

Mr. Peters and the Goddess by H.P. Blavatsky

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translated by Mary G.Lanford

From: "Iz Pescher I Debrei Hindustana"

Letters Home

FROM THE CAVES AND JUNGLES OF HINDUSTAN

[See Russkii Viestnik No. 11, 1885.]

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—From the *Russkii Vestnik*

H. P. BLAVATSKY

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A NOTE FROM THE TRANSLATOR

H. P. Blavatsky wrote for the Russian journals of her time about her travels in India under the pen name of Radda-Bai. These articles appeared under the general title of "Iz Pescher I Debrei Hindustana" ("From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan") in the Russian journal, "Russkii Viestnik" (Russian Messenger), during the years of 1883, 1885-1886.

The narrative about Mr. Peters, the English Collector stationed at Madura, which follows was translated from the original Russian as it appeared in Russia Viestnik, Vol. CLXXXI, February 1886, pp. 772-792. It consists of the third chapter in Part II of the series without any deletion and presents a complete story in itself. To the knowledge of the translator, this text is now translated into English for the first time.

Since it is customary for stories or articles to have titles and since this particular story has none except the general title of the series in which it appears, it is presented under a subtitle of its own — "Mr. Peters and the Goddess."

Mary G. Langford

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I pass on what Mulji related to us "about the Anglo-Indian who loved the Hindus".

Mr. Peters was the Collector for the *holy* city of Madura, the Mecca of Southern India. An ardent archaeologist and venerator of ancient manuscripts, he needed Brahmanas for the search and translation of such manuscripts; consequently, though possibly at first he did not quite love them, nevertheless, as the saying goes, he kept company with the Hindus and he did not, in imitation of his own colleagues, oppress them. A materialist of the worst tinge, he only laughed at their superstitions and prejudices; but his attitude was exactly the same towards his own Christian religion and so the [Page 2] Brahmanas did not pay much attention to this. "Nastika" (atheist), they used to say and wave their hand. But soon all this changed and Mr. Peters surprised both the peoples of India and his own compatriots.

Here is how it happened.

Once a yogi, unknown to any one, came to him and asked for a personal appointment. Having obtained permission to appear before the bright eyes of Mr. Collector, he handed him an ancient manuscript and explained that he had received it from the goddess Minakshi herself (one of the comeliest forms of Kali), who, he said, had ordered it to be given to Mr. Peters. The manuscript was written on an *olla* [Olla — palm leaves which have been dried and prepared for writing] and its appearance was so archaic that it inspired involuntary respect, from the antiquary. The Collector, who was proud of his knowledge in the field of ancient letters, was delighted and immediately wished to reward the hermit properly. To his greatest surprise, the *yogi* refused with dignity any payment. But he surprised the superior still more. Like almost all Anglo-Indian officials, Mr. Peters belonged to the Masonic Lodge. Unexpectedly, the hermit gave him the most secret Masonic sign and, having uttered the well-known formula of the Scottish Rite, "I have not so received *it*, nor shall I so impart it" [This footnote gives the formula as rendered in English and is used above in the text — Translator] (that is, the manuscript was not given for money), disappeared quickly.

Peters became thoughtful. He sent a *sepo*y in pursuit of the guest who had vanished, but himself he engaged at once in the deciphering of the manuscript and in its translation with the aid of a Brahmana pundit. The *yogi*, of course, was not found because, in the opinion of Mulji, the echo in this instance of the whole city of Madura, that had been a werewolf of the goddess Minakshi herself. From diligent study of the *olla*, the Collector found out much that was interesting about some things.

According to the assertions of the pundit, the manuscript was the *autobiography of the goddess* Minakshi *in her own handwriting*, in which there was discourse about manifestations, power, qualities, and about her character in general. According to her own statement, the goddess possessed power (*sakti*) [*Sakti*, literally, "force", the feminine principle in male gods. But *sakti* in the ordinary sense is power] of the most agreeable variety and there were few wonders that she would not promise to her favorites. Too blind a faith in her personal power was not even demanded: it was sufficient *to love* devatri (goddess) sincerely and ardently, as a mother is loved, and she would extend her patronage to the worshipper, take care of, love, and help him.

"O you, fish-eyed one!" whistled the incorrigible materialist Peters upon having heard the above from the lips of the pundit. [Page 3]

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This epithet, however, was not insolence on his part. Literally translated, "fish-eyed one" is the name of the goddess, from the words: *mina* — "fish". and *akshi* — "eyes".

"But what or who is the goddess Minakshi?" the European laity will ask us.

Minakshi is the selfsame Kali, namely, *sakti*, the creative power of Siva, his feminine principle and *aspect*, impregnated with his spirit, and is one of the numerous manifestations of his spouse Kali.

Every god of the vast pantheon of India, be it female or male, in its first-begotten aspect — that is, at its first separation from "the One Impersonal One", the purely abstract principle which they denominate *Parabrahman* — is always neuter. But in its earthly manifestation it appears twofold like the first-begotten Adam and Eve, and the feminine half, separating from the masculine, becomes a goddess while the other half remains a god. The universal divinity, Parabrahman, is *It*, but its twofold energy, which afterwards begets a countless number of gods and goddesses, is *he* and *she*, that is, bisexual. From the principal gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, and their *saktis*, other gods are begotten in their turn. These latter are not direct descendants, as one might think, of the divine spouses, descendants which have in the pantheon of the Brahmanas a completely separate and distinct place from others; but they are simply the same first-begotten gods and goddesses which masquerade and present innumerable "aspects" or countenances out of themselves.

Therefore even the sanguinary goddess Kali, the mightiest of all saktis, appearing under one of her own aspects, such as Minakshi for example, changes her personal attributes completely and becomes unrecognisable. It would be untimely and too boring to explain here the idea of such a transformation. It will be sufficient to say that Kali, in transforming into Minakshi of Madura, becomes the most peace-loving of goddesses, who possesses all the best qualities: meekness, long-suffering, generosity, etc.

Minakshi is the patroness-goddess of the City of Madura, which is built to resemble the plan of the temple Srirangam — a square divided into a great number of inner squares, or enclosures, and in the center of which appears the famous Temple of Minakshi. The goddess, in spite of her inner qualities and, possibly, as proof that she has no vanity nor pride, is far from beautiful in her outer image. Her eyes resemble two fishes, from whence the appellation "fish-eyed one". But then, in the understanding of her worshippers, she possesses extraordinary power, of course. The unfortunate ones who are possessed by *pisachas*, "demons", are brought to her in throngs for cure. There are many such possessed ones in India because the pious Brahmanas include in the category of "those who are possessed" also those whom we, in Europe, designate as "mediums". In India, the right of citizenship is [Page 4] permitted to phenomenal manifestations only in the presence of the yogis, *sadhus*, and other miracle workers initiated into the "secret sciences". Everything which occurs *without the will of the person* and which we call *demoniacal* is attributed by the Brahmanas to the indecent behaviour of the *pisachas*.

But what is a *pisacha*?

Pisachas are the very same "spirits", *esprits frappeurs*, of the spiritualists, only not in the complete structure of their divested personality. Only that part of a human soul becomes a *bhuta* (earthly spirit), or

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a *pisacha*, which, upon separating from the immortal spirit after death, usually remains in an *invisible* form, but which frequently *is sensed* by the living, in the atmosphere where it moved and had existence during the life of the body. After the death of a human being, everything that is *divine* in him departs into a higher, cleaner and better world. *Only the dregs of the soul* which are held back by this atmosphere remain — the soul's *earthly passions* which find temporary welcome for themselves in the semi-material "double" of the deceased, which has been expelled from its habitat by the decomposition and complete destruction of the physical envelope; and the final disappearance of "the double" is delayed because of this, causing it torment. A case such as this after death is sad for the family of the deceased and is looked upon by the Brahmanas as a great misfortune. The Hindus take all-possible measures to avert such an unwelcome event. It happens most frequently, so they think, as the result of a *sinful thirst for life*, or of a particular passion of the deceased for somebody or something with *whom* or with *which* he did not, and even after death does not, wish to part. Therefore, the Hindus try to remain indifferent to everything, not to allow any passion in themselves at all, fearing more than anything in the world to die with an *unsatisfied* desire and, consequently, of becoming a *pisacha*. Natives of all castes and sects detest "spirits" and, seeing in them *pisachas*, the very demons, they try to exorcise such as quickly as possible.

And so, nevertheless, the respect for Minakshi! Daily, in the courtyard of her pagoda, it is possible to see throngs of Hindus who are possessed. There are such among them that crow like cocks and bark like dogs, as they do in our Russia. But there are yet more mediums among them: these are, quite candidly, ghost-seers and *foretellers*, in the presence of which various phenomena and all sorts of devilry take place. Just as soon as the ailing one who is possessed by the *pisachas* is brought before the fish-eyes of the goddess, the demon begins to shout (through the mouth of the possessed, of course) that he will immediately vacate the lodging occupied by him, if only the goddess gives him time. The sick person is led away and the *pisacha*, true to his word and as a token of his having kept it, throws [Page 5] a tuft of hair, always plucked by him from the head of his victim, in front of Minakshi as a farewell. According to the stories, such bunches of hair constantly fly around in the temple before the eyes of the amazed people, from morning till night, unknown from whence. It would be possible to make superb mattresses from them if the Brahmanas did not burn them with great ceremony. [If we are to believe the stories, it is very dangerous to touch this hair. Mulji, during the time of his chaste youth, stole such a tuft of hair from the Temple of Minakshi, and the *pisacha* immediately took possession of the boy. "Thanks to devatri, at long last I got rid of the devil", related the general]

Flocking by thousands and hundreds of thousands, the pilgrims bring huge revenues to the temple, and its officiating Brahman-oracles are considered the richest in India. Besides the Temple of Minakshi, there are only five such lucrative *pagodas* in the entire Madras Presidency, namely: the renowned temples Tirupati, Aligarh, Vaidesvaran, Kovil, and Swamimalai. The first two are consecrated to the god Vishnu, and the last three to Siva. On ordinary week days, from 3,000 to 10,000 rupees are collected in the *pagodas* daily, but during holidays, the daily sums of revenue surpass all belief. They frequently reach from 25,000 to 50,000, and even to 75,000 rupees *a day!* These figures are not exaggerated, but are a well-known fact to the Anglo-Indian government. Not in vain have the Madras authorities been gnashing their little teeth for a long time at the *colossal pagoda* fund of Southern India.

Malicious tongues assure us that this celebrated "fund" escaped for a time the bitter fate which threatened to land it under the complete management of the administrators of Madras only through compromise. It occurred to the richest of all the demon-curing *pagodas*, Tirupati, to present in the nick of time 40 lakhs of rupees (4 million rubles) to the above-mentioned administrators after having apportioned

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the amount according to rank among the members of the legislative council, through which it spared the other pagodas for several years. But it is somehow awkward even to relate such a rumour. Spare us, Englishmen — and suddenly a bribe! Who in Europe now does not know, chiefly from the London papers, that only in barbarous, semi-Asiatic Russia there are still such monstrous anomalies in our century like *bribe-taking officials* (*Pioneer* and *Bombay Gazette*). But is it possible to believe that any of the Anglo-Indians — those sober, temperate warriors and officials, the foremost of which must be reputed from now to the end of centuries to be the "Spartans of the Afghan Thermopolae" — could have decided to take a *bribe*! And could Englishmen *pur sang*, the Englishmen of London, the worthy sons of a nation, the representatives of which punish so severely in Parliament "greediness for usurpation" in their neighbor and the smallest departure from truth and honesty in other nations, have even permitted this in their own Anglo-Indians! Unthinkable, [Page 6] simply absurd. We must not believe this because such a sensible nation would not express so much ardent indignation in the press and Parliament at "*Russian extortioners*" if it had kept company with like transgressions. As a result of this reflection, we have decided to consider the accusation from the Brahmanas an abominable slander coming from ungrateful heathens and to return to the story about Mr. Peters.

Alas, this "story" cannot be attributed to slander as was the "bribe of the forty lakhs of rupees offered by the Temple of Tirupati" to the instigators of the celebrated bill. The heathen grave of the honourable Collector, with its heathen symbols, is seen to this day at the gates of Madura, and at the sight of it the cultured officials, successors to the deceased, blush.

They blush because Mr. Peters, also, belonged to the very same cultured class of officials (only not in relation to bribes), and also because he not only never looked askance at the pagoda funds but even added to them from his own pocket. This was the result of the fact that, after having read the manuscript about Minakshi, for some reason he was moved in his soul in the presence of such great virtue, and he decided to get a little better acquainted with the goddess. Up to that time, though he had studied the philosophy of the Hindus a great deal, he did not share their views on "obsession", and the feminine healer of it he did not include in the province of philosophy; on the contrary, he amused himself and made fun of such beliefs of the natives. But from the day he received the manuscripts, he began visiting the Temple and made an effort to collect all the existing legends about the goddess.

One among such legends gathered by the scholarly Collector proved to be unusually interesting and, though the British geologic ethnographers do not render it due attention, Mr. Peters classified it among fully historical events. Moreover, it was set forth by the goddess herself in her "autobiography", which afterwards, upon Peters' own wish, was buried in the tomb where his ashes repose.

The river Vaigai, on the southern shore of which the City of Madura is situated, belongs to the number of so-called *antarvahini nadi*, that is, to the rivers which flow *underground* from their source to their outlet into the sea; in short, to the subterranean streams. Even during the season of the monsoons, when the environs are flooded with torrential rains and the river overflows its banks, the river bed dries up in three or four days and only its rocky bottom remains. But it is well worth digging at any time of the year an arshine [Arshine — former Russian unit of measurement equal to .77 yards — Translator] or two underground in order to obtain superb water, which is not only indispensable for the city but also sufficient for the irrigation of the fields of the entire district. [Page 7]

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Such recluse rivers are very few in India and, consequently, they are considered very sacred. As is known to all, and possibly to only a few, every temple and hill, every mountain and wood in India, in short, every locality and every building which is considered sacred for some reason or other has its own *Purana* (history or chronicles). [Purana — literally, "ancient", but this word is also a synonym for history.] Written on ancient palm leaves, it is always carefully preserved by the officiating Brahmana of one or the other of the pagodas. Sometimes, the Sanscrit original is translated into the vernaculars and both texts are preserved with equal reverence. On the anniversary of holy days, in honor of such "river-goddesses" and "hill-gods" (to them a river is always a *goddess*, and a hill, a *god*), the manuscripts are brought out, and these local Puranas are read to the people by the Brahmana at night with great ritual and the necessary commentaries pertaining to them. In many temples, on the Hindu New Year's Eve, [In March and April, depending on the sect.] the almanac for the following year is also read to the people by the Brahman-astrologer.

These almanacs indicate accurately the position of the planets and stars; distinguish the *fortunate* from the *unfortunate* hours of each of the 365 days of the forthcoming year; predict the day, date, and even *the hour of that day* when there will be rains, winds, hurricanes, eclipses of the planets or the sun, and various other manifestations of nature. [Our astronomers also predict the hour and minute of eclipses no worse, we take it, than the Brahman-astrologers. But it is strange that the latter seldom make mistakes in frequently foretelling for a whole year ahead the dates and even the hours of chance hurricanes and rains, which (particularly the latter) very rarely, occur out of the rainy season period. Here is what the Maha-rajah of Travancore writes about these Brahman-astrologers in his article, "The Borderland Between Matter and Spirit": "Astrology, so much scouted by moderns, has still its hold upon mankind, and belief in it may often be seen in the most unexpected quarters. A European friend told us the other day that some years ago he was going to a timber depot in the heart of forests and situated on an islet formed by two branches of a large river. It was perfectly dry weather and the streams were quite dry. Happening to meet an astrologer on the way, he was warned that three days hence there would be heavy rain and a terrible flood in the river. There was not a speck of rain-cloud in the sky; and pooh-poohing the prediction he went on to the timber depot. The result was, rain came in torrents on the predicted day, the river was inundated, shutting out all passage and washing away much valuable timber, and compelled him to live most miserably in an improvised log-hut on the most elevated part of the islet for several days. He, for one, professes belief in *astrology*, however much *astrologers* may be impostors in many cases. We have known instances in which the date of child-birth and the sex of the child have been foretold with perfect correctness." (See the journal, The Theosophist, Vol. VI, No. 2, November 1884, page 41, 2nd column.)] All this is read in front of the patron-god or patron-goddess of the temple. The crowd listens reverently to the prophecies of the idol, who speaks through the lips of his Brahmana about famine, wars, and other national calamities; after which the astrologer and the Brahmana bless the crowd and, upon dividing the rice, fruit, and other edible offerings brought to the idols, give it leave to go home.

Collector Peters found a similar *Purana* about *antarvahini nadi* in the "autobiography" of Minakshi. With the aid of his pundit, he [Page 8] translated it from the Sanskrit into *Telugu*, and it is read to this day in the temple of the kindhearted goddess. Here is a brief summary of it in several sentences. This *sthula-Purana* explains the cause of the subterranean streams of the river Vaigai and, in addition, gives proof of the deep trust of the goddess Minakshi in Mr. Peters, to whom she chose to confide the episode of her early youth and love for her spouse Siva.

Kulasekhara, [Literal translation of this name: "the head of the family jewels"] the valiant King of Madura

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during the adolescent days of the chief gods, and his spouse (whose name has not come down [Page 9] in history) found themselves rewarded for long years of continual *tapas* [Tapas — ceremonial prayers in various postures] and of pious works by the birth of a charming daughter.

That was the fruit of hundreds of their past *janmans* (reincarnations) in the forms of other outer personalities, for this daughter was die celebrated and fish-eyed Minakshi. The goddess did not become a goddess at once, but also as the result of piety in many of her former existences, during the course of which she supplicated Siva and Kali — the first, to honor her by selecting her into the rank of his spouses, and the other, to make the supplicant one of her *aspects*. Finally, *Sundaresvara* [Sundaresvara — "the Magnificent Lord", a name of Siva and one of the ekadasa Rudras] fulfilled her ardent prayer and announced to Minakshi that he would marry her.

The king, Kulasekhara, started magnificent preparations for the wedding feast. Overflowing with pride at the thought that he was being honored with such a divine son-in-law, he beseeched Siva to bring a large retinue with him from the most eminent lords of Kailasa. [Kailasa is that part of heaven which is the favorite abode of Siva and his domicile] *Bhumi-devi* (the earth goddess), he said, though her fecundity and innate patience were proverbial, would not have time to give birth to enough devas for the wedding over and above the mass of sinners (not to mention the animal and other kingdoms) which she has to bring forth daily into die world; therefore if Siva did not take pity, the wedding feast would be lacking in splendor and there would be no one to eat the prepared provisions.

The bridegroom promised to satisfy die ambition of his father-in-law, but when he descended from *Kailasa* to "sweet earth", [Madura denotes "sweet earth"] instead of the expected resplendent retinue, he brought with him only one misshapen dwarf, by name Kundadara. [Kundadara — "large belly"] The chosen father-in-law took this action as mockery and became very vexed. But what can the anger of a mortal mean in die eyes of a god? Siva, upon reading the thoughts of Kulasekhara, smiled and only said: "King, feed my little courtier". The Raja, very grieved by the fact that there would be no one to eat his provisions, ordered his *pradhana mantri* (prime minister) to see that the dwarf was well fed. But, when the latter began to eat, he devoured not only the *delicacies* which had been prepared at the palace, but also the supplies, and even the entire year's reserve of the town of Madura; and therereupon, also swallowed all of the reserve water in the wells and fountains. The dwarf, still crying for more water, was then led to the shore of the river Vaigai. All of its water proved to be insufficient for quenching Kundadara's thirst. In one gulp he drained the river to the bottom, following which the river-goddess had to save herself by flight into the bowels of the earth. [Page 10]

That was a lesson given by Siva to his father-in-law, who had not thought of the many poor whom he could have fed with the food prepared for the wedding, but who had preferred that the nobles of the court should eat it. Since that time, the dwarf, under the guise of his *barrel-bellied* stone idol, has been sitting on the bank of the dry river and awaiting its annual appearance during the rainy season. But kind Minakshi, having taken pity on the fate of the Madurans, prevailed upon the goddess Vaigai to return from the bowels of the earth and to flow toward the sea one yard underground, and she permitted the dwarf to drink up all the water of the river just once a year. Since then she has been the patroness of the city.

In a short time, upon visiting the temple frequently, Peters, who had become immersed in the study of the

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glorious deeds of the mighty *deva* and astounded by her virtues, began finding something engaging in the expression of the fish-eyes of Minakshi. It seemed that her Ethiopian mouth would spread into a benign smile upon the approach of the Collector. He began getting used to her ugliness. A bachelor and with simple tastes like all scholars, Peters, who at first had begun to study the religion of the Hindus for the sake of science and, possibly, from boredom as well, started being drawn in, little by little, into the complicated, head-splitting philosophy and soon became an actual Sastri [A theologian who has learned by heart all the "sastras", theological treatises] He ceased making fun of the pious Brahmanas and started fraternizing and surrounding himself with them.

Among the latter there was one *mantrika*, a Brahmana of the Temple of Minakshi, whose duty consisted of uttering *mantras* and other conjuring prayers before the goddess. In a short time, he became the *alter ego* of the Collector. Finally, one fine day he brought the Collector an idol of Minakshi, and the bronze image was placed in the bedroom of the host. Knowing him as an archeologist, the few Anglo-Indians who lived in Madura paid no particular attention to this.

But now, Mr. Peters, who always slept-very soundly, saw his goddess in a dream one night. The fish-eyed apparition tried to waken him hastily, bidding him "to get up and get dressed". But even such summons could not have an effect on the sound sleep of the Collector. Then *in his dream* it appeared as if the goddess herself began dressing him in haste; the holy hands of Minakshi were not even squeamish about pulling his boots over his legs, boots which were made from *sacred* cow hide. (This is the reason that in the eyes of the Brahmanas boots are the most defiled article of European apparel.) Having dressed her admirer, she touched his forehead, saying, "Save yourself through the window. Jump down, else you will perish!" She vanished and Mr. Peters awakened. [Page 11]

The Collector's house was all afire. The blaze was already licking the walls of his bedchamber with its greedy tongues and the sole door leading out of the room was blazing. Without deliberating, he jumped out of the window and thus saved his life. The house was built on the bank of the river, but at the time of the fire, as usual, the Vaigai was absolutely dry. Suddenly and to the amazement of all, before the eyes of the gathered crowd, the water began to ooze through the river bed and to rise rapidly to the very veranda of the burning house. Thanks to this unexpected help, the fire was soon put out and many objects of Mr. Peters' priceless collection were saved. Only papers and documents of great importance to the government were burned.

This fact is stated in the Collector's own handwriting and signed by him, and confirmed by the testimony of his assistant, of his clerks, and many of those present at the scene of the huge fire; furthermore, it is entered in the corded book of the city archives, where the curious document is found even to this day.

Strangest of all was the fact that Mr. Peters, according to the testimony of both his valet and his own recollections, went to bed on the eve of the conflagration undressed and unshod and then, upon jumping out of the window, he found himself dressed and with his boots on. In addition to all this, he did not jump from the first story alone, *but with the heavy bronze idol of Minakshi under his arm*. This inexplicable fact, which he related himself hundreds of times, caused everybody to smile and shake his head. "The honourable Peters", they said, "was simply drunk that eve and probably fell asleep as he was and with his boots on". But the Brahmanas and the native population triumphed and were firmly convinced that *he had been dressed and saved by the Maha-devatri*, "great goddess", herself.

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It is evident that Mr. Peters, also, was fully of this opinion, judging by the unforeseen results of this event: he suddenly became extremely devout, if it is at all possible to use this word in connection with a subject of such piety, and from a complete materialist he actually "was transformed into a pujist", in the words of Mulji. Peters began honouring the goddess Minakshi no worse than any Brahmana. He gave up his service and, upon resignation, clothed himself in the attire of the *Bairagas* and daily performed the religious rites prescribed by the *sastras*, and finally gained the reputation of "the holy white one" among the populace. He grew fond of the Hindus and became such an ardent defender of theirs that his memory still lives in the hearts of the grateful natives, and his name is uttered with greatest respect by all pilgrims who come to worship.

In consequence of such an unusual "occurrence", the government proclaimed him insane and appointed a commission of psychiatrists to despatch him to England for cure. But even here "the goddess" did not betray her admirer. The doctors and experts, evidently, fell [Page 12] under the influence of *tharana* (magnetic influence) of Minakshi, for instead of a testimonial of his mental derangement, they gave him a clean slate which stated that the ex-Collector's reason was found completely sane. Thereupon, having returned to Madras, they again affirmed their testimony. Peters had influential friends in England, also independent means: he was left in peace. When he died many years later, it was his wish that his ashes be buried in a place from which it would be possible to see the temple of his goddess. And so it was done. He was buried, after cremation, on a hillock from which the golden *stupa* (cupola) of the eastern tower of the temple was seen as clearly as if it lay in the palm of one's hand. The granite mausoleum still towers to this day and pilgrims come to visit the grave of "the holy white one". *Peters Tomb* is one of the curiosities of Madura, and the tourist who wishes to gaze upon a view of the city and temple sets out for the very well-known hillock. The latter is located on land belonging to the Temple of Minakshi, otherwise the grave and monument would have been taken down and leveled to the ground long ago.

But Anglo-Indians "who were *not* fond" of the Hindus would have found their own work too much for them had they been forced to proclaim as insane all the Anglo-Indians who, though they did not love the natives, still believed in the power of their gods and goddesses, no matter how strange this might have appeared. All these eccentric people — upon inquiry — appear to have left the ranks of the materialists. All of them are (ex - atheists and positivists! For example, here is what the Maha-rajah of Travancore, the most educated of all the Indian princes, wrote about another Collector whose name he did not wish to reveal:

"A certain Collector of a certain district in the Madras Presidency had a family of several daughters but not a single son. Having had, in the course of his official life, to associate with Native gentlemen of all shades of faith, he was advised by several natives to take sea-baths at Ramesvaram to get a son! Of course, he derided the proposal, but thinking that a sea-bath could do no harm he did bathe at Dhavamkoti. [The Temple of Ramesvaram at Dhavamkoti is a place of pilgrimage visited by the natives under vow *in order to have sons*] *And he had a son shortly after!*" [See journal, *The Theosophist*, Vol. VI, No. 2, Nov. 1884, page 41]

Some Anglo-Indians turned to Mohammedanism; others, who were not accepted into Hinduism by the Brahmanas, became either *Vallabhacharyas* [The Vallabhacharya sect is the most immoral. It recognizes as its sole head, the pontiff, who enjoys absolute connubial rights with the wives and daughters of all Vallabhacharyas without exception] or devil-worshippers from grief.

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Madura is no distance from Madras. When we went there about two years later and thereupon settled on the river of Adyar, one of the [Page 13] old Brahmanas who had known Peters personally told us much about him.

"The goddess revealed herself to him", he said among other things, "in her *actual primordial essence*; otherwise he would never have worshipped her so".

In answer to our comment that even though they, the Vedantins, speak a great deal about the Oneness of Parabrahman, their worship of idols disproves and contradicts this Oneness in their comprehension, he replied:

"*Devatri* (goddess) is an idol only in die eyes of the ignorant *sudra* (lower caste); for the initiated *sastris*, Minakshi, as well as other divinities, is simply *one of the bricks of the common edifice*, the name of which is *Sat*, Be-ness."

This explanation and the expression, "brick", seemed at the time very unsatisfactory to us and, to me, exceedingly ludicrous. Later, however, I better understood its significance.

Prior to my serious study of the *Vedas* and, in general, of the symbolism of the Brahman beliefs, I frequently asked myself the question: by virtue of *what* could such intelligent people and such thinkers as the authors of these, in the highest degree remarkable and original, systems appear to be (to him who has studied the *six* main philosophies of India), themselves have fallen for *polytheism* and its outer expression of idols, or even allowed it in the masses no matter how ignorant the latter might be? For a long time I could not account for this strange predilection. I could not explain to myself, even superficially, why, for example, Keshub Chunder-Sen, the well-known, highly educated Bengal reformer, a man who at one time had charmed Queen Victoria [Keshub Chunder-Sen always called the Queen his "mother". The members of the Brahmo-Samaj sect are considered to be and are called the Indian "Unitarians", semi-Christians] by his conversation and his views, and all London high society by his unusual, enchanting eloquence — why also this mystic, the head and *leader* of Brahmo-Samaj, could not reject while he lived his goddess *Durga*. At times it seemed simply disgusting to listen to him and to read in the press how, in his mystical semi-delirium, he jumbled together Mohamed, Buddha, Chaitanya, and Durga! But I have understood now and sincerely regret my vociferous censure of this reformer who is now deceased. He was an ardent monotheist, but he was born a Hindu and remained one unto death. Possibly the following explanation of the riddle will prove to be not without benefit.

In the strange mythology of the Brahmanas — which at first glance is still more legendary than Greek mythology — and, generally, in their still stranger conception of the world, a profound philosophy is concealed, nonetheless. The outer form of idolatry is but a curtain which hides the truth like the veil of Isis. But this truth is not given to all. For some the curtain hides not the countenance of Isis, but only empty [Page 14] space disappearing into the impenetrable, for them, darkness; for others light pours forth from there. For those not endowed by nature with that innate, inner sense possessed by some, which the Hindus so rightly call "the third eye" or "the eye of Siva", it is by far better to be content with the fantastic patterns on the curtain: for such there is no penetrating into the depth of the impenetrable darkness, no filling of empty space. But he who has the "third eye" or, speaking more clearly, who is capable of transferring his vision from the grossly objective on to the purely inner ground, that one shall

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see light within the darkness, and in the seeming emptiness discern the Universe Inner self-awareness will show him infallibly that the presence of God *is perceived* here, but cannot be communicated, and that wishing to express this in concrete form finds its excuse in the very ardency of the desire to convey this experience to the masses. And thus, though still censuring in his soul the form of worship, he will no longer laugh openly at idols and at the belief in them of that one who, unable to penetrate beyond the curtain, is satisfied with the exterior only because it is difficult for him, if not completely impossible, to receive any kind of suitable presentation about the "Unknown God".

In order to demonstrate descriptively that all the 330 million gods of India taken together indicate One Unknown God, I shall try to speak more plainly. For this it will be sufficient to present one of the allegorical stories of the ancient Brahmanas from the *Puranas*, a story which has not yet, apparently, reached our Orientalists. It is quickly told.

Toward the very end of the last *pralaya* (that is, the intervening period between two creations of our world), the Great Raja who abides in the eternity of endless space, wishing to give to the coming people some means of knowing him, built a palace upon Mt. *Meru* out of *qualities inherent to him* and established residence therein. But when people again inhabited the world, this palace, one end of which leaned upon the right and the other upon the left boundlessness, proved to be so vast that the little folks did not even surmise its existence: for them the palace was a celestial firmament, for which they had no comprehension. Then the Great Raja, having perceived the inconvenience and taking pity on the little folks, desired to reveal himself to them, *not in entirety, but in parts*. He demolished the palace created out of his qualities and started throwing one brick after another down to earth. Each of the bricks turned into an idol: a red brick, into a god and a gray, into a goddess, and each of the *devatas* and *devatris* who had embodied into an idol received one of the innumerable qualities of the Maha-Raja. At first the entire pantheon consisted of only superior qualities. But the people, taking advantage of impunity, proceeded to become more depraved and more evil. Then the Great Raja sent *karma* (the law of retribution) down to earth. *Karma*, which spares [Page 15] not even the gods, changed many of the *qualities* into instruments of punishment: thus destroyer-gods and avenger-gods appeared among the all-forgiving benevolent divinities.

This story, which was related to us by a Brahmana from Madura, explains why he called the goddess Minakshi "a brick" and, in addition to this, indicates the unity at the bottom of all of this polytheism. Between *dii majores* of the holy Mountain Meru — the Olympus of India — and *dii minores*, the difference in their essence is not great. The first are direct rays and the second are dismembered pieces, which are the broken rays of the same luminary. What in reality is Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva? The threefold ray issuing directly from "the light of the universe", *Swayambhu*, that is, from the *power* or the *spirit* that gives life to and fecundates matter, which has been personified in Sarasvati, Lakshmi, and Kali, which are the three representations of prakriti (matter), the three goddesses of the three gods. These three pairs, which have been synthesized in *Swayambhu*, "The Unmanifested Deity", are the symbols that personify his unseen presence in all the manifestations of nature. In short, Brahma and Sarasvati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Siva and Kali represent in their totality *spirit* and *matter* in their threefold quality — *creation, preservation, and destruction*

Vishnu is one, but he has 1,008 names. Each one of these names is the name of *one of the qualities of the One*. The personal qualities of Vishnu are embodied in their turn in secondary gods of the Hindu pantheon. Having thus become a separate personality from Vishnu (while Vishnu himself is only a

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personification of one of the seven main qualities or attributes of Swayambhu), each personification is called one of the *aspects* or "appearances" of Vishnu, Brahma, or Siva — in short, of one or the other of the *main* gods and goddesses. All of them have so many names which the officiating Brahmana of this or that sect repeats *in our time* like a parrot, but each of which had deep significance in the days of antiquity. Swayambhu is the first emanation or ray of Parabrahman, *Attribute-less Divinity*, the first breath of its spirit: it is *Trimurti*, the synthesis of the three spiritual powers in union with the three material powers. From the qualities of these three pairs are born lesser gods, *dii minores*, who in their turn represent qualities of the greater gods.

Thus the seven primary colors of the prism into which the *colorless* ray is decomposed, upon further blending, form secondary composite colors and are diversified *ad infinitum*. The Brahmanas say that the god *Surya* (the sun) has *seven sons*, whose offspring comprise a good third of the pantheon of *devas*; and the god of air, *Vayu*, is the father of the seven primordial syllables and of the seven musical tones in which are generated and from which issue all-possible combinations of sounds in the harmony of nature. [Page 16]

In ancient India, religion was closely tied with the contemplation of nature. Universal truths and the very essence of *Truth* were personified in Deity. Every manifest truth, no matter what it consisted of, had a direct relationship, to divinity or *self-existent* truth. In the pantheism of the Hindu religion, only the outer method of expression is really crude and, usually, has a repellent and caricatured form.

The natural inference from all this, is that the pantheism of India, which obviously has deified all the crude forces of nature as if personifying only the outer forms, is tied in with the realm of physical knowledge, of chemistry, particularly of astronomy, and presents in itself something in the nature of poetised materialism — a continuation of Chaldean Sabaism. But if after casting away its outer form, which has led the ignorant masses to the most repugnant worship of idols, we penetrate to the primordial source of the myths of the pantheism, we shall then find in them neither gods nor even outer worship of various objects from the kingdoms of nature in their ordinary forms, but a worship of the *Omnipresent Spirit*, therefore, equally present in the smallest blade of grass as in the power that begot and grew it.

Such appears to be the simple and natural explanation of the 33 *krores* [*Krore* —100 lakhs or 10 million] (330 million) gods of India. These gods were begotten and endowed with being as a result of the blind endeavor to personify that which cannot be personified, creating by that very means an "idol". In the course of time, the cornerstone of the philosophic and religious world conception of their wise men found itself in the hands of the ambitious, coldly calculating Brahmanas, who broke the stone into chips and ground it into dust for the convenient assimilation by the masses. But for the thinker, as well as for every *unprejudiced* Orientalist, these distorted chips, as also their finely crushed gravel, are, nonetheless, from that very stone — the attributes of the manifested energy of Parabrahman, the One that Is without beginning and without end.

The Brahman-Vedantists postulate three kinds of existence: *para-marthika* — *the real*, the true; *vyavaharika* — *the conditioned* practical; and *pratibhasika* — *the illusory*. Parabrahman is the only manifestation of the first and, therefore, is called *Sat*, "the One that truly Is" or the *One-Existent*; to the second class belong the gods which have been embodied in diverse forms, the *personal* souls [Personal soul or earth consciousness, in the teachings of the Brahmanas, is distinguished from our "immortal

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spirit"] of mortals and everything that is manifested and phenomenal in the world of subjective feeling. This class, having received existence in the imagination of the ignorant masses, has a foundation no firmer than all that which we see in dreams; but in view of the realness of the practical relations of the people to these gods, their existence is allowed *conditionally*. The third class includes in itself such objects like mirage — the mother-of- pearl [Page 17] which is taken for silver, the coiled serpent which is taken for rope — and in its subdivision, also man. People think, imagine that they see one or the other: consequently, for him who sees this and imagines it as such, it *actually exists*. But since this actuality is only temporary and the very substance of the objects is ephemeral, therefore conditional, then in the last analysis it appears that all this actuality is only *illusion*.

All of these conceptions not only do not interfere with the belief in the personality and oneness of deity, but also serve as an impassable barrier to atheism. In India there are no atheists in the sense in which we Europeans use this term. Nastika is an atheist in the sense of *non-belief in gods and idols*. This is known to everyone in India, and we have become completely convinced of that. The atheists of the West, and even the agnostics of the West, have a long way to go to the philosophy of the Nastikas of the East. The former grossly deny everything except matter; the latter, that is, the Hindu materialists, the Nastikas, do not at all deny the possibility of the existence of that which they do not understand. The true philosopher will understand the *spirit* and not the letter of their denial. He will be easily convinced of the fact that if they, in referring to the abstraction called Parabrahman, teach that the principle is "without will and without activity, without sensation as without consciousness", then they do this, namely, because according to their understanding, The *One* under this name is *unconditioned* will, activity without beginning and without end, *self-existent*, self-consciousness, self-contemplation, and self-awareness.

It appears that the pantheists of India, in retaining their gods, sin simply through the profusion of religious, even badly applied, feeling. And in addition, after the all-shattering and equally non-creative *animal* materialism of Europe, such pantheism appears as a moral and spiritual refreshment, a blossoming oasis in the midst of a barren, sandy desert. Better to believe *even in one of the qualities of divinity* after having personified it and worshipped it under that guise which represents to each, according to the power of his understanding, the most convenient representation and symbol of *The All*, than, while denying this *All* under the pretext that it is not provable by scientific paths, not to believe in anything, as our learned materialists, and even fashionable agnostics, do.

From the point of view of the aforesaid, and even though we may be surprised and even sincerely laugh at the originality of his selection for the object of divine worship, we shall understand why Mr. Peters was converted, so unexpectedly and unforeseenly for all, from an ardent materialist of the school of Mill and Clifford to a pantheist and even a pujist [From the word *puja* — worship of gods by established precepts; not prayer, but ritual.]

And now we shall return again to Dig.