

INDIA'S CONTRIBUTION TO RELIGION AND ITS EFFECT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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THE outstanding and unique contribution of the Hindus to religion has a very special significance for a real and uncoerced betterment of international relations. I shall, therefore, attempt to summarize, as clearly as I may, the thought and attitude of the Hindus in this matter, as presented in their literature from the earliest times and as manifested in their daily life.

Almost every religion in the world is forced to hang its head in shame at the fact of the butchery and bloodshed that has been perpetrated by its followers, on numerous occasions, in the name of the love of God or in that of the service of man's eternal welfare. I need only mention as examples, the massacres of the Protestants by the "bloody Mary" (queen of England), which were paralleled by the massacres of the Catholics effected by her sister whom the Protestants have called the "good queen Bess"; the Islamic practice of offering the Koran, and if it were rejected, piously severing the infidels' heads; the horrors that devastated the populations of Mexico and Peru under the Spanish Christian conception of zeal for the service of God and for the salvation of man. Probably Hinduism is the only religion that has never, in all its history, spilled one drop of human blood with the fancied object of extending God's kingdom or saving other people's souls. It may, therefore, not be without some possible use for us to look into the genesis of this happy consummation in the sunshine of which at least one religion seems always to have basked. For therein may be found some hint of a method which can be employed to neutralize the sourness that, among nations, curdles effort into the shame and bestiality of war.

We all recognize that different kinds of food are required to supply the needs for growth of human bodies at different ages and

in varying conditions of health—and that the forcing of a stereotyped diet on the infant, the child, the youth, the adult, the aged, the sick and the well, would result in some sort of a slaughter of the innocents. Hinduism recognizes that a similar principle applies in feeding the souls of men, in supplying their intellectual and emotional, as well as their spiritual, wants. Hence the universality and all-inclusiveness of Hinduism: for the little ones the worship of God as reflected in toy images—the picture-books of religion; for others the communion with the grandeur and beauty of God in the objects of Nature—the sky, the wind, the mountains, the rivers, the sun, the moon, the stars and the trees; for still others the strenuous effort to sublimate all dross so the human may become a fitter vessel for the Divine to shine through; and numerous other variations. Hinduism, then, includes in its technique for spiritual growth the rationale of idolatry, polytheism, monotheism, pantheism, atheism, agnosticism and numerous variants. And each of them is regarded as a method suited to some particular stage of spiritual stature for its further growth and development.

In other words the Hindu regards the different religions of the world, or the various aspects of his own religion, as different roads all leading to God from different stages or directions, corresponding to the varieties of spiritual growth. He regards each religion as most valuable for the individual adapted to it by birth, environment, education, etc. Hence, he considers any effort towards converting a man to another religion as futile and even mischievous. The only conversion he believes in is of oneself and of no one else, and it has to come from within and is a continuing process. There is no such thing as a “one and only true religion”; and in the very nature of things such a notion is a product of provincialism and exaggerated egoism. The Hindu’s view in this matter may be brought out more clearly by a story which was recently told by a Los Angeles teacher who had been giving lessons in biology and psychology for a considerable time to a devout Roman Catholic girl. One day he said to his pupil: “Now, you realize, don’t you, that if you had been born to, and brought up by, devout Mohammedan parents in Arabia or Turkey you would most likely have been a devout Mohammedan and would have come to believe in Mohammedanism as the one and only true religion as you now regard the Roman Catholic form of Christianity. And similarly un-

der appropriate other parentage and devotional environment you could have been a devout Confucian in China, Taöist in Japan, Greek Catholic in Russia, or Protestant in Holland." "Yes, yes, I quite admit that," said the pupil. "But, professor, I thank God that he had me born in *the* one and only true religion, and that he saved me from the terrible misfortune of devoutly accepting, as I might have done, a false faith and being forever damned."

Dr. John B. Watson has shown pretty conclusively, in his studies in behaviorism, that most religious beliefs are acquired through conditioning and have little to do with the intrinsic truth or falsity of such beliefs. Analytic psychology also points to a similar genesis of all unquestioned and unquestionable beliefs in "infantile fixations" which come to be regarded as self-evident and altogether above and beyond reason.

Hinduism seems to be particularly concerned in maintaining the fluidity of beliefs as opposed to their stagnation and crystallization, and insists that each belief is capable of proving itself useful to the appropriate individual; but that after all, it is only a crutch which must be later transcended if one is to travel onward and upward to the Truth which is God. For religious beliefs are merely means to an end. They are not, and can not be, absolutely true. For Truth or God is infinite; while human language and human thought are, in their very nature, limited. The limited obviously cannot encompass the infinite. Therefore everything that can be said, nay! everything that can be thought, is, in the strict sense of the term, untrue. All religions, therefore are untrue, in so far as they lay claim to being *the* Truth; their function is merely to supply a technique whereby we may develop the power or faculty to make an ever closer approach to an understanding of the absolute Truth which is God, by using the ladders of religion and finally transcending them.

The search of the man of religion is for the absolute Truth or that Uncontained Unity which he calls God and which the man of science calls Nature. The method used by both is the method of all mundane knowledge, viz. the selecting of certain details and isolating those from the rest. But in so doing—in isolating such and such details—we practically beg the question we are in search of; and moreover in supposing such isolation we suppose what is false, and therefore vitiate our conclusion. This method has been spoken

of as the method of ignorance or βῆδεπ (Avidyâ), i. e. of ignoring that which is inconvenient or inexpedient, and it may be illustrated even from that most exact science, Mathematics, and in its most perfect branch, Astronomy. Mathematicians have assured us that the moon in its passage round the earth describes an ellipse. But does it in reality? We must remember that while the moon is moving around the earth the latter is circling round the sun at a terrific pace, which makes it impossible for the moon to finish any closed curve around the earth at any time. We may only say that the moon is always starting a new ellipse in its motion round the earth but never gets the chance to complete one. But that is not all. There are perturbations produced in the path of the moon by its greater or less closeness to the earth in different periods of the month, and in the earth's orbit by its greater or less proximity to the sun in different seasons of the year as also by the proximity to or distance from it of other heavenly bodies at different times. Moreover, astronomers tell us that the whole solar system including the sun, earth, moon and other members of the system are moving at a tremendous rate of speed toward a distant point in space. What, then, becomes of the ellipse that the moon's orbit is held to describe around the earth? Why; it has no existence, it is not real. We may speak of it as merely a fiction, arrived at by the method of avidyâ, or ignorance, or ignoring. That is, granting the truth of the Newtonian law of gravitation (which Einstein has shaken up rather badly) and ignoring the existence of other heavenly bodies in space, and ignoring the rapid motion of the earth round the sun, and ignoring the stupendous motion of the solar system itself, if we merely consider the gravitational force as acting between the moon and the earth—the former would describe an ellipse around the latter. But our assumptions are false; the assumed state of things never has, does not, and probably never will exist. Obviously the elliptical orbit of the moon has never existed, does not exist, and probably will never exist. It has an existence merely in the mind, and is a fiction.

However, it has been said that the elliptical orbit must be real because eclipses of the moon can be calculated on that theory. But eclipses of the moon were almost equally well calculated, before the formulation of the elliptical theory, on the older epicyclical theory of Tycho Brahe. As John Stuart Mill, among others, has

shown, the ability to predict does not prove the truth of the theory on which the prediction is based. It merely indicates that the theory is good enough for the purposes of that prediction.

The views of religion—in common with the views of science—are, therefore, like the views of a mountain; each is only possible as long as you limit yourself to a certain standpoint. Move your position and the view is changed.

It should, therefore, be the proud privilege of religion to seek to encompass the Truth from as many angles as possible, and to harmonise effort—not by coercion, nor even by toleration, but by loving acceptance of the different religions and beliefs as honest gropings of finite minds after the Infinite. A necessary corrective to the danger of stagnation and to the intrusion of fraud is supplied by the admission and encouragement of complete freedom of thought and its expression—no matter how critical of, or in opposition to, the generally accepted or established order of things.

A considerable stress is laid in Hinduism on the technique for the development of the faculty whereby Truth or God may be truly known; and we are told that in the exercise of this faculty, when developed, is realised the supernal fact that real knowing and being are one. The whole system of Yoga is devoted to the study and exposition of this technique. I shall content myself here by stating that as pointed out by the great saint of modern India Mahatma Gandhi—who literally practices what he preaches even in the turmoil of active political life—that for the generation of soul-force there must exist the actual practice of truthfulness, fearlessness, conscious and willing suffering for others—all inspired by profound love. It is only by serving here and now our fellow-man (no matter of what religion or belief) in ways suited to him, that limited as we are, we may attain to a glimpse and foretaste of the serene majesty and unruffled joy of the Infinite. For if we cannot love our fellow-man whom we see, how shall we love God whom yet we cannot see?

Religion, to the Hindu mind, is not essentially a matter of the dead bones of formulated beliefs, but it is preëminently a living and dynamic process of fundamental growth leading to ever greater heights of self-unfoldment and mellowness of spirit. The religious or spiritual status of a man is determinable not by the labels placed on him by himself or by others—such as Hindu, Buddhist, Christian,

Mohammedan, Atheist, Agnostic, etc.—nor by the burden of self-imposed religiosity under which he be bowed to his misplaced satisfaction. It is to be determined rather by the natural simplicity of his living and by the measure in which there shines out through him, without the least affectation or self-consciousness the free radiance of the Deity who “maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.”