



CHAPTER I.

Death of the
Mahárája.

found that his soul was departing to the abode of Yama; and he yielded up the ghost with a longing cry for his exiled son. The queen was so affected by the shock that she fell into a deep swoon, which continued throughout the night. Early morning dawned, and the ordinary life of the palace commenced as usual. The servants, male and female, were bringing in water and perfumes, as well as the early morning refreshment which is so general throughout India. Bards and eulogists, according to custom, were singing the praises of the Mahárája. The appearance of the sovereign was expected every moment, for no one was conscious of the calamity that had occurred. At last the ladies of the zenana proceeded to awaken the Mahárája; and then they found that he was dead in the chamber of Kausalyá. At once the palace resounded with their shrieks and screams. The fatal news spread throughout the royal household that the sovereign was no more. The utmost confusion and excitement broke up the calm of early morning. The ministers of state hurried to the chamber, and confirmed the fatal tidings. Mahárája Dasaratha had breathed his last.

The circumstances which followed furnish a glimpse of the political life in the old empire of Kosala. Neither of the sons of the deceased Mahárája was present at Ayodhyá. Bharata had gone to the city of his grandfather, accompanied by one of his brothers; and Ráma had gone into exile with the remaining brother. Consequently it was necessary to defer the funeral ceremony until it could be conducted by the son who was to succeed to the throne. For this purpose the remains of the deceased Mahárája were placed for preservation in a



large cauldron of oil. The council was assembled on the following day, and the nomination of the deceased Mahárajá was accepted. The exile of Ráma was considered to disqualify him for succeeding to the throne; and messengers were sent to bring Bharata to Ayodhyá with all speed.

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The great council.

Bharata hastened to the capital, but on his arrival he is said to have refused to ascend the throne to the exclusion of his elder brother. Before this point could be settled, it was necessary that he should superintend the burning of the royal remains, and perform the thirteen days of mourning. The body of the deceased Mahárajá was placed upon a litter, and covered with garlands, and sprinkled with incense. The funeral procession then moved slowly along to the place of burning without the city. First walked the bards and eulogists, chanting the praises of the deceased Mahárajá in melancholy strains. Next appeared the royal widows on foot, with their long black hair dishevelled over their shoulders, shrieking and screaming as they moved along. Next came the royal litter borne by the servants of the Mahárajá, with the sacred fire ever burning; whilst the insignia of royalty were held over the royal corpse,—the white umbrella of sovereignty, and the jewelled chamaras of hair waving to and fro. Bharata and his brother walked close behind, weeping very bitterly, and holding on to the litter with their hands. Other servants followed in chariots, and distributed funeral gifts amongst the surrounding multitude. The place of burning was a desolate spot on the bank of the river Sarayú. There the funeral pile was prepared, and the royal corpse was reverently placed thereon;

Funeral rites for the Mahárajá.



CHAPTER I. and animals were sacrificed, and their flesh placed upon the pile, together with boiled rice, oil, and ghee. Bharata fired the pile, which was consumed amidst the cries of the women, and the lamentations of the vast multitude. Bharata and his brother then poured out libations of water to refresh the soul of their departed father; and the mourners returned to the gloomy city. For ten days Bharata lamented for his father on a mat of kusa grass. On the tenth day he purified himself. On the twelfth day he performed the Sráddha, or offering of cakes and other food to the soul of his father. On the thirteenth day he returned to the place of burning, accompanied by his brother, and threw all the remains of the deceased sovereign into the river; and thus the funeral rites of Mahárāja Dasaratha were brought to a close.

Closing scenes
and return of
Rāma.

According to the Rāmáyana, Bharata subsequently undertook a journey into the jungle, in order to offer the Raj to his elder brother Rāma; and the interview between the two brothers on the hill of Chitra-kúta is described at considerable length. But the incidents, although interesting in themselves, are somewhat apocryphal, and throw no light upon ancient manners and usages.²⁴ Rāma is said to have refused the Raj; and Bharata returned to Ayodhyá to rule the empire of Kosala in the name of his elder brother. At this point the original tradition of the exile of Rāma seems to have terminated; and it will suffice to add that at the expiration of the fourteen years of banishment Rāma returned to Ayodhyá with his wife and brother, and

²⁴ The details will be found in History, vol. ii. part iv., Rāmáyana, chap. xiii. xiv. etc.



was solemnly installed on the throne of Kosala by the faithful and loyal Bharata.²⁵ CHAPTER I.

The broad distinction between the life of the ancient Rishis, and that of the ancient Kshatriyas, has already been pointed out. There was an equally wide difference in their respective destinies. The Vedic Rishis, who chaunted hymns and offered sacrifice on the banks of the rivers of the Punjab, have left no relic of their existence beyond the picture of domestic and religious life which is reflected in the hymns of the Rig-Veda. For thousands of years they may have cultivated their fields, and grazed their cattle and horses, whilst developing a religious culture which was to revolutionize the old primitive worship of Hindustan. But for ages the Rishis have disappeared from the religious life

Disappearance
of the Vedic
Rishis.

²⁵ The original tradition of the exile of Rāma is to be found in the Buddhist chronicles, and is exhibited at length in chapter iii. on the life and teachings of Gōtama Buddha.

But the Rāmāyana contains an account of the exile, which belongs to a much later period, and cannot apparently have any connection with the earlier tradition. According to this later story, Rāma spent thirteen years of his exile in wandering with his wife and brother from one Brahmanical hermitage to another, in the country between the river Ganges and the river Godaverī. These journeyings extended from the hill Chitra-kūta in Bundelkund, to the modern town of Nasik, near the sources of the Godaverī, about seventy-five miles to the north-west of the modern town of Bombay. The hermitages are said to have been occupied by the old Rishis who composed the Vedic hymns, and who are represented as Brāhmans, although they must have flourished ages before the appearance of the Brāhmans. The whole narrative may therefore be dismissed as apocryphal; as a mythical invention of comparatively modern date, intended as an introduction to the tradition of another and later Rāma, who may be distinguished as the Rāma of the Dekhan. This Rāma of the Dekhan is represented to have carried on a great religious war against a Raja named Ravana, who was sovereign of the island of Ceylon, anciently known as Lankā. Ravana and his subjects are termed Rākshasas or demons; but there is reason to believe that they represent the Buddhists; and if so, the war could not have been carried on during the Vedic period, but during the Brahmanical revival, which seems to have commenced between the sixth and eighth centuries of the Christian era, and to have continued until our own time. It will accordingly be treated in chapter vii.



CHAPTER I. of India; and their strains of natural piety have died out of the land like a poet's dream.

Absence of
Kshatriya an-
nals.

The Kshatriyas were men of a far different calibre. They were the conquerors of Hindustan, and they must have possessed a history; and though the annals of the conquest were not perhaps written in books, they were doubtless preserved for centuries as songs or ballads in the memory of the bards. But during a later age of Brahmanical revival they were lost in religious revolution, or converted into vehicles or parables for Brahmanical teaching. Every element of historical value was eliminated. Genealogies were fabricated by unscrupulous Bráhmans for the purpose of tracing the descent of existing royal houses to the Sun and Moon, to ancient Rishis who composed the Vedic hymns, or to heroes who were present at the Swayamvara of Draupadí, or fought in the war of Mahá Bhárata. Chronology was perverted by caprice or imagination. Thousands of years were assigned to a single reign. The result is that to this day the eras of the Vedic hymns, the war of the Mahá Bhárata, the exile of Ráma, and the invasion of Hindustan by the Vedic Aryans, are as utterly unknown as the date of Stonehenge.

Probable strategy of the
Aryan invaders.

The Punjab.

But although the chronology is hopelessly lost, some idea of the progress of the Aryan invasion may be derived from a consideration of the face of the country. The Punjab has already been indicated as the Indian home of the Vedic Kshatriyas; and consequently the basis for all military operations on the part of the Vedic Aryans against the aboriginal or non-Vedic population of the valleys of the Ganges and Jumna. It is a compact territory lying to the



north-west of Hindustan; and is watered by the Indus and its tributaries, which appear on the map like the sacred candlestick with seven branches.²⁶ The most eastern tributary of the Indus was the river Saraswatí, which formerly separated the Punjab from Hindustan. Indeed the Saraswatí was to the Vedic Aryans what the river Jordan was to the Israelites. It cut them off from the rich valleys of the Jumna and Ganges, which lay stretched out before them like a land of promise:—to the Rishis a land flowing with milk and butter; to the Kshatriyas a land of flesh-meat and savoury game.

The area of the Aryan invasion thus comprised ^{Hindustan.} the greater part of the region between the tributaries of the Indus and the basin of the Brahmaputra; although the stream of Aryan conquest had probably spent its force before it reached Bengal. This area, known as Hindustan, was traversed from the west to the east by the rivers Jumna and Ganges, which appear on the map like an irregular two-pronged fork. The two prongs take their rise in the Himalayas near the sources of the Indus, and bend round in two parallel lines towards the south-east, until they converge, and form a junction at Allahabad, the ancient Prayága, in the centre of Hindustan. The united streams then flow in one current from Allahabad, in an easterly direction towards the ancient city of Gour. There the river elbows round towards the south, and diverges into two channels, known as the Hooghly and the Ganges,

²⁶ The Punjab literally signifies the land of the five rivers, namely, the Indus, the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravee, and the Sutlej. To these may be added the Beas and the Saraswatí, making seven rivers in all.



CHAPTER I. which form the delta at the head of the Bay of Bengal.

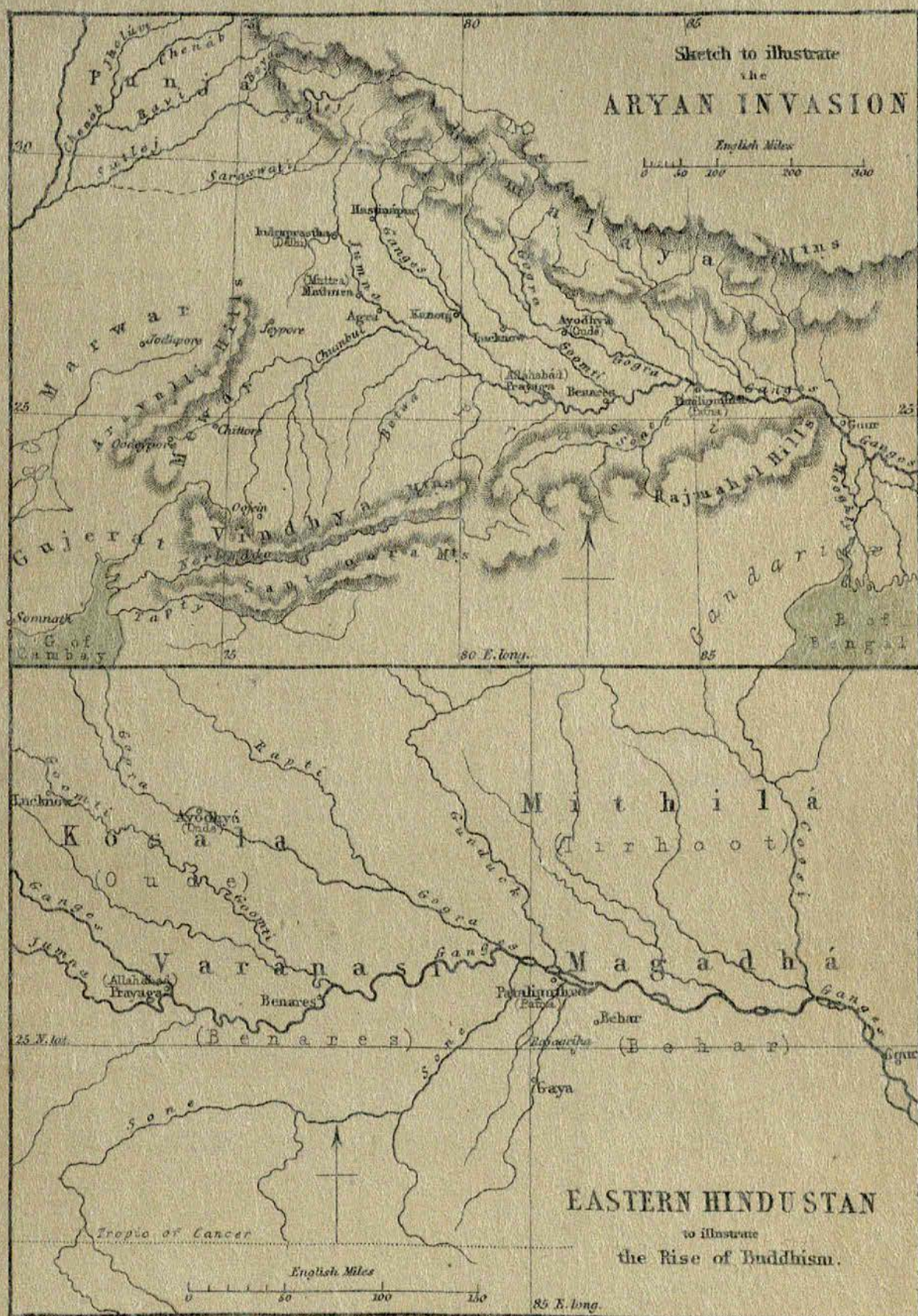
Importance of Allahabad.

The one point of paramount importance in all Hindustan is Allahabad, the ancient Prayága, which is seated at the junction of the Jumna and Ganges. Here the Vedic Rishis, inspired alike by poetic fancy and religious fervour, would approach the union of the two river deities with reverential awe. Here the Aryan Kshatriyas, with true military instinct, appear to have constructed a fortress which secured all the conquests on the upper valleys of the Jumna and Ganges, and overawed all lower Bengal. Accordingly Rajpoot tradition points to Prayága as the most ancient city of the Rajpoots or sons of Rajas.²⁷ It was the holiest place of sacrifice for the Rishis, and the most commanding stronghold for the Kshatriyas, in all Hindustan.

Three probable lines of Aryan fortresses.

The Vedic Aryans thus probably held the valleys of the Jumna and Ganges by three lines of fortresses, as indicated in the map. The first line would be formed by Indraprastha and Hastinápura at the northern entrance to the two valleys. The second line would be formed by four fortresses, each of which may have been situated about half way down their respective rivers, namely, at Agra on the Jumna, at Kanouj on the Ganges, at Lucknow on the Goomti, and at Ayodhyá on the Gogra. Further to the south and east there would be a third line of fortresses along the main stream of the Ganges, and chiefly at the junctions of rivers, namely, at Allahabad at the junction of the Jumna and Ganges;

²⁷ Tod's Rajasthan, vol. i., chap. iv., p. 39.



at Benares near the junction of the Goomti and Ganges; at Patali-putra near the junction of the Sone, the Gogra, and the Ganges; and at Gour near the point where the main stream diverges into the Hooghly and Ganges. CHAPTER I.

It may thus be assumed that ancient Hindustan was occupied by at least ten Vedic Aryan fortresses, which were destined to become the capitals of kingdoms, the emporiums of trade, and the centres of religious thought. They would appear arranged in three lines of advance, illustrating three distinct stages of Aryan invasion, namely—the colonial, the conquering, and the imperial. During the colonial period the Vedic Aryans probably occupied the lands round Indraprastha and Hastinápura on the upper courses of the Jumna and Ganges. During the conquering period they may have advanced half way down the four important rivers which water northern Hindustan, and established a line of fortresses at Agra, Kanouj, Lucknow, and Ayodhya. During the imperial period they may have established a third line of fortified capitals at the junctions or divergence of rivers, namely—at Allahabad, Benares, Patali-putra, and Gour.²⁸

Three stages of
Aryan invasion.

The Aryan conquest of Hindustan must have convulsed northern India, but all memories of the struggle are buried beneath a jungle of legend. It was a fabled war of gods against demons; the invaders were Aryan devatas, the deities of fire and

²⁸ The above description of Vedic Aryan fortresses in Hindustan is of course conjectural. Patali-putra, somewhere near the modern Patna, became the metropolis of the Gangetic empire of Magadha. Gour, at the elbow of the Ganges, may possibly have been of Turanian rather than Aryan origin. According to old Persian tradition Gour was founded by a conqueror from Kooch Beliar, a territory in the neighbourhood of the opposite elbow of the river Brahmaputra.



CHAPTER I.
Legends of
Aryan invasion.

light, the fair-complexioned heroes from the high lands of ancient Persia. The enemies against whom they contended, and whom they drove slowly into the east and south, were the earth-born demons of ancient India; the black-skinned barbarians, who are described with all those exaggerations of hatred and distorted fancy with which cultured invaders generally regard a race of fierce aborigines. These non-Aryan races were called Dasyus, Daityas, Asuras, Rákshasas, and Nágas. They were depicted as giants, man-eaters, hobgoblins, ghosts, and serpent kings. In other words, they propitiated ghosts and serpents, and were identified with the deities they worshipped. But still there are traces amongst the non-Aryan races of widely different stages of civilization. The giant cannibals, who haunted jungles and infested villages, were probably savages of a low type; but the Nágas, or serpent-worshippers, who lived in crowded cities, and were famous for their beautiful women and exhaustless treasures, were doubtless a civilized people, living under an organized government. Indeed, if any inference can be drawn from the epic legends, it would be that prior to the Aryan conquest, the Nága Rajas were ruling powers, who had cultivated the arts of luxury to an extraordinary degree, and yet succeeded in maintaining a protracted struggle against the Aryan invaders.

Traditions of
the Nágas, or
serpent-wor-
shippers.

The traditions of the Nágas are obscure in the extreme. They point, however, to the existence of an ancient Nága empire in the Dekhan, having its capital in the modern town of Nágpore; and it may be conjectured that prior to the Aryan invasion the Nága Rajas exercised an imperial power over the



greater part of the Punjab and Hindustan. Representatives of this ancient people are still living in eastern Bengal, and beyond the north-east frontier, under the names of Nágas and Nágbansis; but they are Turanians of a low type, and retain no traces of their origin beyond rude legends of their descent from some serpent ancestor, and vague memories of having immigrated from Nágpore.²⁹ They may be ranked amongst the so-called aborigines, who have either no religion at all, or are becoming slightly Hindúized. They are the relics of an extinct nationality, and have outlived their race. But references to the ancient Nága empire abound in Hindú story. The clearance of the jungle at Indra-prastha was effected by the expulsion of the Nágas. One of the heroes of the Mahá Bhárata had an amour with the daughter of a Nága Raja.³⁰ The Aryan conquest of Prayága, and other parts in India, are mythically described as a great sacrifice of serpents.³¹ Occasional references to the Nágas will also appear hereafter in Buddhist and Brahmanical legend; and to this day, traces of the Nágas are to be found in numerous sculptures of the old serpent gods, and in the nomenclature of towns and villages from Nágpore in the Dekhan, to Tanja-nagarum, the modern Tanjore, in the south-east coast of the remote Peninsula.

The serpent worship of the Nágas has formed a powerful stimulus to religious thought from time immemorial. The serpent, with its poisoned fang, its association with the phallus, and its fabled homes in

Serpent worship: its phallic character.

²⁹ Dalton's Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, pp. 169, 231, etc.

³⁰ See *ante*, p. 36.

³¹ History, vol. i., part v., Mahá Bhárata, pp. 46, 74, 141, 411, *et seq.*



CHAPTER I. the under world, seems so suggestive of all that is terrible, sensational, and mysterious in humanity, that it will lead the imagination far beyond the limits of experience, unless the attention is strictly confined to actual data. The European regards the serpent with an instinctive antipathy; and such may have been the feeling of the Aryan invaders.³² But this antipathy is by no means shared by the masses. The Aryan element is perhaps weakest in Bengal, and amongst the Dravidian populations of the south; and there the serpent is regarded as a beneficent deity, and is approached with reverential awe. It is propitiated as the deity of a tree, as the guardian of secret treasure, as the domestic god of the family or household, and as a symbol of the power of reproduction. In Bengal barren wives creep into the jungle to propitiate the serpent of a tree with an offering of milk, in the simple faith that by the favour of the serpent deity they may become mothers. Under such kindly aspects the poisoned fang is forgotten, and the reptile is invested with a benevolent character. But there are strong reasons to suspect that the worship of the snake, and the practice of snake charming, formed important elements in an old materialistic religion, which may at one time have prevailed amongst the Dravidian populations, and of which the memory still lingers throughout the greater part of India. In the later mythological system, the world itself is supported by the great serpent; whilst Siva and Durgá, the

³² The great god of the later Aryans was Vishnu, a spiritual conception of a supreme deity which grew out of the worship of the sun god. The antipathy of Vishnu towards the Nāgas, is shown by his being represented as riding on the man-bird Garuda, the devourer of serpents and remorseless enemy of the serpent race.



deities of death and reproduction, are represented with cobras in their hands as symbolical of their supposed powers.³³ CHAPTER I.

The results of the collision between the nature worship of the Aryans, and the phallic worship of the Nágas and Dravidians, must be in a great measure left to conjecture. But one new and important form of religious thought appears to have been an outgrowth of the collision, and has for thousands of years exercised a paramount influence over the Indian mind. This was Brahmanism, or the worship of the supreme spirit as Brahma, which was taught by a class of holy men or sacred philosophers, known as Bráhmans. This religious question, however, must be reserved for a separate chapter. Meantime it may be as well to bring under review such information as can be gathered from ancient legends and inscriptions regarding the original forms of government which prevailed in India, and to ascertain how far they may be traced in the governments of modern times.

The political organization of the people of India, whether Aryan or Dravidian, seems to have borne a general resemblance to that of the Teutonic people.

Hindú constitution. Village communities of landholders.

³³ The part played by the serpent in the later mythological systems of the Hindús, will be further illustrated in dealing with the history of the Brahmanical revival in chap. vii. It may, however, be remarked that the worship of the serpent was almost universal in ancient times. It appears in Egypt as well as in India; in the garden of Eden where it tempted Eve, and in the temple of Jerusalem where it was broken up by Hezekiah. According to Greek tradition the Seythian race was fabled to be descended from Herakles and the serpent woman Echidna (Herod. iv. 9, 10); and the people of Burma claim to be descended in a like manner from a mother half serpent and half woman. Doubtless it was the traditional hatred of the serpent, combined with a morbid animosity against the fair sex, that led Milton to personify Sin as

"Woman to the waist and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fold."



CHAPTER I. It originated in the clearance of primeval forests by the pioneers of humanity. Bands of colonists appear like the Pándavas to have migrated from some parent settlement, and cleared the jungle with fire and axe; and finally to have established new homes and means of livelihood, without throwing off the ties of allegiance and kindred to the parent stem.³⁴ Every new clearance gradually grew into a village; and every village became subject to those internal changes and revolutions which are inseparable from the progress of the human race. In the first instance the village was probably formed by a group of colonists, who cultivated the lands in their collective capacity for their common benefit; and it is not improbable that in this primitive stage of colonial society, the rude system of polyandry prevailed similar to that which was practised by the Pándavas. But the idea of landed property seems from a very remote antiquity to have followed a corresponding development to those of marriage and family. In due course the village com-

³⁴ Besides the mythic account of the colonization of Indraprastha by the Pándavas, which is to be found in its original form in *History*, vol. i., *Mahá Bhārata*, chap. v., a valuable tradition has been preserved of the colonization of the great forest in the southern peninsula, which was carried out in the days of the old Rajas of Chola, or Chola mandalum, the Choromandel or Coromandel of the seventeenth century. In ancient times the kingdom of Chola occupied the lower Carnatic between the eastern ghats and the sea; but the region north of the river Palar was a dense jungle. According to a legend preserved in the Mackenzie manuscripts, a Raja of Chola took a Nāga lady, either as his wife or concubine, by whom he had a son whom the people would not accept as their Raja. Accordingly the prince went out with a miscellaneous band of emigrants, slaves and volunteers, and began to make clearances and establish villages in the forest northward of the Palar. During the first six years no share of the crops was to be claimed by the Chola Raja. For the seventh year of cultivation the emigrants were to pay one-tenth of the produce as land tax; for the eighth year one-ninth; for the ninth year one-eighth; and for the tenth year one-seventh; and for all following years one-sixth. See Mackenzie MSS. in the Library of the Bengal Asiatic Society, vol. i.



prised a community of independent householders, each of whom had his own family, his own homestead, his one separate parcel of arable land for cultivation; and a common right to the neighbouring pastures. The multiplication of families was followed by new clearances; and thus the deep forest was more and more brought under the subjection of man, and cultivation advanced with the increase of the population. But whilst the individual householder was the supreme head of his own family within the limits of his own homestead, he was bound as a member of the village community to conform to all its multifarious rules and usages as regards the order of cultivation, and the common rights of his neighbours to graze their cattle on the pastures. In the present day the independence and privacy of the family are maintained by the Hindús to an extent which renders their domestic life a sealed book to Europeans; whilst land is regarded more and more in the light of property, belonging as strictly to the family as the homestead in which they dwell.³⁵ The ancient village community of independent landholders, governed by common rules and usages, naturally acquired a political organization of its own. It comprised the homesteads of

³⁵ Maine's *Lectures on Village Communities*. Stubbs's *Constitutional History of England*, chaps. ii. and iii. Elphinstone's *History of India*, Book II. chap. ii. As regards the Teutonic communities Sir Henry Maine observes that the land was always originally distributed into exactly equal proportions, corresponding to the number of families in the township; and that at first the proprietary equality of these families was further secured by a periodical re-distribution of the several consignments. He adds that traditions of this periodical distribution are still preserved in Indian villages, and that the disuse of the practice is sometimes mentioned as a grievance. Some further evidence as regards the existence of these traditions would be valuable. Probably they refer to the ancient system of cultivation, known as the Joom system, in which a portion of the jungle is burnt down and serves as manure. This system is still in vogue amongst hill tribes, and necessitates an annual removal to different lands during a period of ten years.



CHAPTER I.

Village officials
and artisans.

the different families; the several allotments of arable lands; and the common land for pasture. Its affairs were conducted by a council of elders; or by the council in association with a head man, who was either elected to the post by the village community, or succeeded to it as a hereditary right.³⁶

The village thus became not only the basis of a political organization, but the type of the kingdom of which it was an individual member. The head man corresponded to the Raja; the council of elders to the council of chiefs and people. At a later period of development each village had its own officials, such as the accountant, the watchman,³⁷ the priest, the physician, and the musician. It also had its own artisans, as the blacksmith, the carpenter, the worker in leather, the tailor, the potter, and the barber. These officers and artisans were generally hereditary, and were supported by grants of land rent free, or by fees contributed by the landholders in grain or perhaps in money.

³⁶ The general type of a Hindú village remains much the same in the present day, but in the course of ages the organization of individual villages has been greatly modified by their individual histories, especially as regards the mode of paying the annual land revenue to the ruling power. Three different revenue systems may be especially mentioned, namely, the village joint-rent system, the ryotwary, and the zemindary. Under the joint-rent system, the inhabitants of each village pay through their head man a yearly lump sum for the whole of their lands; and thus they are left to allot to each one of their number the lands he is to cultivate and the yearly contribution he is to pay. In the ryotwary system the government takes the rent direct from each individual ryot, or village landholder. In the zemindary system the revenue is collected through a middle man, known as a zemindar, whose powers vary with circumstances, and range from those of a tax collector to those of a baron.

Besides the village landholders there are four other classes, namely, permanent tenants, temporary tenants, labourers, and shopkeepers. But wherever there are village landholders, they form the first class of inhabitants.

³⁷ The duties of the watchman are more multifarious than the name seems to convey. He is the guardian of boundaries, public and private. He watches the crops, and is the public guide and messenger. He observes all the arrivals and departures; and next to the head man, is the principal officer of police.



CHAPTER II

Groups of villages formed into provinces.

The ties which bound these villages together in groups were never very strong. Manu refers to lords of ten, twenty, a hundred, and a thousand villages; and traces of the ancient distribution are still lingering in such names as pergunnah and zillah. Since the introduction of the British government as the paramount power the villages still remain, but have been grouped into districts, and placed under the charge of district officers, according to the convenience of the local administration. In this way the villages have existed in some shape from time immemorial. Towns have grown out of the villages, or been formed of clusters of villages. To use the words of Lord Metcalfe, "the village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last when nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty remains the same; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindú, Patan, Mogul, Mahratta, Sikh, English, are all masters in turn; but the village community remains the same."³⁸

³⁸ Report of Select Committee of House of Commons, 1832. Quoted by Elphinstone. The village system prevails over the greater part of India, but has faded away from Bengal.



CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECT OF BRAHMANIC INDIA.

CHAPTER II.

Obscure origin
of the Bráh-
mans: a sacred
caste of heredi-
tary priests.

THE origin of the Bráhmans is one of the most obscure points in the annals of ancient India. They are barely mentioned in the Vedic hymns, and certainly were not recognized as a dominant hierarchy during the period when the Vedic Aryans were as yet confined to the Punjab. But in every later stage of their history, and down to the present day, they have been represented as a hereditary and exclusive caste of holy men, specially created out of the mouth of the god Brahma for the performance of sacrificial rites, and also for the conservation of sacred learning, and the interpretation of the Sanskrit scriptures, which are emphatically known as the Vedas.¹ Moreover, throughout the whole of

¹ Further particulars respecting the Bráhmans and the Vedas will be found in the two previous volumes of the History which deal with the Hindú Epics and the Laws of Manu. But the following details will suffice to explain the statement in the text.

The Hindús are divided into an infinite number of castes, according to their hereditary trades and professions; but in the present day they are nearly all comprehended in four great castes, namely, the Bráhmans, or priests; the Kshatriyas, or soldiers; the Vaisyas, or merchants; and the Súdras, or servile class. The Bráhmans are the mouth of Brahma; the Kshatriyas are his arms; the Vaisyas are his thighs; and the Súdras are his feet.

The three first castes of priests, soldiers, and merchants, are distinguished from the fourth caste of Súdras by the thread, or paita, which is worn depending from the left shoulder and resting on the right side below the loins. The investiture usually takes place between the eighth and twelfth year, and is known as the



their history, and down to a comparatively modern date, their claims to the respect of all other castes appear to have increased from age to age; until at last they have been hedged around with a superstitious reverence approaching to worship. Notwithstanding the spread of western civilization and enlightenment, this reverence for the Bráhmans continues to retain a deep and inscrutable hold upon the imagination of the masses. It is no disgrace, but rather a religious duty, and an act of religious merit, for the mightiest Raja to pay homage to the meanest Bráhman; and this conviction is strengthened by the ignorant belief that the blessing of a Bráhman will be followed by good fortune and prosperity, whilst his curse will bring the direst calamities upon the impious offender. Moreover, even those Bráhmans who have never exercised any religious or priestly calling, and have devoted themselves to secular concerns, are still regarded as of divine origin, and consequently entitled to homage. The Bráhman sepoy will implicitly obey his commanding officer, although of an inferior caste; but when the military duty is over, and the uniform is laid aside, the officer falls back into his inferior position and propitiates the Bráhman with reverential awe.

The secular Bráhmans, however, may be excluded for the present from all consideration. They were

second birth, and those who are invested are termed the "twice born." It is difficult to say whether the thread indicates a separation between the conquerors and the conquered; or whether it originated in a religious investiture from which Súdras were excluded.

As regards the four Vedas, the Rig-Veda is the oldest and most important. The Rig-Veda is divided into three portions, each of which indicates a certain stage in religious development, namely, the hymn of prayer and praise, the sacrificial ritual, and the metaphysical worship of the supreme spirit under a variety of names. Technically they are known as mantras, brahmanas, and upanishads.



CHAPTER II.

distinction be-
tween the
priests or sacri-
ficers, and the
sages or philo-
sophers.

nothing more than men who were born within the caste of priests, but who followed other pursuits. The Bráhmans who devoted themselves to a religious calling are alone invested with historical significance. They appear in two distinct capacities, namely, as priests or sacrificers, and as sages or philosophers. The priest was generally a married householder, who maintained his family after the manner of ancient priests. He performed sacrifices for hire. He officiated at births, deaths and marriages. He appeared occasionally as a seer, diviner, genealogist, astrologer, school-master, expounder of the law, and worker of spells and incantations. Moreover, the presentation of alms to the Bráhmans had always been regarded as a religious duty, which expiated sins, and promoted the prosperity of the giver; and thus in a superstitious age, the Bráhman priest was generally well provided for. Sometimes he lived in the neighbourhood of a temple, or in a street appropriated to Bráhmans; but there was nothing beyond his religious or semi-religious avocations to distinguish him from the ordinary type of the Hindú householder. The Bráhman sage, on the other hand, was supposed to have no thought or care for his daily subsistence. He abstracted himself from all public and social life, and dwelt in the retirement of a grove or hermitage, where he subsisted on roots and fruits, or on such alms as the people of the neighbourhood might choose to offer him. In this manner he prepared himself by religious duties, pious studies, sacred contemplations, and fasting and other penances, for a more spiritual life hereafter. Sometimes the sage was married, or at any rate passed a portion of his life in matrimony; for as he belonged to a hereditary caste, it was gen-



generally considered necessary that he should become the father of a son. Some sages, however, led lives of celibacy, and kept but one object in view throughout their lives, namely, the purification of the soul from every stain of affection, desire, and passion, so that after death it might return to the supreme spirit. The distinction between these two classes of priest and sage must be borne constantly in mind. Occasionally the characteristics of both are blended in the same individual. The illiterate priest will affect to be a sage, and perform religious contemplations and austerities; or the sage will practise daily sacrifices as part of his religious duties in the seclusion of the grove or hermitage. Again, both classes are included under the general name of Bráhmans, which seems to have been borrowed from the term Brahma, which signifies both the supreme spirit and divine knowledge. But still a line of demarcation has been preserved between the mercenary sacrificers and the pious and contemplative sages.²

The priests or sacrificers form the bulk of the Brahmanical community; and their religious ideas and practices seem to have been always of a popular and primitive character. They were prepared to sacrifice, that is, to offer food and liquor, to any and every deity whom the people desired to propitiate, whether they belonged to the Vedic or non-Vedic population. Two deities were specially worshipped by the Bráhman priests, and appear to have been the types of two different races, the Aryans and the Turanians. These were Vishnu and Siva; sometimes propitiated under the names of Hari and

Popular religion
of the Bráhman
priests.

Vishnu, Siva,
and Brahma.

² For a learned exposition on the term Bráhman, see Muir's Sanskrit Texts, vol. i. second edition, chap. iii.



CHAPTER II. Mahádeva. The Greeks identified these two gods with Herakles and Dionysos. Vishnu was an old Vedic conception more or less associated with the Sun; but he appears in the Hindú pantheon as an embodiment of heroic strength and god-like beauty. Siva was a mystic deity of Turanian origin, and represented as half-intoxicated with drugs, and associated with ideas of death and reproduction. To these may be added a third deity, Brahma, who was worshipped as the supreme spirit who created and pervades the universe. In the present day, all three,—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva,—are often individually and collectively identified with the one supreme being.

Animal sacrifices.

In ancient times the ritual of the Bráhmans included the sacrifice of animals, such as beasts and birds; although at some extraordinary epoch to be noticed hereafter the slaughter of animals was prohibited, and offerings of rice and butter were introduced in their stead.³ The Bráhmans naturally

³ Annual sacrifices formed a part of the ritual of the Brahmana of the Rig-Veda, known as the Aitareya Brahmana. (See Dr Haug's edition of the original Sanskrit text accompanied by an English translation, 2 vols. Bombay, 1863.) Such sacrifices were considered allowable by Manu, although the practice was deprecated. (See History, vol. ii., Brahmanic Period, chap. x.) Animal sacrifices were abolished by Asoka about the third century before Christ. See *infra*, chapter v., Buddhist India.

The Bráhmans, however, from a very early period presented such simple offerings to the gods as boiled rice and clarified butter, after the manner of the ancient Rishis. But in the old Brahmanical ritual these offerings were invested with a mystic meaning which was apparently unknown to the Rishis. Thus rice signified the male principle, and melted butter the female. The so-called sacrifice was thus associated with the materialistic religion of the non-Vedic population. (Haug's Aitareya Brahmana, Book I. chap. i.) This fact throws a new light upon the legend of Cain and Abel. Cain offered the first-fruits of the ground; Abel the first-fruits of the flock. The flesh sacrifice was accepted; but the vegetable offering was rejected. So far it would seem that the story was intended to enforce sacerdotal ideas. But offerings of grain were especially associated with a materialistic religion, as in the Greek worship of Demeter; and this form of idolatry was condemned in the strongest terms by the Hebrew prophets. Hence the offering of Cain was rejected.



arrogated to themselves the exclusive right to perform sacrifices. They declared that if sacrificers were employed who did not belong to the Bráhma caste, the deity would be offended rather than propitiated. At the same time they exaggerated the power and efficacy of sacrifice. It was considered to be always grateful to the gods, and if performed with certain ceremonial and mystic utterances, it would ensure victory, dominion, and every prosperity. The Bráhma priests also professed to ascertain from the appearance of the victim, and from the colour and form of the sacrificial flame, whether the offering was acceptable or otherwise. Finally, they taught that sacrifice was a great religious merit, which would not only prove pleasing to deity, and win the divine interposition in behalf of the worshipper, but would act as an atonement or expiation for sins committed against the moral and religious laws.⁴

Origin of the doctrine of atonement.

The doctrine of atonement by sacrifice indicates an important stage in religious development. There certainly was no idea of atonement in the so-called sacrifices of the Vedic Rishis, or the flesh-feasts of the Kshatriyas. Such an idea must have originated in a sacerdotal age, when sacrifices were a source of profit to the Bráhmans; and also in an age of settled government, when sinners were supposed to expiate their sins by sacrifices, penances, and alms-giving, in the same way that criminals expiate their offences by punishment and fines.⁵

⁴ It would be an endless task to review the interminable ritual of Brahmanical sacrifices. Much of it was associated with ideas appertaining to the sexes, which apparently indicate a non-Vedic origin. Thus the Dikshá ceremony is nothing more than a symbolical representation of the neophyte being born again. Haug's Aitareya Brahmana, Book I. chap. i.

⁵ It is a significant fact that religious development often runs in the same



CHAPTER II.

Secret religion
of the Bráhma-
nages.

The religion of the Bráhma-
nages was of a totally different character from that
of the priests. It was not promulgated to the
masses, but only communicated to the philosophic
few. It does not appear to have been a foreign wor-
ship, but indigenous to India, growing out of the ex-
isting creeds, but in the first instance abstracting
itself as far as possible from the prevailing idolatries.
It thus takes the form of a secret religion, which was
taught only as a mystery; and probably this was
its character in a remote antiquity. This Brah-
manical teaching involves three distinct dogmas,
namely—the creation of the universe, the supreme
spirit pervading the universe, and the transmigra-
tions of souls. These dogmas will be found of con-
siderable importance in dealing with the progress of
religious development in India; and therefore it
will be necessary to consider them separately in their
elementary and oriental form.

Creation of the
universe by the
supreme spirit
Brahma.

The idea of a creation of the universe seems
to have been generally formed at a comparatively
late stage in religious development. Primitive man
accepts the universe as it is; as something which
has existed from time immemorial, and will continue
to exist for an indefinable period. He may form
rude conceptions of ancestors and first parents, but

groove as political development. In patriarchal times, as in the days of the
Rishis, the head of the family or tribe performed the duties of the priest. But
when monarchical government assumed an organized form, it was generally
accompanied by an ecclesiastical hierarchy having a similar organization. The
sovereign had his ministers; the deity had his priests. The sovereign made
known his will by means of edicts; the deity made known his will by means of
oracles. The ministers claimed a share of the harvests and flocks, and the pay-
ment of tribute or taxes, for the service of the sovereign. The priests in like
manner claimed first-fruits, firstlings, and tythes for the service of deity. Again,
the ministers chastised offenders by fine and punishment; and the priests
chastised sinners by enforcing almsgiving, sacrifices, and penances.



his curiosity goes no further. Men are born, and that is the beginning of them; they die, and that is the end of them. But in process of time his imagination plays upon his affections until he believes in ghosts; and then his natural sense of justice suggests places of punishment or reward for these ghosts. A consideration of the end of being necessarily leads to a consideration of the origin of being. Then follows an unrecorded age of speculation, which the modern mind can neither realize nor follow. The Hebrew conception of deity was that of a sovereign ruler; and consequently the work of creation was carried out by the vivifying breath of Elohim, moving upon the face of the waters, and calling the universe into existence by the divine command.⁶ The Phœnician idea was more mystical; ether became enamoured of chaos, and produced a watery mixture or mud from which sprung the seed of the creation.⁷ The Brahmanical conception was of the same character, but more materialistic in its expression. The god Brahma placed a productive seed in the waste of waters, which germinated into an egg, and finally expanded into the universe of gods, men, and living creatures.⁸

This idea of the creation by Brahma may have

⁶ Von Bohlen's *Genesis*, vol. ii. p. 8. London, 1868.

⁷ Sanchoniatho, in Cory's *Fragments*.

⁸ Manu's account of the creation has already been analyzed and criticized at length. See *History*, vol. ii., part v., *Brahmanic Period*, chap. v. It will suffice to say that the phallic idea sufficiently predominates to prove that Brahma was originally a phallic deity. The creation of the universe was very generally symbolized by an egg enfolded by a serpent. This has been interpreted to represent the union of ether and chaos. It seems, however, to have originated in the far more materialistic idea that the serpent, as a symbol of the phallus, was imparting life to the egg as a symbol of the universe. The serpent finds no expression in the original Brahmanical cosmogony. In modern cosmogony Seshā Nāga, or the great snake, appears as the supporter of the universe.



CHAPTER II.

Pantheistic
idea of the su-
preme spirit
pervading the
universe.

been borrowed from the materialistic religion of the non-Vedic population. But the second idea of a supreme spirit pervading the universe was either an outgrowth of the Vedic worship of the elements, or was modified by that worship into a spiritual form. If fire, water, and ether were regarded as deities by the Vedic Aryans, they might easily be accepted by the Bráhmans as the manifestations of that creative force which was involved in the conception of Brahma. In this way the Bráhmans appear to have elevated their god Brahma to the highest dignity over the gods of the invaders, by representing him as a supreme spirit who pervaded the universe; as the divine original from whom had emanated all the Vedic Aryan deities, as well as the human race and the whole range of living creatures.

Dogma of the
metempsycho-
sis, or transmi-
grations of the
soul.

The third and last dogma, namely, that of the transmigrations of the soul after death, seems to have had a different origin. It finds no expression in the Vedic hymns, and, indeed, could scarcely have been evolved out of the Vedic religion. It appears rather to have grown out of the mysteries of death and reproduction, which were associated with the worship of the serpent and linga. If life was followed by death, so death might only be the introduction into a new life; in other words, after the death of the body, the soul entered a new body, either of a human being or an animal. The ancient religion of Egypt was evidently derived from the same materialistic source, and had developed into the same speculative belief, that the soul was immortal, and that when it had passed through its allotted course in one body, it entered another body. The Bráhman sages imparted a deep re-



ligious significance to this dogma. They taught that each successive existence was a reward or a punishment exactly proportioned to the good or evil deeds that had been performed in previous existences; that the poorest man might enjoy wealth and prosperity in the next life by being strictly virtuous and religious in the present life; and that the most powerful sovereign might be condemned to poverty and disease in the next life, if he failed in his religious duties in the present life. The chain of transmigrations was not confined to humanity, but extended over the whole range of animated being. A virtuous animal might thus become a happy man; and a wicked man might become a miserable worm or reptile.⁹ This chain of existences was practically eternal; although, as will be seen hereafter, there is a saving clause, that if the soul be sufficiently purified from all the passions and desires of existence, it will return to the supreme spirit Brahma, from whom it had originally emanated.¹⁰

The Brahmanical conception of the creation may be dismissed as a metaphysical dream; devoid of all humanity, although grossly material. The conception of the creator as a supreme spirit is equally

Lifeless character of the conceptions of a creation and creator.

⁹ This dogma of the metempsychosis, or "ever changing habitations of the soul," is often stated with arithmetical precision. If the sum of good deeds exceeds the sum of evil deeds in previous lives, the individual soul will be born in a higher scale of being, and enjoy a degree of happiness in exact proportion to the balance of merits. If, on the contrary, the sum of evil deeds is in excess, the individual soul will be born in a lower scale of being, and suffer a degree of misery in exact proportion to the balance of demerits.

¹⁰ This dogma of the return of the human soul to its creator has originated a controversy as to whether the human soul became absorbed in the divine spirit, or enjoyed a separate and individual existence in what may be called the heaven of the divine spirit, i. e. the heaven of Brahma. The controversy is of no practical moment, although to this day it continues to excite sectarian discussions.



CHAPTER II.

devoid of religious significance. It may have amused the imagination, but it utterly failed to reach the heart. It has been much over-valued in consequence of its supposed identification with the one God, who is worshipped by Jews and Christians. But Brahma was not a personal deity. He was neither a universal ruler nor an eternal father. The idea of Brahma was simply a deification of a primeval male, who created the universe, pervaded the universe, and governed the universe like an unseen machine, whose movements were regulated by inexorable laws. This conception of a supreme spirit was formed by divesting all the Vedic deities of their human sympathies and feelings; of every attribute, in fact, which endeared them to their worshippers, and rendered them objects of devotion and adoration; and then resolving all that remained into one immaterial essence. It is obvious that so far the theology of the Bráhmans was without any moral meaning. It satisfied no yearning, furnished no consolation, and utterly ignored the affections. But without human sympathies, theology soon dies away into a metaphysical dream. They are the life-blood of theology. Man cannot worship deity, any more than he can worship beauty, excepting through the medium of humanity.

Antagonism between the metempsychosis and the old theology.

It seems difficult to understand the circumstances under which the Bráhman sages could have formed such a speculative conception as that of a supreme spirit creating and pervading the universe. There is nothing to show why the worship of the gods, as practised by the Bráhman priests from time immemorial, should have been sapped of all its vitality by the introduction of a me-



taphysical element which could have recommended itself only to the philosophic few. It is certain, however, that at some remote and unrecorded period, the religious life of the eastern world received a shock by the promulgation of the dogma of the transmigration of souls from which it has never recovered. This doctrine dawned upon humanity like a new religion, and threatened to overwhelm the worship of the gods, and to break down every barrier of caste. The idea that the soul after death entered a new body, either of a human being or an animal, is by no means an unnatural one. It pleased the imagination, for it accounted for certain marks of human intelligence in animal life, whilst imparting a deep significance to the whole range of animated being. It further recommended itself to the reason, because it solved a problem which had distressed the human race from time immemorial. Thoughtful men, the socialists of ancient days, saw good and evil scattered over the universe by a blind fatality, which was not only unintelligible, but contrary to the common sense of justice. Wealth and poverty, pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, beauty and deformity, strength and infirmity, were showered down like undistinguishing rain upon the just and unjust, without the slightest reference to their moral or religious deserts. The virtuous man was often wretched, and the wise man a beggar; whilst the wicked man was often prosperous, and the fool was burdened with riches. The dogma of the metempsychosis removed every difficulty. Men could no longer rail at the blindness of fortune, or rail at the injustice of the gods, when they had accepted the law under which all

Profound significance of the dogma of the metempsychosis.



CHAPTER II. good and evil fortunes were regarded as the results of actions which had taken place in previous lives, and which had long since passed out of the memory and conscious experience of the individual.¹¹

The promulgation of the dogma of the metempsychosis, or "ever-changing habitations of the soul," indicates a further stage in the progress of religious development, which corresponds in some measure to a revolt against the gods. The doctrine of atonement by sacrifice had marked a certain advance in theology. The gods were no longer mere guardian deities to be gratified with meat and wine. They had assumed the form of divine rulers, who governed the world like despots, and demanded sacrifices, penances, and offerings in expiation of any infringement of their laws. A gloomy superstition was thus imparted to the national religion, which was calculated to chill the old enthusiastic devotion which sprung from the affections. Under such circumstances it may be assumed that the enlightened few had grown dissatisfied with the popular conception of deity and sacerdotal worship. The dogma of the metempsychosis was the expression of a de-

A revolt against the popular worship of the gods.

¹¹ This dogma of the metempsychosis re-acted in its turn upon the conception of Brahma as the supreme spirit. Brahma was self-existent as the supreme soul. As the individual soul passed through endless transmigrations, so the supreme soul passed through endless creations. Each universe was supposed to endure for about five milliards of years, and was then followed by a chaos which lasted for a similar period. Each successive universe was supposed to be a day of Brahma; and each successive chaos was supposed to be a night of Brahma. The fabled chronology of the Bráhmans thus vanishes away into a childish dream. Brahma awakes and the universe springs into being; he sleeps and it sinks into chaos. A day and night occupies ten milliards of years. The year of Brahma comprises three hundred and sixty of these days; and Brahma will exist for a hundred years. Practically Brahma is eternal. A distinction has also been made between Brahma, the supreme spirit, and Brahjá, the creative force. The point is of no practical importance. See History, vol. ii., part v., Brahmanic Period, chaps. i and v.



mocratic revolt against the irresponsible despotism of the gods. It struck at the root of theology, for it taught that man by his own acts could raise himself higher and higher in the scale of being. It deprived death of all its terrors by representing it as a new birth into a better and happier life. It was, in fact, a religion of good works, as opposed to a theology based upon a conventional faith. But it could make no permanent breach in the sacerdotal religion of the Bráhmaṇ priests; and it utterly failed to carry the old Indian gods by storm. It has left its mark on the religion of the Bráhmaṇ sages; but they only formed a limited class of the community. It still lingers as an idea in the mind of the general population, and finds expression in conventional language, but it exercises no perceptible influence upon the religious life of the masses.¹²

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The religion of the Bráhmaṇ sages was indeed little more than a compromise between the new philosophy of the metempsychosis and the old sacerdotal theology. They accepted the dogma of the metempsychosis, but were not prepared to abandon the ideas of worship and deity. They did not interfere with the popular religion of the masses. They left it in the hands of the priests or sacrificers, whilst they retired to the seclusion of their groves and hermitages, and wrought out a new and comprehensive religion of their own. They imparted a philosophic character to the old theology by teach-

Religion of the Bráhmaṇ sages—a compromise between the metempsychosis and the old theology.

Popular religion of the Bráhmaṇ priests unaffected by the metempsychosis.

¹² This is only true as regards modern Hindús. It will be seen hereafter that the dogma of the metempsychosis exercised a very powerful influence amongst the Buddhists of ancient India, as it does to this day amongst the Buddhists of Burma.



CHAPTER II. ing their disciples that all the gods of the universe were resolved into the conception of the supreme spirit Brahma; and they imparted a theological character to the new philosophy by teaching that the primary object of the truly wise should be to escape from the bondage of successive transmigrations, and become absorbed in the supreme spirit, and thus enter upon an indefinable existence of eternal beatitude. In this manner the old ideas of sacrifice and penance were brought into play, but under new forms. They were not atonements for sin, but purifications of the soul. Sages devoted themselves to the contemplation of the supreme spirit in the universe, and to excessive mortifications of the flesh, in the hope of thereby reducing themselves to mere abstractions; and it was doubtless by such an utter abnegation of humanity that they excited the superstitious awe of the populace, and invested themselves with the halo of divinity, which still finds expression in the national sentiment.¹³ Meantime the old gods were never abandoned by the masses. Indeed the worship of the gods is an instinct of ordinary humanity. Men have always aspired to please the divine rulers and guardians of the universe, by special acts of adoration, and the celebration of special festivals in their honour. Whilst therefore the Hindús may have listened to

¹³ The sacred books of the Hindús are filled with the stories of sages and saints who engaged for a long term of years in constant sacrifices, severe austerities, and deep abstract contemplations of the supreme being in his various manifestations. By these performances they were fabled to acquire such supernatural powers that they could drink up seas, remove mountains, change the courses of rivers, and compel the gods generally to fulfil their behests. These no doubt were the outgrowth of popular superstitions, fostered by the Bráhma priests as throwing a reflex glory over the whole caste.



metaphysical teaching, and paid reverence to the philosophic sages, they continued to employ the Bráhmán priests to perform the old sacrifices and ceremonial which had been practised by their forefathers from time immemorial. They believed that whilst the gods were duly worshipped, the country prospered; and this conviction could not be shaken by the dogmas of a supreme spirit and the trans-migrations of the soul.

It may now be possible to indicate the more important stages in the history of the Bráhmans generally. In that remote age which may have preceded the Aryan invasion, the Bráhmans were probably the priests of a phallic deity named Brahma, from whom they derived their distinctive name.¹⁴ Subsequently, in the character of a hereditary priesthood, they officiated as sacrificers to all the gods, whether of the conquerors or the conquered. This spirit of conciliation or comprehension has always characterized the Bráhmans, and is perhaps the main cause of their success. They identified foreign gods with their own; and then by virtue of their hereditary rank they officiated in the worship of all.¹⁵ The Aryan conquerors, the Kshatriyas of the epics, had previously been their own priests; but they could have had no objection to employ the Bráhmans as sacrificers. The Bráhmans probably were Aryans like themselves, and had already established a powerful influence over the general population. Moreover, they must have made a deep

Stages in the history of the Bráhmans originally sacrificers to all the gods.

¹⁴ The caste system of both India and Egypt seems to have originated in the worship of the phallus.

¹⁵ They thus identified Agni, the Vedic deity of fire, with their own god Brahma, the supreme spirit. Other identifications will be mentioned hereafter in chap. vii.



CHAPTER II. impression upon the Kshatriyas; for whilst the priests, properly so called, appeared as a sacerdotal caste of sacred origin, the sages were supposed to be endowed with divine wisdom and supernatural power by virtue of their rites and austerities.

Development of
the Bráhmans
into a national
priesthood.

Thus in process of time the Bráhmans would be recognized by the Kshatriyas as the only agents between man and deity; as the only priests who were authorized to offer sacrifice. Henceforth they became identified with the Aryan invaders, and every conquest effected by the Kshatriyas outside the Brahmanical pale was followed by the introduction and establishment of the Brahmanical hierarchy. The Vedic Rishis either disappeared, or became absorbed in the Brahmanical community; and perhaps the same fate attended the priests and bards of other races. In this manner the Bráhmans ultimately became the one national priesthood of India. They officiated in the public temples and in private dwellings, at festival celebrations and in family or domestic worship. They performed all the great ceremonies on such state occasions as the consecration of Rajas, the commencement of hostilities, the thanksgivings for victory, the propitiation of offended deity in times of defeat, drought, or pestilence. They also performed the necessary rites at births, deaths, marriages, the sowing of seed, the gathering in of harvest, the building of dwellings, the planting of trees, the digging of wells, and other similar incidents in the life of humanity. They also cast nativities, practised divinations, prognosticated future events, and uttered spells or incantations over weapons and implements of every kind. These pursuits they continued not only after the Aryan