

Chapter One

Indian Religion As Bharata Dharma

A FRIEND of mine who read the first edition of this book suggested that I should add to it an opening Chapter, stating the most general and fundamental principles of the subject as a guide to the understanding of what follows, together with an outline of the latter in which the relation of the several parts should be shown. I have not at present the time, nor in the present book the space, to give effect to my friend's wishes in the way I would have desired, but will not altogether neglect them.

To the Western, Indian Religion generally seems a "jungle" of contradictory beliefs amidst which he is lost. Only those who have understood its main principles can show them the path.

It has been asserted that there is no such thing as Indian Religion, though there are many Religions in India. This is not so. As I have already pointed out (Is India Civilized?) there is a common Indian religion which I have called Bharata Dharma, which is an Aryan religion (Aryadharmā) held by all Aryas whether Brahmanic, Buddhist or Jaina. These are the three main divisions of the Bharata Dharma. I exclude other religions in India, namely, the Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Not that all these are purely Semitic. Christianity became in part Aryanized when it was adopted by the Western Aryans, as also happened with Islam when accepted by such Eastern Aryans as the Persians and the Aryanized peoples of India. Thus Sufism is either a form of Vedānta or indebted to it.

The general Indian Religion or Bharata Dharma holds that the world is an Order or Cosmos. It is not a Chaos of things and beings thrown haphazard together, in which there is no binding relation or rule. The world-order is Dharma, which is that by which the universe is upheld (Dharyate). Without Dharma it would fall to pieces and dissolve into nothingness. But this is not possible, for though there is Disorder (Adharma), it exists, and can exist only locally, for a time, and in particular parts of the whole. Order however will and, from the nature of things, must ultimately assert itself. And this is the meaning of the saying that Righteousness or Dharma prevails. This is in the nature of things, for Dharma is not a law imposed from without by the Ukase of some Celestial Czar. It is the nature of things; that which constitutes them what they are (Svalakshana-dharanat Dharma). It is the expression of their true being and can only cease to be, when they themselves cease to be. Belief in righteousness is then in something not arbitrarily imposed from without by a Lawgiver, but belief in a Principle of Reason which all men can recognize for themselves if they will. Again Dharma is not only the law of each being but necessarily also of the whole, and expresses the right relations of each part to the whole. This whole is again harmonious, otherwise it would dissolve. The principle which holds it together as one mighty organism is Dharma. The particular Dharma calls for such recognition and action in accordance therewith. Religion, therefore, which etymologically means that which obliges or binds together, is in its most fundamental sense the recognition that the world is an Order, of which each man, being, and thing, is a part, and to which each man stands in a definite, established relation; together with action based on, and consistent with, such recognition, and in harmony with the whole cosmic activity. Whilst therefore the religious man is he who feels that he is bound in varying ways to all being, the irreligious man is he who egoistically considers everything from the standpoint of his limited self and its interests, without regard for his fellows, or the world at large. The essentially irreligious character of such an attitude is shown by the fact that, if it were adopted by all, it would lead to the negation of Cosmos, that is Chaos. Therefore all Religions are agreed in the essentials of morality and hold that selfishness, in its widest sense, is the root of all sin (Adharma). Morality is thus the true nature of man. The general Dharma (Samanya Dharma) is the universal law governing all, just as the particular Dharma (Visheshā Dharma) varies with, and is peculiar to, each class of being. It follows from what is above stated that disharmony is suffering. This is an obvious fact. Wrong conduct is productive of ill, as right conduct is productive of good. As a man sows, so he will reap. There is an Immanent Justice. But these results, though they may appear at once, do not always do so. The fruit of no action is lost. It must, according to the law of causality, which is a law of reason, bear effect. If its author does not suffer for it here and now in the present life, he will do so in some future one. Birth and death mean the creation and destruction of bodies. The spirits so embodied are infinite in number and eternal. The material universe comes and goes. This in Brahmanism has been said (see Sanātana Vaidika Dharma by Bhagavan Das) to be "the Systole and Diastole of the one Universal Heart, Itself at rest -- the moveless play of Consciousness". The appearance and disappearance of the Universe is the nature or Svabhava of That which it ultimately is. Its immediate cause is Desire, which Buddhism calls Trishna -- or Thirst, that is desire or thirst for world-enjoyment in the universe of form. Action (Karma) is prompted by desire and breeds again desire. This action may be good (Dharma) or bad (Adharma) leading to enjoyment or suffering. Each embodied soul (Jivatma) will be reborn and reborn into the world until it is freed from all desire. This involves the doctrine of Re-incarnation. These multiple births and deaths in the transmigratory worlds are called Samsara or Wandering. The world is a Dvandva, that is, a composite of happiness and suffering. Happiness of a transitory kind may be had therein by adherence to Dharma in following Kama (desire) and Artha (the means) by which lawful desires may be given effect. These constitute what Brahmanism calls the Trivarga of the Purushartha, or three aims of sentient being. But just as desire leads to manifestation in form, so desirelessness leads away from it. Those who reach this state seek Moksha or Nirvana (the fourth Purushartha), which is a state of Bliss beyond the worlds of changing forms. For there is a rest

from suffering which Desire (together with a natural tendency to pass its right limits) brings upon men. They must, therefore, either live with desire in harmony with the universal order, or if desireless, they may (for each is master of his future) pass beyond the manifest and become That which is Moksha or Nirvana. Religion, and therefore true civilization, consists in the upholding of Dharma as the individual and general good, and the fostering of spiritual progress, so that, with justice to all beings, true happiness, which is the immediate and ultimate end of all Humanity, and indeed of all being, may be attained.

Anyone who holds these beliefs follows the Bharata Dharma or common principles of all Aryan beliefs. Thus as regards God we may either deny His existence (Atheism) or affirm it (Theism) or say we have no sufficient proof one way or another (Agnosticism). It is possible to accept the concept of an eternal Law (Dharma) and its sanctions in a self-governed universe without belief in a personal Lord (Ishvara). So Samkhya, which proceeds on intellectual proof only, does not deny God but holds that the being of a Lord is "not proved".

There are then based on this common foundation three main religions, Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism. Of the second, a great and universal faith, it has been said that, with each fresh acquirement of knowledge, it seems more difficult to separate it from the Hinduism out of which it emerged and into which (in Northern Buddhism) it relapsed. This is of course not to say that there are no differences between the two, but that they share in certain general and common principles as their base. Brahmanism, of which the Shakta doctrine and practice is a particular form, accepts Veda as its ultimate authority. By this, in its form as the four Vedas, is revealed the doctrine of the Brahman, the "All-pervader," the infinite Substance which is in Itself (Svarupa) Consciousness (Caitanya or Cit), from Which comes creation, maintenance and withdrawal, commonly called destruction (though man, not God, destroys), and Which in Its relation to the universe which the Brahman controls is known as Ishvara, the Ruling Lord or Personal God. Veda both as spiritual experience and the word "which is heard" (Shruti) is the warrant for this. But Shruti, as the ultimate authority, has received various interpretations and so we find in Brahmanism, as in Christianity, differing schools and sects adopting various interpretations of the Revealed Word. Veda says: "All this (that is, the Universe) is Brahman." All are agreed that Brahman or Spirit is relatively to us, Being (Sat), Consciousness (Cit) and Bliss (Ananda). It is Saccidananda. But in what sense is "This" (Idam) Brahman? The Monistic interpretation (Advaitavada), as given for instance by the great scholastic Shamkaracarya, is that there is a complete identity in essence of both. There is one Spirit (Atma) with two aspects: as transcendent supreme (Paramatma), and as immanent and embodied (Jivatma). The two are at base one when we eliminate Avidya in the form of mind and body. According to the qualified Monism (Vishishtadvaita) of the great scholastic Ramanuja, "This" is Brahman in the sense that it is the body of the Brahman, just as we distinguish our body from our inner self. According to the Dualists (Dvaitavada) the saying is interpreted in terms of nearness (Samipya) and likeness (Sadrishtya) for, though God and man are distinct, the former so pervades and is so inextricably involved in the universe as creator and maintainer, that the latter, in this sense, seems to be Brahman through proximity.

Then again there is the Shuddhadvaita of that branch of the Agamas which is called Shaivasiddhanta, the Vaishnava Pañcaratra doctrine, the Advaita of the Kashmirian Shaiva-gama (Trika), the followers of which, though Advaitins, have very subtly criticized Shamkara's doctrine on several points. Difference of views upon this question and that of the nature of Maya, which the world is said to be, necessarily implies difference upon other matters of doctrine. Then there are, with many resemblances, some differences in ritual practice. Thus it comes about that Brahmanism includes many divisions of worshippers calling themselves by different names. There are Smartas who are the present day representatives of the old Vaidik doctrine and ritual practice, and on the other hand a number of divisions of worshippers calling themselves Shaktas, Shaivas, Vaishnavas and so forth with sub-divisions of these. It is not possible to make hard and fast distinctions between the sects which share much in common and have been influenced one by the other. Indeed the universality of much of religious doctrine and practice is an established fact. What exists in India as elsewhere to-day has in other times and places been in varying degrees anticipated. "In Religion," it has been said (Gnostics and Their Remains, viii) "there is no new thing. The same ideas are worked up over and over again." In India as elsewhere, but particularly in India where religious activity has been syncretistic rather than by way of supersession, there is much which is common to all sects and more again which is common between particular groups of sects. These latter are governed in general, that is, in their older forms, by the Agamas or Tantra-Shastras, which, at any rate to-day and for centuries past (whatever may have been their origin), admit the authority of the Vedas and recognize other Scriptures. (As to these, see the Introduction to the Kaulacarya Satyananda's Commentary on the Isha Upanishad which I have published.)

The meaning of Veda is not commonly rightly understood. But this is a vast subject which underlies all others, touching as it does the seat of all authority and knowledge into which I have not the space to enter here. There are four main classes of Brahmanical Scripture, namely, Veda or Shruti, Smriti, Purana, and Agama. There are also four ages or Yugas the latter being a fraction of a Kalpa or Day of Brahma of 4,320,000,000 years. This period is the life of an universe, on the expiration of which all re-enters Brahman and thereafter issues from it. A Mahayuga is composed of the Four Ages called Satya, Treta, Dvapara, Kali, the first being the golden age of righteousness since when all has gradually declined physically, morally, and spiritually. For each of the ages a suitable Shastra is given, for Satya or Krita the Vedas, for Treta the Smritishastra, for Dvapara the Puranas, and for Kaliyuga the Agama or Tantra Shastra. So the Kularnava Tantra says:

Krite shrutyukta acarastretayam smriti-sambhavah

Dvapare tu puranoktah, kalavagamasammatah

(see also Mahanirvana Tantra, I -- 28 et seq.) and the Tara-pradipa says that in the Kaliyuga (the supposed present age) the Tantrika and not the Vaidika Dharma, in the sense of mode of life and ritual, is to be followed (see Principles of Tantra). When it is said that the Agama is the peculiar Scripture of the Kali age, this does not mean (at any rate to any particular division of its followers) that something is presented which is opposed to Veda. It is true however that, as between these followers, there is sometimes a conflict on the question whether a particular form of the Agama is unvedic (Avaidika) or not. The Agama, however, as a whole, purports to be a presentment of the teaching of Veda, just as the Puranas and Smritis are. It is that presentment of Vaidik truth which is suitable for the Kali age. Indeed the Shakta followers of the Agama claim that its Tantras contain the very core of the Veda to which it is described to bear the same relation as the Supreme Spirit (Paramatma) to the embodied spirit (Jivatma). In a similar way, in the seven Tantrik Acaras (see Ch. IV post), Kaulacara is the controlling, informing life of the gross body called Vedacara, each of the Acaras, which follow the latter up to Kaulacara, being more and more subtle sheaths. The Tantra Shastra is thus that presentment of Vedantic truth which is modeled, as regards mode of life and ritual, to meet the characteristics and infirmities of the Kaliyuga. As men have no longer the capacity, longevity and moral strength required to carry out the Vaidika Karmakanda (ritual section), the Tantra Shastra prescribes a Sadhana of its own for the attainment of the common end of all Shastra, that is, a happy life on earth, Heaven thereafter, and at length Liberation. Religion is in fact the true pursuit of happiness.

As explained in the next and following Chapters, this Agama, which governs according to its followers the Kali-yuga, is itself divided into several schools or communities of worshippers. One of these divisions is the Shakta. It is with Shakta doctrine and worship, one of the forms of Brahmanism, which is again a form of the general Bharata Dharma, that this book deals.

The Shakta is so called because he is a worshipper of Shakti (Power), that is, God in Mother-form as the Supreme Power which creates, sustains and withdraws the universe. His rule of life is Shaktadhama, his doctrine of Shakti is Shaktivada or Shakta Darshana. God is worshipped as the Great Mother because, in this aspect, God is active, and produces, nourishes, and maintains all. Theological Godhead is no more female than male or neuter. God is Mother to the Sadhaka who worships Her Lotus Feet, the dust on which are millions of universes. The Power, or active aspect of the immanent God, is thus called Shakti. In Her static transcendent aspect the Mother or Shakti or Shivé is of the same nature as Shiva or "the Good". That is, philosophically speaking, Shiva is the unchanging Consciousness, and Shakti is its changing Power appearing as mind and matter. Shiva-Shakti is therefore Consciousness and Its Power. This then is the doctrine of dual aspects of the one Brahman acting through Its Trinity of Powers (Iccha, Will; Jñana, Knowledge; Kriya, Action). In the static transcendent aspect (Shiva) the one Brahman does not change and in the kinetic immanent aspect (Shivé or Shakti) It does. There is thus changelessness in change. The individual or embodied Spirit (Jivatma) is one with the transcendent spirit (Paramatma). The former is a part (Amsha) of the latter, and the enveloping mind and body are manifestations of Supreme Power. Shakta Darshana is therefore a form of Monism (Advaitavada). In creation an effect is produced without change in the Producer. In creation the Power (Shakti) "goes forth" (Prasharati) in a series of emanations or transformations, which are called, in the Shaiva and Shakta Tantras, the 36 Tattvas. These mark the various stages through which Shiva, the Supreme Consciousness, as Shakti, presents Itself as object to Itself as subject, the latter at first experiencing the former as part of the Self, and then through the operations of Maya Shakti as different from the Self. This is the final stage in which every Self (Purusha) is mutually exclusive of every other. Maya, which achieves this, is one of the Powers of the Mother or Devi. The Will-to-become-many (Bahu syam prajayeya) is the creative impulse which not only creates but reproduces an eternal order. The Lord remembers the diversities latent in His own Maya Shakti due to the previous Karmas of Jivas and allows them to unfold themselves by His volition. It is that Power by which infinite formless Consciousness veils Itself to Itself and negates and limits Itself in order that it may experience Itself as Form.

This Maya Shakti assumes the form of Prakriti Tattva, which is composed of three Gunas or Factors called Sattva, Rajas, Tamas. The function of Prakriti is to veil, limit, or finitize pure infinite formless Consciousness, so as to produce form, for without such limitation there cannot be the appearance of form. These Gunas work by mutual suppression. The function of Tamas is to veil Consciousness, of Sattva to reveal it, and of Rajas the active principle to make either Tamas suppress Sattva or Sattva suppress Tamas. These Gunas are present in all particular existence, as in the general cause or Prakriti Shakti. Evolution means the increased operation of Sattva Guna. Thus the mineral world is more subject to Tamas than the rest. There is less Tamas and more Sattva in the vegetable world. In the animal world Sattva is increased, and still more so in man, who may rise through the cultivation of the Sattva Guna to Pure Consciousness (Moksha) Itself. To use Western parlance, Consciousness more and more appears as forms evolve and rise to man. Consciousness does not in itself change, but its mental and material envelopes do, thus releasing and giving Consciousness more play. As Pure Consciousness is Spirit, the release of It from the bonds of matter means that Forms which issue from the Power of Spirit (Shakti) become more and more Sattvik. A truly Sattvik man is therefore a spiritual man. The aim of Sadhana is therefore the cultivation of the Sattva Guna. Nature (Prakriti) is thus the Veil of Spirit as Tamas Guna, the Revealer of Spirit as Sattva Guna, and the Activity (Rajas

Guna) which makes either work. Thus the upward or revealing movement from the predominance of Tamas to that of Sattva represents the spiritual progress of the embodied Spirit or Jivatma.

It is the desire for the life of form which produces the universe. This desire exists in the collective Vasanas, held like all else, in inchoate state in the Mother-Power, which passing from its own (Svarupa) formless state gives effect to them. Upon the expiration of the vast length of time which constitutes a day of Brahma the whole universe is withdrawn into the great Causal Womb (Yoni) which produced it. The limited selves are withdrawn into it, and again, when the creative throes are felt, are put forth from it, each appearing in that form and state which its previous Karma had made for it. Those who do good Karma but with desire and self-regard (Sakama) go, on death, to Heaven and thereafter reap their reward in good future birth on earth -- for Heaven is also a transitory state. The bad are punished by evil births on earth and suffering in the Hells which are also transitory. Those, however, who have rid themselves of all self-regarding desire and work selflessly (Nishkama Karma) realize the Brahman nature which is Saccidananda. Such are liberated, that is never appear again in the World of Form, which is the world of suffering, and enter into the infinite ocean of Bliss Itself. This is Moksha or Mukti or Liberation. As it is freedom from the universe of form, it can only be attained through detachment from the world and desirelessness. For those who desire the world of form cannot be freed of it. Life, therefore, is a field in which man, who has gradually ascended through lower forms of mineral, vegetable and animal life, is given the opportunity of heaven-life and Liberation. The universe has a moral purpose, namely the affording to all existence of a field wherein it may reap the fruit of its actions. The forms of life are therefore the stairs (Sopana) on which man mounts to the state of infinite, eternal, and formless Bliss. This then is the origin and the end of man. He has made for himself his own past and present condition and will make his future one. His essential nature is free. If wise, he adopts the means (Sadhana) which lead to lasting happiness, for that of the world is not to be had by all, and even when attained is perishable and mixed with suffering. This Sadhana consists of various means and disciplines employed to produce purity of mind (Cittashuddhi), and devotion to, and worship of, the Magna Mater of all. It is with these means that the religious Tantra Shastras are mainly concerned. The Shakta Tantra Shastra contains a most elaborate and wonderful ritual, partly its own, partly of Vaidik origin. To a ritualist it is of absorbing interest.

Ritual is an art, the art of religion. Art is the outward material expression of ideas intellectually held and emotionally felt. Ritual art is concerned with the expression of those ideas and feelings which are specifically called religious. It is a mode by which religious truth is presented, and made intelligible in material forms and symbols to the mind. It appeals to all natures passionately sensible of that Beauty in which, to some, God most manifests Himself. But it is more than this. For it is the means by which the mind is transformed and purified. In particular according to Indian principles it is the instrument whereby the consciousness of the worshipper (Sadhaka) is shaped in actual fact into forms of experience which embody the truths which Scripture teaches. The Shakta is thus taught that he is one with Shiva and His Power or Shakti. This is not a matter of mere argument. It is a matter for experience. It is ritual and Yoga-practice which secure that experience for him. How profound Indian ritual is, will be admitted by those who have understood the general principles of all ritual and symbolism, and have studied it in its Indian form, with a knowledge of the principles of which it is an expression. Those who speak of "mummery," "gibberish" and "superstition" betray both their incapacity and ignorance.

The Agamas are not themselves treatises on Philosophy, though they impliedly contain a particular theory of life. They are what is called Sadhana Shastras, that is, practical Scriptures prescribing the means by which happiness, the quest of all mankind, may be attained. And as lasting happiness is God, they teach how man by worship and by practice of the disciplines prescribed, may attain a divine experience. From incidental statements and the practices described the philosophy is extracted.

The speaker of the Tantras and the revealer of the Shakta Tantra is Shiva Himself or Shivé the Devi Herself. Now it is the first who teaches and the second who listens (Agama). Now again the latter assumes the role of Guru and answers the questions of Shiva (Nigama). For the two are one. Sometimes there are other interlocutors. Thus one of the Tantras is called Ishvarakartikeya-samvada, for there the Lord addresses his son Kartikeya. The Tantra Shastra therefore claims to be a Revelation, and of the same essential truths as those contained in the Eternal Veda which is an authority to itself (Svatah-siddha). Those who have had experience of the truths recorded in Shastra, have also proclaimed the practical means whereby their experience was gained. "Adopt those means" they say, "and you will also have for yourself our experience." This is the importance of Sadhana and all Sadhana Shastras. The Guru says: "Do as I tell you. Follow the method prescribed by Scripture. Curb your desires. Attain a pure disposition, and thus only will you obtain that certainty, that experience which will render any questionings unnecessary." The practical importance of the Agama lies in its assumption of these principles and in the methods which it enjoins for the attainment of that state in which the truth is realized. The following Chapters shortly explain some of the main features of both the philosophy and practice of the Shakta division of the Agama. For their full development many volumes are necessary. What is here said is a mere sketch in a popular form of a vast subject.

I will conclude this Chapter with extracts from a Bengali letter written to me shortly before his death, now many years ago, by Pandit Shiva-candra Vidyarnava, the Shakta author of the Tantratattva which I have published under the title Principles of Tantra. The words in brackets are my own.

"At the present time the general public are ignorant of the principles of the Tantra Shastra. The cause of this ignorance is the fact that the Tantra Shastra is a Sadhana Shastra, the greater part of which becomes intelligible only by Sadhana. For this reason the Shastra and its Teachers prohibit their general promulgation. So long as the Shastra was learnt from Gurus only, this golden rule was of immense good. In course of time the old Sadhana has become almost extinct, and along with it, the knowledge of the deep and mighty principles of the Shastra is almost lost. Nevertheless some faint shadowings of these principles (which can be thoroughly known by Sadhana only) have been put before the public partly with the view to preserve Shastric knowledge from destruction, and partly for commercial reasons. When I commenced to write Tantra-tattva some 25 years ago, Bengali society was in a perilous state owing to the influx of other religions, want of faith and a spirit of disputation. Shortly before this a number of English books had appeared on the Tantra Shastra which, whilst ignorant of Dharma, Sadhana and Siddhi contained some hideous and outrageous pictures drawn by the Bengali historians and novelists ignorant of, and unfaithful to, Shastric principles. The English books by English writers contained merely a reflection of what English-educated Bengalis of those days had written. Both are even to-day equally ignorant of the Tantra Shastra. For this reason in writing Tantratattva I could not go deeply into the subject as my heart wished. I had to spend my time in removing thorns (objections and charges) from the path by reasoning and argument. I could not therefore deal in my book with most of the subjects which, when I brought out the first volume, I promised to discuss. The Tantra Shastra is broadly divided into three parts, namely Sadhana, Siddhi (that which is gained by Sadhana) and Philosophy (Darshana). Unlike other systems it is not narrow nor does it generate doubt by setting forth conflicting views. For its speaker is One and not many and He is omniscient. The philosophy is however scattered throughout the Tantrik treatises and is dealt with, as occasion arises, in connection with Sadhana and Siddhi. Could (as I had suggested to him) such parts be collected and arranged, according to the principles of the subject-matter, they would form a vast system of philosophy wonderful, divine, lasting, true, and carrying conviction to men. As a Philosophy it is at the head of all others. You have prayed to Parameshvara (God) for my long life, and my desire to carry out my project makes me also pray for it. But the state of my body makes me doubt whether the prayer will be granted. By the grace therefore of the Mother the sooner the work is done the better. You say 'that those who worship Parameshvara, He makes of one family. Let therefore all distinctions be put aside for all Sadhakas are, as such, one.' This noble principle is the final word of all Shastras, all communities, and all religions. All distinctions which arise from differences in the physical body are distinctions for the human world only. They have no place in the world of worship of Parameshvara. The more therefore that we shall approach Him the more will the differences between you and me vanish. It is because both of us pray for the removal of all such differences, that I am led to rely on your encouragement and help and am bold to take up on your encouragement and help and am bold to take up this difficult and daring work. If by your grace the gate of this Tantrik philosophy is opened in the third part of Tantra-tattva I dare to say that the learned in all countries will gaze, and be astonished for it is pure truth, and for this reason I shall be able to place it before them with perfect clearness."

Unfortunately this project of a third part of the Tantra-tattva could not be carried out owing to the lamented death of its author, which followed not long after the receipt of this letter. Naturally, like all believers throughout the whole world, he claimed for his Scripture the possession in all its details of what was true or good. Whilst others may not concede this, I think that those with knowledge and understanding and free from prejudice will allow that it contains a profoundly conceived doctrine, wonderfully worked out in practice. Some of its ideas and principles are shared (through it be under other names and forms) by all religious men, and others either by all or some Indian communities, who are not Shaktas. Leaving therefore for the moment aside what may be said to be peculiar to itself it cannot be that wholly absurd, repulsive, and infamous system ("lust, mummery and magic" as Brian Hodgson called it) which it has been said to be. An impartial criticism may be summed up in the few words that, together with what has value, it contains some practices which are not generally approved and which have led to abuse. As to these the reader is referred to the Chapter on the Pañcatattva or Secret Ritual.

I conclude with a translation of an article in Bengali by a well-known writer, (P. Bandyopadhyaya, in the Sahitya, Shrubby 1320, Calcutta, July-August 1913). It was evoked by the publication of Arthur Abalone's Translation of, and Introduction to, the Mahanirvana Tantra. It is an interesting statement as regards the Shakta Tantra and Bengali views thereon. Omitting here some commendatory statements touching A. Avalon's work and the writer's "thanks a hundred times" for the English version, the article continues as follows:

"At one time the Mahanirvana Tantra had some popularity in Bengal. It was printed and published under the editorship of Pandit Ananda-candra Vedanta-vagisha and issued from the Adi-Brahmo-Samaj Press. Raja Ram Mohan Roy himself was a follower of the Tantras, married after the Shaiva form and used to practice the Tantrik worship. His spiritual preceptor Svami Hariharananda, was well known to be a saint who had attained to perfection (Siddha-purusa). He endeavored to establish the Mahanirvana Tantra as the Scripture of the Brahmo-Samaj. The formula and the forms of the Brahmo Church are borrowed from the initiation in Brahman worship, (Brahma-diksha) in this Tantra. The later Brahmos somewhat losing their selves in their spirit of imitation of Christian rituals were led to abandon the path shown to them by Raja Ram Mohan; but yet even now many among them recite the Hymn to the Brahman which occurs in the Mahanirvana Tantra. In the first era of the excessive dissemination of English culture and training Bengal resounded with opprobrious criticisms of the Tantras. No one among the educated in Bengal could praise them. Even those who called themselves Hindus were unable outwardly to support the Tantrik doctrines. But even then there were very great Tantrik Sadhakas and men learned in the Tantras with

whose help the principles of the Tantras might have been explained to the public. But the educated Bengali of the age was bewitched by the Christian culture, and no one cared to inquire what did or did not exist in their paternal heritage; the more especially that any who attempted to study the Tantras ran the risk of exposing themselves to contumely from the 'educated community'. Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore of sacred name alone published two or three works with the help of the venerable Pandit Jaganmohan Tarkalankara. The Hara-tattva-didhiti associated with the name of his father is even now acknowledged to be a marvelously glorious production of the genius of the Pandits of Bengal. The venerable (Vridha) Pandit Jaganmohan also published a commentary on the Mahanirvana Tantra. Even at that epoch such study of the Tantras was confined to a certain section of the educated in Bengal. Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan alone endeavored to understand and appreciate men like Bama Khepa (mad Bama), the Naked Father (Nengta Baba) of Kadda and Svami Sadananda. The educated community of Bengal had only neglect and contempt for Sadhakas like Bishe Pagla (the mad Bishe) and Binu the Candala woman. Bengal is even now governed by the Tantra; even now the Hindus of Bengal receive Tantrik initiation. But the glory and the honor which the Tantra had and received in the time of Maharajas Krishna-candra and Shiva-candra no longer exist. This is the reason why the Tantrik Sadhakas of Bengal are not so well known at present. It seems as if the World-Mother has again willed it, has again desired to manifest Her power, so that Arthur Avalon is studying the Tantras and has published so beautiful a version of the Mahanirvana. The English educated Bengali will now, we may hope, turn his attention to the Tantra.

"The special virtue of the Tantra lies in its mode of Sadhana. It is neither mere worship (Upasana) nor prayer. It is not lamenting or contrition or repentance before the Deity. It is the Sadhana which is the union of Purusha and Prakriti; the Sadhana which joins the Male Principle and the Mother Element within the body, and strives to make the attributed attributeless. That which is in me and that for which I am (this consciousness is ever present in me) is spread, like butter in milk, throughout the created world of moving and unmoving things, through the gross and the subtle, the conscious and unconscious, through all. It is the object of Tantrik Sadhana to merge that self-principle (Svarat) into the Universal (Virat). This Sadhana is to be performed through the awakening of the forces within the body. A man is Siddha in this Sadhana when he is able to awaken Kundalini and pierce the six Cakras. This is not mere 'philosophy' a mere attempt to ponder upon husks of words, but something which is to be done in a thoroughly practical manner. The Tantras say -- 'Begin practicing under the guidance of a good Guru; if you do not obtain favorable results immediately, you can freely give it up.' No other religion dares to give so bold a challenge. We believe that the Sadhana of the Moslems and the 'esoteric religion' or secret Sadhana (and rituals) of the Christians of the Roman Catholic and Greek Churches is based on this ground work of the Tantras.

"Wherever there is Sadhana we believe that there is the system of the Tantra. While treating of the Tantras some time back in the Sahitya, I hinted at this conclusion and I cannot say that the author, Arthur Avalon, has not noticed it too. For he has expressed his surprise at the similarity which exists between the Roman Catholic and the Tantrik mode of Sadhana. The Tantra has made the Yoga-system of Patañjali easily practicable and has combined with it the Tantrik rituals and the ceremonial observances (Karma-kanda); that is the reason why the Tantrik system of Sadhana has been adopted by all the religious sects of India. If this theory of the antiquarians, that the Tantra was brought into India from Chaldea or Shakadvipa be correct, then it may also be inferred that the Tantra passed from Chaldea to Europe. The Tantra is to be found in all the strata of Buddhism; the Tantrik Sadhana is manifest in Confucianism; and Shintoism is but another name of the Tantrik cult. Many historians acknowledge that the worship of Shakti or Tantrik Sadhana which was prevalent in Egypt from ancient times spread into Phoenicia and Greece. Consequently we may suppose that the influence of the Tantra was felt in primitive Christianity.

"The Tantra contains nothing like idolatry or 'worship of the doll' which we, taking the cue from the Christian missionaries, nowadays call it. This truth, the author, Arthur Avalon, has made very clear in the Introduction to his translation. The Tantra repeatedly says that one is to adore the Deity by becoming a Deity (Devata) himself. The Ishta-devata is the very self of Atman, and not separate from It; He is the receptacle of all, yet He is not contained in anything, for He is the great witness, the eternal Purusha. The true Tantrik worship is the worship in and by the mind. The less subtle form of Tantrik worship is that of the Yantra. Form is born of the Yantra. The form is made manifest by Japa, and awakened by Mantra-Shakti. Tens of millions of beautiful forms of the Mother bloom forth in the heavens of the heart of the Siddhapurusha. Devotees or aspirants of a lower order of competency (Nimna-adhikari) under the directions of the Guru adore the great Maya by making manifest' (to themselves) one of Her various forms which can be only seen by Dhyana (meditation). That is not mere worship of the idol! if it were so, the image would not be thrown into the water; no one in that case would be so irreverent as to sink the earthen image of the Goddess in the water. The Primordial Shakti is to be awakened by Bhava, by Dhyana, by Japa and by the piercing of the six Cakras. She is all will. No one can say when and how She shows Herself and to what Sadhaka. We only know that She is, and there are Her names and forms. Wonderfully transcending is Her form -- far beyond the reach of word or

thought. This has made the Bengali Bhakta sing this

plaintive song --

'Hard indeed is it to approach the sea of forms, and to

bathe in it.

Ah me, this my coming is perhaps in vain?'

"The Tantra deals with another special subject --

Mantra-Shakti. It is no exaggeration to say that we have never heard even from any Bengali Pandit such a clear exposition of Mantra-Shakti as that which the author, Arthur Avalon, has given in his Introduction to the Mahanirvana Tantra. We had thought that Mantra-Shakti was a thing to be felt and not to be explained to others. But the author with the force of his genius has in his simple exposition given us such explanation of it as is possible in the English language. The Tantras say that the soul in the body is the very self of the letters -- of the Dhvani (sound). The Mother, the embodiment of the fifty letters (Varna), is present in the various letters in the different Cakras. Like the melody which issues when the chords of a lute are struck, the Mother who moves in the six Cakras and who is the very self of the letters awakens with a burst of harmony when the chords of the letters (Varnas) are struck in their order; and Siddhi becomes as easy of attainment to the Sadhaka as the Amalaka fruit in one's hand when She is roused. That is why the great Sadhaka Ramaprasad awakened the Mother by the invocation -- 'Arise O Mother (Jagrihi, janani)'. That is the reason why the Bhakta sang --

'How long wilt thou sleep in the Muladhara, O Mother

Kulakundalini?'

"The Bodhana (awakening) ceremony in the Durga Puja is nothing but the awakening of the Shakti of the Mother, the mere rousing of the consciousness of the Kundalini. This awakening is performed by Mantra-Shakti. The Mantra is nothing but the harmonious sound of the lute of the body. When the symphony is perfect, She who embodies the Worlds (Jaganmayi) rouses Herself. When She is awake it does not take long before the union of Shiva and Shakti takes place. Do Japa once; do Japa according to rule looking up to the Guru, and the effects of Japa of which we hear in the Tantra will prove to be true at every step. Then you will understand that the Tantra is not mere trickery, or a false weaving out of words. What is wanted is the good Guru; Mantra capable of granting Siddhi, and application (Sadhana). Arthur Avalon has grasped the meaning of the principles of Mantra which are so difficult to understand. We may certainly say that he could only make this impossible thing possible through inherent tendencies (Samskara) acquired in his previous life.

"The Tantra accepts the doctrine of rebirth. It does not, however, acknowledge it as a mere matter of argument or reasoning but like a geographical map it makes clear the unending chain of existences of the Sadhaka. The Tantra has two divisions, the Dharma of Society (Samaja) and the Dharma of Spiritual Culture (Sadhana). According to the regulation of Samaja-Dharma it acknowledges birth and caste. But in Sadhana-Dharma there is no caste distinction, no Brahmana or Shudra, no man or woman; distinction between high and low follows success in Sadhana and Siddhi. We only find the question of fitness or worthiness (Adhikara-tattva) in the Tantra. This fitness (Adhikara) is discovered with reference to the Samskaras of past existences; that is why the Candala Purnananda is a Brahmana, and Kripasiddha the Sadhaka is equal to Sarvananda; that is why Ramaprasada of the Vaidya caste is fit to be honored even by Brahmanas. The Tantra is to be studied with the aid of the teachings of the Guru; for its language is extraordinary, and its exposition impossible with a mere grammatical knowledge of roots and inflections. The Tantra is only a system of Shakti-Sadhana. There are rules in it whereby we may draw Shakti from all created things. There is nothing to be accepted or rejected in it. Whatever is helpful for Sadhana is acceptable. This Sadhana is decided according to the fitness of the particular person (Adhikari-anusare). He must follow that for which he is fit or worthy. Shakti pervades all and embraces all beings and all things, the inanimate and the moving, beasts and birds, men and women. The unfolding of the Power (Shakti) enclosed within the body of the animal (Jiva) as well as the man is brought about only with the help of the tendencies within the body. The mode of Sadhana is ascertained with regard to these tendencies. The very meaning of Sadhana is unfolding, rousing up or awakening of Power (Shakti). Thus the Shakta obtains power from all actions in the world. The Sadhana of the Tantra is not to be measured by the little measuring-yard of the well-being or ill-being of your community or mine.

"Let you understand and I understand, O my mind --

Whether any one else understands it or not."

The author, Arthur Avalon, is fully conscious of this. In spite of it, he has tried to explain almost all points making them easy to comprehend for the intellect of materialistic civilized society of to-day. For this attempt on his part we are grateful to him.

"The Tantra has no notion of some separate far-seeing God. It preaches no such doctrine in it as that God the Creator rules the Universe from heaven. In the eye of the Tantra the body of the Sadhaka is the Universe, the auto-kratos (Atma-Shakti) within the body is the desired (Ishta) and the "to be sought for" (Sadhya), Deity (Devata) of the Sadhaka. The unfolding of this self-power is to be brought about by self-realization (Atma-darshana) which is to be achieved through Sadhana. Whoever realizes his self attains to Liberation (Mukti). The author, Arthur Avalon, has treated of these matters (Siddhanta) in his work, the Tantra-tattva. Many of the topics dealt with in the Mahanirvana Tantra will not be fully understood without a thorough perusal of the book. The Principles of the Tantra must be lectured on to the Bengali afresh. If the Mahanirvana Tantra as translated by Arthur Avalon is spread abroad, if the Bengali is once more desirous to hear, that attempt might well be undertaken.

"Our land of Bengal used to be ruled by Tantrik works such as the Saradatilaka, Shaktanandatarangini, Pranatoshini, Tantrasara, etc. Then the Mahanirvana Tantra did not have so great an influence. It seems to us that, considering the form into which, as a result of English education and culture, the mind of the Bengali has been shaped, the Mahanirvana is a proper Tantra for the time. Raja Ram Mohan Roy endeavored to encourage regard for the Mahanirvana Tantra because he understood this. If the English translation of the Mahanirvana Tantra by Arthur Avalon is well received by the thoughtful public in Bengal, the study of the original Sanskrit work may gradually come into vogue. This much hope we may entertain. In fact, the English-educated Bengali community is without religion (Dharma) or action (Karma), and is devoid of the sense of nationality (Jatiya Dharma) and caste. The Mahanirvana Tantra alone is fit for the country and the race at the present time. We believe that probably because such an impossibility is going to be possible, a cultured, influential, rich Englishman like Arthur Avalon, honored of the rulers, has translated and published the Mahanirvana Tantra. When his Tantratattva is published we shall be able to speak out much more. For the present we ask the educated people of Bengal to read this most unprecedented Mahanirvana Tantra. Arthur Avalon has not spoken a single word to satisfy himself nor tried to explain things according to his own imagination. He has only given what are true inferences according to the principles of Shastric reasoning. An auspicious opportunity for the English-knowing public to understand the Tantra has arrived. It is a counsel of the Tantra itself, that if you desire to renounce anything, renounce it only after a thorough acquaintance with it; if you desire to embrace anything new, accept it only after a searching inquiry. The Tantra embodies the old religion (Dharma) of Bengal; even if it is to be cast away for good, that ought only to be done after it has been fully known. In the present case a thoughtful and educated Englishman of high position has taken it upon himself to give us a full introduction to the Tantra. We can frankly say that in this Introduction he has not tried a jot to shirk or to gloss over the conclusions of the Shastra, with the vanity of explanation born of his imagination. He has endeavored to bring before the mind of his readers whatever actually is in the Tantra, be it regarded as either good or evil. Will not the Bengali receive with welcome such a full offering (Arghya) made by a Bhakta from a foreign land?"

Next: Chapter Two: Shakti: The World as Power