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————— COMPLETE WORKS IN ENGLISH —————

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**THE INDIAN SPIRIT**

—————  
**HINDUISM  
AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

**EMESCO**

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## CHAPTER ONE

# The Indian Spirit: Past and Present

*Being one and becoming one, learn from the two eyes,  
For though they are separate from each other, they do not see differently.*

MANOHAR

### PROLEGOMENA

Contemporary Free India seems to present to many Western people a phenomenon difficult to comprehend. They have been taught to believe that the Indian genius is predominantly mystical, that traditions in India endure for centuries without change, that thinking is the monopoly of small *elites* in that country, that Indians have no sense of social crisis (of injustice, oppression and poverty) and that Indian history is one long story of warring kingdoms and periodic chaos. This has been the stereotype built up by the early orientalists and Christian missionaries who came into contact with India and which has, but for a few exceptions, been confirmed by succeeding generations of European scholars, civilians and missionaries. Indian scholars themselves in their works often gave their readers the impression that India cared only for things spiritual, that renunciation, detachment, and *moksa* (liberation from transmigration) were the themes which formed the core of the Indian Way of Life. The sub-conscious inferiority

complex of the older generation of Indian scholars made them assert the superiority of Indian culture over the Western at least in that respect, for in social and political organization, military power and industrialization based on technology, they could not but accept Western superiority in the nineteenth century. Lack of an authentic comprehensive history of India, neglect of the *sastras* that dealt with politics and economics, astronomy and mathematics, chemistry and medicine, sexology and pleasure and the almost exclusive emphasis which both European and Indian scholars placed on *sastras* concerned *only* with *nirvana* and *moksa* were responsible for this. If Kautilya, Brahma Gupta and Varahamihira, Caraka and Vatsyayana had received as much attention as the writers of the Upanisads, the Buddha and Sankara from competent European and Indian scholars, the picture of India in both modern Western and Eastern minds would have been different. Just as it is impossible to have a true and comprehensive understanding of Europe, if we rely only on the knowledge of the Eleusinian and the Dionysiac mysteries, Pythagoras, Neo-Platonism, Diogenes the Stoic, the New Testament and the Early Church Fathers, Thomas a Kempis, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila, it is unfair to think that the *moksa sastras* reflect the Indian Spirit in its entirety. The spirit of a people, —especially of a great people who inhabit almost a continent and who have a continuous known history from at least 5000 B.C. right up to the present and who form an ethnic mosaic that gave rise to a complex cultural pattern—cannot be exhaustively understood by just relying on a dozen of their books mostly produced before the sixth century B. C., dealing only with Brahman and Dharma, which even in their heyday could have interested only a minority of the teeming population. The misunderstanding becomes greater when these books are not studied objectively and critically, but mainly relying on the commentaries of a group of thinkers in the middle ages, who advocated the illusoriness of the world and the superiority of actionlessness (*naiskarmya*) over action. Equal

attention to the books dealing with other matters mentioned above, to literature, art and history, including the history of Indians beyond their borders (to wit in Indonesia and Cambodia), will give a truer understanding of the classic Indian spirit, which only will help us to grasp with sympathy and comprehension contemporary Indian thought and action.

From the point of view of an encounter between India and the West, or between the former and the Far East (China and Japan) or the Middle East, it is more important to notice what India's attitude had been and is to the world, to man's *vita activa* and to the human problems in general, because in the present age it is in relation to these matters that countries and cultures understand each other and coexist, or misunderstand each other and fight. It is not denied that metaphysical assumptions and religious convictions do influence and colour peoples' attitudes to these matters; but if we remember that peoples no longer go to war with each other because the same conception of God and Salvation is not held by others and that identical presuppositions and beliefs can result and have resulted in differing ways of action, we will see how the secular attitudes become more relevant for mutual understanding. The democratic West is at logger-heads with the Communistic East, not because the East is atheistic or denies the existence of the soul and after-life, but because the Communistic attitudes to property, free enterprise, personal freedom and government and the actions based on these are so very much opposed to what the West considers to be the right attitudes and actions. Similarly, it is what India is trying to do in secular matters that should interest the Westerners more, specially because India has no church and there is no united religious platform either for or against any live issue. The only possible exception to this is the quite considerable group of Catholic Christians in India. To a large extent, India exemplifies Whitehead's definition of religion as what man does with himself in solitude. It will not be incorrect to say that religion in India