

Hinduism may best be treated from four different points of view.

1. The lower popular cults and beliefs and practices which center around the worship of local godlings or village deities.
2. The religious sects on the middle and higher levels which worship deities of a more cosmic character.
3. The higher theology or philosophy which makes a synthesis of these various deities and tends to think of this unity as impersonal.
4. The basic social *dharma* which underlies all of these and finds its expression in the caste system.

In what follows I shall try to describe the forest of Hinduism without giving a detailed botanical description of each tree, by emphasizing what seem to be the most significant general trends of thought and action, and by dwelling on the higher ideals and presuppositions of the system as a whole rather than on the lower popular cults. Many treatments of Hinduism tend to compare the highest ideals and practices of western civilization and of Christianity with the lowest ideals and practices of Hinduism. Such comparison is not fair. But Hinduism is extremely complex and difficult to generalize about. Trying to grasp it is like trying to pick up quicksilver between the fingers.

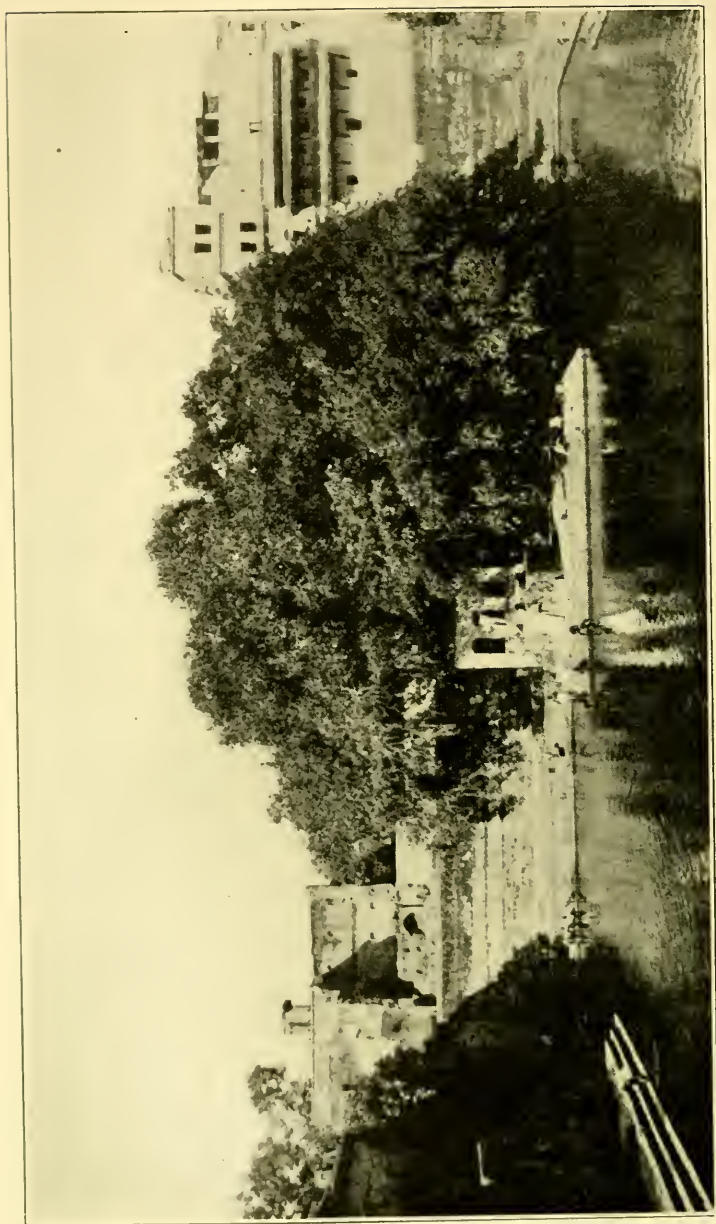
The religion of the masses consists almost entirely of animism, magic, and demonology. Worship centers around local godlings and spirits, freaks of nature, trees and lakes and rivers and hills, inanimate things which have mysterious powers of motion, tools and implements like the plow, animals which are feared like the snake or which are useful like the cow, and spirits of the dead. There is a wide-spread fear of evil spirits. Religion centers in the propitiation of them or in driving them away. It must be remembered that less than one-tenth of the people are literate. Three-quarters dwell in small villages in great poverty, depend directly upon the labor of their own hands in tilling the soil, and have no larger political interests or cosmic point of view. It is inevitable that low levels of belief and custom should predominate among the great majority of the people.

From these lower beliefs Hinduism, by a deeper and deeper synthesis, rises to higher levels of religion by identifying local god-

lings with the more abstract and beneficent gods of the middle and upper classes, and finally, seeking a unity behind all of these, finds in the universe the manifestation of one impersonal power. On the middle levels, and to some extent on the higher level of philosophy, there is a theistic tendency, but this never rises to a full theism in the western sense of the word. There is always a tendency to slip ultimately into a pantheistic or monistic attitude, for the personal to melt away into the impersonal, and especially for *karma* to act as a limitation to God's full sovereignty and grace.

On the middle and higher levels the chief gods are Vishnu and Śiva, each (probably) formed by the amalgamation of many different local deities. Vishnu was originally a sun-god, the kindly maintainer of the universe. He is a personal god (but only vaguely anthropomorphic) who reveals himself to men by *avatars* (incarnations), of which the most important are Rāma and Krishna. Krishna worship developed some erotic aspects. Rāma worship was less frenzied in its devotion and did not lose its grip on practical living as Krishna worship sometimes did. Śiva is much more abstract and impersonal. He represents Nature in all its aspects, largely the destructive elements, but also the creative ones. As an impersonation of the destructive forces of Nature he is fierce and cruel, dwells in cemeteries, is attended by imps and goblins, and carries a skull. As an impersonation of the creative forces of Nature his emblem is the *liṅga*, the male organ of generation, but in a conventionalized form which is not obscene. He is also a learned sage and a contemplative philosopher. He is the typical *yogin* (ascetic), sitting in profound meditation, naked, with ash-smeared body and matted locks. He is a wild, jovial mountaineer, orgiastic, and addicted to drinking and dancing. Śiva appeals on the one hand to all the higher philosophical elements of Hinduism, and on the other hand to all the animistic popular elements. The fact that the symbol by which he is worshipped represents the creative aspect of Nature seems to show that the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva as creator, preserver, and destroyer is a late and superficial construction.

In the temples of Vishnu are found images in which the divine essence is supposed to have taken up its abode after the image has been properly consecrated. The image is worshipped as a symbol of the deity, not as the deity itself. In the temples of Śiva the god is ordinarily represented by his symbol the *liṅga*, not by an image. In the temples of Vishnu the priests wake the god in the morning,



TEMPLE TANK AT GAYA

bathe him, dress and adorn him, offer him perfumes and flowers, burn incense and wave lights before him, give him food and drink, and at night he is put to bed and the shrine closed. A liturgy in Sanskrit accompanies the rites. In South India hymns are sung, both in Sanskrit and the vernacular. Some of the large temples, especially in the South, have bands of musicians and troops of dancing-girls who take part in the liturgy with instrumental music, dance, and song. In the temples of Śiva the offerings usually consist of water and Bilva leaves. The worship is individual, not congregational, even when multitudes gather on days of festival. There is no public cult. Pilgrimages to various places or temples which have acquired great repute for holiness play a large part in the popular religion.

The power of austerities and detachment from the world as a means of attaining supernatural powers, of acquiring supernatural knowledge, of producing abnormal psychical states, or of reaching ecstatic communion with God is a prevalent idea in Hinduism. Over three million *sādhus* "holy men," who are revered for their spirituality or feared because of their supposed supernatural powers, wander about the country supported entirely by alms.

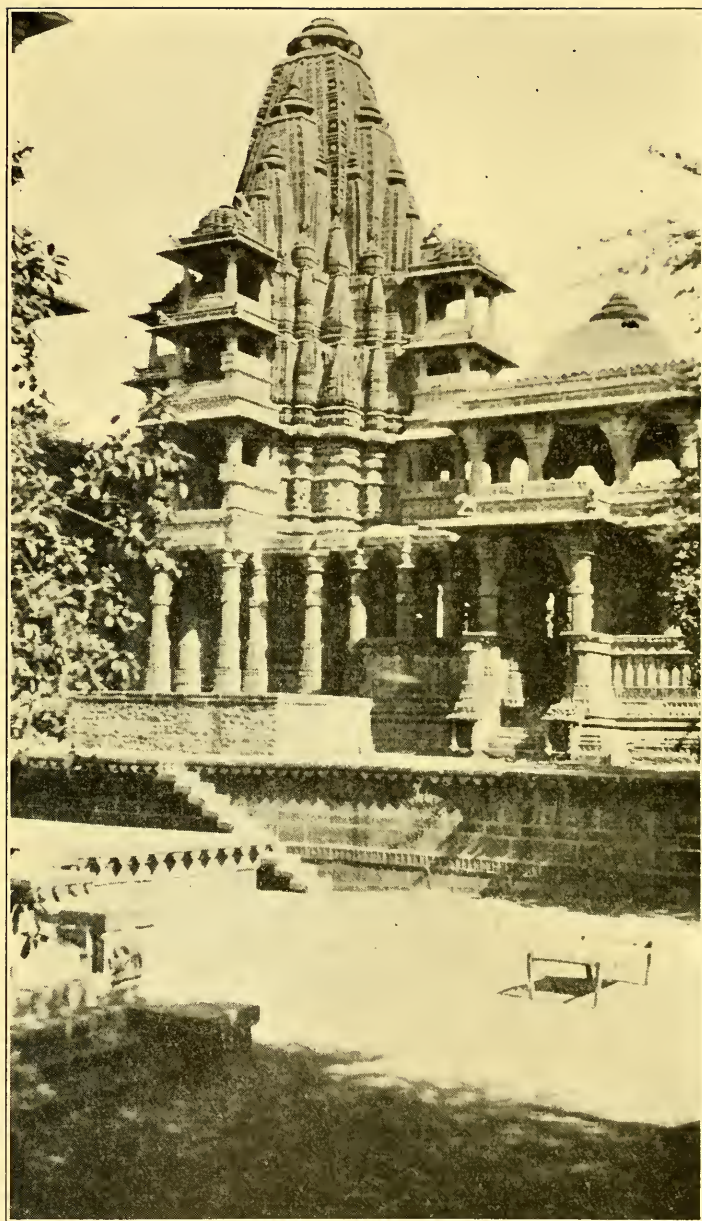
The impassioned religious fervor may develop erotic elements. This is especially true of some of the Krishna sects and some of the Śākta sects. The exquisite pleasure of sexual union becomes the nearest approach to ecstatic communion with God. In both cases, however, the sexual element has been worked over on the higher levels into a philosophical symbolism as in the case of the Hebrew Song of Songs.

Śākta worship is directed to the wife of Śiva (Kālī, Durgā, etc.) who as his *śakti* (energy or active power) represents the female creative power in Nature. The emphasis here is on the motherhood rather than the fatherhood of God. The mother is in closer contact with her children than the father, who is engaged in the larger affairs of life and is more remote from the child. Very characteristic of Hindu thought is the disinclination to conceive of the Godhead as exclusively male, the conception that the female principle in Nature deserves as much recognition as the male principle. Philosophy transcends this dualism by making this ultimate reality neuter. The Śāktas are those who feel very strongly that the female aspect of nature is more accessible than the male and therefore devote their worship chiefly to this. Erotic elements, and elements of fear

and terror have been interwoven, but the worship is not all erotic and terrible. Śāktism contains some of the worst and some of the finest features of Hinduism. Animal sacrifices, especially sacrifices of goats, are frequently offered to Kālī, mostly in northeastern India, and especially in Bengal. Such sacrifices are also offered to the lower Dravidian village deities. This practice does not seem to be derived from the old Brahmanical sacrifice, but to be due to Dravidian influence.

There is on the highest levels of Hinduism, its theology and philosophy, a tendency towards a monism or a sort of pantheism in which the world is not regarded as a machine constructed and set in motion by a personal God who remains apart from it as a responsible moral governor. The soul alone (or chiefly) is responsible, determining its own fate, moulding it by its own *karma*. God is immanent in the universe as well as transcendent; the personal melts away into the impersonal. The power which underlies the universe and manifests itself in it is the same as the power at work in man, as his soul. Vishnu, Śiva, and the other popular gods are only temporary personal manifestations of the neuter Brahman.

There is no word in Sanskrit which really corresponds to the sense in which the word religion is used in the West. There is a word *dharma* which may roughly be translated as "duty," primarily social duty, but also duty to the gods. It is both social and religious in its implications. It is generally qualified by the adjective *sanātana* which means "eternal." The word *dharma* is derived from the root *dhr* "to hold or support" and refers to a regularity of conduct and action which holds together and supports social life, just as a thread upon which beads are strung serves as a support to the beads and holds them together. It also refers in a broader sense to a regularity and order which pervades the whole universe and to which human conduct should conform. The *dharma* which forms the central element of Hinduism is essentially social, old social customs and habits and ideals which have come down from ancient times and will admit of no change. These customs bear the stamp of approval of the sages of old who were in contact with the gods and superhuman powers, and are thereby given a super-human, religious sanction and have eternal validity. On the other hand there are the words *mata* and *darśana* which mean "opinion, belief" and "doctrine, system of philosophy," and the word *mārga* "a path or way of reaching salvation." As opposed to the word *dharma* these three



NORTH-INDIAN TEMPLE AT MANDOR NEAR JODHPUR

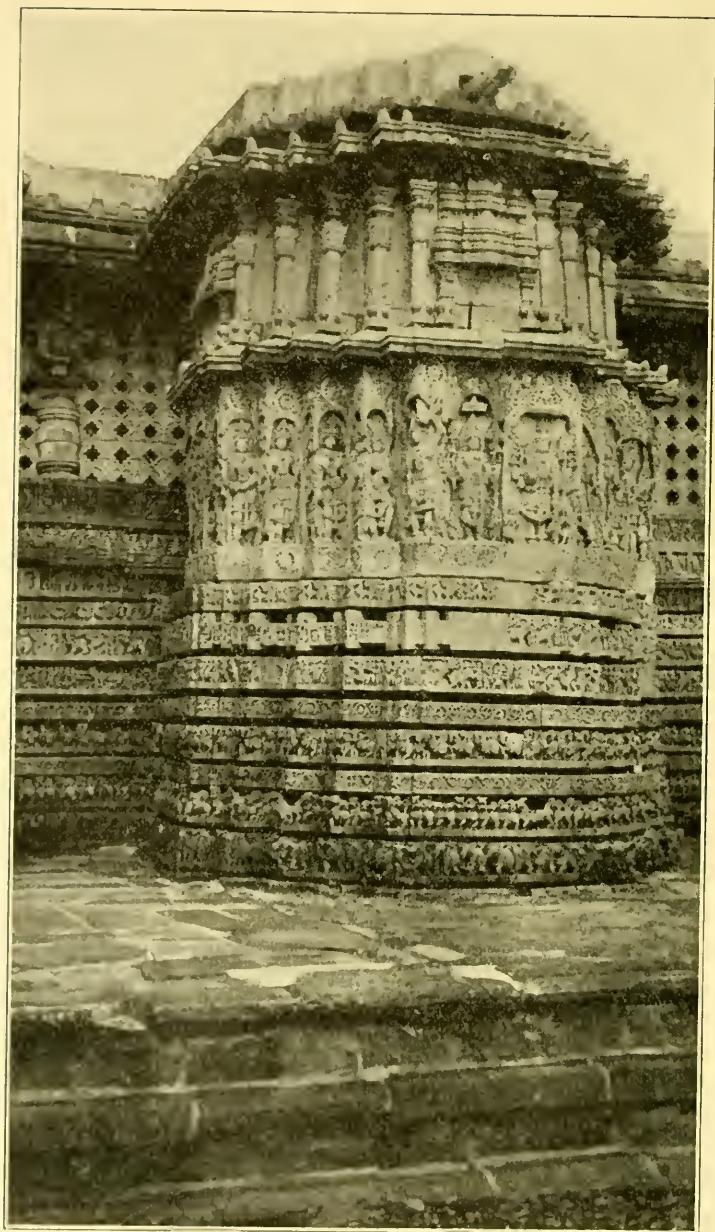
words involve certain definite beliefs about God, soul, and the world, their relationships one to another, and some way of reaching whatever is regarded as the religious goal. The *mata* plus the *mārga* (belief plus a way of living) forms the Hindu religious sect. No matter how different the beliefs and the ways of living, unless they conflict fundamentally with the basic Hindu *dharma*, these sects are orthodox. Christianity could not take into its fold Hindus unless they subscribed to some very definite Christian confession of faith and belief. But so far as the Christian *mata* and *mārga* are concerned Hinduism as a whole could accept most of them, at least those which seem to correspond to the real intent of the New Testament, as perfectly satisfactory at least on the lower levels of society. Hinduism makes a sharp distinction between the Christianity of the New Testament and western civilization, refuses to see anything essentially Christian in western civilization, has no objection to the Christianity of the New Testament but objects to the *dharma* of modern western civilization and compares it unfavorably with Hindu *dharma*.

India has been very conservative in the matter of social customs. There has been little energetic criticism, from generation to generation, of the fundamental bases of belief and practice. Some of these customs or social norms of conduct are regarded as universal virtues which are binding upon all men, but most of them are regarded as binding only upon certain groups of men and are called *varṇāśramadharma* "the particular duties of men of different classes and different stages of life." This idea of relativity is a fundamental idea in Indian civilization and is largely responsible for the clash between a relativistic India and our western absolutism.

There is in India great group solidarity in regard to social matters. There is not a universal *dharma* or duty for all men treated legalistically by an organized religion. There is not a universal right and a universal wrong for all men. Right and wrong are relative. There is the conception of a *dharma* for each group depending on its greater or lesser capacity and intelligence. It is regarded as better to do one's own duty rather than to try to do the duty of some one else, to climb in the social scale and bring about a dislocation and disruption of the various classes of society which should all coöperate for the common good and not struggle for equality or supremacy. But the "belief" and the "way" are com-

paratively free. The individual is free to choose his own religious theory of salvation and his way of reaching it. Just as many rivers ultimately flow into the ocean so there are different ways which all lead finally to salvation. They are adapted to the capacity of different groups and will lead in a longer or shorter time to the same goal. The lower groups may have to wait for many rebirths before they will be capable of the higher teachings and the higher conduct. India with its belief in transmigration is in no hurry. It is not necessary to cram everything into one short life. The lower classes should be contented with doing a good job in the places into which they have been born, and so gain merit and a higher status in succeeding births. Up to quite recently the lower classes, on the whole, have acquiesced in this idea and have made little effort at mass organization which might bring to them immediately some of the good things possessed in this life by the higher classes. India has been much more intolerant in social matters than the West has been, but in the matter of creed and dogma and belief India has been much more tolerant. In the West we have tended to insist firmly on what we call principles and have tried to force them willy-nilly upon others, to legislate others into them. After all, these things which we call principles are, for the most part, only prejudices.

There is in India comparatively little sense of sin as an absolute thing, a principle of evil over against a principle of good. There is no essentially ethical, moral god over against a principle of sin, a devil. On the lower and middle levels the gods are pretty much like men and have all their foibles except that they possess greater power and more means of enjoyment. To higher Hindu philosophical thought God must be above these differences of good and bad. To God good and bad, which apply only to this finite human world, have no meaning. Good and bad are not ultimate principles. They have meaning only in this finite world. God is being, existence in the highest sense of the word, and this is above such opposites as good and bad. The most characteristic epithet used to describe the ultimate reality is *saccidānanda* "existence, intelligence, bliss." The West tends strongly to carry *dharma* and *adharma* (right and wrong conduct), *puṇya* and *pāpa* (merit and demerit) all the way through as ultimate principles. The Hindu point of view with regard to good and bad does not involve such abstraction and finality. Bad consists in breaking some traditional concrete custom which has acquired a religious value, thereby acquiring demerit and delaying



DETAIL FROM TEMPLE AT HALEBID, MYSORE

the process of one's own salvation, rather than in transgressing some ultimate abstract principle and thereby damning oneself eternally unless the grace of God forgives the transgression.

The western sense of dualism of good and bad leads, as it did in Zoroastrianism, to the conception of an active struggle in this world against the principle of evil not merely for the salvation of the individual but in an effort to raise society as a whole to a higher level, to eliminate all the bad and leave only the good. Onward Christian soldiers is typical of this attitude. Onward Hindu soldiers is an unthinkable slogan. There is no organized Hindu religious army. Each man must fight for himself in the effort to disentangle his own soul from the fetters of matter in which it has become enmeshed. His salvation must be gained within himself if it is to be gained at all, and not by any objective worldly struggle. In the West "the end of human activity is a deed not a thought though that thought be the noblest." On the other hand I am inclined to think that an idea is more concrete and vivid and real to an Indian than a fact or a thing or a deed. Things must be made to fit ideas, not ideas made to fit things. Hence the prevailing idealistic tendency of Indian philosophy.

Over the whole world, beautiful as it may be, impends an unknown, uncontrollable something. In Indian art and literature (and I know no other literature in which there is greater feeling for the beauties of Nature) you will find not so much an expression of the harmony of Nature and its adaptability to human needs as an expression of mystery, exuberance, and all-embracing energy. There is not an energetic effort to reach out to control and master Nature; there is not an effort to find contentment by extending desire and increasing possessions, but by limiting desire and being satisfied with what one has.

Desire is never satisfied
By winning each desire;
As fuel, added to the blaze,
Gluts not the hungry fire.

The beauty is there, felt keenly and enjoyed keenly, but the beauty endures but a moment—and then? It is the then rather than the now which matters most. The persistent Indian religious and philosophical question is not "How is it made and how may I control it?" but "Where is it going and what is the real meaning of

the process?" I think of the philosophically minded Hindu as a man in an enchanted garden where things keep taking place which he does not quite understand. He enjoys keenly, but soon a sense of unreality, of mystery settles down upon him, his mirth and pleasure turn to bewilderment and uneasiness.

There is, there must be, an escape!
 Impossible there should not be!
 I'll make the search and find the way
 Which from existence shall release!

Characteristic of India is the way in which many successful men of the world suddenly feel an *ennui*, are taken possession of by an idea and withdraw from the world to live a life of the spirit.

The Hindu on the upper levels of society tends in his religious life towards withdrawal, meditation, contemplation, a feeling of rapture, either a quiet and almost passive knowledge and realization of God or an ecstatic possession by God which is not to be reached by any ordinary worldly way of intellectual thinking. Salvation lies in a personal realization of God without any very active social obligations. In India more of the best and most vigorous minds than in the West have abandoned worldly activity and withdrawn into seclusion. In the place of active social service there is the negative attitude of non-interference with others, a quiet toleration. A man is to become self-sufficient, self-dependent, self-autonomous. This is all in accord with the doctrine of *karma* which, generally speaking, will allow of no vicarious atonement and no possibility of forgiveness of sin by a God.

Hindu philosophical thought, in general, can find no place for a personal God who, at his pleasure, can annul the working of this law of cause and effect. Each man is responsible for his own destiny and the goal of his destiny is a process of self-realization. As M. A. Buch, in his book *The Spirit of Ancient Indian Culture*, has well said "A Hindu philosopher will place metaphysics first and ethics afterwards. Morality has value only so far as it fits a man for his ultimate destiny, on which metaphysics alone can throw light. It has disciplinary value, no doubt. It is not a factor to be ignored. It is the essential preliminary stage which every soul must pass through. It is a fine preparation for higher spirituality, but it is nothing more than a bridge between an unmoral life and a supermoral one. Moral categories are no more final than intellectual

categories. Moral life, therefore, is only an episode in the career of the human soul."

It is frequently argued by western critics that the Hindu conception of *karma* and transmigration is fatalistic, and must necessarily result in pessimism and inactivity. Hindu thought is pessimistic about individual life in this world and rather stoical about it but it is not deterministic and fatalistic. Human effort does avail, but Indian effort has been turned inward rather than outward. Hindu thought compares *karma* to one wheel of a chariot. Human activity and free-will form the other wheel. Two wheels are necessary if the chariot is to move easily. *Karma* is like any other force, for instance that of the hand of the potter on his wheel. It spends its impetus and does not go on without fresh impetus. *Karma* and transmigration might have resulted in an active and optimistic doctrine. The western doctrine of death-bed repentance and the forgiveness of sin might have resulted very disastrously in a moral way. That it has not so resulted is not due to any inherent truth in the doctrine itself. The important element is not the absolute truth or falsity of a doctrine but the nature of the people by whom it is practised; not whether it is absolutely true but whether it is psychologically true. The doctrines of *karma* and transmigration do not weigh upon the Hindus all the time like a heavy burden. As many Christians resort to God and prayer chiefly in time of trouble, so most Hindus resort to the thought of *karma* in time of trouble, and in the less temperate climate of India trouble is frequently at hand.

On the lower levels of Hinduism the people go about their work in a ritualistic, traditional manner, not very adaptable and energetic in experimentation with life, and not very critical of it. To most of them the ideal of a final salvation is too high and remote for immediate attainment. By fulfilling their *dharma* they hope to attain the heaven of some god. Whether this is permanent or only temporary (although for a long period of time) does not matter much. These gods are very much like men except that they are more powerful and have more means of enjoyment. Existence as a god is one stage higher than existence as a man. But to the higher Hindu philosophical point of view the ideal of attaining such a heaven is a low ideal. It would be tolerated as high enough for the imperfect knowledge of the lower classes, but since these personal gods and their heavens of enjoyment must eventually pass away,



NAGA STONES AT BANGALORE, MYSORE

and the gods themselves must be reborn again, such a heaven of enjoyment is merely a stage on the road to a higher salvation.

In the place of sin is found a deep sense of the imperfections of this world and of the sufferings caused by them, but these are all due to the acts of the individuals themselves and can be remedied for these individuals only by their own acts. Hinduism in its easy-going toleration merely codifies and describes and sanctions what it actually finds in the world. It does not try to ordain legalistically what should be one norm of belief and conduct for all men of different capacities in order to bring about a kingdom of God on earth. Hindu thought maintains that there can be no such thing as a kingdom of God on earth, and that the goal of religion lies in the other world, not in this world. A characteristic Indian question would be "Is it the function of religion to produce happiness and success in this world?"

Hinduism assumes as self-evident that men are not all equal and cannot be made equal by any legislation. There are very evident inequalities in different groups. The lower groups may be pointed towards higher lines of conduct, but they are left to realize this gradually by themselves, and this realization is to come in some future life if they perform faithfully the duties of the group into which they have been born in this life.

The upper classes in India have made very little concerted effort to uplift the lower classes, and the lower classes have lacked the energy or initiative or desire to better their own worldly positions.

Hinduism does not believe in a soul created out of nothing, which has only one life, a few brief years in the course of which to determine for itself an eternal heaven or an eternal hell. To it such a doctrine seems unreasonable and ethically unsound. The Hindu does not make such an assertion of the value and importance of man in the general scheme of things. Man is not a special and privileged creation. There is a unity and continuity of life throughout the universe. Man is only an integral part of this general current of life. He has a feeling of kinship with animals and plants, which are merely on a lower plane of being, and with the gods, who occupy merely a higher stage of existence. He has had many lives in the past, and will have many lives in the future unless he can bring this process to an end and find eternal rest.