CHAPTER I

THE HINDU INDIA

"Hethaya Arya hetha Anarya
Hethaya Dravid Chinh
SakHundal Pathan Mogal
Ak dehe holo lin. " (Rabindranath)

(Here the Aryans, here the non-Aryans,
And here the Dravidians, the Chinese,
The Scythians and the Huns, the Pathans and the Mughals
Have all been merged in one body.)

1) Unity  The non-Aryans were the original inhabitants of India.
They were vanquished by the Aryans, but instead of being exterminated
they were absorbed in the body of the Indian society. Gradually,
there arose four castes, viz. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Waisya and Sudra,
each acting within its own circle but maintaining social intercourse
with the others. Thus the Hindu society was formed. The absorption
of new groups of foreigners in Hindu society subsequently became a
usual phenomenon. The Huns, the Gurjaras and the other allied tribes
who poured into India during the fifth and sixth centuries gradually
merged themselves within the Hindu society, just as the Greeks, the
Kushans and the Sakas had done in previous ages. 'Castes without
caste-rigidity' was the earlier phase. Caste-rigidity came later but
without destroying the underlying social unity.
The undivided India was bounded on the north, north-west and north-east by the Himalayas or the Himalayan ranges, and elsewhere by the sea. Vincent A. Smith remarked: "India, encircled as she is by seas and mountains, is indisputably a geographical unit and as such is rightly designated by one name." Chisholm wrote: "There is no part of the world better marked off by Nature as a region by itself than India, exclusive of Burma. It is a region, indeed, full of contrast in physical features and in climate, ... but the features that divide it as a whole from surrounding regions are too clear to be overlooked." (1)

Jambudvipa was the original name of India and had a geographical reference while the name Bharatavarsha has a political reference, for it conveys the idea that the whole of India was governed by a single king, Bharata. The name 'India' was given by foreigners. To outsiders the country was first known by the river Sindhu. 'Sindhu' was changed into 'Hindu' by the Persians, and into 'Indos' by the Greeks. The name 'India' came out of Indos.

Fixity of habitation is one of the marks of nationality. Although India attained her nationhood as late as the beginning of the 20th century, she had developed a very fine culture during centuries past. A nomadic race cannot grow a high type of culture. The birth and growth of culture is associated with fixed habitation which together with a peaceful existence quickens culture. Radha Kumud Mookerjee observes: "The primary requisite
for the birth and growth of a nation is certainly fixity and permanence of place, and when that is assured the other formative forces will appear and make themselves felt in due course. A common fatherland is preliminary to all national development: round that living nucleus will naturally gather all these feelings, associations, traditions and other elements which go to make up a people's language and literature, religion and culture, and thereby establish its separate existence and individuality, demanding its preservation and independent development as a valuable cultural unit. The unifying influence of a common country, of common natural surroundings is indeed irresistible, and the assertion may be safely made that it will be effectively operative against other disintegrating, disruptive forces and tendencies such as differences in manners and customs, language and religion." (2)

Although in earlier times India had a number of States fighting with each other, there was an undeniable, fundamental unity in India. The Indians travelled from one end to another of the country on pilgrimage to see their holy places, and though they liged under separate monarchs, they invariably considered themselves as belonging to Bharatvarsha. The story of Satee's smitten body falling at fifty-two places led to the establishment of fifty-two holy places of pilgrimage. Radha Kumud Mookerjee says: "It is also to be noted that the four most meritorious pilgrimages in India were placed by Sankaracharya in the four extreme points of the country, so that the entire country may be known by the people and the whole area held sacred." (3) He also remarks that "the
Institution of pilgrimage is undeniably a most powerful instrument for developing the geographical sense in the people which enables them to think and feel that India is not a mere congeries of geographical fragments, but a single, though immense, organism, filled with the tide of one strong pulsating life from end to end." (4)

The visit to holy places as an imperative religious duty has made wide travelling a habit in India in all ages of life.

There are other evidences that Bharatvarsha was considered to be one country in olden times. Only to the Vedic Aryans the country beyond the Vindhya range and the Narmada river was not known, for there is no mention of it in the 'Rig-Veda'. The 'Mahabharata' represents a conception of the whole of India as a geographical unit in the famous passage in the 'Bhishmaparva'. The geographical knowledge of the 'Mahabharata' is followed up by all the Puranas which are well-known for their detailed information regarding the places and peoples of India. There is also Greek evidence to show that in the time of Alexander's invasion the Indians had a very accurate knowledge of the form and extent of India. The 'Arthasastra' of Kautilya shows a good knowledge of the economic products of the various parts of India including the south. As an evidence for the development of Indian geographical knowledge, references may also be made to the geography of Kalidas.

Political Sovereignty in ancient India.

History records the names of many Indian rulers who succeeded in establishing a suzerainty over the whole of India. Such a ruler in older days was Harshavardhana, who reigned from 606 to 643 A.D. Such a ruler in yet older days was
Samudra Gupta in the fourth century A.D. He carried his victorious arms from the banks of the Ganges to the border of the Tamil country and thus achieved the political unification of a large part of India. Before the Christian era Asoka the Great was another ruler of this type. His empire extended over the entire territory stretching from Afghanistan to Mysore. His predecessor Chandragupta was also a similar ruler under whom India realized herself as a political unit as she was already by nature a geographical unit.

Empires create a sort of unity through uniform administration. During the time of the Mauryas (324-187 B.C.) the major parts of the country became unified in this way. The gupta empire (319-550 A.D.) was another large empire of antiquity, but it did not have the southern parts of the country directly under its administration. Harshavardhana's reign was a period of learning, culture and piety, which brought about a deeper unity than the mere extension of empire.

Political overlordship and the conception of a Chakravartti Raja (suzerain receiving the tribute and allegiance of subordinate kings) has been one of the most familiar political notions of the ancient Hindus. Overlordship or emperorship also indicates political unity, unity brought about by the subjugation of the rival powers and by the establishment of a single supreme power over a number of rulers. Under an overlord the contention among minor rulers
subsides. By conquests or by ceremonies, such as the Vajapeya and the Rajasuya and the Asvamedha - sacrifice, overlordship or paramount sovereignty and royal dignity were attained. The sense of political overlordship led to the sense of spiritual overlordship. The old Hindu conception of paramount overlordship was seized by early Buddhist thought to describe its achievement which resulted in the foundation of an ideal empire, the empire of righteousness in the hearts of men. The Hindu Chakravartti was he who made the wheels of his chariot roll unopposed over all the world. The wheel was the symbol of his power. But Buddha was a different kind of Chakravartti. He set rolling the royal chariot-wheel of a universal empire of truth and righteousness. His wheel was the symbol not of power but of Dharma, and his work in accordingly described as 'Dhamma Chakkappavatana'.

Religious Unity. Before the Muslim rule and Muslim conversion there was, as it were, only one religion and that was the Hindu. A single religion all over India certainly set up a type of unity. Buddhism and Jainism were offshoots of the Hindu religion. When the Hindu religion showed laxity, Buddhism and Jainism emerged as reformist forces. Buddha and Mahavira brought about rigorous orders among a section of the Indian people. The effect of this was superior discipline and stronger unity. However, there was a clash between Brahminism and Buddhism. Doubtless, Buddhism strengthened Hinduism, for it rehabilitated deliberation and right principles. Although Buddhism vanished from India ultimately, it went a long way towards transforming Hinduism from Vedic ritualism to Upanishadic mysticism.
and deliberation. Buddhism ignored the caste system.

Colonization. Wide colonization is another evidence for unity in ancient India. It meant not only a powerful culture, but also a greater India across the seas. India became a self-conscious unit. India established communication both by land and sea with China, Japan, Syria and Egypt. India sent abroad ambassadors, merchants and missionaries with messages, commodities and 'ideas'. For centuries colonists went out of India to Pegu, Siam, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, Bali and Borneo. Radha Kumud Mukherjee writes: "Indeed, there can hardly be a more convincing proof of the reality and strength of Indian unity than the story of Indian colonising activity and the gradual development of a Greater India across the seas." (5) Buddhist and Brahminical religions spread to the Island of Bali. The colonizing activity resulted in the practical Indianisation of these countries. Indian art, institutions and even geographical names were transplanted there. The ideas and institutions travelled with the spread of Buddhism. The Mahayanist form of Buddhism was accepted by Tibet, Nepal, China and Java, while the Hinayane form by Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia. This propagation of Indian thought and institutions was the work of countless colonists and missionaries through centuries.

Doubtless, India had a very great culture in the past, and in spite of being a vast country, a fundamental unity pervaded the whole of India. It has been seen that many powerful and peaceful Kingdoms with pious kings also arose from time to time, and India's
power and glory travelled oversea. But India had diversities, too, and therefore weaknesses. The caste system became very rigorous later on and hatred for the lower castes became painful. Division makes a people fundamentally weak. Further, to go across the sea was not always looked upon with favour. Superstition and narrowness gradually burdened the religion. The Indian kings had little amity between themselves. Because of want of cohesion, India succumbed to the invasion by the Muslims, and the state fell. India had not only art and literature and culture but also ease and fragility. True, India absorbed foreign tribes like the Huns and the Gurjaras; but there grew up in India violent dislike also for the lower castes. India put forth not only pious and powerful kings and peaceful kingdoms but also cleavages and quarrelling kingdoms. Dr. Tara Chand writes: "The Hindu society was not a unity. It was composed of a heterogeneous mass of peoples of differing degrees of culture. In different regions there were different languages. In the past when education was limited to a small minority of high caste Hindus, the culture of the upper ten was different from that of the majority among whom a very considerable section was steeped in ignorance, superstition and poverty. There were again differences of cult and of laws, gradations of status, occupation and wealth even among the middle and the inferior castes. Hinduism thus presented a panorama of belief and practices which extended from the profoundest truths of philosophy to the grossest forms of superstition". (6)