

## INDIA'S BONDS. I. IDOLATRY

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India has three hundred millions of people, but she has three hundred and thirty million gods; gods of clay, wood, and stone; gods of brass, silver, and gold. It is true that many Hindus see beyond the image of brass or stone some personality of which it is only a representation; but the large majority of worshippers in India as they bow before their idols, believe that they have the very god himself before them.

This is seen in the superstitious reverence they pay to these idols. If I inadvertently place my leather-shod foot upon the platform of the god, there is a howl of indignation from the horrified worshippers that the god is being defiled. A temple near to Mhow was in a state of decay, and it was seen to be about to fall. With great ceremony and much muttering of *mantraes* the threatened idol was carefully removed, none, however, but holy Brahmin hands being allowed to touch it.

A missionary after a long discussion with the people of a certain village, persuaded them to permit him to have a tussle with the god. He picked it up and to their astonishment threw it down the well, without himself suffering any bodily injury. What was his astonishment, however, a few days later to find the same idol restored to his former pedestal and seemingly none the worse of his ducking. The villagers had fished him out, and spite of his undignified downfall, had set him up again as their preserver and saviour.

But to those who do see beyond the piece of brass or stone, what is the character of the personality which the image represents? Hindu worshippers may be roughly classed under two cults:—Vishnuvites and Sivites. As a representative of the objects of worship of the former class is *Krishna* one of the *avatars* or incarnations of Vishnu. No god is more popular or more widely worshipped throughout India.

One image of this god represents him in the act of stealing, another in the company of a woman *Radha*, the wife of another man. His story as told in the *Puranas*

*sagar* or "Sea of love" is a tale of gross licentiousness. During the time of *Krishna's* annual festival, most immoral practices are resorted to. Women are known to leave their own husbands and live with other men, excusing themselves on the plea that their god did it.

*Mahadev*, the most popular god of the other sect or *Sivites*, is most commonly represented by the *linga*, an image whose significance is too gross and vile to be described, an image that can only suggest evil to the thoughts of the worshipper. And yet this image is more frequently met with than any other in Central India.

The story of this god also is a vile parody on the name of god; he was an adulterer and the associate of prostitutes. I have seen things done in connection with his worship that would almost pass the conception of human imagination to believe. And as for the licentious and grossly immoral rites of the *Sakti* or left hand worshippers of this sect, it is impossible for me to even hint at them. As a fit companion for this god is *Kali*, his spouse, whose insatiable appetite is fed annually by seas of blood.

The number of the gods of India has swelled to three hundred and thirty million, for the Pantheistic principles of the Brahmin have allowed him to absorb all the gods and devils of every conquered race and tribe, into the Hindu pantheon. These gods are images "like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things." *Ganesh*, the god of wisdom, with elephant's head and glutton's stomach, and *Hanuman*, the monkey-god, are among the most popular.

It would be wrong to say that none of the objects of worship in India present any better characteristics than those just described; but these are the most popular and whose names are on every lip. Nor does any Hindu deity nor group of deities represent God as we know Him. Instead of power, wisdom, holiness, justice, goodness and truth, the too common picture is a mixture of selfishness, deceitfulness, revenge and immorality, set off it may be by a touch of barbaric generosity, or questionable good nature.

Truly said the Apostle: "The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils: not to God."