

HINDUISM AND ITS RELATIONS TO CHRISTIANITY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649146109

Hinduism and its relations to Christianity by John Robson

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JOHN ROBSON

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BY THE

REV. JOHN ROBSON, D.D.

ABERDEEN

NEW EDITION

EDINBURGH & LONDON
OLIPHANT ANDERSON & FERRIER

1893

PRINTED BY
MORRISON AND GIBB, EDINBURGH,
FOR
OLIPHANT, ANDERSON, & FERGIE,
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.

P R E F A C E.



THIS book is offered to those who take an interest in India, and especially in Indian missions, as an attempt to enable them better to understand the religion of the great majority of the people of that land. I have found prevalent in this country ideas of Hinduism very different from those which a twelve years' practical study of it in constant contact with its followers has led me to form. Generally, among friends of missions, there is an undue depreciation of Hinduism—an ignoring or an ignorance of the amount of truth and vitality still to be found in it; whilst, among those indifferent or hostile to missions, there is an equal ignoring or ignorance of the falsehood which vitiates that truth and poisons that vitality. Not only does Hinduism contain a subtle philosophy, express high moral truths, and enjoin many social virtues; it even in one guise or other embodies many of the leading religious truths which Christianity teaches. But that there is in it an ineradicable vice which neutralises all that is good, which has paralysed, and must paralyse, all those efforts at reform within Hinduism that more enlightened Hindus have made and are now making, and which leaves Christianity the only hope for India—is what I have endeavoured to show.

hold its own, anticipated twenty years ago, is therefore not surprising. There is danger, however, of the mistake being made of attributing its failure to internal dissensions, whereas it was inherent in the character of the movement from the beginning.

On the other hand, the rise of the Arya Samaj has introduced an element into the religious situation which was hardly even suspected twenty years ago. That movement has attracted much less notice in this country, and has met with much less sympathy than the Brahma Samaj. The cause of this is not far to seek. The Brahma Samaj was a product of European rather than of Hindu thought, and was welcomed as such by the leaders of thought in this country. The Arya Samaj is an entirely Indian movement; and, while obliged to reckon with European science and civilisation, it scorns European thought, philosophy, and especially religion. It is the latest effort at reform which has sprung from the midst of Hinduism itself. Its founder, Dayanand Saraswati, was a purely Hindu reformer, of the same type as many who have sought to reform Hinduism previously, with this difference, that he found himself confronted by European civilisation and the advance of the Christian religion, which he looked on as opposed to Vedic religion as much as were the corruptions of Hinduism. There are indications of his followers coming to take the position of another Hindu sect, with the name of Dayanandis. Meanwhile it has secured a far firmer hold on the native mind than the Brahma Samaj ever did, and will be a much more serious element in the religious struggle in India.

Amid all this, Christianity, especially the Protestant Church, has been making steady progress. The increase of the whole Christian community during the last twenty years has been 50 per cent., while the increase of the Protestant portion has been about 150 per cent., a result which bears witness to the vigour with which Protestant missions have been prosecuted. At the same time, it must be noted that the greater part of this increase was during the first decade, the progress during the second being both relatively and absolutely smaller. This may be partly owing to the more active attitude of Hinduism, but it is also to be feared that some methods of evangelisation have been introduced the results of which are not so permanent as some of the older methods. The situation is one requiring the earnest consideration of those who are leading the missionary enterprise in India. The emergence of these questions has led to the last three chapters of the book being entirely rewritten.

While, in the contact between the West and the East, European thought has been affecting that of India, Indian thought has also been affecting that of Europe and America. The most remarkable outcome of this is the Theosophical Society. Theosophy claims to be an old form of religious thought, and to be akin, not only with Vedism and Buddhism, but also with the esoteric teaching of older religions. It has made some attempts to establish itself in India as a cult, amid the unsettlement of religious thought there, as the worship of Isis sought to establish itself in Italy in the unsettlement of religious thought there in the first century. And between some of

the methods used to commend modern Theosophy to the people of India, and some of the methods used to commend the worship of Isis to the people of Italy, as revealed by the discoveries at Pompeii, there is sufficient resemblance to give the modern system a claim to be regarded as the heir of the earlier one. But, putting aside its quasi magical sanctions and alleged communications from those sublimated human beings called Mahatmas, the Theosophists claim that their system can stand on its own merits. And in it there are two main doctrines, that of Metempsychosis, or, as they prefer to term it, Re-incarnation, with its associated doctrine of Karma; and that of Universal Brotherhood. The latter is a Christian doctrine, which we all admit. The former is the Indian doctrine, vehemently diluted indeed with the sentimentalism of the nineteenth century, but practically the same. We have thus a system which seeks to promote efforts after perfection, and recognition of universal brotherhood, by a doctrine the practical outcome of which has been to paralyse all sense of responsibility and annihilate all faith in human brotherhood. In the following pages the reader may trace the development and practical effects of some of these dogmas which are now being commended as the remedy for the evils of the nineteenth century, and the solution of its religious and philosophic difficulties.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	1
Conflicting elements in Hinduism, 1; Macaulay's opinion of Hinduism, 2; Ballantyne's opinion, 2; characteristics of Hindu philosophy, 3; practical application of Hindu philosophy, 3; materials for a history of Hinduism, 4; plan of the book, 5.	
PART I. EARLIER RELIGIONS OF INDIA,	6
CHAPTER I. EARLIEST VEDIC RELIGION,	6
Earliest record of Indian religion the Rig Veda, 6; India three thousand years ago; the Aryas, 7; the aborigines, 7; religious beliefs: traces of primitive Monotheism, 8; modes of expressing God by His attributes and works, 9; Aryan gods: Dyaus and Prithivi, 9; Varuna, 10; Monotheism, Polytheism, Henotheism, 13; deterioration of religious ideas, 14; Indra, 15; Agni and other gods, 15; the unknown God, 17; Vedic worship, 18; future life, 19; religion of the aborigines, 20; contemporary history of Abraham, 21.	
CHAPTER II. BRAHMANISM,	22
Changes among the Aryas, 22; origin of caste: the Sudras, 22; subjection of the Sudras, 23; caste among the Aryas: Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, 24; caste legislation, 24. Religious ideas: Brahman priests, 25; the Four Vedas, 26; the Brahmanas, 26; development of Polytheism, 27; Brahma, 28; Brahmanical and Levitical sacrifices, 28; Levitical sacrifice typical, 28; Brahmanical sacrifice sacramental, 30; difficulties in-	