

**RELIGIOUS  
REFORM: POPULAR  
HINDUISM, PART 1**

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Religious Reform: Popular Hinduism, Part 1 by J. Murdoch

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**J. MURDOCH**

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REFORM: POPULAR  
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PAPERS ON INDIAN REFORM.

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RELIGIOUS REFORM.

PART I.

POPULAR HINDUISM.

Yatha devah, tatha bhakta,  
"As is the god, so is the worshipper."

"Thou thoughtest that I (God) was altogether such an one as thyself."

*The Bible.*

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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At present the hopes of most Indian Reformers rest chiefly on "National Congresses" and political changes. By their means a supposed Golden Age is to be brought back. This is a very old delusion. "In all times," says Smiles, "men have been prone to believe that their happiness and well-being were to be secured by means of institutions, rather than by their own conduct." A comparison between the United States and the South American Republics shows that the value of representative Government depends upon the character of the people.

It is fully admitted that political institutions should vary with the intelligence of the governed. The mistake is to expect more from them than they can give.

No truth, perhaps, requires to be more impressed upon the minds of Indian reformers than the words of Sir Madhava Row :

"The longer one lives, observes, and thinks, the more deeply does he feel there is no community on the face of the earth which suffers less from political evils and more from self-inflicted, or self-accepted, or self-created, and, therefore, avoidable evils than the Hindu community !"

At the root of these evils lies Hinduism. The proverb expresses the truth, *Yatha devah, tatha bhaktah*, As is the god, so is the worshipper. We are assimilated to the objects we worship. The Bhagavad Gita says : "By contemplating material objects we become materialised." The vast majority of the Hindus worship senseless blocks and deities stained with crime. The great reform that India needs is to turn from dumb idols to the one living and holy God. All other changes required would follow in its train.

Among intelligent Hindus there is a general acknowledgment that religious reform is needed ; but, except among members of the Brahma Samaj, scarcely any come forward to indicate the changes that are necessary. The following pages are an attempt to review Popular Hinduism, to show what is defective, and to point out the reforms which ought to be made. Philosophic and Vedic Hinduism are considered in other Papers.

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## POPULAR HINDUISM.

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### INTRODUCTION.

**Religiousness of the Hindus.**—The Hindus are, in their way, one of the most religious people in the world. It has been said of them that “they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and *sin* religiously.” It is so far right that religion engages much attention. Our stay in this world is comparatively short, even in the case of the longest lived. To the man of fourscore, when he looks back, it seems as if it were only a few days since he was a child. Consider, on the other hand, the sternity to which we are speeding, and which we may enter at any moment. The man would justly be considered a fool who spent all his fortune in a single day, and had to starve the remainder of his life. That man is an incomparably greater fool who attends only to his body, which must so soon die, and neglects his soul which will live for ever either in happiness or misery.

**Duty of Religious Inquiry.**—There are two kinds of money, good and bad. Suppose a man is paid for his labour in bad rupees, however many he may have collected, he is, in reality, worth nothing. Just as there are coiners who make bad money and pass it off as good, so cunning wicked men, for their own gain, have devised false religions to impose upon the ignorant.

There are very many religions in the world. A North India proverb says, *jitne muni, itne mat*. There are as many religions as there are Munis. In general, religions are opposed to one another. One religion says that there is only one God, another says that there are 33 crores of divinities. Some say that the soul of man is part of God; others say that it is quite distinct; one religion forbids the worship of idols; others enjoin it; one religion says that sin may be washed away by bathing at certain places; another says that all this is vain. Religions so contradictory cannot all be true. Most of them must be false, and those who follow them are like men paid for their labour in bad money.

Many people, without inquiry, blindly follow the religion of their forefathers. They act more wisely in worldly matters. When a clerk receives his salary, he counts the rupees, and sees that they

are all good. Even a woman when she goes to the bazaar to buy an earthen pot, taps it to find if it is sound before she gives the money. In religion, people generally act like a flock of sheep, which if the first leap over a bridge, the rest follow and are drowned.

Bad money may be known from good by means of the touchstone. God has given us a touchstone to distinguish between true and false religions—our reason. If we do not use it, we will suffer like those men who take bad rupees without examination. This little book is intended to assist those who wish to investigate how far the religion of their forefathers is true and to be accepted.

**Religions of the Hindus.**—India is peopled by more than a hundred different nations. Hinduism is a mixture of all the creeds of such as are willing to acknowledge the supremacy of the Brahmans and adopt caste rules. Mr. Chentel Rao, of Madras, thus points out the erroneousness of the idea that the Hindus have only one religion :—

“There are quite as great differences between the forms of belief grouped under the term ‘Hindu Religion’ as there are between any of the principal religions of the world. Some of the doctrines of the Hindu religion are theistic, some atheistic, and some pantheistic. In short, Hinduism is an encyclopædia of religions.”\*

It admits every form of religious faith and practice—from a pure speculative atheism to the debased forms of demon and fetich worship which prevail among the lower classes.

Sir A. C. Lyall compares Hinduism to “a mere troubled sea without shore or visible horizon, driven to and fro by the winds of boundless credulity and grotesque invention.”

The following main divisions will be considered in successive Papers :

I. **POPULAR HINDUISM.**—This may, in general terms, be defined as the religion of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, the Puranas, and the Tantras. Of nearly 200 millions of Hindus, about ninety-nine out of every hundred accept Hinduism in this form. It is almost universal among the women, and that which they teach their children. Under it, aboriginal superstitions will be noticed.

II. **PHILOSOPHIC HINDUISM.**—This may be described, as the Hinduism of the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, &c. In its pure form it is held by comparatively few ; but some of its doctrines are included in Popular Hinduism, and many persons combine the two.

III. **VEDIC HINDUISM.**—The adherents of the Arya Samaj in North India and the Punjab profess to base their creed on the Vedas, with what correctness will be seen in the course of investigation.

\* *Christian College Magazine*, June, 1866.

IV. *New Hinduism*.—This includes various attempts to purify Hinduism. Either under this head or separately, will be noticed systems like the Brahma Samaj.

*Religious Reform needed in India*.—It must be confessed that the great mass of the Hindus do not admit this. They are perfectly satisfied with their religion, and think it the best in the world. The Vedas are eternal and given from the mouth of Brahma; any change would be for the worse. There are even educated men who regard Hinduism as a "monument of ancient wisdom," a "marvellously consistent and perfect system," "inferior in respect to the purity and practical character of its sacred truths to no other religions in the world."

On the other hand, the most intelligent Hindus admit that the "man-made" portions of their religion ought to be separated from its "God-made" portions. Some years ago Sir Madhava Row recommended a "judicious revival or repair of Hinduism" to "suit the present times."

*The Hindu*, the leading Native paper in South India, has the following remarks in an article on "Social and Religious Reform":—

"As in Christian countries, so in our country also our moral and religious ideas are derived from our theology. But this theology as well as these ideas must be explained away, modified, and reformed in certain aspects at least, to suit the changes that in course of time take place in the intelligence of the people. It is no longer possible to justify to the young educated Hindu apparently immoral and crude practices because they are sanctioned in certain Puranas. The Hindu mythology has to be purged of the absurdities that have overgrown it during centuries of ignorance and of superstitious and timid isolation. In the same manner, the moral ideas of our common people have to be improved. An orthodox Hindu would tolerate falsehood, cowardice and self-abasement, but would damn to perdition his neighbour who swerves the least from accepted conventions even in the details of personal habits. Such moral perversity does not indicate a healthy social condition. Similarly our ideas of charity, of social distinction, education, and social well-being in general have to be drawn out of the influence of an obsolete and backward civilization, and brought in harmony with the fresh spirit of the time." *June 24th, 1887.*

The foregoing proposals must commend themselves to every intelligent Hindu.

*The Reforms Needed*.—While it is admitted, in general terms, that reform is required, it is to be expected that there will be great difference of opinion as to the changes necessary. The only way of arriving at a correct conclusion is to examine each feature of Hinduism in detail, and consider carefully any evils connected with it.