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THE INDIAN MYSTIC

# THE INDIAN MYSTIC

*Some Thoughts on India's  
Contribution to Christianity*

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## INTRODUCTION

### CHRISTUS CONSUMMATOR

"I came, not to destroy, but to fulfil."

THIS book is a brief study of the Indian mystic—a mere outline sketch—intended primarily for Western readers, and written by one who has learnt to love India and to appreciate increasingly the wealth of spiritual treasure that is hers. It starts frankly from the standpoint of sympathy. It repudiates the older view, which laid all the emphasis upon the difference between Christianity and other religions, believing that we of the West had everything to teach and nothing to learn. It stands rather for the belief that Christ's saying, "I came, not to destroy, but to fulfil," while it refers primarily to the Law and the Prophets of Judaism, may also legitimately be applied to His relation to the other great religions of the world.

Christ came "not to destroy." I cannot myself believe that Hinduism, with its astonishing richness of spiritual and cultural heritage, is meant simply to be swept away by the religion of Christ. Such spiritual vandalism would mean incalculable loss, not only to India, but to the

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whole world. In no other country has the quest for Truth, which is the quest for God, been pursued through so many centuries of unwearying effort, or with so remorseless a subordination of considerations of personal comfort and ease to the imperious claims of the great adventure. The result has been a profound understanding in the things of God, and an unrivalled store of spiritual experience. It is incredible that such a heritage should have been thus painfully acquired, only now to be flung upon the scrap-heap. It is unthinkable that it should not have its permanent contribution to make to the sum total of man's spiritual wisdom. Rather is it true to say that we of the West cannot do without India; and the more I understand of India, the more profoundly convinced I become that the light which the Indian religious genius will be able to throw upon Christian thought and life will be almost revolutionary in character, and reveal our present understanding of them as singularly partial and inadequate.

Christ comes also "to fulfil." So far from sweeping away the spiritual heritage of India, He will take all those elements in it which are of permanent value, and bring them to a richer completion than they could have attained without Him. This is, in fact, what is taking place at the present time. India, true to her traditional temper of willingness to welcome fresh truth from all quarters, is beginning already to pay her homage and devotion to the Person of



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Christ. For a time she was blinded, not unnaturally, to His beauty by our association of Him with our Western civilisation, or with the external paraphernalia of our Western Christianity ; but now she is learning to see through these disguises, and to study Him for herself afresh, in the pages of the Gospel, and in the lives of His truest representatives. So seen, she finds Him to be One wholly congenial to her own spiritual atmosphere—One who strangely quickens and illuminates her own deepest intuitions, lifts her ideals yet higher, and supplies her with a fresh dynamic for their attainment. If she is not as yet prepared to accord Him such a position of uniqueness as we in our zeal for His honour might desire, she is at least beginning to share in that experience of Him which has always made it impossible for His disciples ultimately to yield Him less than the highest place ; and we may well be content to wait, with something of God's own patience, for His yet fuller revelation to the soul of India. We may be certain that, in due time, India will find in Christ, not less, but more than we have found, and will, as I have said, help us to understand Him better. We have, indeed, good reason to expect that, out of the working of the leaven of the Spirit of Christ in India, there will emerge a new movement of religion which may have consequences of incalculable importance both for East and West.

The present book attempts some slight study of the mystical intuition of India, particularly in

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three of its most characteristic expressions, and endeavours to show both how these may find their completion in Christ, and also how they may help to illuminate and clarify our Western understanding of the Christian religion.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE SOUL OF INDIA

" Ah, my own East ! How nearer God we were ! "

" THE things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal," wrote St Paul. To the West this is a hard saying, even if we admit its truth theoretically. To India it is a truism. You may find in India almost every type of religion and philosophy that the world has ever produced, but a system of blank materialism<sup>1</sup> you will not find. That is a creed too self-evidently foolish even to need refutation. For the Indian is, as Rabindranath Tagore has said, " incurably religious." Spirit is for him the great reality, and all the common acts of life are sacraments.

It is true that no one has succeeded in formulating the creed of Hinduism. If we start by defining God as the impersonal Absolute of Vedantism, we come up against the passionate

<sup>1</sup> A few scattered fragments of materialistic teaching from Indian Scriptures are collected together in Chap. VII of Hare's *Mysticism of East and West*.

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devotion to a personal God in Rāmānanda, Tulsi Dās, Kabīr, Tukārām, and all the other devotees of the *bhaktimārga*.<sup>1</sup> If we start from the conception of the unity of God, we are faced with the polytheism of popular Hinduism, or the "atheistic" dualism of the Sāṃkhya philosophy. Nevertheless, all who are familiar with Indian thought would agree that, whilst it may not be possible to define its beliefs in any one credal form, it breeds a certain common outlook upon life, a certain common temper of mind, which can be felt more easily than analysed, and which in all the variety of its manifestations bears the ineffaceable impress of the central Vedantic tradition.

The great dominating conviction in this outlook upon life is that which has been already indicated — the supremacy and eternity of "Ātmā," Spirit. This is the Absolute Supreme Self, called also Brahma; unconditioned, self-existent, the One Reality.

Brahma is the only ultimate Substance, and the world of matter owes such secondary reality as it possesses to the indwelling of Brahma. "The source of the whole universe and its dissolution am I. There is naught higher than I, O Wealth-Winner; all this universe is strung upon Me, as rows of gems upon a thread. I am the taste in water, O son of Kunti; I am the light in moon and sun; . . . the pure scent in earth am I, and

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the light in fire; the life in all born beings am I."<sup>1</sup> This thought of the indwelling of the Supreme Spirit in all things is found everywhere. It is at the back of idolatry. It underlies the belief in the sacredness of stones and trees and rivers. It makes natural the worship of men in whom God's indwelling is felt in notable measure. It inspires the strong repugnance felt to the taking of animal life.

The idea that the material world has any independent reality of its own is (at least for the great majority of Indian thinkers) pure delusion. The world deceives us by its appearance of reality—spreads, as it were, a veil of illusion upon our eyes. We become caught in the meshes of the phenomenal; bound to the wheel of life; supposing the world to be our true home. But, in fact, it is not so. All the passing shows of this world, the joys and sorrows, the failures and triumphs, the noise of the battle and the wrangling of the market, and all the changes and chances of "life's fitful fever," are but as the froth and foam on the fretful surface of ocean, to which the unruffled depths below remain serenely indifferent. The Ātmā is alone the real.

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, VII, 6-9. Cp. Swinburne's lines in *Hertha* :

I the grain and the furrow,  
The plough-cloven clod  
And the ploughshare drawn through,  
The germ and the sod,  
The deed and the doer, the seed and the sower,  
The dust which is God.

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The One remains, the many change and pass ;  
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly ;  
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity ;  
Until death tramples it to fragments.<sup>1</sup>

The One Self-existent Ātmā, or Brahma, is the true reality of ourselves. Owing to its association with matter a number of seemingly independent selves have appeared ; but, indeed, this separate existence of ours is but phenomenal and transitory. Our lives emerge into relative and momentary independence, like waves rising above the sea's surface, to sink back again at last, satisfied, into the larger embrace of the all-encompassing Spirit. Our true wisdom is to seek escape from the bonds which bind us to the wheel of life and make us pass through birth after birth of mortal existence, and to set our hearts upon that union with the Eternal which is our true *moksha*, or release. This we can only do by getting back to the truth of things—by coming to know that the divine principle within us is indeed the Supreme Spirit and none other. It is by realising our oneness with Brahma that we attain our goal.

But what thing dost thou now,

Looking Godward, to cry :

" I am I, thou art thou,

I am low, thou art high " ?

I am thou, whom thou seekest to find him ;

find thou but thyself, thou art I.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the age-long quest of India is for union

<sup>1</sup> Shelley, *Adonais*.

<sup>2</sup> Swinburne, *op. cit.*

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with God. The quest, it is true, takes different forms. Some of her thinkers, starting from the conception of God as the impersonal Absolute, and of the identity of the self in man with the Supreme Self, have believed that all that was needed was to cleave the veil of illusion, and so to arrive at clear vision of an already existing oneness. For such thinkers, personality, whether in God or man, seems to be a limitation. God is too transcendent to be described in the terms of personality; and man's ultimate goal is to transcend the personal, and to be reabsorbed into that Essence out of which he (in appearance, at least) has issued. This, so far from being conceived as extinction, is rather the attainment, at last, of fulness of life.

Others, starting from the conception of a personal God, to Whom man owes his life, but Who is not identical with himself, have felt that there were barriers of sin which God's grace and man's answering devotion must overcome before man can be one with God. For such, the ultimate goal to be attained is thought of as a union in which the distinction of identity between the individual soul and the Supreme Soul is not wholly transcended. But for all alike the quest is union with the Highest, and a union in which, even though (according to the thought of some), room is left for individual distinctness, such barriers as we conceive to exist between human personalities are overridden, and "in the ocean of God's love we lose ourselves."

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Thus at the heart of India's religion and life is the mystic's aspiration after union with God, and in studying the Indian mystic we shall be looking into the soul of India. We will take for our starting-points in this study three great words of Hindu religion—*bhakti*, that loving devotion to God (conceived as personal), which has provided the most dynamic force in the religious life of India; *sannyās*, that way of renunciation which has always made potent appeal to the heart of India as the highest path of perfection; and *yoga*, the system of ascetic discipline and training in the art of contemplation. We shall endeavour to consider what each of these has stood for in Hinduism; in what way, if any, each may find supplementing completeness in Christ; and what elements of particular value each may be expected to contribute to what K. T. Paul has called "the full-orbed faith of future generations, not only in India, but the world over."



## CHAPTER II

### BHAKTI, OR THE WAY OF DEVOTION

"Have thy mind on Me, thy devotion toward Me, thy sacrifice to Me, do homage to Me. Thus guiding thyself, given over to Me, so to Me shalt thou come."—(*Bhagavadgītā*, IX, 34).

#### I

THE word *bhakti* means loving devotion to God. It is in some respects similar to St Paul's use of the word faith, involving the same thought of self-surrender in absolute trust to God; but in *bhakti* the emotional element is more prominent than in faith. *Bhakti* is thus described in the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*:

By *bhakti* we mean an intense love of God.

Love of God is like the food of the immortals; for it makes a man perfect, deathless and satisfied.

A man who loves God has no wants nor sorrows. He neither hates nor joys nor strives with zeal for any ends of his own.

For through love he is moved to rapture; and through love does he attain peace, and is ever happy in spirit.

For love is an experience pure and selfless, subtle, unbroken, and ever expanding.

A man who has once experienced love will see that alone, hear that alone, and speak that alone, for he ever thinks of that alone.

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The religion of bhakti in India sprang up out of reaction against the rigid monism of Śaṅkarāchārya, who had systematised and intensified the Vedantic teaching about the identity of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul. This doctrine, however intellectually satisfying to the philosopher, left no room for a religion such as the heart of man craves. For, if I myself am Brahma, there is no God whom I can approach in prayer, none on whom I can depend for succour or deliverance from sin, none with whom I can enjoy the interchange of mutual love.

“To the Vaishnava thinker<sup>1</sup> the Vedantic doctrine destroyed the possibility of that which gave meaning to salvation, namely, the enjoyment of God. To him the very idea of salvation involves personal consciousness and a real relationship between lover and beloved. The illusory doctrine of Śaṅkarāchārya, by which the reality of the soul's existence is only seeming, cut away the basis of the Vaishnava conception of life, both here and in the heavenly Brindāban, and made of bhakti only a fleeting experience.”<sup>2</sup>

The revolt against this monistic teaching was initiated by Rāmānuja, who taught a modified monism allowing a limited distinctness to the individual soul, and was carried further by Rāmānanda and a long succession of teachers of the “bhaktimārga” in different parts of India.

<sup>1</sup> *Via.*, the follower of the way of bhakti towards Vishnu incarnate.

<sup>2</sup> *The Chaitanya Movement*, by M. T. Kennedy, p. 98.

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In the Tamil country this teaching of bhakti took root not only among the sects that worship Vishnu, but also amongst those who worship Śiva; and the blue throat of Śiva, stained for ever by the poison which he drank down to save mankind, became for them the very symbol of the love of God, constraining man's devotion. But elsewhere the bhakti religion is found always amongst Vaishnavites, and is directed towards Vishnu in one or other of his incarnations—particularly in the most popular of these incarnations, that of Kṛishna.

There are certain elements in this religion which, with differences of emphasis, are found amongst all the sects which practise it.

(a) The first is the conception of God as One who loves mankind and thirsts for the response of man's love. His most characteristic name is Bhagavān,<sup>1</sup> the Adorable One, the supremely Lovable, who gives Himself in love to man. Though transcending our human conceptions of personality, still He is personal, a Being responsive to the prayers and devotion of His devotees.

(b) God has become incarnate, not once only, but many times, for the sake of men.

“For whensoever the Law fails and lawlessness uprises, then do I bring Myself to bodied birth. To guard the righteous, to destroy evil-doers, to establish the Law, I come into birth age after age.”—(*Bhagavadgītā*, IV, 7, 8.)

<sup>1</sup> From the same root as the word bhakti.

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(c) Man has need of the grace of God, being separated from God by sin. The stress laid upon sin differs widely in different teachers. Sometimes it is conceived as largely ceremonial; sometimes its moral significance is more clearly grasped. In the Chaitanya sect "the teaching about sin is decidedly meagre."<sup>1</sup> In Tukārām, the Maratha poet-saint, on the other hand, sin is felt as an oppressive burden. He writes :

I am a mass of sin ;  
Thou art all purity ;  
Yet Thou must take me as I am,  
And bear my load for me.  
Me death has all consumed ;  
In Thee all power abides.  
All else forsaking, at Thy feet  
Thy servant Tuka hides.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the Tamil saint, Māṇikka Vāsahar, tells in repeated lyrics of the evil life which he lived before he came to know the grace of Śiva, and how his sin separated him from God, and weighed him down in the midst of his sensual enjoyment.

Here is an illustration of his longing for release from sin :

Since I am false, and false my heart, and false my very love,  
Howe'er I weep, still held by deeds, can I reach Thee  
above ?

O honey, nectar, O essential sweetness, great as sweet,  
Grant grace to me to find the path that leads unto Thy  
feet.

<sup>1</sup> *The Chaitanya Movement*, p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Psalms of Maratha Saints*, by N. MacNicol, p. 65.

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And again :

Whether I praise or curse Thee, still I'm stained with sin  
and sorrowing.

Yet wilt Thou leave me ? Splendour shining like the  
red-hued coral mount,

Master, Thou drankest poison black, the humbler beings  
pitying,

That I, Thy meanest one, might find no poison, but a  
nectar fount.

Or take this illustration, from another Tamil  
singer :

Daily I'm sunk in worldly sin ;

Naught know I as I ought to know ;

Absorbed in vice as 'twere my kin,

I see no path in which to go.

O Thou with throat one darkling gem,

Gracious, such grace to me accord,

That I may see Thy beauteous Feet,

Athihai Virattānam's<sup>1</sup> Lord.

The bond of lust I cannot break ;

Desire's fierce torture will not die ;

My soul I cannot stab awake

To scan my flesh with seeing eye.

I bear upon me load of deeds,

Load such as I can ne'er lay down.

Athihai Virattānam's Lord,

Weary of joyless life I've grown.<sup>2</sup>

(d) All the sects are agreed as to the way of  
deliverance and salvation. It is not to be attained  
by sacrifices or austerities or any outward way of

<sup>1</sup> A shrine in the South Arcot country.

<sup>2</sup> *Hymns of the Tamil Saivite Saints* (Kingsbury and Phillips),  
pp. 97, 101, 43, 45.

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worship or service, but only by the grace of God in answer to the loving faith of the soul.

"They that worship Me with devotion dwell in Me, and I in them. Even though he should have been a doer of exceeding evil that worships Me with undivided worship, he shall be deemed good; for he is of right purpose. Speedily he becomes righteous of soul, and comes to lasting peace. O son of Kunti, be assured that none who is devoted to Me is lost."—(*Bhagavadgītā*, IX, 29-31.)

The way of salvation is, in fact, summed up in the word *bhakti*. "This is set forth as a whole-hearted attitude of love and devotion to Krishna, that engages all the powers of life in complete and selfless service to him alone. The beauty and sufficiency of this way of life is proclaimed with almost endless repetition. It is the glory and joy of life, the one true course, the only real wealth this world offers, the supreme end of all existence. Compared with *bhakti*, all other means of religious devotion are obsolete, ineffectual and void."<sup>1</sup>

This way of salvation is open to all. Rich and poor, men and women, high-caste and low-caste, learned and ignorant, may alike embrace it. Nor does it involve the abandonment of ordinary occupations; it can be practised by the busy householder no less than the contemplative "*sannyāsi*."

<sup>1</sup> *The Chaitanya Movement*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. III.

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(e) The peace and joy which are the fruits of this selfless surrender to God might be illustrated from the writings of all the bhakti saints. Take the following two: the first, from Kabir the weaver, the Mohammedan disciple of Rāmānanda, whose religion combined elements from both Hinduism and Mohammedanism; the second from the Maratha Tukārām :

This day is dear to me above all others, for to-day the  
Beloved Lord is a guest in my house.  
My chamber and my courtyard are beautiful with His  
presence.  
My longings sing His name, and they are become lost  
in His great beauty.  
I wash His feet, and look upon His face; and I lay  
before Him as an offering my body, my mind,  
and all that I have.  
What a day of gladness is that day in which my Beloved,  
who is my treasure, comes to my house !  
All evils fly from my heart when I see my Lord.  
My love has touched Him; my heart is longing for  
the Name which is Truth.  
Thus sings Kabir, the servant of all servants.<sup>1</sup>

Holding my hand Thou ledest me,  
My comrade everywhere :  
As I go on and lean on Thee,  
My burden Thou dost bear.

If, as I go, in my distress  
I frantic words should say,  
Thou settest right my foolishness,  
And tak'st my shame away.

<sup>1</sup> From *Kabir's Poems*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore.

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Thus Thou to me new hope dost send,  
A new world bringest in ;  
Now know I every man a friend,  
And all I meet my kin.

So like a happy child I play  
In Thy dear world, O God ;  
And everywhere, I Tuka say,  
Thy bliss is shed abroad.<sup>1</sup>

(f) This peace which the *bhakta*, or devotee, experiences is regarded as the first stage in an ascending scale of feeling. The next is *dāsya*, or “service”—the relationship which led St Paul to describe himself as “the bondservant of Jesus Christ.” After this comes *sakhya*, that relation of affection which exists between friend and friend. Then follows *vātsalya*, expressive of the love between parent and child ; and finally the feeling of devotion culminates in *mādhurya*, or “sweetness,” which implies the passionate love existing between man and woman. This last is felt to be the fullest and truest symbol of the soul’s devotion, and recalls the use made by St Bernard and other Christian mystics of the Song of Songs and similar imagery of conjugal love in describing the soul’s relation to her Lord. The emotion aroused in the Indian mystic by the love of God is (at its fullest) so intense and passionate an ardour that the only human parallel felt to be adequate to adumbrate it is the passion of devotion existing between the sexes. “My Beloved is mine, and

<sup>1</sup> *Psalms of Maratha Saints*, p. 71.



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I am His." Where Kṛishna has been associated in the worship of the cult with Rādhā (the chief of the *gopīs*, or milkmaids, in the legends of Kṛishna's boyhood), an erotic element of an undesirable kind has sometimes entered into the worship. (This also is not without its parallels in Christian mystic literature, though it probably looms larger in Hinduism.) But where he has been associated with his true consort, Rukmini, this symbolism has been kept free from moral danger.

(g) The chief means for the cultivation of bhakti in the devotee are usually considered to be five, though in some of the bhakti literature nine are inculcated. Of the five principal means the first is the fellowship of holy men. Through association with those in whom love to God is radiantly evident, the disciple becomes himself inspired with a like devotion.

The second, and far the most important, of these means is the *kīrtan*, a form of religious service, conducted by a single leader with a small choir assisting him, in which hymns in praise of God alternate with the spoken description of His doings, usually of His doings when incarnate in human form. The songs of devotion, and the frequent repetition of the divine Name, deeply stir the religious feelings of the hearers. "At the call of the guitar's twang and the cymbal's clash and the drum's rhythmic beat the soul leaps up, ready for the high emprise. As the

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familiar melody moves on and the voices expand into a great flood of sound, earth is left behind, its cares forgotten, its joys despised. The body sways rhythmically to the music; the spirit soars up and sings at heaven's gate. The emotion changes with the mood of the music. Now it is a song of worship and adoration; now a passionate yearning for the Presence; now a transport of loving devotion; now a peace of calm self-surrender to the divine Lover."<sup>1</sup> The intensity of the emotion aroused by the kīrtan may be illustrated from the case of the Bengali mystic Chaitanya, who used it as his chief instrument in winning men to the love of God. "Chaitanya gave himself whole-heartedly to this musical worship, called kīrtan. The courtyard of a certain Śrīvāsa was the centre for the evening's devotions. Here, night after night, Chaitanya found an atmosphere so highly emotionalised and a fellowship so congenial and enthusiastic as to arouse him to a high pitch of excitement. . . . To the stimulus of song and instruments were soon added rhythmical bodily movements and handclapping in unison, and as excitement increased an abandon of dancing. . . . Beginning in the evening, the kīrtan would increase in volume and emotional intensity as the hours passed. The fervour of excitement, induced by the group acting upon one another, mounting higher and higher, eventually produced all the excesses of hysteria and dementia. It is difficult

<sup>1</sup> From the author's *Life of Nārāyaṇ Vāman Ṭīlaka*, p. 61.

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to conceive of the energy, both physical and emotional, expended in these exercises.”<sup>1</sup>

The third means for the cultivation of bhakti is the public or private reading of the sacred Scriptures, telling of the doings of the Blessed One in His incarnate life.

The fourth is going on pilgrimage to one of the sacred shrines specially associated with His presence. Here again, the company of fellow-disciples associated in a common quest helps enormously to quicken devotion; and the enthusiasm becomes intense, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the toils of the road, as the holy place draws near, and the time comes for that *darshan*, or vision of the god, which is the goal of the pilgrimage.

The fifth means for the stirring of devotion is image-worship, most markedly at the time of pilgrimage, as just described, but also in the regular temple worship. The image, regarded as the special shrine of the Deity's indwelling, is felt to bring Him in a peculiar degree within reach of the worshipper, and so kindles the flame of devotional ardour. It can easily be seen how, without pressing the parallel unduly, there is here something akin to the help derived by the Catholic from the sight of the crucifix, or (still more) the Reserved Sacrament.

In these and other ways there is quickened in the heart of the devotee that emotion of love to

<sup>1</sup> *The Chaitanya Movement*, pp. 20, 21.

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God which the bhaktimārga puts forward as the surest way to union with Him.

### II

It is not difficult to see the directions in which Christian teaching may supplement and complete this Hindu bhakti. To put it in a sentence, Christianity can offer to India a wholly worthy Object for her passionate devotion—an Incarnate Person, who is an entirely satisfying "Image of the invisible God."

It is not altogether surprising that the educated Indian of to-day, whilst gaining immense spiritual help from books like the *Bhagavadgītā*, in which Kṛishna is merely the self-manifestation of God, revolts from the (often childish and immoral) stories of the Purāṇic legend, much as Christian thought rejected the stories of the Apocryphal Gospels. So far, indeed, has this revolt gone that the Brahmo Samaj, representing the more advanced wing of liberal Hinduism, rejects *in toto* the whole principle of Incarnation. But this is to pluck up the wheat with the tares. Surely it has been part of India's mission to realise in a special degree the graciousness and intimate love of God, which must make Him long to reveal Himself to man and enter into human life in sympathy and helpfulness. It cannot be that this whole conception should prove to be mere illusion, or this part of India's heritage simply

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thrown away. If, therefore, India can find in Christ an Incarnation of God which she feels to be both historically trustworthy and ethically satisfying, the acceptance of Christ, so far from destroying her old faith, will in fact be the very means of preserving and fulfilling it.

And this is, in fact, what she is finding. There is in the Gospels the story of a real human life, which for the last fifty years has been submitted to the test of a more searching historical criticism than has ever been directed upon any other life, and has stood the test; for, whatever doubts may be felt by some about particular stories in the Gospels, the portrait as a whole is admitted to be the true, living portrait of Jesus of Nazareth.

Further, the Character there depicted stands forth before men to-day as admittedly the highest that the world has seen. If God is to be seen incarnate in any human life, it can only be in this one. India is not backward in feeling this appeal. To her the character of Christ appeals by its combination of masculine strength with a woman's tenderness and grace; by its harmonious blending of the contemplative and the active; by its triumphant purity and sinlessness combined with infinite gentleness to the sinner; and, perhaps most of all, by its unshaken reliance in face of hatred and opposition and violence, upon soul-force, based upon a serene trust in God, and upon a love that could reward evil with good, and pray for the forgiveness of those who nailed Him to the Cross. All

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this appeals straight to the heart of India, and makes it easy for her to welcome Him as indeed an Incarnation wholly divine, and One to whom she can rightly render that devotion which she is beginning to-day in new measure to accord Him.

Further, if India should enthrone Christ as the satisfying Object of devotion, such undesirable excesses of emotionalism as have sometimes vitiated the bhakti movement would be held in check by the sanity and austerity of His life and teaching, whilst the consciousness of His real living Presence and accessibility to the loving worshipper would give unrestrained scope to the sentiment of true devotion.

### III

Think, then, what this wonderful Hindu devotion may grow into when "fulfilled" in Christ. Think of the illuminating power of the message which it may bring to us of the West—a new revelation as to the place and power of the emotions in the life of religion.<sup>1</sup>

It is characteristic of us practical Westerners to say that Christianity is primarily a matter of the will. What matters most, we think, is a sense of duty, the setting ourselves by steady self-discipline to the following of our Lord, to the life of

<sup>1</sup> The following paragraphs are largely reproduced from my small book *Christian Yoga*.

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obedience. Even our devotional life, our communions, our meditations, we tend to carry on as a matter of faithful routine. Feelings are of no consequence, we say ; the will is everything.

Now there is, of course, real value in all this emphasis upon faithful devotion to duty, upon the worth of uninspired drudgery. It is perhaps one of the lessons that India may learn from us. But if we exalt the will into the first place in the religious life, if we begin to think that what matters most is the faithfulness of our own efforts to live the life of obedience, then we are coming perilously near to the conception of salvation by works ; and the attempt to be saved by works will fail, as it always has failed. It will fail, because, as St Paul discovered and taught us long ago, the emotions, the passions, have a dynamic force that can overcome the will. "It is not the good which I will that I do ; but the evil which I will not, that I do." Modern psychology has been teaching us in its own language the same lesson. Our instincts, we have been learning—because of the powerful emotions that they can excite—control us more entirely than we care to think. *So long as our emotional life remains unredeemed, we shall be sooner or later at its mercy.*

There are few things more pathetic than the sight of some heroic Christian, for whom religion means mainly obedience to a sense of duty, struggling on in a desperate fight against evil passions and desires, beaten down but rising

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again ! Pathetic, because foredoomed to failure ! The evil passions, repressed though they may be, are never really overcome. Either they will burst out again from time to time in unguarded moments ; or, if by iron determination they be prevented from finding conscious outlet and expression, they will take their revenge in some nervous disorder like the *accidie*, or nervous depression, which was supposed particularly to haunt the monastic cloister, but in these days at least is the plague of innumerable seculars, both men and women, in whom an emotional complex—to use our modern jargon—remains unresolved.

What is it, then, that we need ? I think that the emotional, loving children of India can teach us. It is to enlist the whole life of the passions and emotions, as well as the will and the intellect, in the service of God. Christianity has never been, and never can be, a way of duty, a religion of law. It is, and always must be, a way of love. "If ye love Me," says Christ, "ye will keep My commandments" ; keep them naturally, without conscious effort, because it is impossible to hurt one we love.

So long as we are thinking of God as a Master or Potentate, whose word is law, we may strive hard to obey that law ; but we shall find ourselves at strife within—caught and bound in the prison-house of our own passions, and beating on its closed doors with ineffectual fury. But India will help to bring us back to the true way of



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deliverance, which St Paul knew. India will help to bring us back to the feet of the crucified Lord, who loved us and gave Himself for us. India will teach us an intense personal devotion to that incarnate and crucified Lord—a love that thrills and burns with so strong a fire that, as it takes possession of us, the whole world will fill with the wonder of a new meaning, and there will be something rich and rare to live for, and the old burden of sin will tumble and roll away, as Christian's did at the foot of the Cross. Those who have known something of that experience know that, in the wonder of it, the old temptations lose all their power and attractiveness. It is the same thing that happens every time a little child that has been naughty sees the sad, loving eyes of its mother, and rushes with a burst of sobbing to her lap. It is the same thing that happens every time some sorely-tempted and sadly-fallen man finds the love of a pure girl, and forever marvels that the sin which looks now so foul and horrible could once have attracted him. It is "the expulsive power of a new affection"—love conquered by love, the love of the evil by the love of the good. Those prison doors, which were barred so fast against us, are flung wide now, by no hand of ours, and we step forth into the sunshine of a new world.

It is that glad experience of deliverance through loving self-surrender to that Divine Lover who is waiting and thirsting for our love, which India will help us to recapture. India will teach us a

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vivid intensity and a human intimacy of devotion, which our religion far too often lacks. One illustration of this from Christian India may conclude this chapter. The following lines are part of a poem by Nārāyaṇ Vāman Ṭīlak, the Christian poet of Mahārāshtra, who died a few years ago :

Once I bethought me, Thou my Guru art,  
I Thy disciple, humble and apart ;  
Sat low before Thee thus, nor ventured near,  
Schooling my soul to reverential fear.  
Ah folly mine ! Thy smile upon me bent  
Had shattered in a trice my fond intent.  
I rose and ran to Thee, and could not check  
My laughter, as I fell upon Thy neck.  
In sooth, dear Lord, so winsome is Thy grace,  
I cannot keep my due and proper place.  
Saith Dāsa,<sup>1</sup> Tell me true, hath any taught  
Friendship with distance ever to consort ?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Viz., "servant," the name adopted by Tilak in his poetry.

<sup>2</sup> *Sushilā and Other Poems of N. V. Tilak.*





## CHAPTER III

### SANNYĀS, OR THE WAY OF RENUNCIATION

‘ From the unreal lead me to the real ; from darkness lead me to light ; from death lead me to immortality.’—(*Upanishads*).

#### I

It is well known that sacred tradition in India prescribes four stages (āśramas) in the life of a Brahman. The first is *Brahmachāryāśrama*, the celibate period, during which he is gaining his education. The second is *Grihasthāśrama*, the householder period, during which he is married and brings up a family. The third is *Vanaprasthāśrama*, the period of retirement to the forest for meditation in semi-reclusion. This is a preparatory stage for the final period of *Sannyāsāśrama*, when the man renounces everything that he has, and in retirement from the world spends his days absorbed in contemplation and prayer, preparing for death, and supported by the offerings of the devout. The conditions of modern life make it difficult for these last two stages to be widely followed, but the ideal has always exercised, and still exercises, a potent influence on the Indian mind.

Further, it has always been recognised that

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some men of exceptional spirituality and self-control are called to pass straight from the stage of brahmāchārya to that of sannyās, remaining celibate throughout; and various ascetic orders exist throughout the country, into which such "sannyāsīs" are enrolled, and in which they live under strict rule. But there are also large numbers of self-made sannyāsīs, who are little better than common beggars, finding the adoption of the saffron robe a convenient means of getting fed gratis. Such men have, to some extent, brought the whole order of sannyāsīs into disrepute; and, at least among the sophisticated population of the towns, the saffron dress now wins little respect. There are still, however, large numbers of genuine sannyāsīs; and the ideal of the life of renunciation is so deeply rooted in the thought of India that it will not quickly lose its hold. Indeed, in the minds of the best Indians, the materialism of our modern life, "with its sick hurry, its divided aims," is reclothing the old ideal with something of its former attractiveness.

The ideal underlying this enthusiasm for renunciation is one familiar also to the Christian, viz., that the attractions of this unreal and transitory world clog and fetter the spirit in its Godward progress, so that it is only by cutting itself sternly aloof from them that the spirit can attain its true destiny.

I had been spending some time in prayer and meditation, one morning, on a railway

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journey; and, when I ended, my Brahman fellow-traveller asked me what had been the subject of my meditation. I read him the passage: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but are of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." And I shall always remember the look on his face, as of the loving recognition of a thing dear and familiar, as he said: "Ah, that's it! That is what we stand for; that is what we have always known!"

There is, no doubt, in the Hindu conception of renunciation an element not contained in the Christian conception. Life in the world is for the Hindu *saṃsāra*, a "wandering" through one after another of a long series of embodied existences, each rebirth into the world being governed by the law of *karma*, viz., by the accumulated merit or demerit of the previous existences. Until this sway of karma is broken, the spirit cannot attain its goal of *moksha*, or release from the weary round of *saṃsāra* and reabsorption into Brahma from which it proceeded; and that sway can only be broken by abstention from all actions, good or bad, since all alike bind one to the wheel of life. It is, therefore, utter renunciation of all part in the manifold activities of the

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world which affords the surest way of hastening the day of release.

It is, however, easy to exaggerate the difference of the Hindu from the Christian conception by overemphasising the influence of the purely philosophic side of this karma doctrine. Religion, all the world over, is a more potent determinant of men's conduct than philosophy; and it may be surmised with some confidence that the dominant motives inspiring the best of the Hindu sannyāsīs, no less than the Christian hermits, would be a longing to shake off those worldly fetters which hamper the soaring life of the spirit, and a passion for undivided communion with God, not merely after a succession of rebirths, but here and now. The possession of worldly goods is felt to entail an expenditure of time and trouble, and to involve a liability to temptation, such as may well rob the soul of its true wealth, leaving it incapable of concentrated attention to the things of God. Similarly, the ties of family life are felt as burdensome distractions to the soul which desires only to be wedded with God. The society of men, with all its temptations to wrangling and rivalries, to love of praise or pride of power, is feared as perilous to the soul which would be stript of all personal ends. The only safe course is felt to be total renunciation of all such secondary and passing interests, and utter concentration of the life's whole energies upon the quest of God.

A part of that material world from which the



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sannyāsi seeks escape is his own body, whose passions and weaknesses also hamper his search for the peace of union with God. So the Hindu, like the Christian, ascetic submits his body to all manner of mortifications and austerities. It is easy to be superciliously contemptuous of sādhus and fakirs; and no doubt there are humbugs and charlatans among them. But men who sit through the burning heat of the day surrounded by five fires, or lie on beds of spikes, or hold up one arm above their heads for days on end, till it is shrivelled and useless, or measure their length upon the ground for two hundred miles to some place of pilgrimage, are not (for the most part) seekers after notoriety, but seekers after God, however deluded we may think them. Such sufferings, they believe, will weaken the mastery of the flesh, win them merit and favour in the sight of God, and bring them nearer to Him. All such austerities, therefore, are to be welcomed in the fierce joy of a divine passion.

Such is India's ideal of sannyās. As Holland says:<sup>1</sup> "Perhaps in nothing do East and West differ more profoundly than in the place assigned to wealth. To us it is almost incomprehensible, but it is none the less plain fact, that the amassing of wealth (as distinct from the pressing problem of getting a livelihood and a comfortable competence) simply does not interest the Indian. What his soul worships instinctively, passionately, is poverty. 'Not the master of industry

<sup>1</sup> *The Indian Outlook*, pp. 15, 16.

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with his millions, not the Boss of Big Business, has roused India's enthusiasm and thrilled her imagination; this has been done only by the sannyāsī, going out from house and home, with no possession but his begging-bowl, to be alone with God.' Gandhi's bare feet and single garment are no small part of the hold he has on Indian reverence. The heart of India will draw instinctively to Him who had not where to lay His head."

### II

In what way, if any, may the ideal of sannyās look for supplementing or "fulfilling" in Christ?

It is often said that, whilst we of the West may well learn contemplation from India, India may well learn more of the life of action from us. It may be doubted, however, whether this quite hits the real point of importance. It is true, no doubt, that in the life of Christ Himself we see a perfect balance between the life of prayer and contemplation, on the one hand, and the life of active service, on the other; and that the normal Christian ideal would be that which keeps closest to the example of the Master's own life, and holds these two elements in proper equipoise. Most of the great Christian mystics have been workers as well as "seers," and some have exercised a dominating influence upon the history of their times by their intervention in the practical

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affairs of the day. But so, for that matter, have some of the outstanding Hindu mystics. To take the two most noteworthy examples of this, Gautama the Buddha, after his illumination, spent the whole of the rest of his long life in active work; and Śaṅkarāchārya changed the whole history of India by his teaching and the monasteries that he founded.

Then, further, it has always been recognised, in the history of the Christian Church, that there are certain people (never more than a very small percentage of the whole number of Christians) who have a special vocation from God to a predominantly contemplative life. The particular service which such Christians render to the Church (apart from the direct help of their intercessory prayers) is to keep before its eyes the vital truth of the *supremacy of life over work*. We in the West are extremely prone to lay all the stress on good works, and to regard quantity more than quality. We are apt to forget that the value of good works depends on the spirit which breathes through them and that, if our own touch with God is so slight that He is not felt to be working through our activities, they will bear scant fruit. We need, therefore, the witness of the lives of those who give themselves to prayer as their primary and central work.

India will help to reinforce this witness. For India has always recognised intuitively that the life lived matters more than the work accomplished, that "being" is the soul of "action,"

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without which action is lifeless and fruitless. The life devoted to God is felt to radiate an influence of spiritual uplift and moral helpfulness, however little it may be busied with activities. Indeed, much even of our religious activity seems to the Indian a serious waste of energy. Our zeal for accomplishing good works appears fussy and overdone. Readers of *My Brother's Face*, by D. G. Mukerji (than which few books give a truer insight into the Indian mind) will remember the Holy One's story of the old sannyāsi, who lived up in a cave on the hill-side above the village, and fed so scantily that they called him the "Air-eater"; and, though he never gave anyone a blessing, nor cured the sick, nor bestowed any other boon, his very presence was a blessing, so that whilst he lived no harm befell the village, but when he died murder broke out among them. The comment of the Holy One is: "My children, do not try to do good. Live like the holy man, my whilom teacher, the Air-eater: live so that evil will never dare come near where you live, and all the good will be accomplished of itself. For, as a scavenger removes dirt and constantly keeps watch lest the dirt infects him with disease, so the doer of good lives in perpetual fear lest his soul be contaminated with the evil he carts away from the house of life. He does not know into what danger the routine of good work can plunge his God-seeking soul. The pestilence of improving others may kill his spirit. Try the safer way—

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live so that by your living all good deeds will be done unconsciously.”

That, no doubt, is one-sided in its emphasis, and we should scarcely be willing to admit that a life devoted to God can ever be entirely without its outward expression in active usefulness. Nevertheless, we may well learn from India to give fresh value to the contemplative life, whose main function is to become a radiating centre of spiritual power, provided always that it be recognised that such a life is a special vocation for the few, and not intended for the generality of mankind. And this recognition India has always given. Retirement from the world is reserved, either for the last years of a man's life in immediate preparation for death, or for the few who feel specially called to it. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, particularly, it is constantly pointed out that this path of total renunciation is a hard one, and indeed for most men impossible and undesirable, and that the essential sannyās consists, not in abstaining from all works, but in doing one's works in the spirit of utter unselfishness which renders them no-works; for it is not actions as such, but desire for the reward of actions, which hinders the attainment of the true goal.

On the whole, then, it may be said that it is not so much a fresh stress on action, as against contemplation, that the ideal of sannyās needs by way of supplement from Christianity. Rather, I would suggest, what it needs is a *less self-centred aim*; it needs to combine the spirit of renuncia-

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tion with the spirit of *service*. For, in spite of the instances of Gautama and Śaṅkarācārya quoted above (and many others could be added to them), it remains true that the dominant motive inspiring sannyās has been personal salvation, whether conceived in the sense of escape from the round of rebirths or of deliverance from the obstacles which hinder the attainment of inner peace and communion with God. It is not so much a question of how much time is to be spent in the "practical" as against the "contemplative" life. It is rather a question as to how far *both* contemplative and practical life are to be inspired with the central ideal of service to one's fellow-men. For, on the one hand, the life of prayer becomes utterly unselfish when it is spent partly in praying for others, and partly in replenishing the sources of that spiritual strength on which personal usefulness depends; and, on the other hand, even the life of good works can degenerate into selfishness, when it is pursued with the motive, which it must be confessed that even the *Bhagavadgītā* holds forth, of attaining personal release.

There is no need to exaggerate the difference of the two outlooks. Escape from hell and attainment of heaven have often been preached by Christians as the compelling motives for a good life, and the most spiritual Christian looks to the joy of union with God as his reward, if not his motive. But it remains true that the Christian ideal has more consistently held up

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service as the true way of life. It could not fail to do so if it should remain in any degree true to the teaching and example of its Master, who came "not to be served, but to serve," whose whole life was one of self-sacrificing ministry to others, and who charged His followers, "Whosoever would be great among you, let him be the servant of all." The true disciple of Christ, like St Paul who prayed that he might be "accursed from Christ," if only his kinsmen the Jews might be saved, forgets all thought of personal salvation in zeal for the salvation of others, and finds his soul only by losing it. The story of Christian service in the world, and not least the annals of the mission-field, tends further to emphasise that this has actually been the characteristic mark of the Christian spirit at its best. I suggest, therefore, that it is by the addition of this ideal of service as the dominating motive that Christ will bring to full-orbed completeness the Hindu ideal of sannyās.

### III

Thus crowned and completed, the Indian spirit of renunciation may well do much to revolutionise our Western Christianity. There is perhaps nothing which the Church of the West needs more, in these days of luxury and materialism and neurasthenia, than a new movement like that of St Francis of Assissi with his enthusiastic devotion to the Cross and his rapturous

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joy in the espousal of the Lady Poverty. Such a fresh movement might well come to us from India.

Already the figure of Sunder Singh stands out in India, to show what the Christian *sannyāsi* can be and do. For, although he disclaims the name of *sannyāsi*, it is the name which describes him most truly. Converted by a vision of Christ at the age of eighteen, he left his home, surrendering a comfortable life and considerable wealth, and adopted the saffron robe of the *sādhu*.<sup>1</sup> He has now spent over twenty years in this life of utter renunciation and poverty, travelling throughout India preaching Christ, and dependent entirely on what he may be given from place to place for food and clothing. He has chosen Tibet more particularly as his field for evangelistic work, partly because of its inaccessibility for the ordinary missionary worker, and partly because of the peculiar hardships which work in that country involves, both from the rigours of travel in such high altitudes, and from the active persecution which in many places he has to undergo.

For one of the points in which Sundar Singh truly reflects the spirit of the Indian *sannyāsi* is in his enthusiastic welcome of suffering. Not, indeed, that he believes in self-inflicted austerities, or hopes for merit through mortifications; but

<sup>1</sup> The word *sādhu* implies strictly an initiated ascetic of one of the sectarian orders, but it is often used loosely for a holy man.



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the more that sufferings come to him in the way of his service of Christ—and they have come to him far beyond the lot of most men—the more he rejoices. Set in the stocks, his naked body covered with leeches, “I do not know how it was,” he says, “but my heart was so full of joy that I could not help singing and preaching.” Some years ago he wrote: “From my fourteen years experience as a sādhu for Jesus Christ I can say with confidence that the Cross will bear those who bear the Cross until it lifts them up to heaven into the presence of the Saviour.”

Streeter and Appasamy, in their book about Sundar Singh, write: “The consequences for India of this pioneer attempt to Christianise the sādhu ideal no man can foretell. Already four hundred young men have come to Sundar Singh, passionate to follow his example. Many of them he thought might be influenced by the emotion of the moment and would not have strength to persevere in so hard a life. Better not to attempt it than to begin and lay it down. He has told them to watch and pray; to make sure of, and then to follow the path, whatever it be, to which they are bidden by the divine call. . . . Suppose, then, that all over India there should arise Christian sādhus. In a country so open to the appeal of religion the effect might be stupendous.”<sup>1</sup>

But it is not India only which would feel the effect. We of the West need it far more, and such a movement could not fail to have its

<sup>1</sup> Streeter and Appasamy, *The Sādhu*, p. 251.

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influence in the West. It would recall us to many of the great texts of the Gospels which we have either forgotten, or explained away. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me." "Whosoever there is among you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." "If thine eye cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . . If thine hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." "He that would save his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for My sake, the same shall find it."

Such a movement would throw new illumination upon our Lord's teaching about riches, which often seems to us exaggerated and hard of explanation. Christians in the West also might begin to understand the romance of giving up all that they have, to win the pearl of great price. We should begin, too, to recapture something of the thrill and gladness of the experience of the Cross which breathes through the stories of the martyrs and the pages of the *Imitation*. We should be ready to face any hardships or difficulties that might come to us in the great quest, not only with resignation, but with a reckless enthusiasm, finding in them a new reality of union with Christ and an intimate secret of hidden joy.

One of the outstanding personalities produced by Indian Christianity was Nārāyaṇ Vāman Ṭīlak,

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from whom a poem, illustrative of Christian bhakti, was quoted at the end of the last chapter. Tīlak was not a sannyāsī all his life like Sundar Singh, but was true to the Indian idea in devoting the last years of his life to that state. At the age of fifty-five he renounced all means of support, and together with his wife entered the Sannyāsāśrama. In announcing this decision he said : " I must be free, except in love and service, of all human agencies, and must be bound entirely and for all purposes to Christ and the Gospel. . . . I am a Christian sannyāsī, which means a follower of *anurāga*,<sup>1</sup> and never of *virāga*,<sup>2</sup> and will try to be and do as I am bid by the Spirit of God." In accordance with this conception of sannyās he did not withdraw from Christian activity, but was diligent in preaching and other work, and these years were in some respects the most fruitful of his life.<sup>3</sup>

The following poem written by him at the outset of this period represents the true spirit of the Christian sannyāsī :

*From this day onward Thou art mine,  
Brother beloved and King divine,  
From this day on.*

My food I'll get in serving Thee ;  
Thy thoughts shall be as eyes to me.  
I'll live and breathe to sing Thy praise  
From this time onward all my days.

<sup>1</sup> Attachment, or love.

<sup>2</sup> Detachment from all passions and emotions ; indifference.

<sup>3</sup> *Vide* the last chapter of *The Life of N. V. Tīlak*.

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Thy feet I choose, the world resign,  
For Thou from this day on art mine,  
Brother beloved and King divine.

To Thee I offer <sup>1</sup> child and wife,  
My home and all my worldly life ;  
To Thee this body too I bring,  
To Thee surrender everything.  
My very self henceforth is Thine.  
O take it, Lord, for Thou art mine,  
Brother beloved and King divine.

My thoughts and words are all of Thee,  
Thou—Wisdom, Joy, and Liberty.  
Now Thee and me no rift can part,  
One, not in semblance, but in heart.  
Set free am I, and for me shine  
The joys of heaven, since Thou art mine,  
Brother beloved and King divine.

*From this day onward Thou art mine,  
Brother beloved and King divine,  
From this day on.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Viz., consecrate. He never deserted them.

<sup>2</sup> *Sushilā and Other Poems of N. V. Tilak.*

## CHAPTER IV

### YOGA, OR THE WAY OF DISCIPLINE

"As a lamp in a windless spot flickers not, such is the likeness of the *yogi* of subdued thought, absorbed in union with the Supreme Spirit."—(*Bhagavadgītā*, VI, 19.)

#### I

THE word *yoga* is related to the Greek *ζυγόν* and the Latin *jugum*, and means "yoke." It is used, in the religious terminology of Hinduism, in two distinct senses. The commoner use at the present day is in the sense of "union" of the soul with God.<sup>1</sup> But in its older connotation the word implied a "rule," or system of spiritual exercises and discipline, to which a man (as it were) harnesses himself.<sup>2</sup> In actual practice the two senses have often come to be combined, since the aim of the rule of spiritual discipline has generally been the attainment of union with the Supreme Spirit. Yoga may, therefore, be taken to cover both the end and the means.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. N. V. Tīlak's description of his vision of Christ, ending :  
Great Lord of Yoga, Thou hast yoked with Thee,  
Saith Dasa, even a poor wight like me.

<sup>2</sup> Yoga is intended for those able to devote themselves entirely to the ascetic life.

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But in the classical system of yoga, that of Patanjali,<sup>1</sup> the word is used in its earlier sense. Yoga is defined at the outset as "restraint of mental modifications (or activities)," and Patanjali sets forth the method by which the soul (*purusha*) may be gradually detached from the meshes of Mind and Matter (*prakriti*), and attain to "isolation" (*kaivalya*) in its own "essential form" (*svarupa*). In Patanjali's system the thought of union with God is not prominent; for Patanjali takes over the Sāṃkhya philosophic system, in which (while the lesser deities of popular Hinduism are accepted as a matter of course) no room is left for One Supreme Being, and the universe is said to consist of two eternal substances, Soul and Matter,<sup>2</sup> and, though Patanjali introduces into this system the conception of God (*Īśwara*), he does not make God the supreme and sole end of the soul's quest, but only one of the various possible means to the attainment of the goal of *kaivalya*.

The recent psychology of the subconscious (or unconscious) has thrown very considerable light upon the Yoga system; and to me at least it appears that what Patanjali sets forth, with considerable psychological acumen, might be described in modern terminology as a method for deliberately isolating, and gaining control over, the

<sup>1</sup> Probably the same as the grammarian of the 2nd or 3rd century B.C. He embodied the yoga doctrine in a series of brief aphorisms known as *sūtras*.

<sup>2</sup> *Prakriti* is really wider than what we mean by matter, including the cognising faculties also.

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subconscious and its powers. He is not concerned directly with the quest for God. God may, indeed, be a centre of special attractiveness for that concentration and contemplation which the system prescribes, but other such centres also will avail. What is sought is the release of powers which are within the soul itself and which are normally in abeyance owing to the activities of the conscious mind. When these activities are brought under control, the subconscious powers come, so to speak, into their own.

It is impossible, within the limits of this small book, to expatiate in detail upon Patanjali's system. I can only here refer briefly to the eight principal stages which he sets forth in the attainment of *kaivalya*.

The first two, *Yama* and *Niyama*, sum up the moral law in its negative and positive aspects. *Yama* prescribes abstention from such acts as killing or injuring, lying, stealing, incontinence, coveting. *Niyama* enjoins cleanliness of mind and body, contentedness, asceticism and austerity, sacred study, devotion to God. They stress the necessity of a life of moral discipline and self-control before the practice of contemplation can safely be taken up. They roughly correspond, therefore, with the "purgative way" of Christian mysticism; and on the necessity of this ascetic theology would agree in laying primary emphasis. For in contemplation the door of the subconscious regions of the mind is opened, almost as in sleep; and, unless the habits of right living

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and thinking have deeply penetrated our whole nature, it may prove easy for the lower passions repressed in those subconscious regions to find scope for their activity at such a time. A habit of steady moral discipline is the essential preliminary.

The next two stages are *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyāma*, postures and breathing exercises, representing the bodily preparation required. It is recognised that for the practice of yoga, just as a certain moral preparation is necessary, so also a certain poise and fitness of the physical organism is needed. There are a large number of "postures" (or physical exercises) prescribed for the development of every part of the body; and an interesting series of experiments is being conducted by a Hindu yogi, trained in Western science and medicine, at his *Āśrama*<sup>1</sup> in Lonavala, near Bombay, with a view to showing the value of the yogic system of bodily training and therapeutics.<sup>2</sup> The value of breathing exercises is universally admitted.

At the actual time of contemplation, also, importance is attached to bodily posture and breathing. The position should be "steady and easy." The man practising contemplation should

<sup>1</sup> The word *Āśrama*, in addition to meaning one of the four stages of a Brahman's life, is also used in the sense of a hermitage or place of religious training.

<sup>2</sup> The results of these researches are published regularly in an admirable quarterly called *Yogamīmāṃsa*, which may be obtained from Swami Kuvalananda at Kaivalyadhāma, Lonavala, W. India.



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be "alone in a secret place . . . in a pure spot." "He shall set for himself a firm seat, neither too high nor too low." He shall "hold body, head and neck erect and steady . . . not looking round about him."—(*Bhagavadgītā*, VI, 10 ff.) Stress is laid, too, on quiet regular breathing as a help to concentration. It is quite true that anything which helps to secure complete repose for the body helps also to quiet the mind. There are some highly-strung people whose bodies are almost always in a state of tension. Such will find great difficulty in securing concentration of mind without first completely relaxing their bodies.

After the body has been thus brought into a state of quietness, the next step is *pratyābāra*, viz., the withdrawal of the senses from the outward objects which distract them. This requires a good deal of quiet perseverance; for the mind is at first, as one writer puts it, like a monkey jumping hither and thither from bough to bough. "Wheresoever the fickle and unsteady mind wanders off, there shall he check it and bring it into obedience to the spirit." "Little by little he shall win stillness by steady control of the mind." "As a lamp in a windless place flickers not, such is the likeness of the yogi of subdued thought, absorbed in union with the Supreme Spirit."—(*Bhagavadgītā*, VI, 26, 19.)

The five stages thus described are preparatory. The three that follow are called the *Rāja-yoga*, or kingly yoga, and constitute the essential part of the yoga discipline.

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The first of these is *dhāraṇā*, or concentration. It is the fixing of the mind, thus brought by *pratyāhāra* under control, upon some particular object. This is usually conceived as some material and visible object, such as a part of one's own body, or the image of a god; but there is no reason why it might not equally be some immaterial object conceived in the mind, e.g., God himself.

Then follows *dhyāna*, or contemplation. This is the continuance of what was begun by *dhāraṇā*. The mind is held quietly in fixed attention upon the object of contemplation. The conscious mind is now largely in abeyance, having done its work in the two earlier stages; but it is not so entirely in abeyance as to be unaware of all outward sensations. This takes place only in the last stage, known as *samādhi*, and answering to the "ecstasy" of the Christian mystic. This is described as being reached when the "light" of the object contemplated takes entire possession of the mind, which thus loses all consciousness of itself as a separate entity. It is in this condition that the yogi looks to receive gifts of supernatural illumination of mind and supernatural powers of body, and the books contain classified lists of such gifts and powers. These were looked upon thirty years ago with almost entire incredulity even by so sympathetic a student of Hinduism as Max Müller. But the advances of psychology and the extended study of mysticism since his day make us now far less

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ready to set aside such claims as unworthy of serious study.<sup>1</sup>

In order to complete this brief outline of the eight stages of the yoga discipline, it ought perhaps to be added that samādhi is considered to be of two kinds. The first admits still a certain consciousness of an object, as dreams are seen in sleep; and it is in this state that miraculous powers or revelations may be gained. But ultimately a second, totally unconscious, plane of ecstasy is reached; and this is held to be the attainment of that kaivalya, or isolation, which is the true goal of the yoga quest.

### II

Where we shall most desire to supplement the yoga teaching is in regard to the *object* of contemplation. We have seen that Patanjali had in view, not the specifically religious end of union with God, but the attainment by the self of "isolation." In pursuing this end he could consistently regard God merely as one among other possible objects of contemplation. But if we are to make the end of our spiritual discipline to be definitely union with the Supreme (as much of later Hindu thought has, in fact, done), we shall need to insist that for us everything

<sup>1</sup> Witness the long chapter devoted by Streeter and Appasamy to a sympathetic consideration of the ecstasies and visions of Sundar Singh.

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turns upon God being made the one essential object of contemplation. We may indeed, if we will, make use of a picture or other aid to realising God under some particular form or attribute; but it is He Himself with whom we seek to be joined, and on whom, therefore, we shall concentrate our minds, and not anything material in the world about us.

Further, it is important to insist that we desire to contemplate God, not (like the Vedantist) as being identical with our own spirit, but as One distinct from our own spirits, though indeed their goal.<sup>1</sup> If we start from the premise "I am Brahma," our contemplation will naturally be ego-centric. Seeking to realise our own spirit as identical with Brahma, we shall turn our mind in upon itself, and anything which will assist the immobility of all our faculties will be an aid to us in attaining our goal. This (though starting from different premises) is, in effect, very similar to the teaching of the "Quietists,"<sup>2</sup> which the Church rightly pronounced to be contrary to Christian ideas.

<sup>1</sup> Here Patanjali would be in agreement with us.

<sup>2</sup> Compare, for example, Molinos (*Spiritual Guide*): "Consider nothing, desire nothing, will nothing, endeavour after nothing; and then, in everything, thy soul will live reposed with quiet and enjoyment." So, too, Madame Guyon: "This divine life becomes quite natural to it (the soul). As it no longer feels itself, sees itself, or knows itself, so it no longer sees or understands or distinguishes anything of God as distinct or outside of itself. It is no longer conscious of love or light or knowledge; it only knows that God is, and that it no longer lives except in God."

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Sundar Singh declares that he finds in Christian ecstasy a sense of uplift and renewal which he failed to find in Yogic practice in his Hindu days. "When I used to practice yoga, there was no permanent refreshment, though the trance might be temporarily comforting. Indeed the great contrast between the state of ecstasy and the yogic states which I cultivated before becoming a Christian lies in the fact that in ecstasy there is always the same feeling of calm satisfaction and being at home, whatever had been my state of mind before going into ecstasy; whereas in the yogic state, if before the trance I was feeling sad, I used to weep in the trance; if cheerful, I would smile. Also after an ecstasy-I always feel strengthened, invigorated and refreshed. This result did not follow yoga."<sup>1</sup> This is exactly what we should expect if the form of yoga practised by Sundar Singh was of the passively introspective order which the Vedantic belief naturally prompts. Instead of the access of spiritual strength and refreshment which results from the loving aspiration of the soul towards God (conceived as indwelling, indeed, yet not identical with the self), there is only a deepening of the original mood which prevailed before the trance started.

We must bear in mind, however, that the yoga discipline inculcated by Patanjali is not of this passive and quietistic type. It demands intense concentration upon some "exterior" object;

<sup>1</sup> Streeter and Appasamy, *The Sādhna*, pp. 135-6.

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and what the Christian, in company with a large number of Indian thinkers, will desire to add, is that in the highest type of contemplation that object will always be God Himself.

### III

We have, then, every reason to expect that India, with her long and profound study of the art of contemplation, will recall us powerfully to this much-neglected aspect of the Christian life. We English Christians, with our stress on the "practical" expression of the Christian life, tend to leave so little room for prayer that we hardly know how to spend half an hour in silence, alone with God. But I remember on one occasion in India taking some Indian boys with me for a month in the country during the school holidays. We had arranged to begin each day with an hour set apart for meditation, but after the first two or three days some of them came to me and asked that the time might be extended, as they found it impossible to complete their meditation within the hour. These were Christians of quite humble origin and simple education. What may we expect, then, from those with a hereditary tradition of religious training like the Brahmans?

I believe that India will bring home to us a new sense of the nearness and accessibility of God, will teach us to realise that we have not to

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be straining up to heaven, as it were, to find Him ; for indeed :

Closer is He than breathing,  
And nearer than hands and feet ;

— nay, He is within our own hearts. He is not, indeed, identical with our spirit, yet He is the true life of our spirit ; and, if we would know and possess Him, we have but to withdraw within the sanctuary of our own hearts to meet with Him and contemplate Him there.

There is a beautiful Indian illustration of this given by D. G. Mukerji. "Once in many years, my child, Mushiknava, the musk-deer of the hills, is haunted by the breath of musk perfume in its nostrils. It does not know whence that odour comes, but it is like the call of Krishna's flute which none can resist. So the Mushiknava runs from jungle to jungle in pursuit of the musk. The poor animal gives up food and drink, sleep and rest. As a child seeks the echo, calling here while echo answers from over the ravine, then crossing the ravine and hearing from this side the answering cry, so it is with the Mushiknava. It knows not whence the musk calls—but it must follow over ravines, forests and hills, until at last hungry, tired, exhausted, it steps carelessly, slipping from the crest of some rock, and falls mortally broken in body and soul. As a last act before dying it takes pity on itself and licks its breast—and there, there ! behold, the musk-pouch has been growing in its

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very own body. It pants deeply, trying to inhale the fragrance, but it is too late. O, my blessed son, do not seek for the perfume of God without, and so perish in the jungle of life, but search thy own soul, and lo! He will be there. Do not fail to feel Him within, no matter how thy senses insist that He is like the deceptive echo—outside thyself.”<sup>1</sup>

There is much, too, that we may learn from the Yoga system about what might be called the “science” of contemplation.

Its stress on the need for a preliminary moral discipline is excellent, and much of the detail in that section of Patanjali shows a strangely modern understanding of human nature.<sup>2</sup> The part played by bodily conditions in the life of contemplation is a matter that has perhaps been too largely ignored by us. The need of careful training in attention and concentration is a matter on which we may learn to lay fresh emphasis.

Consider, in particular, the three last stages, constituting the “essential” yoga, in relation to the Christian life of devotion. After the mind has been withdrawn from external distractions, we set ourselves to direct it upon some object

<sup>1</sup> *My Brother's Face*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Cp., for instance, Book II, *Sūtra*, 33: “Upon thoughts of sin troubling, habituation to the contrary,”—a maxim easily memorised, like all the *Sūtras*, and explained by the commentator Vyāsa as meaning that, when thoughts of injuring, lying, etc. enter the mind, they must be expelled by the suggestion of the contrary thoughts.



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of contemplation, which will usually be some aspect or attribute of God. In the choice of such an object of contemplation meditation upon a passage of the Bible will often be our greatest help. The difference between meditation and contemplation is that in meditation the conscious mind is actively at work, thinking out some words from Scripture or some truth that it has set before itself, whereas in contemplation the conscious mind is to a great extent at rest, and the soul presses upward towards God with the eager aspiring of love; for "by love may He be gotten and holden, but by thought never."<sup>1</sup> It is natural, therefore, that meditation should come first and supply the *direction* for our contemplation; for we have to remember that the subconscious mind, which in contemplation is mainly active, has little or no power of self-direction, though it will carry out almost infallibly the suggestions which it receives. It is like the torpedo, which depends for its direction upon the torpedo-tube, but, once directed, can accomplish the work. There must be first, therefore, whether through meditation or in some other way, some direction supplied to our minds—some thought of God along the line of which we may set our minds and hearts upon Him. This is *dhāraṇā*, or concentration.

Then follows contemplation (*dhyaṇa*), when, still preserving this direction of our hearts towards Him, we are content to rest in His presence without

<sup>1</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing.*

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striving or strain. Here, thought and utterance are alike transcended, and we repose in the enjoyment of God.

In such access of mind, in such high hour  
Of visitation from the living God,  
Thought was not ; in enjoyment it expired.  
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request ;  
Rapt into still communion that transcends  
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
That made him ; it was blessedness and love !<sup>1</sup>

The deep places of our spirits are now open to the inflowing of the divine life. We have no need consciously to ask for His grace. We touch Him, and are healed. So, too, we are not consciously striving after new understanding of truth. We listen, and let Him speak. Surely we may well believe, with the yogi, that this way of contemplation opens the door of a treasure-house of supernatural illuminations and supernatural powers. We live, for the most part, in an unreal world, and our faith never attains to that clarity and sureness of perception which enables it to perform miracles. "We think, like Elisha's servant, that the material powers which encompass us constitute the ultimate forces with which we have to deal ; but had we the serene confidence of Elisha's vision, we should behold those marshalled ranks of the heavenly armies, before which earth's myrmidons are but a puny host. The world holds us indeed in a kind of

<sup>1</sup> From Wordsworth's *Excursion*.

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spell, a kind of illusion which the Christian is bidden to break. The true city, of which we are even now denizens, is Heaven. We live already in the heavenly sphere; and we have, if we will but believe it in all simplicity, the whole of its supernatural powers at our command."<sup>1</sup> It is in the moments of rapt contemplation, more than at any other time, that faith overleaps the barriers which hem it around, and enters into its kingdom.

What, then, of samādhi, that state of ecstasy in which contemplation culminates? Is not this the state in which these miraculous powers are said to be attained?

It is quite true that it is to this last stage of the yogic experience that these powers are particularly said to belong. It is also to the condition of ecstasy that the Christian mystics have been accustomed to look for their times of special revelations and of special spiritual refreshment. My reason for speaking of these under the head of contemplation was that, whilst contemplation is for all and is certainly accompanied by some real measure of divine renewal, it has always been a debated point how far the condition of ecstasy ought to be generally sought or desired. On the whole, the consensus of opinion among Christian mystics of the West would seem to be that, whilst they would certainly discourage the seeking

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the last chapter of *Christian Yoga*, in which I have dealt at greater length with the question of the Christian's supernatural resources.

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of visions, voices or revelations (which are as likely to be diabolic as heavenly), the state of ecstasy itself is one which the pilgrim of the contemplative way need not shrink from desiring, if it be God's will for him.<sup>1</sup> This is quite different from encouraging one who is without moral discipline or training in the spiritual life to start trying to induce a state of trance by any kind of self-hypnotism—a practice which all would agree to be most dangerous. Similarly, a Hindu teacher of yoga would never permit a disciple to go forward to the higher stages without the most thorough training in the earlier ascetic discipline. But there seems no reason why one who is living a disciplined Christian life of prayer and service should not be glad if there come to him times of such refreshment and insight as Wordsworth speaks of in his well-known lines in *Tintern Abbey*, "every word of which might have been used by the Sādhu to describe his Ecstasy":

. . . that blessed mood,  
In which the burden of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened : that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame

<sup>1</sup> Streeter and Appasamy, in their discussion of this question, have (rather strangely) ignored this distinction between the ecstatic state itself, and the visions and other phenomena sometimes accompanying it, treating both as equally dangerous for the average man.

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And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul :  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

If we can at all judge from the instance of Sundar Singh what the character of Indian Christian mysticism will be, we may expect that such condition of ecstasy will hold a not unimportant place in it. Sundar's times of ecstasy come to him frequently, and are always full of refreshment to him. They are generally accompanied by visions of heaven, in which the Figure of Christ is always central. It is no dream state, but "a waking state, a state of concentrated capacity of thought"; and yet he, like all the mystics, feels that words are quite inadequate to describe the experiences which he enjoys at such times.<sup>1</sup>

N. V. Tilak had also (but not, I believe, with great frequency) such times of ecstasy, during one of which he had the vision of Christ which decided him to become a sannyāsi. He has written of one such time in the poem *Love's Samādhi* :

Ah love, I sink in the timeless sleep,  
Sink in the timeless sleep !  
One Image stands before my eyes,  
And thrills my bosom's deep.

<sup>1</sup> *The Sādhu*, Chap. V.

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One Vision bathes in radiant light  
My spirit's palace-halls.  
All stir of hand, all throb of brain,  
Quivers, and sinks, and falls.

My soul fares forth ; no fetters now  
Bind me to this world's shore.  
Sleep ! I would sleep ! In pity spare !  
Let no man wake me more !<sup>1</sup>

The goal of contemplation for the Christian, whether that contemplation be accompanied by ecstasy or not, will always be union with God as He is known to us in Jesus Christ. Our goal is never *kaivalya*, except in the sense of isolation from the old ego which is crucified with Christ. Our goal is akin rather to that union with God which Hindu *bhakti* has conceived and has summed up in the four words, *salokatā*, *saṁīpatā*, *sarūpatā*, *sayujyatā*. The first is being in the same plane with God—living, as St Paul says, “in the heavenlies.” The second is nearness—an association which is less than union, like that of the disciples’ intimacy with the Master during his earthly life. The third is likeness, as the divine image begins to shine forth in the soul that loves. The last is union (literally, “yokedness”),<sup>2</sup> when the separating barriers crumble, and the disciple comes to know the meaning of the words “Abide in Me, and I in you”; “It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in

<sup>1</sup> *Sushilā and Other Poems.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sayujyatā* is from the same root as *yoga* with a prefix implying “with.”

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me." "Such an union is then wrought," says St John of the Cross, "when God bestows on the soul that supreme grace which makes the things of God and the soul one by the transformation which renders the one a partaker of the other. The soul seems to be God rather than itself, and indeed is God by participation, though in reality preserving its own natural substance as distinct from God as it did before, although transformed in Him, as the window preserves its own substance distinct from that of the rays of the sun shining through it and making it light."

Here is an Indian Christian's prayer for "sayujyatā":<sup>1</sup>

As the moon and its beams are one,  
So, that I be one with Thee,  
This is my prayer to Thee, my Lord,  
This is this beggar's plea.

As words and their meaning are linked,  
Serving one purpose each,  
Be Thou and I so knit, O Lord,  
And through me breathe Thy speech.

O be my soul a mirror clear,  
That I may see Thee there ;  
Dwell in my thought, my speech, my life,  
Making them glad and fair.

Take Thou this body, O my Christ,  
Dwell as its soul within ;  
To be an instant separate  
I count a deadly sin.

<sup>1</sup> *Sushtilā and Other Poems.*

## EPILOGUE

### CHRISTUS CONSUMMANDUS

"The fulness of Him who all in all is being fulfilled."—  
Eph. i. 23 (Cp. *Armitage Robinson's Commentary*).

WE have been considering in this book some of the special characteristics of Indian mysticism, and the fresh light which they may throw upon the understanding and practice of the Christian life. As we study, we realise something of our own poverty without this Indian contribution. We begin to long for the day when the Wise Men of India will bring the gold of their loving devotion, and the frankincense of their rapt contemplation, and the myrrh of their joyful renunciation and self-sacrifice, and lay them at the feet of Christ. It is difficult, indeed, to foresee what such a contribution from India might mean for the Christianity of the West. Stanley Jones is right when he says: "Some of us feel that the next great spiritual impact upon the soul of the race is due to come by way of India." And Tilak's prophecy is not too bold:

Yea, at the end of pregnant strife,  
Enthroned as Guru of the earth,  
This land of Hind shall teach the worth  
Of Christian faith and Christian life.



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Those of us who can catch a glimpse of that vision have a new and compelling motive for missionary service. We shall relinquish none of our conviction that India has need of Christ—that in Him we have a treasure of infinite preciousness which it would be sheer selfishness to conceal or to hold back ; but we shall realise also that Christ, and the Church which is His Body, have need of India ; and we shall count no sacrifice too great, no toil too hard, for so great a prize. We shall remember the burning words of Keshab Chander Sen : “ None but Jesus, none but Jesus, none but Jesus, is worthy to wear this precious diadem, India, and Jesus shall have it.” And we shall seek to go out, not in any spirit of racial or religious superiority, but in the spirit of our Master, who “ came not to be served but to serve,” if so be we may have our part in winning this precious diadem, India, for the Head which was crowned with thorns for us.

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