

## HINDU SPIRITUALITY IN RELIGION AND DRAMA

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IT is not always true that a whole culture can be described in terms of a single attribute of soul, of a single quality of world outlook, that finds in it lucid and unadulterated expression. India, however, is old. It has had time to achieve that inner self-consistency and freedom from distracting motives that is the privilege of an ancient culture. In the lavish exuberance of patterns that run through the vast tapestry of its history, one motif stands out from the beginning and grows clearer and purer as the centuries roll on and the national character crystallizes into a finished maturity: Spirituality. What that spirituality means, and how it shines through at least two forms of Hindu aspiration and achievement, religion and art, we shall attempt to delineate in the discussion that follows.

### *The Indian Religion: Pantheism, Mysticism, Pessimism*

#### *A. World-view: Pantheism*

The first religious documents of the Hindus are the Vedas. The word *Veda* comes from a root meaning, "to know." It was wisdom that those early seekers were after, and when they found it, it was simple: knowledge on one hand, and disillusion on the other. Their knowledge was of the Brahma, the one and only reality, supremely real because motionless and changeless, supremely free because above the accidents of existence. Their disillusion was of the world, of the objects of sense and desire, of the gross fibre of corporeal things, of the heavy drag of the flesh, of the obstinate sense of selfish individuality. The sense of the misery of life was heightened by the belief in Karma, the law of the deed, and transmigration: even death held out no longer the promise of a quiet and

dreamless sleep, but meant an endless round of weary existences, of prolonged subjection to the dupery of Maya and the tyranny of fate. Then, with a Brahma who was all-real, and a world that was non-real, the course of wisdom was plain: to flee this world with all its haunting illusions and tormenting lusts, and reach the breathless silence and frozen immobility of the Brahma. Blessedness was now synonymous with extinction, and salvation with release, while the highest good was the Nirvana, the supreme felicity of untroubled nothingness.

### B. *Technique of Worship: Mysticism*

Pantheism and mysticism have always gone hand in hand. It was so in the case of Plotinus, Meister Eckhart, and Spinoza. It was so in the case of these Indians. Distrustful of individuality, weary of the world, convinced that everything that is, is unreal and illusory, eager for the release of the glorious emptiness of the Nirvana, they had only one way of salvation open to them: the *via negativa* of the mystic. Despising ritual and cult as a means of salvation—for were not gods and priests, temples and sacrifices vanities?—they sought to obtain by the double discipline of asceticism and meditation a rapturous reabsorption into their pantheistic absolute. The famous statute of the seated Buddha gazing at his navel is perhaps the clearest symbolic expression of this contemplative mysticism by which the Hindus sought that kingdom that is not of this world.

### C. *Strategy of Life: Pessimism*

With transcendental pantheism for a philosophy and negative mysticism for a way of salvation there was only one logical morality open to the Hindus: the ethics of pessimism and renunciation. Yet, strange as it may seem, such a gospel of other-worldliness and despair was still compatible with three different interpretations: fanatical asceticism, whimsical though disenchanting esotericism, and convulsive sensualism and superstition. Asceticism was the least popular of the three. It called for religious professionalism, demanded a stern sacrifice of all the natural enjoyments of a normal life, and tried to stifle all the passionate exuberance of tropical emotion in an inverted hunger for the extinction of body and soul. But ascetic fanaticism, exuding the odor of holiness and holding out the

promise of the blessedness of the Nirvana, has not been without its charm to the Indian soul, and Jainism, the religion of institution-alized asceticism, has never lacked adherents.

Brahmanism was more popular because it was more sane. It saw that fanatical asceticism was really inconsistent with the true Brahmanic atarxia, that it was still a slave to passion, though passion of different order. Too wise to be fanatical, too sophisticated to be superstitious, too emancipated from desire ever to be a slave to passion, it calmly accepted the illusory nature of the world and worldly things, and attempted to conquer the world not by fleeing it but by smiling at it. It sought in elegance of manner and distinction of form a pleasant escape from the vulgar realities of life. Its ideal was a cultivated and philosophic detachment, a freedom from the domination of earthly goods, purchased not by the abstinence of the barbarian but by the temperate tolerance of the civilized man.

Asceticism, mysticism, cultivated esotericism: these are the privileges of a professional or leisure class. A speculative, mystical or enlightened religion is a luxury which the poor cannot afford. Driven to despair by the necessity of wresting a scanty means of subsistence from an unwilling earth, they too have sought release, but release of a more substantial, more palpable kind than that of the refined Brahmin. If all is vanity, then why not choose the thick instinctive pleasures, that, evanescent though they may be, possess an animal solidity that guarantees their reality while they last. Accepting, therefore, the moral pessimism that is the logical outcome of their religion, the masses have turned to an ethics of a despair, which tries to squeeze all the juice out of the pleasures within its reach. So the masses have lived a brute, unreasoned, self-regulative morality, that plucked pleasure hungrily from where it could find it, and brooked no control save that of physical force or biologic necessity.

### *The Indian Drama: The Art of a Spiritual Soul*

#### *A. The Spirituality of the Indian Soul*

Our approach to the Hindu drama has been indirect but sure. For the drama is the product of a soul. To understand it we must first acquaint ourselves with the soul that gave it birth. Religion represents that soul in its most limpid, most thoughtful, most impassioned moments. Seldom realistically true of man's actual at-

tainments, religion is always symbolically expressive of his ideal aspirations. Often it is only a reaction: having embraced life too passionately, and loved it with a drunken self-abandon, the soul returns to itself with a sharp recoil, and can only find satisfaction in an equally drastic and extreme asceticism. Yet even as a reaction it is richly revealing, for it offers an unchecked if only momentary expression to certain inarticulate longings and timid spiritual strivings that are ordinarily denied fulfilment.

Having then gazed upon the Indian soul at its moments of ecstasy and aspiration, we can feel already certain sympathetic intimacy with it, which comes from acquaintance on the deepest levels. We know something of its other wordliness, its world-weariness, its world-renunciation. We see its spirituality, its keen sense for "that vision of something that lies beyond, behind, and within the passing flux of immediate things,"<sup>1</sup> its secondary interest in this world as the confused reflection of a transcendent reality. We sense now the distinguishing excellence of the Indian soul: Above its pantheism, mysticism and pessimism stands its spirituality, lending it a softness and elegance, a charm and distinction, a detachment and cultivation which marks it off from the vulgar commercialism of the Anglo-Saxon, the shrieking emotionalism of the Latin, or the heavy sluggishness of the Slav. Let us be sure, therefore, of what this spirituality means: It is the gentleness and suavity of temper, which can be sophisticated without cynicism and whimsical without frivolity, which can reject the world, yet without embitterment, and can use it, yet without material absorption; not especially profound or forceful, but always elegant and refined; shunning the explosiveness of a sentimental idealism and the crudity of a photographic realism, guided always by good taste, decency and self-control.

There is a corollary to this Indian spirituality which is of special interest to us in our present study: its essentially 'undramatic' character, its contemptuous superiority to mere busy-ness. 'Undramatic' is here used in the popular sense of the word, which conceives the drama as the maximum of action in the minimum of space and time, and expects a play to be in the style of Balkan politics, where revolution and counter-revolution takes place, kings are established and deposed, cabinets formed and executed, all between sunrise and sundown. In this sense the Indian soul is undramatic

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Whitehead's definition of religion in *Science and the Modern World*.

in the extreme. Contrast, for instance, its colorless plan of salvation with the exciting Christian myth, where Adam, made with God's own hands, deliberately disobeys him for the twinkle in Eve's eyes, and so condemns himself and the whole race to perpetual damnation from the taint of the original sin, till God himself comes to the rescue and suffers for man on the cross. Compare the Indian calm submission to fate, its weary indifference to moral and immoral endeavor alike, its ambivalent ethics of asceticism and sensuality, with the Western puritanism and calvinistic mania for reform, "that so unspiritual determination to wash the world white and clean, adopt it, and set it up for a respectable person."<sup>2</sup> Whether it be the enervating influence of a tropical climate, or the disenchantment of a race grown old and gray, or the superior wisdom that comes from a detachment from material things, the fact remains that the Indian spirituality is essentially undemonstrative, unexplosive, collected, subdued and self-controlled, with open contempt for over-activity, and therefore lacking an element that is popularly deemed so essential to the art of the stage.

### B. *The Religious Origin of the Indian Drama*

The beginnings of the Indian drama are obscure. Legend speaks of a certain Bharata (which, significantly enough, means 'actor'), who first brought down to men from the gods the arts of the dance and of the acted spectacle. The religious parentage of the drama already hinted at in this legend is much more clearly seen in the earliest known instance of a dramatic performance: This was a mystery-play, in which Krishna and his followers, dressed in red, symbolizing the fertility and warmth of the summer, overcame and killed Kansa, the black spirit of winter. This forms a striking parallel with Farnell's theory of the origin of the Greek drama in a mimic conflict of summer and winter, in which the black Neleid Melanthos killed the fair-haired Boiotian Xanthos. Berriedale Keith who notes this parallel suggests that the tragic outcome of the Greek passion-play and the lamentations that follow account for the "dirge-like nature of the Greek drama," while the uniformly happy ending of its Indian cousin may have contributed to establish the rigid banishment of all tragedy from the Indian stage.<sup>3</sup> Krishna thus figured

<sup>2</sup> George Santayana, *Platonism and the Spiritual Life*, p. 85

<sup>3</sup> A. Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 37-38.

in the first extant dramatic exhibition. Another of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, Rama, is the subject of popular religious festivals in which children present the story of the avatar in a series of striking tableaux before a host of devout pilgrims. A last evidence of the religious origin of the drama is to be found in the invocation to Shiva or Vishnu that precedes every Indian play, and in the fact that the Mahabharata and Ramayna, the religious epics of popular Hinduism, from the almost exclusive source of dramatic themes. We can, therefore, accept Keith's statement, that

"the Sanskrit drama came into being shortly after, if not before the middle of the second century B. C., and that it was evoked by the combination of epic recitations with the dramatic movement of the Krishna legend, in which a young god strives against and overcomes enemies."<sup>4</sup>

*C. The Poets of the Indian Drama: Shudraka, Kalidasa, and  
Bhahavuti*

It is needless to trace the development of the Indian drama through a host of mediocre authors. We shall be much more profitably occupied if we consider the great trio of the Classical Indian drama.

Shudraka is the king who received credit for the work of an unknown artist who wrote in the fifth century A. D. His only extant work is the *Mrrichakatika*, or "the Little Clay Cart," a genre-drama of middle life. It is a brilliant panorama of Indian life, remarkable for its tropical fertility of invention, exuberance of detail, and variety of character and episode, for its leisurely but keen insight into life. It is thickly studded with jewels of the brightest colors—epigrams of wit and wisdom, scenes of quaint but touching pathos, and a humor that is human enough to be felt across the wall of an English translation. Its plot consists of two complete stories joined together not without a certain amount of skill, sustaining the interest, and even effecing something like dramatic suspense. Yet its merits are those of "Martin Chuzzlewit" and "the Pickwick Papers": not an exhibition of virtuoso-like ingenuity in plot construction, but an air of broad human sympathy, naïve and childlike delight in life as it is untroubled by the moralistic obsessions of its English cousins, free from affectation and rationalization alike, with a simple animal-like dignity, with the unstrained and unstudied charm of a wild flower.

<sup>4</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 45.

Shudraka's genius has given us a masterpiece that is unique because it is universal: it can afford as much delight to a western as to an oriental audience of the same cultivation and aesthetic discernment. With Kalidasa, commonly considered the greatest figure of the trio, we come to a poet who stands more definitely within the Indian tradition. He is often called the Indian Shakspeare or Goethe. Yet he is not to be equalled or even compared with these western masters, because he lacks the universality of the one and the profundity of the other. The distinguishing merit of his work is a frank naturalism of sentiment combined with an elegance, even a prettiness, which is totally unknown to the repressed and barbaric North, but quite akin to the graceful ardor of the French romantics. Kalidasa is Lamartine without Lamartine's gushiness, and Alfred De Musset without Musset's eroticism. His plots are bare and straggling, almost careless in their construction, but drawn as they are from the great epics so familiar to his audience, they offer ample opportunity to depict the very earthly emotions of nymphs and demi-gods and kings.

Two centuries separate Kalidasa from Bhababhuti. During that time the Indian drama had evolved through a period of increasing elaborateness and conventionality. The spring of the Indian drama that had given birth to the *Mrrichakatika* had passed into an early summer with Kalidasa, and now the first yellow leaves of Autumn had begun to fall. Bhababhuti is the child of a drama that was growing old. We miss in him the freshness of Shudraka and Kalidasa. Gone is the splendid optimism of youth that welcomes life with open arms and faces it eagerly and hopefully, with an animal joy in all that it has to offer. Yet in place of the lost flush of radiant youth has come something else: a keener sense of the reality and tragedy of things, a realization that life is not only an exciting game with lusty passions whose delayed satisfaction only adds so much spice to their ultimate enjoyment, but a field of conflict and disappointment, gray with the poignancy of long drawn-out separation and unrewarded love. Something of this sober sadness of maturer wisdom breathes through his three extant dramas, of which the Uttara-Rama-Charita is perhaps the greatest. The iron rule of Indian convention holds him back from tragedy, but he often comes very near to it, and we wonder what he could have achieved with the freedom of the Greek tragedian. As it is he comes closer to the

Greeks than any of his fellow-dramatists, especially to Euripides, that other disillusioned and uneasy poet, though Bhahabhuti is too much of a gentleman to play with the emotions of his audience quite so daringly as the Greek.

#### D. *The Aristocratic Audience of the Indian Drama*

In his *Development of the Drama* Brander Mathews points out the influence of the audience upon the playwright, "an influence not on the form of the play, but on its substance." He then proceeds to say that "the drama is, of necessity, the most democratic of the arts."<sup>5</sup> We can heartily agree with the first statement, but we are obliged to dissent with the conclusion that is drawn from it; unless indeed we presume upon the ambiguity of his statement, and grant that perhaps the drama is the least aristocratic of the arts. For no art is democratic. It is created for the enjoyment of the discerning few, and any attempt to popularize it results in the casting of pearls before swine, a process as unsatisfactory to the swine as it is degrading to the pearls. Perhaps the best refutation of the delusion of democratic and journalistic drama is to be found in India. For the Indian theatre is the theatre of a class, the theatre of the Brahmins, the noble, priestly, and administrative caste.

There are several reasons which have led to this. Language was one: the Indian drama is written in Sanskrit which ceased to be popular after 300 B. C., and persisted only as the language of the ruling class. I say *chiefly*; for only the chief parts were in Sanskrit; the roles of women and inferior characters were written in different Prakrit dialects, which were intelligible to the common folks, but were still stereotyped to a high degree, so that they by no means represented the language of the people. In the second place, the commercial theatre was unknown to India. Dramatic presentations were reserved for festive or solemn occasions and then given at the palace of some rajah or prince to an audience consisting chiefly of invited Brahmin guests. Having no specially constructed theatres for the housing of such spectacles, the audience was numerically limited to the capacity of the throne-room or banquet hall. The quality of the audience, however, more than made up for its small number: the poet was assured of highly intelligent listeners to whom he could speak with hints and half-tones, suggesting rather than describing, trusting to the cultivation of the

<sup>5</sup> p. 33

audience to supply that which the artist's self-restraint chose to leave unsaid. So the playwright could disregard the plebeian demand for farce, vaudeville or melodrama to which the commercial stage so easily degenerates, and cater to the

"qualities which the virtuous, the wise, the venerable, the learned and the Brahmans require in a drama: Profound exposition of the various passions, pleasing interchange of mutual affection, loftiness of character, delicate expression of desire, a surprising story and elegant language."

And the poet's disregard for popularity could rise higher yet :

"How little do they know who speak of us with censure!  
This entertainment is not for them. Possibly some one exists, or will exist, of similar tastes with myself; for time is boundless and the world is wide."<sup>6</sup>

Here we find the first secret of the spirituality of the Indian drama: its independence of any but a spiritual audience.

#### E. *Structural Peculiarities of the Indian Drama*

In our preliminary discussion of the Indian spirituality which we described as a universal mildness and refinement of outlook resulting from an other-worldly detachment from material things we spoke of it as the outstanding characteristic of the Indian soul. We may have expected to see its symptoms cropping up in the national drama, though so far the first mention of it was only made in the preceding paragraph, where the shaping influence of a spiritual audience on the Indian drama was pointed out. From now on we propose to hold fast to this spirituality and its attendant disregard for realism and disparagement of action, and correlate it with the distinctive features of the Indian drama.

The prologue is the first such feature that calls for mention: Every play begins with the entrance of the manager, who pronounces a benediction, asking for the blessing and protection of Shiva upon the audience, and then in a jocular conversation with one of the actors proceeds to tell the audience something about the author, the character of the play, and a word about the plot. This deliberate effort to make plain to the audience that what follows is to be a *play* is due to the extreme care of the spiritual Indian to avoid even

<sup>6</sup> Both quotations from an induction to one of Bhahabhuti's plays, quoted in *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on "Indian Drama," Vol. VIII, p. 482.

the semblance of deception, and to furnish a gentle transition from the world of reality to that of poetic imagination.

The manager then withdraws, the actors enter, and the play begins. There are no curtains to be drawn back: the only curtain is the so-called "Greek wall," reminiscent of Greek influence at the time of Alexander's invasion, being a plain dark tapestry at the back of the stage, forming the background for the performance. Entrance and exit are made at the back through this curtain. A further peculiarity of the Indian theatre now strikes us, as we notice the complete absence of stage-properties, and, as the play proceeds, the stereotyped character of the movements of the actors, much in the style of the modern ballet.

The scenic bareness of the Indian stage, however, is more than compensated for by poetic descriptions of nature, that give the desired effect without the attendant illusion, and at the same time offer admirable scope of expression for the author's aesthetic sensibility and power of pictorial suggestion. These descriptions sparkle like jewels in the pages of the Indian drama, and must be classed among the highest achievements of a spirituality that could suspend the action to indulge in the purely aesthetic delight of word-pictures. The imaginative splendor and pictorial vividness of these descriptions will be made clear from examples that follow. This snatch is from the lengthy description of the storm that appears as a poetic interlude in the fifth act of the *Clay Cart*:

"The heaven is radiant with lightning's glare;  
 Its laughter is the cry of myriad cranes;  
 Its voice, the bolts that whistle through the air;  
 Its dance, that bow whose arrows are the rains,  
 It staggers at the winds, and seems to smoke

With clouds, which form its black and snaky cloak."<sup>7</sup>  
 Here Bhahabhuti not only pictures natural scenery, but communicates a mood and builds an atmosphere:

"Here lies our path. Yonder is tall Kraunchavat,  
 Amidst the dark glens of whose wooded side  
 The raven silent flits, and hoots the owl,  
 And whines through whistling caves the shrilly breeze:  
 And countless pea-fowl, with discordant shrieks,  
 Chase into sapless trunks and time-worn trees  
 The frightened snakes."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> From A. W. Ryde's translation, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> From Wilson's translation, p. 323.

An even clearer expression of the Indian spirituality lies in its glorious disregard for the unities of time and space: Twelve years elapse between the first and second acts of the History of Rama. In Kalidasa's *Hero and Nymph* we find the king in the fifth act handing over the reigns of government to his son, who is the product of a love-union not completed till after the third act. As for unity of place, the freedom of the Indian playwright is even greater: unhampered by stage-effects of any kind, he can make his characters wander through forests, climb mountains, travel through the clouds, and ascend to heaven in winged chariots, all in the same scene.

But what contributes more than anything else to give the structure of the Indian drama its own peculiar flavor is its carelessness in the matter of action. Judged by Western standards Indian plots are weak, inefficient, disorganized. For one thing, the inventiveness of the Indian dramatist was discouraged by the fact that he could rely on the religious epics for ready-made plots. But even in those rare cases (as, for example, in the *Clay Cart*) where he did try to work out original stories, his work was marked by fertility rather than structural ability, with a tropical profusion of episode undisciplined by subordination of succeeding incidents to a well-defined end. The Indian dramatist never lets himself be worried by structural problems. His plots are simple. In a difficult situation he can always make use of the miraculous and the extraordinary. And if the worst comes to the worst, he feels no compunction in resorting to the *deus ex machina* to help him out of the ditch.

An over-wise Westerner hearing about these peculiarities of the Indian drama might wonder how it could still maintain its respectability in the face of eccentricities such as these. How could such a bare series of conversations between rather stereotyped characters in fantastic situations loosely joined to form a story be called a drama at all? But little would the Indian care for the jaunty judgment of an American reporter. His audience is a spiritual audience, and his purpose a spiritual purpose. He conceives drama as the communication of experience through the medium of the stage. If he can communicate experience without bothering with an elaborate stage or an over-ingenuous plot, why not do it? It is his right. More, it is his duty. One of the first principles of art is the elimination of the unessential. In this respect Indian drama is like William Blake's poetry or a Japanese print: the maximum of meaning with

the minimum of machinery. We cannot fairly blame a man for failing in something which he never attempted. The Indian never felt any ambition to compete with life in the realistic reproduction of nature or the fateful incidence of events. All he ever wished for was to share with his audience something good and beautiful in itself: the moral reaction of human beings under given circumstances. It is to the consideration of this moral and emotional content of the Indian drama, by which its ultimate success is to be judged, that we must now turn.

#### F. *Representation of Experience in the Indian Drama*

Two questions will occupy us here: First, the nature of the depicted emotions, second, their dramatic justice. The first is merely descriptive, the second is appreciative and critical.

The clue to the general understanding of the emotions portrayed in the Indian drama will be found in the recognition of the fact that they are the expressions of the eternal Indian spirituality. This will explain their instinctive nobility, their refinement and elegance, their moral purity, their effortless superiority to all that is vulgar, crude, perverted, or vicious. It will illuminate the complete absence of trivial or petty feelings and will justify the moral stature of a soul that could remain serenely indifferent to any but spiritual sentiments. To a Protestant and a Puritan, like myself, it may seem a matter of some surprise to mark the freedom and spontaneity of this moral elevation; to note the absence of repression and restraint, the freedom from uneasiness and inward conflict, the singleness of purpose and unity of will with which the whole personality acts

Debarred from or rather contemptuous of lower feelings, the Indian soul finds preeminent expression in the two sentiments of heroism and love. Indeed, if it was not for the epic character of most Indian dramas, even heroism would disappear, and nothing else would be left for the uniformly noble and elegant hero but love. As it is, valor adds a welcome but distinctly minor variation to the rather monotonous melody of the gentler passion. When it does come, it is treated in a prosaic, matter-of-fact fashion, as if it was a necessary, but inherently uninteresting business, preliminary, incidental, or instrumental to the more exciting deployment of love. It is often reserved not for the principle character, but for his son, who is unknown to him, and is recognized in the final scene through

some unusual exploit of courage and skill. This occurs in the History of Rama, and also in alidasa's *Hero and Nymph*. In any case, it is inconceivable that chivalry in the European medieval sense should ever possess more than a second or third-rate interest for the Indian: it does not agree with the climate.

Love, therefore, is the all-engrossing passion, yet a love that is neither Platonic, nor romantic, nor adolescent, nor jazzy, but Indian, or perhaps Italian. It is dark and violent like a tropical thunderstorm, but happily free from the protracted murkiness of a Chicago sky. It is too passionate to last, unless separation or unsatisfied desire adds fuel to the fire, and then there are no limits to its endurance. But that love is never noisy, melodramatic or vulgar. There is a poetic idealism even in its most passionate moments which prevents it from descending to the levels of mere lust. It is frankly, even innocently, animal. Yet its undisguised sensuality is not at all incompatible with a certain idyllic character delighting in coquetry and the exchange of pretty sentiment. Pururava speaks about Urvasi:

"Here loveliness lends splendor to her ornaments,  
Her purity gives fragrance to her perfumes."<sup>9</sup>

Notice the Italian prettiness of the following:

"Whom have you sent the envoy of your coming?  
None, but my heart: that has long gone before me."<sup>10</sup>

And something quite like joy-riding in the American style:

. . . . "tis much  
In the unsteady rolling of the chariot  
But for a moment to have touched the form  
Of this celestial nymph; the blissful contact  
Shoots ecstasy through every fibre."<sup>11</sup>

Love has also its more serious side of conjugal felicity:

. . . "What wealth need man desire,  
Who in the fond companion of his life,  
Has one that share his sorrows, and disposes  
All anxious care with exquisite delight."<sup>12</sup>

Its ardor does not evaporate with separation, and the constant lover is seen emaciated and worn by the suffering of an absence of

<sup>9</sup> *Hero and Nymph*, Wilson's translation, p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>12</sup> *History of Rama*, Wilson's translation, p. 320

twelve years, but with an undiminished affection.

"A teaspoonful of heroism in a pint of love"—this seems to be the recipe on which the Indian drama is made. But if the jelly tastes good, why quarrel with the cook on theoretical matters? If the Indian playwright chooses to restrict himself so largely to these two sentiments, we may privately regret the resultant simplification of life, but we cannot censure him for his personal preferences. The only way in which we may criticize him is on the dramatic justice of the portrayed experiences. The term 'dramatic justice' refers to the correlation of theme and material, of substance and form, of idea and technique; it denotes the measure of success with which the artist has mastered the instrument through which he has chosen to express himself, and the degree to which he has made that instrument subservient to his purpose. To be specific: In the preceding paragraph we protested against the unfairness of the critic who would depreciate the Indian drama because of scenic poverty and looseness of plot—the artist has a right to choose his own technique. Now we protest against the equal unfairness of anyone who would disparage the Indian self-limitation to certain particular experiences—it is the artist's privilege to choose his own theme. But having once selected his own theme and his own technique, his freedom can go no further: he has now a definite task before him of embodying the idea in the form. Art is the happy coordination of the two, and criticism can now be called upon to decide as to the success or failure of the artist in this coordination.

On the basis of such a criterion we shall be forced to the verdict that the Indian drama is not only art, but great art. What is its object? To depict certain emotions in their ebb and flow in response to certain natural surroundings and moral situations. What is its technique? To present certain characters to whom the desired emotions are not only possible, but natural; to bring those characters into conjunction with other characters, so as to arouse an action and reaction of will and feeling (chiefly the latter); to create constellations of episodes which will bring new and varied lights to play upon the characters and their attendant feelings; lastly to add to the incidence of events an atmospheric coloring of natural scenery which will enter into the total situation as a component factor. Does object and technique, idea and form work together? Are surroundings and situations used judiciously and

economically solely to produce the desired emotions, and do the emotions grow naturally and spontaneously out of the given surroundings and situations used judiciously and economically solely to produce the desired emotions, and do the emotions grow naturally and spontaneously out of the given surroundings and situations? Looking at the trio of the classical Indian drama, we must answer, yes.

It is only in this light that we can give a satisfactory explanation to the aesthetic unimportance of the structural deficiency of the Indian drama. This somewhat puzzling question is solved when we once realize the *atomism* of the Indian spirituality in contrast to the corresponding Western *organic* view of the emotional life. That is, the West represented by Shakspeare would conceive of the inner life of an individual as something coherent and self-consistent, one emotion growing out of a preceding emotion and strictly conditioned by it. There is a growth and development in a Hamlet or Macbeth, like that of a flower or plant, a growth and development however, which proceeds entirely within the character's individuality. It is this inner continuity of a developmental view of the individual's life that must be balanced by the outward coherence of a well-constructed plot. The Indian, on the other hand, possesses no such strong sense of personality. He rejects the metaphysical dogma of the individual soul. Personality exists only as an incidental and temporary manifestation of the world-soul. Its emotions and moral decisions are not the inevitable expression of an inner organic unity, but are the passing reflections of an impinging natural and social environment, the disconnected shadows cast on the passive waters of a lake by the clouds that flit overhead. With such a view of the inner life, the Indian would not know what to do with an elaborate plot. It would be something extraneous to his art, more of an encumbrance than a help. All he needs is a series of events, no matter how impossible in their sequence and fantastic in their occurrence, so long as they will be fit to evoke certain moral reactions from his characters. In Shudraka, Kalidasa, and Bhahabhuti this is achieved to something very near perfection.

A final question now remains: Is the nature-poetry of the Indian drama a merit or a defect? At first it appears as a distinct weakness. The playwright that lingers for a whole act (as in the Fourth Act of the *Hero and the Nymph*, and the Fifth Act of the *Clay Cart*) to draw word-pictures stops the movement of the play,

suspends the action, and irritates the audience. But this would be only the naive reasoning of a critic who would equate drama to action, and forget that the Indian's interest is not in a story, the outcome of which he knows in advance, but in the interplay of emotion aroused by inherently uninteresting incident. Anything that will arouse that emotion is justified. If descriptions of nature will do it just as well as events, the playwright has a perfect right to make full and deliberate use of them. And if nature can be transported to the stage through graceful and imaginative poetical descriptions infinitely superior to the best of stage-decorations, shall we not admire the Indian spirituality not only for its moral integrity in desiring to avoid illusion but also for its aesthetic instinct in choosing the better of two mediums to accomplish the same end? Again Indian art is justified, and the western critic who is willing to lay aside his western prejudices will recognize that in the representation of experience, which after all is the essence of the drama as of all art, the Indian theatre has achieved a success of the very highest degree.