the word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) through the angel Gabriel and recorded in the book called Musha], which came down to us intact, unaltered, and free from any change or distortion. The divine revelation started when Muhammad (pbuh) was forty years old, and continued for twenty-three years till his demise. The purpose of the Our'an is to guide humanity to the straight path chosen by God. The Qur'an is the last of all the divine books.

The Our'an is a plain book which addresses the human beings as a whole. It makes its appeal in the most direct manner, touching human receptive faculties all at once. Thus it generates feelings, impressions and conceptions of the truth of existence that no other method known to mankind can generate. Moreover, all these are profound, comprehensive, precise, lucid and expressed in a unique style. The Our'an has an inimitable style and symphony and the very sounds of it easily move one to tears. It is a book which has no parallel, a literary masterpiece of surpassing excellence. It is a book given to the people of all time and climate and not to a particular race. The ordering of its chapters and verses is not meant to give the Our'an a topical structure. The order given by the Prophet on instruction from the angel Gabriel fulfills the condition of the literary sublime in Arabic. It is composed of a series of clusters of verses, each cluster treating a different topic, but constituting a complete unit, even if it is only one or two short sentences.

The Our'an has been translated in many languages of the world. The first translation was issued in Latin in 1143; and the earliest English rendering appeared in 1449.²⁴

²⁴ For details, see, Dr. Mofakkkhar Hussain Khan, *English Translations of the Holy Qur'an: A Bibliographic Study*, (Singapore: 1997).

Preservation of the Qur'an

The Qur'an was revealed in parts and piecemeal, sometimes a single verse, sometimes a few verses and sometimes a complete chapter. It has been preserved in two ways simultaneously: writing and memorization. The Prophet was illiterate. So when a fragment of the Qur'an was revealed, he called one from among his literate companions and dictated it to him, indicating at the same time, the exact position of the new fragment in the fabric of what had already been revealed. He, then, asked the scribe to read to him what had been dictated so that he could be sure that it was written correctly. This was one of the two ways in which the Qur'an was preserved. The most famous scribes who recorded the wahy (revelations) were Zayid ibn Thabit, Ubai ibn Ka'b, Mu'az ibn Jabal, Mu'awiah ibn Abu Sufyan, and the four 'rightly-guided' caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali).²⁵

While being recorded on different types of materials (parchment, leather, camels' scapula, wooden tablets, stones, etc.) used for writing at that time, the Qur'an was memorized wholly by the Prophet and a large number of his companions and partly by every Muslim. Every Muslim is required to memorize at least a few verses of the Qur'an because the recital of some of its verses is an essential part of the daily salât (ritual prayer) performed five times a day. Moreover, recitation of the Qur'an is itself a form of worship which Muslims are recommended

²⁵ Sabiinî, *al-Tibyân fî 'Ulum al-Qur'dn*, (Beirut: 1985) p.52

to perform. Apart from reciting the Our'an in and outside the regular saldt and regularly in the saldt *al-tahajjud* (late night prayer), the Prophet would recite to angel Gabriel in the month of Ramadhan the whole Our'an (so far revealed). In Ramadhan preceding his death, angel Gabriel made him recite it to him twice.

During the period of the Prophet, the verses and chapters of the Our'an recorded on different materials were not placed together. During the period of Abu Bakr, the first caliph of Islam, seventy famous *huffaz*²⁶ were martyred in the battle of Yamama. Now it was felt necessary to safeguard the Our'an against the possibility of being lost and to compile it in a proper book form. The task was assigned to Zayid ibn Thabit, the chief scribe of the *wahy*. He accomplished this job under the supervision of the Sahdha (companions) of the Prophet. The final and complete version was checked and approved by all who heard the Our'an from the Prophet and committed it to their memories and hearts. This was done less than two years after the death of the Prophet. Revelations were still fresh and alive in the minds of the scribes, *huffaz* and other companions of the Prophet. The manuscript prepared by Zayid was deposited with Abu Bakr and after his death, with 'Umar, the second caliph. When 'Umar died, the manuscript passed on to his daughter Hafsa.

The period of 'Uthman, the third caliph, witnessed vast expansion of the Islamic state; Muslims scattered

²⁶ *Huffaz* means one who has memorized the whole Our'an.

from the capital and a large number of converts (speaking languages other than Arabic) entered the fold of Islam. Many of the people who did not see the Prophet or hear him started committing mistakes in reading the Qur'an. Differences in recitation and intonation began to cause disputes among Muslims. 'Uthman swiftly acted to meet the situation. After consultation with all the leading authorities, he formed a committee of four members from among the former scribes of revelations including Zayid ibn Thabit. The committee was entrusted to prepare copies of the compilation prepared during the period of Abu Bakr" after a thorough review. All the copies in use were collected and replaced by one standard copy which was to be used according to the accent and dialect of Quraish, the very same dialect in which the Qur'an was revealed. The authorized version bore the seal and signature of 'Uthman. This was done within nineteen years of the death of the Prophet. From that time onwards, the same version has been in use without the slightest change in words or order or even diacritical marks. Copies bearing the signature of 'Uthman still exist in Tashkent and Istanbul.

The Qur'an, as it exists today in millions of copies; retains the purity of the original text compiled fourteen centuries ago. Moreover, there are thousands of *hafizs* (both Arabs and non-Arabs) all over the world who are preserving the sacred book in their hearts. This unique

feature of the Our'an is one of its many miracles which testifies to the truth contained in the promise made by God with regard to its preservation.²⁸ The purity of the text of the Our'an through fourteen centuries is a clear evidence of the eternal care with which the divine book is guarded through all ages.

From these facts, it has been concluded by the scholars that the Our'an stands today as it first came down, and as it always will be. To it there has never been any addition; from it there was no omission; and in it there occurred no corruption. Its history is as clear as daylight; its authority is unquestionable; and its complete preservation is beyond doubt. "All corruptions, inventions, and accretions pass away, but God's pure and holy Truth will never suffer eclipse even though the whole world mocked at it and were bent on destroying it."²⁹

Unique Characteristics of the Qur'an

The Our'an has many unique characteristics. Some of these are as follows:";

²⁸ See the Our'an, 15:9.

²⁹ A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Translation and Commentary*, (Beirut: 1403H), fn. 1944, p. 638.

³⁰ There are hundreds of books, some in large volumes, written on the unique characteristics (*Ijtiz*) of the Our'an.

- It is the finest and sublime masterpiece of literature. It is a magnificent document that has been known for fourteen centuries because of its matchlessness or inimitability. It is not only distinguished in the beauty of its language, but also by the presence of facts and principles that could never have been known at the time of their revelation.

- It is God's eternal miracle revealed to the Prophet for all succeeding generations. In response to those who doubt the authorship of the Our'an, God Almighty has challenged the most articulate Arabs to produce even one solitary chapter which can be remotely comparable to the Our'an. But to this day, no one has succeeded in meeting the challenge.

- It is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both. The verses into which it is divided are threaded together by loose rhymes into shorter or longer sequences within the surab (chapter). The rhythms of those sequences vary sensibly according to the subject-matter. Each suran is a unity within itself, and the whole Our'an is recognized as a single revelation, self-consistent to the highest degree.³¹

- As a whole, it 'is a book without beginning or end.' It can be read or recited by beginning at any verse and stopping at any verse. 'It is infinite, or rather, a window to infinite, a window through which the reader can peek at the infinite space of values and principles constituting the divine will.'

³¹ Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, (Oxford: 1990), pp. x-xi,

- Many of the scientific truths have been mentioned in the Our'an in its own'subtle manner. The statements of scientific nature mentioned in it are in complete agreement with modern sciences.³² In the words of Maurice Bucaille, "In view of the level of knowledge in Muhammad's day, it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Our'fin which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is, moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Our'an as the expression of revelation, but also to award it a very special place, on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides and the presence in it of scientific statements which, when studied today, appear as a challenge to explanation in human terms."³³

- It contains a complete code which provides for all areas of life, whether spiritual, intellectual, political, social or economic. It is a code which has no boundaries

- It is a unique book with a supreme author, an eternal message and a universal relevance. Its contents are not confined to a particular theme or style, but contain the foundations for an entire system of life, covering a whole spectrum of issues, which range from specific articles of faith and commandments to general moral teachings, rights and obligations, crime and punishments, personal

³² For details, see *Scientific Indications in the Holy Qur'an*, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1990.

³³ Maurice Bucaille, *Tire Bible, The Qur'an and Science*, (Paris: 1976), pp. 251-52.

and public law, and a host of other private and social concerns.

- It is the actual word of God, not created but revealed for the benefit of all mankind. God Almighty has taken upon Him the duty of preserving it for ever in its entirety. So well has it been preserved, both in memory and in writing, that the Arabic text we have today is identical to the text that was revealed to the Prophet. Not even a single letter has yielded to corruption during the passage of centuries. And so it will remain for ever.

- It is a theoretical and a practical book, not only moralizing but also defining specially the permissible and the forbidden.

- The importance of understanding the message of the Qur'an is understandable, but simply reciting it with the intention of seeking God's pleasure and rewards is also an act of worship and meritorious in itself.

- In the history of mankind, no book, divine or otherwise, has received so much care as has been received by the Qur'an. Not only its verses and words, but also each letter of the Arabic alphabet used in writing has been counted.

- Since its revelation, it is being read not only in every moment, but many times by the same devotee.

- It is the only book which has a great range of commentaries compiled in every century down to the present day. According to a recent survey, it has at least

seventy commentaries/translations in English language alone."

The *Hadith*

The life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was a model which provides every detail as to how a person can lead his or her life according to the tenets of Islam. He not only gave sermons but showed by practice and example how the teachings of Islam could be followed. All these were recorded and have been preserved in detail in what is called *hadith*.

The term *hadith* refers to an account concerning Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It includes his sayings, his actions, his approval or disapproval of anything that happened or was done in his presence or within his knowledge, his judgements and rulings, the way he did anything, or conducted various affairs relating to his individual life, his family, the community or the state.³⁴ As a source of Islamic Sharī'ah, the *hadith* stands next to the Qur'an. The mission of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was not only to convey the divine message (i.e. the Qur'an) to mankind, but also to explain and demonstrate it to them through his words and actions,

³⁴ For details see, Khan, op., cit.

³⁵ Fazlie, 1993, p. 1.

and provide them with laws and rules based on it. These are what constitute the *hadith*.

Preservation of the *Hadith*

Muslims took utmost care in preserving the *hadiths* in order to be able to follow the Prophet completely in every sphere of their lives and also to convey the same to others. The Prophet himself made every possible arrangement to ensure that his message reached the people in full detail. He used three methods for this purpose. He taught verbally his companions various things from time to time. Secondly, he issued many letters to kings, rulers, chieftains, and Muslim governors. These contained call to Islam, admonition, and also his views on various subjects. Finally, through his own practice, he gave lessons to his companions and issued clear instructions to follow him.

While teaching his companions, the Prophet urged them to convey to others what they had learned from him. He said: "*Pass on from me, even if it is only a verse [or sentence]*", He also said: "*May God brighten a servant who hears what I say, learns it by heart, preserves it, and passes it on [to others].*"³⁷ He not only gave directions to convey his message, but also declared that

³⁶ Mishkat, No. 198.

³⁷ Ibid., No. 228.

there was a reward for teachers and students. He stated that pursuit of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim." One who conceals knowledge is liable to punishment on the Day of Judgement." At the same time, he made his companions alert about conveying his teachings correctly and urged them to be very careful in that respect. He warned those who may attribute something to him which-he did not say or do. He said: "*Let him who deliberately lies about me come to his abode in the fire.*"⁴⁰

The companions of the Prophet had very keen interest in his sayings, deeds and actions. They used to listen to every word uttered by him with utmost care. In his absence, they used to review and repeat what they had learnt. They also used to practice what they had learnt with full care and, therefore, the lessons always remained fresh in their memories. Not fully depending on their memories, a group of them recorded what they learnt from the Prophet from time to time. Unlike the Our'an, the *hadlth*, however, was not compiled officially during the life-time of the Prophet. The reason was to eliminate any possibility of the Our'an being mixed with the *hadlth*.

When the Our'an was complete and the revelation came to an end with the demise of the Prophet, it was right time for compilation of the *hadlth*, During the

³⁸ Ibid., No. 218.

³⁹ Ibid., No. 223.

⁴⁰ Ibid., No. 198.

period of the Sahdiba, most of the hadiths had already been written but remained scattered. With the expansion of the Islamic state to the surrounding regions, the companions also scattered to preach the divine message. The need for compilation of the *hadltn* on a large scale was urgently felt when it was apprehended that this vital source of Islamic Sharl'ah might be lost with the demise of the scholars from among the Tabi'ln (followers of the Sahdiba). The emergence of some unscrupulous elements in the rapidly expanding domain of Islam fabricating *hadlths* to serve their own interests made it more imperative to protect the *hadlths* from distortion and compile them after rigorous scrutiny. The work started on a large scale during the period of Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-Aziz, and was accomplished by scholars like Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim.

Here, it may be pertinent to give some idea about the preservation and accuracy of the *hadlths* with an illustration. Every *hadltn* has two parts, namely sanad (the chain through which the text reached the compiler) and matn (the text). The *hadltn* quoted below from the *Sahh al-Bukhdrl* is an example in point:

"Bukhdrl said that Sulaimdn Abu ar-Rabi' informed him saying that Isma'Il ibn Ja'ar said that NaJi' ibn Malik ibn AbI Amir Abu Suhail informed him on the authority of his father that Abu Huraira related that the Prophet said: the signs of a hypocrite are three: Whenever he speaks he

lies. Whenever he makes a promise, he breaks it. Whenever trusted with something, he proves to be dishonest."⁴¹

Muslims preserved not only what they learnt from the Prophet but also the details about the lives of those who were involved in the compilation and preservation of the *hadith*. The experts in the science of the *hadith* are called *muhaddithin*. Among them were *Sahaba* (companions), *Tabi'in* (followers), *Tabi' Tabi'in* (followers of the followers), and many others up to the end of the fourth Hijra century. The detailed information about them has been preserved. The number of these people stands at over one hundred thousand. This vast treasure of biographical data, known as *Asma al-Rijal* is a science which has no parallel in the history of knowledge.

Among the most celebrated collections of the *hadith* are *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, *Sunan al-Nasa'i*, *Sunan ibn Majah*, *Mu'attd Imam Malik* and *Musnad Imam Ahmad*.

The *hadiths* of the Prophet as we find them in various compilations came down to us after undergoing several stages of scrutiny over time. The authenticity of these *hadiths* has been fully established by Muslim scholars. One can safely depend upon them for guidance in all matters of life.

⁴¹ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, (Damascus: 1993), I:21.

Chapter 3

CONCEPT OF GOD

1. GOD IN HINDUISM

In Hinduism, the concept of god is shrouded in vagueness and confusion. In ancient period, almost every phenomenon in nature which impressed people's imagination was regarded as a deity. Thus, Indra was the god of storm, thunder and rain. The brilliant sun above and fire below were worshipped as gods Surya and Agni. The beauty of dawn led to the creation of the goddess Usha and the vast expanse of heaven to that of Dya¹. Hindus in general believe in 330 million deities. The sacred scriptures, however, do not present the names and identity of all these deities. The *Rig Veda* speaks of 3,339 deities at two places, and of 33 deities at another place. Yet, one of its hymns, refers to one supreme God. In the words of Khushwant Singh, "The vast majority of Hindus believe in a variety of gods and goddesses- human, animal, floral and phenomenal. The number of *devatas* [deities] are said to be over 330 million. Every village has

¹ RC. Majumdar & P.N. Chopra, *Main Currents of Indian History*, (New Delhi: 1994).

its village deity. On the outskirts of every town and hamlet you will see some banyan or peepul tree with its bole surrounded by stone phalluses and images of snakes, monkeys and such others. Most Hindu homes also have their own family deity in a niche. They will awaken it with the chanting of hymns, lighting joss-sticks, daubing it with vermilion powder, they will festoon it with flowers, and offer it food and coconut milk. And at sunset, they will wave salvers full of oil lamps and smoking *agar* (incense), blow conch-shells, clang bells and then put it to rest."² The total number of deities described or mentioned by name in all the scriptures is not more than 400. These deities include rats," owls, donkeys, cows, dogs, foxes, etc.⁴ Hindu gods and goddesses have some special characteristic features, possibly, developed and attributed to them by their devotees as their number continued to increase over time.

² Singh, p.44.

³ Rat devatas in a temple in Rajputana were quite safe during the genocide of rats in India in the wake of outbreak of plague in 1994.

⁴ Muni Pujar Gorar *Katha* [Bengali], p. 50 by Abut Hussain Bhattacharya, formerly an eminent *Brahman* priest, who embraced Islam and served the cause of Islam till his death.

Some Characteristics of Deities

Lack of Absolute Power

Hindu gods and goddesses not only lack in absolute power but often appear to project weakness. The scriptures are full of references to wars between gods and *asuras* (demons). Hindu sages sometime appear to be mightier than the gods. The gods were afraid of the penances exercised by the sages who could topple them with these exercises. The usual method the gods adopted to distract the attention of the *rishis* (sages) engaged in penances was to lure them into sexual temptation. *bn* occasions gods sought the intervention of the *rishis* in their disputes with one another.⁵ The case of Siva, for instance, indicates how helpless he was before the sages. Hindus worship not him but his *linga* (sex organ). According to the Padma Purana, this is because of a curse by a saint called, Bhrgu, that he ceased to be worshipped in the form of human being and his *linga* became an object of worship. According to the *Vamana Purana*, it was the result of a curse pronounced by a number of sages.⁶

The story of Rama narrated in the *Ramayana*, portrayed that a monkey, called Hanumana, was much

⁵ Dr. Sajjad Husain, *A Young Muslim's Guide to Religions in the World*, (Dhaka :1992), p. 98.

⁶ Wilkins, 1993, pp.280-81.

more powerful than him. When he along with his wife Sita and his step-brother Lakshmana was in exile in the forest, Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, king of Lanka. Rama could not even locate her. It was Hanumana who could find her with Ravana, helped Rama to cross over to Lanka, defeat Ravana in a fight and rescue Sita.⁷ Once Lakshmana was hit by a poisonous arrow. His wound could be healed with a medicinal herbs available in the Oshadhi Mountain in the Himalayas. Rama could not collect the medicinal herb; so he sought the help of Hanumana. The monkey went to the mountain to bring the herb but could not identify it. So he lifted the whole mountain and carried it to Lanka.⁸ Proving his great power, the monkey himself became a god.

Doctrine of Avatars

Hindus believe in *innumerable avatars* (incarnations) of gods and they can add to their number without any difficulty. An incarnation appears in the form of a creature, which may be a man, an animal or both. He comes to this world to destroy a particular evil or injustice and to restore order. Vishnu is commonly believed to incarnate ten times. Of his ten incarnations, nine have already appeared. Among them are Rama and

⁷ For details, see Ambedkar.

⁸ Shakunthala Jagannthan, *Hinduism An Introduction*, (Bombay: 1991), pp. 14-15.

Krishna. Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, is the ninth incarnation of Vishnu. Although his religion was different from Hinduism, the *Brahmans* made him an *avatara* so as to bring the Buddhist community under the fold of Hinduism. The last incarnation named Kalki is yet to appear. He will be a man riding upon a white horse with a sword in his hand. He will purify the Kali Yuga (Kali age) and restore purity and goodness. Some Hindu scholars, however, suggest that 'avatara' in Sanskrit is used in the sense of prophet in English. As the descriptions given in Hindu scriptures about Kalki resemble those of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) these scholars believe that Muhammad (pbuh) was the last among the avatars?

Substitution

In the history of Hindu gods, one finds that some gods have been worshipped for a time and then abandoned. Thereafter quite new gods are created and worshipped with devotion. Again, these new gods are abandoned and replaced by a fresh set of gods. For instance, Hindus replaced the gods who were worshipped in the Vedic age by those to whose praise the Puranas are devoted. Shiva, Vishnu, Rama and Krishna who are worshipped by Hindus now-a-days attained prominence at a much later

⁹ For details see *Kalki Avatar Abong Muhammad Sahcb* (Bengali) by Dr. Veda Prakash Upaddhay, Research Scholar, Department of Sanskrit, Prayag University, India.

stage. Among the Vedic gods who lost their importance were Mitra, Varuna, Rudra, Indra, Agni, Prajapathi and Savidar. Finally, the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva replaced the rest. Brahma, later, lost his importance, leaving Shiva and Vishnu as the two important deities, along with the other popular gods and goddesses such as Parvati, Ganesa, Skanda, Krishna, Lakshmi, Hanumana, Ganapathi and others.

Family Life

Hindu gods and goddesses were born like human beings and had married lives with spouses and children. For instance, Yama, god of spirits, was born of Vivasvat (the sun) and Saranya. Saraswati, goddess of learning, was a daughter of Brahma. Lakshmi, goddess of good luck, was born of Bhrighu and Khyati. She was married to Vishnu. Indra, the deity of storm, was married to Indrani. Once having won victory over some demons, Durga, wife of Siva and herself a goddess, danced for joy so furiously that the earth trembled beneath her weight. Being afraid that the earth would be destroyed, Siva asked her to stop but she did not. In a bid to make her stop, Siva lay down among the slain. Durga continued dancing until she found that her husband was under her feet. She immediately thrust out her tongue with shame at the disrespect she had shown to him." Once when

to Wilkins, 1993, p.309.

she was hungry, Durga asked Siva to give her some food. But when she found that Siva was late in giving her food, she swallowed him. Immediately her body started emitting *dhum* (smoke). Since then she got the name Dhumabathi.

Variety of Images

Hindu gods and goddesses are described in many queer ways, possibly, to make them attractive to the people. In the words of S.D. Theertha, "Gods and goddesses are described in numerous fantastic forms with many heads and hands, in the shape of animals and semi-human beings, sleeping on snakes and riding on rats, possessing wives and children, some of whom sit on the heads of their lord, and doing things which decent men should shun, pictures which now furnish models for advertisements of beer or cigarettes and stories which disfigure the nation's life."¹² In pictures, **Vishnu** is represented as a black man, with four arms; in one hand he holds a club; in another a shell; in a third a chakra (discus), with which he slew his enemies; and in the fourth a lotus. He rides upon the bird Garuda, and is dressed in yellow robes. **Siva** is represented as having a third eye in the middle of his forehead. **Durga** has ten arms, in one she holds a spear, with another a tail of a

¹¹ Bhattachariya, op. cit, p. 57.

¹² Theertha, pp.118-19.

serpent, with still another the hair of a giant whose breast the snake is biting. Her other hands are filled with various arms.¹³ **Ganesa**, son of Siva and Durga (regarded as the god of wisdom), has as his head that of an elephant. **Ugrachanda** has eighteen arms. **Chinnamastha** has her head in her left hand after separating it from her own body. **Jagaddhathri** has four hands, three eyes, and is seated on a lion. **Jhar** has three heads, nine eyes, six hands and three legs.¹⁴

Representation

In Hinduism, even ordinary things can represent gods and goddesses for the purpose of worshipping. This fact may be illustrated by the following examples:

Vishnu. Vishnu is represented by salgrama (a kind of rock). When his wife discovered that he had affair with another woman, she cursed that woman. As a result of her curse, that woman was changed into a plant, called tulasi. Vishnu, in order that he might still enjoy the company of his beloved (now a plant, tulasi), transformed himself into a salgrama. Thus salgrama became a representative of Vishnu.

¹³ Wilkins, 1993, pages, 120-21, 270, 300.

¹⁴ Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 51-55.

Siva. Siva is represented by the *Unga* (sex organ) which is an upright pillar of stone erected in the temples dedicated to him. The image is daily bathed with water, milk and *bhang*, and large quantities of food are placed before it. Flowers, sandal-wood, and clothes are also presented.

Lakshmi. Lakshmi is the goddess of good luck. No image is made for her worship. Her representative is found in every house. That is a basket for measuring corn.

Sasthi. Sasthi is the protectress of women and children. The banyan tree, being specially sacred to her, is her representative.

Manasa. Manasa is the queen of snakes. An image is made for worshipping her but a pot of water represents her for this purpose.

Non:Forgiving

Hindu gods show no sign of love or goodness. The idea of a 'god of love and goodness, who is ready, without solicitations, to do good is unknown in Hinduism. He is regarded rather as an enemy whose favour must be purchased, a judge whose decisions can be influenced by gifts and service. Further, it is a common and widespread notion that a man by doing any extraordinary deed, such as the setting up of an image in his house for worship, visiting a shrine, bathing at a specially holy place, making

a pilgrimage, incurring bodily suffering, can have these good deeds written to his credit as an equivalent for a certain sin. Though there are manifold ways prescribed for getting rid of sin, it is explicitly declared in the Hindu *shastras* that pardon is impossible. As a man works so will be his reward. But if there is no pardon, no forgiveness on God's part, there is the payment of an equivalent on theirs.' For a Hindu, therefore, there is no prayer for the pardon from sins.¹⁵

Morality

Hindu gods freely indulge in immoral and criminal activities. Their incarnates also indulge in such activities. **Brahma** cohabited with his own daughter, Saraswati, for one hundred years. For this crime, he ceased to be worshipped. In the *Skanda Purana*, a charge of falsehood is proved against him. This fact also has been mentioned as a reason for his being deprived of adoration.¹⁶ **Vishnu** deceitfully had intercourse with Shankhachur's wife, Tulasi, He could ruin her chastity because he had assumed the form of her husband.¹⁷ Later, he continued his illicit sexual relations with her.¹⁸ According to *Brahmabaibanha Purana*, when Tulasi discovered that

¹⁵ Wilkins, 1975, pp. 41-42.

¹⁶ Wilkins, 1993, pages 100-01, 106.

¹⁷ Sarkar, p. 199.

¹⁸ Wilkins, 1975, pp. 52-53,

Vishnu had destroyed her chastity deceitfully, she cursed him. As a result of that, he became *salgrama*, a rock found on the bed of the river Gandaki to the south of the Himalayas.¹⁹ **Indra**, a Vedic god, seduced Ahalya, wife of his teacher Gautama. He also stole king Sagar's horse. **Rama** murdered Vali, who did not do anything wrong to him, in the most odious way. He also killed Sambuka, an innocent man when he was performing rigorous *tapasya* (penance). He sent his pregnant and innocent wife, Sita in exile, in the most cruel manner. **Krishna** had a career full of intimacy with so many young women. His illicit relation with Radha, wife of his maternal uncle, is a well-known fact

Different Categories of Deities

Hindu deities are grouped under different categories based on their locality, physical features, character, vehicles, favourite arms, etc. Some of these groups are as mentioned below:

Local Deities: Bishwanath in Kashi; Sri **Krishna** in Boikunta; **Kali** at Kalighat; **Jagannath** at Puri; **Gayasura** in Gaya; **Basuki** *in patal* (the nether world); **Serpents** in Nagalok; **Varona** in water; **Paban-deva** in the air; sita

¹⁹ Sarkar, p.504.

²⁰ Wilkins, 1993, pp. 60-61.

(vagina) of Sall (wife of Siva) at Kamakhya; **Mahadeva** on banyan tree; **Durga** on *asvaththa* (Indian fig-tree); **Krishna Tagore** on *kadam* (tree); and **Siva-Parvati** on bilva (a kind of shell-fruit) tree. These and other local-based deities are called local deities.²¹

Special Physical Features: **Chandra** (the moon): tuberculosis; **Shukracharya**: one-eyed; **Ganesa**: elephant-headed; **Indra**: provided with thousand yoni (vagina), **Ahallya**: as solid as rock, **Jotasura**: *jot* (matted hair) in head, **Narayana**: like round stone, **Brahma**: four-faced and blood-coloured; **Mahadeva**: five-faced and white in colour, **Durga**: has ten hands; **Jagannath**: crippled limbs; **Ganapathi**: inflated belly, **Chamunda**: munda (head) in hand, **Kali**: black in colour, **Krishna**: *sham* (dark-coloured). These and some other deities have special physical features.

Deities of Anger: **Mahadeva**: Out of anger he profusely urinated over the entire body of his father-in-law. **Bhrigu**: He hurt the chest of Bhagawan (god) with his leg. **Panorama**: He eliminated the Kshatriyas (a Hindu caste) from this earth 21 times by hurting the earth with his axe. **Gautama**: He transformed Ahallya into a stone. He also created one thousand yoni (vagina) in the body of Indra. **Durbasha**: Cursing king Harish, he transformed him into

²¹ For details about various categories of deities, see Bhattacharya, op. cit., pp. 64-66.

a chanddl (a man from the most inferior caste).
Chamunda: She severed her own head from her body.
Jahnumuni: He drank all water of the Ganges river.
 They did all these when they were angry. They are called deities of anger.

Deities of Love: **Sri Krishna:** He loved one thousand gopinis (milk-maids) in addition to Radha (wife of his maternal uncle), Lakshmi and Saraswati. **Mahadeva:** He became mad when tried to make love with Sati, earned Durga's curse when made love with the Ganges river, and became too much confounded when he loved Parvatl, daughter of the Himalayas. **Narayana:** He was transformed into rock when he loved Tulasi. **Devaraj Indra:** As a consequence of his love with Ahallyii, one thousand yoni (vagina) grew in his body. **Siva:** He lost his linga (sex organ) as a consequence of making love with the wives of some sages. **Jagai Madhai:** Out of love for Krishna, they had complete apathy towards worldly affairs. **Nimai:** Out of love for Hari, he lost interest in worldly affairs. **Menoka, Rati, Rambha:** They distribute love everywhere. **Madan:** He is the king of love. **Rati:** She is the queen of love.

Deities of Fear: There are specified deities invoked for remedy of/protection from special type of danger. Some of these are as mentioned here:

Manasa: for snake-bite; **Jorasura:** for fever; **Shitala:** for cholera and pox; **Ite Kumar:** for itching and skin disease; **Durga:** for any calamity; **Ganesa:** for losses in

trade; **Kartikeya**: for enemies; and **The Ganges**: for drowning of the boat.

Vehicles: **Rat** for Ganesa, **elephant** for Indra, **owl** for Lakshmi; **garuda** (bird) for Krishna, **peacock** for Kartikeya, **duck** for Saraswati, **ox** for Mahadeva, **lion** for Durga, **dog** for Jamaraja, **snake** for Manasa, **donkey** for Shitala, **dheki** (indigenous machine for husking paddy) for Bishwakarma, and **buffalo** for Yama. These deities are called the Deities of Vehicles.

Arms: **Trishul** (trident) for Mahadeva, **chakra** (wheel) for Krishna, **plough** for Balarama, **axe** for Parsurama, **arrow** for Rama, **shanka** (shell) **chakra**, **gada** (club) and lotus for Narayana, **dhanurban** (bow and arrow) for Kartikeya, **bajra** (a weapon) for Indra, **kharga** (falchion) for Durga, **gada** (club) for Vhima, **snake** for Manasa. These and some other deities are remarkable for having arms and are called armed deities.

Some Other Aspects

Inferiority to Brahman: According to Manu Smriti, a *Brahman* is superior even to gods. The *Manu Smriti* says, •*Let a Brahman be ignorant or learned, still he is a great deity. To Brahman, the three worlds and gods owe their*

existence."²² The Smrui further says, "*Brahman is the root of sacred law, by his origin alone he is a deity even for the gods and his word is authoritative for men.*"²³ As quoted by Wilkins, the following statement sums up the popular idea of the power of the *Brahman*: "*The whole world is under the power of the gods. The gods are under the power of the mantras (sacred texts used by the Brahmins). The mantras are under the power of the Brahmins. The Brahman is, therefore, our god.*"²⁴

Sanctity of Banaras: According to the **Vamana Purana**, once Brahma, uttered some boastful words. This made Siva inflamed with anger. He cut off the fifth head of Brahma. When Siva tried to throw the head to the ground, it did not fall, but remained in his hand. To get rid of it, he fled to Banaras, a holy place. There he absolved from his great sin because of the sanctity of the holy place.²⁵

Elephant Head for Ganesa: When Parvati was bathing, she prepared a human body with the oil and ointments used at the bath together with the impurities of her body. She gave it life by sprinkling it with the water of the Ganges and thus created her son Ganesa. She placed him

²² Theertha, p. 37.

²³ Kelkar, *History of Caste*, quoted by Theertha, p.37.

²⁴ Wilkins, 1975, p. 240.

²⁵ Wilkins, 1993, p.274.

at her door asking him to prevent anyone from entering her house when she was taking a bath. Meanwhile, Siva, Parvati's husband, came back home but Ganesa refused him entrance. Siva became furious and cut off Ganesa's head. Murder of her son made Parvati weep profusely. Moved by this, Siva killed an elephant and fixed its head to the headless trunk of Ganesa.>

Temptation of Sex: In a fit of anger, once Parvati committed suicide. When she was re-born as Durga, she wanted to be re-united to Siva as his wife. When she found it difficult to draw his attention to her as he was engaged in meditation, she started to perform the most severe penance sitting in front of him. At the instigation of other gods, *Kamdeva* (god of lust) decided to help her. After sometime, when Siva raised his head, Kamdeva aroused in him the desire to have sex with Durga. Thus Durga could again become wife of Siva. v

How Siva Helped a Devotee: As described in the *Bhagavata*, once when a devotee of Siva was in trouble, he wanted to help him. He "assumed half the body of Parvati [his wife], fastened up his matted hair, rubbed his body over with ashes, ate a large quantity of hemp, swallow-wart and thorn-apple; and wearing a Brahmanical thread composed of white snakes, clad in an

u; Ibid., pp. 327-28.

r; Ibid., p. 295.

elephant's hide, with a necklace of beads, and a garland of skulls, riding upon Nandi [his favourite bull], accompanied by ghosts, goblins, spectres, witches, imps, sprites and evil spirits, Bholonath [Siva] came forth. On his forehead was the moon; he placed the Ganges [river] on his head, and his eyes were very red. His most destructive weapon was a trident; with this he slew the foe who was obnoxious to his follower.^P

Some Observations

Unity of God

Hindus' belief in God is contradictory. While they believe in and worship many gods and goddesses, they at the same time profess to believe in one god. If someone asks them about the number of deities, they will invariably say, "one". There is scarcely any article of faith, on which they are more agreed. 'God is one without a second,' is a phrase on the lips of every one who speaks about the deity. Their belief in one God is in accord with a hymn of the *Rig Veda* which reads like this: "They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly noble-winged Garutman. To what is One, sages give many a title: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan"

²⁸ Ibid., p.279-80.

(1:164.46).²⁹ While professing to believe in one God, Hindus Justify polytheism saying that God is so great that He cannot be fully expressed by any one being; all the gods, differing as they do in form and character, represent a part, but only a small part, of His immensity. They also say that unless something symbolic is there, common people cannot express their devotion to God. This sort of contradiction concerning God was prevalent among the pagans of Makkah over fifteen centuries ago. Their answer to the question, "Who created this world?" always was "Allah" but they justified polytheism saying that they worshipped the idles in order that they might bring them near to God.³⁰

Holiness with Immorality

Hindus believe in the holiness of God but at the same time they believe in the immoral character of His incarnations. When asked the character of God, they will say: "He is without beginning or end, truthful, holy in nature, righteous in act, pure, merciful, almighty, all-wise, everywhere present." Yet. the same people believe that this same God, when incarnates anfflng men, was a man with an weaknesses but using His greater wisdom and power for doing greater evil. The stories of Siva's infidelity towards his wife, and their consequent quarrels;

²⁹ RV, p.xi.

³⁰ See the Our'an, 39:3.

Krishna's unbounded licentiousness; Rama's ignorance of his wife's whereabouts when she was carried off by Ravana, his inability to rescue her, and to say whether she had continued to be true to him during her enforced residence in Sri Lanka, are as fully believed as the moral attributes of God. Hindus generally believe that while the teaching of the gods is good and worthy to be followed, the example they have set is bad and unfit to be copied.³¹

Question of Superiority

Each deity in Hindu worship is addressed as superior to the rest. Each of Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Krishna, Sakti is regarded as the Supreme, and the others are said to have sprung from or are manifestations of the one being adored. In general, Hindu society is divided on the basis of their difference in liking or otherwise of a god. Hindu devotees are generally categorized into either Vishnuvites or Shivites who feud on the question of faith as to which of their deities is more powerful. According to the *Bhagavata* 'Those who worship Siva and those who follow their doctrines are heretics and enemies of the sacred *shastras*.' The *Padma Purana*, on the contrary, declares, 'for even looking at Vishnu the wrath of Siva is kindled, and from his wrath we fall assuredly into a horrible hell: let not, therefore, the name of Vishnu even be

³¹ Wilkins, 1975, pp.136-38.

pronounced. Y Hindu girls, even at their young age, make a distinction between the gods in the choice of a husband. In the Siva *Puja*, a tender girl of five years of age is taught to prefer Siva to Krishna for her husband, because the latter is reputed to have borne a questionable character. When asked why she would not have Krishna for her husband, she promptly would answer that Siva was faithful to his wife (Durga) but Krishna was not a good god, because he had disported himself with thousands of gopinis (milkmaids). In Siva Puja, the girl asks that Siva may be her husband, while in the Krishna Puja, she asks the deity to provide her with a husband."

Confusion in Worship

Belief in many gods and goddesses puts a Hindu ill a state of utter confusion and makes all his religious efforts futile. He does not know the names of them all, nor even their exact number and power. He cannot worship or satisfy all of them, nor has it been said in Hindu *shastras* that worshipping any one or some of them will fetch salvation to a Hindu. He, therefore, worships the one who seems to be the most favoured to him for some reason or other and yet, he cannot be contented because

³² Muhammad Ali Muhiyaddin, *A Comparative Study of the Religions of Today*, (New York: 1985), p.303.

³³ Wilkins, 1975, p.193.

he could not be sure that he had worshipped the right one. Here, the feeling of one Hindu scholar who recently embraced Islam seems to be pertinent. He says, "I was really baffled by the practices in Hinduism where my mother would pray one deity and my father another."³⁴

Abasement of Human Dignity

Hinduism demeaned man to the lowest level among the scheme of God's creation. Man was made inferior to any other creature and his dignity was lowered to such an extent that he felt happy when he bowed his head before idols, inanimate, lifeless objects, and artifacts of his own creation. He was made a slave to credulous belief and irrational fears of demons and devils, afraid of unknown and nameless powers. Under Hinduism, none is more ignoble and humiliated than man. A sacred tree or animal, dedicated to some religious belief or practice enjoys more coveted place than man himself. Until recently, human sacrifice on the altars of countless deities was a common spectacle.

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³⁴ *Arab News*, 17 May 1995.

II. *GOD IN ISLAM*

The concept of God in Islam is absolutely perfect, clear, precise and comprehensive. Perhaps, the greatest service Islam has rendered to humanity is the exaltation and purification of this concept. Through purifying the concept of God from all imaginary ideas and beliefs Islam not only upheld the divine dignity of the real and true God but also provided human beings with the opportunity to recognize their lofty position as being superior to all other creations.

Attributes of God

In every language there is one or more terms used for God. Examples are *Ishwar* in Bengali, God in English and Dieu in French. These words can be made plural (Ishwargan, Gods, Dieux or feminine (Ishwari, Goddess, Dccssc). This is not the case with Allah, the personal name in Arabic of the One true God. The term has no plural or gender. It is interesting to know that Allah is the personal name of God also in Aramaic, the language of Prophet Jesus (pbuh) who preceded Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The very name of God in Islam (Allah) implies that He is unique in all His attributes. He has many attributes which are absolute, perfect and

unique and do not resemble those of His creations in anyway. God is One and Unique. He has no partner. He is the Mighty, the Wise. He is the Creator, the Sustainer and the Nourisher of the entire world. His is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. He is the First and the Last. He is the Evident (as to His obvious existence) and the Hidden (as to His nature). He is Ancient, having no beginning; He is Everlasting, having no end. He is Ever-existing without interruption or termination. He is Perpetual and Constant. He is Ever-qualified with the attributes of supreme greatness. He is the Lord, and the Guardian and Disposer of all affairs.

God has many names which are the best. He has no associate in His divinity, His names, or His attributes. He is the 'Forgiver of sin, the Acceptor of repentance, the Terrible in retribution, the Bountiful. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. He is the Wise, All-hearing, and All-seeing. He sees without pupil or eyelid, and hears without ear. He is the Knower of the unseen and the visible. He is Most Gracious, Most Merciful. He is the Sovereign, the All-Holy, the Source of peace, the Guardian of faith, the Preserver of safety, the Exalted in might, the Irresistible, the Justly Proud. He is the Eternal, Absolute. He has not begotten, and has not been begotten.

God is not like anything that exists, neither does anything resemble Him.³⁵ He is not determined by

³⁵ The Qur'an, 42: 11.

dimensions, nor contained within bounds. He is not surrounded by sides, nor is He comprised within the heavens or earth. God is Living, Powerful; He neither slumbers, nor sleeps. To Him belongs the kingdom, the power and might. He is the sole Creator of beings and Producer of things and from Him everything has its beginning.

God knows all things, hidden or manifest. He knows the number of leaves of the trees, of the grains of wheat and of sand. Nothing passes in the earth or in the heavens, neither small nor great, nor good nor bad, but by determinate decree and His definite will. He is Omnipresent, and Omnipotent. He is nearer to men than their jugular veins,³⁶ and witness to everything. His nearness is not like the nearness of bodies; neither is His essence like the essence of bodies.

God does not exist in anything, nor does anything exist in Him; He is too exalted to be contained in any place; and He is not bound to be determined by lapse of ages or times. He existed before He created time and place. He is now as He always existed. He is distinct from the creatures by His attributes. He is too holy to be subject to any change or decay or death, or to any local motion. He is perfect and needs no addition for perfection. He is known to exist by the apprehensions of the understanding.

³⁶ Ibid., 50: 16.

The attributes of God mentioned above are not at all exhaustive; there are many more. In fact, His attributes are too many to be confined in black and white.

Association with God

The doctrine of *tawn id*, which is the basis of Islam, implies complete denial of partnership with God. Islam considers associating any partner with God (in Arabic, "*shirk*") as the deadliest sin which He will never forgive, despite the fact that He may forgive all other sins.³⁷ Islam has also made it clear that it is far beyond the dignity of God to incarnate in human or any other form. If God intends to do something, His wish is enough to have it done." This is the corollary of His attribute "Almighty" and "All-sufficient". If He needs to incarnate in the form of man or anything else in order to bring about some change, He no longer remains "Self-Sufficient", he becomes a false god. This is absurd.

The unique usage of Allah as a personal name of God is a reflection of Islam's emphasis on the purity of the belief in God. The essence of the message of Islam is a call to the worship of the Creator and the rejection of the practice of worshipping His creation in any form. The Qur'an in many verses reminded men of the futility of

³⁷ Ibid., 4: 116.

¹⁸ Ibid., 16: 40.

worshipping the false gods fabricated by men themselves. It frequently exhorted mankind to accept the pure and perfect concept of God and refrain from associating partner with Him.

The Islamic perspective of God is very logical. The Creator must be of a different nature from the things created because if He is of the same nature as they are, He is temporal, Himself created by someone else. This is absurd. The Creator must be eternal; nothing caused Him to come into existence or nothing causes Him to continue to exist. This means He is self-sufficient. If He does not depend on anything for continuance of his own existence, then his existence can have no end. The Creator is, therefore, everlasting. The Creator not only has created all other things, He also preserves them and is the ultimate cause of whatever happens to them. He and only He, therefore, deserves to be worshipped by His creations. The creation-worship or worship of man-made objects is not only the worst type of disregard to the Creator, it is also far away from any sense of logic. *Shirk* or creation-worship is a heinous sin because it contradicts the very purpose of man's creation. The purpose of the creation of man is to worship the true and only God.³⁹ Consequently, the worship of creation, which is the essence of paganism, is the only unforgivable sin.⁴⁰ One

³⁹ Ibid., 51: 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4: 48.

who dies in this state of paganism or idolatry has sealed his fate in the next life.

A Muslim's Attitude Towards God

Belief in one God with His attributes such as the only Creator, the Preserver, the Nourisher is called *Tawhid* ar-Rubtbiyyan in Arabic. Many of the pagans and worshipers of idols knew and believed that only the Supreme God had these attributes but that knowledge and belief was not enough to make them Muslims. A Muslim must acknowledge that it is God alone Who deserves to be worshipped and he, therefore, must refrain from worshipping any other thing or being. This acknowledgement and belief is known as *Tawhid al-'Uluhiyyan* in Arabic. A Muslim must also believe that the attributes exclusively possessed by God can never be possessed by any other thing or being. Similarly, he also must believe that the names of God are exclusively for Him and can never be shared by any other thing or being. This is called *Tawn id [Il-lsm was Sifat*.

Having had this knowledge about God, a Muslim must constantly have faith in Him. When faith enters a man's heart, it causes certain changes in his attitudes. He loves his Lord and feels grateful to Him for the bounties He bestowed upon him. This feeling of gratitude (*shukr* in Arabic) is the essence of worship, *ibddab* in Arabic. He knows that God is very kind to His slaves and will reward them for any good deeds accomplished by them. He feels

that leading a pious life makes him entitled to the blissful eternal life in the hereafter. He also feels that the good deeds accomplished by him are far from being commensurate with the favours he receives from his Lord. So he seeks forgiveness of God lest He should punish him. Thus expectation for bounties of God (*raja* in Arabic) and fear of His punishment (*khowf* in Arabic) are two elements which should always be there in a believer's heart.

Mercy and Justice

Some non-Muslims suggest that God in Islam is cruel Who punishes His slaves when they do not obey Him; He is not loving and kind. This observation is far from the truth. As indicated earlier, God is most Merciful and most Compassionate. His mercy has been focused repeatedly in the Qur'an." Moreover, the Prophet has emphatically highlighted this divine attribute. He said: *"On the day of its creation God created one hundred mercy, of which ninety-nine He kept with Him and one He sent to all of His creations. If a disbeliever knew the extent of His mercy, he would not despair of attaining His paradise; and if a believer knew the extent of His punishment, he would*

⁴¹ See the verse, 39: 53.

*not feel secure against the hell.*⁴² It is out of His mercy that He provides us with whatever we need. He provides food to a baby even before its birth. While this is true, this is also true that God is just. His justice requires that the virtuous must be rewarded for their pious deeds and the evildoers must be punished for their evil deeds. People suffering throughout their lives for the sake of God and people disobeying Him throughout their lives should not be equally treated after death. If they are treated equally in the hereafter, then there does not remain any incentives for a moral and virtuous life in this world.⁴³

Dignity of Man

The concept of God as given by Islam enables man to recognize his Creator, the Supreme Power, the sole Enricher and Destroyer of life in the most correct manner. Thus man becomes free from the slavery of all the fake and imaginary powers and animate and inanimate gods and goddesses fabricated by him to be worshipped by him. In this way, Islam not only upheld the divine dignity of the true God, but also the dignity of man

⁴² al-Albani, Muhammad Nasiruddin, *Sahih al-Jami' al-Saghir wa Ziadatuh*, (Beirut/Damascus: 1986), No. 1763, 1:363.

⁴³ For details, see Chapter 5.

who is, potentially, superior to all other creatures. By being free from the fear of all else except God, man becomes self-reliant, courageous, and rational being. Islam assured man of his pivotal position in the scheme of creation and made him aware of his worth and dignity. By accepting the role of servant to the One and only God, man becomes aware that he is superior to every other created being and object. He becomes aware of the exalted position allotted to him by God in the scheme of things. Islam made man recognize the fact that he was entitled to much more loving regard, respect and honour than any other creature as the rank accorded to him was next only to God.

WORSHIP

I. *WORSHIP IN HINDUISM*

Nature of Worship

Among the 330 million deities generally believed by Hindus to exist, only 400 have been mentioned in all the Hindu scriptures and the identity of the rest i.e., 329,99,9600 deities remains totally unknown, even their names are not mentioned in any scripture. Of the 400 deities mentioned in the scriptures, the number of those worshipped by Hindus hardly reach the figure of 200; of them, only a few are worshipped in ordinary life of a Hindu and the rest receive their share of worship, if any, only once a year.¹ Another aspect of Hindu worship is that the deities worshipped differ from region to region (e.g. Durga in West Bengal, Rama in the north and Ravana in the southern provinces of India), tribe to tribe, community to community, or even from person to person in the same family. The devotees not only worship the

¹ Bhattachariya, pp. 50-51.

gods, but also their wives and children. Their legendary carrier vehicles are also held sacred or worshipped.

Worship is performed in different forms ranging from repetition of *mantras* (hymns) to sacrifice of a human being. In a general worship called *puja*, a picture or image of the deity is used, *mantras* are recited, flowers, incense-sticks are offered, water is sprinkled and fire is lighted. In this way, love and devotion is expressed for the deity.² There is not a single house or temple of worship in the Hindu community where anything other than a demigod in the shape of either an idol or an illuminated picture is worshipped. Hindus profess that they believe in one Absolute and "Supreme God, but nowhere they are seen to worship Him. They justify their act of worship, in whatever form it may be, as an expression of love for the one Supreme God. This justification accrues from their belief that everything is a part of God and for this reason, worship of anything means worship of God. This belief has given a free license to polytheism to appear in Hindu community in the grossest form, because there is no control over manufacturing new deities and abandoning old ones. Thus, not only many gods, goddesses and demigods but animals like *hanumana* (monkey), rat, cow, eagle, peacock, snake, and objects like linga (sex organ), certain rivers, mountains, trees, plants could have their share in Hindu worship and devotion.

² Chaturvedi, *Hinduism The Eternal Religion*, (Bombay: 1992), p. 159.

Hindus' acts of worship are not intended to aid in securing purity of heart, attaining spiritual or moral benefit, conquering an evil nature, or pleasing God in return for His goodness. In their pilgrimage, there does not appear to be any expectation to attain any noble purpose. Men, therefore, sin at the shrines as they do in their homes, and on their return as they did before their visit to a shrine. Nor is it thought remarkable that this should be so, except in the case of those who have gone to some sacred place to end their days there.³ Hindus, however, believe that by doing well his job within the limits set by the caste system, one can attain improvement in his status in future life. Asceticism has a prominent place in Hinduism. Hindus believe that through renouncing worldly life and becoming ascetic, one can attain communion with the Supreme Lord. The sacred writings abound with stories of the way in which men, by hard and long continued penance, prevailed even over the gods. Hindu scriptures, however, do not provide any specific system of worship through which one can attain such a position,

—Hindu worship is linked with the temples big or small built by Hindus for this purpose. It is therefore pertinent in any discussion on Hindu worship to throw some light on Hindu temples and the activities there.

³ Wilkins, 1975, p.42

Temple Worship

The temples contain idols which are taken care of by the priests who must be *Brahmans*; they perform the worship there. Among the famous temples is that of Jagannath. According to *Ayin-e-Akbari* (translated by Francis Gladwin), the priests wash the image of Jagannath six times every day, and dress it every time with fresh clothes; as soon as it is dressed, fifty-six *Brahmans* attend it and present it with various kinds of food.⁴

As Wilkins observes, there is nothing in the temple worship to attract the ordinary Hindus. This is because the texts are muttered, not distinctly spoken; and if it were possible for them to be heard, being recited in the Sanskrit language, they would not be intelligible. Moreover, the meaning of the ritualistic acts are known only to the priests. It is their duty to repeat the texts, and present the offerings to the gods. The followers' duty is to present gifts, and to pay the priests as mediators between them and the gods. The people have nothing more to do.

The temples are generally small, although there exist some large ones. There is no congregation in the temples to offer prayers to god, or to listen to addresses on religious and moral subjects. Hindus visit a temple not to enter, but simply to walk round the building, hand their

⁴ Toeertha, p. 126.

offerings to the officiating priest, catch (if possible) a glimpse of the idol it contains, and prostrate before it. The religion of temple, as S.D. Theertha observes, recognizes no meritorious work other than worship of the idol. It has no provision to raise the down-trodden, educate the ignorant, or comfort the sinner. It does not believe in giving or doing good, but exists to receive and exact good things from its devotees for the *Brahman* priests.

As to the conditions of temples, S.D. Theertha observ~, "If you go to any ordinary village and ask the first person you meet to show you the dirtiest locality there, if he is honest and sharp-witted, he will take you to the temples; for in most cases, these edifices in their dilapidated appearance, the condition of the precincts and the state of the interior are monuments of neglect, decay and dirty habits.... The plastered walls, if there be any remaining, are filled with filthy figures and writings inscribed by shameless youngsters and sometimes by grown-up vagabonds to exhibit their moral aberration. The small yard will for months remain unswept, overgrown with shrubs and sprinkled with cowdung and other rubbish. Nobody cares to visit the temple except on festive days."⁵ Abbe Dubois wrote in his book *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (p. 199): "There is a well-known Hindu proverb which says, 'A temple mouse fears not the gods.' This exactly applies to the *Brahmans* who enter their temples without showing the slightest sign of serious thought or respect for the divinities who are

⁵ Ibid., p.193.

enshrined therein... Even while performing their numerous religious fooleries, their behaviour shows no indication of **fevour** of real devotion." Giving his opinion on these remarks, S.D. Theertha says, "These remarks are letter by letter true of the temples of the present day, also perhaps with the additional force that the irreverence is manifest among the worshippers also."⁶

Worship of *Linga*

Siva is always worshipped in the form of the *linga* (phallus), although in pictures he is represented in the human form. His devotees are called Shivite which is a major Hindu sect. The *linga* is combined with its female counterpart (*yonis*), the latter forming the base from which the *linga* rises. As Wilkins suggests, it is impossible for anyone acquainted with the legends which account for its being the symbol of Siva, to see and worship it without impure thoughts being suggested.⁷ Women usually worship Siva when they take a bath. They make an image of the *linga* with mud. As they are not taught the *mantras* or sacred texts, their worship consists of bowing to the image of the *linga*.

⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

⁷ Wilkins, 1993, p.280.

How could *Unga* came to be the representative of Siva? Two legends are put forward to answer this question. According to *Padma Purana*, it was the result of a curse pronounced by a sage named, Bhrigu. When he was sent to discover which of the three gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Siva) was the greatest, Bhrigu came to Siva's house, but the doorkeeper refused to allow him entrance saying that his master, Siva, was engaged in intercourse with his wife Parvati. After waiting for sometime, Bhrigu's patience was exhausted and he cursed Siva saying: "Since thou, O Sankara! hast treated me with contempt in preferring the embraces of Parvati, your forms of worship shall be the *linga* (sex organ) and *yoni* (female sex organ)."⁸

According to the *Vamana*, *linga* became representative of Siva as a result of a curse pronounced by a number of sages. When his wife, Parvati (*Durga*) died at Daksha's sacrifice, Siva wandered from place to place like a madman, mourning her absence. He travelled from hermitage to hermitage, but could find no rest. When the hermits' wives saw him, they fell desperately in love with him and followed him from place to place. Their husbands, incensed at this, cursed Siva and deprived him of his manhood. A great commotion followed. Brahma and Vishnu interceded on his behalf with the hermits. The sages consented to withdraw their curse on condition that the offender Siva should be represented by the *linga*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 280-81.

Thus linga became an object of worship to gods and men.⁹

One of the most sacred Hindu holy places is Banaras. The place acquired its sanctity because of the Golden Temple of Bishwanath (Siva). In this temple, *Unga* is worshipped in the most celebrated way. Let us present here an eye-witness account of how the linga is worshipped at that temple. In the words of Santha Rama Rau, an Indian Hindu, "One evening I joined hundreds of pilgrims at the arati at Bishwanath. This is a regular puja (worship) performed four times every day, when Lord Siva is honored not only with flowers but also with the presentation of the arati-oil lamps, or sanctified fire and with long Sanskrit chants."

"Within the courtyard of the temple, in the central pavilion where the polished black stone Siva *linga* is enshrined in a square silver-lined pit, 11 priests conduct the ceremony. They wear white loincloths and are otherwise bare-bodied except for the loop of the sacred thread across the chest and the religious beads around the neck. Sitting cross-legged, each priest has beside him a silver tray holding a silver jar of Ganges water and silver stand for the arati lights."

"The chanting of Vedic verses begins with a sudden shout that shocks everyone into attention, then sinks to a more moderate level as the priests begin the decoration of the linga. First they bathe it with Ganges water, then with clarified butter, honey, and milk. They pack the top

o Ibid., p. 281.

of it with their hands to make a cushion of saffron-colored paste, and then streak their foreheads with their fingers. Wreaths of marigolds, streamers of jasmine, and a pink lotus cover the linga until the black stone shaft is invisible. A large, curling, silver five-headed cobra is placed over the linga, and each snake hood is decorated with flowers."

"Meanwhile the chanting continues, increasing in volume and fervor, accompanied now by drums and bells until it reaches an impassioned and mesmerizing pitch. One priest lights a handful of incense sticks at a small fire beside the altar and distributes them to the others to light the wicks of their *arati* holders. These are presented to the *linga*, there is an abrupt flare of fire from all around the altar coinciding with the final, deafening ululation of the chanting and the thunder drums."

"Now, in a sudden hush, the priests put the *arati* lamps on their trays, pile the trays with flowers from the linga, and walk among worshippers offering them the blessing of the *arati*, a dab of Ganges water on the forehead or the lips, a flower to take away with them. Everybody pushes forward to touch the linga, to receive the grace of the deity from the fire, the water, and the flowers that have been sanctified."?

From the above eye-witness account of the **Siva-linga Puja** - which is a major form of worship in Hinduism -

to *Banaras: India's City of Light* by Santha Rama Rau, published in the *National Geographic*, February 1986, pp. 248-251.

one can easily make a judgement about Hindu worships in general.

Some Other Worships and Festivals

Daily Worship

Most Hindus regard it as a duty to bathe daily if this is at all convenient, and to raise their hands and to bow towards the sun as it rises; but beyond this little or nothing is done. In the home of a rich Hindu, there is a family image which is worshipped by offering flowers, fruits, grain and water. The ceremonies are performed by the family priest. The shopkeepers have a picture or an image of Ganesa (elephant-headed deity) in their shops; they burn a little incense before it before commencing business. A devout workman salutes his tools before commencing work for the day. But except in the homes of the *Brahmans*, and those of the rich in which there are hired priests to attend to these matters for them, there is no daily worship.

Worship of Vishnu

Vishnu is worshipped by his devotees called Vaishnavas (also Vishnuvites), a major Hindu sect. The form in which he is worshipped found its origin in a legend, which says that Vishnu had illicit relation with a woman called

Tulasi. When his wife came to know about that affair she cursed Tulasi. As a consequence of that curse, Tulasi immediately became a plant. From that time, that plant came to be known as tulasi. Vishnu, in order that he might still enjoy Tulasi's company, transformed himself into a *salgrama* (a kind of rock). The worshippers of Vishnu, if they can afford to get one, own a *salgrama*, or at any rate, cultivate a small tulasi plant, the representative of the woman with whom Vishnu had an affair. The Vaishnavas carefully keep and treat the *salgramas* as though these are living beings. In the hot season these are bathed, and a jar of water is hung over them, from which the water slowly drops and keeps them cool: The tulasi plant is also well-cared for. The daily rituals are performed before the *salgramas* and the tulasi plant, or at least the deity is acknowledged by a profound salutation.

Shyama Pūja

Shyama Pūja is an important event for the worship of Durga (also called, Kali, Tara). According to Hindu mythology, when she gained victory over Rakta Vija, the commander-in-chief of her enemy's forces, she was so elated by her powers that she began to dance. Her movements shook the world, and the gods were afraid that it would fall to pieces. In their distress they cried to her husband (Siva) for help. Having found no other means to pacify her, Siva lay prostrate amongst the slain. When Durga looked down, she saw that she was dancing

on her husband's body. She became calm with shame, and thrust out her tongue. In images and pictures she is represented black (as her name implies), her husband is lying under her feet; her tongue protrudes from her mouth; and her four hands are engaged- one grasping a sword, another the head of a giant, and the other two signalling to her hosts. For ear-rings she has demons' heads, her neck is adorned with a necklace of skulls, her only garment, a zone, is made with the hands of her vanquished foes, while her hair falls in long tresses to her waist. Intoxicated with blood, her eyes flash with rage. Her worship is in keeping with her character. It takes place at midnight on the night of the new moon, when numbers of animals are sacrificed to her. "The darkness of the night, the bleeding of the victims, the flashing of the sacrificial knife, the shrieks of the ministering priests as they cry, 'Jai, Joy, Tara', the flicker of the torches, the gestures of the intoxicated worshippers, make this one of the most terrible of all the festivals in India."¹¹

Durga Pijja

Durga Pijja is annually held in September-October. It is the most important festival of Bengali Hindus. A special image of the goddess, Durga, is made and worshipped for nine days. Then it is immersed in the nearby river in large procession and much festivity.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

Kumbh Mela

— Kumbh Mela, a month-long celebration, is held every twelve years at the confluence of the sacred rivers at Allahabad, in north-central India: This mela recalls the struggle of Hindu gods and demons for a cup, or kumbha, that held *amrit*, the nectar of immortality. A drop of the nectar was spilled into the waters where the Ganga (Ganges), the Yamuna rivers meet at Allahabad. The mythical river of enlightenment called Saraswati also flows there. Millions of Hindus gather near the city for ritual bathing. A bath at the Sangam, the 'sacred' confluence of the three streams, is supposed to shrive all sins. The most propitious time for bathing is calculated by astrologers. The bathers enter the water to wash away the sins of their past lives and pray to escape the cycle of endless reincarnation. It is at this festival that one sees the famous congress of Nagas, the nude sadhus covered only with ash prepared by burning cow-dung.¹²

Worship of Gheru

Gheru, the god of itch, is worshipped by women. A dunghill or an old broken earthen pot daubed with lime and turmeric is regarded as his representative. The mistress of the house acts as a priest. After reciting a few verses about the god, the vessel is broken into bits. At

¹² Trumbull, p.244.

this time, Shitala, the goddess of smallpox, and Ola Bibi, the goddess of cholera, are also worshipped.

Worship of Kartikeya

The worship of Kartikeya, the god of war, and son of Siva and Parvati, is performed only on one evening in the year. According to Hindu mythology, he lived an immoral life. So his worship is full of licentiousness and revelry and is peculiarly attractive to the immoral women of the cities.

Rasa Jatra

Rasa Jatra festival is held to commemorate the sports of Krishna with the milkmaids of Vrindavana. It continues for three bright, moonlit nights. Songs descriptive of the amours of the god with his girlfriends, dancing and dramas alternate through the night, and at early dawn the idol is taken back to its temple, where it remains until the next evening.

Holi Festival

Holi festival is widely observed throughout northern India. This is held to commemorate Krishna's sexual amusements with the milkmaids. In observing this festival, the people go about in excited crowds throwing red powder upon passers-by, and singing indecent songs. As

observed by Wilkins, it is almost impossible for a woman to walk through the streets during this festival without being insulted.

Dashara Festival

Dashara festival is the descent of the goddess from heaven into the river at the proper season. Hindus believe that bathing in this river at the proper season purifies all the sins of the previous lives. This is an interesting ceremony. Thousands of people bring their offerings of flowers, fruits, and grain to the river side, and then enter the sacred stream. Men and women bathe together, the men wearing only a cloth round their loins, and the women having the upper part of their bodies exposed.

Tantric Worship

This worship is held by eight, nine, or eleven couples of men and women. They meet by appointment at midnight. When the worshippers go through the prescribed religious ceremonies, all distinctions of caste, rank, and kindred is temporarily suspended. The ceremony involves setting up a nude woman, adorned only with jewels, to act as representative of *Sakti* (the female energy). The participants worship her with strange rites, feast themselves on flesh and fish, indulge in wine, and give themselves over to every imaginable excess. During these orgiastic religious rites, every man present

is, according to their pantheistic notion, Siva himself, and every woman there none other than Siva's consort.¹³

·Temple Prostitution

The institution of devdasi or temple prostitution—custom of devoting girls to the service of Hindu temples—was prevalent in India until it was abolished by law by the British government. The dedication was in the form of "marrying young girls to Hindu gods—such marriages being merely the prelude to a state of licensed prostitution in the service of religion." This custom was introduced by the *Brahmans* in the name of religion to attract people to the temples and extort money from them. The *Brahman* priests not only introduced this custom, they also encouraged the people to participate in the immoral practice. For this purpose, they often used to intone the sentence: "*Vesya darsanam punyam, papa nasanam!*" This scandalous sentence means, "Looking upon a prostitute is virtue which takes away sin."¹⁵

In South Indian temples, a temple girl used to be honoured by Hindus as a daughter of the deity. A father had no hesitation in dedicating his eldest daughter to the

¹³ John Campbell Oman, *The Brahmans, Theists and Muslims of India*, (Delhi: 1973), p.27.

¹⁴ Oman, p.200.

¹⁵ Theertba, p. 194.

temple service. The young girls so dedicated were taught reading, writing, singing, dancing, dressing themselves daintily, adorning their hair with flowers and wearing their jewels with dignity. When they reached the age of thirteen, they went through the ceremony of marriage with the god Subramania who was represented by stone or image. After the ceremony, they were ready to ply their trade (prostitution) with the devout worshippers who attended the temple. Their earnings went to swell the temple revenue.¹⁶

Although the institution of devdasi has been abolished by law enacted by the British government, "the custom is said to exist still in some places [in India], quietly."¹⁷ Recently, the priest of the Jagannath Temple at Puri decided to revive the institution of temple prostitution by hiring girls to work as devdasis, but the government of India is trying to prevent this through appropriate measures.¹⁸ The custom is likely to be revived, if the BJP, who is aspiring to establish Hindu *Rajya* in India, could firmly establish its rule in the country.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁷ Trumble, p. 246.

¹⁸ LSUQ No. 323 dated 28 November, 1995, quoted by the *Muslim India*. January, 1996, p. 38.

Human Sacrifices

Until it was banned by the British government, human sacrifice was in vogue in India. In the Hindu pantheon, there are a number of deities who delight in blood and flesh. Of them, Kali is very prominent because of her insatiable thirst and hunger. She holds an honoured place in the pantheon. Many primitive cults with their bloody rituals had been incorporated in her worship. Among these rituals was the Thag or Thak, (anglicised, thuggee), a special type of ritual involving human sacrifice. In performing this ritual, in the words of S.R. Sharma, "several criminal obscurantists formed themselves into gangs professing the cult of Kali or Durga and indulged in wholesale human sacrifices. They were a social pest like the Pindaris and had remained unattended to by the earlier rulers. Bentinck with the assistance of Sir William Sleeman [who acquired the nickname of 'Thuggee Sleeman'] took effective measures to destroy their nests and organization. During the years 1831-37, over three thousand of them were netted or swept away, 412 being hanged. Similar or worse horrors were perpetrated by the Khonds of the Hill Tracts of Orissa, known as the 'Meriah' sacrifices in which men were torn to pieces in order to propitiate the earth goddess. Thanks to the efforts of Sir Henry Hardinge and Major-General John

Cambell, these too were stamped out between 1847-54."¹⁹

Apart from regular sacrifices at the shrines of deities believed to be cannibalistic, it was a common practice in certain parts of India to offer, at the commencement of the construction of a building, fort or bridge, a human victim so that any cannibalistic spirit inhabiting the area might desist from evil activities. In Maharashtra province, 'it is common to see a Maharin's shrine near the gate of every fort.' Usually the sacrificed Maharin (a woman of the low caste known as Maha) was canonized and her shrine worshipped.²⁰ Although the institution of human sacrifice has been banned by a law enacted by the British colonial government, the heinous practice is still taking place in some parts of India. Recently, a man was sacrificed on the occasion of a *ptlja* performed at the 'Diwali night' in a village in Madya Pradesh.²¹

¹⁹ S.R. Sharma, *The Making of Modern India*, (Bombay: 1951), pp. 478-79,

²⁰ Sandeela, pp. 65-66.

²¹ *Muslim India*, January, 1996, p. 45.

II. *WORSHIP IN ISLAM*

The term worship, *ibadah* in Arabic, is generally understood to mean a ritual act or practice like prayer, fasting, etc. In Islam, the term is used in a very broad sense. This is due to the fact that Islam as a complete code of life regulates the whole gamut of human life: individual, collective, social, economic, political or spiritual. Worship, therefore, includes any activity of an individual, if it is accomplished in conformity with the divine guidance and with the intention of seeking the pleasure of God.

Scope of Worship

According to the Our'an, the purpose of life of a human being is to worship God.²² Man has been exhorted to submit himself completely to his Lord Almighty." The submission to God requires a Muslim to ensure that all his activities conform to the divine guidance provided by God in the form of Islam. Islam

²² Toe Qur'ain, 51: 56.

²³ See *ibid.*, 6: 162.

being a complete way of life, its follower is required to abide by its teachings in every sphere of life, religious or otherwise. This may sound strange to those who think of religion as a personal relation between an individual and God, having no impact on one's activities outside rituals. But this is not the case with Islam; it is a comprehensive system with rules and regulations which control and regulate every aspect of human life. This special feature of Islam makes it different from all other religions.

Islam encourages man to worship his Lord through various forms of rituals, but at the same time it gives due consideration to all the needs and requirements of human beings. While it urges a believer to rush to perform *saldt* (ritual prayer) when it is due, it also exhorts him to engage him in income-earning efforts as soon as the prayer is over.> All the efforts made in connection with fulfilling these requirements are also regarded as acts of worship, if due care is taken of the instructions given in Islam. For example, if a person eats lawful (*halal*) food or takes lawful drinks, it is worship; but if he eats something unlawful (*haram*) (e.g., pork) or drinks something unlawful (e.g., alcoholic drinks), it is an act of disobedience to his Lord.

The concept of worship in Islam is so comprehensive that it includes any good deed. In line with this is the saying of the Prophet: "*Doing any good deed is a*

²⁴ Ibid., 62: 10.

*charity.*²⁵ Thus, eating, drinking, sleeping and enjoyment of innocent recreation or actions which satisfy man's physical needs become acts of worship. The Prophet said that when a person affectionately puts a piece of food in the mouth of his wife in order to strengthen bonds of matrimonial love, he is rewarded for it. Once he said to his companions that they would be rewarded even for having sexual intercourse with their wives. In response to their question as to how one could be rewarded for something he had done for the sake of enjoyment the Prophet asked: "*Suppose you satisfy your desires illegally, don't you think that you will be punished?*" They replied "*Yes.*" "*So*" he said, "*by satisfying it legally with your wives you are rewarded for it*" When a person knows that even his enjoyments and pleasures can become acts of worship merely by virtue of purity of intention and motive he does not find it difficult to obey God in every sphere of his life.

Worship in its narrow sense refers to certain rituals both obligatory and voluntary. These occupy very important place in Islam. If performed in true spirit, these worships elevate a man morally and spiritually and make it easy for him to follow Islam in every sphere of his life. The obligatory worships discussed in the following paragraphs are the basic minimum needed to keep a man on the right track, worthy of the name Muslim.

²⁵ Mishkdt, No. 1893.

Obligatory Worship

The obligatory forms of worship comprise *saldt* (ritual prayer), *zakdt* (compulsory charity), *sawm* (fasting) and *hajj* (pilgrimage). These are the chief means for strengthening man's relationship with God and are the minimum required to be accomplished by every adult Muslim to achieve the main goal of worship. These worships serve to distinguish those who really have faith and wish sincerely to serve God.

Sa/at

Sa/at (ritual prayer) is a combination of physical and spiritual exercise aimed at disciplining and edification of the individual. The obligatory (*Jardh*) *saldt* is performed five times a day and is the minimum a Muslim must perform. The times for daily obligatory *salat* are dawn (*Jajr*, before sunrise), afternoon (*zuhr*), late afternoon (*'asr*), dusk (*maghrib*, after sunset) and early night (*'ishtā*). In addition, *saldt al-Jumu'ah* (Friday's special prayer) and *saldt al-Jandzab* (funeral prayer) are also obligatory for a Muslim.²⁵ There are also other kinds of *saldt* which are of lesser degree in importance. These are *wajib* (strongly recommended), *sunnab* (recommended) and *nafl* (optional) *saldt*. While *wajib* and *sunnab* *saldts* are

²⁵ *Salat* al-Jandzab is a collective responsibility of all the Muslims of the locality of the dead person. If a group of them perform it, all other will be exempted.

performed at prescribed times and generally accompany the obligatory *saldt*, the *nafl* *saldt* may be performed anytime. *Saldi* can be performed at any clean place but daily obligatory *saldt* is recommended to be performed collectively in a mosque, if available.

Saldi is the first practical manifestation of 'imdn (faith) and is regarded as an act which distinguishes a Muslim from a non-Muslim. It prevents an individual from all sorts of vices by providing him chances of direct communion with his Creator five times a day. In his *saldt*, a Muslim seeks God's guidance and asks Him again and again to enable him to avoid His wrath and follow His chosen path. Various poses made by him during *saldt* are the embodiment of the spirit of submission; various recitals remind him of his commitments to his God. He reads out from the Our'an and expresses witness to the truth of the Prophet and also refreshes his belief in the Day of Judgement; he also enlivens in his memory the fact that he has to appear before his Lord and give an account of his entire life. The frequency and timing of *saldt* never let the object and mission of life be lost sight of in the maze of worldly activities.

The daily *saldt* is recommended to be said in congregation and especially so is Friday's *saldt*. This creates among Muslims a bond of love and mutual understanding. This arouses in them the sense of their collective unity, fosters among them national fraternity and inculcates in them a deep feeling of brotherhood. In *saldt*, people from all walks of life- the poor and the rich,

the low and the high, the ruler and the ruled, the educated and the unlettered, the black and the white- all stand in one row and prostrate before one Lord with same devotion. *Salat* is thus a symbol of equality. *Sahli* also inculcates in Muslims a strong sense of discipline and obedience to their leader. In short, *salat* trains them in all those virtues which make possible the development of a rich individual and collective life.

Sawm

Sawm (fasting) is compulsory for an adult Muslim during the day time of the month of Ramadhan." The fast starts at dawn and ends at sunset. During the hours of fasting, one abstains from eating, drinking, sexual intercourse and smoking. Muslims irrespective of their status must observe fast during the same period. This brings to prominence the essential equality of human beings and thus goes a long way towards creating in them sentiments of love and brotherhood.

The main purpose of fasting mentioned in the Our'an is the attainment of taqwd.²⁸ Each and every moment during fasting involves suppressing one's passions and desires, thereby demonstrating the supremacy of the law of our Lord. This consciousness of duty and the spirit of

²⁷ Toe ninth month of Islamic calendar.

²⁸ Toe word taqwd, literally, means to keep away but in Islam, it means a state of being constantly on guard against what has been forbidden by God arising out of His fear.

patience strengthens his or her faith. Rigour and discipline during the month of fasting help a Muslim make his or her life during the rest of the year a life of true subservience to the will of God.

Fasting teaches man the principle of sincere love because when he observes fasting he does it out of deep love for God. It equips him with a creative sense of hope and an optimistic outlook on life. This is because when he fasts, he is hoping to please God and is seeking His grace. It imbues him with a genuine virtue of effective devotion, honest dedication, and closeness to God. It cultivates in him a vigilant and sound conscience because the fasting person keeps his fast in secret as well as in public. It indoctrinates him in patience and unselfishness because when he fasts he feels the pains of deprivation. It develops in him a wise sense of adaptability and power to overcome the unpredictable hardships.

Fasting inculcates in man the real spirit of social belonging, of unity and brotherhood, of equality before God as well as before the law. When he fasts in proper manner he exercises full command over his passions, disciplines his desires and resists all evil temptations. By this course, he is in a position to reassure himself, to restore his dignity and integrity and to attain freedom from the captivity of evil. Once he obtains all this, he has established inner peace which is the source of permanent peace with God and, consequently, with the entire universe.

Zakd:

Zakat, a compulsory charity, is a form of worship which relates to wealth. Every Muslim whose financial ability reaches a certain level, has to part with a certain percentage of his excess wealth every year for certain purposes. It is a means of redistribution of wealth in a way that reduces the gap between various income-groups. Thus it makes a fair contribution to social security. Zakdt is charged on cash balance as well as on gold, silver, merchandise, cattle, and other valuables. Zakat is offered to the poor, a (needy) traveller, a person in debt, and for some other purposes. Zakdt not only makes a person help his fellow beings, but also fosters in him the qualities of sacrifice. In Islam, it is a compulsory duty of every well-to-do Muslim to help his lowly-placed, poor brethren. There could be no greater cruelty than to fill one's own coffers while thousands die of hunger. Zakdt makes one share his own wealth with others and help them stand on their own feet.

Zakat purifies the property of the contributor and clears it from the shares which do not belong to it anymore, the share which must be distributed among the beneficiaries of zakat. It purifies not only the property of the contributor but also his heart from selfishness and greediness. It is an effective instrument of cultivating the spirit of social responsibility on the part of the contributor, and the feeling of security and belonging on the part of the recipient. It is a vivid manifestation of the spiritual and humanitarian spirit of responsive

interactions between the individual and society. It is a sound illustration of the fact that though Islam does not hinder private enterprise or condemn private possessions, yet it does not tolerate concentration of wealth in a selfish manner. Islam adopts a moderate and middle course between the individual and the society, between the citizen and the state.

Hajj

Performing *hajj* (pilgrimage) once in a life-time is a compulsory duty for every adult Muslim who fulfills certain conditions. He should have enough money for the journey to Holy Makkah and back and also for the dependents he is leaving behind. He should be in good health and the way to Makkah should be safe. *Hajj* is performed in the *hajj* season."

Hajj takes place in and around the venerable city of Makkah where lies the Holy Ka'bah, the Sacred Mosque, which, according to the Qur'an, is the first house ever built on earth for the worship of the One and Only God. Makkah is the city where Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was born, the city in which and in whose vicinity he received the first and a large part of the *wahy* (revelations) from God Almighty. Muslims from all walks of life, from all trades and classes, and from every corner

²⁹ The months of *hajj* comprise Shawwail, Dhul Oa'dah and the first ten days of Dhul Hajj. al-Sabiin], Safwat al-Tafaslr, (Beirut: 1985), 1:129.

of the globe, assemble in Makkah in response to the call of God. They dress in the same simple way, observe the same regulations, and utter the same supplications at the same time in the same way, for the same purpose. There is no royalty, but loyalty of all to God. There is no aristocracy, but humility and devotion. It is to acquaint the pilgrims with the spiritual and historical environment of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) so that they may derive warm inspiration and strengthen their' *Iman* (faith). It is to commemorate the divine rituals observed by Ibrahim and Isma'il (peace be upon them), who are known to have been the first pilgrims to the House of God on earth, the Holy Ka'bah, It is a reminder of the grand assembly on the Day of Judgment when people will stand equal before God, waiting for their final destiny.

The performance of *hajj* provides several spiritual lessons to a pilgrim. It enables a Muslim to purify his soul, strengthen his faith in God and apply the principles of Islam in his daily life so that he may gain the peace and prosperity of this life and the eternal joy of the life to come. The course of *hajj* is one of the unique characteristics of Islam. It is the largest annual convention of' *Iman* (faith) where Muslims meet to know one another, study their common affairs and promote their general welfare. It is also the greatest regular conference of peace which has no parallel in the history of mankind. It is a wholesome demonstration of the universality of Islam and the brotherhood and equality of Muslim;.

The pilgrimage to Makkah, the huge assembly of the believers from all five continents, the gathering together of a multitude of worshippers of all races on the plain of 'Arafat is perhaps the most spectacular expression, symbol and proof of unity and brotherhood of man as enunciated and upheld by the religion of Islam. On this occasion, it can easily be observed that it is a course of spiritual enrichment and moral rearmament, a course of intensified devotion and disciplinary experience, a course of humanitarian interests and inspiring knowledge - all put together in one single institution of Islam.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

I. *HEREAFTER IN HINDUISM*

Hindu scriptures do not provide any precise idea about the life after death. The data relating to the subject are full of confusion and sometimes contradictory. Hindus, in general, believe that life does not come to an end with death and a dead person comes back to this world in a form determined by his deeds in his previous life. They also believe in the existence of hell and heaven where one lives after death for a temporary period of time. The ultimate aim in life of a Hindu, however, is said to be absorbed into the Supreme Brahma. As to the question, 'How can one attain that objective?' Hinduism does not provide any clear answer except dying in the Ganges river or abiding by the rules and regulations of the caste system.

Dying Near the Holy Stream

According to the Hindu scriptures, whatever a man's life may have been, if he does not die near some holy stream, if his body is not burned on its banks, or at any

rate near water regarded as a representative of it, and if some portion of his ashes is not thrown into it, his spirit must wander in misery, unable to obtain the bliss for which he has done and suffered so much. Banaras, the holiest city situated on the bank of the Ganges, is regarded by Hindus as the best place for the cremation of a dead person or throwing his ashes into the sacred river. 'Death in this city is a big business. Bus companies carry the dead to the funeral pyres along the city's banks; workers sift through the smouldering ashes for gold dental fillings; Hindu priests haggle over every rupee during the rites; the Banaras post office is swamped with parcels containing ashes from all over India and abroad destined for an unceremonial dump in the river by uncaring priests.'¹ The ashes of M.K. Gandhi was immersed in the Ganges by his great grandson Tushar Arun Gandhi on January 30, 1997, the anniversary of his assassination in 1948 by Nathuram Godse. This Hindu practice has recently been popular among some westerners and Japanese who flock every year to the Ganges to dump the ashes of their friends and relatives expecting salvation for them. Although like the *Dalits*, the non-Hindus are not allowed to have their ashes placed in the Ganges, priests are always available to chant some *mantras* and bless the casteless foreigners against a price ranging from \$14 up to \$500.²

¹ *Time*, March 24, 1997, pp. 28-29.

² *Ibid.*

Excellences of the Ganges River

Hindus believe that the Ganga (Ganges river) is a divine being which has the efficacy to wash away the sin of those who bathe in its water. This belief led them to believe that it must be beneficial to a man to pass his last moments near this river, or near some water as its representative. In a scripture called the *Ganga Balyabali*, the virtues of Ganga have been written as the following: "He who thinks upon Ganga, though he be 800 miles distant from the river at the time, is delivered from all sin, and is entitled to heaven. At the hour of death, if a person think[s] upon Ganga, he will obtain a place in the heaven of Siva. If a person, according to the regulations of the *shastras*, be going to bathe in Ganga, and die[s] on the road, he shall obtain the same benefits as though he had actually bathed. If a person who has been guilty of killing cows, Brahmans, his guru, or of drinking spirits, touch[es] the waters of Ganga, desiring in his mind the remission of these sins, they will be forgiven."³ According to the *Skanda Purana*, by dying in the Ganges, a person will obtain absorption into Brahma. The same work contains a promise from Siva, saying, 'whoever dies in Ganga shall obtain a place in his heaven'.

The *Bhavishya Purana* affirms that if a worm, an insect or a grasshopper, or any tree growing by the side of Ganga, dies in the river, it will obtain absorption into Brahma. According to the *Karma Purana*, those who

³ See Wilkins, 1975, p. 373.

consciously die on the banks of the Ganges shall be absorbed into the essence of Brahma; and those who die there unconsciously shall go to the heaven of Brahma. According to the *Agni Purana*, those who die when half their body is immersed in Ganga water, shall be happy thousands of thousands of ages and resemble Brahma.

In addition to these authoritative texts concerning the virtues of Ganga, there are related stories which are commonly told. One of these stories goes like this: On the bank of the Bhagirothi (another name of Ganga), there grew a stately banyan tree, in whose ample foliage a paddy-bird had made her nest. On a certain day the tree was blown down by a storm. The bird was destroyed, and its bones buried in the deep channel of the Ganges. In the next life, the bird became one of Indra's queens in the heaven, because after death, it had been deposited in the bed of the Ganges river. The queen's stay in the heaven was only for a period of time equal to that which was needed for the decomposition of her bones in the river. When the day approached for her return to the earth, Indra asked her to tell him in which form she wished to be born again. She chose to be re-born as an elephant, because its bones, being of an immense size, would occupy a long time in decomposing.

These are, in a nutshell, the virtues attributed in Hinduism to the Ganges river. It is because of this that a Hindu wishes to die or efforts are made for him to die or be cremated there.

Treatment of a Dying Patient

The common practice of Hindus with respect to a sick person does not present a happy scene. In the words of Wilkins, "Whenever the disease of a patient arrives at such a stage as, according to the judgment of the doctors, renders any further attempt for his recovery fruitless, the first thing that is suggested to his friends and relatives, as a matter of duty, is to carry him to the banks of the river. Here we must observe that in the minds of the orthodox Hindus the carrying of their sick to the river is reckoned as a higher and a stronger duty than the seeking of means for their recovery. When the necessary preparations are made, a piece of cloth, the worst and dirtiest on the patient's bed, is spread over the coach on which he is to be carried, and then he is placed upon it. He is then brought upon the *ghat* [bank of a river], where either a low, damp, and miserable hut, or, as in some places, a decent building, but crowded with a multitude of dying people, and filled with all kinds of dirt and nuisance, receives him. Here he is taken from the khat [coach] and laid on a miserable bed on the floor, surrounded by beings like himself, whose shrieks and groaning disturb his repose at every moment. A few moments before his death he is brought down to the brink of the river where half immersed in water, he gives up the ghost."⁴

⁴ Ibid., p. 376.

This treatment of the sick, as **Wilkins** observes, is not only cruel, but destructive to human life. Many a sick man dies solely on account of being exposed to the destructive influences of the above unhealthy environment. "This truly murderous custom" he further observes, "daily acts in killing scores of our fellow-creatures who might otherwise survive, and in rendering miserable the last hours of thousands."

Cremation

After the sick man dies at the *ghat*, "suffering, perhaps, excruciating pangs and agony", his corpse is removed to the burning *ghat*, and preparations for a funeral pyre are speedily made. The body is then covered with a piece of new cloth and laid upon the pyre, the upper and lower parts of which are composed of firewood, faggots, and a little sandal-wood, and ghi [refined butter] to neutralize the smell. The son, or the nearest of kin, changing his old garments for new white clothes, at one end of which is fastened an iron key to keep off evil spirits, sets fire to the pile. The body is consumed to ashes, but the navel remaining unburnt is taken out and thrown into the river. Thus ends the ceremony of cremation. When a Hindu dies at a distance from the river the corpse is carried to its banks, and burned there.

⁵ Ibid. p. 380.

It is now generally admitted by Hindus that cremation of corpses is causing a lot of damage to the environment. The residents living in the vicinity of the site of cremation often complain of air pollution due to the smoke from the pyres. Moreover, the cost of fuel consumption to burn a body is not insignificant. Again, the use of firewood for cremation is causing enormous damage to the forest areas. According to T.V. Mali, Chief Engineer, Bombay Municipal Corporation, "The daily firewood requirement for each cremation is 400 kgs, which is equal to 60,000 kgs of wood for 150 dead bodies cremated everyday. This amounts to 20,000 fully grown trees or four acres of forestland, adding up to 10 hectares of forest-cover every year."⁶

Hereafter

Hindus believe in the life after death. When the soul forsakes the body, it ascends to heaven to enjoy the reward or sinks into hell to suffer, depending on good or bad deeds accomplished during the earthly life: After a period of reward or punishment, it returns to the earth in a lower or higher position than in the previous life. This succession of life and death goes on until finally it attains that condition wherein it is fit to return to the Supreme Spirit whence it came, and of whom, all unconsciously, it was a part. However low in the scale a soul may be, in

⁶ *Indian Express*, 12th July 1993.

due time it will rise to the highest, though the process may extend over millions of years. As all have come out from God, to Him they must eventually return.⁷

Hell

There is very little mention of hell in the *Veda*. According to the *Sri Bhagavata*, there are 100,000 hells. Each class of offenders will be cast into one place, where appropriate punishment is given. For example, those guilty of fornication and adultery, and those guilty of stealing children, are to be cast into *Tamisra*, or the hell of darkness. The proud, who neglect the ceremonies of religion, are to go to *Rowrava*, where they will be tormented with animals called *rums*. The glutton is to be cast into a hell of boiling oil. He who disregards the *Vedas* and *Brahmans* is to be punished in a hell of burning metal for 3,500,000 years. He who injures a man of superior caste is to be torn by swine.⁸

Heaven

Hindus believe in the existence of hell and heaven as these are mentioned in their scriptures. There are four

⁷ Wilkins, 1975, p. 402

⁸ Ibid. p. 412

kinds of happiness after death. The first or lowest form of blessedness is to enter the heaven of one of the gods. Most of the gods have a heaven of their own, to which they raise their worshippers after death. The second is a temporary deification. By the performance of sacrifice like the aswamedha (horse sacrifice), mortals are said to have attained to the position of Indra, or king over gods. But this position can be held only for a time. At any moment they may be compelled to yield their throne to others who, by virtue of greater austerity or costliness in sacrifice, have proved themselves more worthy of the honour. The third stage is where the inhabitants of a heaven live in close intimacy with its god. The grade and duration of those enter heaven depend on the quality and quantity of good deeds. These three forms of heavenly bliss are terminable, and when the period of enjoyment to which the recipient is entitled has passed, he must be re-born into the world, and endure another trial, starting from a higher level than at the commencement of the previous life. The highest good is absorption into the Divine Being from whom the spirit came, and of whom it is a part.

In some scriptures, there is some description about heaven and its inhabitants. According to the *Mahabharata*, Brahma's heaven is eight hundred miles long, four hundred wide, and forty high. Vaikuntha, the heaven of Vishnu is made entirely of gold, and is 80,000 miles in circumference. The heaven of Indra, called Swarga is situated on Mount Meru, the centre of the earth, which is supposed to be somewhere to the north of

the Himalayas. The heavens of the other deities are situated near it. The *Vishnu Purana*, describing the condition of those in heaven, says: 'Not in hell alone do the souls of the deceased undergo pain; there is no cessation even in heaven; for its temporary inhabitant is ever tormented with the prospect of descending again to earth, and again must he die.'

None of the low-caste (non-Aryan) Hindus have an immediate hope of attaining the highest blessedness which is exclusively for the *Brahmans*. The Sudra's hope is that by virtue of his good deeds he may in due time be born as a *Brahman*, and then reach the summit of bliss attainable by mortals. It is a long vista that opens to the view of these people, as the *shastras* teach that thousands of lives must be spent in rising from the lower to the higher castes, even by those whose ascent is uninterrupted by a single failure.

Transmigration

Hindus believe in a succession of lives for each individual, although they freely admit that they bring with them no memory of their past experience. When a parent is distracted with sorrow at the loss of a child, or when his business does not prosper, or tribulation of any kind falls upon him, his first thought is, which of the gods have I offended? What religious duty have I neglected? If nothing especially sinful can be remembered, the reflection

comes that the trouble must be a punishment for sin committed in a former birth.

The aim of a Hindu is to break the chain of birth and rebirth that binds him to the earth. Realization of this aim means absorption in the Supreme; Brahman. The first step to be taken on this path is for each one to perform his *own dharma* or righteous duties.⁹ Performing dharma or rightful duties only involves by His rules and regulations of the caste system.

According to the *Agni Purana*, a person who loses human birth passes through 8,000,000 births among inferior creatures before he can appear again on earth as a human being. Of these births, 2,100,000 are among the immovable parts of creation, as stones, trees, etc.; 900,000 among the watery tribes; 1,000,000 among insects, worms, etc.; 1,000,000 among birds; and 3,000,000 among the beasts. In the ascending scale, if his works qualify him, he lives 400,000 lives among the lower castes of men, and 100 lives among *Brahmans*. After this he may obtain absorption into Brahman.¹⁰

A careful scrutiny proves that the doctrine of transmigration is an absurd phenomenon. A human being, according to Hindu belief, is a human being because in his previous animal form he had done good deeds. Similarly, an animal is an animal because previously as a human being it had accomplished evil

⁹ Jagannathan, p.56.

¹⁰ Wilkins, 1975, p. 417.

deeds. In other words, to be a man or an animal is the consequence of one's deeds in one's former form. One may well ask: 'In which form, man or animal, existed first?' If it is said that the creature was a man before being born as an animal, then it will have to be accepted that he must have been ~n animal before that, and was given a human form for its good deeds. If it is said that the first form was animal, then it has to be accepted that it must have been a man before that and was transformed into an animal for his bad deeds. This creates a vicious circle. The advocates of this belief cannot settle any form for the first creature, for every generation implies a preceding generation so that the succeeding generation may be considered as the consequence of the former. This is simply absurd.

II. *HEREAFTER IN ISLAM*

Belief in life after death is a fundamental article of faith in Islam. Even a slight doubt in this article means denying God and makes the very edifice of Islam crumble down. The earthly life becomes meaningless if it is not followed by another life where reward and punishment will be given to individuals on the basis of the deeds accomplished by them in their earthly lives. God is just and His justice requires that one who spent his life obeying His guidance and undergoing various sufferings only for His sake and one who spent his life defying Him must not be treated alike. On the Day of Judgement, therefore, each individual will be called to account for his actions in his earthly life and rewarded accordingly. Those who were good in their previous lives will be given paradise as a reward, whereas those defied divine guidance will be punished in hell.

Life and Its Purpose

According to the Qur'an, man was first created from clay. Then after this creation God made man's progeny from the union of the male sperm and female ovum. The individual that results from this union is given life through

breathing into him something of His nih:" This metaphysical element (*n/h* in Arabic) is called soul or spirit and is immortal and indestructible. This element makes man different from other animals. The differentiating quality of man gives him a limited choice of good and evil. In exercising this choice, he becomes accountable to God. Besides perceptual consciousness, man has been given rational, aesthetic and moral consciousness which guides him in taking a decision relating to any action.

In the scheme of God's creation, man has been given a very high position.. God has placed him in his uncorrupted state even above the angels, but in his corruption man makes himself even lower than the beasts. Man, the noble creation of God, was not created in jest but for some definite purpose and that is to serve God.¹² The worldly life is an opportunity for him to make preparation for the eternal life after death when he will be given the rewards for all his actions accomplished in this world. For him, this world is nothing but a place of trial. If he leads his life according to the guidance given by God through His prophets, he is successful in life and if, on the contrary, he disobeys God and becomes a slave of his passions and desires, he is a failure. While a true believer has as his ultimate aim in life the pleasure

¹¹ The Qur'an, 32: 7-9.

¹² Ibid., 23: 115, 51: 56.

of God, a non-believer identifies his main objective the satisfaction of worldly desires.

Death and Treatment of a Dead Person

Death simply means the separation of the material element from the non-material element, soul. The soul departs without being perceived or even felt. Death marks the end of the earthly life and the beginning of the hereafter. Death always produces grief for the members of the family and other relatives and friends, but it may make the dying Muslim feel a kind of happiness when he realizes that he is going to an everlasting world full of bliss and enjoyment.

A Muslim in his death-bed clears the dues, if there remains any, which he might owe to others and asks forgiveness from God for all the sins he might have committed in his life. He always wishes to be his last word the Kalimah, the solemn affirmation of his faith in One God pronouncing: *There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger*. After a Muslim dies, his corpse is ritually washed with scented water and wrapped in simple and clean white sheets. Then it is taken to a mosque or open place and *saldt al-jandzan* (funeral prayer) is offered in congregation attended by the local community. In the funeral prayer, God's forgiveness and mercy is sought for the deceased person. After the prayer is over, the corpse is taken to the cemetery and buried there.

After death, an interval period called *barzakh* begins and continues to remain till the Day of Resurrection. When at this stage, the spirit of a human being remains in a state of happiness or otherwise, depending on the deeds accomplished by him in the earthly life.

Hereafter

The concept of hereafter has various features. The earthly life and all that is in this world will come to an end on an appointed day. All the human beings who had lived in this world since the inception will be brought to life. The body of every human being will be reunited with his or her soul. This is called *al-ba'th* (resurrection). On the Day of Resurrection, all human beings will be presented in the court of God. The entire record of deeds and misdeeds of every man and woman will be presented before Him for judgment. God shall finally adjudge the record of every person. Everyone's good and bad deeds shall be weighed. One who excels in goodness will be accorded a good reward. One whose evils and wrongs outweigh his good deeds, will be punished. The reward and punishment will be administered with full justice. Those who emerge successful in this judgment will go to paradise and doors of eternal bliss will be opened to them. Those who will be condemned and deserve punishment will be sent to hell, the abode of fire and torture.

Resurrection

Before the Day of Resurrection, there will be a violent blast. This will be followed by a second blast and there will survive nothing except God. Another blast will signal the beginning of the Day of Resurrection. All human beings will present themselves before God. They will be questioned about their actions. Books in which all good and bad acts are recorded will be given to them. Those who will have no good actions in their account will go to hell. Those who did not do any evil action but many excellent deeds will go to paradise. Those who did both good and bad actions, their actions contained in the books will be weighed in a scale.¹³ Those whose good actions will exceed their bad actions will go to paradise and those whose bad actions will exceed their good actions will go to hell. However, many Muslims who will not qualify for paradise at the beginning will go to paradise because of intercession of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). After his general intercession, the door of intercession will be opened to other prophets and also to other pious human beings. Beside the general intercession, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) will exercise several other kinds of intercession for a number of people.

¹³ **u** The Qur'an, 7: 8.

Implications of the Belief in the Hereafter

Belief in the life after death plays a key role in determining the behaviour of a man. If he believes that he will be accountable to God in the hereafter, he will try to do things in a just manner but if he does not believe in his accountability before God, he will always be guided by his self-interest and passions in deciding to do anything. God is just and His justice requires that a person be punished for his sin and rewarded for his good deeds. If a person passes his life committing every kind of evil, with total disregard to God's command, he cannot escape punishment unless he attains forgiveness of God. Similarly, one who has followed the law of God throughout his life must be rewarded. If a despotic ruler or dictator, for instance, inflicts torture on thousands of people which results in the death of many innocent people,¹⁴ and then dies when he is still in power, how can he escape punishment? If such a person will not be punished in the life to come, where can God's justice be brought into action? If a person manages to usurp the rights of others, by stealing, fraud, telling lies, etc., and all his crimes remain undiscovered until he dies, how could he escape punishment? How could justice be administered to his victims? There is simply no way we

¹⁴ Two such dictators of this century, namely Joseph Stalin of the former U.S.S.R., and Pol Pot of Cambodia, may be cited here. Each of them is believed to be responsible for the death of millions of innocent people.

can think of administration of justice by God unless we believe in life after death. Similarly, if a person spends his whole life carefully obeying the divine guidance and always keeps himself away from what has been forbidden by God, and remains on the path of piety and virtue till the end of his life, justice requires that his sacrifice should not go in vain.

Life in this earth is very short for a human being and, therefore, the time span one can have here is not enough for his punishment for evil deeds or reward for his pious actions. Moreover, the entire life span of a man is a period for action. A full account of his action cannot be available until the end of his life. It is possible only after his death to make a judicious judgment about his deeds. Therefore, the record of deeds will definitely be judged in the hereafter. The consequences of the evil deeds will be fire and torture in hell and the reward for good deeds will be in the form of eternal bliss in paradise.

The concept of the hereafter plays a significant role in our lives. To one who does not believe in the Day of Judgment, neither obedience to God is of any advantage, nor disobedience to Him of any harm. He will not be prepared to do any good deed, if it does not serve his interest. Similarly, he will not hesitate to accomplish any evil deed, if it serves his interest. A person who believes in the final consequences of his actions, on the other hand, would look upon worldly gains or losses as temporary. To him, all that pleases God is good and all that invokes His displeasure is evil. One cannot, therefore, become a good person without belief in the

hereafter. The denial to the Day of Judgment may degrade a person from humanity to a place even lower than that of the lowest of animals.

Hell

Hell is a place where punishment is given in its extreme form. This is the abode of the devil and also of those who deserve it by disobeying God. It is described as an awful place, terribly hot, its fuel are human beings and stones, its drink mixed with blood. The clothes of its inhabitants are made of ever-burning pitch.

The most serious sin is to refuse to accept the *dīn* (religion of Islam) prescribed by God or to associate a partner with Him. Whoever commits such a sin will remain in hell for ever. Muslims who committed other sins also will be in hell for sometime but they will be rescued after they have suffered the punishment they deserved. Anyone who has the slightest measure of *īmān* (faith) will be taken out from hell after the punishment is over.

Paradise

Paradise is a place of eternal peace and happiness; it is a place where there will be blessings of God in its utmost form. Those who obeyed God in this world will attain the blessings of paradise. They will always remain

there enjoying all kinds of delights. There they will have all that they desire," God says in a *Hadith Quds* [¹⁶ : "I have prepared for My virtuous servants what an eye has not seen, nor has an ear heard, nor has come to the mind of man."!

As indicated in the above *hadith*, for a man of this world, it is difficult to imagine what will be there in paradise for its inhabitants. However, some idea about the bounty of God that will be there has been given in the Our'an and also in the *hadith*. Among the things mentioned in the Our'an are gardens, fountains, rivers, fruits, pure drinks, maidens and youths. According to the *hadith*, the inhabitants of paradise will be hairless, beardless, with black eyes.¹⁸ They will be youthful, and will grow neither older nor younger. They will eat and drink there, but will not spit, or pass water, or release the bowels, or blow the nose.¹⁹ All superfluities will be discharged, and carried off by perspiration as odoriferous as musk. Paradise will be a shady place full of perfumes where no one will suffer from fatigue. All kinds of

¹⁵ Ibid., 50: 35.

¹⁶ The difference between the Qur'an and the *Hadith Quds* is that in the case of the former, both the statement and the language are of God, but in the case of the latter, the inspiration is divine but the language is of the Prophet.

¹⁷ Mishkdt, No. 5612.

¹⁸ Ibid., No. 5638.

¹⁹ Ibid., No. 5620.

delicious fruits and food will be available there. There will be rivers of sweet smelling water, milk, and clarified honey. The delights of paradise are not solely in bodily and sensual pleasures and enjoyment; but include spiritual enjoyments too. The highest spiritual delight enjoyed by the inhabitants of paradise will consist in looking at God's Face." Nothing will be dearer to them than looking at their Lord.²¹

²⁰ The term "Face" here should not **be** understood in its ordinary sense. It must be recalled that there is nothing which resembles God. "God's Face", therefore, will be something which is far beyond our imagination.

²¹ Ibid., No. 5656.

SOCIAL SYSTEM

1. *HINDUISM: CASTE*

Caste System

The most significant feature of the Hindu social system is what is called 'caste' under which the people are divided into various groups. The status of an individual in the society is determined by the caste in which he is born. A Hindu is born in a caste and he dies as a member of that caste. There is no Hindu without a caste and being bound by caste from birth to death, he becomes subject to social regulations and tradition of the caste over which he has no control. A person born in a caste carries the name of that caste as a part of his surname.¹ The division of the people into various castes is said to be eternal so that no act of virtue or vice in this earthly life is enough to make any change in the caste or social status of a man or woman. The caste system of India has generally been regarded as an absurd,

¹ For details, see **Theertha**, p.187.

unhealthy social phenomenon, without parallel elsewhere in the world.

On the top of the caste hierarchy is the *Brahman* and at the bottom is the Untouchable (Dalit) and in between are the *Kshatriya*, the *Vashya*, and the *Sudra* in a descending order. According to the Hindu scriptures, the *Brahmans* have been sprung from the mouth of Brahma (Hindu god), the *Kshatriyas* from his arms, the *Vashyas* from his thigh and the *Sudras* from his feet. Broadly, Hindus are divided into two groups: caste Hindus (also varna Hindus) and low-caste Hindus. The former includes the *Brahman*, the *Kshatriya* and the *Vashya* who are the descendants of the fair-skinned Aryan invaders and the latter includes the *Sudras*, who are dark in skin and are the offspring of the original inhabitants of India. In this group is also included the most unfortunate Dalit who is outcaste because he falls outside the original fourfold grouping. He is untouchable because his touch is bound to pollute the other castes and that is why he must always remain at a sufficient distance from them. The fourfold division is not the end of the caste system; the community is subdivided into thousands of sub-castes (*gotras*). According to a survey undertaken by the Anthropological Survey of India during 1985-92, those who are called Hindu are divided among 2,800 unique communities. The total of low-caste Hindus is officially divided into three broad groups, namely Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. According to this

survey, these groups are sub-divided into 450, 461, and 766 distinct communities respectively.²

The great distinctions of caste are to be maintained not only in the earthly life, but also after death. According to Markandaya Purana, after death, the virtuous *Brahman* goes to the abode of Brahma, the good Kshatriya to that of Indra, the worthy *Vashya* to that of the Maruts, and the dutiful *Sudra* to that of the Gandharvas.³ Apparently, the Untouchable (*Dalit*) does not deserve an

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Origin of the Caste System

'Caste' is a Portuguese word, used by the Portuguese as equivalent of '*vama*' (a Sanskrit word, which means 'colour'). They used this word to designate the peculiar system of religious and social distinctions which they observed among those who are called Hindu. Caste originally was a colour-bar, and in India, as later in America, served at first to separate free men from slaves. Gradually, the *Brahmans* made it a religiously ordained social fabric for the Hindu society. Manu, a *Brahman*, gave in his book, Dharma *shastra*, details about the caste system.

– When the fair-skinned Aryans invaded India, about two thousand years before Jesus Christ (pbuh), they

² *Dali, Voice*, 15:4, p. 20.

³ See Oman, p.50.

defeated the dark-skinned indigenous people, Dravidians, who were the founder of the Indus Civilization. The Aryans subjugated them, learnt many things from them. and built up another civilization which came to be known as the Ganges Valley or Hindu Civilization. To perpetuate the enslavement of the original inhabitants of India, the Aryans created the caste system, and thereby excluded them from their own society with the name of 'Sudra' (which means 'slave'). In the words of S.W. Tilak, "When the ancient priests set themselves up as an exclusive caste of Brahmans in order to establish their self-assumed superiority, they had to inflict degradation on all other Hindus (i.e., original Indians) and press them down to various layers of subordination. They had to keep the people divided, disunited, weak and degraded. to deny them learning, refinement and opportunities of advancement, and permanently and unalterably to fix them down to a low status in society. The Hindu social organization based on hereditary castes was evolved by the Brahmans with the above object and was enforced on the people with the help of foreign conquerors."

Caste Determines Duty

In Hindu community, the basic duty of every individual is determined by his caste. The **Brahman** is the rightful possessor of the *Veda* and is the chief of the whole creation. He has the exclusive right to become a

* Tilak, p.164.

priest. It is through his benevolence that other mortals enjoy life. The *Kshatriya* is described as the dispenser of justice, particularly as the one whose duty it is..to punish law-breakers; he exercises the civil power and to his tender mercies the *Brahmans* could hand over law-breakers. He has to see that the various castes attend to their prescribed duties; but in doing this work he must abide by the decisions of the *Brahmans*. The *Vashya* comprises the merchant, the agric — st, and the keeper of cattle. His chief work is keeping cattle. The *Sudra* has been created to serve the other three castes (i.e. the fair-skinned Aryans). "He is spoken of as a slave, his property, as well as his person, being at the disposal of his master." The **Untouchable** (*Dalit*) is to perform the most unpleasant tasks: cleaning lavatories, carrying night soil, skinning carcasses and making footwear.

The social, economic and other aspects of life are controlled by the caste regulations. Caste differences are largely invoked while arranging marriages and eating together. For rural Indians, castes shape almost every aspect of their lives: the food they eat, and who can cook it; how they bathe; the colour of their clothes; the length of a *sari* (cloth worn by a woman); how the *dhoti* (cloth worn by a Hindu man) is tied; which way a man's moustaches are trained and whether he can carry an umbrella. Everything is determined by caste and nothing is left to chance.

Caste regulations formulated by Manu are discriminatory in nature; they favour the Aryan Hindus and discriminate against the so-called low-caste Hindus. In teaching the duties of the low-caste people concerning marriage, Manu declares that a man aged thirty may marry a girl of twelve, and a man of twenty-four years may marry a girl of eight. He, however, is very particular about the marriage regulations of *Brahmans*. A *Brahman* must avoid marrying a girl whose family has produced no sons, that which has thick hair on the body, or is afflicted with hereditary disease. Let him choose for his wife a girl whose form has no defect, who has an agreeable manner, who walks gracefully like a young elephant, and whose body has exquisite softness. ⁶

Punishment for offence is also determined by discriminatory caste regulations. A crime against a man of his own caste by a *Sudra* is venial offence; but a similar offence committed against a man belonging to so-called higher caste is proportionately greater. If a *Sudra* through pride dares to give instructions to priests concerning their duty, hot oil will be dropped into his mouth and ears. A high-caste man having intercourse with a *Sudra* woman is to be banished; a *Sudra* having intercourse with a woman of the superior castes is to be put to death. Whatever a *Brahman's* offence, the king must on no account put him to death; he may, at the most, banish him, allowing him to take his property with him. Further, in case of wrong-doing against him, a

⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

Brahman need not approach the civil court, he is free to take vengeance upon the offender.⁷

Superiority of the *Brahmans*

From the days immemorial, the *Brahmans* in India, have been the owners of wealth and power, the leaders of the people, the custodians of religious and secular learning, unrivalled politicians and administrators, besides being the trustees of the people's conscience as priests. In the words of S.D. Theertha, "Probably no other class of persons in any society ever combined in themselves all these advantages so exclusively as the *Brahmans*. It is equally doubtful if any other aristocratic class has ever exercised their privileges to the detriment of the common people so unscrupulously and for so long a period as these *Brahman* priests."⁸ He further observes, "No imperial power ever imposed on a weaker people a more ruthless and soul-destroying domination than the *Brahmans* did on the rest of their fellow citizens, and no race of superior men ever arrogated to themselves such haughty supremacy and false greatness as they have."⁹

The extent to which the *Brahmans* went on advocating their own unimpeachable divine greatness may be seen in

⁷ See Wilkins, 1975, pp. 239-40; Oman, p. 52.

⁸ Ibeertha, pp.113-14.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 163-64.

some quotations from the *Manu Smriti* as given below,¹⁰

- *'A Brahman is born to fulfil Dharma. Whatever exists in the world is the property of the Brahman. On account of the excellence of his origin, he is entitled to all. The Brahman eats but his own food, wears but his own clothes. All mortals subsist through the benevolence of the Brahmans.'*

- *'Let the king after rising early in the morning, worship Brahmans who are well-versed in the threefold sacred sciences and learned in policy and accept their advice.'*

- *'When a learned Brahman has found treasure deposited in former times he may take even the whole of it, for he is master of everything. When the king finds treasure of gold concealed in the ground, let him give one-half to Brahmans and place the other half in his treasury.'*

- *'A Brahman is allowed to marry four wives, a Kshatriya three wives, a Vashya two wives and a Sudra one wife only.'*

Here are some more quotations-which are very high-sounding in respect of the holiness and divine status of the *Brahmans*.

- *'A man who baseely assault a Brahman, with an intention to hurt him, shall be whirled about for a century in a hell called Tamisri; but having smitten him in anger and by design, even with a blade of grass, he shall be born*

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 32:

in one-and-twenty transmigrations from the wombs of impure animals:"

- *'If a man sells his cow, he will go to hell; If he gives her to a Brahman, he will go to heaven.'*¹²

- *'If on Ganga's (the river Ganges) anniversary the whole villages be given to Brahmans, the person presenting them will acquire all the merits that can be obtained; his body will be a million times more glorious than the sun, he will have a million virgins, many carriages and palanquins with jewels, and he will live in heaven with his father, as many years as there are particles in the land given.'*¹³

- *"The son of/ta then inquired : Tell me Vayu, to whom the earth, with its wealth, rightfully belongs, to the Brahman or the Kshatriya? Vayu replied: All this, whatever exists in the world, is the Brahman's property by right of primogeniture; this is known to those who are skilled in the laws of duty. It is his own which the Brahman eats, puts on, bestows. He is the chief of all the castes, the first-born and the most excellent Just as the woman when she has lost her (first) husband, takes her brother-in-law for a second: so the Brahman is the first resource in calamity; afterwards another may arise (Mahabharata)."*¹⁴

- *"No blame accrues to Brahmans from teaching or sacrificing or from receiving money in any other way... Just*

¹¹ Wilkins, 1975, pp. 240-41, quoted from the Manu Smrithi.

¹² Ibid, p. 241.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mahabharata, Saptaparvam, verse, 2755.

as a fire does not lose its purity by blazing even in a cemetery, so too, whether learned or unlearned, a Brahman is a great deity. Cities are not rendered magnificent by ramparts, gates, or palaces of various kinds if they are destitute of excellent Brahmans."¹⁵

- "Whatever good man bows to a Brahman, worshipping him as a Vishnu, is blessed with long life, sons, fame and wealth... The bearer of a drop of water which has been in contact with a Brahman's foot has all the sins of his body thereby destroyed. Whoever carries on his head the holy things touched by a Brahman's foot, verily, verily I say, he is freed from all sins (Padma Purana)".¹⁶

- "The wealth that is stolen by the Brahman tends to well being in the next life; the wealth that is given to the Sudra tends to Hell" (Sulwvniiti).¹¹

- "The Brahman is supreme to law, even to moral law, when it clashes with his worldly interest; and though it is disgraceful for him to be a hired servant; he may without hesitation take the property of a Sudra." (Dharma Shastra)¹⁸

- "Let a Brahman be ignorant or learned, still he is a great deity. To Brahman, the three worlds and the gods owe their existence. Thus though Brahmans employ themselves

¹⁵ Oman, pp. 50-51.

¹⁶ Dr. John Wilson, *Indian Caste*, Vol. 1, p. 426, quoted by Oman, p. 52.

¹⁷ Theertha, p. 118.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 239.

in all mean occupations, they must be honoured in every way, for each of them is a great deity." (Manu :Smriti).¹⁹

- *"Through the powers of the Brahmans the Ausuras were prostrated on the waters; by the favour of the Brahmans the gods inhabit heaven. The ether cannot be treated; the mountain Hamavat cannot be shaken, the Ganga (river) cannot be stemmed by a dam; the Brahmans cannot be conquered by anyone upon earth. The world cannot be ruled in opposition to the Brahmans; [or the mighty Brahmans are the deities even of the gods. If thou desire to possess the sea-girt earth, honour them continually with gifts and with service"]*

- *"In the Mahabharata Bhisma says to Yudhishtira, 'the highest duty of a crowned king is to worship learned Brahmans; they should be protected as one protects oneself or one's children, and be respected, bowed to and revered as if they were one's parents. If Brahmans are contented the whole country prospers; if they are discontented and anm- everything goes to destruction. They can make a god not-a-god, and not-a-god a god. One whom they praise, prospers; and one whom they reproach becomes miserable."*²¹

It should be noted that the books in which the *Brahmans* have been elevated to such a superhuman and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

²¹ Muir, Sanskrit Texts, vol. 1, pp. 129-30, quoted by Oman, pp. 50-51.

²¹ R.G. Bhandarkar, *Peep into Early History of India*, pp. 64-65, quoted by Theertha, pp. 90-91.

superdivine position were written by the *Brahmans* themselves. Among them, Manu was the most prominent law-giver. In sharp contrast to the superhigh position of the *Brahmans*, the status of the original Indians whom the Aryan invaders gave the name *Sudra* (slave) was lowered to a level quite unfit for any human being. This the *Brahmans* did to perpetuate the dominance of the invading nation over the defeated people.

Status of the Sudras

The *Sudra* has a precarious position in Hindu community. According to Manu, a *Brahman* is forbidden to give advice or even food to a *Sudra*, for the *ghi* (clarified butter) having been offered to the gods, must not be eaten by him. Further, the *Brahman* must not give 'spiritual counsel to him,' nor inform him of the legal expiation of his sin. He who declares the law to a servile man, and he who instructs him in the mode of expiating sin, sinks with that very man into hell. A *Brahman* should never be the guru of a *Sudra*. *'While the first part of a Brahman's name should indicate holiness, that of a Kshatriya's power, and that of a Vashya's wealth, that of a Sudra's should indicate contempt.* The *Veda* is never to be read in the presence of a *Sudra*, and for him no sacrifice is to be performed. He has no business with solemn

rites." A *Sudra* has no right even to listen to the *Veda*. Recitation of or listening to this sacred book is exclusively a privilege of the Aryan Hindus. There is provision of severe punishment for a *Sudra*, in case he dares to enjoy this privilege. If he "overheard a recitation of the *Vedas*, molten lac or tin was to be poured into his mouth; if he repeated recitation of the *Vedas*, his tongue should be cut; and if he remembered Vedic hymns, his body was to be torn into pieces."²³

A *Sudra* is debarred from marrying a woman of the higher castes; if he does, their offspring will sink into a class even lower than his own. He must not participate in carrying the corpse of a *Brahman*. He is allowed to carry his dead only through the southern gate of the city where he may live. *The murder of a Sudra by a Brahman is equal only to killing a cat, or a frog, or a cow.*²⁴

In fact, the *Sudras* who have only deprivations and sufferings in their lots, are not Hindus. As Wilkins suggests, "the *Sudras* were not originally part of the Hindu system, but were engrafted into it..."²⁵ Still worse than the *Sudras* are the *Dalits* (also called Untouchables) who fall outside the caste system and are therefore the worst in the social hierarchy.

²² Wilkins, 1975, pp. 247-48.

²³ Theertha, p. 42.

²⁴ Wilkins, 1975, p.248.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

Inferiority of the Dalits

The so-called *Dalits* (Untouchables) are the most pitiable victims of the obnoxious and pernicious caste system. Manu has little to say about them. He affirms that the members of three castes, the *Brahman*, the *Kshatriya*, and the *Vashya*, are twice-born; the fourth, the *Sudra*, once-born; there is no fifth.' All others are outcastes. The common name *Dasyas* (slaves) is applied to them all.²⁶

The treatment accorded to the ——— imply inhuman. According to Mdiu *Smriti*, "Outcasted persons have no share in inheritance." The orthodox *Būnmans* still believe, if the shadow of a *Dalit* falls on them; they are polluted and will have to purify them by sprinkling over themselves water from the holy river, the Ganges." 'You may breed cows and dogs in your house,' wrote Mr. M.C. Raja. 'You may drink the urine of cows and swallow cow-dung to expiate your sins, but you shall not approach an *Adi Dravida*.' These people are still denied the use of public wells and tanks and at the same time, stigmatized as unclean. They are still kept out of schools and colleges maintained by public funds and at the same time despised as ignorant and illiterate. They are still

²⁶ Ibid., p. 263.

²⁷ Oman, P. 47.

²⁸ Sandeela, pp. 69-70.

²⁹ i.e., original Indians: Dalits, Sudras, tribal people.

shut out from temples, and yet branded as ungodly and unfit to associate with. For access to public roads and even for spaces to bury the dead, they have to depend much on the capricious benevolence of their caste-Hindu neighbours.¹³⁰

Untouchability in Practice

Untouchability has been banned in the constitution of India, which was drafted by a committee headed by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, himself an untouchable. It was his great ingenuity that he could tactfully make such a provision in the constitution of a country dominated by the *Brahmans*. However, there are plenty of evidences that the constitutional provision is honoured more by violation than by observance by millions of so-called high caste Hindus. Here are some:

"An attempt by a group of Harijans (untouchables) to enter an historic Hindu temple at the holy town of Nathdwara in Rajasthan state failed on Monday evening when high caste priests and others beat them back with sticks, injuring at least six. The attempt was organized by social reformers to coincide with the 120th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, the spiritual founder of independent India, who named the Untouchables (Dalits) 'Harijans'. Reports from Nathdwara say, a large contingent of police, deployed by the state government to

¹³⁰ Theertha, pp. 184-85, quoted from p. Chidambaram Pillai's *Right of Temple Entry*, p. 150.

maintain peace, took no action to prevent the attack despite the high court ruling." (*Financial Times*, 6 October 1988)

"In a village 100 miles from Delhi, villagers hanged and then threw on to a fire a girl and two boys; the boys had first been tortured, while their fathers made to watch, and one of them and the girl had still been alive when put in fire. They had managed to crawl out, but were thrown back. The girl, from the powerful Jat caste, had tried to elope with one of the boys, assisted by his friend; both were untouchables, a group so low they are not even on the bottom rung of the caste ladder. Not long before, in three villages in the state of Bihar, the huts of 400-odd families of untouchables were burnt down by gangs working for the local landowning caste, because they were demanding the legal minimum wage, 16 rupees (78 cents) a day." (The *Economist*, June 8th 1991).

"At school Harijans are often made to sit on the floor; in some villages they have to take off their shoes while walking past upper-caste houses, and are usually banned from drawing water from the village well for fear they will pollute it..A Brahmin on a packed bus cannot hop off and bathe six times each time he fears the shadow of an untouchable has fallen on him." (The *Economist* June 8th 1991).

"Twenty Harijans (untouchables) have been hacked to death in a village in southern India by high caste Hindus and their bodies thrown into a nearby canal, news papers reports said. *The Statesman* said the incident occurred on

Tuesday at Tsundur village near Guntur town in Andhra Pradesh state. Other reports said a group of Harijans were attacked by deadly weapons while trying to flee across marshes. A police picked in the village remained passive to the gruesome murders, *The Hindu* newspaper said. The incident had its origins in an incident that occurred about a month back in a local cinema hall. A Harijan boy watching a movie stretched himself and his leg accidentally touched a high-caste boy sitting in the next seat. Soon there was an altercation between them. The Hindus took this as an affront on their authority. They summoned the teacher-father of the Harijan boy and held him hostage until they caught hold of the boy and beat him. After this, other minor incidents between the two groups snowballed and finally led to arson and mayhem. The southern Indian incident comes three weeks after two lower caste youths and a 15-year old upper caste girl were publicly hanged by their own fathers goaded by a vigilante mob in a north Indian village. They were punished for defying the Hindu social code barring inter-caste marriage." (*Arab News*, August 10, 1991).

"In 1989, the national government (of India) recorded 14,269 cases of atrocities committed against outcastes, including 479 murders and 759 rapes." (*Arab News*, March 31 1991).

"Jagjiban Ram (former Union Minister of India) with all power and wealth at his command was made to know that his social status was not even equal to the poorest and uneducated Brahmin of India. When he visited

Varanasi on invitation and garlanded the statue of Sampurnanand (a Kayasth), the statue was washed with *gangajal* (sacred water of the Ganges) and mantras were recited to make it 'pure' as the touch of a SC ~funtotichable) had desecrated the stone statue." (*Dalit Voice*, Vol. 12, No. 21, p.17).

"In Kerala, Namboodiri Brahmins till very recently were compelling 'low caste' women not to wear blouses lest they should appear as high caste. The result was that these women had to go bare-breasted which was condemned by all civilized nations." (*Dalit Voice*, Vol. 12, No. 21, p. 17).

A recent example of caste-based atrocities was published by the *Indian Express* (June 24, 1995). A Scheduled Tribe woman, Prakash Kaur, was most painfully murdered in a village in Maharashtra province in May, 1995. Brutes from the Aryan Hindus (1) dragged her to the village temple; (2) shaved her head; (3) beat her with sticks, (4) inserted a stick into her private parts; (5) blackened her face; (6) put her on a donkey and paraded her in the market; and (7) continued to beat her till she died. When the dying woman asked for water, the killers poured hot water and kerosene in her mouth. Her only offence(?) was that her 12-year old son had entered the local Hindu temple. The place where the incident took place is very close to the local police station. The more painful aspect of the incident is that when the Home Minister of the state was contacted by the *All India Democratic Women's Association*, he refused to take

any action in the matter saying that it was not a murder but a "reflection of mob anger".

Another recent example of caste-based atrocities was published by the *Times of India* in its issue of 18 January 1997. A 41-year old low-caste woman was stripped and paraded naked through a village near Muradabad town (U.P.). Her only offence (?) was that her son had, allegedly, teased a girl who was a caste Hindu. The woman cried for help but none dared to come to her aid.

The racial atrocities meted out by the arrogant caste or Aryan Hindus to the underprivileged people of India have no parallel in modern world. The above instances are only few of such incidents presented to indicate how things are going on in a country claimed to be the largest democracy in the world.

Gandhi and Untouchability

M.K Gandhi is widely portrayed in and outside India as the main champion of the cause of the Untouchables (*Dalits*). It is, however, far from the truth. There is no doubt that he wanted the untouchability to be abolished but he, at the same time, was a strong supporter of the caste system. Supporting the caste system he said: "I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration." He also said, "To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation, which is the soul of the caste system. The

hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder."³¹ Obviously, the stance of Gandhi with respect to the caste system was contradictory. Since untouchability is a by-product of the caste system, it does not make any sense to advocate the abolition of the untouchability while trying at the same time to perpetuate the caste system. In fact, Gandhi was neither a friend of the Untouchables, nor was he sincere in advocating the abolition of untouchability. His actions clearly belied his precepts. In 1933, he established Harijan (*Dalit*) Sevak Sangh for the welfare of the Untouchables (*Dalits*). But when there was a demand for the representation of the Untouchables on the Governing Board of the institution, he flatly refused it. He disapproved appointment of Mr. Agnibhaj, a distinguished personality, as a minister in the Congress cabinet in the Madya Pradesh because he was from the Scheduled Caste. In the Round Table Conference held in 1932, the then British Government accepted the demand of the Dalits for separate electorate. The basis of that demand was the fact that the Dalits are not Hindu but a separate nation. Gandhi started his 'fast unto death' against that plan and sabotaged it. It was a thunderous blow to the cause of the emancipation of the *Dalits*. Gandhi, however, showed great respect to the *Dalits* when he made them comparable to the cows who have divine position in Hinduism. He said: 'Majority of

³¹ Fazlul Huq, *Gandhi Saint or Sinner*, (Bangalore; 1992), p. 68.

Harjans (Dalits) can no more understand the presentation of Christianity than my cows."³²

An examination of the role played by Gandhi apparently to serve the cause of the *Dalits* will clearly indicate that he was not sincere at all in showing sympathy towards them. The attitude which he really had towards the *Dalits* has superbly been portrayed by Dr. Ambedkar in the following words: "*Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors. The sanctity and infallibility of the Vedas, Smritis and Shastras, the iron law of caste, the heartless law of karma and the senseless law of status by birth are to the Untouchables veritable instruments of torture which Hinduism has forged against Untouchables. These very instruments which have mutilated, blasted and blighted the lives of the Untouchables are to be found intact and untarnished in the bosom of Gandhism.*"³³

³² M.K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*, (Ahmedabad: n.d.), p. 58.

³³ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables?*

II. *ISLAM: EQUALITY AND BROTHERHOOD*

Islam lays down not only the laws which govern the relations of human beings to God, but also regulates and distinctly defines the proper relationship between a person and his fellow-creatures. It provides a complete social system with minute regulations for a person's conduct in every sphere of life. The social and religious parts of Islam are so closely bound together that one cannot be separated from the other without destroying both. The most important principles which regulate the social system of Islam are equality and brotherhood. While the principle of equality applies to all, irrespective of religious affinity, the principle of brotherhood regulates the social relations among the members of the Muslim community, called the *Ummah*.

Equality

The principle of equality teaches that all human beings are equal in the sight of God. In Islam, equality of man is not the figment of the human brain and mind. It is a guiding principle decreed by God. Among many verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet which serve as the principles of the social structure of Islam, are those which indicate that humanity represents one family

springing from one and the same father and mother, and aspiring to the same ultimate goal. The principle of equality accrues from other basic principles. God has conferred on all human beings honour and respect.^P All human beings are created by One and the Same Eternal God. The final goal of humanity is God. From Him we come, for Him we live and to Him we shall all return. Every human being is a member of the universal family established by the first father, Adam, and the first mother, Eve. God is just and kind to all His creatures. He is not partial to any race, community, age or religion. The whole universe is His dominion and all people are His creatures. All human beings are born equal in the sense that none of them brought anything with him or her when born, and all human beings die equal in the sense that none of them takes anything of his or her worldly belongings when he or she dies..God judges every human being on the basis of his or her own merits and according to his or her own deeds.

Common Ancestry

The concept and idea of the oneness of humanity is Islam's unique contribution to human civilization which came up as a natural outcome of its cardinal doctrine of tawhīd, the unity of God. As indicated earlier, we are all children of Adam, and Adam was made from dust. Here dawned the idea for the first time in human history that

ⁿ The Qur'an, 17: 70.

all men have a common origin. Thus the whole of humanity is but one family, one nation, and should, ideally form one fraternity, the universal brotherhood of man. The differences of colour and languages, of build and of features are not regarded as differences of quality, or as marks or degrees of excellence, but as an expression of the diversity in nature." In his famous sermon delivered on the occasion of his Farewell Pilgrimage Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "*Mankind, all of you belong to Adam, and Adam is created out of dust. The Arab has no superiority over the non-Arab. Nor does the non-Arab have superiority over the Arab except in the fear of God.*" Of pride of affiliation to a community or ancestry, he commanded his followers: "*Abandon it for it stinks.*"

No Colour-Based Superiority

During the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs regarded themselves as a superior race and did not recognize the negroes except as slaves. The Prophet brought about a radical change in that attitude by establishing a true spirit of equality. During his period, the mosque was the most important centre of official activities. He himself acted as the *imam* (leader) in leading congregational prayers and bestowed on Bilal, formerly a negro slave, a rare honour of working as the *mu'adhdhin* (caller of prayers). When he was in his death-bed, the Prophet appointed Usamah,

³⁴ Ibid., see among many verses, 2: 213, 4: 1, 30: 20, 30: 22.

son of Zaid, a former slave, to act as the commander of a battalion which was sent for an expedition. One day a heated discussion arose between Abu Dharr al-Ghifidi and a former black slave. Abu Dharr addressed the former slave saying, "*O son of a black woman!*" The Prophet was highly irritated by this remark and said to Abu Dharr, "*How dare you revile him because of his mother's colour? You still have traces of pre-Islamic attitudes*". Then he said: "*You have gone too far. A white woman's son has no superiority over a black woman's son except due to greater piety and righteousness.*"

Upon hearing this, Abu Dharr put his face on the ground and said to the former slave, "Come, *and step over my face.*"

Such is the power of Islam which like a magic wand transformed the proud Arab nobles into a humble people.

Criterion of Nobility

Human beings differ from one another in respect of ancestry; colour, financial position, etc., but these factors are not taken into account in determining their real status. The amount of wealth one possesses, the high position one occupies, the status of a stock one comes of, have no value in determining the worth of a man or woman. The only criterion that makes the difference is the virtue of taqwa - righteousness and piety."

³⁵ Ibid., 49: 13.

The quality by which one can achieve superiority in Islam lies within reach of every human being, and that is to make efforts to cultivate within oneself *taqwd* (piety). This virtue, however, does not entitle its possessor to any special privilege; it only makes him more honourable in the sight of God. This criterion is applicable to each and everyone without any exception. Once the Prophet said to his beloved daughter: "*Fatimah, work for your future life, for I shall avail you nothing when you stand in front of God.*"

Some Manifestations of Equality

Islam not only provides a set of precepts for establishing a just society, but also provides the mechanism needed to ensure their application in practical life. The system of *saldt* (ritual prayer), *sawm* (fasting) and *hajj* (pilgrimage) are among various measures which play effective role in levelling inequality from and establishing equality in the society.

Saldt was a very effective instrument in establishing social equality during the period of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In performing five-time prayers, Muslims met together in congregations. Among them were members of the noblest Arab families as well as a good number of negro slaves. At prayers, they all stood shoulder to shoulder before the Almighty. By standing side by side in the prayer, they mingled freely on terms of perfect equality on all other occasions. Service to God was, thus, the door through which the fraternization of humanity

was effected. Meeting together on terms of equality in prayer and in religious gatherings, Muslims became convinced that they all were equal before God. Life once moulded on these lines led to the natural consequence that the negro slaves and the Arab nobility enjoyed equal status in society. The same prayer continues to be performed by Muslims all over the world till date and still remains a leveller of all the artificial and false distinctions among human beings based on caste, colour, language, etc.

During the month of Ramadan, every adult Muslim who is not sick or on a journey has to fast from dawn till after sunset as an obligatory religious duty. This worship has to be performed by everybody regardless of his or her economic or social status. The rich, the poor, the king, the common people, all endure the pangs of hunger and thirst during fasting. When the sunset comes, even the king offers heartfelt thanks to God ~mighty for such a simple thing as a glass of water. The lesson of fasting is thus shared by all. It inculcates in man the spirit of equality before God and also before the laws given by Him.

Hajj performed in Makkah every year presents a living scene of equality in Islam. Male pilgrims- black or brown, yellow or white, rich or poor, young or old- are dressed alike, wearing two white seamless sheets of simple material, thus eliminating completely all marks and signs of distinction of dress and bearing witnesses to the equality of all human beings before their Creator. The huge assembly of Muslims from the five continents of the

world, the gathering together of a multitude of worshippers of all races on the plain of 'Arafat is, perhaps, the most spectacular expression, symbol and proof of unity and brotherhood of man as enunciated and upheld by the religion of Islam. By virtue of the modern communication system, people all over the world can watch in the screens of T.V. sets the vivid picture of the grand assembly of pilgrims during performance of *hajj* every year.

Zakdt and Inheritance

The institution of zakat and the law of inheritance are two very effective measures provided by Islam for establishing economic equality in the society and removing the evils associated with the unrestricted accumulation of wealth. These measures play a key role in an Islamic society in ensuring proper distribution of wealth and fulfillment of basic needs of the members of the community. Economic inequality resulted from unrestricted accumulation of wealth creates various social problems including deprivation of a section of the people from their basic needs. Islam tries to create a healthy and peaceful social environment where everyone can remain assured of a portion of what has been produced in the society. The Prophet of Islam says: *He is not a believer who eats his fill when his neighbour beside him is hungry.*³⁶

³⁶ Mishkat, No. 4991.

Equality in Social Life

The emphasis given by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) on equality in status of human beings has been vividly reflected in his saying, "*People are like the teeth of a comb.*" There are also many other hadlths in which he emphasized equality. He was not satisfied by merely teaching brotherhood and equality but he meant what he taught and put it into practice. One of the most important areas where people seek to stress their privileged position is that of marriage. People always covet good social connections. What did the Prophet do in this regard? He set the criteria very clearly. He said: "*Should a person whom you find satisfactory on account of his strength of d!n (religion) and his morals come to you with a proposal of marriage, then accept his proposal Unless you do so, there will be strife and much corruption in the land.*" Similarly, his advice to men is to choose their wives on the basis of *din* (religion). He says: "*A woman may be sought in marriage for one of the four factors: Her wealth, her beauty, her family lineage and her strength of din. Choose the one who is of strong d!n, so that you may be prosperous.*" He married his cousin, Zaynab to Zaid, a farmer slave. He himself married a negro girl from Abyssinia to eliminate racial vanity. In consequence of these teachings and their translation into practice by the Prophet of Islam a complete change was brought in the minds and hearts of all Muslims.

Equality Before Law

With respect to administration of justice, the instructions given in the Our'an are candid clear. The Our'an commanded the believers to stand out firmly for justice against anybody including themselves." The divine instruction was completely applied in practice. When a noble Arab woman committed theft at the time of the Prophet, some people tried to get her a pardon from him. The Prophet told them: *•Should Fatimah bint Muhammad (i.e. his own daughter) steal, I would certainly have her hand cut.*" Here, he emphasized equality of all people before the law. Social rank or high office of a person does not bestow upon him or her any special privilege before law. The equality established by Islam continued to be maintained in Muslim society. In his first speech after becoming caliph of Islam, Abu Bakr said: *"To me, the strongest among you is one who is weak till I recover his right Similarly, to me the weakest among you is one who is strong till I recover from him what is due from him."*

An incident which took place during the period of 'Umar, the second caliph, vindicates the truth about the equality established in Muslim community during its early period. Jabbala, king of the Ghassanides, was a new convert. He set out on a pilgrimage to Makkah. While he was performing tawaf of the Holy Ka'bah, a humble pilgrim, engaged in the same sacred duties, accidentally

³¹¹ The Our'an, 4: 135, 5:9.

dropped a piece of his dress over the royal shoulders. Jabbala turned round furiously and struck him a blow. The poor man went to the caliph and asked for justice. 'Umar sent for Jabbala and asked him why he had so ill-treated a brother in Islam.

Jabbala answered that the man had insulted him and had it not been for the sanctity of the place, he would have killed him on the spot. 'Umar replied that his words had added to the gravity of his offence, and that unless he obtained the pardon of the injured man, he would have to submit to the penalty of the law. When Jabbala refused to comply because, as he retorted, he was a king and the complainant only a common man, 'Umar replied: "*King or no king, both of you are Muslims and both of you are equal in the eye of law.*"

In another incident, a Jew raised a case against 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. When they came to the court, 'Umar, addressed 'Ali by his pet name," Abu al-Hasan and the Jew by his first name. At this 'Ali showed signs of displeasure. 'Umar thought that 'Ali's displeasure was on account of putting him on equal level with a Jew in the court of justice. When asked about the reason of his anger, 'Ali said that the Caliph had not treated him and the Jew equally but showed discrimination between the two when he

³⁸ Used when showing respect to the person concerned.

addressed him by his pet name.³⁹ Such was the spirit of equality and justice among Muslims.

Islamic Brotherhood

Within the broad family of human beings, there are communities, each of which is based on some distinct and common ideology. Those who believe in Islam and apply its principles form the Islamic *Ummah* and are united by moral and spiritual bonds peculiar to the Islamic community. The backbone of the *Ummah* is the common belief of its members which motivates them and brings them into a special relationship with one another. Their unity of purpose and objectives derives from tawhīd which is built on reason and knowledge. The bond that unites Muslims is brotherly love. In several verses of the Qur'an, the believers have been described as brethren." Urging Muslims to strengthen the link of brotherhood among them, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said:

• *"A Muslim is another Muslim's brother; he does not treat him unjustly, nor does he abandon him."*⁴¹

³⁹ Anwar Ahmad, *al-Addlat al-Ijtima'iyah* [] al-Islām, (Cairo: 1977), p.23.

⁴⁰ See the Qur'an, 3: 103, 8: 63, 49:10.

⁴¹ Mishkdt, No. 4958.

- *"One cannot be a true believer till he likes for his (Muslim) brother what he likes for himself."*⁴²
- *"The whole of a Muslim for another Muslim is inviolable: his blood, his property, and his honour."*⁴³
- *"A believer is another believer's brother who guards him against [his] loss and protects him when he is absent." <*
- *"Believers are like a wall, one part supporting another,"*⁴⁵
- *"Believers in respect of mutual compassion, sympathy and co-operation are like a single body. If one part is sick the whole body suffers from insomnia and fever."*⁴⁶

The principle of Islamic brotherhood requires all members of the Islamic *Ummah* to help and protect one another whenever the need arises. This is an obligation both individual and collective. Every individual must extend help to those who need it, while it remains the primary obligation of the community to protect and help its members. This principle applies to cases of physical aggression without justification and also to cases of poverty. In fact, Muslims are exhorted to quell any oppressive act or wrong doing whenever it takes place and to the best of their ability. Once the Prophet said

⁴² Ibid., No. 4961.

⁴³ *Muslim*, vol. 8. p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Mishkdt*, No. 4985.

⁴⁵ Mukhtasar Sahlh. *al-Bukhari*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Abd al-Aziz al-Khawli, *al-A dab alNabawl*, Beirut, 1986. p. 153.

that a Muslim should back his Muslim brother whether the latter is the transgressor or the transgressed. When asked how one should support the transgressor, he replied that such support would be to stop him from transgressing.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in his famous sermon delivered on the occasion of his Farewell Pilgrimage emphatically re-affirmed the principle of brotherhood. In his oration he said: "*All Muslims arc brothers to one another. You arc one brotherhood. Nothing which belongs to another is lawful unto his brother unless freely given out of good will Guard yourself from committing injustice.*" In no time the teaching of the Prophet brought about a revolution in the mind and behaviour of his followers, Arabs, who were divided into many clans and tribes perpetually engaged in feuds. Now they not only broke all artificial distinction between man and man but rooted out mutual hatred and jealousy and loved one another not merely as their co-religionists but as real brothers. The Ansdrs (helpers) of Madina divided up all their belongings equally with the Muhajirs (refugees) from Makkah as brothers would divide their father's assets equally among themselves. History fails to present any instance of such a sense of brotherhood based only on an ideology, In the words of S.S. Leeder, *•Embrace the fâith, and you arc at once an equal and a brother. Islam knows no colour line.*"⁴⁷

⁴⁷ S.S. Leeder, *Veiled Mysteries* of Egypt, (London: 1912), p. 335.

STATUS OF WOMEN

I. *WOMEN IN HINDUISM*

Hinduism has special laws and customs relating to and regulating women's lives at various stages. The rights and privileges enjoyed by them under these laws and customs do not present any happy picture. Compared to men, women are not only at a disadvantaged position in the society but it seems that they have been created only to undergo various types of sufferings. As Hindu scriptures are inimical to women, they have been totally deprived of their basic rights and their status has been relegated to that of slaves.

Fundamental Rights Denied

Right of Ownership: Women have no right to own any property. A woman may earn an income, but that will belong to the man to whom she belongs (i.e. husband for wife, father for a girl and son for a widow).

Freedom: Women have no freedom in the society. They have no right to do anything of their own. In every

sphere of their lives, they have to be dependent on men. This is determined by the laws given by Manu in his *Dharma Shastra*, which is accepted by Hindus as a divinely inspired book. According to this scripture, "*By a girl, or by a young woman, or by a woman advanced in years, nothing must be done, even in her own dwelling-place, according to her mere pleasure. In childhood, must a female be dependent on her father, in youth on her husband, her lord (husband) being dead, on her sons. A woman must never seek independence.*"¹

Early Marriage: Hindu scriptures prescribe early marriage for girls. For this reason, the practice of early marriage of girls was widely prevalent in Hindu society in India until it was prohibited by an Act of the British colonial government in March 1891. The Act was vehemently criticized by Hindu leaders as it, in their view, was a gross interference in their customs and religion.

The practice of early marriage for girls was in accord with the legislation given by Manu in his *Dharma Shastra*. This legislation has several provisions.² There is no atonement for a man who has had intercourse with a Vrishali (i.e. a woman who has period before her marriage). The father, mother, and elder brother who tolerate a girl in her period before marriage go to hell. A

¹ Wilkins, 1975, p. 185.

² Sec Oman, pp. 181-86; Wilkins, 1975, pp. 195-96.

Brahman who will marry such a girl is not to be spoken of or admitted into society. The marriage of a girl is to be celebrated after she is seven years" old, otherwise it becomes repugnant to the dictates of religion. At the age of eight she becomes a *Gaury* (i.e. Siva's consort, who is regarded as an ideal Hindu wife). At the age of nine a *Rohini* (i.e. the wife of *Chandra*, the moon), and at the age of ten an ordinary girl. In other words, after being seven years old, the sooner a girl is married, the better. If the father does not provide her with a husband before she is eleven, she is justified in seeking one for herself.

Right as a Wife: Hinduism discriminates between husband and wife. The legislation of Manu, who legalized abduction as one of the eight forms of marriage, is very candid in this respect. A man can divorce his wife but in no circumstances a woman can divorce her husband. In all circumstances, she has to obey her husband as a deity and tolerate any atrocity meted out to her by him. *Though the husband be cruel and untrue to his wife, this does not free her from her obligations to him. Though unobservant of approved usages, or enamoured of another woman, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must constantly be revered as a god by a virtuous wife. Although the wife must honour her husband as a god, and remain a widow after his death, the husband, seven years after marriage, if there be no son, may supersede her by another wife. A wife who speaks unkindly may be put aside without delay. If a wife drinks, shows hatred to her lord, is*

*mischievous, or wastes his property, she may at any time be superseded by another wife.*³

Some other provisions left by Manu for women are as follows⁴:

- *A man both day and night must keep his wife so much in subjugation that she by no means be mistress of her own actions. If the wife have her own free will, notwithstanding she be sprung from a superior caste, she will behave amiss. A woman is not to be relied on.*
- *A woman who eats before her husband eats, such woman shall be turned out of the house.*
- *A woman shall never go out of the house without the consent of her husband;... shall never hold discourse with a strange man, ... shall not laugh without drawing her veil over face, ... shall not stand at the door; and must never look out of a window.*
- *Confidence must not be placed in women.*
- *If one trusts a woman, without doubt he must wander about the street as a beggar.*

The result of the religious provisions is that when a husband does any injustice to his wife, there is no way for her to get divorce or justice except by renouncing her

³ Wilkins, 1975, pages, 181, 183, 185.

⁴ Ibid., 1975, pp. 185-86.

religion. Aware about the danger of conversion by Hindu women who are increasingly becoming conscious about their rights, the Government of India adopted some measures after independence, to rectify the injustices being done to them in the name of religion.

Religious Right: Manu forbids a married woman to approach the gods in her own name. *"No sacrifice is allowed to women apart from their husbands, no religious rite, no fasting. As far as only as a wife honours her husband, so far she is exalted in heaven. A faithful wife who wishes to attain in heaven the mansion of her husband must do nothing unkind to him, be he living or dead"* Hindu women, however, are not forbidden to visit shrines and temples, but it is only in their husbands' name that they can approach the gods.

Manu debarred women from reading or listening to the *Vedas*. He declares that women have no concern with the *Vedas*. This is lawfully settled. For this reason, Shankarachari of Puri Swami Nischalanda publicly stopped a woman, *Brahman* by caste, from reciting verses of the *Veda* at a function held in Calcutta on 16 January 1994.⁶ Women have no share in puja (worship) of Saraswati, goddess of learning, although the deity herself is a woman.⁷ Having, therefore, no evidence of law, and

⁵ Ibid, p.181.

⁶ Fazlie, p. 107.

⁷ Wilkins, 1975, p. 80.

no knowledge of expiatory texts, sinful women must be as foul as falsehood itself. In perfect accord with this is the teaching of some Hindu sects that women cannot obtain final emancipation, the highest bliss of heaven, until in later lives they have been born as men.⁸

The *Vedas*, as indicated in various hymns, also are not in favour of women. In the hymns, while sons are prayed for, and blessings implored in their behalf, daughters are not asked for, nor is intercession made for them. Several of the hymns show that the old Aryans had no high opinion about a woman's purity and virtue.⁹

Sati (Widow-Burning)

According to Hindu scriptures, a widow is required to mount the funeral of her dead husband and be cremated along with his corpse. If the husband dies at a distant place, the widow is nonetheless to be burned alive on a pyre by herself. A widow who burns herself to death this way is called *sati*. The guiding force to motivate Hindus to practice *sati* is the instructions given in their scriptures. Some of these are as given below:¹⁰

⁸ [bid.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 187-88.

¹⁰ Ibid., pages 186 and L:3.

- *"It is proper for a woman, after her husband's death to bum herself in the fire with his corpse; every woman who thus bums herself shall remain in paradise with her husband 35,000,000 years by destiny."*
- *"The wife who commits herself to flames with her husband's corpse shall equal Arundathi, and reside in Swarga (heaven)."*
- *"Accompanying her husband, she shall reside so long in Swarga as the 35,000,000 of hairs on the human body."*
- *"As the snake-catcher forcibly drags the serpent from his earth, so bearing her husband [from hell] with him she enjoys heavenly bliss."*
- *"Dying with her husband, she sanctifies her maternal and paternal ancestors, and the ancestors of him to whom she gave her virginity."*
- *"Such a wife, adorning her husband, in celestial felicity with him, greatest and most admired, shall enjoy the delights of heaven while fourteen Indras reign."*
- *"Though a husband had killed a Brahman, broken the ties of gratitude, or murdered a friend, she expiates the crime."*

The rite of sati was prevalent in India until it was prohibited by the British Government in 1829. Regulation XVII of 1829 declared *sati* illegal and punishable by the criminal courts as 'culpable homicide' amounting to 'manslaughter', for which a death sentence could be

awarded." The orthodox Hindus protested that measure and made an appeal to the Privy Council in England, but, fortunately for the would-be Hindu widows of India, the council dismissed the appeal. Thus after having been practiced in India for over two thousand years, the institution of widow-burning became illegal by the law enacted by a foreign power.

Until the practice of widow-burning was made a punishable offence, the number of widows sacrificed every year was appalling. Early in the nineteenth century, in Bengal alone, the annual number of such cases was about twelve hundred. In 1818, no fewer than 839 cases of sati occurred in Bengal. Of these cases, as many as 544 were accounted for by Calcutta division alone.¹²

It appears that Hindu society was not ready to honour the ordinance which banned sati except under duress. Long after the date of enactment of the ordinance, the rite was freely practiced in Hindu States outside the jurisdiction of the British power. The sati which accompanied the cremation of the body of Moharja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab in 1839 is a case in point. Four of his wives and seven female slaves were burnt to death on the funeral pyre with his corpse when it was

¹¹ Sharma, P. 478

¹² Ibid.

cremated.¹³ *Sati* continued to be practiced in some parts of India even after independence.

Apparently, the institution of *sati* highlights the chastity of women. However, when one considers the institution of *devdasi* (i.e. the system of keeping temple prostitutes) to satisfy the lust of the priests and enable them to earn handsome income through engaging these girls in immoral activities with rich pilgrims, one fails to understand what is the real purpose of *sati*, upholding the chastity of women or torturing them to death.

Widowhood

The alternative to the rite of *sati* is enforced widowhood, with all its degrading accompaniments. It seems as if the Hindu law-givers made harsh regulations to be strictly followed by a widow to make her life as miserable as possible. The widow had from the moment her husband died not only to deplore the loss of a companion, but she had also to take a position of utter degradation in the household where formerly she had an honourable place. In the words of J.C. Oman, "In many parts of India, it is customary a few days after the cremation of the husband, to perform what may be called the ceremony of formally degrading the widow, when she has her head shaved by the barber and is deprived of the use of all her personal ornaments. Even after that she is

¹³ Oman, p.192.

condemned to sleep, not on a bed, but upon a mat spread on the floor; to have but one meal a day; and to be excluded very strictly from all festivities and family gatherings. Not only is the widow degraded and set aside, but her very presence on joyful occasions becomes an actual offence, and her mere shadow is in certain cases unpropitious."¹⁴ The widows who had no parents were still more to be pitied; they would become servants to their brothers' or sons' wives. If there were widows in a house, there was no need for servants.¹⁵

According to Hindu scriptures, the bond uniting a woman to her husband is indissoluble even by death. Remarriage of widows was, therefore, not in vogue in India. In view of the barbarous injustice meted out to widows, the British Government legalized remarriage of widows in 1856 through enactment of Act XV. The sentiment of the people, however, is still against this Act. Whoever marries a widow is looked down upon as an outcaste. This is because Manu has laid down that among the persons to be carefully shunned are husband of a twice-married woman. Her second husband, herself, and any children born to them would be outcaste. For a widow, it is unlawful even to mention the name of another man, and that by remarriage 'she brings disgrace on herself, and shall be excluded from the seat of her

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 218.

lord."¹⁶ The case of a widower, however, is different. He may remarry a few weeks after the death of his former wife.

The sufferings of widows led them sometimes to suicide, and when very young, into immoral courses and other heinous crimes. Sometimes widows are actually encouraged, as among the Tulava Brahmans of southern India, to take to 'prostitution in the name of religion.'¹⁷ In the words of J.C. Oman, "Regarded from any point of view, the cremation of Hindu widows with bodies of their dead.husbands was a decidedly barbarous practice, and the same may be said of the formal degradation of Hindu widows and their perpetual exclusion from the ordinary pleasures of life."¹⁸

The touching appeal made by a Hindu woman to Almighty God may be quoted here:

*"O Lord! Why hast Thou created us to make us suffer thus? From birth to death, son-ow is our portion. While our husbands live, we are their slaves; when they die, we are still worse off But they have all they wish here, and promises for the life to come"*¹⁹

¹⁶ Oman, p. 199; Wilkins, 1975, p. 211.

¹⁷ Oman, p. 195.

is Ibid., pp. 195-96

¹⁹ Wilkins, 1975, p. 216.

Female Infanticide

The religious teachings of Hindu shastras which are very much hostile towards women have profound influence over the minds of Hindus. This factor coupled with economic hardships has been responsible for the widespread prevalence of female infanticide in Hindu community in India. Modern medical technology has made it easier to get rid of the female fetuses even before their births. Readers of Indian newspapers often come across advertisements of medical clinics saying, "*Spend 500 rupees to save 500,000 rupees later.*" The savings mentioned in the blurb refer to spending a lesser amount to discover the sex of a fetus and abort the female one and thus save the money which otherwise would have been spent on bringing up the girl child and paying dowry to the groom.

The World Bank in a report on the status and conditions of women expressed concern over the prevalence of such clinics and practices like female infanticide in India. According to this report, it is because of such practices that the female-male ratio has declined in India from 933 to 1,000 in 1981 to 929 to 1,000 in 1991. If this trend persists, it could reach a low of 672 females for 1,000 males in 2050

Abortion of female fetuses, which is prevalent mainly in rich classes, has reached menacing proportions in the cow-belt region of northern India. Poor families, who cannot afford to spend for sex-determination tests, get rid

of their newborn baby girls by feeding them poisonous substances or starving them to death. According to the National Commission of Women (NCW) of India, female infanticide is on the rise in India and spreading to new areas. Attempts to root out this practice have not borne much fruit so far.

Female children who could survive are mostly neglected. According to a report published by the UNICEF, out of about 15 million girls born in India every year, five million do not live to celebrate their 15th birthday and a third of these deaths take place in the first year of life.^{2D}

A law recently passed by the Government of India bans the use of medical tests to determine the sex of a fetus to abort female fetuses. Experts, however, are skeptical about the effectiveness of the new law since there is no mechanism to police such facilities and check whether the tests are being conducted only for legitimate purposes. In India, where abortion is legal, most of the people live in the rural areas and in these areas, one can have a baby killed by paying only 50 rupees to a mid-wife.

An Observation

The dismal picture given above about the conditions of Hindu women is what was prevailing in India prior to

^{2D} Arab News, 11 January 1996.

various reform measures introduced by the foreign colonial power and what should ideally be under a system provided for them by Hinduism. Fortunately for Hindu women, the modern world is different from the previous one or one expected under a system depicted under the tenets of Hindu scriptures. The contact with Muslims, the colonial rule of the British, enlightenment due to modern education, awareness among women, human rights watch, all these factors have brought about some changes in the attitude of Hindus towards women. The British colonial power through legislations, prohibited sati and child marriage and legalized remarriage of widows. In independent India, it was Jawaharlal Nehru who, through legislation, gave Hindu women the right to divorce and the right to own property. All these reform measures were vehemently opposed by the custodians of Hinduism, priests and Shankaracharyas as these all involve gross violation of the instructions given in Hindu scriptures. No doubt, the reform activities have made the lives of Hindu women better. But the recent rise of Hindu fundamentalism has made them scared because they are afraid that if the Hindu fanatics could realize their dream of Hindu *Rashtra*, they would revive the old pagan practices and the lives of women would be in jeopardy.

II. *WOMEN IN ISLAM*

In Islam, the variations in colour, language, financial status or gender do not provide any basis for superiority or inferiority. The sole basis for superiority of a person over another is piety and righteousness. Women in Muslim community, therefore, have been given rights and privileges which they never enjoyed under any other religion or social system. This fact becomes clear when the rights given to women by Islam are considered, keeping in view the treatment they received under other social systems.

Rights and Privileges

As Islam does not make any discrimination between man and woman in respect of their rights and privileges, the gender of a woman does not in any way deprive her of anything. Islam fully recognizes her right to own any property irrespective of whether she is single or married. She may buy, sell, mortgage or lease any or all of her property at will. This right remains the same before and after her marriage. For this reason, Muslim women may keep their maiden names after marriage, an indication of their independent rights as legal entities.

A woman is not only free in respect of managing her own affairs, she can also express her views, and participate in private and public affairs. She has always been treated as a human being without any discrimination. Islam sufficiently safeguarded the interests and basic rights of women. The Qur'an and the hadiths are replete with evidences which are indicative of this fact. One of the chapters of the Qur'an, named *Mujadilah*,²¹ mentions about a woman who entered into argument with the Prophet himself. She not only expressed her opinion but also reasoned and her sound opinion was accepted. During the period of 'Umar, a woman reasoned with him in the mosque, expressed her opinion and caused him to declare in the presence of the people: "A woman is right and 'Umar is wrong." It should be noted that equality does not mean identity. It is absurd to consider men and women biologically equal. Men will never experience pregnancy just like women can never experience having full beards. Islam has therefore provided certain principles and rules for all which should be followed by both men and women. These principles and rules have been provided keeping in view their nature, and individual and social needs and requirements.

²¹ Literally, 'the woman who pleads'.

²² Compare this freedom of expression enjoyed by a Muslim woman of Arabia in the seventh century with that of an American woman who had no right to vote until the advent of the 19th Amendment in the US Constitution in the twentieth century.

These have been given in order to maintain balance, decency, peace, human dignity and healthy environment in the society. After all, there is nothing in the civilized society which can be called absolute freedom. It is a recognized fact that freedom without certain constraints leads to anarchy and disorder.

Right as a Child

The Our'an ended the practice of female infanticide which was not uncommon among pagan Arabs. The Our'an also rebuked the unwelcoming attitude of some parents upon hearing the news of the birth of a baby girl. Parents have been made duty-bound to show kindness and justice to their daughters. Exhorting parents to be good to their daughters, the Prophet said: "*He who maintains two girls till they grow up, he and I will come on the Day of Resurrection thus (and he pointed with his two fingers held together).*"²³ He also said: "*If anyone maintains three daughters or a like number of sisters, teaching them good manners and showing kindness to them till God makes them able to get by, God will guarantee him paradise. (On being asked, if this would apply in case the number was two, he replied.] Or two.*"²⁴

When guiding the parents about their responsibility towards children, the Prophet did not make any

²³ Mishkdt No. 4950.

²⁴ Ibio., No. -1975.

distinction between girls and boys. He said: "*He who has a child born to him, should give it a good name and good manners*"²⁵ A crucial aspect in the upbringing of daughters that greatly influence their future is education. Education is not only a right **but** also a responsibility for every Muslim, both male and female. The Prophet said: "*The search for knowledge is an obligation laid on every Muslim*"²⁶

Right as a Wife

Islamic law stipulates that a gift called *mahr* be given to a woman by her husband. This gift is a symbol of noble gesture, love and affection showed by the husband to his wife. This gift is included in the nuptial contract. In the family, the husband is responsible for the maintenance, protection, and overall leadership of the family, within the framework of consultation and kindness. The husband's leadership in the family does not mean his dictatorship over his wife. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family affairs." This is a responsibility which is natural in any collective life and also is consistent with the nature of man.

²⁵ Ibid., No. 3138.

²⁶ Ibid., No. 218.

²⁷ See the Ouran, 2:2:11

A woman has the right to accept or reject marriage proposals. Her consent is a pre-requisite to the validity of the marital contract. Once a girl came to the Prophet and said that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Prophet gave her the choice (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it).²⁸ As the right of a woman to decide about her marriage is recognized, so is recognized her right to seek an end to an unsuccessful marriage. However, to provide for the stability of the family, and in order to protect it from hasty decisions under temporary emotional stress, certain steps and wait periods should be observed by men and women seeking divorce. Like man, woman can be divorced from her husband without resorting to the court, if the nuptial contract allows that. Divorce, though allowed, has been discouraged in Islam. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "*The lawful thing which God hates most is divorce?*"

Beside her basic rights as a wife, a woman is entitled to kind treatment. The Qur'an very clearly commanded husbands to treat their wives politely." The Prophet

²⁸ Ibn Hanbal, No. 2469.

²⁹ Mishkat, No. 3280.

³⁰ See the Qur'an, 4:19, 30:21. Compare this Quranic instruction, revealed over fourteen hundred years ago, with the rhyme, which was popular in the British society up to the last century:

*A dog, a wife, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat them the better they be.*

. Bertrand Russel, *The Unpopular Essays*, p. 136.

emphatically exhorted his followers: *The best among you is the best to his family and I am the best among you to my family.*

Right as a Mother

Showing kindness to parents and good treatment to them has been considered by Islam as something next to the worship of God. The Qur'an in several verses exhorted children to be good to and treat properly their parents.³¹ They have been reminded of the sufferings underwent by their mothers for their sake during pregnancy period and later. They have been asked to give priority to mothers when dealing with parents. Once a man asked the Prophet: "*To whom I should show kindness?*" The Prophet replied: "*Your mother.*" When asked: "*Who comes next?*", he replied: "*Your mother.*" Again being asked the same question, he replied: "*Your mother.*" Being asked again the same question, he said: "*Your father, then your relatives in order of relationship:*" A famous saying of the Prophet is "*The paradise is at the feet of mothers.*"

³¹ See the Qur'an, 17: 23-24, 29: 8, 31: 14-15, 46: 15,

³² Mishkat, No. 4929.

Religious Right

Men and women have the same religious duties and responsibilities in Islam. Each human being, whether man or woman, is liable to face the consequences of his or her deeds. Therefore, worships like *saldt* (ritual prayer), *sawm* (fasting), *zakdt* and *hajj* are made compulsory for both man and woman. In some cases, however, woman has some advantages over man. For example, a woman is exempted from the daily prayers and from fasting during her menstrual periods and forty days after childbirth.³³ She is also temporarily exempted from fasting during her pregnancy and when she is nursing her baby, if there is any threat to her health or that of her baby. The fact that man and woman are equal in respect of religious affairs, has been indicated in many verses of the Our'an."

Financial Security and Law of Inheritance

As mentioned earlier, women are entitled to receive marital gifts (*mahr*) without any limit and can keep their present and future properties and income for their own benefit and security, even after marriage. No married woman is required to spend any amount of her income

³³ This period may be less or more depending upon the physical conditions of the woman who gives birth to a child.

-- See the Our'an, 3:195. ·U 21. 16:97.

on the household. In special circumstances, however, she may find it necessary to spend some of her income to assist her family. While this is not a legal obligation, it is consistent with the spirit of mutual co-operation among the members of the family. Woman is also entitled to maintenance during marriage and also during the waiting period (iddat in Arabic) in case of divorce or widowhood. Moreover, a woman who bears a child in marriage is entitled to support for the child from its father. Thus a Muslim woman is guaranteed maintenance and support in all stages of her life, whether she is a daughter or a wife or a mother or a sister.

The financial advantages accorded to women have a social counterpart in the provisions made by the Qur'an in the laws of inheritance. In most cases, the share of man in inheritance is twice that of woman. Men inherit more but ultimately they are responsible for maintaining their female relatives: their wives, daughters, mothers and sisters. Women inherit less but they can retain it for investment or future use, without any legal obligation to spend any part of it, even for their own sustenance. Thus a woman under Islam has got not only the right of inheritance (after she herself was an object of inheritance in some societies), she also enjoys full security.

An Observation

The status of a woman in Islam is something which has no similarity in other social systems. The rights and status achieved by women in various countries during the present time was not due to the kindness of men or due to natural process. It was achieved as a result of their long struggle, on the one hand, and the need of the society for their contribution and work, on the other. The rights which women have gained under Islam were given by divine decree, not achieved under the threat or pressure of women and their organizations. This fact indicates and demonstrates the divine origin of the Qur'an which ensures justice for all.

The western woman reached her present position by force, and not through natural processes or mutual consent or divine teachings. She had to force her way, and various circumstances came to her aid. Shortage of manpower during wars, pressure of economic needs and requirements of industrial development forced woman to get out of her home to work, to learn, to struggle for her livelihood, and to appear as an equal to man. She was forced by circumstances and, in turn, she forced herself through and acquired her new status. Whether all women were pleased with these circumstances, and whether they are happy and satisfied with the results of this course is a different matter. But the fact remains that whatever rights the modern women enjoy fall short of those of what Islam gave the Muslim women long ago.

If we look at the status of a woman in the western nations, we find that she is not really in a happy situation. She has to work hard to live, and sometimes she does what a man does but her wage is less than his. To get where they are, women struggled hard for centuries. To get freedom of work and earning, they had to offer painful sacrifices and give up many of their natural rights. Yet, in spite of all these sacrifices and painful struggles, they have not acquired what Islam gave the Muslim women by a divine decree over fourteen centuries ago. Most women today exercise the right to go out independently, to work and earn, and pretend to be equal to man; but this, sadly enough, is at the expense of their families.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The discussion in the foregoing chapters on Hinduism and Islam should enable the reader to formulate some basic ideas needed to make a comparison between the two religions and draw his or her own conclusions. This chapter presents a summary of the discussion and also some conclusions based on the study.

I

1.1 Hinduism and Islam are among the major religions of the world. While Hinduism dates back to thousands of years, Islam is generally regarded as the youngest religion of the world. The prevailing conceptual understanding of Islam, however, is erroneous. In fact, Islam is the Arabic name of the revealed religion which was preached by all the messengers of God since the dawn of human civilization. While Islam claims to be a revealed religion, Hinduism does not make such a claim. However, some Hindu scholars suggest that their religion is eternal. While Islam got its full body of beliefs, rituals, rules and regulations from Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) himself, the development of the beliefs and rituals of Hinduism took a very long period of time and still it has not reached a stable position. May be this fact explains why the creed,

teachings, rules and regulations of Islam remained intact but those of Hinduism could not get any definite form and as a result Hinduism became a basket which contains everything for everybody.

1.2 While the term 'Hinduism' is derived from and based on the word 'Hindu', name of a people, 'Islam' is not based on any other word but it is the proper name given by God in the Our'an for the religion propagated by the Prophet of Islam. While 'Hinduism' simply indicates the religion of Hindus, Islam is an original word used from the very beginning as the name of a particular religion. While Islam is the Arabic name of the eternal religion chosen by God for human beings, Hindus have no specific name for their religion; sometimes they call it *Vedic Dharma* (religion of the *Veda*), sometimes *Sanatan Dharma* (eternal religion).

1.3 While the word 'Hindu' is alien, given by Muslims to the ancient people of India, the word 'Muslim' is given in the Our'an for the people who follow Islam. While the word 'Hindu' is, originally, related to a region (used as the name of the ancient people who lived in a particular geographical area) without any ideological implications, the word 'Muslim' is related to a religion. Anyone who accepts Islam is a Muslim, but anyone who lives in the region beyond the Indus river (inhabited by the ancient people of India) cannot be called Hindu. While the terms 'Islam' and 'Muslim' are used in the Our'an, the most sacred scripture of Islam, the words 'Hinduism' and

'Hindu' were not used in Hindu scriptures; both of these words were coined by non-Hindus- 'Hindu' by Muslims and 'Hinduism' by Christians.

1.4 While Islam is a revealed, comprehensive and precise religion, Hinduism utterly lacks in precision, and cannot even be defined. Dr. Radhakrishnan, a celebrated authority on Hinduism, could not define the term. The aggregate of the traditions, beliefs, customs and institutions of all the tribes and castes in India who are not Muslims or Christians is called Hinduism, though they may be mutually irreconcilable themselves.¹ It is, therefore, difficult to call it a religion because it does not provide any specific lesson or definite guidance for the spiritual and moral development of its followers. In view of this fact, a scholar like Jawaharlal Nehru was not convinced to call it a religion and a veteran champion of the so-called Hindutva movement, Atal Bihari Bajpayee² was compelled to admit that 'Hinduism was not a religion, but a way of life.'³ This is why Dayananda Saraswati and Raja Rammohon Roy tried to develop new versions of Hinduism called *Arya Samaj* (not Hindu *Samaj*) for the Aryan Hindus and *Brahma Samaj* (not Hindu *Samaj*) for the monotheist Hindus respectively. In

¹ Thcertha, p. 176.

² He was prime minister of India for a record period of thirteen days.

³ See *Arab News*, 9 June 1996.

fact, Hinduism is a social system which got a superficial and fake religious cover through the efforts made by the *Brahmans* to serve their own interests.

1.5 Since Hinduism as a way of life does not provide any precise moral or spiritual guidance, its inner significance, if any, remains beyond the comprehension of even the eminent scholars. However, one thing is clear about Hinduism. In view of the fact that it includes so many diverse, heterogeneous and contradictory elements, one can say that Hinduism has everything for everybody. Modern Hindu scholars suggest that this heterogeneity provides Hinduism with flexibility and diversity. But the question remains: Does this feature not strip Hinduism of any practical use? If a tax officer declares: "If you pay the tax, you are a good citizen; if you do not pay the tax, you are a bad citizen." does it make any sense? The position of Hinduism is simply like this. To give a specific example, the *Rig Veda*, the most sacred Hindu scripture, gives different number of gods at different places. Some of the gods were rejected and some new gods fabricated subsequently. The *Puranas* compiled at a later stage multiplied the number of gods and reallocated their status. This situation renders one helpless with respect to forming any idea about god. Islam, on the contrary, is very precise and clear in all its teachings. Take, for example, the Qur'an, which was revealed during a period of twenty-three years. The doctrine of *tawhid* (unity of God) runs through it from the beginning to the end with the same clarity, emphasis and tone. Similarly, *shirk*

(associating partner with God) has been condemned throughout in the same vein without showing any slackness anywhere. This is because the Our'an was revealed from one single source, God Almighty, only Whose Word is perfect.

1.6 An examination of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' in their historical, social, and cultural perspectives may lead one to conclude that it is a misnomer to call the non-Muslim, non-Christian Indians 'Hindu'. This is because they have nothing in common in their culture, beliefs or rituals which can be regarded as a basis for the community to be called 'Hindu'. Mere the fact of being non-Muslims and non-Christians does not provide enough justification for them to be called 'Hindu'. Secondly, most of the so-called low-caste (non-Aryan) Hindus, who constitute over 65 percent of the population of India do not regard themselves as Hindu. Thirdly, historically, the word is believed to indicate only those people who used to live beyond the Indus river. Finally, the word 'Hindu' is alien, not Indian.

1.7 In the absence of generally accepted rules, Hinduism gives license to everybody to do whatever he or she likes in the name of religion. As a result, whatever a Hindu does could become an element of Hinduism. A Hindu writer defines Hinduism as: "Hinduism is that which a Hindu does."⁴ This is because Hindus believe in

⁴ERE, 6:699.

anything and everything, if said in the name of religion. They never question the logical basis or authenticity of the source of what is said or done in the name of religion. There is no criterion to judge the authenticity and veracity of a religious statement or book or the reliability of a person speaking or writing for the religion. The case of Islam is just the opposite. Each and every element of Islam is from the sources of its laws. These sources are the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet, the Ijma' (the consensus of the jurists⁵) and the Qiyas (analogical reasoning). There is no room for anybody, whatever may be his or her scholarly attainments, to add anything to the body of Islam. The Prophet very strictly closed the door of innovation in Islam. This fact, among other things, explains why Islam could retain its originality,

1.8 Hinduism is based on irrational beliefs, dogmas and superstitions. Hindu scriptures, especially the *Puranas* are full of absurd and ridiculous stories relating to the deities. It appears that Hindu rishis or writers never failed to explain natural phenomena in such a way as to elevate the status of their favourite deities. As an illustration,

⁵ These jurists include only those universally recognized by the Islamic Ummah,

⁶ This sort of reasoning is acceptable only when done by a jurist who belongs to the group mentioned above.

consider the following story which highlights the power of Daksha and presents the cause of the lunar eclipse:

Chandra (the moon) married 27 daughters of Daksha but was more inclined to Rohini, one of the sisters. When the sisters of Rohini took the matter to their father he cursed Chandra. As a result of the curse, Chandra was decreasing in size. Realizing the danger, Chandra repented for his mistake and started equally treating all his wives. Now, his size began to increase till he became full. Since that incident, Chandra (the moon) decreases in size in one fortnight and the opposite happens to him in the other fortnight of the lunar month.'

Islam strongly urges human beings to apply reason and shun superstitions, irrational beliefs and meaningless rites and practices. Compare the following incident with the one mentioned above:

When Ibrahim -m. son of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) died, there was solar eclipse. It was said that the eclipse was due to the death of Ibrahim. The Prophet instantly corrected the remark saying that the sun and the moon are two signs of God; the death and life of a person has nothing to do with their eclipse.⁸

⁷ Bhattacharya, pp. 52-53.

⁸ al-Halabi, al-Silah al-Halabtyyah, (Beirut: 1980), 3:396.

'1.9 Islam, which ensures peace in this world and eternal blessing in the hereafter, is a complete code of life with precise rules and regulations needed to lead a pious life in this world. Hinduism does not offer any clear vision about life nor does it provide any body of rules and regulations to guide individual and social life. It, however, provides absolute freedom in respect of religious pursuits so long as it does not cause any harm to the caste-based social system. It seems that Hinduism has no other purpose except maintaining the status quo in the social system, which was developed by the *Brahmans* with a view to serving their own interest and maintaining the domination of Aryan Hindus over other people.

II

2.1 All the Hindu scriptures have a mythical origin and nobody knows for sure when and how they got their origin and by whom they were compiled. The origin of the scriptures of Islam (the Our'an and the compilations of *hadiths*), on the other hand, is firmly established. Even the occasions, dates and places concerning the revelation of the verses of the Our'iin are recorded in a special branch of Islamic literature known as 'Ulum al-Qur'dn' (Sciences of the Our'an)." Similarly, the detailed

⁹ Under this broad bead falls tens of branches of knowledge each relating to a particular aspect of the Our'an (c.g., *ta'sir*, *tajwifd*); again, each branch contains thousands of books written on the subject.

information about the narrators of the *hadlth*, starting from one who listened to the Prophet to one who compiled it, has been preserved in a special branch of Islamic literature known as *Asma al-Rijal* (Particulars of the Narrators)."

2.2 The Hindu scriptures have undergone distortions, interpolations and changes over time. No doubt, these scriptures include those who have high intellectual and philosophical value but they are full of contradictions and confusing ideas. The *Veda*, the most sacred scripture, for example, presents different number of deities at different places. The contradictions are more true in respect of other scriptures like the *Puranas* and *Upanishadas*. This phenomenon has minimized their usefulness except for literary pursuit. Moreover, written in Sanskrit, a dead language, even the *Brahmans* have little access to them, not to speak of the non-Aryan Hindus and womenfolk, who have been debarred from reading or listening to the *Veda* by the *Veda* itself. The scriptures of Islam, on the other hand, remained intact, completely free from any change. The Our'an has remained well-preserved and intact in written form in such a manner that there is no difference, whatsoever, between its first edition and the

¹⁰ This is a new and unique addition to the body of knowledge. Muslim scholars, for the first time, compiled under this head in the encyclopedic form detailed biographic data on over one hundred thousand narrators (*ruwat* in Arabic) of *hadlth*. This they did for the single purpose of retaining the purity and originality of the *hadlth*,

most recent edition; simultaneously, it has remained preserved in the hearts of millions of Muslims. It is a startling fact that since its revelation, there has passed not a single moment when it was not recited by thousands of its followers.

2.3 Every minute detail about the life of the Prophet of Islam has remained well-preserved. Even the biographies of those who were directly or indirectly involved in the collection and compilation of his sayings, actions or any other information relating to him, also have been written properly and are available to any reader for scrutiny. Thus, it remains above any shadow of doubt that the records about the Prophet, which came down to us over centuries, are all correct. The case of Hinduism is just the opposite. Consider the case of the rishis who are believed by Hindus to have received parts of the *Vedas* from earlier thinkers and communicated the same orally to the later generations over centuries. Who were these people? Who were the people who received the *Vedas* from the rishis? Can Hinduism provide detailed and reliable information about these people? It appears that Hinduism has no answer to these questions. There are, of course, traces of information about the origin and activities of some of the rishis but these are no more than shameless narrations about sexual affairs and pornographic stories.

2.4 The contents of Hindu scriptures are full of ambiguity, confusion and in many cases contradictory.

Take, for example, the *Veda*; it gives confusing and contradictory ideas about even the god advocating both monotheism and polytheism. The contents of the scriptures of Islam, on the other hand, are crystal clear, precise and in full conformity with reason. A serious reader of the Our'an and the *Sunnah* finds to his surprise that the basic concepts like *tawhîd*, *risdlat* and *dkhîrat* and all other religious teachings always have full consistency everywhere with the same tone and emphasis.

2.5 The scriptures of Islam received unparalleled care and attention for their preservation, interpretation, and application in real life. These efforts made by Muslim scholars led to the development of a large number of academic disciplines which fall under the category of Islamic literature. Since the time of the Prophet of Islam, the teachings contained in the scriptures of Islam are being followed and practiced by Muslims with utmost care and devotion without any break even for a single moment. The scriptures of Hinduism, on the other hand, have little practical use. Hinduism never had any body of teachings for the people called Hindu. This fact explains why Islam could maintain its original purity and Hinduism fails to say what was its original shape and what changes have been made in it from time to time.

III

3.1. Hindu views concerning God are shrouded in vagueness and utterly lack acceptability to any sensible

mind. They seem to be a jumble of rudimentary and conflicting ideas developed by different people at different times. This fact becomes evident when we consider the prevailing ideas concerning the number, character and other aspects of Hindu gods. The concept of God in Islam, on the other hand, is perfect, precise, clear and in complete accord with reason. We notice that the whole universe is regulated and controlled by a definite law. The uniformity, regularity and complete obedience to a firm law in all fields of nature indicates that there is one and only one single authority who governs the universe. That single and absolute authority is God Almighty. If two or more entities share the powers and exercise control over the universe, there will be chaos everywhere. The collusion among them will turn the whole world into pieces. Obviously, the concept of many gods and goddesses, prevailing among Hindus, does not hold water.

3.2 Hindus generally believe in 330 millions of deities of whom very few (hardly 400) have got some description or mention in the scriptures and the rest are not known even by their names. In the scriptures, there is no clear indication as to who is the most superior among them. This situation keeps a Hindu in a state of confusion as to who to worship and who to invoke when in distress. As he cannot worship or satisfy all of them, he has to choose one from among them. This is a task beyond human capacity. A Hindu, however, selects one who seems to be the most favoured to him for some reason or other and

regards him or her as the most superior. The worshippers of particular deities are grouped together as sects. The Vaishnavas (worshippers of Vishnu) regard Vishnu as the most superior, the *Saivas* (worshippers of Siva) regard Siva as the most superior. Similarly, in southern India, Hanuman (monkey god) is adored by Hindus with complete disrespect to Rama, but the case is just the opposite in the northern cow-belt region of India.

3.3 Belief in the existence of many deities makes all the religious efforts of a Hindu futile. As he can never satisfy all of them, he is always afraid that those who did not receive his adoration may harm him. As it has not been said in the Hindu *shastras* that worshipping any one or some of the deities will fetch salvation, he always has doubt in his mind as to the usefulness of his worship. He worships his favourite deity but he is never contented because he could not be sure that he had worshipped the right one. As Wilkins observes, "Shrine after shrine is visited and work after work is done; and yet the fear remains that some deity has been neglected who at any moment may demand his right, or punish for neglect."¹¹ Belief in one God as expounded by Islam keeps a person free from any confusion with respect to adoring and approaching his or her Supreme Lord.

3.4 Hindu deities are conspicuous by their immoral and criminal activities. The accounts of their activities and

¹¹ Wilkins, 1975, p.39.

those of the holy personalities narrated in the Hindu scriptures do not present any good lesson to be followed by a Hindu and make it a difficult job to adore them with due respect and reverence. The most striking aspect about these narrations is the fact that they are conspicuous by the acts of obscenity, vulgarity and all sorts of immorality. These things have simply lowered the Hindu scriptures to the level of pornographic literature. As the character of Hindu deities widely differ from one another, Hinduism utterly fails to provide any guidance in every day life of a man. In the words of Wilkins "almost any habit can be indulged in, almost any vice committed, under the impression that it is pleasing to one or other. If a man is inclined to drink spirits, he can use *bhang*, or opium. He can do this as an act pleasing to Siva. Does he wish to eat flesh? This can be done as part of the worship of Kali. Is he lustful? He has an example in Krishna."¹² God, as expounded by Islam, has all the sublime attributes and is above all imperfections. Islam strictly forbids the immoral activities, highly emphasizes the purification of life from all evil things, and the spiritual elevation. The books written on Islam by Muslim scholars are filled with moral lessons and the life of any pious Muslim of any period is replete with noble examples for others to follow for improving their moral character and attaining spiritual upliftment.

¹² Wilkins, 1975, p.39.

3.5 In Hinduism, there is no direct relation between a devotee and his god. A devotee must approach his chosen deity through a priest (who must be a *Brahman*). The idea of a Merciful God who forgives the sin of His servants is absent in Hinduism and, therefore, His favour must be purchased against some payment made to the priest. God, in Islam, is Most Merciful, Most Gracious and there is no intermediary between Him and a person. There is no bar to establishing direct relation with Him. He exhorts human beings to seek His forgiveness which He is always ready to offer them.¹³

3.6 Hindus believe in incarnation of god. Islam rejects incarnation. The communion with God is not attained by God assuming a human form, but by man rising towards God by spiritual progress and the purification of life from all bad desires and low motives. Reason cannot accept as god a man who was born of human parents, suffered from human wants and grew in stature, power and wisdom like all other human beings. To put human limitations on God and to believe in His complete manifestation in human form is to deny the perfection of God. It was an old pagan idea to think of the great man as an incarnation of the deity. By preserving and upholding that idea, Hindus align themselves with the pagans of the old age. One can ask, "How can God in flesh serve as a model for frail human beings who have

¹³ See the Our'an, 39:53.

to meet hundreds of temptations? Is it not necessary for God to be above any temptation?"

IV

4.1. In Hinduism, there is no definite system of worship but in line with the ancient pagan practices, the objects of worship are many. Hindus worship and adore bodies like rivers, plants like *tulasi* plant, and animals like cows", snakes, monkeys, and even rats as their deities. Not only that, a very important object of their worship is *linga*, an image of male organ erect on its female counterpart as its base in the most obscene manner. Worship of these things relegates human beings to a position lower than that of animals and inanimate objects. Although the *Veda* is universally regarded by Hindus as the most sacred scripture, the ancient practice of sacrifice so strongly emphasized in it has been abandoned altogether. Islam teaches that everything on the earth has been created for mankind. These things are to serve them, not to be worshipped by them. Men have been exhorted to use them to meet their requirements. Islam tries to free humanity from the false bondage and servitude of everything other than God Almighty. This is in line with the dignity of human beings and their superiority over all other creations. Islam provides a definite and precise system of worship characterized by

¹⁴ Hindus, however, do not hesitate to use the shoes made of the leather from the skins of the cows and their offsprings.

Creator-worship rather than creation-worship as a means to ensure peace in this world and eternal blessings in the hereafter.

4.2 Hinduism provides a characteristic example of the primitive, unorganized polytheism, an example probably unique among the races of modern world.¹⁵ Idolatry and polytheism were also prevalent in Arabian peninsula during the era known as *Ayyam Jahilyyan* (Days of Ignorance) which ended with the appearance of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). But compared with those of ancient Arabia, the practices of paganism, polytheism and idol-worship as they prevail in India till date, seem to be far more advanced in their magnitude, intensity and crudeness. This is because the Arab pagans used to worship the images of some gods only but Hindus worship not only the images of gods but also their vehicles, weapons, etc., and they do not spare even animals (e.g., monkey, cow, rat), trees, etc., in this respect. In this sense, Hindus seem to be much more paganistic in their outlook and practices than the Arab pagans.

4.3 Hindu system of worship involves observance of rituals without any regard for the worshipper to attain purification in personal character or achieve spiritual elevation. These rituals performed in the form of idle worship serve only the interests of the priests. It is only

¹⁵ ERE, 6:712.

due to the false authority of the *Brahman* priests and their deceitful acts and fake practices that the idol worship of the primitive age could survive in Hindu society. In the words of S.D. Theertha: "*If each worshipper were allowed to keep his idol and worship it himself, he would soon discover what nonsense it all is. But apart from that what purpose does the organized religion of public temples serve in national life, except to perpetuate the degradation of the masses, to facilitate the exploitation by priests.*"¹⁶ In contrast with Hinduism, Islam highly emphasizes the need for attaining purification in personal character, and acquiring spiritual elevation as a means to gain salvation and eternal bliss in the hereafter. This is the main objective of a Muslim's worship. Islam regards paganism not only as a meaningless practice but also as the most heinous sin because creation-worship keeps human beings away from Creator-worship, the very purpose for which they have been created, and at the same time makes them the lowest of the low, sub-servient to the forces of nature.

4.4 Justifying the idle-worship, Hindu scholars of even today say that forming correct idea about Supreme God and worshipping Him is not an easy job, especially for the common people. Idle-worship, therefore, is a temporary system of training for developing the skill in that direction. One must worship idles until one acquires that skill. As soon as a man is capable of worshipping the

¹⁶ Theertha, p. 195.

real God, he should renounce idle-worship. The idles and images are not the targets of the worshippers, they are the means to reach the real target. To a rational mind, these arguments put forward in support of the idle-worship are not acceptable. This is because idolatry breeds ignorance, superstitions and corruptions. An evaluation of this practice which was introduced thousands of years ago leads one to the conclusion that it never leads one to the true form of worship: worship of the Supreme Lord. The idle-worshippers could never show any sign of progress in that direction and they are just whirling round the idles for so many years; they are still where they were thousands of years back. It has been observed that even the most enlightened idle-worshippers or Hindus could not show enough moral and spiritual strength to get out of this impasse. This fact should sufficiently prove the futility of idle-worship. Realizing this fact, the people all over the world except India abandoned idol-worship long ago. One, however, feels stupefied to find that not only the images of gods and goddesses but animals like owl, rat, snake and various inanimate objects are still adored in India.¹⁷ It is time to see whether Hindus of India, a country which is showing amazing progress in catching up with the developed countries in the area of science and technology, could follow the world community in renouncing the age-old paganism and the dogmas, beliefs, rituals and all other practices related to it.

¹⁷ See Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, pp 87-90.

V

5.1 The conditions of a Hindu lying in the death-bed are very miserable. The treatment meted out to him for the sake of making him happy after his death seems to be inhuman. It is very usual for a person to expect to breathe his last in the most familiar surroundings and homely atmosphere among his nearest and dearest ones. But Hinduism makes a dying person to be dragged away to some strange place and horrifying environment, away from his own bed and surroundings. Similarly, at the time of cremation, the eldest son puts fire in the mouth of his most respected person, his father. To a sensible human being, it is difficult to understand, what type of respect it is shown by the most beloved one to his dear and respected father, at the last moment of his final departure. In Islam, a person in his last journey from this world is treated in the best possible manner. When he breathes his last, special prayer is offered for his salvation and forgiveness. The corpse is buried with utmost care and respect.

5.2 A Hindu has no clear vision as to what would be his fate in the hereafter. Even if he has an expectation to deserve salvation from hell and attain some place in paradise, he cannot be happy. This is because of the fear that his stay in paradise will be for a temporary period and he will be turned out anytime. A Muslim's vision about his prospects in the hereafter is very clear. His only mission in this earthly life is to qualify himself through

good deeds for attaining salvation and a permanent blissful life in the hereafter. He has got clear and precise guidance from Almighty God to work for reaching this target. In paradise, there will be all that the souls could desire, all that the eyes could delight in, for those who believed and did good actions. There they will remain for ever.

6.1 Hindu social system is a living embodiment of gross injustice. The society is based on the principle of inequality, The position of a man is determined by his birth, an aspect completely beyond his control. Introduced By a section of the Aryan invaders to keep the vast majority of the people (original Indians) under subjugation, the system was later sanctified by Hindu scriptures to give it a perpetual lease of life. It is really very difficult to understand how a social system based on vama (colour) could survive in India when the modern civilization has wiped out all the traces of apartheid even from the dark continent. One wonders, standing on the threshold of the twenty-first century, whether the Indian people have any prospect to shun the traces of the racial atrocities, whether the vast majority of them will be able to throw off the yoke of the inhuman, humiliating and tyrannic caste system imposed on them some thousands of years ago.

6.2 The caste system has relegated the non-Aryan Hindus to a position of slaves. *Dasyu* (slave), *Sudra* (slave), *Harijon* (bastard), and similar other names given to them by the Aryan Hindus are definitely derogatory and absolutely inappropriate for any human being of any time. The Islamic social system, on the contrary, ensures that every human being enjoys freedom and liberty as his or her birth-right. During the caliphate of 'Umar, the son of the Muslim commander who had conquered Egypt and was working as Governor of the country, whipped the son of an ordinary Egyptian. The victim went to Madina and lodged a complaint against the culprit. The Caliph immediately summoned the Governor and his son. When the punishment of the accused was over, the Caliph angrily said to the Governor: "When did you start to enslave the people, though they were born free of their mothers?"

6.3 Hinduism is very unkind to women. The life of a woman, from early childhood to its end, is simply miserable. Early marriage of girls, temple prostitution in the form of *devdasi*, the institution of widow-burning in the name of *sati*, and the wretched life of widows in the society, all are something not expected of a system called religion. These practices were prevalent in Hindu society in India till they were banned by laws enacted by a foreign power. Islam does not make any discrimination against women. All human beings are equal regardless of their gender. What a woman of western society attained in this century after so much struggle, was given by Islam

to women over fourteen centuries ago. Of course, equality in the context of man and woman does not mean identity. Each sex has its sphere of activities commensurate with the physical, psychological and other factors.

6.4 Hindu social system presents an example of gross injustice in so far as it elevates the *Brahman* class to a divine position and at the same time lowers other sections of the society to an extremely low level. From the quotations given below one can imagine to what level the dignity of non-Aryan Hindus was lowered by the *Brahmans*.

*"As a Brahman walks through the streets, low-caste people account it an honour to take the dust from his feet and place it upon their head[s], and even to drink the water in which his feet have been washed. This is through fear of his curse, and his supposed influence over gods."*¹⁸

Islam treats all the children of Adam with respect and honour. None is superior to other on the basis of his or her profession, race, colour or gender. The dignity and honour is for all and not for any particular section of the people. Once, when a funeral procession was passing by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) he stood up as a gesture of respect. The people around him said to him, *"It is the*

¹⁸ Wilkins, 1975, pp. 266-67.

funeral of a Jew." The Prophet said: "*Does not a Jew have a soul?*"

6.5 It appears that in Hinduism there is no prospect for improving the social status of the teeming millions of non-Aryan people who are considered as low-caste or outcaste Hindu. For centuries, these people remained victims of the discriminatory and oppressive social system. In India, which is claimed to be the largest democracy in the world, no attempt is being made either at the government level or at any other level, to break the shackle of the age-old caste system, which is a strangle-horo on social harmony and basic human dignity. However, taking into account the growing awareness among the caste-victims of the country regarding their basic human rights, one can conclude that the new millennium is bound to be different for them. It appears that the only way open to them for getting out of the impasse is to cross the artificial barrier of Hinduism which, so far as they are concerned, seems completely irrelevant and out of context. Islam with its social system based on pure justice, equality and brotherhood has in all ages been the only haven for the oppressed people of the world.

VII

7.1 The expressed aim of the protagonists of the current *Hindutva* movement of India is to completely "Hinduise" the Indian society, of which over twenty percent (15

percent Muslims and 5 percent others) is non-Hindu people, seems to be a hollow cry in the wilderness. This is because in Hinduism there is no provision for conversion. The caste-based social system is essentially hereditary. Hindu law-giver Manu could not contemplate the possibility of there being any other people who might be accommodated within the fold of the four-fold caste system. The laws given by him could not accommodate even the original Indians (e.g., *Daius*, tribal people) in the Hindu society and kept them outside the fold of Hindu society as outcaste (i.e., not belonging to a caste).¹⁹ As there is no provision for conversion in Hinduism, the religion is exclusively for those who are Hindus by birth. If Indian non-Hindus are to be converted to Hinduism, the abominable caste system has to be abolished first and, at the same time, provision has to be made for conversion. It, however, appears that the only concern of the protagonists of so-called Hindutva movement is to use or misuse their religion for achieving their political objectives. Apart from providing a platform for political pursuits, Hinduism is of no use to them. For a person sincerely seeking after the truth, there is nothing in Hinduism: he has to look for it elsewhere.

¹⁹ It must be noted here that these unfortunate people who are denied all the social and human rights by Hindu scriptures, have nothing to do with Hinduism. The cunning *Brahmans* classified them as a special group (outcaste) under Hindu community in order to extend the sphere of their domination over them.

7.2 Some Hindu reformers and philosophers made attempts from time to time to provide their community with a logically acceptable concept of god and reform the social system so as to eliminate the injustices of the caste system. These attempts, however, utterly failed. This is because human knowledge cannot be a substitute for divine guidance. Naturally, a question arises here: How long a substantial portion of the children of Adam will continue to sink in the ocean of darkness, ignoring the heavenly light dazzling and glittering around them? Age-old superstitions and prejudices keep human beings away from the truth. When invited to Islam, the pagans and polytheists of Arabia used to say: "We shall follow the ways of our fathers." It is only courage and sincere desire for the truth which can enable one to shun irrational beliefs, prejudices and superstitions and accept the divine guidance sent by Almighty God.

7.3 Hinduism pays little or no attention to the moral aspect of human life. In fact, the activities of Hindu gods encourage their worshippers to be involved in various immoral practices. A reader of Hindu scriptures finds, to his utter dismay, that Hindu gods were involved most unscrupulously in various deceitful, obscene and immoral activities. These activities included adultery, fornication, theft, telling lies, abduction, killing, addiction to alcohol, etc. In contrast, Islam is very strict about the morality of a person. It teaches mankind not only to maintain the purity of moral character but also to attain a very high degree of morality.

7.4 The prevailing customs and superstitious beliefs based on the teachings of Hindu scriptures cause severe damage to the psyche of a Hindu. He loses the sense of self-respect and dignity and does not hesitate to go to any extent when trying to make some gain. For example, Rajib Gandhi, ex-prime minister of India, bowed his head before Deoraha Baba, a Hindu guru, who put his foot on Rajib's head, thereby issuing his pretended blessing to him. Similarly, twenty ministers of Narasimha Rao's cabinet (himself included), touched, as a gesture of respect, the feet of Chandra Swami." a Hindu *sadhu*, who has been found involved in some heinous scandals of cheating and corruption.²¹ In contrast, Islam encourages human beings, the best among the creations of God, to keep their dignity high up. This is because God when created Adam, the first father of human beings, ordered His angels to bow down to him in adoration. According to the Our'an, everything in the earth has been created for human beings. In line with the dignity conferred by God on human beings, Islam has made special provisions for the protection of their honour and even of their privacy. A Muslim is never allowed to bow his head before anybody except the Almighty Lord.

²⁰ *Arab News*, June 8, 1996.

²¹ The blessings of these holy (?) men, however, could not help the former two prime ministers in the elections; both of them faced humiliating defeat.

VIII

8.1 Hinduism and Islam, both have some elements, apparently common. Both believe in the existence of God, and also in the concepts like spirits (*jinn*), life after death, paradise, and hell. While Hindus believe in the existence of a large number of deities, Muslims believe in a large number of angels. These concepts, though appear to be common in both the religions, sharply differ with respect to the details of their nature. While Hindus worship a large number of deities, Muslims believe that angels are creations of God engaged in various tasks assigned to them. They worship only One God. While Muslims believe that an angel called 'Azra'Il is responsible to take the souls, Hindus believe that a devata called *Yama* is assigned the same job. But while 'Azra'Il is regarded by Muslims as one of the most respectable angels, *Yama* is regarded by Hindus simply as a symbol of terror. While Muslims believe in the existence of *hur* in paradise, Hindus believe in the existence of *apsara* there. But while a *hur* is considered to serve the dweller of paradise as a wife, an *apsara* is regarded as a prostitute. While Muslims believe that messengers of God were sent from time to time to various nations to teach them righteousness, Hindus believe that God Himself comes to this world as an *avatara* (incarnation) in the form of human being or any other creature with a view to eliminating corruption and restoring order. But while Muslims respect all the prophets as the most respectable servants of God, Hindus

worship the *avatars* as their gods. Both Hinduism and Islam agree that human life has a purpose and that is to make the new life after death happy and peaceful.

8.2 This temporal world is a place for action where a person can accumulate for his or her sustenance and glory in the world to come. If he or she neglects spiritual pursuits, he or she will lose the rich reward in the next world. If, on the other hand, he or she follows the true guidance of his or her Lord, he or she will be successful in his or her mission in this world and will attain eternal blessings in the world to come. It is obviously wise to adopt a way of life which provides clear and precise guidance based on rationality. It is only Islam which can provide such a guidance.

8.3 According to Islam, to every people God sent a prophet to guide them to the right path. All the prophets were sent with the same divine message, to urge their people to worship God alone and shun idolatry. While every earlier prophet was sent to his own people, Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to all nations of the earth.²² This fact distinguishes him from all other prophets and also distinguishes Islam from all other religions.

8.4 It is very unlikely that a significant portion of the world population living in India was left by God without

²² See the Our'an, 7:58.

any prophet. As mentioned earlier, Hindus generally believe in one God. The main objects of Hindu worship are the *devas* (i.e. deities). The word deva has been derived from *div* which "is connected with brightness and radiance, and the *devas* by connotation were the shining ones."²³ One of the attributive names of God is Light. Some scholars suggest that 'Brahma', a very important name in Hinduism is a distortion of Ibrahim (English, Abraham) who is called "Abul Ambia" (father of prophets) and was very prominent among the messengers of God. Hindu concepts of life after death, heaven, hell, Yoma, etc., at least superficially resemble those in Islam. It is very likely that Hindus received these concepts through some prophets who were sent to India but like the teachings of Christianity and Judaism, these were distorted subsequently. May be like other religions of the past, the religion of India was distorted and lost its original form. Famous Muslim saint Ahmad Sarhindi, known as Mujaddid-i-Alf Thanf (971H-1034H) and eminent scholar Ashraf Alf Thanavi (1280H/1863G-1362H/1942G)), reportedly, were of the view that prophets were sent to India. According to Dr. Veda Prakash Upadhdhay, a renowned scholar of Sanskrit, the term avatara is an equivalent of prophet in English. He also suggests that the Sanskrit word 'Narashongsa' widely used in Hindu scriptures including the Rig Veda means 'praised' and is the equivalent of the Arabic word 'Muhammad' which also means 'praised'. After

²³ Basham, p. 235.

thoroughly examining different Hindu scriptures, he established by clear evidences that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was none but Kalki, the last *avatara*, predicted in many scriptures.²⁴

8.5 It is only Islam which still has for mankind divine guidance in its original, pure and undistorted form. Only Islam has the true standard for judgment of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. This standard is obtained not by a trial and error method; it was given by the Creator Himself. Islam is not based on meaningless dogmas and rituals; each element of its teachings has its *raison d'etre*, logical basis and justification.

8.6 The religion propagated by every earlier prophet sent by God from time to time got its complete form in Islam preached by Muhammad (pbuh). Islam came to purify the divine guidance from all distortions and give it a complete form for all the people of the world till the Day of Judgment. Islam, therefore, is not only the latest form of the eternal religion, it is an all-inclusive religion which contains within itself all religions which were propagated earlier. Islam is not for any particular group of people; it is for all mankind. The Qur'an says:

²⁴ For details see *Veda O Purane Hazrat Muhammad* (Bengali) by Dr. Veda Prakash Upadhdhay, M.A. (Sanskrit), D. Phil., Prayag University, India, tr. by Prof. Asit Kumar Bandapadhdhay.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَشْكُرَهُ لَوْلَا دَعْوَةُ اللَّهِ
 وَالنَّبِيِّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ أَلَمَّا نَسُوا اللَّهَ أَلَمَّا اسْتَمْتَعُوا بِرَحْمَتِهِ
 وَأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا مُعْتَدِينَ

*"Say (O Muhammad): O men! I am sent to you all, as the Messenger of God, to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; there is no god except Him; it is He Who gives both life and death. So believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His Words: follow him so that you may be on the right path."*²⁵

Addressing those people who were given specific divine books, the Qur'an says:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَشْكُرَهُ لَوْلَا دَعْوَةُ اللَّهِ
 وَالنَّبِيِّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ أَلَمَّا نَسُوا اللَّهَ أَلَمَّا اسْتَمْتَعُوا بِرَحْمَتِهِ
 وَأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا مُعْتَدِينَ

The Qur'an, 7: 158.

247 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

"Say: O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you; that we worship none but God; that we associate no partner with Him; that we take not from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God If they turn back, say: Bear witness that we [at least] are Muslims"²⁶

The Qur'an, 3:64.

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