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Nidān

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Introduction

Denzil Chetty

Volume 16 (2004), is the first publication of Nidān – Journal for the Study of Hinduism - in the new merged university of the former universities of Durban-Westville and Natal, now University of KwaZulu-Natal. This volume contains five articles, focusing on various discourses within Hinduism.

The first article by Maheshvari Naidu, *Engendered Goddess: Some Considerations for a more Gender Relevant God*, explores the archetypal goddesses presented in Hindu religious tradition as personifying the ideal woman, most particularly the figure of Sita. Building upon the hypothesis that Sita perpetuates a particular construct of women that speaks more intimately to women's experiences of alienation, Naidu attempts to offer some thoughts on finding an alternate goddess with whom women may find closer kinship. Naidu develops her argument by tracing the developments of Women in Religion, Women in Hinduism, Early Hinduism in South Africa and Women and Ritual to the Goddess. She concludes her article by offering some possible research areas which emerge as how folk goddesses are perceived within the Neo-Hindu Movements in South Africa, and the importance attached to the folk goddesses within the diasporic Hindu communities in other parts of the world. Naidu ends her discourse with the assertion that Sita as a model for the ideal women does not articulate the lived reality of many women's experiences, instead fortifies the construct of women being 'sexually sanitized, chaste, paragons of virtue and preoccupied with upholding the reputation of their male counterparts'.

In the second article, *Ethics and the Discourse of HIV/AIDS: A Hindu Response*, Shukla explores the pragmatism of selected Hindu ethical norms, which serves a prophylactic purpose in determining whether a social redefinition of life and human relations could postulate a moral-ethical revolution in the discourse of HIV/AIDS. In response to human tendencies, proclivities and urges and the fact that humans indulge in recreational sex in addition to procreational sex, Shukla argues that the Hindu view is not based on 'denial or repression', but on 'sublimination towards their true spiritual nature'. Shukla offers *Dharma* or order as the Hindu view to create a framework for the development of society. In this regard, Shukla analyses the Code of Manu – i.e. four social forces (*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha*). In concluding her article Shukla acknowledges that her responses reflect ideas and ideals which were strictly followed in the ancient times. However, the resurgence of these values in India and their promotion worldwide is necessary in providing a socio-ethic/moral in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Rambhajun Sitaram in his article, *The Ramayana and World Order: Past, Present and Future*, examines the problems confronting humanity in the context of 'world order' and the possible ways of resolving them on the basis of ideals of the Ramayana. Based on the acts of Sri Rama in the Ramayana, Sitaram appeals to the moral and ethical centres of the human psyche, as a response to acts of aggression. Sitaram argues that the world in which the Ramayan was conceived and written in not much different to our present age, which is similar to that of ancient history which is 'replete with wars of conquest, terrorism, abductions, genocide, abuse of women etc.' Building upon his hypothesis, Sitaram argues that if *Dharma* controls destinies and protects people, then there is a corresponding effort in the metaphysical world to come to the rescue of righteous people. Sitaram concludes his article by posing the question of whether the 'idyllic world of *Krtayuga*', one of peace in co-existence, equality and compassion can be brought to the fore front of the present age.

The Search for Hindu Ethics in Contemporary India vis-à-vis Dharma, by P. Kumar, argues that the *Dharmasustra* and the *Dharmasastra* tradition represented by Manu and the *Arthasatra* tradition by Kautilya are structured within the format of the *svadharma* based ethical discourse. After substantiating his argument, Kumar brings into question that the search for modern Hindu ethics (which has moved away from the *savdharma* discourse) needs to take into account the influences from the colonial past which has immense influence in present day India. In highlighting the significant difference between that of nineteenth century India and present day India, Kumar uses Chaudhuri's three important social forces – i.e. Humanism, Hindu Protestantism and the Hindu Counter Reformation also known as the Hindu Revivalist Movement. Against this background, Kumar surveys both the Laws of Manu and the *Artasastra* of Kautilya. Kumar concludes his article emphasizing that a search for Hindu ethics in a contemporary Indian society must take cognizance of the 'changing patterns of Indian society, increasing globalization of culture, economy and political life and the increasing mobility that has become possible for the current generation of people in India.

Finally, the article by Kenneth Valpey, *Animal Rights and Ahimsa: An Ancient Discourse on Humans, Animals, and the Earth*; based on the increase of food costs in America, which would lead to a significant reduction of meat consumption; explores the contribution to a more comprehensive animal ethic. Raising questions about the changes in public attitudes towards meat consumption, Valpey's hypothesis is that a comprehension of animal ethics would bring twenty-first-century humanity into a 'more sustainable relationship to the land we inhabit'. Valpey substantiates his hypothesis by arguing the significant importance of an Indic discourse on '*ahimsa*' (non-violence) responding with an 'ethos that could counterbalance the consumerist thinking that dominates rights language today by fostering a principle of human self-understanding centered in participation rather than competition'. Valpey basis his argument on the exposition of the following: *yajña*, *dana* and *tapas*. Valpey concludes his article by asserting the importance of the Indic teachings on nonviolence which offers a chance to 'tame' ourselves and to become less of a source of 'fear' to the animals.

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Engendered Goddess: Some Considerations for a more Gender Relevant God

Maheshvari Naidu

Introduction

It is a reliable premise that religion is one of the institutions that many women turn to in their search for meaning and fulfilment. Religion is understood as one of several important structures through which our lives come to be ordered and experienced. Paradoxically it is also the very structure that many women eventually turn their backs on in the wake of their experiences of perpetuated patterns of alienation. Some of this alienation is affected through the traditional and normative values and figureheads presented to women, which the women themselves may well experience as repressive.

This exploratory essay looks at one of the archetypal goddesses presented in the Hindu religious tradition as personifying the ideal woman, most particularly the figure of Sita. At the level of popular religious praxis as well as that of popular religious discourse within Hinduism, goddesses such as Sita perpetuate a particular construct of women and it would serve us well to look to other goddess figures within the religion that speak more intimately to women's experiences of alienation. This paper attempts to offer some thoughts on finding an alternate goddess with whom women may find closer kinship.

Women and Religion

Denise Ackerman (1991:31) speaks of a kind of exodus from structured religions as "leaving religions often into an aching place of not belonging". Presumably this place of not belonging is a kind of nowhere-land of 'no religion'. This movement out of a religion can be painful if it is a protest to belong, as women and religious human beings. In another context it can be merely dismissive of that particular religious institution and the protest for recognition as women come to be articulated on a stage other than religion, perhaps in the context of political and social activism. An Indian female writer writing in the context of feminist scholarship has this to say regarding feminism and religion:

> Most of those who are happy to call themselves feminists have little to do with religion, and some prefer to distance themselves from it. They shy away from religion or dismiss it as being oppressive and restrictive (Sugirathrajah 2002:97).

She goes on to say that there are indeed Indian feminists (who may well be of the Hindu faith themselves one adds) who look at issues relating to Hindu women, however, these women would not want to call themselves Hindu feminists and rather that these feminists are looking at women's issues, not necessarily from the point of religion but rather in the context of their own disciplines (Ibid 98).

One feels that some of these women, especially those from the Christian faith would have also gravitated towards the so-called pagan or earth religions with their focus on earth and mother in their search for a place of belonging and kinship. However, many women, most notably from the Christian and Islamic traditions have also chosen to stay within structured religions in a bid to reorder their rightful place within the organization and articulation of institutionalised religions. These women are both feminist academics as well as what can be considered as feminist activists who choose to challenge the status quo of male dominance. These feminist scholars have worked within the religious traditions to reclaim and retrieve women's voices from within the various religious traditions. They have worked to challenge and reconstruct narratives from mythological, historical, canonical, et.al. textual sources. More substantial work has been done by Christian feminists than by feminist scholars working within the other major religions. Women like Sarah Grimk`e and Mary Daly have challenged the male interpretation of the Genesis myth, interpretations that would have us see Eve subordinate to Adam, or that Eve was responsible for his down fall. Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi have in turn worked with Islamic material offering challenging views of the history of Islam.

Many feminist theologians commenting on the "gender" of divinity (Prichard 2000:55) offer compelling arguments as to the analogy between a male god and male dominance in society and history. Their argument is that a male divinity justifies women's exclusion from sites of power and sacrality (Ibid.).

Women and Hinduism

Within the Hindu tradition, the scene is somewhat different. The Hindu women, unlike their Christian counterparts have not moved toward earth religions and such. This is because quite simply, Hinduism itself is replete with figures of the Feminine divine and notions of Earth and Mother are woven into most streams of Hinduism. However, the status of women in Hinduism is anything but unambiguous as the religion is anything but homogenous. Thus, although there is a stream of indigenous Hinduism that is strongly matriarchal and mother centred, there are also other brahmanical streams of Hinduism with emphasis on male gods, or female gods positioned as consorts to the male gods. The result is that many women still find the religion, as Sugirathrajah has stated, restrictive and oppressive. Thus, within Hinduism, even the notion of a Female-god and Divine Mother, (as the discussion on Sita will show) become oppressive symbols that serve to enslave rather than liberate. So much so, Sugirathrajah states, (2002:98) that the feminist (with a Hindu upbringing) would distance rather than ally herself with Hinduism.

Let us look at the more popularly known figure of Sita. The goddess-heroine Sita of the well-known Hindu religious text, the Ramayana, has enjoyed a long history complete with the reiterative clichés of being the epitome of female virtue and the embodiment of the ideal wife.

There have been some recent attempts by a few academics working from a feminist perspective and working with Hindu materials who have attempted to liberate Sita from the parochial clutches of such appellations of 'embodiment of virtue, chastity, humility' and the like. What is indeed sorely needed is the move to put to pasture some of these better known models for womanhood touted by religious custodians as well as scholars working with selected Hindu texts to the exclusion of other oral sources of Hinduism, while simultaneously liberating and inserting into the discourse the lesser known folk goddesses that lie somewhat obscured within and by the dominant streams of the Hindu tradition.

Academic writers like Wendy Doniger O' Flaherty, David Shulman et.al. have worked to bring to the fore textual motifs of violence and sexuality and of women (and goddesses) as possessing a dangerous erotic power. While this sort of work is not necessarily a feminist reading of the Hindu texts, it does work to highlight the fact that there exist tensions within the 'greater' tradition where deities and myths have been appropriated and welded to 'great' Sanskrit tradition from the little or folk traditions. More importantly it serves as a pointer to the fact that the folk tradition appears to house many powerful goddesses. Closer to home, Alleyn Diesel has done extensive work on goddess worship in South

Africa and contextualizes it within the phenomenon of goddess worship in India. Using fieldwork and interview material she has attempted to explore the importance of the indigenous goddesses in the lives of the South African female devotee. The findings of researchers such as Diesel, Kumar et.al. show that, at the level of popular religious practice in South Africa, the worship to the indigenous goddesses is substantial and meaningful. Notwithstanding this though is the reality that the importance of particular goddesses is still proclaimed over and above others and the priori assumption is that these goddesses are the models to be emulated by Hindu women.

In the heart of such an assumption lie also imperialistic notions within the popular religious discourse of which goddesses are to be viewed as the legitimate goddesses that even warrant our attention. Goddesses that are comfortably part of the so-called Great Tradition are referred to as the *Shaktis*, which literally means the 'powers'. Goddesses such as Parvathi, Sarasvati, Sita and Savitri are well known within the tradition, as are the assimilated (previously folk) goddesses such as Kali. Goddesses from the Little Tradition or indigenous folk tradition, while revered and feared in some contexts such as the goddess Mariammen, are not held up as healthy or ideal representations of women. Vital then is a process of reclamation to legitimise certain dispossessed goddesses that have been dispossessed due to imperialistic and sometimes parochial readings of certain texts or the rendering of the written text as being more authoritative than the parallel and sometimes predating indigenous oral traditions.

The feminist claim is that within the androcentric frame, the term man is understood as including men and women but this kind of terminology erases women as subjects in their own right. Accordingly, one possible remedy is to reread or re-interpret theological or mythological texts and position woman at the centre of the discourse, or put another way, to frame ones questions with women in mind. However, even when woman is kept in mind, there are particular archetypes of female hood that appear to be touted by certain scholars and even social activists that seek to re-evaluate the position of women in society. Catherine Robinson (1999) has done extensive research into the ideology and methodology of the Indian women's movement in India and shows how women have been active appropriators of traditional role models even in their campaigns for change. While this has been an effective strategy as part of the movement, it in turn may well perpetuate the fallacy that the Sitas and the Savitris[1] are the only goddesses that women may find kinship with.

As Catherine Robinson shows, The Indian Women's Movement in India is a case in point. Sarojini Naidu, herself to be seen as the kind of women, who in some ways challenged the way Indian women ought to be seen, was also someone who espoused the qualities of Sita as role model and source of strength for Indian women. The point is that much discussion of ideal woman has purportedly revolved around the figures of Savitri and Sita with sustained retelling at the popular as well at the level of academic discourse.

So the problem (in this particular) instance is not that woman has not been kept in mind. It is rather that a particular representation of woman is indeed kept in mind to which are offered the scriptural supports of the likes of the Savitris and the Sitas of Hindu texts.

Diesel's research shows that worship of the indigenous goddesses are important to women in South Africa. Diesel's research group though, would have been largely drawn from a particular class and educational background of females. My perception is that while a certain category of thinking Hindu woman may not necessarily accept Sita as her role model, she is also not likely to accept any of the indigenous goddesses. This is due to the following factors:

The brahmanical tradition has tended to privilege certain representations of women (like that of Sita) while simultaneously pathologising other, alternate representations as deviant. Not only are there of course, contested interpretations of sacred texts, the definition of what constitutes "text" is also contested. Within the so called Greater tradition the written texts have acquired, or rather been ascribed privileged status over other modes of texts such as story telling and ballads that are the carriers of the ideas and theology of the folk tradition.

Thus, rather than refract the goddess Sita through the lenses of any kind of feminist critique, I suggest that we shift our focus from Sita to some of the other goddesses. That is not to say that the feminist readings and deconstructions do not have their worth, because they do, on one level at least. However, on another level they deflect our attention from other models that might not even demand any sort of deconstruction.

Oh Sita not you again!

Let us quickly turn to just what exactly it is that is revered about Sita. In quick summary the mythological narrative recounts that Sita is abducted by the evil king Ravana and is later rescued by a messenger god of Rama. However Sita is venerated not so much for her brave endurance of the trauma and ordeal of the abduction. She is venerated for the fact that she passes the test that would check to see whether her chastity was intact and she had not suffered (or tolerated!) any sort of molestation perpetrated by the abductor. She is admired for the fact that she passes the test of chastity that might otherwise have soiled her person (or that of her divine husband the god Rama). True, this shortest of retellings of the mythological narrative is stripped bare of the religious attachments and religious sentiments that necessarily cluster around religious stories. However, it is within such threadbare narratives that the vital issues come to the fore, possibly unfettered by selective interpretations that any particular religious tradition might dictate.

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[1] Savitri is the other goddess that is especially venerated in the popular literature for her faith and chastity.

Thus, Sita comes to be seen as the figure of an ideal woman, the triumphant woman that comes to be communicated to our daughters and to the wives by the male custodians of Hinduism. She is the person that personifies the chaste wife who has not brought disrepute on her husband. But much of Sita's ordeal remains meaningless to many contemporary women. Women may find it increasingly meaningless and unnecessary to have to defend themselves and their perceived behaviour to a male audience.

There are however, as has been pointed out, several other lesser known goddesses within the wider Hindu tradition that offer another more interesting model of woman, keeping in mind that it is itself problematic to use the term 'model' for the normative and representational image that it conjures up. Here the term model is used rather to merely indicate and signpost the way to alternate figures of women (in Hindu religious literature) that paint a different and more enlightened picture of woman.

The 'not Sitas'

The (alternate) and largely oral 'histories' of these goddesses show them as having been wronged by males, having suitably avenged themselves and achieved their Divine status because of their personal triumph that vindicated themselves and not necessarily their male counterparts. This can be construed as a kind of pre-patriarchal religion with little or no access to the written texts. Indeed, even more interestingly, these are single goddesses who are not wed to any male figure. Thus, unlike Sita they are not consort goddesses who are attached and seen in relation to the male god. They are not always depicted as beautifully clad as Sita is. Indeed, they are even sometimes unclad and naked.

The depiction of the naked goddess is not to be construed as objectifying women but rather as freeing women from otherwise imposed norms that may seek to restrict and cover their freedom and sexuality. This portrayal is not seen as possessing the "erotic appeal" (Polinski 2000:45) of the nude. Within the tradition of indigenous Hinduism it (the naked body) is not viewed as a body to be coveted. Neither, is it deemed as unbecoming or unacceptable. To the modern women this depiction of the female can be refreshing and liberating. For women have also experienced religion, and its images of the female, as exerting some form of control and restriction of the way women's bodies ought to be seen. Consider the so called respectably attired Brahmanic goddesses as opposed to the sometimes nude folk goddess with wild hair. The former is held up within popular discourse as models of decorum as bodies meant to be covered, the latter as wild and uncontrollable. Thus, the naked goddess can be seen as a "redescription of women's bodies" or an uncensored description of women's bodies (Polinska 2000:56) as they truly might appear.

Unlike Sita they are also sometimes mortal women like the goddesses Mariammen or Gangeiamman who have achieved some sort of deification because of the power of their wrath towards the unjust behaviour of the males in their lives. These goddesses are human women, who have through their own actions achieved deified status.

These experiences of initial alienation and injustice and subsequent justice form the narrative backdrop of these goddesses. As Diesel's research shows these are the very stories that can find resonance with the experiences of many women who have fallen victims to one or more patriarchal structures or been a victim of an abusive relationship with a male.

Early Hinduism in South Africa

In the context of indigenous Hinduism or village Hinduism practiced in India, each village is associated with a particular protective mother goddess. This goddess connotes in very real terms the stability and order of the village and the villagers. She is synonymous with the well being of all who reside in that particular village. Indeed the tradition teaches that she is 'married' to the village as a whole and thus the villagers' welfare is her primary concern. As such this female divinity was understood as most powerful and capable of affording protection.

Coming from the rural villages and semi-rural small towns or the depressed economic peripheries of the urban areas the early indentured Hindu labourer was illiterate and came with a particular understanding of the religion, what historians of religion working with Hindu materials would refer to as non-Brahmanical or what anthropologists have termed as indigenous folk religion. At the fore of this type of religion was goddess worship. Initially it was this type of Hinduism that was brought over and practised in South Africa.

The patriarchal controlled Hinduism of the so-called Brahman elites of India privileges the textual tradition over the predominantly oral folk goddess tradition. In privileging these texts the tradition also pathologises a particular representation of Hindu women supposedly prescribed by these selfsame texts. Thus, the particular folk tradition of lone and powerful goddess shows up the position and eminence of women as unique and assertively otherwise.

In the early 1900s, Hindu leaders that were seen as representatives of Hinduism and seen as being able to offer spiritual guidance to the Hindus in South Africa were invited. These individuals were themselves the results and inheritors of a kind of revivalist and reformed religion of the likes of Ram Mohan Roy et.al. and brought with them a more philosophical Hinduism. Subsequent to these visits Neo Hindu movements such as the Arya Samaj and Divine Life Movement, Ramakrishna etc. were born. The Divine Mother was revered in the latter two religious movements, most especially in the Ramakrishna Movement. While the figure of Sri Sarada Devi as Mother is understood as being inspirational to many women (and men), this kind of conceptualisation of the divine, as householder yet virginal, chaste and enlightened, still fails to encompass and respond to the needs of many other women, women who were religious and sexually liberated.

Some of these women have concerns of patriarchal behaviour and institutions with male dominance and abuse from males. And who might choose to speak and act out towards these males. These are women who may well respond to the powerful image of goddesses whose own mythological histories show them as acting out against male abuse. However, the ideal figure of woman touted in these organisations is again that of Sita and the like.

Goddesses like Mariammen, Kali etc. have not been as championed as say Sita, or if they have it has been within certain narrow hermeneutics, Mariammen as the goddess presiding over certain contagious diseases, and Kali, in her re-appropriated role as goddess within the larger Brahmanic tradition. But these goddesses have rich mythological histories that reflect their strength and independence from any male god. It is these narratives[2] that hold the possibility of a more meaningful model of women that the female can draw inspiration from.

Women and Ritual to the Goddess

Aside from the oral narratives these goddesses can still be held up as models of inspiration for the manner in which they appear to prefer worship and ritual (and in some contexts, blood sacrifice) to them. For it is the female as officiating priest, that offers ritual to these goddesses. The female, unlike in the Brahmanic tradition is not barred from the immediate sanctum of the goddess on the grounds of blood contamination during her menstrual cycle. Indeed, ritual to the goddess in certain parts of India have, not only, not shunned this very natural part of female-hood, but even embraced it in the ritual expression and prayer to the goddess.

Part of the ritual towards the goddess also involves the invocation of what is referred to as trance. One adds that the trance referred to is a kind of self induced hypnotic state where it is understood, within the tradition, that the person under trance is 'possessed' by the goddess and uses that body to 'communicate' and offer a blessing to cast away the misfortune or illness of the devotee. As such, the female officiating as priestess here is imperative to the relationship between devotee and goddess. These possessed women are revered to as the Divine and they are seen as being able to bless others, to act as oracles and are seen as having healing powers. These women are often regarded with great respect by the believers and are sought out as spiritual healers and counsellors (Diesel 2002:51).

It is thus, the women who act as mediators between devotee and goddess. These goddesses 'appear' to communicate through the female priestesses, who are vested with the task of communicating the devotees' particular misfortune to the goddess. And it is the priestess who, in turn communicates to the believer, the goddess' instructions for retribution. Diesel notes that the women commented on the close connection between the divine females and human females and saw their close relationship with the goddess as adding and contributing to their own identity and worth as women (Diesel 2002:52). One adds that in the absence of the class of formal Brahmin (male) priests (as almost no Brahmin was among the early indentured labourers), the early indentured women could comfortably replay the ritual allegiances to the goddesses, in their role as custodians of the shrine, as they would have in the Indian rural villages.

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[2] The actual details of these narratives are in the works of writers like, Whitehead, Elmore, Kinsley, Hiltebeital et.al. Diesels' unpublished doctoral thesis also contains the narratives of these goddesses.

The later arriving Brahmin would have also found himself to be a minority. Hence, there would not have been a stress on emphasising the male deities from the Brahmanical tradition, to the exclusion of folk elements of worship from the matriarchal non-Brahmanical tradition. The indigenous goddess tradition in turn demands no preordained priestly class. The priests (female) who officiate can come from any class or caste background. However, the present status of many of the little sacred spaces where females officiate, have with but a few exceptions been relegated to the status of so called back-door temples and are perceived as places of unhealthy cites of blood sacrifices and ritual.

Possible Research Areas

Proper research would need to be done as to the extent that the emergent Neo-Hindu Movements have either intentionally or unintentionally contributed to the perception of unnecessary blood sacrifice with regard to worship of indigenous goddesses. But one can presume that the movements did not deem these ritual practices as reflective of 'true' Hinduism, and as reflective of a more philosophical Hinduism. It would be useful to do some form of research to see how these folk goddesses are perceived within the Neo-Hindu Movements in South Africa. Another possible area of research would be to look into what importance, if any, is attached to the folk goddesses on the part of other diasporic Hindu communities in other parts of the world. South Africa is somewhat distinctive, together with maybe Mauritius, for the conditions of indenture and the specific immigrant conditions that prevailed. Even more distinctive is the unique reality of apartheid, all of which would have contributed to the kind of Hinduism currently practised here. It would be interesting to see if other diasporic communities have moved completely away from folk goddesses and toward the main Brahmanic gods, or have retained patronage within certain contexts, as in the patronage of Mariammen and Draupadi festivals[3].

Conclusion

There does appear to be a need for Hindu women who have chosen to remain with, rather than distance themselves from Hinduism, to be exposed to other models of womanhood that can possibly offer greater relevance to the reality of their lives. If religion is really to be accepted as one of several important structures through which our lives come to be ordered and experienced, and one of the institutions that many women turn to in their search for meaning and fulfilment, it has to emerge as relevant and meaningful. Sita as a model of ideal women may well be inspirational to some women. However, this ideal is hollow and irrelevant to many other women against the milieu of their experiences. It just does not articulate with the lived reality of their lives. It smacks of being parochial and rigidly constrained of what exactly defines ideal women and as mentioned earlier, much of this ideal-ness is defined in relation to a male counterpart. This particular normative and essentialist construct paints women as almost sexually sanitised, chaste, paragons of virtue and preoccupied with upholding the reputation of their male counterparts.

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[3] See Kumar's book *Hinduism in South Africa* for a discussion of the Mariammen and Draupadi ammen festivals in South Africa (Details in bibliography).

At the level of religion studies discourse, the issues of which Hindu goddesses have achieved prominence over and above other goddesses is vital for the understanding of forces within the religion itself. This may not be the concern of the lay Hindu women herself. In very simple terms, of concern to her may be whether her religion makes any sense to her. Also of concern to her is whether her religion offers her models of women that are relevant to her. In the final analysis, what is of concern to her is whether she feels embraced by her religion, or alienated from it.

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Ethics and the Discourse of HIV/AIDS: A Hindu Response

U D Shukla

Abstract

It is postulated that a strong moral-ethical revolution coupled with the proper development and channeling of youthful energies is the only saviour of humanity, especially in the absence of cures and absence of guarantees that the viruses won't mutate and make medication futile. The ethical basis for a discourse on HIV/AIDS must consider the reinforcement of love combined with sex, family values, caring for people one interacts with, and, of course, the desire to live and enjoy a long, healthy and happy life. This paper will attempt to investigate some of the ethical norms of the Hindus, which could serve a prophylactic purpose. The various attributes and aspects of these norms will be examined in this paper to determine whether a social redefinition of life and human relationships could contribute to a better, healthier society.

The unrelenting march of the AIDS pandemic leaves humanity with no option but to adopt the best possible measures to care for those already afflicted, intensify the search for cures and change lifestyles and attitudes towards human sexuality. Whilst worldwide efforts are in progress towards treatment, not sufficient has been done about prevention and revisiting the issues of human sexuality, particularly in the light of ethical - moral values.

This necessitates an evaluation of the codes of human conduct found in all cultures, in particular those dealing with sexuality and reproduction. This effort has to be maintained and the lessons gleaned applied with deliberate seriousness of purpose even if causes and cures for HIV/AIDS are found - because one cannot risk the prospect of another virus or disease appearing after this one is conquered. One has to look at the aims and purposes of human life and imagine a picture of

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ourselves, our descendants and humanity on earth in the future decades and centuries, and decide whether there would be any kind or quality of life remaining to enjoy, after disease, environmental destruction and strife have done their work on our planet.

The ancient Hindu view of the world was one of unity of all life, harmony in the cosmos, on earth and between people. The Peace Hymn of the Atharva Veda, one of humanity's earliest scriptures, prays for peace thus:

> There is peace in the heavenly region; there is peace in the atmosphere; peace reigns on earth; there is coolness in the water; the medicinal herbs are healing; the plants are peace giving; there is harmony in the celestial objects and perfection in eternal knowledge; everything in the universe is peaceful; peace pervades everywhere. May that peace come to me.
> May there be peace, peace, peace!

Taking cognisance of the need for conscious caring for people, the Hindu thinkers conceived of a highly organised type of society wherein health, prosperity, harmony, peaceful co-existence amongst all forms of life and caring for one another would be the guiding principles. The Hindu concept of the entire world being one family, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, makes it imperative that people respond to human tragedies and needs wherever necessary.

The structures created for the purposes of the individual from conception to death were aimed at providing the best quality of life for individuals and society. This was particularly in view of the fact that humans above all of creation indulge in recreational sex in addition to procreational sex. Human tendencies, proclivities and urges were identified and rules of conduct laid down for the proper channeling / directing of these into positive, useful forces. The Hindu view of life was not one of denial or repression, but of sublimation and transcendence towards the true spiritual nature of human beings.

The codes of conduct were enlarged and interpreted through centuries and millennia in Primary and Secondary Scriptures and reflected in secular literature, epics and modern prose and poetry. These ideals still exist: the Hindu responses to disasters such as AIDS still remain the proper and purposeful union of man and woman, inspite of the fact that the number of AIDS infected people in India is increasing exponentially, with intensive educational and medical efforts to stem the spread.

The same dilemma as the one faced in India looms in Africa: whilst the scourge of Aids is threatening to reduce populations of countries, attitudes and outlooks towards sexual activity have existed in African cultures which could have mitigated the disaster if not prevented it. The importance placed on virginity in KwaZulu Natal (Daily News 10/4/2002), the call to girls for abstinence for five years (Swaziland) and the recent announcement of rewards for celibacy until marriage in Buganda (Sunday Tribune 5/5/2002:12) are but some of the recent attempts at emphasizing a simple fact of 'abstinence'.

Abstinence is accorded first place in the battle against HIV/AIDS. According to Alta van Dyk (2001:147, table 8.1) abstinence is the best no-risk situation in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Abstinence does not mean total exclusion of sex from one's life; but its fulfillment in the appropriate time and circumstances. Human beings have been encouraged to sublimate the urges through spiritual practices. "The spiritual transcendence of sexuality is not easily attainable, on account of the power of the sexual urge" (Sitaram 2001:2). Hence, the Hindus conceived the rules of *Dharma* or order to create a framework for the development of society.

The Code of Manu is the most important work in this respect. It developed the notion of four social forces (*Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, *Moksha*) and for social institutions (*Asramas*) dividing the human life-span into four parts for proper activities in each quarter. Furthermore, there were rites of passage (*Sanskaras*) to reinforce the attempts at proper development of the individual.

Manu approached *Dharma* as a "concept of social forces. *Dharma* is something inherent in the individual" (Motwani 1958:55). It is asserted that every human being has *dharma* as the predominant feature of his existence; in accordance with which he carries out his actions. The next social force is *artha* or wealth through right activities; followed by *kama*, enjoyment of sex. The Hindu view, as expressed by Manu, is that sex is a basic, divine urge - "the all-absorbing impulse of man" (Motwani 1958:56). Hence the sublimation of desire, until the attainment of the stage for its legitimate satisfaction, is prescribed for the proper development of the individual. Abstinence from erotic thoughts and actions (Motwani 1958:87) are considered necessary for the sublimation of urges. The fourth social force - *moksha*, cessation of birth and death, is deemed to issue from the proper adherence to the Laws of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*. It is the stage of final bliss.

In Manu's Code the four social institutions or *Asramas* are *Brahmacarya* (celibacy), *Grahastha* (married householder stage)

Vanaprastha and *Sannyasa*, each of twenty five years duration according to the perceived life-span of 100 years.

Brahmacarya or celibacy (student) phase is the most important for our purposes, because it inducts the individual into the householder phase in which all life's pleasures are satisfied. *Vanaprastha* is the stage of a "suburban recluse" (Motwani 1958:60), withdrawing from activities of the senses, while still living with the family. The *Sannyasa* stage is devoted solely to spiritual purposes, in preparation for reunion with the Divine. It is pursued in seclusion, even in the forest.

The *Brahmacarya* or celibate phase is dedicated to the moral and physical development and education of the young human being. Sublimation of desire is central to this phase, and proper training for the satisfaction of desires in the next phase is found in the celibate stage. Manu states that "desire is the dominating motive of life. It is deeply implanted in human nature, and should be given due satisfaction" (Motwani 1958:87). This balanced approach to the basic urge of living beings is expanded by the explanations that desire cannot be fully and finally extinguished. Hence, the senses must be controlled together with the mind. Sublimation takes place when the celibate student concentrates on the aim and purpose of life and the acquisition of skills for livelihood. The realisation that there must be control over the senses in order to give due consideration to one's duties instills in the individual a sense of responsibility. The Hindu approach to a good life begins with a healthy mind and body, as developed in the *brahmacarya* stage wherein discipline and duty are inculcated in the person. The provision for the enjoyment of legitimate pleasures in the *grahastha* stage, were intended to make the rigidity and effort required in the *brahmacarya* stage endurable, even enjoyable. As stated earlier, sublimation not repression, was the Hindu motto: transcendence not avoidance of the world was the right way. Celibacy or abstinence from sexual indulgence is glorified in India, just as virginity and abstinence are promoted in African cultures.

The social forces and institutions of the Code of Manu, based on a proper understanding and appreciation of human instincts and proclivities, and with due recognition of the needs of a stable society, gave rise to the observance of *Sanskaras* or rites of passage to reinforce the ideals of Manu and in an empirical way direct the development and sustenance of the individual as flesh and spirit.

The *Sanskaras* of which sixteen have been prescribed, were meant to enable a person to move along a path that leads to the realisation of the purpose of life - *moksha* or liberation.

Great emphasis was placed on the nature and nurture of the individual- attempts being made by prayer, rituals and nutrition that the child to be born to a couple will have a sound mind and body. Hence there were three *Sanskaras* performed before the birth - one at conception, the second at three months after conception and the third at the sixth or eighth month after conception. Amongst the other important *Sanskaras* are the *Vedarambha*, (education - the most important aspect of the *brahmacarya* phase) and marriage.

It has been emphasized that indulgence of pleasures, sex being the foremost, was reserved for the *Grahastha* stage - between 25 and 50 years. The *Sanskara* or ritual of marriage and family life provides the framework for enjoying material pleasures and comforts of life. It was within marriage that sexual gratification, procreation of healthy children and performance of other duties of a householder were enjoined. Sexual gratification outside marriage was not given approval. Marriage as a spiritual union of wife and husband constituted an eternal bond. The notion of sanctity attached to not only marriage but also to sexual union. The violation of this sanctity was severely denounced. Such notions regarding sex and sexuality exist in other cultures as well. Communities in Africa use words such as "defilement" of a female who is made to have sex outside a marriage and call for severe punishment:

> "Parents in the district (Lira, Uganda) have asked the Government to hang men who defile young girls so that others abstain from the immoral act"(The New Vision, Uganda 25/4/2002:9).

Hence the ideal of sexual purity, marital fidelity, monogamy etc. are very highly valued.

The social institution of marriage as the only appropriate state for material enjoyment especially of sexual pleasure, heightened its importance, and led to the development of eight types of marriage, in order to bring all kinds of sexual relationships within binding, committed parameters.

Thus, Manu made provision for eight types of marriage:

The four blameless types are

A *Brahmya*
B *Prajapatya*
C *Daiva*
D *Arsha*

In these the parents have a role in marrying off the daughter honourably.

The four blameworthy types are

A *Asura* - marriage by sale of the bride. Manu discouraged this since it led to the "marketing of daughters" (Benjamin Walker 1983:48).

B *Gandharva* - the romantic union - Kalidasa's Shakuntala.

C *Rakshasa* - a woman carried away as war booty and married by captor.

D *Paisaca* - whilst this form was also blameworthy, it was accepted as a last resort to afford some reparation to the victim of deceit and treachery. In this marriage the female was carried away by force or deceit, or ravished whilst unconscious or drugged. Walker (1983:39) says that although this form of marriage was universally condemned "the maxim of *factum valet* was recognised and the girl's marriage was accepted as having been accomplished to confer on her the legal status of a wife".

All the above attempts at "marrying" people aim to confine sexual relations between men and women within marriage.

The call for an end to promiscuity and a return to monogamous relationships is intensifying in the face of the advance of HIV/AIDS. This was reportedly voiced amongst others by Lt. Jerry Rawlings, former Ghanian President, on a visit to Swaziland thus: "African men and their polygamous lives were to blame for the spread of AIDS" (Daily News, Durban 28/3/ 2002).

The ancient Indian epic, the Ramayana also promotes monogamy through the hero Rama in an era when polygamy was common. The restriction to single partners was not only conducive to good health but also fostered discipline and self-control. This approach must be seriously considered in our current society where there is greater exhortation to indulgence rather than restraint. This view of Manu must be thoroughly understood: "if the student keeps feeding the senses, he is adding fuel to the fire, for the senses can never be satisfied by indulgence" (Motwani 1958:87).

The modern Hindi epic Kamayani by Jayshankar Prasad describes the deluge which ended the previous human civilisation. He depicts the over-indulgence of the "gods" of that civilisation in sensual pleasures and their disregard of natural laws as the cause of the deluge:

Everything was drowned, inundated was
Their glory, the oceans becoming one
The joys of the gods are now reverberating
With the roars of the ocean of sorrow
(Kamayani Canto 1:16)

An antithesis to this diluvian destruction is the concept of Ramarajya of the Ramayana. Tulasidasa, in his version of the Ramayana portrays monogamy, sexual fidelity and restraint as the chief ingredients of human happiness in a golden era of civilisation (*Ramarajya*):

> "Every husband was pledged to a vow of monogamy and the wives, too, were devoted to their husbands in thought, word and deed" (Ramacaritamanasa, Uttarakanda 21-4).

Sitaram (2001:12) asserts that "*Ramarajya*, based on morality is achieved through active effort of men and women".

The foregoing emphasises the fact that the realisation of the goals of life and understanding the dangers lurking in the path of expediency and indulgence are the best safeguards for the future generation. There is need for a moral-ethical reorientation of society whereby sex will find its rightful place. Instead of being a lifestyle imperative sex should be projected as a precious experience akin to the touch of the Divine in the correct environment.

The foregoing Hindu response reflects ideas and ideals which were strictly followed in bygone times. Resurgence of these values in India and their promotion worldwide is therefore necessary. India, too, is in the grips of the scourge and is beginning to adopt all means of containing it. Its socio-economic system leads to large sale purchasing of sex by men separated for long periods from their wives and families. Even prostitutes are being enrolled in HIV/AIDS education to ameliorate the situation (Sunday Times Insight 7/4/ 2002:18). In addition, the Indian authorities are succeeding in breaking taboos about sex and open discussion thereof. In rural India where the problem is more complex, social advertising conveys warnings such as "Protected Sex: Prevention of AIDS" (Bhatia 2000:234). Billboards advocating the use of condoms have headlines such as "Protector" (Bhatia 2000:237). Bringing sex out of the closet of social and cultural taboos is imperative especially if combined with the ethical-moral approach to sex. In South Africa former President Nelson R. Mandela appears in full page advertisements exhorting parents to talk to their children about sex.

For India, Africa, as indeed for the whole world, prevention and cure have to go hand in hand for the benefit of the future generations. The important task before communities everywhere is to give the best possible care and support to those already afflicted by the disease, make provision for the welfare of AIDS orphans and infected babies and families left destitute as an immediate concern. One of the common daily prayers of the Hindu is:

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah
Sarve santu niramayah
Sarve bhadrani pasyantu
Ma kascid dukha bhaga bhavet

Let happiness prevail everywhere
Let everybody enjoy good health
Let us see auspiciousness on all sides
Let no one endure suffering.

The desire to see everyone happy and healthy implies the due care and comfort given to the sick and frail.

Thereafter, as a means of preventing the contracting of any deadly disease particularly through sex, ethics and morals need to be brought to the forefront as weapons in a war between a few moments of indulgence and indiscipline and lifelong agony for the victims and their dear ones. The rigours of abstinence based on ethical and moral principles must be more alluring or palatable than surrender to instincts and urges which lead to damnation.

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The Ramayana and World Order: Past, Present and Future

Rambhajun Sitaram

Abstract

The concept of "World Order", or peace, amity and security amongst nations and peoples of the earth is an old one. Mankind did experience this kind of peace and security in past aeons, such as the *Kritayuga* of the Hindu time-cycle. However, in the quest for national or regional stability, acts of aggression often become the means of attaining the end of peace. In the 20th Century, even leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru uttered the sentiment "If you want peace, prepare for war". It is postulated that there are ways of establishing world order without any serious disturbance of the lives of people. The Ramayana has shown the way to achieve this. This paper will examine the problems confronting humanity and possible ways of resolving them on the basis of the ideals of the Ramayana.

The Ramayana, an extraordinary epic poem on the acts of Sri Rama is an eternally appealing spiritual document. It appeals to the higher moral and ethical, as well as aesthetic centres of the human psyche. It evinces equal concern for the pains and tribulations of animals and human beings, creations of the Supreme. Sri Rama is described by Devarshi Narada as being endowed with sixteen attributes that make him Divine. When Maharshi Valmiki asked him "Who in this contemporary period is endowed with all the qualities" enumerated in Srimad Ramayana, Balakanda 1.1 slokas1-19, seemingly with the aim of writing about a super – eminent personality in human society, with his newly evolved, spiritually charged personality – later to be enhanced by the gift of poetry – Sage Narada at once answered that it was Sri Rama born in the Iksavaku Dynasty. There was no mention of

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another personality to match the criteria posed by Valmiki. This exchange between two Rishis and the identification of Sri Rama as the abode and repository of all the virtues locate Him in the Divine sphere. A careful reading and understanding of the Valmiki Ramayana Balakandam 1.1; 1-19 will illustrate the fact that the criteria cannot be all found in one single ordinary mortal. It was only Sri Rama who could restore the world order as it existed in *Kritayuga*, after the decline of *Dharma* and the rise of *Adharma* in the form of ogres and rakshasas foremost of whom was Lankadhipati Ravana. In Ayodhyakandam 33.15 Valmiki gives a description of Sri Rama which makes him foremost in all creation in addition to being the cause of all creation:

> *Mulam hyesa manusyanam dharma saro mahadyutih*
> *Puspam phalam ca patram ca sakhascasyetare jana*
>
> Rama of great effulgence is the very essence of virtue, is the root of the tree of all created humanity, whereof all other human beings are but flowers and fruits, leaves and branches (Valmiki Ramayana Ayodhyakandam 33.15).

Valmiki further describes the divinity of the Ramayana itself:

> *Gayatryasca swarupam tadramayanamanuttamam*
> *Yah patheta srinuyannityam caritam raghavasya ca*
> *Bhaktaya niskalmaso bhutwa dirghmayura vapnuyat*
>
> Whoever daily reads or hears with devotion the sacred Ramayana, the life-story of Sri Rama, which is the very embodiment of the holy hymn of Gayatri, is absolved of all his sins and lives the full span of life.

Goswami Tulasidasa constantly refers to Sri Rama's divinity, his status as *Parabrahma*, and his attributes of compassion, strength, righteousness etc. The lines that follow give an insight into who Sri Rama is:

> *Bandau nama rama raghubara ko, hetu krsanu bhanu himakara ko*
> *Bidhi harihara maya beda prana so, aguna anupama gunanidhana so*

> I greet the name of 'Rama' of the chief of the Raghus which is composed of the seed letters representing the fire god, the sun god and the moon god. It is the same as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, and the vital breath of the Vedas. It is unqualified, peerless and a mine of virtues (Ramacaritamanasa, Balakanda 18.1).

The world in which the Ramayana was conceived and written was not much different from what we have known. Ancient history is replete with wars of conquest, terrorism, abductions, genocide, abuse of women etc. Valmiki Ramayana portrays Ravana as a threat to world order. Tulasidasa in his Ramacaritamanasa also does the same. Adikavi Valmiki describes the terror and turmoil resulting from the actions of demonic forces led by Rakshasa Ravana. The situation becomes so desperate that Divine intervention is sought. Just when King Dasharatha commences his *putreshthi yajna* (sacrifice to beget a son), the *devas* and *rishis*, noticing the presence of the spiritual luminaries at the sacrifice, approach Brahma for aid:

> *Bhagavamstvaprasadena ravano nama rakshsah*
> *Sarvana no badhate viryacchasitu na shaknumah*
>
> By dint of the powers acquired through your grace, O Lord, the ogre named Ravana is molesting us all. We cannot subdue him (Valmiki Ramayana Balakandam : XV:6).

Brahma knows that Ravana can only be exterminated by a human, because of his boon (*Prasad*) to him. When Lord Vishnu arrives at Dasharatha's *yajna*, Brahma entreats him to manifest as Dasharatha's four sons to vanquish Ravana:

> *Tvam niyoksyamahe visno lokanam hitakamyaya*
> *Rajnyo dasarathasya tvamayodhyadhipatervibho*
> *Visno putratvamagaccha krtvaatmanam caturviddham*
> *Tatra tvam manuso bhutva pravrdhdam lokakantakam*
>
> With intent to ensure the good of the worlds, O Vishnu, we are going to impose a burden on you. Splitting yourself into four personalities, O all pervading Lord, play you the role of a son to the munificent King Dasharatha, ruler of Ayodhya. Appearing in humam semblance

> through them, O Vishnu, make short work of Ravana, the scourge of the world (Valmiki Ramayana, Balakandam XV – 19 & 21).

It is noteworthy that this appeal to the Lord was made for the good of the world, not of just a single country or community. It is even more significant that one high born individual, Ravana, through study and austerities attained so much power to abuse creation, that he became a thorn in the flesh of the people. Unchecked power leads to tyranny and oppression, until a stage is reached when ordinary mortals cannot counter it. *Dharma* is subverted to unrighteous ambitions. The victims' ultimate recourse is the merciful Lord for deliverance.

Goswami Tulasidasa, writing in the dark period of India's history, the 16th century, fully understood the despair and frustration experienced by the world under the ravages of Ravana. Tulasidasa borrows the idiom of the Srimadbhagavadgita 1V. 7-8 to convey the sense of the conditions under which the Supreme intervenes to restore *Dharma* and order in the world. He says:

> *Jaba jaba hoi dharama kai hani, badhahi asura adhama abhimani*
> *Karahi aniti jai nahi barani, sidahi bipra dhenu sura dharani*
> *Taba taba prabhu dhari bibidha sarira, harahi krpanidhi sajjana pira*
>
> Whenever *Dharma* declines, great *asuras* of a lowly and arrogant nature emerge, tormenting the vulnerable parts of society as well as the gods and the earth. Then the merciful assumes different bodily forms to remove the suffering of the godfearing people (Ramacaritamanasa, Balakanda: 120d- 4/5).

It is significant to grasp the point in Bhagavadgita and Ramacaritamanasa that demonic forces arise whenever *Dharma* declines. The decline of *Dharma* is the cause, and not the result, of the activities of Rakshasas or Adharmik forces. Light and darkness cannot exist side-by-side; darkness takes over as soon as the light is extinguished.

Already at the beginning of *Tretayuga*, *Dharma* began to decline; the world order was in imbalance. To alleviate the distress of creation, Bhagavan Sri Ramachandra manifested as son of Dasharatha and Kaushalya. Dwapara witnessed greater slide of *Dharma* when evil infiltrated ordinary mortals, not just specific demonic groups. Such is the nature of *Dharma*: once it is established, it must be maintained by the beneficiaries of *Dharma*, otherwise it will recede, giving way to evil forces to inflict pain on the people. It is stated that in *Krtayuga* there was no decline of *Dharma*:

> *Adau krtayuge varna nrnam hamsa iti snrtah* (Srimadbhagavad Purana).

In *Krtayuga* all the people were alike, called *Hamsa*. They obeyed divine laws and lived in peace and harmony. The decline of *Dharma* implies neglect of duties enjoined by the scriptures, lack of compassion for fellow beings, covetousness and lust, lack of moral courage to support what is right and oppose what is wrong. Great, noble rulers of the earth such as Bhagavan Rishabhadeva, Ashwapati, Raghu, Dhasharatha, Rama, Ashoka, Chandragupta set examples of ideal kingship. Yet, we find examples such as Ravana and Kamsa who tormented humanity and intimidated the gods, without opposition. People were not carrying out their *Dharmik* duties, and even worse, were not standing up to oppose these Rakshasa powers. Bhakta Prahalada and many virtuous figures are noted for resistance to evil: however, these were just isolated individual incidents. Pavananjaya, hero of a *Puranic* romance novel *Muktiduta* by Virendra Kumar Jain opposes Ravana's decision to bombard tiny Varuna-dvipa because it refuses to submit to the overlordship of Mahamandaleshvara (Superlord) Ravana. He says :

> Considering the imbalances of this present war, it seems that if this campaign against Varuna-dvipa is allowed to continue, then the ideals of heroism and the conventions of war will be destroyed. The unbridled rampage of murderers and brigands will ensue. With the disappearance of the guidelines of *Dharma*, anarchy will become the order of the day, and everyone will behave as he wishes (Jain 2001:194).

The foregoing illustrates the consequences of allowing powerful tyrants to do as they please. Unholy alliances existed in Ravana's time, as they have during all periods of history. The Ramayana and all other scriptural and literary works promote universal brotherhood, peace, love and compassion. The Sutra: *Ayam nijah paro veti ganana laghucetasam, Udaracaritanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam,* highlights the Hindu approach to peaceful co-existence.

The Ramayana spread its message of righteousness, love, peace and godliness throughout East and South Asia in ancient times. Because of the peaceful and benevolent conquest of the Ramayana, it was accepted and adopted in the local cultures where it went, and enjoys a respected place in the national lives of the people. Even where the Ramayana depicts victory or conquest the motive was not to acquire territory or property of the subdued nation. Golden Lanka itself had no charm for Maryada Purushottam Rama - he anointed Ravana's brother Vibhishana as the new King. Sri Rama confided to Lakshmana that "even golden Lanka does not appeal to me". The main consideration for Sri Rama is *Janani janmabhumisca svargadapi gariyasi,* the mother and the motherland are even greater than heaven. This approach of renunciation in the heart of a conqueror is rare; but so sorely needed in our present world, in the context of war and politics, civil / criminal litigations, commerce and diplomacy.

In the present era many personalities adopted the ideals of Sri Rama and Ramayana, either through direct study and devotion or through knowledge gained from others. Gandhiji's principles of *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, *Aparigrha* and *Sarvodaya* were developed through study of Gita, Upanishads and Ramayana. India's national leaders from Bal Gangadhar Tilak to Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, the spiritual *Acharyas*, *dharmacharyas* and *gurus* have highlighted the ideals of Ramayana for peace, love and harmony. Outside India, followers of Gandhiji's ideals of *Ahimsa* and *Satyagraha* inspired Martin Luther King to free the African-Americans from white prejudice. In South Africa, Chief Albert Luthuli, and our icon Nelson Mandela followed the same principles of equality and justice for all. Dr Mandela, awarded the Bharat Ratna by India, as well as two Nehru prizes, imbibed the basic principles of all major religions from his fellow inmates at Robben Island where he spent a large part of his 27-year long imprisonment. When Nelson Mandela and his colleagues were finally arrested and tried for treason (the Rivonia Trial) in 1964 – the sentence of death was the most likely outcome. Dr Mandela was already by then a highly spiritual being, and told the trial judge:

> During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and just society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die (Nelson Mandela 1995: 439).

The above statement of Mandela, and his subsequent actions after release in 1990, during his presidency 1994-1999, and his continued untiring efforts for making the world a better place, even in his frail old age of 86 years, set him apart as a world leader. It was in recognition of his values and actions that the 18th International Ramayana Conference, Durban, South Africa, 2002 awarded him the International Ramayana Conference Human Solidarity Award.

Our world is nevertheless still afflicted by conflict- by threats on one hand and fear on the other. Terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and mutually assured destruction, environmental disasters waiting to happen, are all caused by rapacious and short-sighted human beings. In ancient times spiritually charged weapons were available for use to protect humanity. Now anybody who has money can purchase weapons and technology to blackmail the world.

We need a new generation of Gandhis, Mandelas, Ashokas and Chandraguptas to point the world in the right direction. We need a Saviour or *Mahanayaka* who will free us from even the threat of untimely and meaningless destruction which is always looming over the horizon. The powers of the world, both legitimate and self-appointed, create a cloud of fear in the hearts of humanity in order to have their way. In the words of Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, describing how fear muted the voices of African leaders when an airliner carrying hundreds of passengers was shot down over Niger in 1987, "the world jettisoned all notion of a common humanity", and continues that:

> … from Lockerbie through Niger to Manhattan (World Trade Centre) the trail of fear had stretched and broadened to engulf the globe, warning its inhabitants that there was no longer any categories of the involved or the non-involved. No longer could, not just innocents, but even a community of historical victims that inhabit the African Continent, lay claim to a protective immunity (Soyinka in Sunday Times, April 2004:21).

The above fear-dominated picture of the world also occupies the mind of other thinkers and spiritual personalities: His Holiness the Dalai Lama also voiced the reign of fear which stifles or mutes, resulting in their continued domination over lives. Speaking of world peace and non-violence, in the context of powerful nations which are viewed as champions of liberty and justice, but are falling short in various ways, he says:

> I think the various leaders are doing their best. Of course, mistakes will happen. But my main concern is about the future, and also each individual from the ordinary public, and particularly the younger generation. We must educate about what is going wrong now, (and) the many unnecessary problems we are facing today (Dalai Lama in Mail and Guardian, June 2004 :18).

The above-quoted personalities describe the situation, but fall short of prescribing directly the remedy of the world's ills. What becomes explicit, however, is that they speak of a common humanity threatened by diverse forces. Man has to find his inner strength through spirituality to find solutions. He must invoke the Higher Moral Order and Consciousness and re-learn the lessons of *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, *Dharma*, *Vishwa Bandhutva* etc. Mankind must invoke Sri Rama as the source and protector of *Dharma* to stabilize the world order. We are seeing an era where protectors are becoming predators, where Ravana's philosophy of *vayam rakshamah* (submit to be safe) is being practised by the powerful. We must accept nothing less than protection of *Dharma* – which is just and equally disposed towards all.

How does one transform the world from a path of *Adharma* to *Dharma*? It is believed that the efforts and austerities of saints, sages, *acharyas*, *rishis* and *munis* have been mitigating the excesses of *Kaliyuga*. Whilst there are powerful forces overriding the wishes, desires and welfare of the masses of humanity, there are also institutions and organizations – UNO, WHO etc. that attempt to balance the interests of nations. However, these institutions are often shackled by greater powers, diminishing their effect. There needs to be greater effort towards spiritualizing and uniting humanity as a single mass of people vulnerable to the same dangers. Groups pulling in different directions will exacerbate the process of destruction. Spiritual movements dedicated to recreating paradise on earth must join forces.

If *Dharma* controls our destinies and protects us, then there is a corresponding effort in the metaphysical world to come to the rescue of righteous people. There seems to be an epochal change *(yuga parivartana)* in the spiritual world according to Lallan Prasad Vyas. Sri Vyas poses the question: How can the world be saved from its destiny shaped by its sinful and uncontrolled actions of the past? The Venerable Misusama of the

Paradise on Earth project is of the conviction that only those who surrender to the Lord will be safe (Vyas 2003:5).

The way towards complying with and applying *Dharma* is shown in the Ramayana. Valmiki gives but a brief direct description of *Ramarajya* (ideal rule) whilst the epic is infused with the message of righteous living in all circumstances. Goswami Tulasidasa paints a more lucid picture of *Ramarajya* where human beings lived at peace with one another, in a status of equality, and on terms of peace and compassion with animals, plants, the environment and climate. This was a return to the idyllic world of *Krtayuga*. Can this happen again?

I believe that humanity will come to a stage of existence, when seeking salvation through spirituality will be the only option. In preparation for that eventuality the lessons of Ramayana and other scriptures must remain available to point the way. The means of conquering the forces of destruction will ultimately be spiritual, like Tulasidasa's Chariot of Victory based on Kathopanishad. Ramacaritamanasa, Lankakanda 79 describes the Vijay Ratha. Sri Rama tells Vibhishana the true chariot of victory is a moral / spiritual one:

> Valour and fortitude are the wheels of that chariot, while truthfulness and virtuous conduct are its enduring flags and pennants. Strength, discretion, self-control and benevolence are its four horses, harnessed with the cords of forgiveness, compassion and evenness of mind. The worship of God is its skilled charioteer, dispassion his shield and contentment his sword, charity his axe and reason his fierce lance, and the highest wisdom his relentless bow. A pure and steady mind is his quiver, filled with arrows of quietude, restraint and religious observances. Homage to the Brahmans and the preceptor is his impenetrable shield, there is no other way to ensure victory than this.

These words of Sri Rama represent him in the world today. We must grasp the message and mould our actions according to the precepts expressed therein.

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The Search for Hindu Ethics in Contemporary India vis-à-vis Dharma[1]

P. Kumar

Abstract:
This essay attempts to argue, first, that the *Dharmasustra* and *Dharmasastra* tradition represented by Manu and the *Arthasastra* tradition represented by Kautilya, despite many basic differences in the way the two approached the application of *Dharma*, are broadly speaking structured within the format of the *svadharma* based ethical discourse. Second, the contemporary discourse on Hindu ethics has moved away from the *svadharma* based discourse and, therefore, the quest for modern search for Hindu ethics has to take into account the influences from the colonial past and it has to deal with the growing sense of social, cultural and political diversity in India today.

The search for Hindu ethics is a relatively new enterprise. Although, there is an entire genre of texts that are known as *Dharma* texts (from Manu to Yajnavalkya and to other legal texts), the use of *Dharma* as a moral concept in much the same way as the modern western notion is a new invention of the nineteenth century India. In order to contextualise this let me refer to Nirad C. Chaudhuri's remarkable analysis of the nineteenth century India in his book *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951, republished in 1999). Using Bengal as the pulse of Indian society, he provides a window into the social, religious and political changes that were sweeping the country during the nineteenth century. What Chaudhuri says of Bengal in particular can be applied to the rest of

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[1] This article in its earlier and much shortened form was originally read at the conference on *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, held at the Oriental Research Institute of Mysore from 13-16 June 2002. It is substantially expanded and is published here with the permission of the Oriental Research Institute, Mysore.

India of the period. He says that the most significant difference between modern India and the nineteenth century India is the following-- "Without becoming atheistic or agnostic or ceasing to be superstitious, modern Indians have ceased to be interested in religious and ethical problems" (Chaudhuri 1999:198). Chaudhuri identifies three important social forces during the nineteenth century-- Humanism represented by the then famous Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutt, son of a wealthy Bengali who converted to Christianity; Hindu Protestantism represented by Rammohun Roy and the Brahmo Samaj; and the Hindu counter reformation or Hindu revivalist movement represented by Bankim Chandra Chatterji whose preoccupation was culture vis-à-vis religious and secular, and Vivekananda who was more concerned with proselytising (Chaudhuri 1999:205). Both Bengali humanism and Brahmo puritanism had underscored the goodness of European culture and value. It was in the end the Brahmo Samaj that championed the Hindu liberalism. However, Chaudhuri notes that it was the conservatism of the Hindu revivalists, namely Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Vivekananda that won the battle. He says:

> These two schools wrestled for the soul of modern India, and there was hardly one modern Indian with any capacity for thinking who did not experience this struggle within himself. Even Tagore, a Hindu liberal, if ever there was a Hindu liberal, felt drawn towards the new Hinduism, and his novel Gora is an exposition of this theme. By the time the nationalist agitation over the partition of Bengal had reached its climax (1907) Hindu conservatism may be said to have definitely won the battle. Politics made a powerful contribution to this victory (Chaudhuri 1999:206).

The real struggle between the two movements, the Brahmo and the Hindu revivalism is primarily focused on morality. It was the Brahmo Samaj that first crusaded against the prevailing decadent behaviour within the popular Hinduism. Chaudhuri notes that "[t]he Brahmo Samaj began its moral crusade with a practical programme. It attacked four vices which it found to be very widespread in the society and the times in which it came into being. They were sensuality, drunkenness, dishonesty, and falsehood" (Chaudhuri 1999:213). He further states that "[t]hese sordid and banal vices overlay Hindu society like a coat of slime" (Chaudhuri 1999:214). The vigour with which the Brahmo approached these moral issues was similar to that of the Christian puritanical approach. In fact, it was from the Christian puritanism that Brahmo received its impetus to judge and critique the Hindu society in very much along the lines of Christian morality. Of course, the Hindu revival movement did not sit back. While it did not approve of Brahmo's critique of Hindu society from a western norm, Hindu revivalist movement considered, nonetheless, morality as indispensable to spiritual advancement. Chaudhuri rightly points out that

> [t]he Brahmo movement fought not only the sordid immoralities it found practised by contemporary Hindu society, but even more resolutely this moral turpitude. In this it was inspired by Christian European ethics, for in its essence Brahmoism was an application of Christianity to Hinduism as Sikhism was the application of Islam. The Hindu revivalist movement which sprang into existence as a counter blast to Brahmoism approached morality from the specifically Hindu standpoint, and was not prepared to acknowledge any debt to Western Christianity, but there is no room for doubt that its conscience too was quickened by the example of Brahmoism and by the Christian leaven (Chaudhuri 1999:218).

Furthermore, Chaudhuri remarks that "[t]he fact of the matter is that despite theoretical differences both Brahmoism and new Hinduism were ascetical and puritanical in practice" (Chaudhuri 1999:215). This above analysis of Chaudhuri poignantly points out that the contemporary Hindu concern for ethics and morality is a direct result of the then Christian missionary impact on the nineteenth century Hindu intellectuals and orthodoxies. One could have used other scholars such as D.D. Kosambi.[2]

It is against this background that I wish to survey both the Laws of Manu and the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya. Before I go further let me make a preliminary remark on the respective titles that both of them have given to their respective works. Manu had called his work *Dharmasastra* whereas Kautilya called his work *Arthasastra*. In other words, while it is obvious the overriding concern of Manu was *Dharma*, the concern of Kautilya was that of *Artha*. These two constitute, interestingly, the two fundamental elements in the fourfold goals of Hindu life and practice. Hindu society also developed a highly technical science called *Kamasastras* (*Kamasutra* is an example), and the *Bhagavad Gita* together with the *Vedanta* genre of literature might be construed as the *Mokshasastra*. So, each of the four goals or four attitudes, as Karl Potter calls them, have gradually developed their highly specialised literary texts detailing those sciences.[3] V.V.R. Dikshitar comments that,

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[2] For more details on this see Sridhar and Bilimoria in the same volume.

[3] Some scholars believe that Kautilya was the author of a *Dharmasastra*,

> The Mauryan state like any other Hindu state had for its aim the realisation of the *trivarga*—the trinity group of *Dharma, Artha and Kama*. Of these the author of the *Arthasastra* attaches greater importance to the second, namely *Artha* or wealth, for on this depended the realisation of *Dharma* and *Kama* (Dikshitar 1993:141).

If Manu had focused on *Dharma* and Kautilya on *Artha*, the question for us in the twenty first century is as to what extent the two of them have influenced our contemporary ethics. From the comments of Chaudhuri which I have outlined above, it is obvious that the nineteenth century socio-political context set the pace for a new quest for Hindu ethics. But to what extent the exploration of the Hindu reformers and counter reformers was in line with that of Manu and Kautilya is a question that we need to reflect upon in the light of our contemporary socio-political context.

Before I do so, let me outline the background of Kautilya and Manu[4] in order to place them in their respective socio-historical contexts. Manu in his *Manava Dharma Sastra* or *Manusmriti* quite clearly outlines the geographical and social context in which he developed his laws. He says,

> He whose life is regulated by holy text, from his conception even to his funeral pile, has a decided right to study this code; but no other man whatsoever.
>
> Between the two divine rivers *Sarasvati* and *Drishadvati* lies the tract of land, which the sages have named *Brahmavrita*, because it was frequented by gods:
>
> The custom preserved by immemorial tradition in that country, among the four *pure* classes, and among those which are mixed, is called approved usage. *Kurukshetra*, *Matsya*, *Panchala*, or *Kanyakubja*, and *Surasena*, or *Mathura*, form the region called

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Arthasastra, *Kamasastra* and *Mokshasastra*. See. V.R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, *The Mauryan Polity*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1993, p. 317.

[4] Scholarly opinion differs on whether the *Arthasastra* as a school belongs to the *Dharmasastra* school or an independent one. For a discussion on this see R. P. Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthasastra*, Part III. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), pp. 12ff.

> *Brahmarshi*, distinguished from *Brahmavrita*. From a *Brahman* who was born in that country, let all men on earth learn their several usages.
> That country, which lies between *Himavat* and *Vindhya*, to the east of *Vinasana*, and to the west of *Prayaga*, is celebrated by the title of *Madhyadesa*, or the central region.
>
> As far as the eastern, and as far as the western oceans, between the two mountains just mentioned, lies the tract which the wise have named *Aryavrita*, or inhabited by respectable men.
>
> That land, on which the black antelope naturally grazes, is held fit for the performance of sacrifices; but the land of Mlechhas or those who speak barbarously, differs widely from it.
>
> Let the three first classes invariably dwell in those before mentioned countries; but Sudra, distressed for subsistence, may sojourn wherever he chooses (*Manava Dharma Sastra*: Ch. 2: 16-24).

The above quote from the text makes clear as to the boundaries of the land that Manu considered fit for the practice of the laws that he had composed.

As per the *Arthasastra* of Kautilya, scholars are of the opinion that the whole of north India and a good part of south India were included in the empire that was controlled by the Nandas who preceded the Mauryas. It is also held that when Chandragupta Maurya came to the throne, "he was in possession of the whole of this empire left intact by the Nanda predecessors" (Dikshitar 1993:50). Scholars are divided whether the southern part of the empire was in fact acquired by Chandragupta through his conquests or whether he simply inherited it from the Nandas (Dikshitar 1993:51). Be that as it may, what is undisputed is the fact that the Maurya dynasty which came into existence through the help of Kautilya had under its control "all of South India beyond the Vindhyas, barring of course the Tamil kingdoms" (Dikshitar 1993:66).

Nevertheless, some two thousand or so years after the composition of the text as we now know it as the *Manava Dharma Sastra* or *Manusmriti*, being attributed to the person called Manu, the first modern print of the text in Sanskrit appeared in 1825, published by Professor Graves Chamney Haughton. More than thirty years before, in 1794, Sir William Jones had already published in Calcutta an English translation by an order of the then Government of India. It was clear that both the then Government of India and the rest of Europe in general considered the Laws of Manu as a repository of ethical codes for the whole of the Hindu people of India. In the high noon of the British Empire in India, the text was considered indispensable.

> The Empire of Britain has, during the short time that has elapsed, been extended to the natural boundaries of the country. Public Servants have been greatly multiplied, and Christian Missionaries, and secular teachers, have been increased a hundred fold. Of late, European capital and enterprise have begun to send forth their Agents to develop the resources, and to share the wealth of the country. Under these altered circumstances a new impression of the Code of Manu must be regarded, not merely as opportune, but as a necessity. To public servants, to those who are engaged in the study and practice of the law, and to Christian teachers, a knowledge of the Institutes [of Manu] must be regarded as indispensable.
>
> To public servants, who have to do with the Natives of the country, and to those who are engaged in our Courts of Justice, it must be considered of vital importance to have a correct idea of the principles held sacred by the people whose welfare they are bound to promote. It must not be overlooked that, in all arguments upon the topics of Indian politics, or of judicial amelioration, or of religious instruction, the Legislature of Great Britain has bound itself to act in accordance with those principles which the Hindus firmly believe to have been promulgated originally by the Supreme Being, and which are embodied in the Institutes [of Manu] (G.C. Haughton 1982: Preface, pp. vi-vii).

From the above remarks made in the introduction to the English translation of the Laws of Manu, it is clear that the British Government viewed the text as representing the worldview and moral dispensation of Hindu people throughout India. In other words, the initially intended boundaries that the author of the Laws of Manu outlined have been greatly expanded during the British Empire to incorporate the whole of Hindu India.

Whether or not the *Arthasastra* came into existence after the Laws of Manu,[5] the fact is that Kautilya had a much wider audience in his mind than Manu. Much of the analysis for the purpose of dating these texts was based on the historical personages of these individuals and their styles of language. Nevertheless, if we shift the focus from the individuals to the traditions that they seem to have represented, we can maintain two points without much controversy. First, there were distinct schools known as the school of *Arthasastra* and the school of *Dharmasastra* (which came first and who borrowed from whom might be a different question). Second, while the tradition of Manu's *Dharmasastra* wished to locate itself within a narrowly defined social context of Aryavarta, the *Arthasastra* quite clearly located itself within a much broader social and political context that far exceeded the traditional limits of the Aryavarta. Why the text of *Manusmriti*, if it came into existence much later than Kautilya's *Arthasastra* (whose socio-political context is extended right upto a substantial portion of Southern India), wishes to locate itself within a social context which is obviously more primitive than that of the *Arthasastra* is a moot question. It is not within the scope of this essay to pursue this debate further except to note that the text of Manu and that of Kautilya locate themselves in very different social contexts. Suffice to say that Manu's text represents a much more restricted social context while Kautilya's a much broader one.

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[5] Scholars are divided on the issue of whether the *Manusmriti* was composed before Kautilya's *Arthasastra* or the other way around. For the debate on whether Manusmriti is earlier than Arthasastra see R.N.Sharma, *Ancient India According to Manu*. Delhi: Nag Publishers,

There are, therefore some fundamental differences between the two traditions. The first observation that needs to be made is that Kautilya's *Arthasastra* is written from a thorough going secular point of view (A.K. Sen 1986:4), while Manu's text is fundamentally a religious text. It allocates different gods to different castes (Shiva to Brahmans, Vishnu to the Kings (Rajas) (E.W. Hopkins 1971:xxiii). R.N. Sharma (1980:272 ff) points out that it deals with religio-philosophical topics quite extensively. A.C. Burnell also pointed out in his translation of the text of Manu, that "The *Manava-Dharma-sastra* is then essentially a religious book, and not, as in England and most of Europe, a profane treatise on mere law. The ordeals mentioned are all, e.g., religious ceremonies" (Hopkins 1971:xxxiii). Secondly, Kautilya's text views the election of a king as a human responsibility where as Manu conceives the king as

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1980, p. 17f. Also see R.P. Kangle, Ibid., pp. 59-115; Edward W. Hopkins (ed.) *The Ordinances of Manu*. (Translated by Aurther Coke Burnell). (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1971, first published by Trubner & Co., 1884), pp. xvi-xxviii. R.N. Sharma points out that Buhler and Kane have placed the *Manusmriti* at 200 C.E; Hopkins had argued for a much later date of 500 C.E. for the text of Manusmriti. R.P. Kangle, after reviewing the opinions of several western and Indian scholars, comes to the conclusion that the *Smrtis* of Manu and *Yajnavalkya* were indebted to the text of the *Arthasastra* (p. 83).

divine in origin (A.K.Sen 1986:50ff).[6] Besides these, there are other differences in details of justice, administration and so on that need not be enumerated here.

Despite several differences in various details of application of *Dharma*, there are some essential continuities between the two texts and the traditions. For instance, both texts certainly upheld the notion of *svadharma*. In Kautilya, we notice an emphasis on the need for the subjects of the state to follow "the practices, laws of castes and orders according to the rules laid down in the Vedic literature" (Dikshitar 1993:115). In Manu there is a clear division of society according to the four *Varnas* who are supposed to follow their respective vocations (R.N. Sharma 1980:37ff). Nevertheless, there is also sufficient consensus in the Indian tradition that the *Smrti* literature generally holds the view that "*Dharma* and *Acara* may change from time to time according to the change in the social conditions and practices of the country in their own times" (R.N. Sharma 1980:8-9).

Before dealing with the notion of *Dharma* in both Manu and Kautilya, let us take cognisance of the various ways in which the concept is used within the Indian tradition itself. V.P. Varma identifies a few — in the *Rigveda* the concept of *Dharma* means "ordinances or laws. In *Yajurveda* the idea of fixed or unshakable *Dhrama* occurs. In the Vedic period the notions of *Rita* (referring to moral law) and *Dharma* (referring to ordinances and rules) were used in distinction. In later period the moral significance of *Rita* was transferred to *Dharma*. Thus, in the *Brahmana* texts such as the *Satapatha Brahmana*, the king was seen as the protector of *Dharma*. In the Upanishadic tradition the notion of *Dharma* is understood as truth and in relation to *Brahman*. In the Buddhist usage the word *Dharma* came to be used in the sense of doctrines. In Kautilya we find three distinct uses of the word *Dharma*— in the sense of social duty, as moral law and as civil law (V.P. Varma 1974:112-127). Manu also uses the word in these three ways but emphasises the notion of *Rajadharma*. Varma says:

> According to Manu the king shall establish a law what may have been practised by the virtuous, by such twice born men as are devoted to *Dharma* provided it be not opposed to the customs of countries, families and castes (Varma 1974: 149).

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[6] However, R.P. Kangle argues that Kautilya's theory of kingship supports the view of divine origin of kings which was subsequently and fully developed in *Manusmriti* (Kangle, Op.cit., p. 117).

One important contribution of Asoka to the idea of *Dharma*, as *Varma* notes, is that he closely links it with the politics of kings. That is to suggest that it was Asoka who deemed "political violence is against *Dharma*" (Varma 1974:146).

The notion of *Dharma* in Manu is a ritually centred concept in that it takes into account the social status of the individual in relation to the Vedic ritual. Hence, the justification of the *Varna* system in the *Manusmriti.* He places Brahmin *Varna* at the top precisely for reasons of ritual significance. Manu describes the status of the Brahmin in great detail (*Manava Dharma Sastra* Ch. 1:93-101). It is no surprise that he distinguishes the Brahmin as the very incarnation of *Dharma*. (1:98). It is also certainly an indication that in the view of Manu, *Dharma* is fundamentally a ritual concept in that it needs to be seen in relation to the ritual roles that each *Varna* had to play. And therefore, Manu deliberates extensively on the respective duties of each *Varna*. In the Arthasastra also the notion of *Dharma*, in so far as it is located in the context of *svadharma* or ones own *Dharma*, it must be noted, does have the same intentions as that of the *Manusmriti.* Dikshitar notes that "[t]he primary function of the state was, according to the *Arthasastra*, the upkeep of the social *sthiti* or in other words, the maintenance of the social order" (Dikshitar 1993:247). The social order is the basis on which the *Arthasastra* developed the theory of the state. According to Dikshitar, such a position of the *Arthasastra* is very much in line with the authors of the *Dharmasutras* and *Dharmasastras* (Dikshitar 1993:249). Saral Jhingran says that

> [t]he *Dhramasastras* were supposed to regulate the entire life of man, and if they chose to prescribe the above amoral taboos, instead of giving meaningful moral commands and prohibitions, it may suggest that these ritualistic concerns were more important for them than moral ones" (Jhingran 1989:51).

However, Kangle strongly argues that, in fact, the *Dharmasastras* are not to be regarded as source books for subjects like administration and law. He says,

> If, then, the *Dharmasastra* works cannot be regarded as source books so far as the topics of administration and law are concerned, they must themselves be supposed to have derived their material on these topics from some other source. This source was quite obviously the works on *Nitisastra* or *Arthasastra* (Kangle 1992:15).

The classical notion of *Dharma*, primarily as *svadharma* in a ritual context, was in fact structured around a duality of spiritual authority and temporal power—the priest representing the spiritual world and the king representing the temporal power. Ananda Coomaraswamy traces this duality to the pair of gods such as *Indra-agni*, *Mitra-varuna* and *Indra-brihaspati*. "*Mitra*, *Agni* and *Brihaspati* being on the one hand the divine archetypes of the Sacerdotium or Spiritual authority (*brahma*), and *Varuna* and *Indra* those of the Regnum (*kshatra*) (Coomaraswamy 1978:2). In the traditional Hindu view, the spiritual and the temporal go hand-in-hand as "counsel" and "power". In other words, the king is always advised by the counsel of the priest in following the *Dharma* appropriate for the situation. In this sense, there is continuity between this conception of the *Samhita* and the *Brahmana* portions of the *Veda* and the later texts such as the *Manusmriti* and the *Arthasastra*. That is to say that both genre of texts of the Hindus do consider the mutual reliance between the king and the priest in the pursuit of *Dharma*.

Furthermore, both the earlier *Sruti* texts such as the *Samhitas* and the *Brahmanas* and the later *Smrti* texts such as the *Dharmasastras* do conceptualise the notion of the king in very similar fashion. Having analysed the *Samhita* texts and the *Brahmana* texts, Coomaraswamy comes to the conclusion that the notion of the king in those texts is not that of a constitutional ruler, nor is the king appointed by social contract, but instead he is a "ruler of Divine Right". However, Coomaraswamy does point out that the King is subject to the *Dharma*. In other words, *Dharma* "is the very principle of royalty" (Coomaraswamy 1978:16). Dikshitar, who mainly focused on the *Arthasastra* text, also admits that there is nothing higher than *Dharma* and that according to the *Arthasastra* it is the responsibility of the state to maintain the social order. Commenting on the notion of the king according to the *Arthasastra* and as practised by the Mauryan dynasty, Dikshitar says that

> there is the great conception of the ancient Hindus that the king could not be, and was not, a law-maker. The law is eternal (*sanatana*) and is contained in the law-codes or the *Dharmasastras* of the different *Smrtikartas*, which were based on the *sruti*. The king of the land was to act according to the laws prescribed by these law-givers and he could not override them. To override the laws already established was considered sacrilege...Therefore, the law of the law-books was the real sovereign of the land (Dikshitar 1993:91).

It is in this sense, Dikshitar maintains, that King Asoka was not a legislator and his edicts (*sasanas*) are not to be understood as new laws but "declaration of the old law without prejudice to the customary law or the *samaya* of the *Arthasastra* and *Dharmasastras*" (Dikshitar 1993:92).[7] This issue whether the king is the law maker or law implementor (which means that he is subject to the laws laid down in the *Dharmasastras*) cannot be separated from the issue of whether or not a distinction was maintained in these ancient texts between politics and law or to put it differently, between political *Dharma* and ritual *Dharma*. Kangle notes that some western scholars such as Jacobi and Hillebrandt saw politics and law being closely related in the ancient texts, but, however, Hillebrandt especially raised doubts whether they were studied jointly within the same schools. Kangle also notes that Hillebrandt raised questions about the existence of separate *Arthasastra* schools. He then suggests—

> There does not appear to be reason for such doubts. If, as indicated above, *Dhramasastra* was not primarily concerned with politics and law but derived its material on these topics from other sources, it must be supposed that these topics were originally studied in circles outside the *Dharmasastra* schools. Nor are there sufficient grounds for supposing that politics and law were not studied in the same schools. *Nitisastra* and *Arthasastra* was concerned with both from the start. (Kangle 1992:17).

But note that Kangle does not mention the *Dharmasastra* schools to which Manu obviously belongs. In other words, while it may be true that in the *Nitisastra* and *Arthasastra* schools the topics of politics and law were studied together, the case of *Dharmasastra* could have been different. This might explain why in the *Manusmriti* and in the *Dharmasastra* tradition generally the king is viewed as divine in origin, whereas in the *Arthasastra* there seems to be some ambiguity. Hence, the differing interpretations by Dikshitar who holds that *Arthasastra* does treat the king as divine in origin, where as A.K Sen thinks, that the king in the *Arthasastra* is elected by people. Of course, Kangle thinks that the notion of the divine origin of king belongs originally to the *Arthasastra* and developed further in the *Manusmriti* (Vide f.n. 7).

The issue of divine origin of king is fundamental to understanding the interrelation between the political role and the ritual role of kings both in the *Dharmasastra* tradition and the *Arthasastra* tradition. Whether it was original to the *Arthasastra*, as Kangle thinks, or not, the non-controversial point is that it is present in both to varied degrees. What is interesting is to recognise that in both the traditions, viz., the *Dharmasastra* and the *Arthasastra*, the role of the priest (Brahmin) is highlighted in ensuring that the political *Dharma* of the king is in line with his ritual *Dharma*.

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[7] Kangle of course disagrees with this view and as noted earlier, holds that in the *Arthasastra* there is a conception of the divine origin of king and king is conceptualised as god (Kangle, Op.cit., p. 117).

Another important point to be dealt with in this context is the distinction between the *Sanatana Dharma* (ancient custom/law) and the *Sadharana Dharma* (law of day-to-day life). By locating the laws that he compiled within the social framework of the Aryavarta, Manu seems to have clearly intended to emphasise the ancient custom or law which is based on ones own ritual obligation or *svadharma* and to be understood from the standpoint of the Vedic injunctions and rules of ritual. As such his interpretation and application of *Dharma* is, as R.N.Sharma notes, "in agreement with the *Vedas*, *Brahmanas*, the *Kalpasutras* and others" R.N.Sharma 1980:37). This does not mean that attention was not paid to the local laws or customs. A.C. Burnell notes that the "recognition of local laws is very early, and occurs in full already in the *Dharmasutras*" (Hopkins 1971:xxxvi). He also notes that the "authority of the inferior castes to make their own laws was early admitted" (Hopkins 1971: xxxvi). Thus, it would be safe to assume that Manu, following the tradition of the *Dharmasastras* and *Dharmasutras*, accepted the local laws.

In the case of the *Arthasastra* also it recognises the social order based on *Varna* and *Asrama* and hence based on the *svadharma* model. Kangle says,

> This order is believed to be prescribed in the *Vedas* and as such thought of as divinely ordained and immutable. The state had no hand in its creation, nor has it the right to try to modify it. The duty of the state is only to preserve this order and not allow it to be disturbed in any way. In this respect the standpoint of the *Arthasastra* in no way differs from that of *Dharmasastra* (Kangle 1992:142).

In other words, the rules of ones own caste or jati were observed in accordance with their professions. Nevertheless, Kangle also notes that the reference in the *Arthasastra* 3.7.40 prescribes the *Dharma* "peculiar to any region or community or *samgha* or village" which should be recognised (Kangle 1992:148). This would mean that the various local customs and laws were also recognised by the *Arthasastra* tradition.

When the British attempted to employ the notion of *Dharma* within the context of running the administration of the state, what they perhaps did not realise was the ritual implications of the notion. Nevertheless, they applied it to the prevailing conditions of the country which were very different from those of the times of either Manu or Kautilya. Employment of the notion of Hindu *Dharma* by the British during the nineteenth century is mixed with both ritual overtones of *svadharma* as well as other socio-political aspects. On one hand they intended to run the administration of the country in accordance with the British laws. But on the other hand, they were soon forced to realise that the laws of Britain did not make sense in a predominantly traditional Hindu context. Often the crucial issue for the administrators and legal experts was to determine as to which laws or whose laws they could apply to a given situation. A classic case in point is the famous legal case of Rukmabhai in the nineteenth century. She was eleven or thirteen when she was married to a nineteen year old Dadaji according to the prevailing Hindu custom. Some eleven years later when Rukmabhai refused to go and join her husband, he filed a case for what is known in the British law, "the restoration of conjugal rights." Now, the provision within the law for such a right to be exercised is based on the assumption that the married couple lived together for a while and then separated and then one of the partners is able to move the courts of law for the "restoration of conjugal rights." However, in the case of Rukmabhai, the marriage was never consummated. And hence not a case of "restoration of conjugal rights" but "an institution of the conjugal rights". The Bombay High court judge Pinhey gave judgement against the Plaintiff, Dadaji and ordered him to pay the costs. The husband was advised by his counsel to appeal. As Pinhey retired, the case came before Mr. Justice Farran who overturned the judgement of the previous court and ordered Rukhmabai to join her husband or face the prospect of six months in jail. Rukhmabai's counsel filed an appeal and eventually a compromise was reached in which Dadaji relinquished his claims to Rukhmabai (Dalmia & Stietencron 1995:155-157).

As Sudhir Chandra notes that while defense thought that the case of restitution of conjugal rights did not lie within the scope of the Hindu laws, the counsel for the plaintiff argued that on the basis of a book on Hindu Laws written by John Mayne it is within the Hindu laws and that the onus is on the defendant to prove otherwise (Dalmia & Stietencron 1995:157). In the case of justice Pinhey, who gave judgement in favour Rukhmabai, he made a fine distinction between "restitution of marriage" and "institution of marriage". He thought that the former did not necessarily include the latter. The plaintiff's counsel first argued that according to the Hindu custom once the marriage ceremony is performed the wife becomes a member of her husband's family and should live with her husband. There is no need for consummation. And therefore the husband has a right to his wife. Secondly, the counsel for the plaintiff argued that according to the Civil Procedure Code (XIV of 1882), sec. 260 of the British law which was in practice in India at that time, the right of the husband can be enforced. Here is the dubiousness of the counsel for the plaintiff. According to Sudhir Chandra,

> They were practically suggesting that while the criteria for determining the extent and legality of conjugal rights should be derived from traditional Indian laws — in this case from Hindu law — the enforcement of those rights should be in accordance with a set of imported laws (Dalmia & Stietencron 1995:159).

Thus, we notice that the nineteenth century British India attempted to use on the one hand, the Hindu laws which are located within the ritual order of the Hindu society and on the other hand the imported English laws which are culturally alien. However, it must be pointed out that even justice Pinhey, who gave judgement in favour of Rukhmabai, also used a combination of Hindu laws and the British Christian morality. On the one hand, he felt that the case for restitution of conjugal rights" was outside the Hindu laws, his opposition to child marriage is clearly based on his Christian moral sense.

If the above case in point, in the context of the British colonial society, forced the Hindus to conceptualise their social laws much more broadly and perhaps with an entirely new look than either Manu or Kautilya had envisaged in their time, the Maharaja libel case, as it came to be known, forced the moral outlook of Hindus to seriously reformulate their theology of ethics. The conventional Hindu morality never perceived the *lilas* of Krishna in any morally objectionable way. If anything, the flirtations of Krishna with the *gopis* are seen as the most profound form of devotion. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Swami Narayana sect against the back drop of the gradual Hindu social resentment towards the Vallabhachari sect is by no means a coincidence. The Swami Narayana sect is, in fact, a social reaction to the practices within the Vallabhachari sect, which have been abhored by its followers being influenced by a new sense of morality drawn from the British Christian society. The 1861 Maharaja libel case was a landmark in this profound social change in Hindu India. Korsandas Mulji published periodically in his newspaper, *Satya Prakash*, the vices that the head of the Vallabhachari sect was indulging in, namely engaging in sexual activities with the wives of the devotees. For according to the tradition of the Vallabhachari, the devotees are expected to surrender to Krishna everything that belongs to them, including their wives. Since the guru, called Maharaja, the head of the sect is seen as the living embodiment of Krishna, the devotees should surrender all their possessions to the guru.

Over a period of time, this practice led to corruption among the gurus in the Vallabhachari sect. Being awakened by the new puritanical social morality that was being preached by the Brahmo's and others champions, Mulji published severe criticism of the Vallabhachari sectarian practices. Maharaja of the sect filed a case of libel against Mulji. The case attracted wide publicity and as Jurgen Lutt points out, "[t]he scandal was complete when one witness, who was a medical doctor, revealed that he had treated the Maharaja for venereal disease" (Dalmia & Stietencron 1995:145). The judgement was given against the Maharaja who was asked to pay Rs 50 000 for costs. The Swami Narayana sect instantly grew in large numbers most of whom left the Vallabhachari sect in disgust.

Both Rukhmabai's case and the Maharaja libel case point to the emergence of a search for a new Hindu ethic that is far more distanced and separated from the notion of *svadharma*. This modern quest for Hindu ethics is no longer containable within the ritual order of the Hindu orthodoxy, but rather expressed within the context of religious and cultural pluralism that Hindu India was thrust into. Although, the Muslim rule in India began this process of change quite manifestly, the British India of the nineteenth century brought about a radical change in how Hindus viewed and conceptualised their morality. It is important to note that the British in choosing to administer Hindus and Muslims under separate personal laws as initially indicated in his manifesto by Warren Hastings (1772), created a new common Hindu law which is a mixture of traditional Hindu laws and British laws. Dieter Conrad points out,

> British courts, by systematically referring to *Dharmasastras* as law books and further by introducing their own techniques of binding judicial precedent, virtually created a coherent structure of common Hindu law where before there had been 'a congeries of legally self-sufficient communities and sects (Dalmia & Stietencron 1995:310).

In creating this apparently new "Hindu Law" by the British, the important difference that needs to be noted is that whereas the customary Hindu laws whether based on Manu's Laws or on the *Arthasastra*, was mostly in tune with the usage rather than on the basis of the written text. The Hindu rulers of the ancient India did precisely that in using the legal texts as broad guides rather than as exact references. As referred to earlier, Burnell calls attention to the ancient Hindu practice of allowing inferior castes to "make their own laws". "Neither were the Sanskrit Brahman laws forced on them, nor were their own customs ignored, as is now the case" (Hopkins 1971:xxxvi). He bemoans that during the British

Raj the English lawyers neglected the rules about local customs (Hopkins 1971:xxxvi). But the British on the other hand needed uniformity throughout India in applying the law, and the result was the old convention of the Hindus which always referred to the usage in oral tradition was replaced in favour of the written text. Although the British did not realise the complexities involved at the beginning, they chose to achieve this imaginary unity of the Hindu law deliberately by legislation, as Conrad rightly points out (Hopkins 1971:311).

While the British attempted to achieve this unity of the Hindu law for political purposes, the reformers of the nineteenth century by focusing initially on social reform needed to confront the social organisation within the Hindu society based on caste. The Hindu reformers made attempts to down play the diversity that existed in the Hindu caste based society and rather interpreted caste in terms of *Varna* along the lines of division of labour of functions. Conrad points out that religious reformers as well as political activists alike tended to provide such apologetics (Dalmia & Stietencron 1995:310ff). From Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda to Gandhi, all of them in their own way made such apologetical explanations for the caste and attempted to integrate social cohesion in the context of the Indian Nationalist Movement. As such, the issue of caste became a thorn in the flesh of Indian Nationalism. Indian National unity could not be achieved without addressing the divisive element of caste in Hindu society. A much more radical step was needed. A Special Marriage Act of 1872, which was initiated by the Brahmo Samaj (which became known as Brahmo Marriage Act), was the first step in the direction of achieving social integration within the Hindu society. From the Indian Nationalist Movement of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, it was fundamental to ensure the inclusion of the so called Depressed Classes in an attempt to achieve united Hindu society. The Special Marriage Act, of 1872 which was further amended in 1923 became an important tool in achieving this. This meant that inter-caste marriages between the Depressed Classes and the conventionally called higher caste Hindus was crucial to the achievement of overall Hindu unity, especially in countering the political threats from the Muslim sections. This also meant that it became important to ensure that the so called Depressed Classes remained Hindu which was the sole reason for the attempts by the Hindu reformers to secure an amendment in 1923 to the original Bill and enable Hindus to marry under the Act while remaining Hindu. This exercise was certainly, as Conrad suggests, in the right direction of achieving Hindu communal unity (Hopkins 1971:313). However, it becomes clear that the new forms of laws and the search for new Hindu ethics certainly moved away from the traditional *svadharma* based laws of Manu and Kautilya. Not only is the modern

Hindu ethics expressed far beyond the scope of the notion of *svadharma* and its ritual location, it has implicitly called into question the very basis on which the classical notion of Dharma is structured.

As Indian society, through increasing urbanisation and diasporisation (by this I mean the phenomenon of increasing dispersion of the Indian society far beyond the conventional Indian boundaries), moves away from the rigid caste-centered society, the question that needs to be raised is whether this new search for Hindu ethics can effectively reflect a pan Indian ethic incorporating the religious and cultural pluralism that is becoming increasingly felt on the Indian society. In this regard, one should also bear in mind the increasing impact of globalisation on Indian society. Indian society is home not only to traditional Hindus and other ethnically Indians but also is becoming home for many westerners who are basing themselves in India for various modern enterprises. These ethnically non-Indians may be considered a floating population but they leave their social and moral impact on Indian society through their residence, temporary it might be. And in this interaction with the outside world and with the increasing mobility that is becoming common among Indians, the social values and ethical norms are bound to come under scrutiny.

In the case of urbanisation in India, the core of the caste values have not changed that much. For instance, people still get married within the boundaries of their caste even though they might be living outside the traditional village system where such caste interactions are more conspicuous. People still follow their rituals and customs, at least at the time of some major occasions such as birth, marriage, death and so on. However, on a day-to-day basis caste loyalties are hard to be forged in an urban situation where caste groups are not necessarily living in the same area. Often, in an urban setting, loyalties are forged along the lines of language and religion.

In the case of a Diaspora situation, forging and maintaining caste loyalties is even more difficult than in the context of urbanisation. To a certain extent, the first generation Indians living in the US and Canada and elsewhere might be able to preserve some caste loyalties, but there is no guarantee that in the second generation and thereafter, such loyalties will survive. The Indian community in South Africa is a case in point where, for instance, marriages do not any longer take place according to the conventional caste lines as most people either do not remember much of their caste origins, or have changed their caste identity by acquiring another caste name. In such situations as in South Africa, religion and language have clearly become the identity markers and people forge their loyalties according their religion and language.

As such, the modernity is thrusting Indians toward a more individual family network rather than caste family networks. This would mean that the values that the caste centered society had espoused could not be relevant any longer and people tend to appropriate values and customs from a variety of sources including from the outside world through the impact of television and other multimedia. In this process, certain values become universalised and people make their moral choices in accordance with those universally accepted values rather than their conventionally inherited values. The conventionally inherited values, if they cannot find place within the broader universal values, then they tend to fall away by the side. Or, people make their moral choices in view of the universally accepted values rather than for reasons of upholding their conventional values. For instance, a person living in an urban situation, such as Delhi might preserve the value of fidelity in his/her marriage not so much for any caste based value system, but fidelity in a marital relationship is generally upheld as a healthy phenomenon. Such values are upheld by people, be they Indians or Americans or anyone else in the world. Even in some African societies where polygamy has been a culturally accepted phenomenon, the new generation of young people prefer to have single partners and raise a single family than following their conventional practice. In a modern urban situation, such as living in Johannesburg in South Africa, it is not only expensive to have to maintain multiple families that result in polygamous marriages, it is also considered outside the normally accepted practice in a civilised society as the educated African young men and women tend to emulate their western counterparts. Thus, fidelity is one of the values that people cherish across cultural and religious boundaries. Furthermore, the modern quest for ethical principles is no longer driven by caste or tribe centered or such other conventional modes of thinking, but rather, as R. Prasad (1989:326) states, based on "the hope and faith that a life lived, by and large, in accordance with them will be happier than the one lived, by and large, by transgressing them." In other words, it is in search of greater happiness and harmony that people tend to engage in ethical discourse. The Indian is no exception.

Thus, a search for Hindu ethics in contemporary Indian society has to take into account the changing patterns of Indian society, increasing globalisation of culture, economy and political life and the increasing mobility that has become possible for the current generation of people in India. This new search, which began in the precolonial and more concretely in the colonial India, as pointed out earlier, has to inevitably draw from a plurality of sources and the arbiters of those ethical debates are no longer the caste centered authorities but the civil society itself. The constitution, the penal codes and the parliamentary debates take the role of arbiters rather than the conventional authorities. Hindu society in India has moved so far away from its *svadharma* based ethics that it could not afford to look back but rather move on and find new ways of integrating its age old values into the new in a secular civil society. There will always be forces that will attempt to go back in time and reinvent their age old systems as do some contemporary social and political groups in India. Such attempts will only result in greater disharmony and threat to the progress of a society. Social values are not cast in stone, but they change as generations change with many varied life-styles impacted by increasing global networking. Nevertheless, the values that uphold human welfare and harmony become universal and rarely do they terminate with time.

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Animal Rights and Ahimsa: An Ancient Discourse on Humans, Animals, and the Earth

Kenneth Valpey

> The significant problems we face today can not be solved by the same level of thinking that created them.
>
> – Albert Einstein

Introduction

Nearly a decade ago Cornell University ecologist David Pimentel and his colleagues predicted sweeping changes in American agriculture and eating patterns over the next sixty years, based on demographic, agricultural and other trends. With a doubling of population and a reduction of arable land by some 180 million acres (thirty-eight percent) by 2064, American dietary practices could become similar to those of large portions of the rest of the world. Anthropologist Sidney Mintz, reflecting on the ramifications of Pimental's study, wrote:

> For Americans, food costs would increase by a factor of between three and five-- at worst, up to more than half of total income. Should these calculations prove correct, however, the composition of the American diet would also have to change substantially. While nearly two-thirds of the national grain product of the United States, grown on over 100 million acres, is now used as livestock feed, by 2060 all of it would have become food for us, not for our cattle and pigs and poultry (Mintz 1996:122).

Consequently, Sidney Mintz notes, there would have to be a significant reduction of meat consumption in the United States:

> Since India's nearly one billion people and the People's Republic of China even larger population get 70 to 80 percent of their calories and nearly all of their protein from grains and legumes, such a change in the United States would be in the direction of aligning North American consumption with that of the rest of the world. It would also contribute to a vast improvement in American health (Ibid. 122-123).

Whether or not such conditions will occur as predicted, Pimentel's and Mintz's observations raise questions about what kind of changes in public attitudes toward meat consumption might be required (or helpful) to accommodate this trend, and what might contribute to a more comprehensive animal ethic which would bring twenty-first-century humanity into a more sustainable relationship to the land we inhabit with a myriad of other life forms. Here I will explore these questions from a perspective of Indic discourse on *ahimsa*, or nonviolence[1] -- a pervasive and persistent theme that informs all Indic religious traditions. This may serve as a corrective to Western animal ethics discourse, which suffers from a paucity of vocabulary in the animal rights issue. Together with the term '*dharma*' (roughly, duty),[2] '*ahimsa*' adds important vocabulary for meaningfully discussing human-animal relations. More broadly, *ahimsa*-talk is a powerful means of clearing space for an ethos that could counterbalance the consumerist thinking that dominates rights language today by fostering a principle of human self-understanding centred in participation rather than competition.

Surely to import foreign terms such as *ahimsa* or *dharma* into Western discourse is problematic. Yet the urgency with which environmental ills call us to respond justifies listening intently to voices from around the globe and helping articulate to others whatever may serve the ailing earth. A good example of such cross-cultural investigation is Christopher Chapple's

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[1] Many definitions have been given for *ahimsa*. For convenience I use the expression coined by Mohandas Gandhi. More precise might be "absence of the desire to harm or kill." Monier- William's Sanskrit Dictionary merely gives "not injuring anything; harmlessness."

[2] *Dharma* is as difficult a term to translate as, probably, "*tao*" of Chinese origin. Monier- William's Sanskrit Dictionary gives, for example: that which is established or firm, statute, ordinance, law; usage, practice, prescribed conduct, duty; right, justice, virtue, morality; doing one's duty.

Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions. Chapple writes in his introduction:

> It is suggested here that the ethical challenge posed by *ahimsa* can help address issues of contemporary life, such as the abuse of animals, the current state of ecological ravage, and the disconnectedness and dehumanization of mass society. A system such as *ahimsa*, which originates from outside the structures of science and technology, might help inform or perhaps inspire new models for personal and societal reform (Chapple 1993, xiv).

Another useful source for this enterprise is Padmanabh S. Jaini's (1991) article entitled *Animals as Agents in Ahimsa Action and Spiritual Life* which, focusing on Indic narratives involving animals; suggests an important corrective to purely discursive thought on human action in relation to animals. Following Jaini, here I will give brief examples of Indic narrations that imagine agency and voice for animals, raising them toward a human level as moral agents rather than lowering humans to a level of animals as moral non-agents. Even amidst heated doctrinal crossfire, religious texts of varied Indic traditions grant animals (even if only imaginatively) human voices and capacity for moral action. Such narrative imagery deserves attention as an important expression of *ahimsa*. Within the cultural fabric of India it expresses means by which biotic violence is contained or, one might even say, accommodated and restrained. Yet, originating as it does from outside the structures of science and technology it offers an important challenge to such structures as perpetuators of violence.

Ahimsa and *Dharma* in Three Traditions of Containment

Indic religious traditions recognize the reality of biotic violence as much as do Western traditions. All these traditions might agree with feminist writer Rosemary Reuther's (1992) observation that "[T]he consumer-consumed relation is an inevitable part of the biotic condition." The *Bhagavata Purana* (I.13.47), an important *Vaishnava* Hindu text, puts it succinctly:

> *jivo jivasya jivanam,*
> One living being provides life for another.

But in varying ways all the Indic major schools would take issue with Reuther's conclusion:

> Consequently the effort to escape from the ambiguity of killing other life in order to live is finally impossible (Reuther 1992:225).

Much Indic traditional *ahimsa* discourse, can be seen as a questioning of Reuther's latter statement, or as a variegated theological / practical proposition to do the impossible, to escape from the ambiguity of killing. As located in the three major well-known traditions – Hindu, Buddhist, and Jaina – each variation on the *ahimsa* theme shows a different emphasis that, for simplicity, can be associated with the three classical Indian pious acts, namely *yajña* (sacrifice), *dana* (charity), and *tapas* (austerity). Keeping in mind the dangers of over-generalization and historical non-specificity, for heuristic purposes we can locate Hinduism in the concern for *yajña*, Buddhism in the concern for *dana*, and Jainism in the concern for *tapas* (Agarwal 1991:263). These three traditions all champion the observance of *ahimsa*, and they are all concerned with the maintenance of *dharma*. To this end each defines selfhood in ways that comprehend relationship to nature and society yet, transcend temporal and spatial constraints; and each finds a different solution to the common problem of biotic existence.

Yajña: Ritual Containment

Since Buddhism and Jainism are often seen as heterodox reactions to the Vedic tradition out of which Hinduism developed, we do well to first look at Vedic-Hindu conceptions of *ahimsa*, *dharma* and *yajña*. Here I focus on their expression in classical *Vaishnava* texts. One narration in the *Bhagavata Purana* (III.13) illustrates these relationships:

> The earth, having become overburdened by a *dharma*, or the neglect of proper performance of duty, is restored to its proper place by Varaha, a descent (*avatara*) of the supreme divinity Vishnu in the form of a gigantic cosmic boar. Normally, perceived as a lowly creature, the boar is an appropriate form for Vishnu to assume for dredging the earth out from the depths of a cosmic ocean. Nor does being a hoofed creature hinder him in valiant duel with the giant *Hiranyaksha* ("Golden-Eyed"), the battle-hungry immediate cause of the earth's displacement into the primeval waters and disruption of *dharma*. In their victory eulogy, sacrificial priests identify each of Varaha's limbs with the various ingredients and utensils of the sacrifice as the gargantuan theriomorphic victor lifts the earth – now identified as his consort – on his shoulder. Concluding their praises,

> the Brahmin priests announce, O Lord, to provide residence for both moving and non-moving beings, you sustain this earth, your wife. We bow unto you, our father, along with mother earth, in whom you have invested your own power, as a sacrificer invests fire in sanctified wood (BP III.13.42).

As represented in the *Bhagavata Purana,* the divine personage who restores *dharma* is also the personification of sacrificial ritual – the brahmanical process of maintaining cosmic order and locus of *dharmic* activity; moreover, as Vishnu, Varaha is the beneficiary of the sacrifice by receiving fire oblations; he is the personification of the *Vedas*, the sacred texts delineating the sacrifice; and as the upholder of *dharma* in the form of a wild animal he imbues the earth with power to sustain all creatures. Finally, rather than being a sacrificial victim as in a typical Vedic *yajña*, this "animal" is victor over he who would disrupt the practice of ritual sacrifice to undermine the practice of *dharma*.

In this narration we encounter a beast of superlative moral status by virtue of its identity as divine Vishnu. Throughout the *Bhagavata* in passages describing Vishnu and his descents we are reminded repeatedly of his divinity, so also in the *Varaha* narration. Yet, that a lowly abhorrent boar exhibits superhuman heroism superior to that of his titan opponent suggests an unsettled relation between human and beast. Divinity becomes the arena of ambiguous identity, wherein the lowest becomes highest, a reversal of position made possible by ritual Vedic sacrifice (Jaini 1991:269).

The presentation of an animal as victor in this narration accords well with Vedic scholar J. C. Heesterman's view that nonviolence was incorporated fully within the Vedic sacrifice, instead of arising, as some scholars hold, externally to it as a later idea. Herman Tull notes,

> "Heesterman's viewpoint [...] means that we must take seriously the Vedic assertions that the animal killed in the sacrifice is not really killed – or, at least is perceived as not being killed – at all. Thus, in the *Rigveda* the already dismembered sacrificial horse is told: 'You do not really die here, nor are you hurt' (RV 1.162.21)" (Tull 1996:225).

We may well wonder in what sense a sacrificial animal is "not hurt." In the *Bhagavadgita*, the famous conversation between Krishna and his warrior friend Arjuna, Krishna exhorts Arjuna to fight in the battle and assures him:

> He whose temperament is free from egotism and whose intelligence is not tainted, even were he to kill [all] these worlds, kills not, nor is bound (Bg. 18.17).

Thus, the *Bhagavadgita* echoes the *Rigveda* assertion, stressing the proper attitude of the person acting, while recognizing that to act in the world involves apparent harm to others. By acting for the essential purpose of the sacrifice, namely cosmic maintenance and divine satisfaction rather than personal gain, there is no legal implication in the broader sense of *karma* as the invisible binding force to obligatory subjugation by the forces of material nature. By no means is this so, where an improper attitude prevails retribution is to be expected from the very beings one has harmed or killed. Returning to the *Bhagavata Purana,* in its Eleventh Book a sage warns (XI.5.14):

> Those presumptuous, sinful persons who consider themselves, to be pious, without compunction commit violence against animals that fully trust in them. Those (same) animals eat such persons in the next world.

This and similar warnings in the *Bhagavata* and other *puranic* literature urges one toward the culture of renunciation that, as we will see, characterizes Buddhist and Jaina traditions.

For the Hindu ascetic, escape from the ambiguity of killing comes as resorting to self-sacrifice, either through knowledge (*jñana*) or devotion (*bhakti*), in which biotic existence is but a temporary vehicle for transcendent life. *Sankara*, the great eighth-century theologian, argued that the general rule in the performance of ritual sacrifice is the prohibition of *ahimsa* the exceptions within certain specific sacrifices become an impetus for the genuine seeker of truth to awaken a stronger desire to gain release from the world, which is a world of ambiguity, duality and, at best, mixed happiness (Taehtinen 1976:22). To reject outright the Vedic sacrifice would be to unleash the tendency for violence beyond the contained and controlled realm of ritual and thus to wreak havoc in the world at large. But if one can take to *jnana-yajna*, the sacrifice of knowledge, one avoids all types of violence and elevates oneself to the realm of *samadhi*, full absorption in transcendence, by meditation. Some passages in the great Indian epic *Mahabharata* extol such a monistic understanding as the basis for the practice of *ahimsa*:

> That person who sees being as like his own self,
> who casts aside the stick and whose anger is conquered,
> prospers happily in the life to come.
> Even the gods are bewildered at the path
> of the one who seeks transcendence,
> who regards all beings as similar to oneself (Chapple 1993:112).

For followers of Hindu theistic *bhakti* traditions such as *Vaishnavism*, the ambiguity of killing is resolved by taking refuge in directives such as are found in the *Bhagavadgita* to offer all foods prepared for oneself as sacrifice to God, strictly abstaining from the flesh of animals. Whatever *karmic* reaction may accrue from the growing and harvesting of grains and vegetables is absorbed by God and thus, neutralized. A life dedicated to the service of God thus, becomes sacrificial and sanctified.

Hindu theistic devotional literature is full of narrations describing animals infused with devotional qualities - An elephant attacked by a crocodile recollects prayers it learned in a previous life; a vulture sacrifices its life in an attempt to protect Rama's wife Sita from the abducting Ravana (later receiving a full ceremonial burial from Rama, as one would do for one's father); wild animals in a forest assemble to praise Krishna, induced by the *bhakta-avatara* Shri Chaitanya; cows come running to answer the call of Krishna's transcendental flute. Thus, animals become participants in the celebration of spiritual pastimes in a transcendent realm where all forms of life are fully conscious agents dedicated to the service of their Lord.

Devotional ascetics' meditations could well include remembrance of such animals' exemplary behavior as a means of becoming themselves free from material existence, with its attending ambiguities of killing and exploitation. Pious Hindu householders are likely to participate in *goraksha,* the protection of cows, either themselves or by supporting cow sanctuaries, as a means both of gaining *punya*, pious credit, and as a means of worshipping Krishna by supporting his favorite animal (Lodrick 1981).

Dana: Containment in Charity

The well-known monastic system of early Buddhist tradition made a sharp social demarcation between householder laypersons and ascetic monks. In this system, *dana*, or the giving of charity, became a central vehicle for the acquiring of religious merit by householders, promising gradual freedom from suffering and ultimate release, or *Nirvana*. Motivations for one's actions gained particular attention in a framework of religiosity that rejected the Vedic sacrificial programme and the associated social structures of *Varna*, or class division. Intentionality became a marked component of nonviolence, such that, as the Dhammapada states, to desist from the desire to harm is itself the cause for the cessation of suffering (Taehtinen 1976:7). Psychological analysis of the origin of violence and nonviolence becomes significant. The *Abhidarmakosa* locates the origin of violence in *klesha*, affliction; the source of the intention of nonviolence is the perception of nonviolence; or, we might say, it is the perception of the possibility or option to desist from violence.

Prior to the rise of the later Mahayana Buddhist practice of vegetarianism, a Buddhist *bhikku* (monk), as a "field of merit" receiving the charity of laypersons, would dutifully accept whatever alms were offered, provided he had no knowledge that any meat won by begging came from an animal expressly killed for serving him (Ruegg 1980:234-35). The monk's duty was to receive charity so that donors may gain pious credit for their efforts (Chapple 1993:26). In this system, *himsa* is contained within *ahimsa* in the sense that a social system which recognizes the superiority of the renounced life dedicated to seeking liberation pays honour to those who discourage, but do not entirely prohibit, animal slaughter. Containment of violence toward animals also took on a legal dimension through Asoka's pillar edicts, which listed numerous species forbidden to be killed (Ibid. 24-25).

The *Jataka* stories of early Buddhism are replete with animal narrations demonstrating the primacy of charity as the vessel of *ahimsa*, in which animals give themselves for the sake of others – either humans or other animals. Sometimes, these stories show animal thinking capacity; at other times they emphasize not only thinking capacity and willpower but also cleverness in offering one's own life for the sake of others (often by virtue of the animal's, having been the *Boddhisattva*). Padmanabh Jaini (1991) recounts a case of *guptadana*, or anonymous charity, wherein the *Bodhisattva*, as an elephant, wishing to save one thousand lost travelers in the jungle from starvation, arranges to provide his own body for their sustenance. Anxious that travelers will be physically incapable of killing him, the elephant informs them that a dead animal lay ahead, fallen from a nearby cliff, then proceeds to throw himself over the cliff to his own death before the starving party arrives. The author of the *Jatakamarana* comments:

> Even though born as animals, there is seen the charitable activities of great beings, performed according to their capacities (Jaini 1991:272).[3]

The Indic Buddhist tradition extolled respect for and protection of animals, but singled out no particular type of animal as worthy of worship.

Tapas: Containment in the Heat of Self-restraint

Although, both Hindu and Buddhist traditions preach principles of self-restraint linked with the practice of *ahimsa*, neither shows quite the extremity of practices to minimize harm to living beings as the *Jaina* tradition. And if we find ascetic practices and attention to personal, individual religious culture in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, all the more so does Jainism advocate the practice of *tapas* (austerity, penance), as the most promising vehicle for realizing *dharma*. Chapple (1993:10), noting that "At the heart of Jainism is the practice of *ahimsa*", points out that vegetarianism finds its fullest articulation in this tradition, as one of but several observances aiding one in the practice of *ahimsa*.

For a follower of Jaina tradition, which enumerates no less than 432 types of violence (Taehtinen 1976:15), the ambiguity of killing is minimized by pursuing a program of carefully graded reduction of actions harmful to other beings culminating, as a final resolution to the problem of harming others, in the practice of *sallekhana*, fasting unto death. Sharply contrasted with suicide, which is strictly forbidden, this practice is offered in *Jaina* texts to those who recognize the inevitable approach of death through sickness, old age, calamity or famine. After prescribing a procedure for gradual reduction of food intake to nil, the second century CE Ratnakarandaka Ravakacara enjoins:

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[3] We need not assume that animals are always seen as saintly creatures in these traditions. The Pali Buddhist Suttanipata notes that the life of one whom like, a beast, takes delight in injuring others is very wicked, and he increases his own bondage (Tahtinen 1976:40). In all Indic texts there is discussion of the possibility to be born as an animal as a result of sinful behavior as a human – a form of condemnation which is difficult to overcome, usually over many lifetimes. As we will discuss later in this article, in the *Hitopadesa* (usually considered a Hindu text), humans are distinguished from animals by virtue of their ability to practice *dharma*, whereas animals are generally seen as following the strict rule of nature.

> During the observance of the vow, one should not commit any of the transgressions: entertaining a desire to live, wishing for a speedy death, exhibiting fear, or desire to meet friends or remembering them or expecting to be born with all comforts and pleasure in the next life (Chapple 1993:101).

In this extreme vow of *tapas* all tension between *himsa* and *ahimsa* principles dissolves in the abandonment of any effort to preserve the body, the instrument by and for which one inevitably commits violence to other beings. Suicide, on the other hand, is violence committed against oneself, for which reactions (*karma*) accrue.

As in the Buddhist texts, numerous stories within the *Jaina* tradition tell of some conscious self-sacrifice for the sake of another being, either human or animal. Fitting to the *Jaina* assertion that animals possess thinking capacity (*manas*) as well as will-power is the famous story of the elephant that protected a rabbit: As all the forest animals crowded around a forest lake to avoid a raging fire, an elephant lifted its leg to scratch an itch, giving opportunity for a rabbit to find space beneath its leg. Jaini summarizes the story:

> The elephant, out of an overwhelming desire not to hurt the rabbit, stood on three legs for more than three days until the fire died down and the rabbit scampered off. By then, his leg was numb and he toppled over. Still retaining a pure mind and heart, the elephant died. As a reward for his compassion he overcame the need for embodiment as an animal and was born as a prince by the name of Megha and eventually became a disciple of Mahavira, taking the vows of a monk in hopes of transcending all forms of existence (Chapple 1993:12-13, quoting Jaini).

Thus, we see a creative broadening of the moral circle such that animals exercise thinking and will-power specifically for altruistic purposes underscoring the *ahimsa* principle, quite independent of human presence. Sometimes, an animal is simply credited with pious intentions for which it is rewarded in the next life, as in the story of a frog on its way to hear a sermon from Mahavira: Upon being accidentally trampled by a royal elephant, the frog is reborn in heaven due to its devotion to the Jaina Tirthankara (Jaini 1991:278). As might be expected of Jainism, the moral circle includes not only the avoidance of hurting, but also the protection of animals. Thus, India is familiar, since several centuries, with the Jaina practice of maintaining animal hospitals, or *panjrapoles*.

Yajña, *Dana*, and *Tapas*: Three Means of Executing *Dharma*

So far I have briefly represented the three Indic religious traditions in terms of the principle of *ahimsa*, typifying each in relation to one of three central concerns of all the traditions, namely *yajña*, *dana*, and *tapas* – sacrifice, charity, and austerity. For convenience I have linked Hinduism to *yajña* as a central concern, Buddhism to *dana*, and Jainism to *tapas* in order to make rough distinctions which, if examined too minutely, would certainly lose their neatness. Out of the chorus of voices urging practice of *ahimsa* which is the body of Indic religious texts it can be difficult to separate specific voice registers. But what is for us to observe here is that all the strains of Indic religious life hold *ahimsa* as a central principle to the maintenance of *dharma*, or duty, in which one or another means of accommodation of the biotic demand for violence is accomplished, the moral status of animals is in some way raised to approach that of humans, and humans are provided facility for encountering the non-material dimension of their existence.

The *Bhagavadgita*, generally considered a work of theological synthesis among a variety of schools, is centrally concerned with *dharma*. In it, *yajña*, *dana* and *tapas* are all upheld as practices "never to be given up" (*Gita* 18.5). Agarwal (1991: 263) notes that the modern *Gita* commentator Vinoba Bhave equated these three categories with, respectively, the "effort to replenish nature's loss," the "help given through body, mind, material resources and other means to discharge the debt to society," and "self-discipline needed for removing the deficiencies and distortions in the body caused by normal wear and tear". In other words, the practice of *dharma* includes proper human action in relation to the cosmos, human society, and the individual, all of which are to be carried out with a certain attitude conducive to liberation, namely detachment. Significantly, it is in the context of detachment that we find explicit mention of rights in the *Bhagavadgita.*

As is well known, the *Bhagavad-gita* opens with the great warrior Arjuna wishing to withdraw from an impending battle: the kingdom of Arjuna and his four brothers, unjustly usurped by a rival part of the same clan, can be regained only by war. Such is the conclusion of Krishna, who has found all attempts at diplomacy a failure. As Arjuna's charioteer, Krishna instructs Arjuna on the principles of *dharma*, insisting that,

> Only with respect to your prescribed duty do you have a right. You are not entitled to the fruits of (your) action. Never become the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duties (Gita 2.47).

The Sanskrit word *adhikara* means right, jurisdiction, authority, privilege, prerogative, or entitlement. The 'fruits of action', '*karma-phala*', in contradistinction to the performance of action (*as yajña*, *dana* and *tapas*), are not objects of entitlement and are hence not to be the source of one's motivation to act. M. Hiriyanna comments on this verse:

> The significance of this principle is to elevate the moral quality of actions above their content. What really matters is the motive inspiring their doing – how actions are done and not what they are. 'God cares,' some one has stated, 'more for the adverb than for the verb' (Sharma 1986:152).

Duty is to be performed, according to the *Gita*, "without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat" (2.38) in order to free one from the taint of action. By maintaining such an attitude in relation to duty a person does not succumb to the whims of the mind and senses out of which stem insatiable demands for acquisition of objects over which exploitation can be exercised. By adopting the dutiful attitude of detachment, the activities of *yajña*, *dana* and *tapas* become joyful enterprises as one upholds *dharma* through replenishment of nature rather than its destruction; through reciprocation with one's neighbors (including those of other species) rather than exploitation of them; and through understanding the self rather than self-effacement or self-indulgence.

The *Gita*, as an important Indic religious text exploring the concept of *dharma*, thus challenges a fundamental assumption of modern legal rights discourse upon which much animal and environmental protection argumentation has foundered. At the same time, the *Gita* challenges a prevailing conception of self as independent agent. Krishna's initial lesson concerns the relation of the *jivatma*, the individual self, to the *deha*, the body,[4] after which he discusses the important concept of *karma*, action, which must always be executed within the context of *daivam*, the higher, spiritual order. To think of oneself as a completely independent moral agent is a fundamental feature of illusion, according Krishna. In the *Gita*, Krishna repeatedly urges Arjuna to act decisively, having become free from the manifold illusions of temporary embodied existence, such that at the end of the text Arjuna can finally proclaim:

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[4] Of course, here Buddhist teachings depart from those of the *Gita*, claiming that there is ultimately no ultimate existence of self.

> "My delusion is now destroyed. By your grace my memory is recovered. I now stand free from perplexity, ready to execute your order " (Gita 18.73).

Animal Rights and Moral Agency in Animals

In her article *Animal Liberation and Ahimsa*, Maithili Schmidt-Raghavan proposes a re-examination of the notion of duty as a corrective to the unproductive rights-language prevalent in present-day discussions on animal protection. She observes:

> The whole language of rights is so tangled up with talk of claims, entitlements and contracts that it is recalcitrant to attempts by philosophers to distill the moral connotation of the term. The ambiguity of the concept has created complications over the requirements for something being an appropriate 'bearer of rights'. The term 'rights', which seemed to equip advocates of animal liberation and vegetarianism with a shining new tool to crack the barriers of speciesism has, in fact, led to the skidding of their feet. Their preoccupation with rights has led them off in the wrong direction (Schmidt-Raghavan 1993:71).

Schmidt-Raghavan instead proposes to 'redraw the ethical map' to include the 'moral considerability' of animals by upholding a doctrine of the 'unity of life' through ahimsa practice. Laudable as this idea is, we need to think carefully what 'moral considerability' might involve. Let us remember that, while ahimsa is central to Indic ethical discourse, it issues from the recognition of the biotic fact of violence in nature and seeks to reconcile that fact with the philosophical assumption of the unity of life. The inclusion of the moral considerability of animals in a human 'ethical map' invites us to at least imagine animals as moral agents, as so many Indic narrative texts do. Jaini notes,

> The concept of animal rights imply the presence of moral and spiritual capacities in animals, however hidden that may be from human eyes...

> animals too have moral and spiritual capacities, a fact deeply perceived by parts of the Indian tradition. In this sense, even animals are held to be capable of *ahimsa* as of other elements of *dharma*. To have such a perception is to go one step beyond merely stipulating that we humans ought to comport ourselves *ahimsa*-wise towards all members of the animal kingdom... animals are not merely at the receiving end but also at the giving end of moral and spiritual conduct, especially when it comes to *ahimsa* and all that it implies (Jaini 1991:275).

But is Jaini here proposing a total erasure of the distinction between animals and humans? Hardly, he quotes a well-known saying from the *Hitopadesa*, an Indic book of moral instruction:

> Men are the same as animals
> As far as food, sleep, fear, and sex are concerned.
> They are distinguished only because of *dharma*:
> (A man who) lacks *dharma* is the same as the animals (Ibid. 270).

By *dharmic* conduct humans are distinguished from animals, and central to *dharmic* conduct is the exercise of nonviolence (in one or another form, according to capacity) by which, inversely, animals seen as other-than-human are admitted into the human social world as morally considerable beings. In short, humans become conscious of the possibility to communicate with animals, in ways that may challenge our rationalistic sensibilities. While this opens up a fascinating, if not perilous topic,[5] suffice to note here that this is, I think, a real possibility suggested by Indic insights into human-animal relations clustered around the notions of *dharma* and *ahimsa*.

In the concluding chapter to his book *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*, Richard Sorabji (1993) observes that both ancient and modern Western discussions on animals have produced disappointingly one-dimensional moral theories. Neither ancient arguments for animal protection (i.e.- useful contract and *oikeiosis*, or belonging), nor the two modern arguments of Peter Singer and Tom Regan (preference satisfaction and inherent value) take into account the variety of relationships occurring between animals and humans. Sorabji (1993:208-217) questions the very need for a moral theory at all, especially one that 'boils down all considerations to one'. He rather proposes the following, with the assumption that he is addressing moral people who have no wish to hurt their fellow human beings:

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[5] Of the considerable literature on animal training and communication with animals, little is quite so engaging philosophically and entertaining as Vicki Hearne's *Adam's Task*. See Sources.

> Whatever protects our fellow humans (and I have no theory to tell me what does), the same will protect animals, to the extent that they do not differ in morally relevant ways. We should then study the ways in which other species do differ, and be ready to consider whether these ways are, or are not, morally relevant. The relevant differences, I have suggested, will include possible relationships to us (Ibid.217).

Seen from a broad perspective, what Indic religious traditions seem to suggest is that what protects both humans and animals is *dharma*, understood as the internal regulating function of which humans can become consciously aware and upon which they can act. This regulating function is a trained sensitivity to one's place in relation to the world, society, and the source of all being, or God, which is nourished by the detached attitude conjoined to an ethos of *ahimsa*. If the West could become more engaged with these notions, we may be able to stop skidding our feet in animal rights and animal talk and get to the deeper level of thinking and acting required for healing the earth and, while we are at it, improving our diets and our health.

Practical prescriptions for environmental healing as conclusions to theorizing can be either disappointing or angering. But as I noted in the beginning, radical change in American dietary patterns that suggest a significant reduction in the consumption of meat might be imposed by economic forces. While, like other vegetarians, I would welcome the trend away from animal consumption, I am also apprehensive, knowing the trigger-happiness of many non-vegetarians, whose hunting instincts would likely surface the moment they think their dietary habits threatened. The Roman Catholic apologist G.K. Chesterton wrote,

> We talk of wild animals; but man is the only wild animal. It is man that has broken out. All other animals are tame animals; following the rugged respectability of the tribe or type all other animals are

> domestic animals; man alone is ever undomestic, either as a profligate or a monk. (*Orthodoxy*. Quoted in *The Critic*, Summer 1994, 83).

Indic teachings on nonviolence offer a chance to tame ourselves, to become less of a source of fear to the animals that our civilization now slaughter at the rate of some sixteen million daily to please our palates. When *ahimsa*-talk enters the discussion on environmental protection and animal rights, there is at least hope that if we insist on eating meat, we will think to ask the animals first whether they will permit us to kill them. This would be a major step toward becoming enough tame that human civilization could begin to seriously protect the environment. Otherwise, sooner or later we can expect our wild nature to catch up with us, and there will be nowhere for us to break out to.

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