

**SKETCH OF THE
RELIGIOUS SECTS OF
THE HINDUS, PP. 4-238**

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Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus, pp. 4-238 by H. H. Wilson

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H. H. WILSON

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RELIGIOUS SECTS OF
THE HINDUS, PP. 4-238**

Joseph Breen
Allahabad

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OF THE

RELIGIOUS SECTS OF THE HINDUS.

BY H. H. WILSON, L.L.D., F.R.S.

INDIC
HONEY SANSKRIT PROFESSOR, OXFORD.

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The varieties of opinion kept pace with those of practice, and six heretical schools of philosophy disputed the pre-eminence with their orthodox brethren : we have little or no knowledge of these systems, and even their names are not satisfactorily stated : they seem, however, to be the *Saugata* or *Bauddhas*, *Arhats*, or *Jain*, and *Vārhaspatys*, or *Atheistical*, with their several sub-divisions.*

Had the difference of doctrine taught in the heretical schools been confined to tenets of a merely speculative nature, they would, probably, have encountered little opposition, and excited little enmity among the Brahmanical class, of which, latitude of opinion is a very common characteristic. The founder of the Atheistical school, however, *VRIHASPATI*, attacks both the *Védas* and the *Brahmans*, and asserts that the whole of the Hindu system is a contrivance of the Priesthood, to secure a means of livelihood for themselves,† whilst the *Bauddhas* and *Jainas*, equally disregarding the *Védas* and the *Brahmans*, the practice and opinions of the Hindus, invented a set of gods for themselves, and deposed the ancient pantheon: these aggressions provoked resentment: the writings of these sects are alluded to with every epithet of anger and contempt, and they are all anathematised as heretical and atheistical: more active measures than anathemas, it may be presumed, were had recourse to: the followers of *VRIHASPATI*, having no worship at all, easily eluded the storm, but the *Bauddhas* of Hindustan were annihilated by its fury, and the *Jainas* apparently evaded it with difficulty, although they have undoubtedly survived its terrors, and may now defy its force.

* In a work written by the celebrated *Mādhyama*, describing the different sects as they existed in his day, entitled the *Sarva Daršana*; the *Vārhaspatyas*, *Lokáyatas*, and *Chárvákas* are identified, and are really advocates of an atheistical doctrine, denying the existence of a god, or a future state, and referring creation to the aggregation of but four elements. The *Bauddhas*, according to the same authority, admit of four sub-divisions, the *Mādhyámikas*, *Yogácháras*, *Saurántikas*, and *Vaisháshikas*. The *Jains* or *Arhats*, as still one of the popular divisions, we shall have occasion to notice in the text.

† *Vrihaspati* has the following texts to this effect:

अग्निहोत्रं त्रयोवेदा चिद्वदंभस्मगुणं ।
बुद्धिपौरुषहीनानाङ्गीषिकेतिवृद्धस्पति ॥

The varieties thus arising from innovations in practice and belief, have differed, it may be concluded, at different eras of the Hindu worship. To trace the character of those which have latterly disappeared, or to investigate the remote history of some which still remain and are apparently of ancient date, are tasks for which we are far from being yet prepared: the enquiry is in itself so vast, and so little progress has been made in the studies necessary to its elucidation, that it must yet remain in the obscurity in which it has hitherto been enveloped; so ambitious a project as that of piercing the impenetrable gloom has not inatigated the present attempt, nor has it been proposed to undertake so arduous a labour, as the investigation and comparison of the abstruse notions of the philosophical sects.* The humbler aim of these researches has been that of ascertaining the actual condition of the popular religion of the inhabitants of some of the provinces subject to the Bengal Government; and as a very great variety prevails in that religion, the subject may be considered as not devoid of curiosity and interest, especially as it has been left little better than a blank, in the voluminous compositions or compilations, professing to give an account of the native country of the Hindas.

The description of the different sects of the Hindus, which I propose to offer, is necessarily superficial: it would, indeed, have been impossible to have adopted the only unexceptionable method of acquiring an accurate

“ The Agnihotra, the three Vedas, the Tridanda, the smearing of ashes, are only the livelihood of those who have neither intellect nor spirit.” After ridiculing the Brâddha, shrewdly enough, he says:

ततश्चजीवनोपायो ब्राह्मणैर्विदितस्त्विह ।
मृतानामेतकार्म्याणि नत्वन्यद्विद्यते क्वचित् ॥

Hence it is evident, that it was a mere contrivance of the Brahmans to gain a livelihood, to obtain such ceremonies for the dead, and no other reason can be given for them. Of the *Vedas*, he says:

त्रयो वेदस्य कर्तारो भवन्धूर्तनिशाचराः ॥

The three Authors of the *Vedas* were Buffoons, Rogues, and Fiends - and cites texts in proof of this assertion.

* Something of this has been very well done by *Mr. Ward*, in his account of the Hindas: and since this Essay was read before the Society, the account given by *H. T. Colebrooke, Esq.* in the first part of the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, of the Sankhya and Nyâya Systems, has left little more necessary on this subject.

knowledge of their tenets and observances, or of studying the numerous works in Sanscrit, Persian, or the provincial dialects of Hindi, on which they are founded. I have been obliged to content myself, therefore, with a cursory inspection of a few of those compositions, and to depend for much of my information on oral report, filling up or correcting from these two sources, the errors and omissions of two works, on this subject professedly, from which I have derived the groundwork of the whole account.

The works alluded to are in the Persian language, though both were written by Hindu authors : the first was compiled by SĪTAL SĪNH, Munshi to the *Raja* of Benares ; the second by MATHURA' NA'TH, late librarian of the Hindu College, at the same city, a man of great personal respectability and eminent acquirements : these works contain a short history of the origin of the various sects, and descriptions of the appearance, and observances, and present condition of their followers : they comprise all the known varieties, with one or two exceptions, and, indeed, at no one place in India could the enquiry be so well prosecuted as at Benares.* The work of MATHURA' NA'TH is the fullest and most satisfactory, though it leaves much to be desired, and much more than I have been able to supply. In addition to these sources of information, I have had frequent recourse to a work of great popularity and extensive circulation, which embodies the legendary history of all the most celebrated *Bhaktas* or devotees of the Vaishnava order. This work is entitled the *Bhakta Mālā*. The original, in a difficult dialect of Hindi, was composed by NA'BHA'JI, about 250 years ago, and is little more than a catalogue, with brief and obscure references to some leading circumstances connected with the life of each individual, and from the inexplicit nature of its allusions, as well as the difficulty of its style, is far from intelligible to the generality even of the natives. The work, in its present form, has received some modifi-

* The acknowledged resort of all the vagabonds of India, and all who have no where else to repair to : so, the *Kāśī K'ānd*,

श्रुतिस्मृतिविहीनानां ये श्रौचाचारविचर्जिताः ।
शेषान् क्षापिगतिर्नास्ति तेषां वाराणसीगतिः ॥

" To those who are strangers to the *Śruti* and *Smṛiti*, (Religion and Law) ; to those who have never known the observance of pure and indispensable rites ; to those who have no other place to repair to ; to those, is Benares an asylum."