THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

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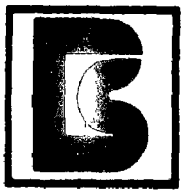
P. T. SRINIVASA IYENGAR



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MADRAS

POINEER BOOK SERVICES
63, Ist Main Road, West C.I.T. Nagar
Madras - 600 035

Price Rs. 50/-
First Published : 1924
First PBS Reprint : 1985
Printed in India
Published by N. Kumaraswamy
For Pioneer Book Services
No. 63, Ist Main Road, West C.I.T. Nagar
Madras-600 035

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THE PRESENT

BY

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1924.

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CHAPTER I.

To the south of Asia hangs India, a triangle with its base up and top down. Did India always look like a triangle? No, say those who know these things, it was not so millions of years ago. Then there stretched a great ocean across the middle of Asia. The Aravallis, then much bigger than now, overlooked in lonely silence this vast ocean which washed the feet of these ancient hills. But small shrunken remnants of this ocean exist now, like the Aral Sea. Then, Tethys, as this great ocean has been named in our days, covered North India, Tibet, and a great part of China. It was the great Mediterranean ocean of the far off past and divided the northern from the southern Hemisphere. Beneath its waters for an immense period of time were the Himalayas built up, bit by bit. Many kinds of sea-animals lived in that ocean. When they died, their bones were laid upon the tops of the Himalayas, then hidden under the ocean-waves. In course of time, these bones were changed into stone. In a later age, up rose the Himalayas above the level of the sea, tall and majestic, and lifted up the fossil sea-animals resting on its peaks. One such is the holy ammonite, called by us the Salagramam, which rolls down the Gandak, when the melting snows of the Himalayas flow fast in the bed of that river. We cherish the ammonite in our houses as a

symbol of the first Avatar of Vishnu, the first manifestation of animal life on the earth.

South of the Great sea of Tethys, stretched a huge continent, of which the Deccan is now the tiny representative. To the East the land extended into what is now called the Bay of Bengal, so as to include the Laccadives and the Maldives. To the South it extended to Ceylon and then bent West so as to embrace Madagascar and join South Africa. India and South Africa then looked like uplifted branches, between which flowed an arm of the Mediterranean ocean, Tethys. The land-connection did not end here. To the East it went on and reached the Malayan Archipelago and thence Australia, whence a narrow strip of land, now represented by the line of islands that stud the Pacific Ocean, like jewels on a belt, connected Australia with America. This huge ancient continent has been named Gondwana-land by scholars of our times. Simpler kinds of plants like ferns, various forms of shell-fish and immemorable species of reptiles inhabited this land.

A vast period of time elapsed. Then there was a great volcanic eruption; but it was not through a crater. The surface of the earth cracked in a number of places. The cracks were many, many miles long and through them overflowed molten rock which spread flat above the land. The lava did not all come out at once. Sheet upon sheet, each about 15 ft. thick, was formed at a time, and it spread over 500,000 square miles of the surface of the earth. This took place very slowly. The thickness of these ancient ava beds now varies from 10,000 ft. to 2,500 ft; in

several places it is but 500 ft., and at the edges so little as 200 ft. This rock is now called the Deccan trap; 'trap' means 'stairs' or 'steps' and now the hills of the Deccan trap look like steps rising one above another.

The fierce rays of the Indian sun have for many thousand years broken up this trap rock into fine black sand and the monsoon rains have been ceaselessly sweeping this sand down to the sea. Hills have, hence, been cut off from the main plateau, and stand like lone giants keeping guard over the surrounding districts from Sindh to Telingana. Half-a-million square miles of trap rock were formed at first and this has now been reduced to 200,000 square miles. The fine sand from the rocks, washed down to the plains and mixed with the rotting leaves and stems of plants forms the black soil of the Peninsular portion of India, where nowadays so much cotton is being grown.

This great outflow from the bowels of the earth led to other great events. The Gondwana continent broke up; the sea rose and swallowed large slices of it, and South Africa and India took on their present look. The arm of Tethys which stretched like a blind alley between them, now worked its way through to the south and mingled its waters with those of the Indian ocean, under which was engulphed a great portion of the southern continent. At the same time rose aloft to the sky the giant Himalayas and Tethys began to dry up. This upheaval took place slowly; the pleateau of Tibet, crept heavenward little by little, till it became the roof of the world. Since then India has been

hanging, an upside down triangle, root up and head below, the India we love so dearly.

Were there men to witness the uplifting of the Himalayas? Did the ancient Indians know what their words meant when they spoke of Sindhu Samudra, the ocean of the Indus? Did they know that North India was once covered by a vast ocean? When they sang that Vishnu rose by three great steps to the high Heaven, did they refer to the gradual uplift of the Himalayas? Some scholars say that men were not born, even the most savage of them, when these wonderful events were taking place. Others say that man had been created by that time. Marks of man's presence are found in the Narmada and the Godaveri valleys and the plains of South India from very early times. But whether he lived in those far off times we cannot say for certain. We are only sure of this, that ever since he arose on our planet, he has inhabited this fair land of ours; he has gradually spread through it from the seacoast to the interior, from the edges of the forests right into the heart of them, eating of the substance which the kindly soil, whose fertility is deathless, provides for him; he has flourished and risen step by step to the present high level of culture, without any break, without the country drying up and reaching a sandy grave, and without the cruel hands of the stranger turning it into a desert, as has happened in other ancient countries.

CHAPTER II.

The writer of a manual of Indian History has said that 'the most essentially fundamental Indian unity rests upon

the fact that the diverse people of India have developed a peculiar type of culture and civilization utterly different from any other type in the world', that the 'dominance of the North, has been the chief note of that history, and that, thanks to the Vedic Rishis, 'Brahminical ideas and institutions' have become 'universally diffused in every province'. But we do not read in Histories of India about the life of the Indian people before the Vedic Rishis began to sing the Vedic hymns and hence we imagine that the Vedic Rishis were the first men of India. As a matter of fact the period of time that has elapsed from the Vedic age to our own is but a tiny bit of the whole of the human epoch; it is but a drop in the ocean of time during which man has flourished in India. The prehistoric period has to be counted in hundred thousands of years and the historic but in hundreds. Man's progress has been slow, painfully slow, and students of history seldom realize this.

Ever since man arose in India and other tropical lands, he walked on his legs and used his hands for making tools. When primitive man stumbled against a stone or hit his head against the overhanging bough of a forest tree, and, instead of pounding the stone to dust or tearing the bough to shreds in impotent rage, he learnt to use the stone as a missile or turn the bough into a club, he started on his human career of ceaseless invention. He devised means of making fire by rubbing wood against wood or striking stone against stone. This way of making fire can be observed even to-day in India. In the heart of the forest men can be seen coaxing fire out of stone fire-drills; and Brahmanas who die after performing the smallest of the

Vedic sacrifices are burnt with fire churned out of wooden fire-drills. Ancient man thus made fire and at it he burned the end of his club till its point became sharp. With this club he fought the elephant, the tiger, the lion and the buffalo. He soon learnt to split bamboos for use as bows, make bow-strings of dried creepers or sinews of animals and shoot long thorns from them. Ancient Indians were expert bowmen; even to-day the Indian forester can kill the fierce man-eating tiger with a single arrow.

In those days man ate the fruits and nuts and roots which he got without trouble from the edges of the forests. When the supply of fruits and roots failed, he took to eating the meat of animals. Man's teeth are weak, unlike those of the flesh-eating animals ; so he learnt to cook meat and soften it before eating it. But as vegetable food can be procured in plenty in this country, the Indian never became much of a meat-eater. Even to-day, he eats meat as curry and not as food.

Man, alone, of all creatures, can easily give up old habits, learn new ones and thus adjust himself to the changing conditions of life. Hence he multiplies faster than his fellow-creatures ; and when he found the narrow strip of land between the sea and the fringe of the forest not enough for his occupation, he set fire to the forest and made clearings which rendered it available for his dwelling. Echoes of this use of fire are found in the Vedic hymns. Agni "envelopes the forests, consumes and blackens them with his tongue." 'Driven by the wind, he invades the woods." "His flames roar like the waves of the sea." "He bellows like a bull and

invades the forests with his flames; the birds are terrified at the noise when his grass-devouring sparks arise."

In those far-off days man made tools of stone for cutting up the flesh of the animals he killed and digging roots from the ground. Those ancient Indians were wonderfully clever in making stone tools. They carefully chose small blocks of stone and with one blow from another stone, knocked it into the required shape. Nowadays with all our boasted cleverness, we cannot make stone tools so easily or so well as they; our hands have lost the ancient cunning.

Then the Indian man wore no dress; he was stark naked. The climate of the greater part of India does not require that man should cover much of his person. Even to-day most Indians are half-naked; for too thick dress or too much of it is but a store-room of dirt in the Indian climate, and to shut out the sun from the skin is but to prevent his rays from making it sweet and clean. When it was very cold the Indian of old days scraped the flesh from the skin of animals with a stone-scraper, dried it in the sun and covered his person with it. Hide, being the earliest material of dress, is even to-day considered to be very holy; hermits wear it; many use it as a carpet for sitting on, during times of worship, or wear bits of deer-hide on occasions of religious ceremonial.

In Europe men then lived in caves for fear of cold; but in India they rarely resorted to caves, which would have been uncomfortable. Nor had they other forms of houses, for they had no wealth to store in them. In that age man was a great wanderer on the face of the earth. He would take his stone tools and go wherever his feet led him. He did not

bury his dead, but left their bodies wherever they dropped down, to be eaten by beasts of prey and pecked at by flesh-eating birds. This ancient custom is still partially kept up by the Tibetans and the Parsis and prevailed to a small extent among Indians till comparatively recent times.

Man, then, lived and moved in herds. Being much weaker than his huge animal foes, he practised the lesson that union is strength; else the big beasts would have wiped him off the face of the earth.

Even in those ancient days, Indian man had invented speech; speaking, like the use of the hand, the making of tools, and the lighting of fire, distinguishes man from the lower animals and is the result of human intelligence. The languages that were then spoken probably survive in the Andamanese, the Mundari, the Savara, and the Sonthali now spoken by the most primitive of existing Indian tribes; but these languages must have altered very much from their ancient forms.

CHAPTER III.

During this, the longest period of Indian History, the Indian very slowly changed his ways of life and learnt new arts. He tamed and made friends with certain animals; he taught them to live with him and to serve him. The dog became the companion of his travels, his helper in hunting and the guardian of his flocks. He slowly gave up his wandering life and learnt to live where he could rear his domestic animals. That is to say, he passed from the nomad to the pastoral stage. The cow requires large fields

of grass to graze on and the buffalo needs, besides, pools of muddy water to wallow in for hours and to cool his black shining skin. Hence the pastoral Indian migrated to the river-valleys. The old-fashioned people of the age looked upon the older wandering life of the hunter as the proper thing, parted from the riverain folk and took to the heart of the woods where they could get beasts to hunt and to the tops of hills where they could wander at will and breathe the keen dry mountain air to their heart's content. There they sacrificed buffaloes and even men to their gods and drank the fierce liquor brewed from the Mohwa flower to rouse their religious zeal. Their descendants, to-day, like the Savaras and the Khonds repeat these ceremonies when out of the reach of the long arm of British law.

Pastoral life acted as a check on the spread of meat-eating. The Indian learnt to love the gentle-eyed cow which, like his own mother, gave him sweet milk to drink ; he grew to hate cow-killing, and the love of the cow is to-day his ruling passion. And milk and butter do not keep in the powerful Indian sun ; so he learnt to make buttermilk out of milk and turn the butter of the cow and the buffalo into sweet smelling ghee. He made the flute out of the young bamboo to help to spend time in the solitude of the pasture land. And Krishna, the guardian of cattle, has, since ancient times, been the best beloved deity in India, adored alike by man and maid.

Besides tending cattle, Indian man domesticated the ce-plant, millets and pulses, the plantain and the mango, the sweet potato and other tubers. He tilled the land, irrigated it, and raised various kinds of crops. The pastoral and the agricultural stages of life seem to have

grown more or less at the same time and are, even now, found together in most Indian villages. Indian man of those days also learnt to make thread out of the fibre of the cotton plant and weave it into cloth. The cotton plant is a native of the Deccan plateau, covered with ground-down trap-rock. The ancient Indians got plenty of cotton without any trouble and wove cloth many cubits long. They wound long pieces of it loose round their persons and tight round their heads and this is the form of outdoor dress best suited to the country. Moreover cloth was easily had; hence they did not get into the habit of cutting it in pieces and stitching it into shirts and coats, so as to make short bits of cloth go a long way. The fashion of wearing unstitched clothes persists to this day; nay, stitched clothes are unorthodox, against rule, on ceremonial occasions, for in the matter of ceremonial all over the world, old ways are considered to be proper and new ways improper and undignified. Ladies are everywhere most attached to old ways; and Indian ladies wear the least quantity of tailored dress and the greatest length of unstitched cloth.

Indians of this age learnt also to extract yellow, blue, and red dyes from plants and fix them on cloth. Yellow, being the easiest to obtain, was probably the earliest of these; from then to now, it has been the symbol of all that is auspicious, all that is pleasing, in the lives of the Indians. It is used on occasions of marriage; it is the mark of the happy lady whose husband is alive; and it is the colour of Narayana, the central deity of the Solar Sphere, whom they daily picture as golden-rayed, golden-armed, golden-bodied and clad in yellow silk.

Another kind of life grew in the low-lying land near the sea. Here the old Indian became a fisherman. The sea supplied him with his chief food. He made nets for catching fish; he grew to love the sea and swim boldly on its waves. He hollowed out tree-trunks, or tied a number of them together into a catamaran, or again made a wicker work boat covered with hides and went far into the sea for casting his nets. He went by sea from place to place, hugging the coast. He crept along the west coast and reached Makran, where, even in much later times, the Greeks found a colony of Ichthyophagi or 'fish-eaters'. He went beyond to the Persian Gulf and probably to Arabia. On the East he went to Burmah and the Malay Peninsula whence he brought back to his country the hot but sweet-smelling betel-leaf.

All this varied work he did with his stone tools, of which he had more than two hundred varieties. Unlike the stone tools of the older times, those of the new stone age were ground till the surface became smooth and beautifully polished. The Indian craftsman can work more patiently than the workmen of any other country, excepting perhaps the Chinese. The raising of the rice-crop requires more patience than the cultivation of any other food-grain; and the same extraordinary degree of patience the ancient Indian stone-worker displayed in polishing the surface of his tools till they shone like burnished speel; specimens of these can be picked up by those who have eyes to see with, throughout the length and breadth of the land.

CHAPTER IV.

In the new Stone Age they practised other arts as well. They made pots of clay, coloured and baked them. These clay pots were highly polished, and so well that even after being buried in the earth and soaked in subsoil water for thousands of years, some of them are as bright as if they were made yesterday. They adorned the pots with beautiful designs in line. Line-drawing has always fascinated Indians, so much so that even to-day Indian ladies delight to decorate the ground inside and outside their houses with beautiful designs in lines drawn with white and coloured rice-flour, and to embellish their walls with intricate patterns in colour. No domestic ceremonial takes place but has to be performed on floors beautified in this way.

Agriculture spread along the river valleys. The valleys of the Ganga and the Kaveri, flatter than the rest, soon became centres of a dense population. The fertile river valleys gave every year a rich yield of crops, more than even their large population could consume. They stored the surplus and thus became wealthy. Having wealth to keep safe from thieves—human and animal—they built houses of timber and provided them with granaries. The huts of the less wealthy were round and covered with cocoanut or palmyra leaves. The walls were made of wattle and clay and the rafters, of split palm trunks. Where the rafters met at the top, they were held together by an earthern pot with a hole at the bottom. This fixed for all time the dome shape of the roofs of Indian shrines and the ornament called kalasam at the top.

Besides houses, the wood-worker made carts, boxes, sitting planks, wooden pillows, swinging cots, etc.; these were profusely ornamented with wood carving. The Indian workman never made any article, however humble it might be, without some art work on it. Doors, door-frames, the legs of benches, the various parts of carts, were all profusely ornamented. The lotus flower, which grows on a plant, every part of which is used by the Indian, was one of the beautiful forms frequently cut on all articles of wood. This fashion of ornamenting articles in daily use is to-day dying out through the influence foreign machine-made articles. Tools for this art-work, as well as those for ordinary wood-work, for agriculture, weaving and various other arts were all made of wood or stone. The workmen of the new stone age used almost as many tools of stone as his descendant of to-day uses tools of iron.

The Indian of the new stone age buried his dead. He dug graves about ten feet long and six feet broad, and placed the dead man in a sitting posture inside a big earthen pot. The pot was then half filled with sand and earthen trays full of food stuffs were placed in front of him and his tools around him. The pot was then filled with earth and an earthen lid was placed on its top. It was then let into the grave, which was filled up and closed with a huge stone slab; more earth was then poured over and a number of upright stones was planted all round it. Miles of such graves mark ancient settlements of the new stone age. Often a number of these graves is separated from a neighbouring set of them by a circle of upright stones, making each field thus marked off the burial vault of an ancient family.

A new group of languages arose among the folk of this age, some of which a little modified, and others, very much altered, are now spoken throughout India. The Kui, spoken north of the Godavari valley, is the most primitive representative of this group and Tamil has the most ancient culture. The dialects of Northern India have come much more under the influence of Sanskrit than those of South India.

The new stone age is still with us to some extent. Utensils of wood, stone and clay, exactly of the type which prevailed in that ancient epoch are still used by us. Our grinding stones with which we make wheat or rice flour, the stones on which we make curries and curry-powder, the wooden mortar and pestle we use for pounding cereals and pulses and many other things in our houses have come down to us from those far off days. They are regarded as more holy than articles made of metal; on ceremonial occasions we readily return to fashions of dress and customs of the stone age. The holy thread of Brahmanas has to be made with stone age tools. Numerous other such old customs can be discovered by the intelligent enquirer.

CHAPTER V.

Ages later, when a big fire was lighted on blocks of iron-stone, the stone was so much heated that molten iron flowed from it. The ancient Indian was a keen observer and thus learnt, how to get metallic iron out of iron ore. He soon found out that iron was a much better material for making

tools with than stone and thus the iron age began in India earlier than in other countries of the world. The change from the stone age to the iron age was rapid; so much so that in the earliest graves of the iron age, stone tools and iron tools are found together and both kinds of tools continued to be used for a long time. The shapes of the implements of early times were exactly the same as those of the tools in the hands of the village gods to-day, such as the trident, the curved sword, the spear; weapons of such shapes can be found in ancient graves; but the tools which men use for secular purposes have altered in shape and size, all except the mace, the bow and the quoit which continue to be of the ancient pattern both in the hands of gods and man.

The discovery of iron was very soon followed by the discovery of gold, copper and silver: but lead, tin and zinc were introduced into India from foreign countries. Copper and silver were comparatively rare even in ancient times; the former was used for making domestic utensils; hence even now copper vessels are considered the proper thing for ceremonial use; and wealthier people use silver ones; but articles of lead, tin and zinc, as well as of bronze and brass, which are alloys of copper and these other metals, can be used only for secular purposes. Gold is considered the holiest of metals, but, being always rare, was, except in royal houses, used only for making ornaments. Gold is easily worked and keeps bright and untarnished for a long time; it is, besides, suited for delicate art work. Indians of old loved to decorate their persons with gold jewels, several of which of fine workmanship are found in the graves of the early iron age. Gold ornaments still are the chief passion of the Indian; the

poorest person will to-day invest what he saves on gold jewels.

In these early times a vast internal and foreign trade developed; this was conducted by barter. The woolen goods, horses and medicinal plants of Northern India were exchanged for the pearls and precious stones of South India. Indian timber found its way to Babylonia; it has been discovered in the sand-buried ruins of its ancient cities; Indian cloth, dyed in indigo, has been found wrapped round Egyptian mummies. The elephant hunters of the interior of Africa who supplied ivory to the workers of the valley of the Nile used steel axes which in those days were made only in India. Indian "agates" and other precious stones and Indian spices were eagerly sought after by the advanced communities of Asia and Europe. Was this foreign trade carried along the coast or right across the Arabian Sea? The inhabitants of the coast of India loved the sea and were not afraid of it. They were very shrewd observers of nature, and they discovered the simple fact that the monsoon winds blew in one direction for six months and in the opposite one for another six months and the ancestors of the lascars of to-day sailed boldly across the deep, dark-blue ocean and took their goods to the coasts of East Africa and Burmah. Others, less bold, skirted the coast and hence the East and West Coasts of India were studded with sea-ports, most of which flourished till the XVIII century, when the big modern vessels took away the carrying trade from the ancient sloops and rendered the small ports absolutely useless and made them sink to the position of obscure fishing hamlets.

The trade of ancient India required a network of roads from the places where articles were produced to centres of distribution and thence to the ports. Goods were transported by means of the old springless carts drawn by oxen and of donkey-loads, kavadi-loads and headloads. Even to-day long strings of these pass every night from villages to seaports (and railway stations), exactly as they did thousands of years ago. The roads, as in ancient times, are still made by spreading the clay from the rice-fields near; the tracks of the heavy carts are marked by deep ruts in the clay. These primitive roads ran from one end of India to the other. On these roads, some more than 2,000 miles long, men and women trudged along, one person carrying two persons' loads, hanging from either end of a split bamboo resting on the shoulder. From Kanyakumari to the Indus and the Brahmaputra, along the West Coast and along the East Coast, between the ghats and the sea, ran these roads and tracks. They were studded here and there with sacred bathing-ghats and shrines.

The iron age developed a new type of graves, square and not circular; they were lined with polished stone slabs and divided into two compartments by a slab with a hole in the middle. Probably a chief was buried in one compartment and his wife in the other. The dead were still buried in big pots with food-grains and tools placed in front of them. Ornaments of gold and other metals were also placed in the pots and a lighted earthenware lamp, in a corner of the grave. In this age another fashion of burial monuments, called megalithic, being built of huge blocks of stone, was intro-

duced by Indian traders who had travelled to Egypt. But this fashion does not seem to have spread much, for megalithic monuments are comparatively rare in India.

CHAPTER VI.

Of the languages now spoken in India, Tamil reached a high stage of development in very early times. It grew uninfluenced by Sanskrit and its speakers reached a high level of culture long ago. Thus by a consideration of native Tamil words, it is possible to construct a picture of the life of the Tamils in particular and the Indians in general more than five milleniums ago.

The land was divided by the Tamils into five kinds—the ploughland, the woodland, the seashore, the hilly country and the sandy desert. The life of the people differed according to the kind of land they occupied; thus were evolved five different classes. The farmers inhabited the river-valleys. They were rich and from them usually came the kings of the various districts. During a part of the year they were engaged in work on the fields. When the yearly harvest was over, they spent their time in making merry, drinking, dancing and singing, or in exciting amusements like dicing or racing or tribal wars. The wars were ordinarily undertaken not so much for taking up each other's territory—earth-hunger was not then the chief cause of wars—but for spending spare time and of cultivating the martial virtues. Hence fighting was regulated by a very strict code of rules which placed honour much above mere

victory and all battles were but a series of duels between individual warriors, as in mediæval Europe.

The woodlanders led a pastoral life. They raised herds of cattle and sheep. Their life was slow and leisurely. All the year round they sang and piped and danced. They wandered in the woods and learnt to love the varying aspects of nature; they acquired an intimate knowledge of trees and plants, all of which they gave names to and whose properties they investigated and understood. Even to-day these woodlanders have a wonderful knowledge of the uses of roots and herbs; they prescribe simple remedies of wonderful efficacy for the most obstinate diseases and can 'reduce' refractory metals by means of the juices of common plants.

The hillmen were sturdy hunters. They hunted the wild animals with the bow and the arrow. In their hearts grew a wonderful degree of bravery and in their hands an incredible amount of skill. They could unflinchingly face the fiercest beast and kill it with a single arrow. The arrow let loose from the bow was unerring in aim and pierced the brain of the beast through the eye. Failure meant instantaneous destruction and as the hunter could not afford to be nervous and fail, he became an expert shikari. Descendants of these hunters, as brave and as skilful as their ancestors of old days, can still be met with in the heart of the hilly country, where the whistle of the railway engine and the hoot of the motor horn has not yet penetrated. It was regarded as the greatest possible disgrace for a bowman to lose a single arrow. The arrow was made of reed tipped with a sharp arrowhead of excellent steel and winged with feathers. The

bow was made of split bamboo. When they did not want to kill an animal, but merely to scare it away, they shot balls of clay dried in the sun. Such primitive shot is still largely used in villages to drive the monkey off the cocoanut tree and by such tribes as the Gadabas for shooting birds. In the hilly tracts, also arose expert workers in steel, who forged weapons of offence and defence, swords and battle axes, shields and coats of mail.

The dwellers of the coast districts were fishermen. They sailed on canoes and catamarans far into the sea, and cast huge nets, tied them to their boats and dragged them to the shore. They were brawny men, their skin tanned by the sun and seasoned by the salt sea spray. They built ships and in them sailed across the Arabian sea and the Bay of Bengal, to Persia and Africa, to Malaya and China and were the carriers of ancient India's foreign trade. They took Indian cotton goods, Indian spices and gems and Indian timber to these countries and brought back the silks and sugar of China, the horses and wine of Persia, the ivory and gums of Africa. Like sailors all the world over, when they stayed on land they gave themselves up to the wildest merriment.

There is no proper desert land in South India; so they applied the name 'desert' to the drier, sandier land outlying the other divisions of the soil. The life of the desert was not unlike that of the tracts near. People living such a merry life as the ancient Tamils could not help developing an early ballad literature. The ballads sang of love and war—respectively called 'home' and 'abroad'—of the hopes and disappointments of lovers and of incidents on the field of

battle. This ancient lyric poetry is now lost; but it has left indelible marks on the later, more developed, more artificial literature, of which latter we have a few representative specimens, coming down from more than two thousand years ago. These point to the fact that the earlier literature lived long enough to evolve strict canons of literary criticism. These canons were derived from the usage of the different forms of poetry which were born in the different divisions of the land and which were suited to the different conditions of life that prevailed there. Thus several thousand years ago it was settled what kinds of poetic images, what sentiments and what situations, what kinds of plots and incidents were suited to what kinds of districts; and these canons were rigorously applied to all ancient Tamil poetry.

Various gods were worshipped in these ancient days. Each village had its own special guardian duty, but the method of worship was the same throughout the land. Its essential feature was the sacrifice of some animal—the cock, the goat, the bull, the horse and rarely man. Food grains were mixed with the blood of the sacrificial victim and offered to the god. A pandal was put up for the occasion, and decorated with flowers. The worship ended with drinking and dancing and the beating of tom-toms. Such methods of worship can still be seen in every village throughout India but are prevalent only among the lower orders of society.

CHAPTER VII.

More than 5,000 years ago came into prominence another cult in Northern India. Its chief feature was the use

of fire as the mouth of the gods. All offerings—of animal or vegetable products—were poured into the flame-tongues of Agni, who, it was believed, would carry them to the gods. The men who followed these fire-rites called themselves Aryas and the 'fire-less' men, Dasyus. In the household rites a single fire was lighted and in the greater rites conducted for the benefit of kings and noblemen, three fires were lighted and a number of priests were engaged. These rites were accompanied by the chanting of prayers by Rishis in ancient Sanskrit. The origin of the fire-rite in India is lost in the mists of antiquity; but its spread in the land and the increase in complexity of the ritual was due to the activities of two lines of kings—the Solar and the Lunar—who soon secured sovereignty throughout the land and patronized the Brahmana-priests who alone were competent to conduct the ritual.

The spread of the fire-rite and the gorgeous ceremonial it developed into, made the Kshattriya and the Brahmana the most influential classes of society; the farmer, the trader and the herdsman followed the simpler 'fireless' rite. But except for the facts that offerings were made through fire and were accompanied by the chanting of Vedic mantras, the Arya rite was not essentially different from the Dasyu rite. The culture of the followers of both rites was the same. They lived and loved, fought and amused themselves in the same ways, the difference between them being one of cult and not one of culture. The gods invoked in the Arya rites were associated with the natural phenomena peculiar to India and very few of them were known outside this country.

But the fire-rite grew very elaborate and gave rise to a great ritual literature, called Vedic, and from this, in later times, was evolved a vast philosophical and scientific literature, chiefly by the Brahmanas. This led to the development of a very special type of culture and outlook on life which is peculiar to India and has persisted practically unchanged through the ages.

The great majority of the people, then as now, tilled the ground and raised rice, a grain which requires more hard work and very much more patience but more sumptously feeds the people who work at its cultivation, than any other grain. The raising of rice requires the storing of water in tanks and taking it to the rice-fields and away from them at frequent intervals. Hence Indians from ancient times became experts in hydraulic engineering. Besides rice, they raised numerous other grains which do not require irrigation; but grains are at best but tasteless foodstuffs and therefore Indians from old days learnt to grow several kinds of spices—aromatic and pungent—like the round pepper, the long pepper, mustard, cardamoms, cloves, etc. to season their food with. These they exported also to foreign countries. The constant intercourse of India with far off lands and the consequent rise and fall of India's wealth at various stages of its history is intimately connected with the demand and supply of Indian spices from old times.

Besides agriculture, industries also flourished in the Vedic age. The artizan was much respected and was the friend of kings for whom he made cars to ride in and thrones to sit on. The thrones had 'iron columns decked with gold',

and kings held court 'arrayed in golden mail and shining robes', with magnificent carpets spread under their feet. Heralds proclaimed their glory in councils, where Brahmanas debated questions of law and polity. Kings lived in stone-castles with a thousand columns of wood, covered with intricate and skilful wood-carving and images and creepers made of metal. Their chariots were decked with gold and mother-of-pearl—gold from the Himalayan region and mother-of-pearl from the extreme south of India—and drawn by teams of 'well-fed' horses or oxen.

Weaving in cotton and wool was a very important industry, so much so that the making of prayers, the performance of sacrifices, and the creation of the world by the gods, were compared to the weaving of cloth. "The sacrifice drawn out with threads on every side, stretched by a hundred sacred ministers and one, this do these fathers who hitherward are come; they sit beside the warp, and cry, 'weave forth, weave back'. The man extends it and the man unbinds it: even to the vault of heaven hath he outspun it. These pegs are fastened to the seat of worship; they made the Sama-hymns their weaving shuttle." Agriculture, the rearing of herds and all other industries prevailed just as they did in the preceding age and just as they do to-day in the more inland parts of the country. The Vedic hymns indicate that medicine and surgery were much advanced in this age.

Chariot-racing, dicing and fighting continued to be the amusements of the higher classes; this was but a continuation of the customs of the pre-Aryan times and was not affected

by the rise of the fire-rite. Fighting continued to be more an exciting amusement than a means of self-aggrandisement; it was of the nature of duels for the exhibition of personal bravery and individual skill in archery or fencing. It was preceded by a conventional cattle-lifting which served as the ancient method of the declaration of war. Strictest possible rules governed the details of fighting and Kshattriyas were very jealous of their honour.

Along with the spread of the fire-rite, the custom of cremating the dead arose as a consequence of the fire-rite. This was followed by the burial of the ashes in a 'narrow house of clay', a hemispherical clay-mound. But the older forms of disposal of the dead—abandonment of corpses or their burial in urns still continued, especially among the people who did not come under the influence of the Arya rites.

CHAPTER VIII.

The great Mahabharata war took place about 35 centuries ago. It proved to be the most important event in the history of ancient India. It is said that almost all the Rajas of India took part in it; and as a result of the war, almost all the ancient royal houses were destroyed, never more to recover their ancient splendour. With the decline of the Kshattriyas, the greater fire-sacrifices declined, for they were generally celebrated for the benefit of kings. The race of 'ancient Rishis' who 'saw' the Mantras disappeared, and their place was taken by the 'modern Rishis, who were content to gather the old hymns, arrange them in anthologies,

interpret and comment on them and record for the benefit of posterity the ancient tradition regarding sacrifices and civil and canon law.

On the decline of the sacrificial system, new ways of seeking communion with the gods were born. One such was meditation in forest retreats; this was called the method of 'inturned vision' This led to the composition of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, which many regard as having reached the high-water-mark of human thought. The beliefs that have since become the foundation of all Indian systems of thought now came into prominence. The chief of them are that the soul is born in human bodies every now and then, when he gets experience of the pains and pleasures of life, that the course of these experiences is strictly regulated by the law of cause and effect called the Law of Karma and the goal of man's life is to obtain release for the mind from the stored energy of desire so that man might become the master of himself.

A profound change came over the character of the Indian people as a result of these beliefs. They lost, as a nation, for all time, the martial virtues. It became impossible for them to grow into a nation of fighters or to acquire the desire for conquering or subjugating other peoples. Individual kings might now and then arise who, fired by personal ambition, might extend their sway far and wide, and found imperial houses. They might gather vast armies and amass immense wealth; they might hold splendid courts and build great monuments to perpetuate their glory: but in the second or third generation, kings of their line would either

turn ascetics or go to the opposite extreme and become dissolute. Either way royal dynasties would rise and fall with meteoric rapidity

Another result of the decline of the sacrificial system was the development of devotional cults, in which one single god was worshipped as the Supreme Deity. Some worshipped Vishnu, the 'wide-stepper', the sustainer of all life; others were devoted to Siva, the Healer and the Destroyer of desire; others, again, worshipped Amba, the world-mother, the embodiment of the energy which drives the universe. In all the ways in which human kings were honoured, the images of these gods were worshipped. These images, made of wood, of stone, of Salagramam and mortar, and of metals, especially copper, were housed in temples. These temples were called the House of the King—even to-day in Tamil the same word is used for a Temple as for a Royal Palace. As the King, gaily decked in silk and gold, rode in elaborately decorated wooden cars on various occasions, so the idol was bathed, dressed, bedecked, and bejewelled, placed in a gorgeous car full of splendid carvings and dragged through the four principal streets round the temple. Often kings instituted the cults of new gods or installed new idols as a means of making money. The temple festivals were the occasion of much innocent merry making by the people. The stories of the sports of Siva and the incarnations of Vishnu were sung or enacted by the devotees. This was the origin of the Indian drama.

The cult of these gods was largely unvedic. In the Vedic ceremonies only the Brahmanas, the Kshattriyas and the

Vaisyas could take part; but Temple-worship and devotion to Vishnu or Siva was open to all—even to the Chandala and the Mleccha (the foreigner). Even to-day this is theoretically so; but the priesthood in most temples has passed into the hands of the Brahmana, who has also introduced into temple-worship a few elements of Vedic lore. The temple-rites are primarily of the nature of personal worship and hence 'fireless'; the Vedic sacrifices were 'bloody,' because they required the slaughter of animals, but the temple worship was bloodless, because cooked rice, cocoanuts and fruits alone were offered to the gods and then distributed to the worshippers. Yet the worship in temples came to be called 'sacrifice' (*yajna*) and undying lamps are burnt inside them in imitation of the fires of the Hall of Sacrifice.

The ground plan of temples was a copy of that of the Sacrificial Hall. The latter was oblong in shape; from this a square was cut off by a cross wall and this was the Holy of Holies, called the 'House of the Birth' of the God. The part that remained over has borne the name of the Front Hall or the Half-Hall. The Holy of Holies was covered by a dome topped by a metal pot. This, the fundamental plan of the shrine, has remained unaltered through the ages. The temples were for a long time built of entirely of wood—the first building material of India—and profusely ornamented with carvings. Then they were built of brick and mortar with the carvings in stucco. Neither brick and mortar nor wood-work can live in the Indian climate for more than a few centuries; hence the older temples have all disappeared. The earliest structural temples that we can see

now are not much more than 1,500 years old; temples began to be excavated in hills about 2,000 years ago and built of stone some time later.

The cosmopolitan character and the bloodless rites of temples became immensely popular among the common folk, in whom grew rapidly a strong sentiment against the taking of animal life.

CHAPTER IX.

But the temple-festivals and the comparatively crude religious observances of temples which were accompanied by boisterous merry makings and loud display of dress and jewels could scarcely satisfy the religious aspirations of the thinking part of the population. To give up pleasures, to learn to go without the ordinary needs of the physical and the mental life, to sacrifice desire at the altar of self-control, to bend the body and the mind so that they might become the slaves and not the masters of the spark of God in us called the soul (*atma*)—this alone could appeal to the loftier spirits in the country. Under the impulsion of this desire for release from the slavery of the senses, arose orders of monks, ascetics, Sanyasis, Bhikshus, Sadhus who swarmed in the land.

This movement first began among the Brahmanas in the Vedic age; the break up of the sacrificial system on account of the convulsion of the Mahabharata war, and the consequent change in the estimation of the value of the pleasures which the world has to offer, led to the great accentuation of the impulse to renounce the world. The belief spread wide that salvation (*moksham*) could be obtained only by

leading the rigidly abstemious life of the hermit; and the life of the hermit was available only to Brahmanas. They alone underwent the rigorous previous discipline which fitted them for the life of the ascetic. The ideal of the Brahmana, even when his life was of the earth, earthy, was that of the beggar. To teach him to forget the desire for riches, beggary was the only profession open to him, and to help him to conquer the desires of the flesh he was called upon to live a life hedged in by all kinds of rules and restrictions.

Hence he, alone, was entitled to become an ascetic, and, that, after leading the life of the student, the married man and the exile in the forest. He then became a hermit and learnt to despise the pleasures of the world. For this purpose he submitted to a stricter discipline. He usually lived away from the haunts of men and ate roots, fruits and wild vegetables. He wore old rags which he picked up and washed, or a dress of bark or skin. He took five major vows—to avoid injury to living beings, to be truthful, not to take the property of others, to be continent and to be liberal; he took, besides, five minor vows—not to give way to anger, to obey his guru, to avoid rashness, to be cleanly and to eat pure food. He never visited the same village twice, except in the rainy season, when he had to remain in the same place for four months and spend the time in meditation and in lecturing to lay disciples.

The life of the hermit was, according to the canon law, open only to Brahmanas, and this aroused the jealousy of the Kshattriyas. They thought that they were in no wise in-

ferior to the Brahmanas in culture and wanted to enter ascetic orders and strive to attain salvation. From this ardent desire of the Kshattriyas arose two orders of monks, called the Jaina (the victorious) and the Bauddha (the enlightened). The Jaina ascetics followed rules of conduct much stricter than those followed by Brahmana hermits. The Bauddha monks followed rules which were much easier than those of any other order. The cults of Vishnu and Siva produced other orders of asceticism. Some of these practised various forms of self-torture. From this age, the stream of asceticism has flowed in India without interruption.

The spread of asceticism, however, did not quite rob the common man of the joy of life which came down from the pre-Aryan ages. He drank and gambled, sang and danced, made love and made merry without taking thought of the morrow. The fairs which were held frequently were occasions when the people gave themselves up to pleasure. They trooped out in holiday costume, displayed their jewels and brightly coloured garments, enjoyed the music, dramatical entertainments, and numerous other forms of amusements provided by kings. Popular music and primitive drama flourished side by side with the refined music and the literary drama of the schools. Besides these, there were several seasonal festivals coming down from remote times—the spring festival, the harvest festival, etc. The various religious sects tried to weld the festivals to their own systems of worship, but the common man cared not for the associated religious legend so much as for enjoying the fun of the moment.

But yet the Sadhu and the Sanyasi was often a skeleton in the feast and in the long run the serious view of life preached by the ascetics gradually told on the minds of the people and the unseen side of Nature and the future salvation of the soul became more important to the Indian than the unrestrained enjoyment of the seen and the present. The nation lost the buoyancy of youth and became a grave Nestor among the nations of the earth.

CHAPTER X.

The period from 1000 B. C. to 400 B. C. was an age of extraordinary intellectual activity in India. The withdrawal of the cream of society to the quiet life of the forest, the release from life's fever of the best intellects of the land, led to a persistent pursuit of knowledge. Schools of philosophy arose; as many ways of analysing human experience and explaining the 'name and form' which constitutes life's show, as is possible for human genius to devise, were invented. Different points of views (*darsanam*) were taken up and schemes of thought, arising from these view-points were pursued with merciless logic. The fame of the wisdom of the sages of India spread to foreign countries and pilgrims from far and near came to learn the wisdom of the gymnosophists, the 'naked wise men' of India.

The science of geometry was founded in the Vedic schools, rendered necessary for laying out the Sacrificial Hall; for which purpose was taught the theorem which

Pytaghoras learnt from the schools of Takshasila and took to Europe and is hence called the Pythagorean theorem. The elements of Astronomy, so far as is concerned with the equation of the Solar and Lunar years, and the daily motion of the Sun and the Moon with reference to the constellations near their path in the skies, were investigated for the purpose of determining the seasons and days when the numerous Vedic ceremonial observances had to be celebrated.

The science of grammar was studied and taken to a high degree of perfection. Moreover the victims for the sacrifices had to be cut up skilfully, to be carved as a dish fit for the gods. This led to an accurate knowledge of anatomy and hence to a great development of medicine. The study of medicine was pursued in a scientific spirit and the great knowledge which the inhabitants of the woodland regions had of the properties of plants and their experience in 'reducing' gold and other metals and 'purifying' them was pressed into service. The decoctions and electuaries invented in those days, the preparations of metals and mercury and arsenic and sulphur first manufactured in that distant past, are prescribed to-day by Indian medical practitioners and found to be more easily assimilable with the tissues of the body and more efficacious in the cure of chronic diseases than the ever new inventions of modern chemistry.

Civil law and political science were studied and treatises written for the benefit of Kings, Ministers and the Councils of learned men *(parishads)* which laid down the law on all occasions. Only a few of these books have come down in their

original form ; others have been revised by later authors to suit the varying needs of later times but are yet ascribed to the ancient authors. The development of military science led to the study of archery, the care of horses and elephants, the construction of forts and the disposal of armies on the field of battle. The names of various ancient books on these subjects are referred to in old literature, but many of these have succumbed to the numerous destroying agencies of the long passage of time.

Arts and industries flourished. Books were written on most of these and systematic teaching given by master-artists to their apprentices. Wood-work, metal-work of all kinds ivory-work, wonderful forms of weaving which attained fame throughout the ancient world, glass-making, music, dancing and gesturing—which make up the 64 *Kalas* were taught. Large scale industries were generally undertaken by kings and formed one important source of their revenue. They claimed ownership of all forest produce and of that of land and water mines. Ores of various kinds were mined and reduced; jewellers and other artizans were greatly patronized by kings. This led to a vast development of trade; and this, in turn, caused a great advance in ship-building. The life of the people in the first millenium B. C. was indeed marvellously advanced.

In the VII and VI centuries B. C. there suddenly arose in the world a great religious ferment; a great yearning for escape from sin, a wave of enthusiasm for asceticism spread far and wide in India, in Persia, in China and other civilized countries. Great movements seem to start among men through-

out the world at the same time; they generally produce great leaders who give a body and form to these impulses. Varddhamana, the Mahavira, the great hero, and Gautama the Saugata, the welcome-one, were two Indian princes who came to the forefront on the crest of this wave of unrest. Each of these great men took up a Kshattriya order of monks which was languishing for want of support and made it fashionable. Varddhamana reorganized the Jaina order; he made its rules very stiff. His monks had to take vows very much more difficult to observe than those of Brahmana Sanyasis. They had to give up shaving for fear of killing minute insects in the hair of the head; instead they had the hair pulled out one by one. They had to shut their eyes to all beautiful objects and their ears to all agreeable sounds, to avoid pleasant smells and sweet food. They had to adopt severe forms of mortification of the flesh and difficult methods of mental training. And after pursuing such a very difficult path, they generally ended their lives by starvation.

Gautama went to the opposite extreme in reforming the other Kshattriya ascetic order. He abolished all forms of self-torture and made his discipline chiefly a mental one. The life led by the Bauddha monks was not very different from that of the ordinary man, except that they practised a sterner morality and devoted themselves to spiritual exercises. Thus their method of reaching salvation was the training of the mind and the heart without the discipline of denying the comforts of the flesh. On this account the Bauddha cult became extraordinarily popular, and its bounds were thrown

open to all classes and both sexes. Though it spread rapidly in India and flourished for a few brief centuries, it died a natural death in the land of its birth ; for the ideal of attempting to release the soul from the trammels of the flesh without previously submitting to a crucifixion of the flesh cannot permanently appeal to the Indian imagination. In countries outside India the Bauddha cult has spread and instead of a discipline has become a creed, though it has served to tame the passions of several Asiatic people and turn some of their instincts to useful channels.

But the immediate consequence of the popularity of Gautama's teachings was a great veneration for the person of the Master. This led to the erection of monuments for enshrining the ashes and other personal relics of the Enlightened One. The monuments were but a copy of the burial mounds of the vedic age. As the relics of the Saugata were placed in them, they were called the House of Relics, *dhatugarbha* or *dagoba*. Later the building of mere mounds (they are now called topes) without any relics became an act of merit and the land was covered with them. At first they were built of earth, then of brick and lastly of stone. This gave a great impulse to stone architecture, which has since become the characteristic of Indian culture and the undying embodiment of Indian art-effort.

CHAPTER XI.

It was the last quarter of the IV century B. C. The 'fifty-six' kingdoms of India had been brought under 'one

umbrella'—that of Chandragupta, the Maurya monarch of Magadha. A net-work of officers from the royal princes (*Yuvarajas*) who ruled over vast provinces, down to village officers (*gramanyas*), administered the affairs of state, all in accordance with the principles laid down by the great Brahmana minister, Chanakya, based on the teachings of the Rishis and supplemented by his own ripe wisdom. While the advisory officers were Brahmanas, the executive officers were derived from all classes of the community, for we hear of a Governor of a Western Province far removed from Pataliputram, the capital city, who was a Vaisya of the name of Pushyagupta. He constructed at a place a 1,000 miles away from the capital, and on the borders of the Arabian Sea, a great lake called Sudarsana, the beautiful, for irrigating the fields of the district around. Officers were appointed to measure each man's land and inspect the sluices by which water was distributed into the branch canals, so that every one might enjoy his fair share of the water.

Notwithstanding the extremely careful organization of the Central Government, local affairs were left in the charge of local committees. The king levied a tax of one-sixth of the produce of the land; but the chief sources of his wealth were the crown lands, the income from mines and forests, and from the industries and trade conducted by the crown. The king was bound by the Laws whose sanction was the Sruti and the Smriti—revelation and tradition—and which had been co dified in the schools of the Brahmanas. The crown maintained hospitals for the sick and choultries for the

hungry, highways throughout the length and breadth of the land provided with mile-stones and signposts, and waterways in charge of ferry-superintendents. The crown also supervised private industries and trade, so that a high standard of industrial and commercial morality was kept up. A foreign observer has noted that men were truthful and brave, and the women good and pure; there were no slaves; every one trusted every one else; people did not lock their doors, as there was very little theft and they scarcely went to law.

Pataliputram, the capital, was situated on a tongue of land formed by the junction of the Son and the Ganga—a position which could be easily defended. It was a great and noble city extending about nine miles long and two miles deep. A heavy timber wall protected the city on all sides; it was furnished with 64 lofty gates and defended by 570 towers. A deep moat filled with water from the Son ran all around the wall. The city was provided with parks and tanks which made the city look beautiful. The plan of the palaces and houses was not different from that of modern ones, but they were built of wood and probably looked like the timber palaces which one can see now in Kashmir. The royal court of Pataliputram was the most magnificent then on the face of the earth. The palace was filled with elaborate wood-carvings; and its pillars were ornamented with creepers, flowers and birds of silver and gold. The vessels used in the royal palace were made of solid gold; the skill of the Indian artizan of 2,200 years ago can be judged from the fact that the gold water-pots used in the royal palace measured six feet across. The king went out

in golden palanquins; he rode on elephants provided with gold trappings and seated within a gold howdah. The kings and nobles were dressed in exceedingly fine muslins, dyed in beautiful colours, whose secret is now forgotten, thanks to modern coal-tar dyes, and ornamented with intricate designs in gold and silver thread, the making of which has been destroyed by the competition of modern electroplated wire. Shoes were made of fine, white leather and richly decked in silver and gold.

The royal court was magnificent; yet the king was easily accessible to the poorest supplicant. The person in the lowest position could visit the king and tell him his tale of woe, when the king was having his daily inunction with oil charged with the sweet scent of Indian flowers. This daily anointment was done by women-attendants: foreign women—usually Greek—were employed for all service in the royal household and skilful women-archers formed the king's bodyguard, because foreign women would less readily enter into plots that traitors might weave against the king's life. When the king went out in procession, women carried the insignia of royalty—the white umbrella, the flywhisk, the full-water pot, etc.

The 'Sacred fire was kept up in the royal palace and the attenuated fire-rite was performed by the royal priests; seated in the house of the sacred fire the king consulted his physician about his physical health and ascetic gurus about his moral health. Though the vedic fire-cult was still the official one, the cults of Vishnu or Siva, the Jina or the Buddha were more popular. These cults lived in terms of perfect

amity, such as has prevailed among rival cults in no other country in the world. And when the call of the forest reached the ears of prince or peasant, he joined the particular ascetic order that appealed to him, but was respected by all people alike. Chandragupta suddenly laid down the burdens of royalty after a splendid reign of 25 years and became a sanyasi. Along with his guru and his 12,000 disciples, he trudged along on foot to where is now the province of Mysore, where he lived a beggar for twelve years and died, at the end of that period, like a devout Jaina, of starvation; his grandson, Asoka, became a Bauddha ascetic, but became the head of the order in India.

This fashion of the sudden renunciation of high position and taking to the life of the forest, is not unknown even in the India of to-day.

CHAPTER XII.

About this time there began a great development of stone-architecture. The ancient forests had been gradually denuded of trees and turned into arable land; timber had become scarce; so stone came to be used as building-material. The first stone-temples were excavated on the sides of hills. In this work, Indian workmen displayed the wonderful patience and skill which is the chief mark of Indian craftsmanship. The walls of Barabar caves near Gaya, donated by Asoka to Ajivaka monks, though cut on refractory gneiss rock, are polished like glass mirrors and have actually been mistaken for metal. When the Indian workman first began to use stone instead of wood, he quietly

transferred to rock all the intricate designs he had carved on wood. The richly carved pillars and doors, friezes and corbels which the wooden pillars were full of, he imitated on stone with infinite patience. The most delicate lines which he used to cut on gold and ivory he reproduced with inimitable skill on stone. The chief ideal of the Indian artist is to triumph over the intractability of the material he had to work upon; the more unpromising the material, the more difficult the work, the more powerfully did it appeal to his artistic pride.

Stone is as plentiful in India as was wood in the previous milleniums. So the Indian workman was not tempted like the builders of the gothic temples of Western Europe to invent the arches and steeples necessary for getting the greatest amount of strength and effect from the least expenditure of stone. On the contrary he displayed remarkable engineering ability in transporting to great distances and raising to giddy heights tremendously big blocks of stone. He filled them with carvings as delicate as those on metal and as full of meaning as a poem. The whole is on the one hand extraordinarily full of detail and on the other of a gigantic scale of magnitude. At the same time the perfect finish of the stonework is a marvel of technical execution. These wonderful stone-temples have gradually become the chief feature of the Indian landscape so that the foreign traveller has learnt to think of India as the land of superb temples. The stone-worker's art is the only ancient art that is yet living in India, not yet having been killed by the impact of modern machine-made art.

These gigantic temples are dedicated to the worship of Vishnu or Siva. Both gods are conceived to be fountains of infinite grace. Their worshippers attempt to secure the favour of the Deity by loving adoration. The festivals associated with the worship of these gods today alone retain anything of the joy of life; but the shadow of asceticism clouds the joys of temple-festivals too; the desire for release from the compulsion of desire is the supreme religious motive that inspires even the worship of these gods in temples. The Vedic fire-cult is all but dead now; the great sacrifices which lasted for several years and required the services of an army of priests are no more heard of. Just a faint echo of the Vedic mantras can be heard now in a few houses on occasions of wedding and funeral rites.

The Brahmanas have turned their back on the severe discipline that was prescribed for them as a preparation for the life of renunciation; they keep up but a ghost of the ideal of plain-living and high thinking that was their glory in old days. In their lives can be noticed no desire for the strenuous pursuit of the path of renunciation which alone can transmute the lead of knowledge into the shining gold of wisdom. The Bauddha cult has vanished from the land, leaving but a few great Sanskrit works as a witness of its ancient glory. The Jaina cult has become secularized and flourishes chiefly in the dry and sandy tracts of Rajputana, where it has inspired its followers to raise the most intensely beautiful monuments of Indian art—temples which are dreams materialized in marble. Its votaries are the modern embodiments of the

chivalry of the ancient Kṣhattriyas and the commercial acumen of the Setthis of old.

But the age-long efforts of the spiritual giants of antiquity have not been quite wasted. The great Acharya, Sankara, arose in the VIII century A. D. and re-stated the essentials of the ancient teaching. The fundamental beliefs of the past ages—that thought and action indestructibly bear with them the seeds of fruition and reaction, that the unseen is ever with us and is more real than the seen, that God is everywhere in the world and in the hearts of all beings turns the wheel of Being—these beliefs are not quite dead. The women of India to-day are so filled with these ideas that they will not willingly let the men forget these essential truths. The past yet lives in the present though in rather attenuated forms.

CHAPTER XIII.

From time immemorial the Arabs were the intermediaries of India's trade with the West. The spread of Muhammad's teachings amongst them gave a special impetus to the commercial activities of the Arabs. Muhammad promulgated the Semitic law that it is wrong to lend out money at interest, to take a breed for barren metal. So trade was the only way open to Muhammadans for earning wealth. These Arabian traders spread in the wake of the Arab conquest of Western Asia. On account of them the overland route through Baluchistan and Persia to the coasts of Asia Minor grew to great proportions. To these merchants we are

indebted for a knowledge of the trade routes of this region. The commercial intercourse of Islam with India soon led to intellectual intercourse. Brahmanas were invited to the court of Harun al Rashid, whose name will be on the lips of all youthful lovers of romance as long as theThousand and One Tales told by Shaharzad continue to charm them. Sanskrit works on astronomy and astrology, medicine and chemistry, mathematics and romance were rendered into Arabic; thence they were translated into Latin and the lamp of the wisdom of the Brahmanas was once more lighted in Europe, this time to illuminate the darkness that had engulphed it in the early Middle Ages.

In the XI century Amir Mahmud of Ghazni invaded India 17 times, looted the wealth of palaces and temples and therewith enriched Ghazni with buildings as beautiful as those he observed in India and made it the jewel of the world in his age. One of his courtiers, Al Beruni lived in Sindh, mastered the difficulties of the Sanskrit language and wrote, for the benefit of his co-religionists, on Indian Astronomy and Indian philosophy.

In the last ears of the XII century, like a flash of lightning, Muhammadan adventurers spread their sway over Northern India and gathered a good number of the people of the Indo-Gangetic plain under the banner of Islam. Islam means willing submission to the will of God, humble acquiescence in his decrees as expressed by the formula Kismath, His will be done. Rigid adherence to the simple, unambiguous rules of conduct prescribed in the Quran and a vivid realization of the doctrine that God is one

and indivisible and utterly different from all forms that man can invent are the chief characteristics of Islam. Hence Mussalmans are fiercely opposed to any form of the doctrine of the manifestation of the divine in human flesh and to any kind of representation of God in man-made images, which they feel to be a blasphemous degradation of the Supreme. Hence the uncontrollable iconoclasm which irresistibly impelled them to raze to the ground and pound into dust the wonderful specimens of architecture and sculpture which adorned many of the cities of Northern India. Hence also the burning hatred of drawing and painting, from the fear that these arts would insensibly lead man to the desecration of the Almighty by representing him in images.

But the artistic spirit of India captured the soul of Islam even before it entered the country. The old temples were destroyed but fair mosques soon took their place. These mosques were built by Indian artists and were therefore the materializations in stone of the soul of Indian art. It is true that the inside of a masjid is ordained to be severely plain and well-lighted; whereas the interior of temple is filled with dim religious light, in the soft play of which alone can be realized the beauty of the sculptures that adorn it. It is by dragging these sculptures out of the setting intended for them by the artist to the cruel glare of the fierce tropical sun that foreigners have been unable to appreciate their worth. Islam deemed these figures as unworthy of a place inside the House of god. It further tried to give a Mussalman look to the masjid by adopting the foreign minar and modifying the semi-circular Indian arch by pointing it, slightly at the centre, but this cannot disguise the essentially Indian character of the archi-

tecture. The critical eye can easily pierce the foreign veil with which Islam attempts to disguise the fair Indian face of these buildings.

Otherwise, too, the soul of India has reacted on Islam. The teachings of the Quran are plain and simple, intended to reach the heart of the common man. But the age-long mysticism of India penetrated the soul of Islam and there arose the ascetics called Sufis devoted to the practice of spiritual exercises and to the mental discipline which leads to mystic experience, in character the same as that of Indian monks.

Islam, however, is essentially democratic; in its bosom can be observed the rigorous practice and not merely the theory of the absolutely equality of all men. This spirit of social democracy Islam has preserved in India. The tendency for people to become divided into castes, with which the air of India is so heavily charged, has not affected the practice of brotherhood in the social life of the Mussalmans. Sitting down to feasting or kneeling down in mosques, the Sultan and the scavenger, the wealthy Nawab and the needy mendicant are brothers, absolutely equal in the sight of God and man.

Another new note was struck by Islam in India. Old India was engrossed with the life of the soul and despised the body which was but the all too short tenement of the immortal spirit. Therefore when a person died, the real man was treated as having departed and his body but a worthless corpse which had to be burnt soon and its atoms return

ed to the elements of which it was made up. To speed the parting guest was regarded as the sacred duty of the living. Hence permanent houses of the dead were never built in ancient India. But Islam brought into the land the Semitic idea of preserving the carcase so that it might serve as the habitation of the dead man when he would arise from his grave at the call of the trumpet on Judgment Day. Hence began in this country in recent times the custom of building houses for the dead. The artistic instincts repressed by the religious law among the Muslim, expressed themselves in the splendid tombs they raised and these tombs became the rivals of temples in magnificence of construction and wealth of adornment. Wherever great Muhammadan monarchs ruled, these have arisen in large numbers.

CHAPTER XIV

Old times were changed, old manners gone. The land was parcelled out among a number of princes who were always fighting with each other. In the South the Chola and the Chalukya were locked together in a century-long embrace of death. The Chalukyas were always bent on humbling the Paramaras—one of whom was Bhoja Raja of Dhara, still remembered both by the Pandit and the peasant as the ideal of liberality and charity. The Paramaras were the constant enemies of the Solankis. The Solankis were always quarrelling with the Chauhans. The Muhammadan Sultans were fighting with all these and amongst themselves. In the old, old days, the princes and the nobles alone fought and they fought not for taking away each other's territory

but for increasing their personal glory. Foreigners remarked in those days that while great battles were raging, the husbandmen would go on cultivating their fields, reaping the harvest and storing the grain, within sight of the battle. Soldiers did not interfere with the peaceful pursuits of the non-combatants. The land was not ruined, houses were not razed to the ground, and the common people were not affected by the fights of the nobles. But the time-spirit had changed and ordinary men could not longer live in peace; ruined villages and burning houses marked the path of victors and the glory of princes was purchased not with their own bravery and skill but with the lives of the poor people.

But there was a silver lining to the cloud. The ambition that led these princes to fight with each other constantly, also spurred them on to excel each other in the patronage of learning. Delhi and Ahmedabad became centres of Islamic culture; Dhara and Kalyani, Tanjore and Vijayanagaram, headquarters of Sanskrit studies. The vanity of kings made them patronize the arts and the sciences. Their prodigality led them to encourage manufactures and trade. Their desire to outshine their rivals induced them to build magnificent temples and lofty masjids, most of which now stand in their original glory as permanent additions to the Indian landscape.

The ancient Indians attached so little value to the body that perishes, that notwithstanding their great advancement in drawing and painting, they never tried to preserve the faces of their great dead in pictures. No single portrait exists of any of the great Indians of the early ages. The

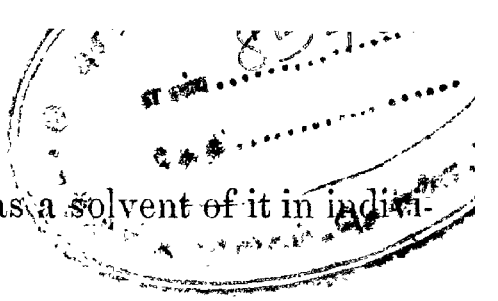
features of the one great hero who attained the greatest amount of personal popularity—Gautama, the monk-prince of Kapilavastu—were not attempted to be perpetuated for four centuries after his passing away. And the famous image of the seated Buddha, of which there are thousands of replicas in India, in Ceylon, in Burmah, in Tibet, in Siam, in China, in Mongolia and in Japan, is not a portrait, but an ideal picture of the conquest of the flesh by the spirit, the expression in stone of the blissful calm that the attainment of Nirvana spreads on the human face.

The sentiment against personal portraiture was so violent in ancient India that, though the hands of its goldsmiths were so supremely skilful, kings of old did not issue coins with their features engraved on them. The vast trade of old India was carried on by barter; even when the beautiful coins of Greece and Rome reached the land, they preferred to import coins from those countries, because the Indian artist rightly felt that to strike off coins mechanically from dies was not work fit for his skilful fingers and the kings, too, thought that it would be insensate vanity to perpetuate the form of one of the innumerable bodies which it was the lot of each man to inhabit before he could get release from the revolution of the ceaseless wheel of birth and death. But in time, modern Rajas got over this sentiment and issued coins of their own, rivalling the Muhammadan and other coins in beauty of workmanship.

Other influences Islam exerted on the life of the Indian people. The Muhammadans gave the name 'Hindu' to those of the people of India that did not accept Islam; and as a reaction to its onslaughts, a new

solidarity arose among the heterogeneous ranks of those to whom a new general name was thus given for the first time. Hence the bonds of caste became rigid. In the II century B. C. a Greek ambassador to Central India could describe himself a Bhagavata and build a temple to Vishnu. In the V century A. D. Brahmanas could go to Egypt in the West and China in the East to spread Indian culture. In the VII century A. D. a Chinese scholar like Ywan Chwang could take a Sanskrit name, Dharmatrata, and be admitted to learned disputes about the Sastras by Brahmanas. In the VIII century A. D. Manki, a Brahmana, could go to Baghdad to teach Sanskrit lore to the followers of Islam. In the XI century A. D. a Turki savant like Al Beruni could learn the Sacred Books of the Brahmanas. Hordes of foreign tribes like the Hunas, the Gurjaras, etc., could find a status in the Indian social scheme and found Kshattriya families which continue to flourish to-day. But since Islam became the leading power at Delhi, the modern inelastic frame of Hindu socio-religious polity was evolved chiefly as a measure of self-protection.

Islam is an uncompromisingly monotheistic creed and the path of devotion is its chief feature. This, too, exerted some influence on the Hindu religious life. Ramanuja, Anandatirtha, Ramananda, Chaitanya and Ramdas form a line of teachers of the path of devotion from the XII century onwards. Loving adoration of a Personal God has, in individual cases, dissolved the bonds of caste; for a devotee is beyond caste, so much so that even Chandala and Mussalman saints are respected by the men of the highest caste. The influence of Islam has thus been, as it were, bipolar—to stiffen the



bonds of caste generally and to act as a solvent of it in individual cases.

Among the people who have accepted Islam, personal conduct and religious rites are entirely in accordance with the teaching of the Quran, but the outlook on life, the underlying desires and impulses, the emotions and sentiments, which reside in the deeper levels of the mind, are absolutely at one with those of the rest of Indians. Scratch away the beliefs which are but the outer skin of the mind, the man within is an Indian, the heir to all the milleniums of growth on Indian soil and under the influence of Indian environment. The devotion to the spiritual life, the preference of the unseen to the seen, the superior attraction of the life of self-sacrifice—these are the heritage of all Indians. Hence more than one attempt was made to unify the two religions—one as old as the hills and the streams, and the other, the latest to be born on the earth. Kabir, a weaver, disciple of Ramanand sang of Ram and Allah in the same breath and called on men to lift the curtain of words which shroud the Infinite Light and seek 'the breath of all breath.' Nanak the Guru of the Sikhs led another movement to bring together these opposed religions. But these efforts have but added to the innumerable sects that flourish in the land.

A more successful effort was that of the Mogul emperors to blend the art of Persia and that of India into the Mogul school of art which has displayed a wonderful vitality and leads to-day a vigorous life in North India. Hence the painting, the architecture and music of the North has parted company with the arts of the South,

where the old tradition is pursuing a natural line of evolution.

During the last four hundred years new forces have been working in the country, forces which have come in the wake of European culture so different from that of India. How these new tendencies are going to alter the life of the Indian people is concealed in the womb of time. It is the duty of every Indian to cling to what is best in the old and to absorb what is best in the new, so that out of the blending of the two, a newer India will arise fit once more to occupy the proud position of the Guru of the world.