

The Meaning of the Castes

By

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FACE

".....causing the distinction of things for the perfection of the whole, the same divine wisdom is also the cause of inequality. The universe would not be perfect were there but one level of goodness".

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS:

Summa Theologica.

In a world of "impoverished reality" as Ananda Coomaraswamy has called it, where it is considered to be futile and "out of fashion" to look into the "meaning" of things, where with the universal spread of "literacy", another and yet another person has come to discover the "folly of the ancients", where not a day passes without some tilting or decrying, alike by responsible and irresponsible persons, of ancient ideals and institutions without the least effort of thought as to their validity, it is gratifying to know that there has grown a small group of scholars of the highest rank in Europe, who have devoted themselves to the study and interpretation of the traditional doctrines of the East and the West based on the authentic scriptures in every case and their authorized representatives in the respective countries. In the opinion of Ananda Coomaraswamy, himself eminently qualified for the function, both the writer of the essay published here, Mr. Schuon and the translator Mr. Pallis, as also the late French Scholar Rene Guenon, are pre-eminent members of that extremely small intellectual elite in the world today, possessed of that rare degree of discrimination and wisdom that alone can act as a check to the fantasies of modern iconoclasts.

Two of Mon. Schuon's works in French have appeared in English: "*The Transcendent Unity of Religions*" (Faber, 1953) and "*Spiritual Perspectives*

and Human Facts " (Faber, 1954). Herein, what we had considered from our limited view point as "stumbling-blocks" in religion are revealed to be actually "stepping-stones" to the transcendent. "Wisdom enshrined in all the Religions,—very unlike most contemporary books on the same subject that have scarcely been able to avoid an apologetic tone when they have to deal with traditional theories.

M. Schuon has been a collaborator of Rene Guenon who is better known to Indian readers. M. Guenon's "*Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*" was translated into English by Mr. Pallis (Luzac, London 1945).

Mr. Palli's own book "*Peaks and Lamas*" (Cassell, 1939 and Alfred Knopf, New York 1949), deals with ascensions—terrestrial and spiritual, with Tibet and Tibetans, with Lamas and Buddhism, with *Krama kriti* and *Krama-bhanga* (following tradition and breaking tradition);—one of the few books written in the present century, by an Oriental or a European, about peoples, from which an adequate and faithful picture can be got of what Tradition, now become a superstition with us, really means. The author fulfils the office of interpretation admirably not merely by studying the Tibetan tradition from authentic sources, but by active participation in that tradition itself.

It is a matter of sincere gratification that this essay on the Caste came within the benign notice of His Holiness Sri Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Kamakoti Peetha, Kanchipuram, and that it is being printed and issued in the form of a booklet at the instance of His Holiness.

K. N. I.

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Like all sacred institutions, the system of castes rests upon the nature of things, or, to be more exact, upon an aspect thereof, and therefore upon a reality that cannot but manifest itself under certain conditions; the same remark applies to the opposing aspect, that of the equality of men before God. In short, in order to justify the system of castes, it is enough to put the following question: does a diversity of qualifications and also heredity exist or not? If so, then the system of castes is both possible and legitimate. Likewise the absence of castes, where this is imposed traditionally: are men equal, not only from the point of view of animality, which here is not in question, but from the point of view of their final ends? Assuredly it is so, for every man has an immortal soul; this consideration can therefore take precedence, in a given traditional society, over that of diversity of qualifications. The immortality of the soul is the postulate of religious equalitarianism; just as the quasi-divine character of the intellect—and hence of the intellectual *elite*—is the postulate of the caste system.

Nothing could be more divergent than the Hindu hierarchisation and the Muslim levelling, and yet, their difference is only a matter of emphasis, for truth is one: in fact, if in human nature Hinduism considers before all else certain fundamental tendencies which divide men into as many hierarchically

disposed categories, it nevertheless realizes their equality in the super-caste of the wandering monks (*sannyasis*) in which social origin no longer plays any part; the case of the Christian clergy is analogous, in the sense that titles of nobility disappear there: a peasant cannot become a prince, but he can become Pope and crown the emperor. Inversely, hierarchy is manifested even in the most "equalitarian" religions: in Islam, where everyone is his own priest, the Sherifs, descendants of the Prophet, form a religious nobility and thus are superimposed upon the rest of society, without however assuming in it an exclusive function. In the Christian world, it can happen that a distinguished citizen is "ennobled"; whereas such a thing is altogether excluded in the Hindu system, where the object of the superior castes is essentially to "maintain" a primitive perfection, and it is the "descending" sense given to the origin of castes which explains that caste can be lost, but not acquired.¹

This perspective of "hereditary maintenance" is the very key to the caste system. It is this same perspective, moreover, which explains, in Hinduism, the exclusiveness of temple entry—temples are not pulpits for preaching—and, in a more general way, it also explains the preponderant part played by rules of purity. The "obsession" of Hinduism is not the conversion of "unbelievers", but on the contrary the maintenance of a primordial purity, both intellectual and also moral and ritual.

1. Pandit Hari Prasad Shastri has however assured us that there could be exceptions to the above rule (quite apart from possible reintegration of a family through successive marriages) and he quoted the case of King Vishvamitra, companion of Rama. One must doubtless take note, in that case, of the quality of the cyclic period concerned and of the special conditions created by the proximity of an *avatara* of Vishnu as also of the fact that the highest spirituality is able to "burn up" certain atavisms and create fresh hereditary dispositions.

Now, which are the fundamental tendencies of human nature to which the castes are more or less directly related? These tendencies could be described as so many manners of envisaging an empirical "real"; in other words, the fundamental tendency of a man is connected with his "feeling" or his "consciousness" of a "real". For the *brahmana*—the purely intellectual, contemplative "sacerdotal" type—it is the changeless, the transcendent, which is "real". In his innermost heart he does not "believe" either in "life" or in "earth"; there is something in him which remains alien to change and matter; therein consists, roughly speaking, his intimate disposition, his "imaginative life", if one can so put it, whatever may happen to be the weaknesses by which it is obscured. The *Kshatriya*—the "Knightly" type—possesses a keen intelligence, but one turned towards action and analysis rather than towards contemplation and synthesis; his strength lies especially in his character; he makes up for the aggressiveness of his energy by his generosity, and for his passionate nature by his nobility, his self-control, his greatness of soul; for this human type it is the act which is "real", for it is by action that things are determined, modified and ordered; without action there is neither virtue nor honour nor glory. Otherwise put, the *kshatriya* believes more in the efficacy of an act than in the fatefulness of a given situation: he despises the servitude of facts and only thinks of determining their order, of clarifying a chaos, of cutting Gordian knots. Thus just as for the *brahman* all is "changeless" and "unreal" except the Eternal and whatever is attached to It—truth, knowledge, contemplation, ritual, the Way—so also for the *kshatriya* all is uncertain and peripheric excepting the constants of his own *dharma*: action, honour, virtue, glory, nobility, on which all other values depend. This perspective can be transferred to the religious plane without altering its psychological quality in any essential respect.

For the *vaishya*—the merchant, the peasant, the artisan, the man that is to say, whose activity is directly bound up with material values, not only in fact and accidentally, but in virtue of his intimate nature—for the *vaishya*, it is riches, security, prosperity, “well-being”, which are “real”; other values are secondary for his instinctive life, he does not “believe” in them in his innermost heart; his imagination unfolds itself on the plane of economic stability, of the material perfection of work and the return it yields, and this, when transposed on to the religious plane, will become exclusively a perspective of accumulating merit in view of posthumous security. This mentality offers an external analogy with that of the *brahmanas* from the fact of its static and pacific character; but it is removed from the mentality of *brahmana* and *kshatriya* alike by reason of a certain “littleness” of both intelligence and will⁽¹⁾; the *vaishya* is endowed with ability, he also possesses common sense, but he is lacking in the specifically intellectual qualities as also in the chivalrous virtues, in “idealism” in the higher sense of the word. We wish to repeat that here we are speaking not of “classes” but

1. In the Nineteenth Century the bourgeois laity had for reasons of equilibrium to realize in their turn the qualities of the classes that had been eliminated; we are not referring here to the mere fact of belonging to the citizen class, which is unimportant in itself, but to the “bourgeois spirit”, which is quite a different thing. The scientism of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries proves, not indeed that “humanity” has “progressed”, but that the “intellectuality” of men of the “mercantile” type is hardly able to rise above the level of mere facts; the common illusion concerning a supposed possibility of rejoining the metaphysical realities by dint of scientific discoveries is quite characteristic of this heaviness of spirit and only goes to prove that “the rise of the *vaishyas* spells intellectual night” (Guenon). Besides, “civilization” minus any article or qualifying epithet, is a typically *vaishya* concept, and this explains on the one hand the hatred felt nowadays for anything supposed to partake of “fanaticism” and on the other hand it accounts for an element of pretentious kindness, which is a deadly feature of the systematic oppression dealt out by the civilization in question.

"castes", or, to be more precise, of "natural castes", since institutions as such, even though they may retrace nature, can never be quite proof against the imperfections and vicissitudes of all manifestation. One does not belong to such and such a natural caste because one exercises a certain profession or is the issue of certain parents, but one exercises such a profession—at least under normal conditions—because one belongs to such a caste and the latter is largely—but not absolutely—guaranteed by heredity; this guarantee is at least sufficient to render the Hindu system possible. That system has never been able to exclude exceptions, which as such "confirm the rule"; the fact that exceptions have even attained the largest possible number in this present time of over-population and of the "realisation of impossibles" could in any case not vitiate the principle of a hereditary hierarchy.

The "twiceborn" (*dwija*), namely the three castes we have been speaking of, might be described as a spirit endowed with a body, and the *shudra* who represents the fourth caste—as a body endowed with human consciousness; in fact, the *shudra* is the man who is only properly qualified for manual occupations of a more or less quantitative kind, and not for works that demand greater initiative and more complex aptitudes; for this human type, which is separated from the preceding types still more than the *vaishya* is separated from the noble castes, it is the bodily things that are "real"; it is eating and drinking which strictly speaking constitutes happiness for it, together with the psychological concomitances pertaining thereunto¹; in his innate perspective, his "heart", all

1. The meaning which the words "reality" and "realistic" have assumed for many of our contemporaries is extremely significant in its way: "reality" has become synonymous with humdrumness and triviality, therefore also with ugliness and brutality; in such a "realism" there is no longer any room for truth, nobility or beauty. that is to say for values that are not amenable to quantitative measurement.

that lies outside the realm of bodily satisfactions smacks of "luxury", not to say of "illusion", or in any case it seems like something situated alongside of what his imagination takes for reality, which is the satisfying of immediate vital needs and no more. It might however be objected that the knightly type is also an enjoyer, but that is really beside the point, since here the question above all is one of the psychological function of enjoyment, of its place in an assembly of compossibilities; the *kshattriya* readily turns poet or aesthete, but he lays very little stress upon matter as such. The central as well as elementary part that enjoyment plays in the innate perspective of the *shudra* explains the willingly careless, dissipated and "momentary" turn of mind of the latter, a characteristic in which he rejoins, by a curiously inverted analogy, the spiritual carefreeness of the man who is "beyond the castes" (*alivarnashrami*), the monk (*sannyasi*) who likewise lives "in the moment", not thinking of the morrow and wandering about without apparent object; but the *shudra* is too passive in the face of matter to be capable of governing himself, consequently he remains dependent upon a will other than his own; his virtue is fidelity, or a kind of massive rightness, doubtless somewhat dense, but yet simple and intelligible.

A confusion often arises between the qualities of *vaishyas* and *brahmanas* or *vice versa*, for the simple reason that both these castes are peaceable; similarly, it happens sometimes that *shudras* and *kshattriyas* are bracketed together because of the aspects of violence proper to these two castes; these errors are all the more harmful inasmuch as we are living in a civilization that is semi-*vaishya*, semi-*shudra*, the "valuations" of which facilitate confusions of this kind. In such a world, it is impossible to understand the *brahmana* without having previously understood

the *kshatriya*¹; unwarranted assimilations are only too easy, so that it is always incumbent upon one to distinguish sharply and on every plane between superior and inferior, conscious and unconscious, spiritual and material, qualitative and quantitative; failing which one can hardly avoid confusing the issue.

It now remains for us to consider the case of the men "without caste"; here as always it is the natural type, the basic tendency, that we have in mind and not exclusively the categories of the Hindu system as occurring in actual fact. We have seen that the *shudra* in his characteristic form is opposable, by his lack of real interest in whatever transcends bodily existence and by a resultant lack of constructive aptitudes, to the group of the three higher castes; in a similar way, the "outcaste" is opposable, by his chaotic character, to all the men of homogeneous character. The type *chandala*—the "untouchable"—is one tending to realize those psychological possibilities that other men have excluded, whence his proneness to transgression; he finds satisfaction in what the others reject. According

1. In the present state of Western mankind, and of Eastern in an increasing degree, when the mental tilt in favour of externalised activities has become, thanks to their modern upbringing, quasi-instinctive in most people, few are those who are still able to rise directly to an understanding of the essentially active character of pure contemplation or of the power that its practice automatically confers, a power that is effective in function of its very serenity. For most men, an intellectual bridge is required between the life of action, in the ordinary sense, and the life of Knowledge, and this will in most cases be found by way of appreciation of certain forms of action itself, those, namely, in which the contemplative influence has made itself most strongly felt, such as for example, the arts under their purest, that is to say their least "dynamic" forms: thus being led, as it were, to the brink, a man is then able to cross the intervening gap (which is in any case never an absolute one) separating the ideal of the *kshatriya*, the man of perfectly accomplished selfless action and that of the *brahmana*, the man who rests content in that knowledge which is for him, seed, tree and fruit, all three together.

to the Hindu conception the lowest of the "untouchables"—the *chandala* properly so-called—is the offspring of a *shudra* father and a *brahmani* mother; here the basic idea is that the maximum of "impurity"—that is to say of psychological dissonance due to congenital incompatibilities—will be obtained when a maximum of distance separates the castes of the parents; the child of *shudra* parentage is "pure" thanks to their mental homogeneity, but the child born of the mixture of a *shudra* and a noble woman is "impure" in the exact measure of the superiority of that women's caste over that of her husband. Besides, in Christian countries as pretty well everywhere else, an illegitimate child, "the fruit of sin", is practically regarded as "impure"; from the Hindu standpoint, which is centred in a kind of organic purity, this initial sin is hereditary in the same way as nobility of the sword with us, or "original sin" ¹.

1. "Illicit mingling of castes, marriages contrary to the rules, and the omission of prescribed rites, are at the origin of the impure classes. "*Manava Dharma Shashtra* (X 24.)" According to Sri Ramakrishna "the rules of caste efface themselves automatically for the man who has reached perfection and realized the unity of all things; but as long as this sublime experience has not been obtained, no one can avoid a feeling of superiority towards some and of inferiority towards others; and all must observe the distinctions of caste. If a man in this state of ignorance feigns perfection by trampling on caste distinctions and living without restraint he certainly is like an unripe fruit that has been caused to ripen artificially. Those who invoke God's Name become saints. Krishna Kishore was a saintly man of Ariadaha. One day he went on pilgrimage to Vrindavan. During his journey he became thirsty and seeing a man near a well he asked him to draw some water. The man excused himself saying that he belonged to a very low caste, being a cobbler, and was unworthy to offer water to a brahman. Krishna Kishore then said to him: purify yourself by uttering the Name of God! Say: "Shiva! Shiva!" The man obeyed; afterwards he offered him some water and this orthodox brahman drank it! How great was his faith!.....Chaitanya and Nityananda used to transmit the name of Hari (the initiation into ritual invocation, *Japa yoga*) to everyone, including pariahs, and they embraced them all. A brahman who is without this love is no longer a brahman; a pariah who possesses this love is no longer a pariah. By *bhakti* an untouchable becomes pure and is raised up" (Teaching of Ramakrishna, published by Jean Herbert). The

. All things considered, the pariah, whatever may be his ethnic origin and his cultural background, constitutes a definite type which normally is to be found dwelling at the margins of society where it exhausts those possibilities that no one else wishes to handle; if he happens to be talented he will readily display the characteristics of one who is ambiguous, out of true, sometimes also simian and promethean, and this makes him capable "of all and of nothing", if one might so put it; one often sees him as a chimney sweep, acrobat, comedian, executioner, without mentioning illicit occupations; in a word he shows a tendency either to exercise activities of a strange or sinister kind or else simply to neglect established rules, in which he resembles certain saints, but of course in virtue of an inverse analogy. As far as "impure" or "contemptible" professions are concerned, it might be thought rather hypocritical to abandon to certain men activities which one avoids for oneself and of which one feels, nevertheless, a certain need; but it must not be forgotten that society has a right to protect itself against tendencies that could be harmful to it and to neutralise these tendencies by putting them to use through the intermediary of men who in some measure are their embodiment; society—as far as it is a "totality"—enjoys "divine rights" which an individual, as such—inasmuch as he is a "part"—does not possess; the reverse also is true under some circumstances. An individual is able to abstain from condemnation; but society is obliged to resort to it.

above is an example of the particular virtue of *bhakti* about which we have spoken in our book *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Faber & Faber). If account be taken of the inevitable inequation between the principle of caste and its social crystallisation in actual practice, it will be readily understood that an individual brahman can be intrinsically heretical—such as Dayananda Saraswati or Ram Mohun Roy and that a pariah can be a saint through knowledge, such as Tiruvalluvar, who is venerated by brahmans as an *avatara* of Shiva; inferiority can arise in the framework of superiority and *vice versa*.

However, even unvarying situations can become attenuated with the passage of time: the pariah mass of India is benefiting under the cosmic law of compensation from the very fact of its number, and from the collective homogeneity resulting therefrom: number itself acts as an absorbent substance, for the mass as such has something of the levelling innocence of earth; just as, according to Moslem esoterism, the flames of hell will in the end be cooled off, God being "essentially," not "accidentally", good, so likewise the congenital transgression of the pariah, in short his "impurity", must become attenuated in the latter days, and even must in many cases be completely reabsorbed, without however for that reason abolishing heredity, of which the individual will still remain a link or a part.¹

For these individuals, the fact of being a pariah will be an aspect of *Karma*—a consequence of "anterior actions"—exactly as is a disease or any other kind of misfortune for a member of a higher caste. On the other hand, "untouchability"—rather like the state of widows, but at a lower level—has a certain religious

1. According to the *Manava-Dharma-Shastra* the man belonging to a vile class may be recognised by his actions: the absence of noble feelings, rudeness of speech, cruelty (malice) and a forgetfulness of duties denote down here the man who owes his birth to a mother deserving of contempt. These criteria obviously can no longer be applied outright to the mass of pariahs, any more than all the higher castes, on their side, possess the virtues appropriate to their respective *dharma*. It can be added that this aspect of the problem is independent of the question of temple entry; even while admitting that a certain social formalism may be suppressed in view of new cyclic conditions, which is incontestable; such an easing of external forms would remain independent of any question of knowing whether pariahs are to have access to brahmanical sanctuaries. A Hindu temple is something very different from a church or mosque; it is not the seat of an obligatory cult, a fact that seems to be symbolised by the absence of windows. The principle of ritual exclusion, with the unquestionable dogmatic rights that it implies, is moreover known to all religions; one need only recall the case of the Temple enclosure at Jerusalem and the iconostasis of Orthodox churches.

value for the pariahs themselves, such as explains the refusal of many of them to escape from their condition of inferiority by abandoning the Hindu world.²

Caste is the centre of gravity of the individual soul; the pure pariah type has no centre, he lives in the periphery and by inversion; if he tends towards transgression, this is because it lends to him in some degree the centre that he lacks and thus delivers him in illusory fashion from his own equivocal nature. The pariah's is a decentralised subjectivity, therefore centrifugal and without recognised limit; he flees the law, the norm, because this would lead him back to that centre which he avoids by natural instinct. The *Shudra* type is also "subjective", but this subjectivity is opaque and homogeneous, it is bound to the body, which is an objective reality; the *shudra* has the quality, as also the defect of being "solid". One could express the matter in the following way: the *brahmana* is "objective" and centred in "the spirit"; the *kshatthriya* tends towards "the spirit", but in a "subjective way"; the *vaishya* is "objective" on the plane of "matter"; as for the *shudra*, he is "subjective" on the same plane.

Consequently the three upper castes—the "twice born" of Hinduism—can be distinguished from the *shudras* either by "the spirit" or else by "objectivity"; the *shudra* alone represents both "matter" and "subjectivity" at the same time. The *vaishya* is a materialist like the *shudra*, but his is a materialism of the general interest; the *kshatthriya* is an "idealist" like the *brahmana*, but his is a more or less worldly and egocentric idealism.

The inferior caste not only lacks the mentality of the superior, but cannot even conceive it exactly; besides, few things are more painful than psychological

2. For example by becoming Muslims—Formerly also, pariahs used to throw themselves under the wheels of the car of *Jagannath* at Puri in order to be reborn in a superior state.

interpretations that lend to the superior man intentions he could not entertain under any circumstances and that merely reflect the small-mindedness of their authors, as can be observed *ad nauseam* in the case of "historical criticism" or in "the science of religions"; men whose souls are fragmentary and opaque would have it that they can inform us about the "psychology" of greatness and of the sacred.

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We have said that the system of castes rests upon the nature of things, that is to say upon certain natural properties of the human race and is a traditional application of these properties; now, as always happens in any similar case, the traditional system "creates"—or contributes to creating—those elements of which it is itself an application: the Hindu system is the result of intellectual or spiritual differences, and at the same time it creates types that are all the more strongly differentiated; whether this be an advantage or a disadvantage, or both at once, the fact exists and it is inevitable. The same applies to a traditional absence of castes: the latter perspective not only derives from the real indifferentiation of men but it also realizes it, that is to say, it eliminates in a certain sense those factors which, in the contrary perspective, give rise to the system of castes. In Islam, where there is no priestly caste—neither in a hereditary nor a vocational sense—every man has in him something of a priest and none is entirely "lay", nor "vile" either; to mention another example, it can be said that, if every Muslim is "something of a priest", every Redskin is "something of a prophet", at least under certain set conditions and by reason of the particular structure of this tradition, which distributes the prophetic quality throughout the collectivity, though without thereby doing away with the prophetic function properly so-called. If one were minded to reproach Hinduism with having "created" the pariah, one could just as well reproach the West

with "creating" sin, since the concept, here as elsewhere, contributes to the realization of the thing itself, in virtue of an inevitable accompaniment of any kind of formal crystallisation.

Howbeit, if Westerners find some difficulty in understanding the caste system, this is above all because they tend to underestimate the law of heredity and they do so for the simple reason that this law has become more or less inoperative in an environment as chaotic as the modern West, where pretty well everybody aspires to climb the social ladder—if indeed this can be said still to exist—and where hardly anyone follows his father's calling; one or two centuries of such conditions are enough to render heredity highly precarious and unstable, all the more so since formerly it was not turned to account through any system as vigorous as that of the Hindu castes; however, even where trades transmitted from father to son actually existed, heredity was practically abolished by the machines. To the above must be added, on the one hand, the elimination of the nobility, and on the other, the creation of new "elites": the most diverse and "opaque" elements have been turned into "intellectuals", with the result that hardly anyone is still to be found "in his normal place", as Guenon would have said; nor is there anything surprising in the fact that "metaphysical knowledge" is henceforth viewed, according to the perspective of *vaishyas* and *shudras*, a change that no claptrap of "culture" is able to conceal.

The problem of castes raises a supplementary question: how to define the position or quality of the modern industrial worker? We will answer in the first place that the "worker's world" is a quite artificial creation, due to the machines and to the popular diffusion of scientific information attaching to their use; otherwise put, the machine infallibly creates the artificial human type known as "proletarian", or rather it creates a "proletariat", since in

the latter there is question essentially of a quantitative collectivity and not of a natural "caste", not of one, that is to say, having its basis in such and such an individual nature. If it were possible to suppress machines and restore the ancient crafts with all their aspects of art and dignity, the "problem of the workers" would there and then cease to exist; this is true even in the case of purely servile functions and more or less quantitative occupations, for the simple reason that machines are inhuman and anti-spiritual in themselves. The machine kills not only the soul of the worker but the soul as such, therefore also the soul of the employer: the pair employer-worker is inseparable from mechanisation, since the crafts keep clear of this crude alternative thanks to their own human and spiritual quality. The mechanised universe means, after all, but the triumph of ironmongery, ponderous and shifty; it marks the victory of metal over wood, of matter over man, of cunning over intelligence;¹ expressions such as "mass", "block", "shock", which occur so commonly in the vocabulary of industrialised man, are altogether significant for a world which is much closer to an existence of insects than of humans.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that "the workers' world", with its psychology compounded of "machine-cum-scientism" and materialism, is especially impermeable by spiritual realities, since it presupposes a "surrounding reality" of a quite meretricious kind: it requires machinery, therefore metal, noise, hidden and treacherous forces, a nightmare environment, unintelligible comings and goings, in a word, an insect-like existence carried on in the midst of ugliness and triviality; within such a world,

1. We have read somewhere that only the advances in technology are able to explain the novel and catastrophic character of the first World War, and this is a just remark. Here it is the machines that have created history, just as they are elsewhere creating men, ideas, an entire world.

or rather such a "stage setting", spiritual reality will seem like an obvious illusion and a condemnable luxury. In a traditional environment of whatever kind, on the other hand, it is the industrial "problematicism" which would cease to have any persuasive force: in order to render it convincing one must therefore begin by creating a stage-world corresponding to it, in which the very forms are suggestive of the absence of God; Heaven must be made to seem improbable, mention of God must take on a false sound¹. When the worker says that he has "no time for praying", he is not so far wrong, for he is expressing thereby all that his own condition contains of the inhuman, or, let us say, of the "subhuman"; the ancient crafts, on the other hand, were eminently intelligible and they did not deprive a man of his human quality which by definition implies the faculty of thinking about God. Some will doubtless object that industry is "a fact" and must be accepted as such, as if the state of fact took precedence over truth; many people readily take for "courage of one's opinions" and "realism" that which is their exact opposite; that is to say, because one is unable to prevent a certain calamity one labels it a "benefit" and makes a virtue of one's inability to escape it. Error becomes truth simply by "existing", a belief that agrees only too well with the "dynamism" and the "existentialism" of the

1. The great error of those who wish to lead back the industrial masses to the fold of the Church is their readiness to confirm the worker in his "dehumanisation" by accepting the mechanised universe as "a world" that is real and legitimate, and in thinking that they even are called upon to "love that world for its own sake." Translating the Gospel into slang or caricaturing the Holy Family in the guise of proletarians is to mock the workers no less than religion; it is, in any case, the basest kind of demagoguery or let us call it a display of weakness, for all these attempts betray the inferiority complex of the "intellectuals" when in the presence of that kind of "brutal realism" that characterises the industrialised worker; this "realism" becomes ever easier in proportion to the limitation and grossness of its world, therefore also to the unreality of that world.

industrialised mentality ; all that exists thanks to the blindness of men is simply called "our times", in the tone of voice of a "categorical imperative". It is nevertheless evident, for any one who chooses to think, that the impossibility of escaping a certain evil does not prevent that evil from being what it is ; in order to find a remedy, in any such case, the evil must be viewed independently of one's chances of escaping it or one's wishes not to perceive it, for no good can ever arise in opposition to truth. It is a common error to think that the establishing of a fact is dependent upon a knowledge of its causes or of means to remedy it, as the case may be, as if man had no right to see things he is able neither to explain nor modify ; people refer to the pointing out of an evil as "barren criticism" and forget that the first step towards an eventual cure must be a correct diagnosis of the disease—this want of logic is typical of what is known as the "positive", as well as the "existentialist" mentality of our time. However, every situation provides a possibility, if not of an objective solution, at least of a subjective valuation, a liberation by the spirit ; whoever fathoms the real nature of industrialism will escape by that very fact from the psychological servitude of the machine, which is already a great gain. We say this without any kind of "optimism" and without losing sight of the fact that the present-day world is a "necessary evil" of which the metaphysical root, in the final analysis, lies in the infinity of divine possibility.

There is however another objection to be reckoned with : some will say that machines of some kind have always existed and that those of the Nineteenth Century were simply more perfect than the others, but this argument contains a radical and a most characteristic error, one that is continually encouraged under various forms : it arises from a lack of a "sense of dimensions", or otherwise expressed, the error springs from an inability to distinguish between

qualitative or "eminent" differences and those which are quantitative or accidental. An ancient loom, for instance, were it even the most perfect possible is a kind of revelation and a symbol which by its intelligibility allows the soul to "breathe", whereas the machine is properly "suffocating"; the birth of a handloom goes with spiritual life—a fact which is also apparent from its aesthetic quality—while the modern machine on the contrary presupposes a mental climate and a labour of research that are incompatible with spirituality, even without mentioning its aspects of a gigantic arthropod or a magic box, which are equally valuable as criteria. A saint could construct or improve a watermill or windmill, but no saint is able to invent a machine, precisely because that kind of technological progress implies a mentality alien to spirituality, a criterion which appears with brutal evidence, as we have said, in the very forms of mechanical constructions.¹

One striking characteristic of machines is that they devour materials—often of a tellurian or darksome character—instead of being set in motion by man alone or by some natural force like water or wind; in order to keep them "alive" one is compelled to plunder the earth and this is not the least aspect of their disintegrating function. A man must be very blind not to see that neither speed nor over-production are benefits, without mentioning the proletarianisation of

1. The attempts which, in antiquity and the Middle Ages, came nearest to mechanical constructions were those that served for people's entertainment, being regarded as merely curious and therefore as things that became legitimate by reason of their exceptional character. The ancients were not like feckless children who touch everything within reach, but on the contrary they were more like men of ripe judgment who avoid exploring certain orders of possibilities because they can in a certain sense foresee their disastrous consequences.

the people and the hideous disfiguring of the world¹; but the basic argument nevertheless remains the one mentioned first of all, namely that such technique cannot take birth except in a godless world—a world in which cunning has replaced intelligence and contemplation.

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After this digression, let us take up once again our fundamental theme: it is easy to understand how, for an Occidental, the equality of men before God springs from the nature of things, all the more so since the monotheistic religions—and likewise Buddhism—neutralise by their very structure the drawbacks that can result from human inequalities; the fact that they accept these on the “lay” or “worldly” plane and that they create on the other hand religious hierarchies does not in any way impair their basic perspective. Some may ask why, given that such a “levelling” is spiritually possible, Hinduism could not take up a similar standpoint and give up the castes; now Hinduism as such, that is to say as a totality, has neither the power nor the right to do so, since it goes without saying that if a sacred institution exists, this is because it is metaphysically possible and therefore necessary, which means, that it offers advantages that could not be realized in another way².

1. It is easy to guess that some would deny us the moral right to make use of modern inventions, as if the economic structure and the rhythm of our time would allow one to avoid their use or as if it were useful for one to escape it when no one else is able to do so; but in any case, such an argument would only be valid if those who use it were prepared to restore to us at the same time all those values that the modern world has destroyed.

2. The caste system moreover proves its legitimacy by its results: “We do not think—writes a missionary on the subject of the brahmans—that there is to be found in the world an aristocratic home, even a royal family, that has defended itself so pitilessly against every contagion, every base marriage, every taint whether physical or moral. That is why, speaking personally, we cannot conceal the fact that our contact with this splendid caste has left us truly dazzled and has affected us, in the bottom of our heart, with a profound sympathy. To the dignity of plastic beauty the Brahman

. In fact, the pure and direct character of the Vedantist metaphysic would be inconceivable without the caste system; in India the most transcendent intellectuality enjoys a practically total freedom, whereas that same intellectuality has to accommodate itself, in other traditions, to an esoterism, that is more or less sybilline or even "tortuous" in its formulations, as well as to certain sentimental constraints; this is the price paid for the simplification of the social framework. In the Semitic religions, esoterism is closely bound up with exoterism and *vice versa*; the absence of castes imposes a certain mental uniformity which does not offer less disadvantages, from the point of view of pure metaphysic, than does the caste system from the point of view of the imponderables of human nature; the exoterism readily trespasses upon the field of esoterism, with a consequent

plainly unites that of intelligence. Especially he is endowed, in an extraordinary degree, with capacity for the abstract sciences, philosophy and above all mathematics. A man who, in this subject, is certainly one of the most celebrated in Southern India and a member of the higher council of Professors of Madras University, the Revd. Father Honore, has declared to us that the average ability of countless brahman pupils, whose instructor he has been during a half century of teaching, greatly exceeded not only the average but even the higher run of our students in the universities of Europe". (Pierre Llande : *L'Inde Sacree*). "There is no doubt that caste (here it is a case of sub-castes of *vaishyas* and *shudras*) offers many advantages to its members. It makes their work as light, easy, pleasant and honourable as possible, cuts out competition properly so called, distributes a given volume of work among the largest possible number of available persons, looks after them in case of unemployment and defends their interests by the most various means. On the other hand the fact that a profession is transmitted from father to son ensures, in many respects, the quality of the work; through heredity, a man reaches an almost organic qualification for a particular activity, in a manner that would otherwise hardly be realizable; at the same time technical secrets are transmitted which allow the craftsmen to produce masterpieces by the use of the most primitive means. Lastly, the caste system has largely contributed to the stabilisation of Hindu society and the preserving of its civilization"(Helmuth von Glasenapp : *Der Hinduismus*).

oscillation between these two planes, to which a man like Omar Khayyam, himself an orthodox Sufi, has replied by means of paradox and irony.¹

Where there exists a marked exoterism, the esoterism can hardly avoid walking on exoteric "stilts", although in reality it represents the essence of truth which transcends forms and incidentally shatters them: this is well shown by a case like that of El-Hallaj, a "lover" of God whom the Hindus certainly would never have condemned. It must not be forgotten that a collectivity represents a principle of density and complication; it readily lends an absolute character to facts, and it is this tendency that religious dogmatism *a priori* takes into account. If esoterism is able to infuse in the mass something of its own mystery and graces, the mass will lend to it in return—according to the measure that the esoterism gives itself to that mass—its own tendencies both of "coagulation" and "dissipation", whence come doctrinal simplifications and a need for external activities that stand at the antipodes of intellection and contemplation.

Let us however return to the positive aspects of the Muslim "levelling": Islam not only neutralised differences of caste but it also did away with racial oppositions; perhaps no other civilization has mixed the races as much as Islam: the cross-breed generally speaking appears in Islam as a perfectly "pure" and honourable element, and not as the pariah which he practically has become among peoples of Christian origin: one could say that for the Muslim the turban or fez is what a white skin is for the European. In the eyes of Islam, determinations of nature are

1. If religious hypocrisy is an inevitable happening, its contrary must also be possible, and hypocrisy calls it forth, moreover; that is to say, a wisdom and a virtue which hides under the appearances of scandal. Among the *Malamatayah*—the "men of blame"—an attitude of this kind even forms part of their method.

accidental ; slavery is an accident, it has therefore no relation to any caste system ; the original humanity was without castes or races ; this is what Islam wishes to restore, in conformity with the conditions of our millenium.¹

The case of Christianity and Buddhism is an analogous one : every man of sound mind can become a priest or monk ; the clergy corresponds to a vocational caste, not a hereditary one as with the nobility ; this absence of hereditary character is compensated for by celibacy. We have already let it be seen that under these conditions Hinduism would admit in principle that a non-brahman could become brahman in virtue of his individual aptitude and his vocation—for then the risk of negative atavisms would be kept at bay, and in fact something of the sort exists in the state of *ativarnashrami*, situated as it is beyond the castes, but on condition of the person concerned withdrawing himself from the living body of society ; the fact that there are some orders of *sannyasis* who only admit brahmans in no wise hinders a man from becoming a *sannyasi* outside those orders. Let it also be observed that *avatars* of Vishnu, the great divine incarnations of Hinduism, were *kshatriyas* and not *brahmanas*, although they possessed the brahmanical nature by definition and in the highest degree ; therein can be seen a manifestation of universality as well as a

1. The Prophet, after his victorious entry into Mecca, made various declarations, of which this is one : " God has removed from you the pride of paganism and the pride of ancestry ; you all descend from Adam and Adam was dust. God says : Oh men, We have created you from a single man and a single woman, and we have divided you into peoples and tribes in order that you might know yourselves ; he is the most honoured of God who fears God the most." The Khalif Ali expresses it thus : " Nobility derives from high qualities and not from the mouldering bones of ancestors." That which Islam wants to restore is, to be more precise, the religion of Abraham, primordial form of the Semitic current and for that reason an image of the primordial tradition in its absolute sense, the tradition of the " golden age".

compensation, since God, in His direct and flashing manifestations cannot be expected to conform to any pre-existing framework, were it even a cosmic law; such exceptions are a requirement of His own infinitude.

In order to forestall any misinterpretation, it is important to note here that the absence of castes properly so-called in Islam, and even in the greater number of other non-Hindu traditions, has nothing to do with an attitude of "humanitarianism", in the current sense of the word, for the simple reason that the point of view of tradition is that of a global interest—and not of the exclusive pleasure of human beings; it has no use for a pseudo-charity which saves bodies and kills souls.¹ Tradition is centred

1. "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul" says the Gospel, and also "what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The characteristic humanitarianism, which is specifically modern—we certainly have no wish to criticise genuine charity, one that springs from a total and not a fragmentary vision of man and the world-humanitarianism, as we were saying, is founded after all upon the error according to which "the totality of all living beings is the Personal God provided I can adore and serve the only God that exists, the sum total of all souls." (Vivekananda). This philosophy is false twice over, firstly because it denies God by altering the notion of God in a decisive manner, and secondly because it deifies the world and thus restricts charity to the most external sphere; now it is not possible to see God in one's neighbours if one starts off by reducing the Divine to the human. Nothing then remains but the illusion of "doing good", of being indispensable, coupled with contempt for those who "do nothing," even if they be saints whose very presence keeps the world together. "Reading the Vedanta—again says Vivekananda—and the practice of meditation, leave them alone, postpone them to a future life. Let today's body be dedicated to the service of others. What importance is it for the world that you and I should attain deliverance? We have to drag the whole universe with us, to deliverance Myself realized in every being that breathes and every atom of the universe!" And again "If you seek your own salvation, you will go to hell. It is the salvation of others one must seek." It is difficult to imagine a more intrinsically absurd form of sentimentalism.

upon that which gives a meaning to life, and not on an immediate "welfare", a partial and ephemeral welfare, conceived as an end in itself; it does not deny—the legitimacy—relative and conditional—of welfare, but subordinates all values to the final ends of man¹. Unfortunately spiritual welfare is incompatible, for the majority of men, with a too absolute welfare upon this earth; human nature requires "trials" as much as "consolations." A given individual, whether he be rich or poor, can be sober and detached by his own will, but a collectivity is not an individual and is not endowed with but a single will; it has something of the nature of an avalanche held in check and it can only preserve its balance with the help of restrictions; in fact the hereditary virtues that may happen to strike us in the case of a given ethnical group are kept up, thanks to a continual struggle, on whatever plane this may be carried on; after all, the struggle itself forms part of happiness, provided it keeps close to nature, which is maternal, and does not become abstract and perfidious. On the other hand, let us never forget that "prosperity" is something relative by definition; when one takes up an exclusively material standpoint, the normal balance between spirit and body is upset and appetites are unchained which carry in themselves no limiting

1. Of Christians who believe in purgatory and hell the least one can say is that it is illogical of them to regard as "barbarous" such sacrificial customs as the voluntary cremation of widows that took place formerly in India, since the principle is the same in both cases: the widow who accepted to follow her defunct husband on to the funeral pyre passed through a "purgatory", and, as a result, she was venerated as a saint after her death; a similar case is that of Buddhist monks who had themselves burned while chanting *Suttas*, and to whom prayers were subsequently addressed. There is nothing essential, of course, about these cases; but let no one pretend to understand or even represent the Hindu tradition if he rejects these sacrificial customs or other practices of the opposite kind, those of the "extreme" forms of Tantrism for example; in any case, the decline of Hinduism is not to be found in tradition, but in the intellectual impotence of its would-be "reformers".

principle. This aspect of human nature is what humanitarians, in the usual sense of the word, deny or studiously ignore; they believe man to be good in himself, good therefore apart from God and they are ready, in a most arbitrary way to lay his faults at the door of unfavourable material conditions, as if experience did not prove not only that human malice need not depend upon any external factor but also that such malice often develops in a state of "prosperity" and in the absence of elementary worries; the insanities of bourgeois "culture" illustrate this to the point of repletion. For the religions the "economic" norm is expressly the state of poverty of which the Founders themselves have moreover given the example—here it is a question of a poverty that keeps close to nature, and not an indigence that has become unintelligible and hideous under the servitude of an artificial and irreligious world—while riches are tolerated, because they represent a natural right and do not prevent either detachment or sobriety—no one moreover is compelled to be a saint—but riches are not set up as an ideal as is practically the case in the modern world. A mechanised and so-called scientific "standard of living" has been invented which its votaries would fain impose on all peoples, and especially upon those whom they have classed as "backward", whether these be Hindus or Hottentots; for the progressivists, happiness is identified with a host of complications both noisy and ponderous, apt to crush out of existence many elements of beauty and therefore of welfare; and in wishing to abolish such and such "fanaticisms" and "horrors", people forget that there are also to be found atrocities on the spiritual plane, and that the so-called humanitarian civilization of the moderns is filled with them.

Some will doubtless say that humanitarianism, far from being materialistic by definition, aims at reforming human nature by educational and legislative means; now it is contradictory to seek reform of the

human outside the divine, the latter being the essence of the former; such an attempt can but end in provoking miseries far worse than those one was trying to escape from. Philosophical humanitarianism undervalues man's immortal soul from the very fact that it overvalues the human animal; it almost is compelled to blacken the saints in order the better to be able to whitewash the criminals, for the one seems unable to go without the other; one result is the oppressing of those of contemplative bent from their most tender years: in the name of humane equalitarianism, vocations are blurred and geniuses are put out of gear by the school in particular and by official worldliness in general; every spiritual element is banned from professional and public life,¹ which amounts to removing from life a great part of its content and condemning religion to a slow death. The modern levelling, "democratic" if you will, is at the antipodes of the theocratic equality of the monotheistic religions, for it is founded, not upon man's theomorphism, but upon his animality and his rebellion.

Besides, the thesis of an indefinite progress comes up against the following contradiction: if man has been able to dwell for thousands of years under the domination of errors and stupidities—supposing the traditions to have been like that, in which case error and stupidity would be well nigh immeasurable—the immensity of this deception would be incompatible with the intelligence with which man as such is credited and with which one is compelled to credit him; otherwise put, if man is sufficiently intelligent to arrive at the "progress" that our period embodies—assuming for the sake of argument that belief in it

1. In revenge and by compensation, professional life is taking on an ever more "religious" appearance, in the sense that it is claiming man in his entirety—his soul as well as his time—as if the sufficient cause for the human state were not immortality, but such and such an economic undertaking.

rests on some foundation—then man must have been *from the outset* too intelligent to have fallen dupe, during thousands of years, to errors as ridiculous as those attributed to him by the modern progressivism; but if man is stupid enough to have believed such nonsense for so long, then he must be too stupid to come out of that state. Or again: if the man of the present day had at last arrived at the truth, they ought to be proportionately superior to the men of olden times, and this proportion would be practically absolute; now the least that can be said is that ancient man—mediaeval or antique—was neither less intelligent nor less virtuous than modern man, indeed far from it. The ideology of progress is one of those absurdities which strike one as much by the want of imagination they display as by absence of a sense of proportion; this ideology, moreover, is essentially a *vaishya's* illusion, rather like "culture", which amounts to nothing more than an "intellectuality" minus intelligence.

Let us however return to the question of castes: the absence of castes in an external sense—for natural castes could only be done away within sainthood, at least in certain respects—requires conditions calculated to neutralise the possible disadvantages of this lack of social differentiation; it requires for instance a code of manners that will safeguard everyone's spiritual liberty; by which we mean, not licence for error, which obviously is devoid of spiritual character, but liberty for a life in God. Such a code of manners is the very negation of all equalitarian levelling, since it is concerned with that which is highest in us: men are enjoined to dignity. They should treat each other as virtual saints; to bow to one's neighbour is to see God everywhere, it is opening oneself to God. The contrary attitude is "camaraderie" which, for its part, denies to one's neighbour all mystery and even all right to mystery: it is placing oneself at the level of human animality

and reducing one's neighbour to the same level, forcing him into a suffocating and inhuman platitude. Social indifferentiation can only exist on a religious basis: it can only operate from above, first by attaching man to God and then by recognising God in man. In a civilisation like Islam there are no "social strata", strictly speaking; as the rules of decent conduct form part of religion, it is enough to be pious in order to know those rules, so that a poor man will feel at ease among the rich, all the more so as religion is "on his side", poverty viewed as a state being a perfection; likewise a rich man will not be shocked, among the poor, by their lack of education or "culture", for there is no culture apart from tradition, and its point of view is in any case never a quantitative one. Otherwise expressed, the poor man can be "aristocratic" under his rags, whereas in the West it is the civilization itself which prevents this; it is true that even in Europe one can find aristocratic peasants, for instance in some of the Mediterranean countries, but they make an impression of survivals from another age;¹ the modern levelling everywhere destroys the beauties of religious equality, for, being its caricature, it is incompatible with it.

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Caste, as we understand it, has two essential aspects, namely that of a "degree" and that of a "mode" of intelligence, a distinction which is due,

1 The psychological and indirectly spiritual quality of the men of "the earth" or of nature is especially apparent in their music. In Europe, forms of folk music that are most remarkable for their power and depth probably are those of Spain and Russia, without forgetting some mediaeval survivals in other lands, for example in Auvergne, where the "bourree" has kept all the flavour of the Middle Ages; mention should also be made of the bagpipes, archaic instruments endowed with a strangely "african" or "asiatic" tone quality. In the greater part of Europe the Nineteenth Century was fatal for music, as it was for popular art in general: the accordion, that diabolically vulgar "musical machine" seems to have been expressly invented in order to destroy all that the popular soul contained of originality, nobility and depth.

not to the essence of the intellect itself, but to accidents of its manifestation. Intelligence can be contemplative or enquiring, intuitive or discursive, direct or indirect; it can simply be inventive or constructive, or even it can be reduced to an elementary good sense; in each of these modes there are degrees, so that one man can be more "intelligent" than another while remaining inferior to him in respect of mode. In other words, intelligence can be centred upon the intellect, which is transcendent and infallible in its essence, or upon reason, which has no direct perception of transcendent realities and therefore is unable to guard against the intrusion of a passionate element into thought; reason, on its side, can be determined in greater or lesser measure by the intellect, but it can also confine itself to the things of practical life, or even to its most immediate and rudimentary aspects. Now the system of castes, as we have shown, derives essentially from a perspective of intelligence, therefore of intellectuality and metaphysical knowledge, hence the spirit of exclusiveness and purity which is so characteristic of the Hindu tradition.

Equality—or rather absence of differentiation—as realised by Buddhism, Islam and other traditions, refers to the pole of "existence" rather than the pole of "intelligence": existence, the being of things, neutralises and unites, whereas intelligence for its part distinguishes and separates; existence is by its very nature (*ex-stare*) a "coming out" from Unity, it therefore constitutes the plane of separation, whereas intelligence, being Unity by its own intrinsic nature, is the ray leading back to the Principle; existence and intelligence both unite and divide, but each does so under a different relationship, so that intelligence divides where existence unites, and *vice versa*. It would be possible to express oneself in another way; for Buddhism—which does not expressly "deny" the castes, but rather "ignores" them—all men are "one",

firstly in suffering and secondly in the way of Deliverance; for Christianity, all are "one", firstly in original sin and secondly in baptism, pledge of Redemption; for Islam all are "one", firstly because created from dust and secondly in the unitary faith; but for Hinduism which starts out from Knowledge and not from man, it is Knowledge above all which is "one" and men are diverse by their degrees of participation in that Knowledge, therefore also by their degrees of ignorance; it can be said that they are "one" in Knowledge, but the latter is not accessible, in its integral purity, except to an elite, hence the exclusiveness of the *brahmanas*.

The individual expression of intelligence is discernment; the individual expression of existence is the will. The perspective that gives birth to the castes, as we have seen is founded upon the intellectual aspect of man; for that perspective, man is intelligence, discernment; contrariwise, the perspective of the absence of social differentiation—referring as it does to the pole of "existence"—starts out from the idea that man is will, and within that will, it will distinguish a spiritual tendency and a worldly tendency, just as the perspective of the intellect and of the castes distinguishes the various degrees of intelligence or ignorance. This moreover allows one to understand why *bhakti* practically ignores caste and is able to allow the initiation even of outcastes: this is because *bhakti a priori* sees in man will, love, and not intelligence, intellection; consequently there is, side by side with the castes founded on "knowing", another hierarchy founded on "willing", so that the human categories are ever crossing one another like the threads of a tissue, though even so a spiritual "willing" is much more frequently to be met with where there is also a "knowing".

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All the above considerations cause one to think of the disappointment felt by some when they see the

ease with which traditions thousands of years old collapse in spite of the contemplative mentality of the peoples concerned, a mentality which was believed to provide certain safeguards. Two things must however not be forgotten: firstly, that there do not exist only contemplative Orientals and "activist" Westerners but also, whatever may be the traditional surroundings, there exist "spiritual" men and "worldly" men; secondly, one has to remember that in every civilization only a minority participates consciously and actively in the spirit of the tradition, while the remainder more or less "lie fallow", that is to say they are ready to receive any influences that happen to come their way. One knows how easily many Hindus, Malays and Chinese came to accept a spiritual form as alien to them as was Islam, a fact which proves a certain detachment in relation to the native traditions: if to this detachment—or to this passivity as the case may be—there be joined a materialistic and "worldly" spirit—and God knows that Orientals can also behave as "practical materialists" on occasion—there is then no reason to wonder at the abandoning of traditions by such people and at their adhesion to materialistic ideologies. "Worldliness" in the widest sense of the word, that is to say the love of pleasures and the craving for gain, in short, the over-valuing of the things of this world, has always been like an open door leading towards error; intellectual capacity is far from constituting an absolute criterion or an absolute protection. It must be added that the spiritual minority, participating consciously and "actively" in the tradition, is to be met with in all strata of society, which amounts to saying, conversely, that there are also to be found "passive-minded", "unconscious" and "worldly" people everywhere.

In an analogous order of ideas we wish to make the following observation: whatever may be the deficiencies of modern man, it nevertheless cannot be said that he is endowed with no superiority of any

kind, be it in a virtual or conditional sense, over "ancient" man, a statement that can perhaps be made plainer in the following manner: supposing an Occidental of our own time were to recognise all the errors which surround him and were able to go back to the Middle Ages or live in any integrally traditional world one cares to name, adopting its ways of thinking and acting, that person would, in spite of all, never become an entirely mediaeval person; his spirit would bear the trace of experiences unknown to other than modern men. In particular we are thinking here of a critical sense that can only develop in the face of great obstacles, and which is unknown in a traditional world inasmuch as certain kinds of obstacles never manifest themselves there; there are some functions of intelligence which can hardly be deployed except by way of struggle and disappointment. In the traditional worlds there is to be found a certain tendency towards pious overstatement with its attendant illogicalities—and likewise certain all too easy prejudices are unavoidable, which can be explained precisely by the too "compact" character of ideas and tastes; otherwise put, there are some spheres in which the men of old have never suffered and they never even suspected that certain things might one day be called in question. Man is so constituted that he is never fully actualised, in the measure of his possibilities, except thanks to constraints, otherwise he would be a perfect being; where there is no bridle, there will be exaggeration and unconsciousness. If what we have just said is inapplicable to the vessels of election of the ancient wisdoms, it nevertheless applies to the average, which is bound to leave its mark upon the whole civilization.

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Psychologically speaking, a natural caste is a cosmos; men live in different "worlds", according to the "reality" on which they are centred; it is impossible for the inferior truly to understand the

superior, for he who truly understands is that which he understands. On the other hand, it can be said that all these human categories are again to be found, were it but in an indirect and symbolical sense, not merely within each of the aforementioned categories but also within every man; there is likewise a certain analogy between castes and ages, in the sense that the inferior types are recognisable in certain aspects of childhood, while the passionate and active type will be represented by the adult, and the contemplative and serene type by the aged; it is true that the process often is the opposite where a man of coarse type is concerned, who will tend to keep, after his youthful illusions have passed away, only his materialism and who moreover will only too readily equate those illusions with the modicum of nobility that youth had once lent him. Let us however, not forget that each one of the fundamental types is possessed of virtues that characterise it, so that the non-brahmanical types are not to be regarded in a purely privative sense: the *kshatriya* has nobility and energy, the *vaishya* honesty and efficiency, and the *shudra* fidelity and diligence; the contemplative spirit and detachment of the brahmanical type contains all these qualities eminently.

The principle of caste is reflected not only in the ages of man, but also, in a different way, in the sexes; woman is opposable to man, in a certain sense, as the chivalrous type is opposable to the sacerdotal, or again, under another relationship, as the "practical" type is opposable to the "idealist", if one may put it so. But just as the individual is not absolutely bound by caste, he is not bound in an absolute way by sex either; the metaphysical, cosmological, psychological and physiological subordination of woman is plain enough, yet woman nevertheless is the equal of man from the point of view of human condition and therefore also of immortality; she is his equal in respect of holiness, but not in respect of spiritual

functions : no man can be more holy than the Blessed Virgin, and yet, the least of priests can read the Mass or preach in public where she was unable to do so. On the other hand, woman assumes, in the face of man, an aspect of Divinity : her nobility, compounded of beauty and virtue, is for the man as a revelation of his own essence, therefore of what he "wishes to be" because he "is" that thing.

Lastly we would like to mention a certain relationship between the actualisation of the castes and sedentarism: it is an undeniable fact that the inferior types are less common among warrior nomads than among sedentary peoples ; an adventurous and heroic nomadism brings it about that qualitative differences are as it were submerged in a kind of generalised nobility ; the materialist servile type is "kept in abeyance" ; by compensation, the priestly type does not become completely separated from the chivalrous type. According to the conception of these peoples, human quality—"nobility"—is best maintained by the combative mode of life : no virtue, they say, without a virile, and therefore perilous activity ; man becomes vile when he ceases to look suffering and death in the face ; it is impassibility which makes a man ; it is the event, or adventure if one prefers it, which is the making of life. This perspective explains the deep love of peoples like the Beduins, Tuaregs, Redskins and Mongols for their own ancestral nomadism or semi-nomadism, and also it explains their contempt for the sedentary peoples, especially the town dwellers ; in point of fact, the deepest evils under which humanity is labouring came out of the great urban agglomerations, never out of virgin nature.¹

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1. Among the Balinese, a man of higher caste can marry a woman of lower caste, but a man of lower caste cannot enter into wedlock with a woman of higher caste ; this slight easing of the Hindu system can be explained by qualitative facts analogous to nomadism, namely insular isolation and the necessarily restricted number of inhabitants ; also the Balinese show a proud and independent character that brings them close to the nomads.

In the cosmos, all things show at the same time an aspect of simplicity and an aspect of complexity, and in every sphere there is room for perspectives referring to one or other of these aspects; synthesis and analysis alike are in the nature of things, and this is true of human societies as of other orders; it is therefore impossible that castes should be found nowhere or that there should be nowhere without them. Hinduism, strictly speaking, possesses no "dogmas", in the sense that in it every concept may be denied, on condition that the argument used is intrinsically true; but this absence of dogmas properly so-called, that is to say "irremovable" ones, at the same time hinders social unification. That which permits this to take place, for instance in the monotheistic religions, is in fact the presence of dogma which fulfils the function of a transcendent knowledge, accessible to all; Knowledge as such is inaccessible to the majority, but it imposes itself on all men under the form of faith, so that the "believer" is something like a "virtual" or "symbolical" *brahmana*. The exclusiveness of the brahman versus other castes is repeated *mutatis mutandis*, in the exclusiveness of the "believer" versus "unbelievers"; in both cases it is "Knowledge" which excludes, whether it be a matter of hereditary aptitude for Knowledge or the fact of a symbolical and virtual Knowledge, that is to say a religious belief. But in faith revealed, as in the institution of caste, this exclusion—which is conditional and "offensive" in the first case and unconditional and "defensive" in the second—can only be "formal", not "essential", for every saint is a "believer" whatever may be his religion, or a "brahman", whatever may be his caste.

Caste, in its spiritual sense, is the "law" (*dharma*) governing such and such a category of men in agreement with their qualifications; it is in this sense—but in this sense only—that the *Bhagavad-Gita* has said: "Better for each one his proper law of action, even

if it be imperfect, than the law of another, even well applied. Better it is to perish in one's own law; it is perilous to follow the law of another." (III.35).¹ And similarly the *Manava Dharma Shastra*: "It is better to carry out one's proper functions in a defective manner than to fulfil those of another perfectly; for he who lives while accomplishing the duties of another caste forthwith loses his own" (X.97).

1. The *Bhagavad Gita* certainly does not mean to suggest that every individual must follow, against tradition, his personal opinions and tastes, otherwise Hinduism, which is a tradition, would long since have ceased to exist.

