

Prabuddha Bharata

No. 33—Vol. IV—APRIL 1899

INTERVIEW WITH SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON THE BOUNDS OF HINDUISM

HAVING been directed by the Editor, (writes our representative) to interview Swami Vivekananda on the question of converts to Hinduism, I found an opportunity one evening on the roof of a Ganges houseboat. It was after night-fall and we had stopped at the embankment of the Ramakrishna Math, and there the Swami came down to speak with me.

Time and place were alike delightful. Overhead the stars, and around the rolling Ganges. While on one side stood the dimly lighted building, with its background of palms and lofty shade trees.

“I want to see you, Swami,” I began, “on this matter of receiving back into Hinduism those who have been perverted from it. Is it your opinion that they should be received?”

“Certainly,” said the Swami, “they can and ought to be taken.”

He sat grave y for a moment, thinking, and then resumed. “Besides,” he said, “we shall otherwise decrease in numbers. When the Mohammedans first came, we are said—I think on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Mohammedan historian,—to have been six hundred millions of Hindus. Now we are about

two hundred millions. And then, every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less, but an enemy the more.

Again, the vast majority of Hindu perverts to Islam and Christianity are perverts by the sword or the descendants of these. It would be obviously unfair to subject these to disabilities of any kind. As to the case of born aliens, did you say? Why born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on.

In my own opinion this statement not only applies to aboriginal tribes, to outlying nations, and to almost all our conquerors before the Mohammedan conquest, but also to all those castes who find a special origin in the Purans. I hold that they have been aliens thus adopted.

Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were only alienated by conquest,—as in Kashmir and Nepal,—or on strangers wishing to join us no penance should be imposed.”

“But of what caste would these people be, Swamiji?” I ventured to ask.—“They

must have some, or they can never be assimilated into the great body of Hindus. Where shall we look for their rightful place?"

"Returning converts," said the Swami quietly, "will gain their own castes, of course. And new people will make theirs. You will remember," he added, "that this has already been done in the case of Vaishnavism. Converts from different castes and aliens were all able to combine under that flag, and form a caste by themselves,—and a very respectable one too. From Ramanuja down to Chaitanya of Bengal, all great Vaishnava teachers have done the same."]

"And where should these new people expect to marry?" I asked.

"Amongst themselves as they do now," said the Swami quietly.

"Then as to names," I enquired. "I suppose aliens and perverts who have adopted non-Hindu names should be named newly. Would you give them caste-names, or what?"

"Certainly," said the Swami, thoughtfully, "there is a great deal in a name!" and on this question he would say no more.

But my next enquiry drew blood. "Would you leave these new comers, Swamiji to choose their own form of religious belief out of many-visaged Hinduism, or would you chalk out a religion for them?"

"Can you ask that?" he said. "They will choose for themselves. For unless a man chooses for himself the very spirit of Hinduism is destroyed. The essence of our Faith consists simply in this freedom of the Ishtam."

I thought the utterance a weighty one, for the man before me has spent more years than any one else living, I fancy, in studying the common bases of Hinduism in a scientific and sympathetic spirit—and the freedom the Ishtam is obviously a principle big enough to accommodate the world.

But the talk passed to other matters, and then with a cordial goodnight, this great teacher of religion lifted his lantern and went back into the Monastery, while I, by the pathless paths of the Ganges, in and out amongst her crafts of many sizes, made the best of my way back to my Calcutta home.

KALI, AND HER WORSHIP

[The following is the substance of a lecture delivered by Sister Nivedita (Miss M. Noble) on Monday, the 13th February, 1899, at the Albert Hall, Calcutta.]

I AM aware that I have little right to stand here, and offer myself as a lecturer on Kali-Worship. I am not qualified by a knowledge of Sanskrit or of Indian history to judge between rival theories as to the archæology

of the matter. I have been in India only one year, and as I am often reminded, that which seems incontestable to me now, may seem as unsupported in another year's time.

In the meantime, certain rights are mine. *First, I have been hearing of Kali-Worship all my life*, in terms not flattering to Kali or Her worshippers, and now that I am in contact with the thing itself, I have a right to stand