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PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHOR, Y.M.C.A.

AND

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AMONG THE HINDUS

A Study of Hindu Festivals

BY

R. MANOHAR LALL

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PREFACE



Almost all the essays embodied in this volume originally appeared in the Young Men of India in 1928 and I wish to acknowledge the courtesy of the Editor in allowing me to reprint them. I have also included an article on Kaliyuga, not written by me, from the 'Madras Mail' with the kind permission of its Editor.

These essays are the result of personal observation. I am conscious of the fact that in many instances the celebration of the festivals seems to be not in conformity with the rules laid down in the Shastras. A perusal of the essays will, I doubt not create a desire in the hearts of many of my readers to observe with greater care some of these happenings in their workaday lives. In describing the ceremonies certain seemingly critical statements may have been made. I can assure my readers that no offence to anyone is meant.

Y. M. C. A.
Cawnpore, U.P.
INDIA
1st. January 1933.

R. Manohar Lall

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HINDU MONTHS



The Hindu year—Samvat Era—ordinarily begins in March. It has twelve months except every third year, when it has thirteen months, and this extra month is called Laund. In order to give the reader a general idea of the Hindu months as corresponding to those used in the Christian calendar the different tables are printed below side by side for comparison.

15th March to 15th April	... Chaitra or Chet.
15th April to 15th May	... Vaisakha or Baisakh.
15th May to 15th June	... Jyeshtha or Jeth.
15th June to 15th July	... Ashadha or Asar.
15th July to 15th August	... Shravana or Savan.
15th August to 15th	
September	... Bhadrapada or Bhadon.
15th September to 15th	
October	... Ashwin or Asoj.
15th October to 15th	
November	... Kartikka or Katik.
15th November to 15th	
December	... Margashirsh or Mangsar.
15th December to 15th	
January	... Pausha or Poh.
15th January to 15th	
February	... Magha or Magh.
15th February to 15th	
March	... Phalgun or Phagun.

LIST OF HINDU FESTIVALS



The following list of Hindu festivals is compiled from a Maharashtra Panchanga—calendar—giving the names of festivals observed by the Hindus in the Central Provinces.

- Chaitra :** 1st.—Dhivijaropan, the erecting of the flag. New year day.
9th.—Ramnaumi—the birthday of Ram.
15th.—Hanuman Jayanti—the birthday of Hanuman, the monkey-god.
- Vaisakha :** 3rd.—Akshya Tritya—Unperishing third.
- Jyeshtha :** 12th.—Vat Savitri.
- Ashadha :** 15th.—Vyas Puja.
30th.—Deep Puja. This is a great festival of goldsmiths and silver-smiths. They worship their implements and tools this day and pass the day in festivities.
- Shravana :** 5th.—Nag Panchmi—the fifth, sacred to the snakes.

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15th.—Rakshabandhan, tying of threads on the wrist.

Narali Purnima—as observed on the West Coast.

23rd.—Badya Ashtami, Janam Ashtami or Krishna Jayanti, the birthday of the God Krishna.

30th.—Pola, or the cattle festival.

Bhadarpada: 4th.—Ganesh Chathurthi.

8th.—Durga Vahanam or Gauria Vahanam, that is, the establishing or placing of the goddess Durga or Gauri.

9th.—Gauri Pujan, the worshipping of the goddess Gauri.

10th.—Gauri Visarjanam or the immersion of the image of Gauri.

24th.—Avidhya Naumi; this is the day set aside for the performing of certain ceremonies by the husband for the soul of the dead wife. The ceremonies are the same as in the Pitri Moksh, the ceremony performed by the son for the salvation of his dead father.

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30th.—Sarva Pitri Moksh Amavasya.
This is the day reserved for performing the ceremonies for the dead father and mother.

Ashwin : 10th.—Vijaya Dashmi—the tenth as Victory Day, or Daserah (celebrating Ram's victory over Ravan).

15th.—Koja giri—First fruit, full moon—worship of the goddess Parbati, wife of Shiva.

29th.—Narak Chaturdashi.

30th.—Laxmi Pujan—the worship of the goddess of wealth.

Kartika : 1st.—Bali Pratipada.
Gokridanam, the worship of the cow.

New year of Samvat Era.

2nd.—Yama Dvitiya. .
Bhaubij.

Chandar darshan—looking at the new moon—an auspicious thing to do.

12th.—Tulsi Vivaha—the Tulsi plant wedding.

14th.—Vaikanth Chaturdashi.

15th.—Tripuri.

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Margashirsh : 6th.—Champa Sheshti.

15th.—Datta Jayanti.

Pausha : Til Sakrant—It has no fixed date.

Magha : 5th.—Basant Panchmi.

13th.—Of the dark half ;—Shivratri.

Phagun : 15th.—Holi.

16th.—Dhuli Vandanam —worshipping
of the ashes of Holi.

INTRODUCTION



It is difficult and dangerous to generalise about India. The customs and manners which are observed in one part may be wholly unknown in another section of the country. These differences excite little interest among the peoples, for there is nothing strange in the phenomena. There are about 2378 castes and innumerable sub-castes among the Hindus, illustrating the fact, that in India differences are emphasised and proudly maintained. The author can bear witness to the helplessness of the people who groan under the tyranny of these social and religious rites and customs. To extricate themselves from this blood sucking octopus which sends its tentacles into the innermost recesses of Hindu society, is well-nigh impossible. The women of two families of different castes living side by side compare notes on the very expensive ceremonial observances with tears in their eyes. They dare not swerve from the course laid down by their teachers and leaders; so rigid are the dictates of religion.

Enveloped as he is in an atmosphere of religion, the texture of the Hindu's being is made up of the

warp and woof of religious ideas and sanctions. And we may say that even while he is in his mother's womb the Hindu is charged with the spirit of religion. Therefore from the cradle to the grave he is preeminently a philosopher and a devotee. The Maharaja on his gaddi and the poor subject in his cottage take a delight in the discussion of the fundamental problems of life. Even some of the educated Hindus who have lost faith in image worship, rites and ceremonies still preserve the same outlook on life as the others. The Hindu woman in particular perpetuates religion in its original form. And very often it is the influence of the women which is the cause of the men adhering to the traditional worship.

The complete transformation of the Hindu family is only a question of time. Hinduism has not been able to keep pace with a progressive world. In recent years however, the old prejudices are vanishing, making the transition from the old to the new easy under the influence of the West. The impact of Christianity on India has also been very effective in introducing certain new ideas and purifying several of the old methods. Perhaps the most noticeable change is the new attitude to life—an attitude which is produced by the adoption of the principles of Jesus Christ.

Invaders have come and gone leaving the Hindu after a little disturbance to settle down to his own

quiet and even life, the reason being that the Hindu philosophy of life has proved a bulwark to the religion. Latterly even the self-satisfied Hindu has been drawn into the whirlpool of the new life that is surging within and without him. That section of the people who have hitherto been called the "untouchables" have in recent years asserted their position and have attained a very important status in life. No longer are the restraints of the past binding on them. In South India, the stronghold of the caste system, they are demanding to walk on the same streets as the higher castes and the days are coming when it will be a thing of the past for blacksmiths, carpenters and leather workers to pollute a Brahmin at 24 feet, toddy drawers at 30 feet, Charuman cultivators at 48 feet and Pariah and beef eaters at 64 feet. On the other hand there are a number of schools meant for untouchables only where the highest class of Brahmins teach them and eat things from their hands. There is no doubt that the motive is economic in a large number of cases.

If one were to observe carefully the different festivals, customs and manners of the Hindus one could notice a strange and inexplicable mixture of things—new and old. The progressive is entwined with the conservative and the beautiful with the ugly. The gross is wrapped up with the sublime and the things that are of good report are inextricably mingled with the features of ill

report. The result is one of bewilderment and not clearness.

The gods are many and their characteristics are varied. As amongst men and women, even within the hierarchy there is jealousy. Sometimes the gods are jealous of human beings lest the latter should excel them in meritorious doings. Some of the gods are mischievous and full of revenge. They are subject to all the earthly passions—lust, hatred, and envy. They are playful, and full of pranks. Some of the gods love solitude while others delight in company. Sometimes they love to be surrounded by courtiers and even by dancing girls. To go about in disguise is not unknown amongst the gods. For they revel in misleading human beings. The goddesses have not infrequently shown their ability to dominate and direct the courses of their husbands. These gods hold sway each over his own domain. And some are a kind of absentee landlords. These gods which are many and endowed with diverse gifts number about 330 million.

Brahma is the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Protector and Shiva the Destroyer—this last being the most dreaded of all. Shiva is considered the head of the triad. Brahma has hardly any temple to his name due to his uttering a falsehood when he was sent out to find out the top end of Shiva's linga. Brahma did not continue his search to the end but tried to mislead Shiva. Shiva laid

a curse on him. Hence the absence of temples in honour of Brahma. Brahma is said to have been born from the lotus navel of Vishnu, and is said to be the advocate of the gods in heaven, where he represents their case to Vishnu. He fell in love with his daughter Satarupa. Once when she made a circumambulation around her father, he had an intense desire to follow her movement but on account of delicacy of feelings he did not think it proper to do so, but lo, five faces immediately appeared on his neck facing in four directions and on top, and was thus able to have the pleasure of watching the bewitching movements of his daughter whom he later on married, and thus created a son Manu, the Adam of the world.

Brahma lost his fifth face as a result of a fight with Mahesvara in the body of Kalabhairva. In a dispute between Vishnu and Brahma as to who was the lord of the universe, one Katurveda rejected the claims of the both and decided in favour of Mahesvara, thus antagonising both of them. When Brahma gave a look of wrath from his top face, it was decapitated by Mahesvara in the fierce fight that ensued. He now has four faces and four arms and rides on a chariot drawn by seven swans.

In India, only two of the three chief gods are worshipped. Hindus are therefore divided into the two main groups—Vaishnavas and Saivites. Vaishnavites consider Vishnu all-important while the

Saivites hold Shiva in great esteem. These attachments lead to persistent quarrels between the illiterate and orthodox followers of the two gods, constant argument and verbal combat characterising all these conflicts. They ridicule each other's observances by offering sometimes, dirty interpretations. Yet there are days which are observed by both the sects in common. In the central parts of the country there is not much antagonism between the two. They observe each other's days with almost equal respect to both.

Vishnu has ten incarnations — Ramchandar, Krishna, Rama-with-the axe, Vaman-Dwarf, Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Budha—(it is said that Vishnu appeared in this incarnation in order to beguile the world into the wrong faith). Kalki avatar has not yet appeared. He will come during the millenium. Kala Bhairva is considered a manifestation of Shiva. He has a big temple in Benares. As he was black and was always followed by a black dog, so in the streets a black dog is held in peculiar veneration. He is generally well fed by the people in order perhaps to please Shiva. Quite a number of people desire to die within the holy precincts of the Kala Bhairva temple in Benares so that they may be saved from being born again in this world. The author once saw in the Central Provinces Kala Bhairva being worshipped by means of five stones, one placed in front of four

other stones arranged in a line and a black dog fed on excellent food. Shiva has no incarnations except Kala Bhairva. But he is worshipped in other forms. But Shiva and Vishnu have incarnations of their combined Sakti—Energy.

Besides these incarnations there are scores of objects which are worshipped and held in veneration. People worshipped nature in its many aspects—trees and plants, animals, the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars, and finally the seasons. They observe auspicious and inauspicious days and times. They believe also in the existence of ghosts and spirits who are propitiated lest they harm human beings. There are goddesses whose help is invoked for minor purposes. Some diseases are traced to certain other goddesses. They are called Matas—mothers. Our earth is also called "Mother" because she sustains us. Mother earth is supposed to be subject to all the physical changes that human existence is heir to. She is supposed to have her regular periods. These days are observed by the Hindus. The rainy season is utilised to fulfil mother earth's desire for cleanliness. The season of ploughing and sowing is akin to her conceiving and in due course she delivers her ripened crops till her next period of uncleanness arrives.

Every epidemic is considered to have some presiding Mata. For instance, the goddess of small Pox is called 'Sitla'. When people suffer from

this disease, the Mata is supposed to have appeared in that particular individual's house. The women then go in a procession to a temple, or to some idol by the way-side, to sacrifice a goat with the usual accompaniments of vermillion, rice, incense. In epidemics like Cholera and Plague, the people get together in a central place, and then proceed to march with an effigy of the disease. The words Ram Ram Sat Hai "God alone is true" are used in the chants. And finally the effigy is carried outside the village, the idea being that the goddess of that particular disease has been driven outside the village limits. The common understanding is that the vanished Mata appears in the adjoining village. By this process, after being driven from village to village, the disease is said to disappear either into a distant country, or into the sea. No kind of injury should be inflicted on the Mata. No effort should be made to stamp the disease out of a village. This is the reason why some of these epidemics spread so rapidly in India, without disappearing altogether!

In India almost everything is considered to have life. Anything that is useful is held in awe and veneration. The author's cook had to withdraw from one place to cook in another house at short notice. But the cook delayed going, and was busy cleaning the fireplace. On enquiry, the cook replied that he would be considered lacking in gratitude to the spirit if he left the place unswept. It is

believed in some parts of India that if you spit in fire, your mouth will be full of sores. If you drop a piece of bread on the ground you must pick it up and kiss it immediately. If you do not want to eat it, you may give the morsel to a bird or an animal. To sit on books, or in any other manner to show disrespect to them, is considered equivalent to insulting Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Instances could be multiplied to prove that any agency of usefulness should, in the thought of the people of India, be treated with considerable respect.

As has been mentioned above, the gods have their own domains. Their work is divided each minding his own business. But they are sometimes afraid of demons and of men also. When they are unable to overcome their enemies they go in deputation to the chief gods whose assistance helps them to maintain their dignity. They sometimes behave like weak human beings.

The manner of the birth of the gods is not after the way of men. There is nothing extraordinary about them. Sita, the wife of an incarnation of Vishnu was born of a furrow. Karna was born out of the ear of Kunti; children have been born by the mere looks of a pious but lustful sage. The cut up bits of a child born through miscarriage have grown up into full size babies. The wife of Shiva made the god Ganesh with the dirt of her skin while bathing. Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma

created a woman by means of their combined thick and mist-like breath.

Certain of the gods have a weakness for beautiful women. Some gods are faithful to their wives. There are goddesses living in the heavens and if the gods so decree, the beautiful women of this earth can be transformed into goddesses. Some gods are very passionate and lustful. A god's attention can be drawn by beautiful but naked women of this earth. If a god is busy elsewhere his attention can be attracted easily if urgently required. Ordinarily gods have got to be reminded about certain things. Curiously enough they are not omnipresent and omniscient. In the temples the gongs are struck and bells are rung not only to rouse them from their deep sleep but also to inform them, in the same manner, of their dinner and breakfast. There is no Hindu temple in India where the bells are not rung and the gongs are not struck.

As a six-years old boy the author had occasion to witness the extraordinary ceremony of attracting the attention of Indra, the thunderer, the rain god, the god of Swarga or paradise. A dozen young women, two of them being nearer middle age, the fair and handsome looking wives and daughters of farmers, whose dependence on rains is well-known, came together in a courtyard and commenced dancing naked under the canopy of the threatening clouds.

Each woman sang and danced for fifteen seconds praying to God for rain. The ceremony was followed by heavy rain. It should not be inferred that the women were lacking in the sense of modesty because though they had to remove their clothes quite early till the actual time for dancing arrived, they were hiding their shame with the clothes in their laps. When her turn came each woman setting aside her clothes danced in a circle turning first to the right and then to the left. The impression left on the author's mind was that those who participated in the ceremony did so with a certain amount of merriment. There was no seriousness. Though the women were shy they laughed among themselves. This strange performance of nude women created a weird feeling in the mind of the author. For it reminded him of the story of the witches dancing in a darkened atmosphere to the accompaniment of clouds. The object of the dance was to attract the attention of the god who might be busy with other affairs.

A god is not known to lead a lonely life. Both in the heavens and on earth gods have their courtiers and wives about them in their durbars. The presence of devadasis is explained away by the excuse that it is providing company for the gods. The women dance before the gods within the temple and while they are in procession. The Brahmins who are supposed to represent the god very often

abuse the privilege and gross immorality prevails in certain places.

It is said that the stories of the gods and their doings should not be taken literally. There is a spiritual interpretation revealing a deep mystical meaning. The amatory tendencies of the gods should not be associated with base inclinations. The contention is that the gods in some of these deeds come down to the level of even the lowest of mankind thereby making it possible for the least initiated to understand the ways of the Divine.

A correspondent writing to 'The Epiphany' of Calcutta about Sri Krishna says: "Sri Krishna, the Herald King of Mathura—nurtured in the abode of the bucolic chief of Gokul—is the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, one of the deities of the Hindu triad. He is the embodiment of all that attracts the human heart, love, music and beauty.

"The "Lilas" (sports and diversions) of the Divine Cow-herd are but the similitudes to the eternal varieties of the highest religion. Playing upon the flute on the banks of the Jumna He pours forth His sweetened melodious strains and the river swells up in an ecstasy, trying to touch the lotus-like feet of our lord Krishna. Similarly the heart of a seeker-after-him leaps up with joy like the surges of the Jamuna when he listens to the melliferous call of His ambrosial voice.

"The "Gopis" or the village maidens of Brindaban repair to the river Jamuna in order to perform their ablution. They take off their clothes from their persons and keeping them on the bank enter the river to sport themselves merrily in the water. Stealthily taking away their garments Sri Krishna climbs up a "Kadamba" tree (*Nauclea Cadamba*) situated on the bank. He refuses to restore the apparels to the damsels, unless they come out of the water and beg for them with the palms of their folded hands. The deeper significance underlying the allegory is that Sri Krishna stands for the Over-Soul or the Supreme Spirit, whereas the virgins collectively represent the sentient human soul which must know itself in its most hideous nakedness before it can ask for the grace of the Over-Soul.

"The "Rasa-Lila" (or the amorous sports held between Krishna and the milkmaids of Brindaban) poetically illustrates the orderly dance of the Cosmic forces. Each force manifests itself in pairs—male and female. The whole cosmos dances with the music of Sri Krishna by the rhythmic movements of the twin-forces.

"The vision of Sri Krishna has been India's vision throughout the ages. Nations as well as individuals perish for want of vision. The Hindu India lost her pristine glory and greatness when she lost the spiritual vision for which Sri Krishna stands".

The Epiphany of Calcutta writing under the heading of "A Last Refuge"* says as follows:—"The last refuge of the defenders of polytheism and its attendant mythology is the attempt to maintain that the stories of the gods are capable of deep mystical and spiritual interpretations which make them alike the vehicle of noble doctrine and the inspiration of a truly religious life. It was when polytheism in the Graeco-Roman world was about to fall, undermined as a system of credible theism by the new moral sense which Christianity was gradually but surely diffusing amongst mankind, that educated men, and indeed accomplished writers such as Plutarch, attempted to prop it up by pretending that by allegorizing these unpleasant and immoral stories deep spiritual truths could be conveyed to man.

"It would be well if Hindus would remember that there is nothing really distinctive in their polytheism. Point by point it is exactly the same in its expression in worship and practice as was that old polytheism which long ago was abolished in Europe and North Africa. Hinduism is simply another name for the old Graeco-Roman religion; India is the one land of the whole world in which this exploded polytheism still survives. Plutarch, as we have said, attempted the method of allegorization, but it was the last refuge of a discredited cult. It was easily demolished by the application of a little commonsense, and men

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came to see that a system which violated reason and outraged moral decency could not be defended by attaching to its myths and stories meanings with which they had not in reality the remotest connection. It was obvious that children taught these stories and given these explanations straightway proceeded to remember the indecencies and to forget their so-called "spiritual" interpretation. At the philosophical congress held a short time ago in Calcutta Rabindranath Tagore in his presidential address referred to the advice which Plato gave as to the expulsion of poets from the ideal republic, but he did not (in the report we read) explain why Plato had given this advice. It was because the poets so largely occupied themselves with the stories of the gods and goddesses and their highly improper behaviour that, for the sake of the children who would naturally think that being gods and goddesses their conduct might rightly be imitated, it were expedient for the State to banish them altogether. Plato was a far greater man than Plutarch and did not shrink from facing facts. You cannot prop up an immoral system of mythology by tying to it "mystical" interpretations. Adultery, fornication, drunkenness and lying remain ugly things whether they are attributed to deities or men, and all the "spiritual" explanations in the world will not build up out of such material a religion of true and pure monotheism which may serve as the inspiration of a really holy life.

“But when we arrive at a last defence we may hope that the fall of the citadel of error is near; even the Hinderburg line was pierced at last. The very fact that educated Hindus are beginning to realize that no other defence of the gods and their conduct is even possible points to the ultimate and inevitable fall of the system. The immensity of the population of India, the lack of education amongst the vast majority, the leaving of the women even of the well-to-do classes mostly untaught, are the causes of the prolonged survival of polytheism and idolatry in this land, although it has perished almost everywhere else. It has also obtained an added lease of existence (we will not say “life”) owing to the mistaken idea that Hinduism and nationalism are bound together in one bundle, and that a true patriot must not desert the shrines of the gods. Kali and country are felt somehow to belong to one another, and because the Krishna-Radha cult had its origin in India therefore true sons of India must uphold it at all costs. But again this cannot last. Men’s vision is bound to get clearer, and truths will come out in their true perspective. If India is ever to be one it will be because the principle of spiritual liberty is universally recognized, and spiritual liberty carries with it the implication that true religion is not only supernatural but it is also supernational. Hinduism ought no more to be bound up with patriotism than Christianity or Buddhism. The Indian must be spiritually free, a loyal, loving citizen of the Kingdom

of God without any diminution of his loyal love to his mother land, but rather with an increase of it.

"What is now more necessary than anything is for students calling themselves Hindus to face the facts. They do not read the shastras and only have vaguest ideas of what they contain. When they are confronted with passages which describe the gods as drunken and immoral they simply refer us to some writer who has "spiritualized" these incidents and given us their true meaning.

"If it be urged that it is only in the later Hindu books that these low and degrading descriptions of the gods can be found and that a pure monotheism is to be found in the Vedas, careful and open-minded examination of them will demonstrate that this belief is without foundation. The Brahmans are "that part of the Veda which was intended for the use and guidance of Brahmans in the use of the hymns of the Mantra, but the Brahmans, equally with the Mantra, is held to be Sruti or revealed word". Let us look at the Brahmans with a view to finding the conception of deity which they teach. We shall find that the Aitareya-Brahman (vi. II) charges the gods with drunkenness; prohibition does not prevail among them. "The gods get drunk, as it were, at the midday libation, and are then consequently at the third libation in a state of complete drunkenness". And these words are really a commentary on the Rig-Veda viii. 58. II "Indra has drunk, Agni has drunk,

all the gods have become exhilarated". Lovers of wine are frequently depicted as lovers of women, and the gods are also thus represented in the Satapatha-Brahmana vi. 5. In the Shadvinsha Brahmana of the Sama Veda a ceremony is prescribed in which the god Indra is to be invoked in these words; "O adulterous lover of Ahalya".

"In these days when the removal of untouchability is so frequently talked and written about and so little is done to remove it, save by Christian workers, it is sad to notice that the Satapatha-Brahmana teaches that "The gods talk only to the upper castes" (xi. 4. 4. I). The god Indra always acted on the principle that all is fair in love and war, and so we find him not only using a mean trick against his enemies, but also addressed by his own priest at the altar in these unworthy words, "Come, O Indra! Come, O Lord of the bay steeds! Ram of Medhatihi! Wife of Vrishanasva! Best riding buffalo! Lover of Ahalya! Thereby, he (*i.e.* the priest performing the ceremony) wishes him joy in these affairs of his".

"It is things like these that have to be mystically interpreted, taken not from the later books, but from Sruti. Can any reasonable man maintain that it is a method consonant with the Divine Holiness to enshrine His revelation in images which by themselves draw men to think lightly of drunkenness, deceit, and lust?"