

INTRODUCTION

TO

*The Origin of Subjectivity in Hindu Thought**

ETHEL MAY KITCH

One of the most fascinating and yet most neglected fields of human experience is that known as Indian or Hindu thought. Hemmed in by the Himalaya Mountains and the Indian Sea, it existed in comparative isolation from both oriental and occidental thought until the invasion of the English in the eighteenth century. Even the hardest and most persistent investigator has been baffled by this prolific product of more than thirty centuries, extending from the migrations of an Aryan branch into the Indus Valley some ten or fifteen centuries before the Christian era to the conquest of Lord Clive. However, a century of arduous research by Max Müller, Oldenberg, Geldner, Rhys Davids, and other adventurous spirits has blazed pathways into this fascinating jungle. The disagreement of these pioneers makes it, nevertheless, sometimes rather unsafe ground for the novice, who must always proceed with caution and trembling.

But the pursuit proves too interesting. Hindu thought is essentially social and also universally religious. The social is religious and the religious social. Indian thought passes through a variety of forms, but this characteristic is always outstanding. It has almost nothing that could be classed as strictly secular. No Burbank of human experience could produce a species more delightful to the modern religious theorist. It differs from Hebrew life in a comparative absence of the moral element; from the Greek in its lesser

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definition of its god-forms, in its polytheism, and in its want of interest in science; from the Roman in its lack of initiative and of ability for organization; and from all Western thought in its emphasis upon the subjective phase and its neglect of the individual as such.

The means of investigation in this field is itself restricted. Because of India's isolation foreign commentary prior to the tenth century A.D. is of small amount; Megasthenes, the Macedonian ambassador to the court of Chandragupta in the fourth century B.C., has left us some records of Hindu life of that period. Also Chinese travelers of India have given a description of Buddhist India. The internal presentation of its thought is limited by its lack of treatises on history and science. The materials to be used are the religious hymns, the sacrificial formulae, the law-books, the epics, the dramas, the fables, the lyrics, and the philosophical treatises. For the sake of simplicity and clearness it may be advisable to indicate the arrangement of the earliest portion of the Sanskrit literature — the Vedas. The core of these is the Rig-Veda, a collection of ten books of sacrificial hymns; it is followed by the Sāma Veda, the metrical version of these hymns; by the Yajur-Veda, sacrificial formulae; and by the Atharva-Veda, magic charms and spells. Each Veda has special divisions, and these cover a considerable period of time, showing definite change and development. These divisions may be indicated as follows:

Veda —

- (a) Mantra : Mere hymn-poetry
- (b) Brāhmaṇa : The text in prose — an interpretation or explanation of the Mantra.
 - (1) Āraṇyaka : Forest Books.
 - (2) Upanishads : Philosophical Books.
- (c) Sūtra ("thread") : A syllabus of the long Brāhmaṇa.
 - (1) Ārauta : Public type of sacrifice — king's sacrifice.
 - (2) Grihya : Minor sacrifice — marriage, death, etc.
 - (3) Dharma : Concerning relations towards fellow-men and gods-duties.

The highest interest in all the literature is that which centers around the essential characteristics of later Vedic thought—its subjectivity. The subjectivity, with its attendant pessimism and doctrine of illusion, form a development different from that of any other country. Hence our problem becomes an investigation of the sources and conditions which could produce such a peculiar type of experience.

Subjectivity is a type of self-consciousness due to a persistent thwarting of individual experience. Consciousness does not appear in the experience process until an obstacle arises, that is, until there is a lapse in the process; instincts and habit are illustrations of such a continuous experience process. But when the experience process is blocked, this suspension permits its separation into parts, and it becomes what we call the knowledge process. Such an opposition of parts is necessary to the rise of self-consciousness; every individual consciousness must become aware of something set over against itself before it can be aware of its. These parts of the opposition we call the subject and the object. However, this self-consciousness can be expressed in two ways: If this opposition is mediated, the synthesis that results is a relationship of unity in difference, the unity of the act. In the unity of the act the object of knowledge or the object of desire is created as such from the reactions of the subject; this furnishes a mechanism for the control of the object, and a voluntary, natural accommodation on the part of the subject. It is not merely the definiteness of an object that permits us to act, but the ability to act defines the object, makes it more concrete. The individual in this mediation does not lose his identity or his form of expression; he expresses himself through his construction of the physical object, which in turn is built up by the reactions of the self. The knowledge process, then, is a continuous interaction of subject and object when we have an objective type of thought. When the impulse to movement, of which this object of knowledge or desire is the initial phase, attains fulfilment, it becomes universalized, that is, a part of the world outside of the individual. In a concrete situation the process would be expressed as the object of knowledge or desire becoming socialized; thus the individual be-

comes a real, active, concrete element within his social group, and his experience is taken over by the group-consciousness. The individual consciousness now possesses a social value through the individual's ability to initiate and organize group experience.

On the other hand, if this opposition in the experience process cannot be mediated, cannot become an action, the subject turns back within itself. The result is a subjective self-consciousness. In its social aspect this means the thwarting of the universalizing or socializing process, and experience must turn within the individual and there reform the object of knowledge or desire. The result is either the rise of a system of control within the individual in terms of other ideas and desires or the suppression altogether of this idea or emotion which cannot be universalized. The meaning of this suspended impulse is that eventually it kills itself or is annihilated; on the social side of the individual fails to find an evaluation of himself in the group-consciousness.

This is what happened in India. A fixed caste system furnished the unyielding opposition against which the self was forced. In the northern and eastern parts of India, where migration and conquests were still active, the warrior controlled conditions. In the older and more permanent civilization of Western India the warrior had lost his function, and the Brahman became the chief figure. Here the priests dominated everything. Thus all orthodox doctrines arose in the western center of Brahmanism, and the reconstructive tendencies are attributed to the warriors in the eastern section. The Brahman, not being opposed in the expressing of his function, did not feel problems that must confront the Kshatriyas. His loyalty to caste, his indifference to, and even unconsciousness of, the others' problems, served as an effective check on the ideal and desire that the king chose to realize. The king was a figurehead, not a real ruler. It was the history of this opposition which set the theme for all later literature and which was the history of a suspended ideal that was never universalized in Indian Society. The result was the doctrine of illusion in the Vedanta system and the pessimism and negation of Buddhism. The trend of subjectivity was in a continuous line, fatal and pre-

determined as long as the Brahmins were at the head of the caste and not aroused to self-consciousness.

In chapter 1 is traced the early tendency toward an objective development of nature and the person; the following chapter shows its transition to a philosophical interest and the rise of a subjective interest through emphasis upon the class-consciousness of the Brahmin and the function of this group. The class-consciousness was developed through the sacrifice, which was the chief expression of the priest's function, and also through the form of education and initiation for this duty, *Brahmacarya*. Thus the priests were set aside as peculiarly fitted for this service and as particularly sanctified by it. All of this emphasized and helped crystallize the class system which was rapidly arising from distinctions in occupation and colour (conquered Dravidian).

In chapter 4 the social system and the religious formulation have arrived at a condition of arrested development. The first attempt to express the individual desire for new function and meaning comes in the *Kshatriyan* doctrine of the self as the knowing subject. The texts hint at a self which is to find all its impulses and activities real. The sense-world is true and valuable. But the Brahmins have taken all the flavour out of these passages by identifying this self with an All-God which cannot be known.

The Vedanta is the conclusion of this theory. It asserts that the true self is the unknown and unknowable inner being. This self through ignorance becomes united with the senses, but the world which this union depicts is unreal, therefore an illusion.

Buddhism and the heretical movements are discussed in chapter 5. The Buddhists accept no god and eventually destroy the conscious self. Their system of control of self assists in bringing harmony into this life, but is of no value for the future existence in Nirvana. The materialists conclude the negative movement by destroying everything except existence in this life.

Chapter 6 records briefly the positive developments as found in the epic and the renaissance of the Christian era, which held vital possibilities that were never realized.

