



# INDIAN

ओम् भूर्भुवः स्वः ।  
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।  
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

**JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
HINDU STUDIES & INDIAN PHILOSOPHY  
UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN - WESTVILLE**

**VOLUME 9**

**DECEMBER 1997**

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**DEMOCRATIC IDEALS and HINDUISM**  
**IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by Dr. HG Dewa, Univ of Dbn-Westville

*This paper attempts to provide an insight into the strengths and weaknesses of initiatives at democratization within Hindu society in South Africa.*

*From ancient times, Hindu society has been seen to operate along lines of social divisions based on ethnic differences. Modern newspaper reports often indicate the extent of the social problems arising out of traditional perceptions of supposedly inborn differences.*

*Taking note of the Human Rights guarantees entrenched in the Indian Constitution, and of the reform ideas propounded by political and religious leaders like Svami Dayananda, Svami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Radhakrishnan and others, the present study adopts a strong positive approach to the existence of rigid caste structures in Hindu society.*

*This study hinges on the hypothesis that a significant number of modern Hindu social, political and religious leaders are now imbued with zeal for the democratic ideals of freedom and equality, and from their positions of administrative control in various religious organizations and power structures, they would be striving to implement measures to democratize all procedures affecting social and educational matters within their sphere of influence.*

*Seen against the background of traditional caste rigidity, this study traces the ideas of social and educational freedom and equality as obtaining in the Hindu tradition, and their manifestation in modern Hindu society at the individual and corporate levels.*

*Since this study incorporates research conducted by the writer in the major centres in South Africa, the extent and effect of an ongoing Hindu Reformation is revealed. The conclusion is drawn that, while democratic ideals are widely espoused theoretically, some aspects of caste rigidity are still seen to manifest at the practical level in Hindu religious and social structures.*

The foundation of Hindu ethics is provided by the concept of Dharma, as it has developed from Vedic times, through the formative and creative period of the Sutras, and through the Puranic and later Puranic periods, and down into the modern age. It is important to understand that the process of development is continuously occurring within Hinduism, and that the tradition itself is clear on this point. Hence we can justifiably speak of the further development of the concept of Dharma in the modern age.

We may recall two historical personalities in order to illustrate this position. The first is the Buddha, whose heroic and super-human grappling with the large-scale animal sacrifices that had been the order of the day during his time, significantly changed the understanding of the concept of Dharma, bestowing on it the sense of non-killing or ahimsa. The second illustration is from our own day - the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who unfurled the banner of non-violence against the canvas of a much enlarged world stage. Necessarily, and very significantly, Gandhi extended the meaning of AHIMSA into the realm of human relationships and showed the practice of untouchability as a very serious violation of it. Doubtless, the Buddha also could never have tolerated untouchability had it existed on the scale and form in which it existed in Gandhi's day.

Both the Buddha and the Mahatma held non-violence as a vital component of the meaning of the concept of Dharma, which, as noted, had been conceived in earlier times to be of a somewhat different nature. These earlier times are largely a legacy of the Brahmana period of Vedic development, which overlaid and continued to influence much of later thought and practice, even as it does up to this day in various ways.

But it has to be noted that the concept of Dharma was very different in the earliest Vedic period of the Samhitas, when the hymns and mantras themselves were probably in the process of formation. The idea of Dharma is there expressed as RTA, another ethical term of stupendous religious implications. The many significations of this term were later taken up into the concept of Dharma, and its most

outstanding contribution to ethics is the idea of LAW - the inviolable law that is the inherent principles of all existents. Rta is regarded as Truth itself, which is its alternate mode of expression and operation on the empirical plane. The Rg Veda says that the entire universe was created out of Rta and Satya through inward concentration or tapas.

We may clarify our understanding of Hindu ethics by stating that the unchanging and absolute aspect of Rta is its character of law-abidingness or truthfulness or righteousness. What these terms mean for different times and circumstances may be subject to variation, and indeed they have changed during the course of Indian history; but the framework, or essential foundation of the concept cannot change. And so it is stated that, while Dharma remains constant, its content may change according to the needs of the times.

Hindu social theory is very much dependent upon the concept of Dharma, invested as it has been with several significations of Rta - righteousness, right order, that which is true, the truth of the precise ordering of the cosmos, the cyclic patterns in nature, the harmony of the seasons, etc. etc. And through Rta, Dharma is manifested in human society as the right ordering of the four varnas or castes - the Brahmanas or priestly class, the Ksatriyas or warrior class, the Vaisyas or trader class, and the Sudras or servant class.

This primitive and simplistic classification, which seems to have a strong psychological component, is traceable to the Purusa Sukta hymn of the Rg Veda (1), and which is repeated, with six additional verses, in the Vajasneyi Samhita of the Yajur Veda (2). In this hymn, in a single couplet, the four orders of society are stated to originate from the head, arms, thighs and feet of God (3). At the end of the hymn it is declared that these social orders, together with the many other manifestations from the Being of God, ie., all things in the universe, are the earliest ordinances or manifestations of Dharma, taken as the Law Supreme.

And thus it has come down to us, following the orthodox tradition of interpretation of the hymn, that the Divine Principle or Dharma dictates that humanity is divided into four classes, each of which has perforce to pursue its own specific varna-dharma, or sva-dharma (as it applies to the individual). The duties and obligations of the four orders are different, and the differences pertaining to individuals are fixed at birth, depending on the order or caste in which one is born. It is contended by the orthodox that, since the Rta-Dharma principle is the essence of Godhead, the four-fold social structure is a reflection of the will of God, and persons who strictly follow their caste-duties will be harmonising their individual will with the Divine Will, thus enhancing their own spiritual development.

It is obvious that such caste-groupings, with their highly prescriptive and authoritarian system of ethical praxis, violate the very basis of a democratic life-style. Today, there can be no doubt that democratic ideals are universally espoused, although we do hear criticisms that such ideals are the creations of the Western world, and should not be consumed undiluted by non-western cultures.

For the purposes of our thesis in this paper, we need to ask the question: “Whom does the rigid ordering of castes, with differential sets of duties, benefit?” The clear answer is, that it benefits those who are higher in the scale of social status, with its attendant special privileges, and that it benefits most those at the highest level, i.e., the Brahmins.

From the perspective of theology, we may examine the original hymn of the Purusa Sukta (hymn of the Primeval Being) a little objectively. We then notice that the four orders mentioned therein are in an organic and inter-dependent series of necessary relationships with one another. Further, there is neither mention nor indication of special privileges or special social status attaching to any group, as all the four classes, though representing different parts of the body, are products of one and the same Divine Body of God.



Upon thus examining the hymn (which privilege was consistently denied to the Sudras throughout Indian history), it becomes obvious that the four varnas are metaphoric indicators of functional divisions that are basic to any community of human beings. The head and arms of the Supreme Lord, in their reference to Brahmins and Ksatriyas, cannot possibly mean exclusive intellectual brilliance and military prowess, respectively. In point of fact, randomly selected individuals from any community around the world, fall quite naturally into a Gaussian curve distribution, with a few gifted individuals and a few morons at each end of the curve, and the rest falling in between. And so we find gifted individuals even among Vaisyas and Sudras, when opportunities for advancement are offered to them. Human society at the empirical level, then, would be a very poor reflection of the will of God, as understood in the orthodox tradition!

We contend that the caste system in its orthodox interpretation is a warped understanding of the clearly metaphorical intention of the original hymn. And, unfortunately, later historical and social developments conspired to establish it according to the orthodox understanding of it. We have to assert, however, that the orthodox understanding severely violates the ethos of Divine Oneness that the Purusa Sukta hymn projects, along with all other original Hindu texts. The ethos of Divine Oneness is asserted in the texts as existing between God and humans, between God and the world, among all members of society, and among all creatures generally. It does not need much acumen to translate such a teaching into a social theory of total equality among all persons in society. The ancient Hindus may not have called it “democracy”, but democracy is precisely what the ethos of ONENESS means at the social and political levels of empirical life. Since the Hindu teachings, in terms of their most general and fundamental principles, insist on the fullest Divine worth of each individual, democracy would be the only appropriate social theory correlating with Hindu theology. In this regard SK Saksena says:

**“The history of the early Indian period reads like that of a perfectly modern and individualistic society wherein the standards of equality and of the freedom of the individual as an individual irrespective of any kind of discrimination are firmly established in theory and in practice.” (4)**

With regard to the caste system as practiced in ancient times, the same author asserts as follows:

**“The Indian theory of varna or classification of society into four classes, was in perfect conformity with contemporary ideas of freedom and the status of the individual and social justice, and was and remains democratic with regard to the individual’s status and his relation to society. It is supposed to be of divine origin, but this is not to be taken literally. It has purely ideological and functional bases and is universal inasmuch as society must have classes of individuals according to their qualifications, interests and abilities to engage themselves towards the progress of society and toward their own fulfillment, religious or secular. This does not mean that the classification was static or immobile, or that an individual, if he was endowed with ability and knowledge, could not attain to whatever classification he aspired to.” (5)**

The most ancient conception of the varna system was undoubtedly that of a necessary functional division. It was not a hereditary system, though passing on a trade, or craft, or learning, from father to son was convenient and practical. Yet no bar existed or operated against new entrants into any vocation.

Even after the castes became rigid, the many persons who rose from lower castes to higher castes, and lower caste members who are recognised as saints and honoured teachers, indicates the flexibility of the system, and points to an earlier age of total mobility. A verse in the Rg Veda says:

**“My father is a physician; I am a writer of verse;  
my other grinds corn. We all follow different occupations.”**  
(6)

indicating a healthy attitude of freedom of choice as pertaining to vocations. The very word “varna”, though it has been taken to mean colour in one sense, is derived from a verbal root meaning “to choose”.

A mythical figure that stands at the head of an important theological perspective, is that of Prahlada (7). Born of the demon king Hiranyakasipu, Prahlada is himself referred to as a demon. But he is a most endearing demon-child, for he is extremely devoted to God, adamantly refusing to worship his father who wished to usurp the honours normally addressed to God. For his intransigence, Prahlada is compelled to suffer many trials and tests, from which his singular devotion brought him forth unscathed. If devotion to God can so raise the status of a demon, how much more so would the principle apply to a human being though born in a low caste! A human low caste birth must surely be considered higher than a demon birth!

Indeed the Hindu tradition boasts of many persons born in lowly homes, but who are celebrated as saints of a very high order.

Such examples, it may be contended, while impressive against the background of caste rigidity, do not touch the nerve-centre of the caste system. This nerve-centre is not the principle of endogamy, but the assumption of special privileges based on birth. The privilege of following the vocation of a Brahmin, consequent upon access to the Veda and related religious lore, is the inner core of the entire system of castes, which violates the fundamental democratic norm of EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY.

Radhakrishnan recognises that the rules of Dharma are framed in order to protect and enhance the “immortal ideas” inherent in Dharma, and which are changeless. He declares that social rules “are the mortal flesh of immortal ideas and so are mutable.” (8). Following this procedure, every item of human conduct may be weighed in terms of this primary meaning of Dharma, which is the

**Divine Universal Oneness.** This is the Oneness of God, which necessarily has to be reflected in the Oneness of all creatures.

The rules of conduct must change with changing times. That is an important part of the meaning of Sanatana Dharma, says Radhakrishnan, as noted above. The term Sanatana refers to the unchanging foundation in the concept of Dharma, and is a reflection of the Supreme Divinity of God Himself. It is the Sanatana element that maintains the continuity and meaningfulness of Dharma in its every stage and state of manifestation. Thus it is easy to see, in terms of our understanding of democracy, that false manifestations of Dharma, like the warped and corrupted orthodox interpretations of varna-dharma, are not Sanatana Dharma at all.

The idea of Human Rights, and the concept of the individual, have been marred by the intricacies of metaphysical thought since the time of the Upanisads. The value and appropriateness, in the philosophical context, of Hindu metaphysical theories concerning the soul and its destiny cannot be denied. But its enshackling influence upon the role of the individual in society as a free agent prevented Indian thinkers from giving human rights contents to their social theories. Today, several protagonists of Eastern social theories tend to object that the approach to social theories from the human rights perspective does not do justice to indigenous oriental thinking about these issues, and that oriental theories emphasize duties and obligations more than rights (9).

The sense of **duty and obligation** engendered in the Hindu tradition and the orthodox interpretation of Dharma, will become clearer by the following illustration from an actual historical event of recent times, as reported by John Carmen:

*“Once in the mid-nineteenth century a group of Brahmins representing the hierarchy of a temple in Tirunelveli, in the extreme south of India, came before the British magistrate with a serious complaint. The outcastes with the traditional duty of pulling the car*

had become Christian, and they now refused to pull the car, with the result that the entire festival could not take place.

It was generally British policy to respect the customs of Hindus and other religious groups, but in this case the British magistrate had a serious problem. How, he asked the Brahmins, could he compel the outcastes to perform a vital service for a religion to which they no longer belonged? To this the Brahmins had a prompt and emphatic reply. It does not matter, they said, what your personal religious convictions are, or what the personal feelings of the outcaste servants are. The duty to which they were born, their *dharma*, is to provide physical labor to the rest of the community, and your duty as a ruler is to force them to do their duty. Otherwise the procession cannot proceed, and the *dharma* of the temple will be disregarded. If the ritual order is upset in this way the deity will be displeased and will withhold the rains. Your duty as ruler is to ensure the prosperity of the entire people through the timely arrival of the monsoon rains, and that maintenance of cosmic order depends on the ritual order of the temple, including the pulling of the temple car.

The British magistrate declined to act on that complaint, but it was not because British law in India paid no attention to Hindu notions of law, including moral and religious duties. Indeed, the British went to a great deal of trouble to seek out manuals of traditional law, both Hindu and Islamic, in some cases to translate them into English and in a great many cases to adjust British law to the Indians' own sense of what was fair and just. In this case, however, the magistrate also felt an obligation to the outcastes, who by becoming Christians had assumed new religious duties, including what might be called the negative duty of not participating in Hindu festivals. What that magistrate was doing, whether he realized it or not, was interpreting *dharma* as a self-imposed obligation by morally free agents aware of and responsible for their own choices. It may well have been impossible for any British magistrate in the nineteenth century, anywhere in the world, to do otherwise. Yet this was a profound change from the traditional notion of *dharma* as a differentiated duty built into the very nature with which a particular group of beings is born and related to a vast system of natural duties embracing all classes of beings in the world. Failure to live according to one's caste *dharma*

*would notonly produce bad karma that would affect one's station in life in a future birth; it would also upset the present order of nature, leading to floods, or in South India still more frequently, to droughts."* (10)

While a few scholars plead for greater emphasis on duties and obligations, it is not clear to most other scholars just what that means, apart from a sense of charity and morally good behaviour, which obviously cannot be enforced and have to be enacted voluntarily *by each person acting as a free individual*.

CP Ramaswami Aiyar, a wise scholar of the Indian tradition, while cautioning that Indians should assimilate (and not imitate) Western ideas into the Indian cultural context, nevertheless says:

"It has been our good fortune to be brought into touch with the currents of Western thought and speculation, and Indians have been under their influence for nearly a century in our universities. .... There is a great danger of our not securing the full benefit of the newer culture for lack of proper assimilation" (11).

The big question, to my mind, is: How do we assimilate the value of individual human rights into an Indian context, unless we transform it in some ways, in which case it will no longer be individual human rights? And no apologist from the Indian or Asian side has thus far offered the insight of how the transformation, or adaptation, or adjustments is to take place; no one has yet shown what part of the concept of democratic human rights and civil liberties has to be sacrificed in order to assimilate it within the oriental situation. The plain fact of the matter is that the concept of individual human rights is fundamental to our idea of democracy and is based on the total equality of all persons in human society. Such a concept of the equal worth of every human being is inviolable, because, if altered, it gets destroyed, making some human beings more equal than others! We hold that the idea of total equality among human beings is simply another way of stating the Divine Oneness proposed in Hindu

theology. And therefore, the modern concept of democracy is germane to Hinduism in its essential understanding.

Some writers have offered the criticism that Indian thought falls short on the concept of the individual, that the individual in Indian thought does not possess a firm identity that can be protected against encroachments (12). Such criticisms suggest, to me, that in Indian culture, the individual operates as part of the herd, and not as an individual in himself, free and unshackled. While we may not be able to deny that in the orthodox interpretation of Dharma (as in the chariot-pulling illustration) such a criticism may be justified, we also have to assert that the foundations for a true and just system of HUMAN RIGHTS are fully available within Hindu culture itself, and have been so available from over six thousand years (witness our references from Saksena, given above).

The teachings of Vivekananda, and of Radhakrishnan, based as they are on a correct scriptural understanding of Hindu philosophy, clarify beyond any doubt the intrinsic worth of every human being as a free agent, thus negating and contradicting the gross misinterpretations of *dharma* that have come down to us as traditional Hindu culture. It is only due to group interests and chauvinism that the ruling class operated a whole set of prescriptive rules upon the subject masses, while pseudo-Brahmin teachers propounded a pseudo-philosophical and arbitrary metaphysical veneer to give it scriptural credibility.

While not accepting it in its total abstraction, Saksena nevertheless defines the concept of the individual as follows:

“When an individual is given the same freedom which any other individual may claim for himself, he is treated as an individual, and is given the rights of individuality. .... If an individual is treated as an end in himself - in terms of equality of freedom and status - and never as a means to another individual’s purposes, he is then considered a genuine individual.” (13)

(Moore, 359)

This perspective of the individual appears acceptable to us, in terms of our understanding of democracy and human rights. There can be no compromise with this definition in any situation. Any attempt at assimilation of this definition of the individual to the current Hindu cultural situation would be a plain violation of it. However, it is important, and heartening, to realise that the will of most of the scholars of India has found expression in the Indian Constitution where “Fundamental Rights” are guaranteed, as this preamble shows:

**“PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA**

*We, the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens:*

*Justice, social, economic and political;  
Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship;  
Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote  
among them all  
Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity  
of the Nation;*

*In our Constituent Assembly this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do hereby Adopt, Enact, and Give to Ourselves this Constitution.”*

(14)

Such a position now obtaining in modern India was not won without valiant precursors acting upon the dictates of conscience and scholarly investigation of the roots of the Hindu cultural tradition. While there were sporadic objections to the imposition of traditional caste rules upon the subject masses during the medieval period, in the early nineteenth century (when the British had just established themselves as the rulers of most of India) Raja Ram Mohun Roy, himself of traditional Brahmin stock, made direct attacks upon the



orthodoxy for the superstitious and undemocratic practices prevalent then. How radical a reformer he was can be seen from the following account of the fate he suffered:

“He was banished from his father's house once or twice; he was insulted by his friends; his life was threatened; and even in the streets of Calcutta he had to walk around armed. Later in life his relations (his own mother) tried to deprive him of his caste, and indirectly of his property.” (15)

In the latter part of the 19th century Svami Dayanand fearlessly fought a protracted battle against the Hindu orthodoxy. He founded a Protestant-type of Hindu society called the Arya Samaj, opposing superstitions, idolatry and the caste system. The work of the Arya Samaj has helped in large measure to soften traditional caste prejudices by openly inviting all classes of persons to take up the priesthood. Even women have been enrolled and trained as priests.

Peculiarly, however, the great reformer wrote in his *Satyartha Prakash* that children born to Brahmin parents should be given the surname “Sharma”; children born to Ksatriya parents should be given the surname “Varma”; children born to Vaisya parents should be given the surname “Gupta”; and children born to Sudra parents should be given the surname “Das” (which means ‘servant’)! It is not easy to understand this glaring contradiction in the otherwise consistent work of this great champion of the downtrodden masses of Hindus. (16)

Svami Vivekananda, the famous Hindu monk who became a legend all over the world for his refreshingly modernistic views and interpretations of the Hindu religion, established the Ramakrishna Mission at the turn of this century. This society conducted vast amounts of reform work among the poor and ignorant masses of Indian people, though it is not clear to what extent the society is promoting democratic ideas in respect of caste orthodoxy at the present time. However that may be, it is significant that the great Vivekananda was vigorously opposed to special privileges and to the

corrupt orthodoxy. As an example of his strong views against caste orthodoxy, we may note his words:

**“To advance oneself towards freedom --- physical, mental and spiritual --- and help others to do so, is the supreme prize of man. These social rules which stand (in the way of) the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily.”**

We should note that Vivekananda is emphatic about the need for a felt and experienced physical sense of freedom in the field of social interaction among all members of society.

Although Mahatma Gandhi appeared to support vocations based on birth (which is the crux of the entire caste system) on the assumption that the alternate system of free choice would engender competition and greed, in his later years he appeared to feel caste should give way to a more equitable social order. Regrettably, he made no actual pronouncement in this regard, apart from declaring that caste represented an anachronism. However, we have to admit that Gandhi's stand regarding the utter sanctity of each individual still remains the basis for the democratization of the entire Hindu social system.

The great statesman-philosopher, Radhakrishnan, has supported democratic ideals in every way, and has pleaded for a thorough revision of the Indian social system in the light of these ideals. He has stoutly maintained that the democratic ideals of the modern world are a reflection of the true and proper essentials of Hindu Dharma from ancient times, however misinterpreted they might have been in the process of cultural development. He recognized radical change as the need of the hour, to which every Hindu cultural leader and intellectual must respond. As a true philosopher and concerned leader, he has given directions concerning the proper interpretation of fundamental theological concepts, so that their democratic flavour and thrust become apparent, and so that

orthodox and prejudiced interpretations may not continue to prevail.

These inspiring developments on the part of somany Hindu leaders and reformers has doubtless served to motivate some form of democratic reform in the diasporic regions. When we turn to a consideration of the South African situation, we are constrained to note that the ideals latent in the ancient Hindu ethos of total oneness is beginning to become significant in practical social life of the Hindu people. The hypothesis behind our research that a Hindu Reformation may be occurring in South Africa in terms of democratic ideals, and measured in terms of their implementation in daily life, appears to have been largely supported by the results.

### The Hindu Reformation in South Africa The South African Research

#### Aims of the Study

The present study has been intended as a pilot research to establish whether or not a Hindu Reformation is taking place in South Africa in the social, educational and religious life of the Hindu people. The hypothesis was framed in positive terms, that Hindu society is changing significantly towards greater democratisation in the spheres of religious, social and educational ethical praxis.

The hypothesis took account of three facts, largely acknowledged by all scholars throughout the world:

- (1) that Hindu social and educational practices reflect a segregational, apartheid-type, almost racist prejudices among members of Hindu society itself;
- (2) that the essential and fundamental features of Hindu Dharma support the concept of the TOTAL ONENESS of all

humanity (which, though a metaphysical concept, is meaningless in a religious sense unless it is also applicable to social realities); and

(3) that, while India has given itself a Constitution that mirrors the concept of ONENESS in terms of HUMAN RIGHTS, but whose social realities are in general and widespread violation of this concept, the Hindu diasporic populations must necessarily be influenced by the democratic norms and procedures of their respective Western environments, and would reflect a positive integration of these norms into their own ethico-religious cultural praxis.

### Statement of the Problem

The present study is based on the contention that rigid caste structures have been a significant reality in the social life of the diasporic Hindus. Given the constant attacks upon caste rigidity by modern Hindu leaders like Dayananda, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore and Radhakrishnan, and the continuous emphasis on the concept of total oneness as the basis of Hindu theology, Hindus in the diaspora, living in a western-oriented, democratically governed cultural milieu, must experience some tension, caught up between the two varieties of life-styles, the one rigid and denying freedom in social and educational matters, and the other flexible and allowing free growth and development. Their responses, as revealed in their ethical praxis, would indicate how the hiatus is being bridged.

### The Hypothesis

The present study adopts the hypothesis that Hindus in South Africa are moving away from caste rigidity to a significant extent, in their social, educational, ecclesiastical and general cultural spheres of life.

### Methodology

Being a research project in the humanities, and being a socio-anthropological study with a dominant religious and theological

interest, it became obvious that the methodology would have to utilise the two major tools of investigation pertinent to the field - these being:

- (1) The Questionnaire, and
- (2) Objective Observation.

The latter is noted as a powerful tool of investigation in the phenomenology of socio-religious ethical praxis, and can be an important corrective to the biases that can arise from the exclusive use of the questionnaire.

### The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was drawn up, comprising thirty questions, and which included 16 basic questions that directly pertained to the aims of the present study. The full questionnaire is given as Appendix I. The 16 basic questions, which were used for computing the results, were questions 2, 3, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26 and 28.

### Sampling

It was understood that there were two routes available in this matter under the present circumstances:

- (1) selecting subjects at random from the larger population of Hindus on an individual basis, and
- (2) selecting Hindu organisations, again either on a random basis or by design. For this research, it was felt appropriate to select organisations by design. There is a notion prevalent among South African Hindus that members of the Tamil, and, to a lesser extent, Telugu language groups, had mostly outgrown the ancient caste prejudices, while the Hindi language groups lagged somewhat behind these, with the Gujarati language group being considered the most orthodox in this regard.

Accepting this notion as largely true, we selected two organisations in each of the major Hindu population centres in South Africa - Cape Town, Port Elizabeth/East London, Johannesburg/Pretoria,

and Durban/Pietermaritzburg. It was intended to administer the questionnaire to 20 members from each of the 8 groups selected. In practice, however, it turned out that members of a few of the organisations could not be contacted (in the short time that the researcher had available in each of the centres - an average of ten days each). It was found feasible to work with organisations that were more readily available. In this manner 13 Hindu organisations were in the study across South Africa, with varying numbers of subjects from each, leading to a total of 245 subjects, which is considered more than satisfactory for this pilot study.

The following organisations participated in the study, given together with an indication of the language group and the number of respondents:

**Cape Town:** (a) Cape Hindu Seva Samaj (Gujarati - 33)  
(b) Siva Alayam (Tamil - 2)

**Port Elizabeth/East London:** (a) P.E. Hindu Seva Samaj  
(Gujarati - 33)  
(b) Siva Soobramaniam Alayam and the Port  
Elizabeth Thirukootam - Tamil (24)  
(c) East London Hindu Seva Samaj (Gujarati - 24)

**Johannesburg/Pretoria:** (a) Lenasia Kshatriya Mandal  
(Gujarati - 9)  
(b) Lenasia Yuvak Mandal (Gujarati - 13)  
(c) Dakshina Yuvak Mandal (Gujarati - 25)  
(d) Sahaj Marg Society (Gujarati - 4)  
(e) Sivan Koil (Tamil - 11)  
(f) Sanathan Ved Dharma Sabha (Hindi - 17)

**Durban/Pietermaritzburg:** (a) Isipingo Hindi Society (Hindi - 23)  
(b) Gujarati Vedic Society (Gujarati - 27)

**Administration Procedure:**

The administration design was to arrange with of each organisation to get their members together, to briefly introduce the research aims to such subjects as present themselves, and then hand out the questionnaires and writing materials to them. At times it became necessary to make social calls on a friendly basis, and to seek out the respondents in their homes, obtain their consent to participate in the project, and administer the questionnaires to them. In any case, at all times a standard administration procedure was adopted, as follows:

**Step One:**

- (a) The subjects were thanked, on behalf of the University of Durban-Westville and the Department of Hindu Studies & Indian Philosophy, for agreeing to participate.
- (b) A very brief introduction, indicating the challenging changes occurring in the social and political environment internationally, and especially in South Africa after the free elections and the installation of a popular government.
- (c) How Hindus and Hindu organisations are responding to these challenging circumstances.
- (d) The perception that we may be witnessing and participating a Hindu Reformation in South Africa.
- (e) A printed sheet was distributed to the subjects, which substantially re-iterated the verbal introduction (this sheet is given as Appendix II).

**Step Two**

- (a) Each subject was given a copy of a South African newspaper report which recorded a violent incident in India about a group of "high-caste" Hindu villagers seeking out and beating to death a "low-caste" Hindu youth for eloping with and wanting to marry a "high-caste" Hindu girl, under the caption "Untouchable Youth Beaten to Death."

(b) Each subject was given a copy of a South African newspaper report which related the social and political incidents concerning a "low-caste" State Minister in India, Lalloo Prasad Yadav, and his campaign against the privileges enjoyed by the "high-caste" priestly classes, under the caption "Battling With Brahmins."

Both the above reports appeared in South African newspapers over the last few years. In handing out these reports, the subjects were informed that the researcher represented no particular view in the matter, but that, since some might have read the reports and others not, the reports were being given to them in order to equalise the state of knowledge among them regarding a matter which certainly affected social and educational issues among Hindus. The subjects were further informed that they were not obliged to take any particular view on the matter. They may make use of the reports to answer any specific question in the questionnaire, or they may totally ignore the reports, as they pleased.

### Step Three

- (a) The subjects were informed that they were not required to write their names on the questionnaires, nor were they required to sign the questionnaires.
- (b) The subjects were informed that, not only were the questionnaires confidential, their responses also couldn't be traced back to them.
- (c) The subjects were requested to give their responses individually, without consulting other persons.
- (d) The questionnaires were handed out to the subjects.

### Results

Below are the results for the questions as numbered and repeated. The results are given for all the groups taken together, as there were few significant differences among the samples on most questions. Where significant differences in the responses of the



different samples are noted, these are indicated with respect to the relevant questions.

Q. 2. In which activities of the society do you participate?  
and

Q. 3. How frequently?

The vast number of respondents in every sample indicated their active participation in the activities of their respective society.

Q. 8. What religious education have you received in the society?

None of the respondents indicated any formal religious education. Approximately 75% indicated some informal religious education.

Q. 11. Do you participate in the rituals of your society?  
and

Q. 13. How often?

Approximately 60% reported frequent participation.

Approximately 30% reported occasional participation.

Approximately 10% reported nil participation.

Q. 14. Have you received any certificates for religious education?

Approximately 90% gave a negative response.

Approximately 10% gave an affirmative response.

Q. 16. Which scripture or religious book do you use most often?

Of the Gujarati and Hindi samples:

More than 50% indicated the Bhagavad Gita;

Approximately 30% indicated the Ramayana.

Of the Tamil sample:

Approximately 90% indicated the Thirukural or Thevaram or Bhagavad Gita;

Approximately 20% indicated the books of their spiritual master, or the Prayer Book of their society.

It is noteworthy that 2 respondents indicated the Vedas, while 1 indicated the Upanisads, and 1 indicated the Bible!

**Q. 18. Which is your favourite prayer?**

Approximately 20% indicated the Gayatri Mantra.

Approximately 15% indicated the Arati.

In the Tamil samples responses of "Kavady" and "Tamil" were returned in approximately 30% of the cases.

**Q. 19. Which person (in early or recent history) has influenced the most in the formation of your religious ideals?**

Approximately 40% indicated their parents (either singly or together).

Approximately 40% indicated their spiritual master.

Approximately indicated Gandhi. - 15%

5 respondents indicated Krsna, while another 5 indicated Rama.

**Q. 21. What feature of Hinduism do you find most attractive?**

90% of the responses were positive, and mostly featured the following types: "universal teachings", "acceptance of other religions", and "respect for other religions."

**Q. 22. (After a quotation from Radhakrishnan about the existence of negative aspects in Hindu culture) What feature (if any) of**

**general Hindu culture do you find unattractive or embarrassing?**

Approximately 40% indicated "caste system".  
Approximately 40% indicated "superstitions" or "primitive".

- 8 respondents indicated "too many rituals".
- 2 respondents indicated "too many deities".
- 4 respondents "ignorance of the religion".
- 6 respondents indicated "slaughtering of animals" (presumably as part of prayer rituals?)
- 3 respondents indicated "fire-walking".
- 2 respondents indicated "Idolatry and animal worship".
- 1 respondent indicated "Throwing fowls during Easter & goat prayers".
- 2 respondents indicated "trances".
- 1 respondent indicated "unqualified priests", and
- 2 respondents claimed: "I am not Hindu, I am Saivite Tamil".

**Q. 23.** (After stating Radhakrishnan's view that "The aim of religion is to spiritualise society, to establish a brotherhood on earth", the respondents were asked whether they agreed.

Approximately 95% agreed, with statements as:  
"Yes, very much so";  
"Most certainly",  
"Most decidedly",  
"Yes, definitely", and  
"Yes, for all mankind".

**Q. 25.** (After quoting Svami Vivekananda on the baneful influence of the caste system with regard to individual freedom, the respondents were asked whether they had **"any suggestions on how caste-related problems may be overcome"**).

Approximately 99% responded as fully opposed.

2 respondents appeared to be mildly opposed. Some respondents either did not have any suggestions, or could not frame a response. The following responses were most frequent:

"must be destroyed" "do away with it"

"all are equal" "one caste"

"should be banned totally"

"it is de-humanising"

"should be abolished"

"myth of caste operated by a sector to subject the masses"

"in Radha Soami all are equal"

"in the eyes of God all are one"

"all are equal and should be treated as such"

"stop placing each other in different castes from birth"

"not beneficial"

"do not see what is beneficial in caste"

"all are on an equal footing"

"inter-caste marriages"

"open the priesthood to all"

"more media coverage"

"I do not believe in the caste system"

"get rid of the system"

"makes people feel low and unwanted"

"there should be no caste system"

"It should be totally banned"

"do away with the caste system in our Hindu religion"

"caste is made by man himself"

"we should live like one family".

**Q. 26. In your opinion, are women at a disadvantage in the Hindu community?**

Approximately 60% disagreed.

Approximately 40% agreed.

**Q. 28. Do you agree with the proposition that women may also become priests?**

Approximately 80% responded affirmatively.

Approximately 20% responded negatively.

### **Discussion of the Results**

With respect to the major aims of this research, ie., with regard to initiatives towards democratization of procedures in Hindu affairs, the study clearly reveals that there silent but sure revolution going on apace, so far as individual Hindus and their aspirations and ideals are concerned.

Not being threatened with the public exposition of their views (our questionnaire did not require the names of the respondents), the respondents were clearly in favour of totally excising the caste system from the body of Hindu practices.

In terms of objective observation (which, as we indicated earlier, is a powerful tool of investigation), we have to note that no member of any of the organisations studied, has made any public pronouncement against special privileges based on birth, or published any objection to the priestly training being offered only to members of the "upper caste" priestly families.

Again, in terms of objective observation, we have to record that at least two organisations in Cape Town (whose members are historically, in South Africa at least) to special privileges and the caste system, have imported priests from "upper class" priestly families to officiate at their rituals and ceremonials. The same has occurred in the one major organisation in East London. There are two such imported "high caste" priests in the Johannesburg region, one in Pietermaritzburg and two in Durban. In addition,

**the indigenous persons operating as priests and largely accepted by the population are themselves members of "high-born" priestly (Brahmin) families who have settled in South Africa.**

**It is to be noted that the vast majority of respondents agreed that religious education was an important part of the programme of their societies, yet the organisations did not appear to be delivering the goods, so far as religious training for the priesthood was concerned. These comments apply largely to the Gujarati and Hindi language groups of South Africa, somewhat less to the Telugu-speaking groups, and still less to the Tamil-speaking sections of the larger Hindu community.**

**The above study makes it clear that there is a vast gulf between the deeper aspirations of the individual members of the community, and the actual practices promoted by the prevalent organisational structures. There does not seem to be the realisation that training for the priesthood is the central core of a true religious training (as it exists in Judaism, Christianity and Islam). The traditional caste hierarchy has served to promote the notion that religion and religious aspirations are a purely individual affair, so that a person, though he may be a great philosopher or a great yogi, he cannot officiate at religious ceremonies or offer sacraments unless he is born in a "high-caste" or "brahmin" family. We therefore have to conclude that, while Hinduism in South Africa is firmly on the road to reformation, much public discussion has to take place on concepts of "religious education", "priesthood", "special privileges", "individual freedom", "high-caste and low-caste dichotomy", etc. Most importantly, it appears to us that the leaders of the various Hindu societies need to openly and publicly address the challenges posed by the modern democratic ideals in terms of the fundamentals of Hinduism itself.**

**Appendix I: The Questionnaire**

(The spaces for responses have been omitted in this reproduction)

University of Durban-Westville  
Department of Hindu Studies & Indian Philosophy

**CONFIDENTIAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

Age ..... Sex .....

Occupation: .....

Highest Ed. Qualification: .....

Name of Society: .....

Position: .....

1. **When did you join the Society?**
2. **In which activities of the Society do you participate?**
3. **How frequently?**
4. **In what activities do members of your family participate?**
5. **How would you assess your role in the affairs of the Society?**
6. **Is religious education a part of the Society's work?**
7. **How would you rate this aspect of the Society's work?**  
**Not important / Important / Very important**

8. What religious education have you received in the Society?
9. Your family-members?
10. How would you rate rituals and ceremonies?
11. Do you participate in the rituals of your Society?
12. In which rituals?
13. How Often?
14. Have you received any certificates for religious education?
15. From which society?
16. Which scripture or religious book do you use most often?
17. How often do you attend a Temple or Prayer Service?
18. Which is your favourite prayer?
19. Which book has influenced you most in your perception of religious and social matters?
20. Which person (in early or recent history) has influenced you most in the formation of your religious ideals?
21. What feature of Hinduism do you find most attractive?
22. Here is a quotation from Radhakrishnan: *“In its anxiety to lose nothing in the march of ages, ..... it (Hinduism) has become a synthesis combining within itself various elements and motives. It is not surprising that the religion is full of superstitions, dark and primitive.”*



**Considering the above, what feature (if any) of general Hindu culture do you find unattractive or embarrassing?**

**23. Here is another quotation from Radhakrishnan: “*The aim of religion is to spiritualise society, to establish a brotherhood on earth.*”**

**Do you agree with this statement?**

**24. Would you prefer to state the aim of religion in any other way?**

**25. Here is a quotation from Svami Vivekananda: “*To advance oneself towards freedom -- physical, mental and spiritual -- and help others to do so, is the supreme prize of man. These social rules which stand (in the way of) the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily.*”**

**This is a reference to the caste system in its more baneful influence. The news media have also been reporting on some of the evil effects of this system. As a member of a modern Hindu society, and bearing in mind that the caste system also has many beneficial features, do you have any suggestions on how caste-related problems may be overcome?**

**26. In your opinion, are women at a disadvantage in the Hindu community?**

**27. If so, what are the important disadvantages?**

**28. Do you agree with the proposition that women may also become priests?**

**29. Would you like to offer reasons for your views?**

**30. Would you like to offer any comments on any aspect of Hindu Religion and Culture?**

**Appendix II: The Introductory Sheet**

**University of Durban-Westville**

**Department of Hindu Studies & Indian Philosophy**

**MODERN HINDU MOVEMENTS**

**and**

**THE HINDU REFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**with special emphasis on social and educational issues.**

**A Study of:**

- \*\* The types of perceptions developing in the minds of modern Hindus.**
- \*\* How we are responding to new and challenging situations**
  - in South Africa**
  - around the world.**
- \*\* What factors may be operating as restraining influences preventing the enactment of social and educational ideals.**
- \*\* What steps may be taken to give such ideals a practical shape.**

**== The Hindu Reformation in South Africa.**

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**Notes:**

1. Rg Veda Samhita 10. 90.
2. Yajur Veda (Vajasneyi Samhita) 31.
3. Rg Veda Samhita 10. 90. 12.
4. Saksena. In Moore ,C.A., The Indian Mind, 360/1.
5. Saksena. Ibid., 361/2.
6. Rg Veda Samhita 9. 112. 3.
7. Mani, V. Puranic Encyclopaedia, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, 595-598.
8. Radhakrishnan, S. Religion and Society, 108.
9. Rouner, L. (Ed.) Human Rights and the World's Religions, 8-10.
10. Carmen, John. In Rouner (Ed.) Human Rights and the World's Religions.
11. Aiyar, R. In Moore, C.A., 249.
12. Kumar, P. "Hinduism and Human Rights: A South African Perspective." (Unpublished paper), 3. Kumar cites Du Mont's view that the notion of the individual is absent in Hinduism.
13. Saksena. Op. Cit., 359.

14. Preamble to the Constitution of India. (Reproduced by Carmen, in Rouner (Ed.): Human Rights and the World's Religions.)
15. Muller, Max. I point to India, 41. Quoted in French and Sharma, Religious Ferment in Modern India, 22.
16. Dayananda, Svami. Satyarth Prakash

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# The *Mahāyāna* expulsion out of India: a case of memic selection

Garth Mason

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To attempt to identify the causes for an historical event appears absurd against the backdrop of an understanding of causality such as *pratītyasamupāda*, because one cannot know all the contingent factors contributing to the event's arising. My paper endeavours to suggest salient trends, not events, that may have contributed to the gradual departure of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism from India up until the 13 century CE.

The central trend which I evince concerns the relationship of the laity to celibacy codes.<sup>1</sup> The debate revolves around the degree of access the laity have to the subtle understanding of reality. Early Buddhism considered subtler realms of experience to be inaccessible to the laity. This had the effect of perpetuating the social status quo of the set roles of monks and the laity in society.

I argue further that the growing understanding of *sūnyata* was extremely dangerous to the ruling Buddhist Mauryan Empire in south-eastern India because it contained epistemological codes that were potentially disruptive to the social order. I would suggest that it was, therefore, selected out of the cultural/epistemological codes of south-eastern India. Although

arguably, insubstantiality was Buddhism's central philosophical concept, paradoxically, it was the challenging of the narrowness of this conception in the thought of *Sthaviravada* by the *Mahāśāṅghika* school that, in my opinion, led eventually to the cultural selection of *Mahāyāna* from India in the early years of the Common Era.

My ruling metaphor, that of cultural selection, is drawn from what Richard Dawkins refers to as “memes”. A meme is a cultural parallel of the gene, and is consequently the unit of cultural selection. Memes are transferred by two means: some are transmitted by relics and objects, and others are passed on by written and oral traditions. Richard Dawkins describes memes as

... patterns of information that can thrive only in brains or the artificially manufactured products of brains — books, computers, and so on. But, given that brains, books and computers exist, their new replicators, which I called memes to distinguish them from genes, can propagate themselves from brain to brain, from brain to book, from book to brain, from brain to computer, from computer to computer. As they propagate they can change — mutate. And perhaps mutant memes can exert the kind of influence that I am here calling “replicator power”. Remember that this means any kind of influence affecting their own likelihood of being propagated. Evolution under the influence of the new replicators — memic evolution — is in its infancy. It is manifested in the phenomenon we call cultural evolution.

(1986: 158)

Although Dawkins suggests that memic patterns are developing during the computerized information age, I argue that memes can be detected in Indian culture in the period I am focusing on. The transmission of ideas appears across the orthodox / unorthodox divide, despite the reformative force at the root of Buddhism and Jainism. This can be seen in, among other notions, the realization that by way of the individual's own performance, yogic practices and reasoning abilities, he or she could gain access to subtle realms of reality.

The philosophical trends encapsulated within the *Mahāśāṃghika* and later the *Mahāyāna* movements that caused them to be ousted from India were not new to that period, but can be found in the *Upaniśads* and foreshadow the methodology found in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlānāyāmicakārikā* (MMK). Nāgārjuna's *prasāṅga* method attempts to deconstruct any sense of substantialism. Nāgārjuna utilizes similar modes of argumentation to those used in the *Upaniśads*' challenge to Vedic social structure to deconstruct gross thought and take it to more subtle regions of reality. I would argue, then, that Nāgārjuna is not only responding to essentialism in the *Abhidharma*, but draws on modes of reasoning similar to the *Upaniśads* to penetrate the delusion of phenomenal reality. For instance, similar modes of deconstructive argumentation can be found in both the MMK and the *Chandogya Upaniśad*. In the quest for the finest essence — the Self — in the *Chandogya*, Śvetaku's father queries him about the essence of a fig. When Śvetaku acknowledges that there is nothing at the 'heart' of the fig, his father comments:

My dear boy, it is true that you cannot perceive this finest essence, but it is equally true that huge fig tree grows up from this finest essence. My dear child, have faith. This finest essence,

— the whole universe, has as its self: That is the  
Real: That is the Self: That you are, Śvetaku!

(*Chandogya* vi: xii in Zaehner 1992: 123)

and in the MMK Nagarjuna writes:

Neither from itself nor from another,  
Nor from both,  
Nor without cause,  
Does anything whatever, anywhere arise.

(*Mūlamadyamikakārikā* 1:1 in Garfield 1995: 3)

Both quotations deconstruct perceived substantial phenomenal reality. The passages lead the reader to an understanding of reality that is not founded on a gross view of reality and challenges him/her to look beyond conventional modes of perception.

The roots of this form of argumentation in *Upaniṣadic* and Buddhist thought, I aver, can be situated during the period of the Aryan unification of Northern India between 800 and 300 BCE, when a subversive social force began to challenge the Brahmin power base. This force was led predominantly by members of the *Kshatrya* caste and aimed to forge new social orders (Wolpert 1989: 45 and 50). In tandem with this social upheaval, new philosophical questions were being posed, largely in reaction to the containment of knowledge within the priestly caste. In response to the priests' claim to uphold *ṛta*, new modes of philosophical practice claimed to have the ability to discern between knowledge of the phenomenal world and the invisible realms. What was invisible was understood to be the substratum of the phenomenal reality, to which all people had access, not simply the priests. *Jainasastra*, the Buddha's teachings and the *Upaniṣadic* teachers all identified the issue of distinguishing phenomenal reality from more subtle understandings of reality in



order to break the bonds of the attachment to the phenomenal reality developed by the senses.

The reformist trend during this period identified the subtle reality as either substantive (Upaniṣadic), (*Jainasastras*) or insubstantive (Buddhist). Certain reformist groups, such as *Jains* and Upaniṣadic teachers, perceived the “ground” of reality as the *sat* (being), whereas in Buddhism the ground was in-between the two. Indeed, at times it is difficult to ascertain with any accuracy what the Buddha understood to be the Real, since he tailored his teaching methods to the needs of his audience (Lopez 1988: 61 and Lamotte 1988: 16).

I am interested in two questions here. First, what were the conditions that allowed for the particular cultural selection of ideas in early Buddhism (*nirodha* and impermanence)? Second, what conditions enabled the cultural selections of social and epistemological ideas to reject the new form of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in the second century CE and cause its expulsion from India?

While one clue to these historical developments can be found in the two-Truths formulation, here I am going to explore the social factors at work during the period. Murti refers to a tendency almost to liken orthodox notions of Brahman with *śūnyata*. This is tempting in the light of the fact that they both utilize the two-Truths formulation. Murti points out that the way that Buddhist and Upaniṣadic philosophies get to this point differs. Buddhism uses negative dialectic whereas the *Upaniṣads* uses logic (in Sprung 1973: 9). In order to point to the *paramartha*, Nāgārjuna uses *prasanga*, which is a form of argumentation that deconstructs existing viewpoints and shows the absurdity of their positions. The *Upaniṣads* argue that it is logical to assert an invisible reality which sustains the transitory visible world. The similarity between the orthodox and the unorthodox positions is

that both deconstruct conventional reality in order to undercut the habit of identifying reality with phenomenal existence.

Given this theoretical background, my focus is on the expulsion of pre-*Mahāyāna* Buddhism from the Mauryan Empire after the 3rd Buddhist Council and its strengthening after the fourth Council in Kashmir during the 2nd century CE. The difference between *Mahāyāna* and *Theravada* social systems is that *Mahāyāna* tends to transcend social structures, whereas *Theravada* operates within social forms. First, in *Mahāyāna* enlightenment is attainable by all. Its defining foci are compassion and wisdom. The emphasis on compassion has the effect of opening the philosophical system. The opposite can be seen in *Theravada*, where the emphasis on the *dhamma* in social terms underscores the specific relationship between the laity and the monastic order. The monks offer teaching to the community in return for material support. In this sense it is not much of a deviation from the *Vedic* social system, where the priests held privileged access to the knowledge. Silber (1984) argues that monks in *Theravada* Buddhism act as cultural symbols of renunciation for the laity. The symbol maintains a certain distinction between monks and lay people; but the monks are not too distinct from worldly matters as this would alienate common people from the monks' purpose, namely liberation. This explains their involvement in teaching the *Dhamma* in the community (in Eisenstadt, Kahene and Shulman 1984: 94). A clear example of this process is seen in early Buddhism. King Bimbisāra, a wealthy patron of the Buddha, who donated two parks and a monastery to the *sangha*, said:

Where indeed can the blessed one dwell? He needs a place which is not too close to town, but not too far either, where people can come and go, ease of access for those who wish to visit, not crowded during the day, peaceful at night, a

**place away from people, sheltered from disturbances and crowds, and appropriate for the religious life (in 38-39,158).**

**(in Wijayaratna 1996: 23)**

**Bimbisāra displays what Silber terms the cultural symbolic function of monks. They must be at the right distance from the lay community to inspire them, but must not be so close that the laity disturb their other-worldly tranquillity.**

**The adoption of *Sthaviravada* Buddhism by Aśoka can be seen as a process of memic cultural selection of thought patterns that would sustain social order and peace. Dawkins, quoting Dennet, argues that religious memes are self-serving:**

**The avenues for entry and departure are modified to suit local conditions, and strengthened by various artificial devices that enhance fidelity and prolixity of replication.**

**(1995: 13)**

**This also explains why, after the 3rd Council, root *Mahāyānic* thought patterns were excluded from the epistemological landscape of the Mauryan Empire. The thought formations clustering around the notion of *sūnyata* challenged social codes, whereas the notion of the *dhamma* in *Theravada* emphasized canon (measure) and containment. Gokhole (1966) asserts that Aśoka's abiding interest in maintaining his kingdom was ensuring the unity of the *sangha*. Silber makes the point that kings in *Theravada* Buddhism often invested in the *sangha* for merit and as a political force from which they could gain legitimation. For this reason they often conducted campaigns of**

purification, as did Aśoka (1984: 91). Another result of the use of the *sangha* for political purposes is that *Theravada* kings have often tried to organize the *sangha* along hierarchical lines so that it would be easier to control. The *sangha* acted as a middleman between kings and their subjects in legitimating their rule. Kings legitimated holy men by investing money in them and in turn holy men legitimate the kings (Holt 1996: 25).

Aśoka achieved this in two ways; first, by ordering the lay community to have regular contact with monks and second, by making strict categories for assessing whether monks were sticking to the rules of the *sangha* (66: 196). Although Aśoka makes no reference to the Third Council in his edicts, there seems little doubt that it did take place. The purpose was to root out monks that were not following the traditional rules of the *sangha* set out by the *vinaya* and expel them (1966: 66). All monks were to recite the rules together to ensure unity. The fissions that were occurring in the monastic community seemed to revolve around the extension of the Buddha's teachings. Aśoka supported the integration of traditional Buddhism with Indian social and political structure. He writes in one of his edicts in the twenty-sixth year of his reign,

Both this world and the next are hard to reach  
except by great love of the law, great self  
examination, great obedience, great respect,  
great energy ... this is my rule: government by  
the law, administration according to the law,  
gratification of my subjects under the law, and  
protection through the law.

(Wolpert: 66)

This quotation from one of Aśoka's edicts smoke-screens the inherent contradiction between *nirvana* and *karma*. The only way that *Theravada* can reconcile the conflicting notions of *karma* and *nirvana* in *Theravada*, I would argue, is to build in an

institutionalized relationship between the monks and the laity hinged on the practice of merit accumulation (Silber 1984: 87 and 88). In order for the *Theravadin* social system to work, monks need to be grouped in monasteries and halt the tradition of loosely structured communities of monks wandering across the countryside as was the case during and soon after the Buddha's life.

Such marginal loose bands of renunciates were perceived to be very distant from the lay community and hence they were either viewed with awe or suspicion (Silber 1984: 85). There was also the threat that if monks marginalized themselves too much from society they would form sectarian branches of the *Dhamma* and reformist monasteries (Silber 1984: 102). This goes some way to explaining why Aśoka built thousands of monasteries throughout his empire (Holt 1996:19).

In contrast to the *arahat*, who is a symbol for the Reality beyond *samsāra* for lay society (but paradoxically is intrinsic to society's fabric), the *Mahāyāna* ideal of the *bodhisattva* does not need relative or absolute isolation in order to realize *nirvana*. The *Mahāyāna* perception is that, not only does *nirvana* mean liberation from defilements and *samsāric* unease, but, in addition, by one's very nature one is liberated and inseparable from the absolute (Schumacher & Woerner 1994: 216). Hence people need not seclude themselves from secular life to realize liberation because, if viewed correctly, lay existence could be a path to liberation. Such a thought form would have been disruptive to the social structure of Buddhist Maurya because stability in the Empire depended on the mutual dependency between the laity and the monks. My argument seems to be supported by the fact that, when schisms began occurring in the *sangha* between the Second and Third Councils, Aśoka pronounced in an edict inscription that "the *sangha* cannot be divided by anyone": indeed, monks and nuns who caused division would have to wear

white robes and reside in non-residence. Although this would have been seen as an enforced removal from the *arahat* pursuit, according to the *vinaya* there could be no expulsions from the *sangha*. Members could only leave of their own accord. Confessions were made in front of the community when rules were transgressed, there was no central power and authority in the *sangha* and there were no vows made on entering the community (Wijayaratna 1996: 145, 148 and 153). When one considers the latter fact together with the fact that the Buddha did not prohibit contradiction in the understanding of the *dhamma*, it would seem that Aśoka found it necessary to test the bounds of the *vinaya* in ensuring that the *sangha* remained strongly unified. In addition he posted officers all over the kingdom to ensure that the edict against *sangha* divisiveness was adhered to (Gokhale 1966: 77). It is interesting that Aśoka's administering of missionizing Buddhism outside of India only occurred after the Third Council once the *sangha* had been purged of divisive elements.

The onset of the collapse of the Mauryan empire after the death of Aśoka in 232 BCE and then its definitive demise in 184 BCE, due to attacks from Macedonian forces in the North, allowed for the growth of *Mahāyāna* in Northern India. The conversions of Milinda and Kanishka strengthened the cause of *Mahāyāna* and after Kanishka's hosting of the Fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir, *Mahāyāna* overtook *Theravada* as the main form of Buddhism in India. This gave impetus to the spreading of *Mahāyāna* to China and throughout Asia.

The unification of northern India by the Greeks led to the Punjab being a centre for trade with the East, Middle East and the West. Greek and Roman art forms deeply influenced Buddhist art and Western science and medicine influenced Indian astrology and herbalism. In addition Vedic traditions were experiencing a revival as Helodorus, a Greek ambassador,

declared himself to be a follower of Krishna. It is therefore no wonder that *Mahāyāna* flourished in this environment. The notion of *sūnyata* would not have been threatened by the openness of such a fluid society. It did not require strict social structures to ensure its survival. Proof of this must surely be found in Milinda's conversion to Buddhism. Nagasena's use of the chariot to delineate the insubstantiality of visible reality reveals the looser emphasis Milinda placed on social control and therefore the Greek ruler was not threatened by a concept like *sūnyata*.

Nagasena is attempting to deconstruct Milinda's notion of substantiality by dismembering the chariot until it is unrecognizable as anything resembling a chariot. (It is surprising that this methodology is found in *Mahāyāna*, more specifically in the MMK, and not in early Buddhist discourses). A similar method of argumentation is used in the *Upaniśads*. Such radical questioning was threatening to both Vedic forms of thought and early Buddhism under Aśoka. In contrast, what appealed to Aśoka about the Buddhist *dhamma* above the many other monastic groups in existence during that period was the Buddhist indifference to death and its seriousness about immortality, as explained to him by the novice Nigrhoda. When Nigrhoda returns with thirty-two elderly monks Aśoka hears about

- a) the many temptations sprouting from human nature and about the base desires one had to fight, because they caused humanity's suffering;
- b) how to purge one self of these cravings;
- c) that all life carried the spark of the divine;
- d) the bliss of meditation;

- e) the close kinship among the members of the sect;
- f) the duties of the *upasaka*, the lay devotee, the *ajivika*, the religious mendicant; the *bikkhu*, the member of the *sangha*, the hermitage.  
(Lengyel 1969: 76)

Quite clearly, the teaching here revolves around the five *skhandas*, the five hindrances, the *vinaya*, and the right livelihood for the laity. I aver that points a) to d) would have been very attractive to Aśoka in terms overcoming his remorse after the violence committed during the Kalinga conquests and points e) and f) would have been useful in imposing order on his society to assure social structure and stability. Indeed, his own symbolic abdication and entering the monkhood would have underscored the adoption of Buddhist rules and duties (Holt 1996: 30). By contrast, I maintain, the argumentative and questioning methodology found in the *Chandogya Upaniṣad* and in Nagasena's and Nāgārjuna's forms of argumentation would only be accepted by a society undergoing social change or in a very socially fluid society.

The discrepancy between the thought-forms of fluid and more structured social forms is discussed very clearly by Horton (1993). He examines the elements of the Cultural Selection of religious ideas within the parameters of two co-ordinates, namely manipulation and communion. In the manipulation-dominated society values function purely to achieve a certain end, whereas in a communion relationship parties of equal importance and power relate to each other by upholding certain values and beliefs (1993: 35).<sup>2</sup> Horton argues that religiously motivated social systems all exhibit differing degrees of these two poles. Where a sub-group displays no support for the dominant value system the sub-group will be situated in a position of



competitiveness towards the larger totality. Such competitiveness sets into motion a process of cultural selection, which parallels natural selection. Resembling Dawkins's conception of memes as a cultural form of genes, in place of the gene pool Horton speculates about the existence of a pool of religious ideas (1993: 39). Developing this theory, he postulates the possibility of a Mutation-Selection model. Gods and beliefs "become co-ordinated to individuals" and groups "based on perceived relevance of particular goals" (1993: 43). The selection of gods and beliefs is contingent on the "particular idiom of the individual innovators" (1993: 45).

In terms of Aśoka's Mauryan Empire, I would aver that the weighting lay more on the side of the manipulative aspects of religion, but not to the exclusion of its communion aspects. Further, I argue that *Mahāyāna* Buddhism favours the communion aspects over the manipulation aspects, which, I think, goes some way towards explaining its selection out of the politico-social fabric of the Empire.

Aśoka's use of stone edicts, stupas and pilgrimages, which were constructed with such proliferation throughout his kingdom, can be seen as reminders of the prevailing Buddhist tradition, and also as persuasive lexical imprints on the cultural landscape of the south-eastern kingdom. Granted, Aśoka does appear to have objected to certain stern measures taken by some of his district administrators against *Mahāsāṃghika* followers, which resulted in the deaths of many monks (Gokhole 1966: 78), but the use of edicts must have created a sense of cultural and philosophical imposition rather than a sense of acceptance of competing religious claims. The social system of the laity supporting the *sangha* to gain merit in return for the *sangha* preserving and teaching the *dhamma* opposed any moves towards the two social forms merging and establishing any sense of equality between the monks and the laity.

Notes

1. Paul Williams argues idiosyncratically that early *Mahāyāna* Buddhism did not emerge out of the laity's concern with the recitation of certain sutras, but rather that early stupa- and sutra-centred worship can be located in the monastic order (1989: 22). I do not disagree with Williams on this point, but I think he does not sufficiently take into account the nature of knowledge which early *Mahāyāna* Buddhism was espoused. Most notable was the emphasis on two notions: compassion and emptiness. Compassion drew monks and nuns closer to the laity, and while the foregrounding of the emptiness of all phenomena undercut the construction of the elevated position of the monastic life.

2. Very similar to Horton's conception of cultural selection is Weber's notion of social selection. Weber seems reluctant to give concrete reasons why certain social forms survive while others do not. He ventures only to say that reasons peculiar to the given situation influence the survival or demise of a particular social form (Weber 1978: 40). I agree that the survival of a particular social form implies nothing about its intrinsic 'fitness'; only about its compatibility with existing conditions.

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## SANKARA ON THE STHITAPRAJNA

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The description of the sthitaprajna in the Bhagavadgita (II.54-72) is too well-known to be repeated. It may briefly be summarised thus: the sthitaprajna is a person who having overcome desires, is unaffected by the vicissitudes of life and being forever self-possessed reaches a state of equanimity which possesses positive soteriological implications.

The purpose of this paper is to examine this description of the sthitaprajna in the Gita in the light of two works of Sankara - the Gitabhāṣya and the Vivekacūḍamāni. This examination will be carried out as follows. First, the textual description of the sthitaprajna will be compared with the commentarial image of Sankara, then the commentarial picture of Sankara will be compared the picture of the sthitaprajna as drawn in the Vivekacūḍamāni. Finally, the picture of the sthitaprajna in the Vivekacūḍamāni will be compared with the one which may be drawn on the basis of the text of the Gita. Very briefly then, three comparative operations will be involved.

### I

The key to Sankara's understanding of the sthitaprajna is contained in the prefatory remark with which he introduces his gloss on II.55. It runs as follows:

*From II.55 to the end of the discourse (adhyaya), the characteristic attributes of a man of steady knowledge as well as the means of obtaining that knowledge are taught to him who, having from the very commencement renounced all works, has entered upon a discourse of Devotion to knowledge (jnana-yoga-nistha), as well as to him who has reached that stage by means of Devotion to works (Karma-yoga). For, everywhere in spiritual science (adhyatma-sastra), the very*

*characteristic attributes of the successful Yogin are taught as the means (of attaining that stage), since they are to be attained by effort. The Lord now points out those characteristic attributes which, as attainable by effort, constitutes means as well (1).*

A close analysis of this passage reveals that according to Sankara the description in the Gita contains a consideration of the following aspects: (I) steady wisdom attained through jnanayoga as well as (ii) steady wisdom attained through karmayoga; (iii) a description of the end state of steady wisdom as well as (iv) a description of the means by which it is attained. In other words the discussion in the Gita, according to Sankara covers all the four cases: jnanayoga, karmayoga, siddhavastha, and sadhanavastha.

A reading of the original verses shows that Sankara has introduced the idea of jnanayoga or that of the identity of Brahman and Atman extraneously. Although both Atman and Brahman are referred to in the verses (II.55; II.72) nowhere is their identity strated in the verses themselves. Sankara, however, commences his gloss on II.54 with the remark: ahamsi param brahma! This is one point at which he steps beyond the text. He also takes the expression atmany eva atmana tustah in II.55 to mean "satisfied in the Self alone by himself" (2). It could, however, as well simply mean "self-satisfied" (3). The difference is significant because in the first sense it describes a siddhavastha, while in the second sense it could as well describe a sadhanavastha. Even verses II.55-57 could be taken either as describing the characteristic attributes as such of the realized person or as describing the means of attaining the state (4). This latter approach represents the general tenor of the succeeding verses.

One may then conclude that when Sankara's commentary is compared with the text his tendency towards an Advaitic overinterpretation is evident, and that it is evident in two ways: in taking the verses as describing the Advaitic version of Jnana Yoga and in taking some verses

as describing the end-achievement rather than constituting the means to it when this is not necessarily the case.

## II

By contrast, the picture of sthitaprajna drawn in the Vivekacudamani is distinctly Advaitic. This can be clearly seen in the interpretation of the word prajna. Sankara explains prajna in sthitaprajna in his commentary on the Gita as follows: sthita pratisthita "ahamsi param brahma" iti prajna yasys. In other words, for Sankara prajna does not represent a steady mentality in general but a specific realization in particular. In his gloss on II.55 he again specifies the content of this realization: atmanatmavivekaja prajna. However, as S.N. Dasgupta points out the "wisdom, or prajna, of the Gita is no realization of any philosophic truth, but a fixed and unperturbed state of the mind, where the will and intellect remain unshaken in one's course of duty, clear of all consequences and free of all attachments, and in a state of equanimity which cannot be shaken or disturbed by pleasures or sorrows" (5).

The text of the Gita, therefore, does not allow him full scope to expatiate along Advaita lines. In the Vivekacudamani, on the other hand, he is subject to no such constraints. In fact he offers a highly technical explanation in terms of Advaitic epistemology (verse 428):

*nirvikalpa ca cinmatra  
vrttih Prajneti kathyate  
sa sarvada bhaved yasya  
sthitaprajnah sa ucyate. (6)*

In brief, when the mind ceases to have an object whose shape it can assume, it assumes the form of no-thing and becomes nothing other than pure consciousness.

## III

Now the picture of the sthitaprajna of the Gita may be compared with that of the sthitaprajna in the Vivekacudamani.

The difference is enormous. The sthitaprajna of the Gita can be understood without any reference to the identity of Brahman and Atman or the cessation of mental vrttis. But the sthitaprajna of the Vivekacudamani must be comprehended in those very terms.

The point can be illustrated with the help of an example. The question asked in Bhagavadgita II.54 pertains to the manner in which the sthitaprajna performs daily activities such as sitting, speaking, walking, etc. The Gita does not answer the question at that level but focuses on the internal life of the sthitaprajna. The Vivekacudamani, however, states (verse 458) that “eating, sleeping, etc. are to a wise man but as the recollection of objects seen in a dream” (7) for one who has realized the identity of Atman and Brahman (8). The Gita, however, makes no such statement.

To conclude: the picture of the sthitaprajna in the Gita can be viewed without invoking Advaitic philosophy and its picture in the Vivekacudamani can only be understood by invoking Advaitic philosophy. Sankara’s commentary on the Gita represents an intermediate stage when Sankara tries to view the picture of the sthitaprajna in the Gita in an Advaitic context.

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2. *Ibid.*, p.69.
3. S. Radhakrishnan translates the syntactical unit as “when his spirit is content in itself” and comments “negatively, the state is one of freedom from selfish desires and positively, it is one of concentration on the Supreme.” (The Bhagavadgita Bombay: Blackie & Son (India) Ltd, 1974, p. 123).
4. Richard Gotshalk presents this point of view cogently when he says (Bhagavad Gita: Translations and Commentary (Delhi: Motilal



Banarsidass, 1985, pp. 94-95): "In asking the question Arjuna had used terms that relate to what Krsna has just been saying about buddhi, and through those terms we are pointed to the basic character of the condition being asked about. It is a condition of ingatheredness under the supporting presence of what is ultimately imperative (the supreme), and a condition of ingatheredness in which there is present both a prajna and a dhi. Both of these terms refer to conditions of buddhi, and here, to settled conditions, enduring qualifications of this power through which a human being enters upon action in human fashion. And more, they qualify a mature form of human capacity, potency, capability, in regard to buddhi. As such, they refer to factors integral to our effective capacity to participate in what is at stake in human existence. Indeed prajna, a term with a wide variety of meanings, carries with it throughout that variety (like sophia in Greek and "wisdom" in English), an implication of know-how, of capability in regard to human affairs, as well as the presupposition of experience (as in a "man of experience"). Perhaps the relevant meaning of prajna here, however, would be something like "clearsightedness", where this refers to buddhi primarily in its awareness side. Dhi, in contrast, probably means something like "understanding", as a qualification of buddhi in its intentional side or in regard to thought as a matter of putting one's mind on something, paying attention to and concentrating on so as to understand. And, dhi has a reference to know-how in regard to human affairs, as in a "man of understanding", but with the connotation of an understanding which fathoms the human within a religious dimension."

5. S. N. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge University Press, 1931, Vol. II, p. 504.
6. Vivekacudamani, Verse 428.
7. Mohini M. Chatterji, (Tr.), Vivekacudamani (Adyar, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1973, p. 173.
8. Sankara refers to this realization in his gloss on Gita II.54. See Srisankaragranthavalih Samputa 8 (Srirangam, Srivanivilasamudrayantralayah, no date, p. 51.

**PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE  
RAMACARITAMANASA WHICH SUSTAINS  
INTEREST IN RAMAKATHA IN SOUTH  
AFRICA**

by

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The Ramacaritamanasa of Gosvami Tulasidasa is a manifesto of his faith. He proclaims:

**Eka Bharosau Eka Bala Eka Asa Biswasa**

**Eka Rama Ghanasyama Hita Cataka Tulasidasa**

I depend on Him alone. He is my strength, my only hope and faith. Sri Rama the benevolent is the dark rain-bearing cloud, and Tulasidasa is the Cataka bird which drinks from the drops falling from that cloud (Dohavali).

In the mangalacarana of Balakanda he salutes Siva and Parvati as the embodiment of reverence and faith

**Bhavanisankarau vande sraddhavisvasarupinau**

with the following line stating that without these elements represented by Siva and Parvati the highly evolved spiritual masters cannot perceive the Lord seated in their hearts:

**Yabhyam vina na pasyanti siddhah svantah sthamisvaram.**

(Balakanda - Mangalacarana 2)

Tulasidasa followed the classical tradition of the mahakavya (epic poetry), commencing each Kanda or Canto with an invocation (mangalacarana). In the first canto, Balakanda, he invokes Sarasvati, goddess of learning, and the divine duo Siva and Parvati as the source or embodiment of faith. Gosvami Tulasidasa again salutes Sivaji in the

form of Guru. in his attempt to reconcile Saiva and Vaisnava Hindus. He then salutes Hanuman the scholar, in order to validate the intellectual, rational aspect. He thereafter salutes Sita (in the form of Maya) and Sri Rama as the Supreme Lord. the object of sraddha and visvasa. He changes the combinations of divine personalities involved in the mangalacaranas of the different cantos in order to highlight different viewpoints. His invocations indicate his attitude to personalities of the Ramayana as well as his religio-philosophical outlook.

Religion consists in faith, belief and trust. Philosophy, known as darsana in Hinduism, implies the science of "seeing" the truth. In the development of Indian Religio-philosophical thought from the beginnings of Vedic religion and philosophy upto the enunciation of Vedantic principles, faith and reason have come together to produce firm foundations for religion amongst Hindus. Hence, one sees the concept of a personal God (Narayana) in the theistic Vaisnava tradition of Visistadvaita Vedanta, providing for devotion within the rational framework of Vedanta. With regard to the Vedanta Hiriyanna (1973 : 151) states:

"The term occurs in the Upanisads"; but while there it means only 'final portion of the Vedas' it has since come to signify the settled conclusions of the Veda taken as a whole. Accordingly the Vedanta, in its later forms, stands for the teachings not merely of the Upanisads, together with the earlier portion of the Veda, but also of the other parts of the sacred literature such as the Bhagavadgita and the Visnu Purana which are regarded as reiterating and amplifying the Upanisadic doctrine. The doctrine thus combines in one harmonious whole the results attained by all previous orthodox thinkers, and is therefore looked upon as the most perfect expression of Indian thought".

Sankara's aphorism **Brahmasatyam Jagannmithya Jivo Brahmaiva Na Parah** dominates Hindu Philosophical thought despite the appeal of the Visistadvaita theistic mode which accommodated the concepts of Narayana and Avataras in the later period of its development.

Sankara postulated Brahman the Absolute, Supreme Lord as the only reality (Paramarthika Satta), the created world being false or Vyavaharika Satta. In this philosophy there is no difference between Brahma the Absolute and Jiva or individual soul. Sankara explains the world with everything in it as Maya or Avidya (ignorance). This ignorance or imperfect knowledge can be renounced by the acquisition of true knowledge regarding the immortality of the soul. The Veda had already distinguished between imperfect and perfect knowledge:

**Avidyaya mrityum tirthva, vidyaya amrtam asnute**

By worldly or imperfect knowledge one can transcend death but through true or perfect knowledge one attains immortality.

The Brahman of Sankaracharya is Supreme, Absolute, attributeless, unborn, eternal, unchanging. Tulasidasa's Rama is beyond attributes, and is the source of creation and the soul of the Vedas:

**Bandau nama rama raghubara ko, hetu krsanu bhanu himkara ko  
Bidhi hari haramaya beda prana so, Aguna anupama guna nidhana  
so.**

I greet the name "Rama" of the chief of the Raghus which is composed of seed letters representing the fire-god, the sun-god and moon-god. It is the same as Brahma, Visnu and Siva and the vital breath of the Vedas; It is unqualified, peerless and a mine of virtues (Balakanda 18,1).

In this one can already see Tulasidasa introducing modifications to the advaitic concept, in that Sri Rama is "Guna Nidhana". Tulasidasa was linked to the Visistadvaita Sampradaya of Ramanuja through the Ramananda school in Kashi, where Kabir the Absolutist (Nirguna) also found initiation. This in itself explains the flexibility of the Vedantic doctrine which had already branched out into four schools-- Shankara's Advaita, Ramanuja's Visistadvaita, Madhva's Dvaita and Nimbarkacharya's Dvaitadvaita. Tulasidasa accepted the principle of Avatara and of Prapatti (total surrender) and propounded a philosophy through which "the souls could gain proximity to the Supreme Soul of which they are part, through devotion to a loving Creator"

(R C Shukla 1968:114).

Gosvami Tulasidasa acknowledges the immanence and transcendence of Sri Rama. in the Visistadvaitic tradition. The Yajnavalkya-Bharadvaja samvada illustrates this:

**Eka rama avadhesa kumara, tinha kara carita vidita sansara**

One such Rama is the prince of Ayodhya, whose exploits are known throughout the world (Balakanda 45,4).

and

**Prabhu soi rama ki apar kou jahi japata tripurari**

**Satya dhama sarbagya tumha kahahu bibeku bicari**

Is it this very Rama, my lord, or someone else whose name the Slayer of the demon Tripura, Siva, ever repeats? You are an embodiment of truth and omniscient; so ponder well and give me your considered reply (Balakanda 46).

The answer is that Sri Rama is both Prince of Ayodhya and the Supreme, Absolute. Transcendental Brahman.

Kabir's famous comment on the Supreme Absolute nature of Sri Rama, distinguishing him from the Prince of Ayodhya is as follows:

**Dasaratha suta tihu loka bakhana, Rama nama ka maram hai ana**

The son of Dasaratha is extolled in all three worlds, however, the secret of Rama's name is something different.

The principle is pure Advaitic, but Tulasidasa reconciled the Advaita and the Visistadvaita through the dialogue of Yajnavalkya and Bharadvaja. The "marama hai ana" refers to the transcendental Brahman. To the question how Nirguna can become Saguna, Tulasi says that there is no difference:

**Sagunahi agunahi nahi kachu bheda, Gavahi muni purana budha beda**

There is no difference between qualified Divinity and the unqualified Brahma: so declare the sages and men of wisdom, the Vedas and the Puranas (Balakanda 115, 1).

and also

**Gira aratha jala bici sama kahiata bhinna na bhinna  
Bandau sita rama pada jinhahi parama priya khinna**

I reverence the feet of Sita and Rama, who though stated to be different are yet identical just like a word and its meaning or like water and the waves on its surface, and to whom the afflicted are most dear (Balakanda 18).

Tulasi's much quoted line **Isvara ansa jiva abinasi, Cetana amala sahaja sukha rasi** (Uttarakanda 116, 1) means that the soul is part of the Divine, immortal, conscious, untainted by Maya, and blissful by nature. The soul becomes ensnared in avidya (imperfect knowledge) through the action of Maya; and only true knowledge can extricate it and restore it to bliss.

Sankara's Nirguna Brahma, anirvacaniya, can only be described as **neti neti**. Rao (1966:115) therefore says it can only be expressed negatively in terms of what it is not. Tulasidasa also uses this concept "neti neti" in his description of Sri Rama in the following doha:

**Sarada sesa mahesa bidhi agama nigama purana  
Neti neti kahi jasu guna karahi nirantara gana**

Goddess Sarasvati, sesa (the thousand-headed serpent-god), the great Lord Siva, Brahma (the Creator), the Agamas (Tantras), the Vedas and the Puranas unceasingly sing His virtues saying "not that, not that" (Balakanda 12).

"This shows that the gods and scripture mentioned above, though ever engaged in singing the virtues of Sri Rama, are only able to touch the fringe of His glory and find themselves unable to describe it in full. That is why they make only a negative assertion. **Na iti** (not that), meaning thereby that whatever is predicated of God falls too much short of His real glory and is at best only a faint indication of it" (Publisher's commentary on Balakanda 12).

The following description of Sri Rama as the Absolute (Nirguna) Brahma

**Binu pada calai sunai binu kana, kara binu karama karai bidhi nana**

**Anana rahita sakala rasa bhogi, binu bani bakata bada jogi**

**Tana binu parasa nayana binu dekha, grahai ghrana binu basa asekha Asi saba bhati alaukika karani, mahima jasu jai nahi barani**

He walks without feet, hears without ears, and performs actions of various kinds even without hands. He enjoys all tastes without a mouth (palate) and is a most clever speaker even though devoid of speech. He touches without a body (the tactile sense) sees without eyes and catches all odours even without a nose (the olfactory sense) His ways are thus supernatural in every respect and his glory is beyond description (Balakanda 117:3-4).

confirms that Tulasidasa also emphasizes that He does things without having attributes (negative description). The above chaupais reflect Svetasvataraopanisad (3:19- Swami Tyagisananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math).

**Apanipado javano grahita pasyatyacaksuh sa srnotyakarnah**

**Sa vetti vedyam na ca tasyasti vetta tamahuragryam purusam mahantam**

Without hands and feet he goes fast and grasps, without eyes he sees, without ears he hears. He knows whatever is to be known, yet there is none who knows him. They say He is the foremost, the great Infinite Being

The doha immediately following the chaupais above, brings in a visistadvaitin concept.

**Jehi imi gavahi beda budha jahi dharahi muni dhyana**

**Soi dasaratha suta bhagata hita kosalapati bhagavana**

He who is thus extolled by the Vedas and men of wisdom and whom the sages love to contemplate is no other than the divine Rama, son of Dasaratha, lord of Ayodhya, the friend of His devotees (Balakanda 118).

The contiguity of the above chaupais and dohas "expels all doubts as to Tulasidasa's view on Brahman. Tulasidasa believes in One Ultimate

Reality. It is that same Absolute or Ultimate Reality that even the Vedas and the wise extol and Who is none other than Sankara's 'neti neti' as well as the Narayana of Ramanuja Whom Tulasidasa calls Sri Rama" (Shukla 1993:110). It is a different matter that in the greater part of the Ramcaritmanasa Tulasidasa's Rama has greater similarities with Ramanuja's view of Brahman. Rao's thinking in this respect is noteworthy:

"Ramanuja's conception of God is intimate and it answers the purpose of religion. God is with us. He is close to us and works in our lives. He is seated in the heart of man "(Rao 1966:170).

For mankind ordinarily, and especially Tulasidasa's India, three salient features of Sankara's Brahmvada create difficulties. Rao enumerates them thus:

1. Shankara's Brahman cannot be understood by the intellectually indolent (Rao 1966: 114);
2. The conception of God as an abstraction chills us (Rao 1966:170);
3. Shankara's Absolute is regarded by Ramanuja as a metaphysical monster (Rao 1966:165).

The masses whether indolent or not, needed a God to love and be loved by. Sankara's Absolute is too remote, passionless and abstract. Tulasidasa blurs the distinction between the Advaitic Brahman (Saguna and Nirguna) and the God of Visistadvaita, and presents Rama to the masses as Karunanidhana (abode of compassion), Krpsindhu (ocean of mercy), Sevaka Trata (Protector of His Servants), Asarana Sarana (Helper of the helpless), Arata Bandhu (Friend of the distressed, Saneha Nidhana (Abode of Love) etc.

Gosvami's Tulasidasa's philosophical basis in the Ramcaritmanasa is Vedantic. Vedanta represents the "settled conclusions of the Vedas as a whole" (Hiriyanna 1973:151). Hiriyanna further states concerning Vedanta, of which Badrayana's systematization is extant, that



"The doctrine thus combines in one harmonious whole the results attained by all previous orthodox thinkers, and is therefore looked upon as the most perfect expression of Indian thought" (Hiriyanna 1973: 151).

Although there are divergences of views in Vedanta as also illustrated in Tulasidasa's treatment of the nature of Brahman in the *Ramcharitmanasa*, especially on the theoretical perspective, there is largely concurrence on practical issues. The unity of the soul and the need for gnana for moksa are not debated. The Vedantic schools are either Absolutistic considering the Ultimate Reality Brahman as an Impersonal Principle, and the theistic schools interpreting Brahman as a Personal God.

### Absolutistic Vedanta (Advaita)

The absolutistic Advaita Principle of the Upanisads articulated by Sankara as **Brahmasatyam Jaganmithya Jivo Brahmaiva Na Parah** - only Brahman is real, the world is an illusion and there is no difference between the Jiva and Brahman contains four aspects.

1. Maya or the illusory power of Maya which is neither real nor unreal. Maya creates an appearance that the world exists .
2. The other three principles deal with spiritual matters viz.
  - a. Brahman which is the Advaitic Absolute and basis of everything, while Maya is a "change of Brahman". Brahman is changeless. Even the fact that Brahman is the cause of the universe is to be seen on the analogy of the rope and serpent: the rope forms the basis for the notion of the snake. Brahman transcends all empirical attributes that characterize the physical world including unity and diversity. Hiriyanna (1973:163) emphasizes the fact that Brahman described as featureless or nirguna implies that it **transcends** the distinction between substance and attribute: it must not be construed as meaning that it is a substance **without** attributes. Brahman and maya are each thought of as cause of the universe, but in different senses. If Brahman and maya are regarded as together constituting the cause of the universe, this combination is the saguna (qualified) Brahman of advaita. It may like maya, be seen as

cause and effect. *Apara* or lower Brahman is that which is mingled with *maya*, *para* Brahman is the higher Brahman.

b. Saguna Brahman personified becomes the God or *Isvara* of *advaita*. Man and the qualified Brahman or God are not as such ONE. It would be blasphemous even in *advaita* to suggest that they are one. God remains above all consequences of association with attributes such as love, hate. In religion God is represented as creator of the universe and His *Sakti* (*Maya*) helps in this process. He is thus the material and efficient cause of the universe. *Hiriyanna* (1973:164) cautions against confusion regarding the Absolute

"What, however, is really ultimate, we must not forget, is the Absolute and neither the qualified Brahman nor God. These conceptions are like stepping stones to the weaker among the disciples in rising to a true conception of the ultimate reality".

c. Jiva is the third spiritual element. It is the Ego in relation to Brahman and the world. The ego is a blend of the self and the not-self. This non-self is *avidya* - which is like *maya* in relation to Brahman. It may be called the individual's share in *maya* .

There is a vast difference between *jiva* and God. The *jiva*'s identifying of self and not-self results in all the problems encountered in life. To gain liberation, man must transcend himself.

#### Theistic Vedanta (Visistadvaita)

*Visistadvaita* is one of the theistic schools started by *Ramanuja* (the other is *Madhva*'s *dvaita*). Belief in a God (theism) was not a prevailing feature in the early Upanisads. Theism developed independently in the form of *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism*. The revival in the Gupta period witnessed *Sankara*'s reinterpretation of the Upanisads as well as attempts to weld the Upanisadic doctrine with theism. *Vaisnavism* had developed by the time of the Gita and the concept of Trinity had already evolved before *Ramanuja*'s time.

Ramanuja resolved the problem of reconciling statements identifying Brahman with the individual soul and the universe, with those statements that distinguish Brahman from the individual and the universe. Ramanuja says that we often identify things that are distinct eg. rose is red. The substance rose and quality red are not same, yet we speak of them as if they are the same. We also say "I am a man" - this identifies a soul with a mortal human form. However, a man and his coat, or a man and his staff cannot be identified. Ramanuja says that the relationship of the rose, or the man is more intimate and thus different from the coat or staff. The intimate relationship is found between the substance and attribute (rose/red) and body and soul - two substances of which one is spiritual. This requires that one of the entities is dependent on the other - it exists and is known because the other exists and is known at the same time.

The relationship between Brahman and the soul/world is of this latter type: God is the central principle of the individual soul and the physical world. While the three entities - soul, world and God are real and distinct from one another, they are not on the same footing or level of relationship. Hence, Ramanuja postulates the final Upanisadic teaching to be that while Brahman, the soul and physical world are different and eternal, they are also inseparable. (Visistadvaita is erroneously called qualified monism). The Visistadvaita doctrine means soul, world and God are distinct but they stand in a very close relation to one another. Souls and matter are not identical with Brahman or one another.

The theistic Vedanta (Visistadvaita) which makes possible the attainment of the Loka of Narayana, provides for two means for attaining this - prapatti, complete self surrender (Vaisnava), easy for all, and bhakti based on the Upanisads and restricted to higher castes. Bhakti involves training in three stages - karma, gnana and bhakti yoga. It is significant to note that prapatti is necessary even for bhakti.

While Saguna and Nirguna Brahman of advaita do not differ fundamentally, the visistadvaita brought about an amalgamation of

Vedanta with Vaisnavism. Ramanuja's disciplic succession centuries later changed his Sri Sampradaya, worshipping Visnu or Narayana, into a school of Ramabhakti with which Tulasidasa is identified.

Gosvami Tulasidasa constantly emphasizes that Saguna and Nirguna (both concepts of Sankara's advaita) are not contradictory. He also posited Rama as Brahman. Whether Tulasi takes Rama in the sense of the Avatara in the Visistadvaita tradition, or called Brahman Rama within the Advaita tradition can form the topic of much debate. Tulasi does refer to Sri Rama as an Avatara as seen in the following chaupais: **Jaba jaba hoi dharama kai hani, badhabi asura adhama abhimani Karahi aniti jai nahi barani, sidahi bipra dhenu sura dharani Taba taba prabhu dhari vividha sarira, harahi krpanidhi sajjan pira**

Whenever virtue declines and vile and haughty demons multiply and work iniquity that cannot be told, and whenever Brahmans, cows, gods and earth itself are in trouble, the gracious Lord assumes various (transcendent) forms and relieves the distress of the virtuous (Balakanda 120,3-4).

Tulasidasa's Prabhu is Rama. Kakabhusundi proclaimed:

**Jaba jaba avadahpuri raghubira,  
dharahi bhagata hita manuja sarira**  
Each time the Hero of Raghu's line  
assumes the form of a man in the city of  
Ayodhya for the sake of His devotees  
(Uttarakanda 113,6).

i.e. Rama is born again and again, but at other times Tulasi refers to Rama in transcendental terms eg.

**Bandau nama rama raghu bara ko, hetu krsanu bhanu himkara ko**  
and

**Tata rama nahi nara bhupala, Bhuvanesvara kalahu kara kala  
Brahma anamaya aja bhagavanta, Vyapaka ajita anadi ananta**  
Sri Rama, dear brother, is no mere human king; He is the Lord of the universe and the Death of death himself. He is the Brahma (absolute)

who is free from the malady of Maya, the unborn God, all-pervading, invincible, without beginning or end (Sundarakanda 38,1).

Tulasidasa thus seems to be amalgamating Advaitic and Visistadvaitic concepts; but particularly strengthening and fortifying the empirical Saguna element of advaita with the Nirguna (transcendental). Tulasi's love for Sri Rama, whether derived from Valmiki direct, or through other sources, was inspired by something kvacidanyato'pi; and since Ramabhakti was already being spread Tulasidasa adopted the (visistadvaitic or theistic) concept of Visnu's Avatara; and established Sri Rama as Brahman (in the advaitic meaning).

Scholars have grappled with the question as to what inspired Tulasidasa to write the Ramcaritamanasa; and to which philosophical school he owes allegiance.

Undoubtedly Tulasidasa proposed Bhakti as an antidote for Kaliyuga  
**Rama nama narakesari kanakakasipu kalikala  
Japaka jana prahalada jimi palihi dali surasala**

The Name of Rama is, as it were, the Lord manifested as a man lion and the age of Kali, the demon Hiranyakasipu. Crushing this enemy of gods, the Name will protect the devotees repeating It, even as the Man-lion protected Prahalada (Balakanda 27).

because kaliyuga requires Rama's grace as seen earlier in **Jaba jaba hoi dharama kai hani-----**.

Tulasidasa's age had seen a plethora of religious sects/movements most of which were deviating from the traditional path of Dharma. Tulasi is supposed to have said **Gorakha jagayo jog, bhagati bhagayo loga** (R C Shukla 1968:64) -peoples attempts to attain supernatural powers had alienated them from God. Growse (1978:Liii) states that Tulasi "protested the virtual atheism of philosophical Hindu theology". While this assertion may be coloured by Christian notions of God or religion, the context of Tulasidasa's time is aptly described here.

R C Prasad in his introduction to Growse (1978:vi) says  
"Tulasi is so passionately devoted to the son of Dasaratha, so intensely in love with him, that by the sheer liveliness of his poetic imagination he transforms the hero of the Solar race, first into the qualified Incarnation of Visnu, and then into the Lord Himself whom even the Vedas and the Puranas cannot fully comprehend, in other words into the Nameless Absolute or attributeless, formless, imperceptible and unborn Brahman"

Radhakrishnan (1967:136)says:

"The Supreme is something viewed as the Super-personal Absolute Godhead or as the Personal God bestowing his love and grace on all the seekers. The metaphysical ideal of the absolute, transcendent, and immanent, gives place in theistic systems (i.e. Visistadvaita/Dvaita) to the ideal of God. Prayer takes the place of meditation and love (that of) knowledge. In religious experience we have both knowledge of the absolute reality and the personal encounter with God. The two do not exclude each other. Sankara, the famous non-dualist thinker of India, spoke of spiritual union and personal communion".

Tulasidasa had the inner compulsion to communicate his own love and devotion of Rama to the world, at a time when humanity was in a state of confusion; in the Indian historic, political, social and religious domains. Religion, ethics and morals were being superseded by cults drawing people away from the established varnasramadharm. The Vaisnava and Saiva sects were at loggerheads and the intellectual elements were engaged in their philosophical debates to no avail.

R C Prasad explains this situation and Tulasi's attempts at reconciling these divergent elements through the Ramcaritamanasa in the excerpt above (Growse 1978:vi).

Given that Sankara's Brahman was a metaphysical monster, and a chilling concept, visistadvaita seemed to be an appropriate point of departure. However, Tulasidasa is conciliatory, even to the evil people as seen in:

**Bandau santa asajjana carana, Dukhaprada ubhaya bica kachu barana**

I adore the feet of a saint and a wicked soul, both of whom give pain, though some difference is said to exist between them.

He desired to bring everybody under the play of Ramabhakti, for the greater good of all. Tulasidasa's entire life was Ramamaya - he saw the world as Siyaramamaya, and Sri Rama was his Eka Bharoso Eka Bala. Sri Rama was his all in all; the name Rama was greater than even the person Rama. It is thus easy to understand that Rama replaced Visnu, Siva, Brahma and even Brahman as the only, Supreme, Absolute Reality, who assumes a body to help his devotees as seen in

**Taba taba prabhu dhari vividha sarira, harahi krpanidhi sajjan pira.**

With such abounding, boundless love for Sri Rama, it is inconceivable that Tulasidasa would countenance conflicts between philosophies, sects, cults or other religions, to impede the spread of Rama Nama in the world.

Gosvami Tulasidasa's philosophy in Ramacaritamanasa

To Tulasidasa Sri Rama is

**Rama ananta ananta guna amita katha bistara**

Rama is infinite, infinite are his virtues and the dimensions of His story are also immeasurable (Balakanda 33).

There is nothing apart from Sri Rama in all creation for him. In order to convey his love, faith and devotion he gives credence to all the religio-philosophical traditions followed by devout persons, even philosophers. He salutes the founder of Sankhya, Kapila in exalted terms in

**Adideva prabhu dinadayala, jathara dhareu jehi kapila krpala  
Sankhya sastra jinha pragata bakhana, tattva bicara nipuna  
bhagava**

She bore in her womb the all powerful and benevolent Lord Kapila, the primal divinity, who is compassionate to the humble and who openly expounded the philosophy of Sankhya, and adept as He was in the enquiry after ultimate principles (Balakanda 141,3-4).

Tulasidasa salutes and acknowledges Nana Purana Nigamagama in his opening invocation. While accepting and reconciling all views, he finally creates a new Sastra - **Ramabhakti**. Within the philosophical framework of the Sadadarsanas he acknowledges Sankhya and all philosophies. Sri Rama is described as Vedantavedyam vibhum (knowable through Vedanta) in the invocation of Sundarakanda. He explores Kabir's question mentioned above (page 3) and Yajnavalkya answers it in Balakanda 46,4

**Rama katha sasi kirana samana. Santa cakora karahi jehi pana**

The story of Rama is like the moonbeams that are drunk in by the cakora birds in the form of saints.

In Siva/Parvati samvada any misgivings about Sri Rama's divinity are removed. Kakabhusundi also removes Garuda's feigned ignorance or doubts regarding the Divinity of Sri Rama.

Growse encapsulates the questions or doubts and the only response possible, thus: "The final purpose of the Incarnation, like the idea of any revelation whatever from God to man, is above comprehension" (Growse 1978:Liv).

It must appear that Tulasi himself was not tormented by any doubts or questions- his settled conclusions to the ills of existence was total surrender and devotion to Sri Rama. As a Vedantin he erased or blurred the distinction between Nirguna and Saguna of the Advaita (Aguna saguna nahi kachu bheda). Bhakti which was described by the Upanisads as being for the elect (privileged) was made the birthright of all by Tulasi, prapatti or total surrender, which was for the masses, still underlying Bhakti. The Vaisnava element of Visistadvaita Vedanta thus also becomes submerged or absorbed into Advaita. Only Vedanta with its cardinal principles remained as Tulasi's guide--(Brahman is all, capable of everything and anything - Sarvam khalvidam Brahma).



The Sankaracarya of Puri (Kalyan 46-Ramank:11) states more categorically what Radhakrishnan (supra) explained with regard to the possibility of Brahman expressing Himself in various ways:

Some people say that the Nirguna Brahman cannot become Saguna. This statement is illogical. They, too, acknowledge the Nirguna/Nirakara as omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. If the Nirguna cannot become Saguna then He cannot be omnipresent, and if He lacks the knowledge of becoming Saguna then He cannot be called omniscient

Tulasi with his prescription of Ramabhakti gave a new life to the Sanatana Dharma through the ideals of Dharma, maryada and bhakti of the Sevaka Sevyā Bhava.

Scholars identify passages in the Ramcaritamanasa to determine Tulasi's philosophical basis, or locate him within a particular system. While this is very valuable, the objective is difficult to achieve. While Jada cetana guna dosa maya points to Sankhya, Iṣvara ansha jiva abinasi points to Vedanta. But both are appropriate and apposite in their contexts.

Even the question whether Tulasi regards Sri Rama as an Avatara of Visnu or whether He is simply Visnu who is chief amongst the trinity, or Brahman, the Supreme Absolute Who is beyond the trinity, is not fully comprehended. Indeed it is comprehended by Kakabhusundi who says whenever Sri Rama descends in Ayodhya, I witness His childlike frolicking. Hence to Tulasidasa and Kakabhusundi Rama is everything and beyond everything.

Further in Balakanda 145, 2-3 Sivajis and Kakabhusundi's ista is described as **Saguna aguna jehi nigama prasansa** - (ista) is glorified by the Vedas as both with and without attributes.

Fascination with the enduring appeal of the Ramacaritamanasa leads modern scholars to re-analyse the questions already posed and answered by Tulasidasa in the various samvadas. Ramakanth Tripathi (in Singh 1976:210) refers to the advaita assertions made in the Ramcaritamanas

**Byapaku eka brahma abinasi, Sata cetana Ghana ananda rasi**

Brahma (God) is one, all-pervading and imperishable; He is all truth, consciousness and a compact mass of joy (Balakanda 22.3).

and

**Rajata Sipa mahu bhasa jimi jatha bhanu kara bari**

**Jadapi mrsa tihu kala soi bhrama na sakai kou tari**

Just as a shell is mistaken for silver and a mirage for water even though the appearance is false at all times (in the past, present and future), nobody can dispel this delusion (Balakanda 117).

and

**Binu Pada calai sunai binu kana -----**

He walks without feet, hears without ears ----- (Balakanda 117,3-4).

and suggests that Tulasidasa adapted the main principles of Advaita Vedanta viz. Nirguna Brahman, the falseness of the world, the creative power of Maya and the role of knowledge in removing suffering. He however, concludes that Tulasidasa postulated the desirability of the Bhakti of the Saguna Brahman. Tripathi rejects the distinction of lower or Apara Brahman (saguna) and higher or Para Brahman (nirguna). Tulasi has cleared this question in

**Sagunahi agunahi nahi kachu bheda, Gavahi muni purana budha beda**

There is no difference between qualified Divinity and unqualified Brahma: so declare the sages and men of wisdom, the vedas and the Puranas (Balakanda 115,1).

Hence, the debate on the distinction between Saguna and Nirguna is no more relevant. The Saguna Brahman is indispensable for the Vedas, for creation and everything else. Brahman has to assume the Saguna form, and even manifest, in order to grant grace to devotees. Kakabhusundi in Uttarakanda (109 d,8) and Agastya in Aranyakanda (12,7) prefer the Saguna Rupa of Brahman. Tulasi believed that Saguna Brahma is the more difficult path:

**Nirguna rupa sulabha ati, Saguna jana nahi koi**

The attributeless aspect of the Godhead is easy to understand, but no one can comprehend the embodied form (which is beyond all modes of Prakrti and divine in character) (Uttarakanda 73 b).

Bhakti leads to the attainment of true knowledge because Bhakti conquers Maya:

**Bhagatihi sanukula raghuraya, tate tehi darapati ati maya**

The Lord of the Raghus is well disposed towards Bhakti; hence Maya is terribly afraid of her (Uttarakanda 115 b, 3).

Bharatbhushan "Saroj" and Krishnadev Sharma (1977:151) cite scholar Dr Rajpati Dixit and Paramhansa Sri Ramakrishna who are reluctant to label Tulasidasa as an Advaitin in Sankara's mould. Other scholars such as Ramavatar Sharma attempt to prove Tulasidasa a Visistadvaitin. The authors assert (Page 151) that it is virtually impossible to categorize Tulasidasa as a philosopher and in a particular philosophical school.

"Saroj" and Sharma emphasise the futility of treating Tulasidasa as a philosopher while he was foremost a devotee /poet who wanted to speak of nothing else but Rama (p.152). Tulasidasa's preferred method of bhakti is the **sevaka-sevya bhava** (Uttarakanda 119).

The authors state :-

According to Gosvamiji, the only way to grace is through being Sri Rama's servant, because he is omnipotent; in his refuge, and having surrendered to him, no worldly tribulations afflict the devotee. Gosvami Tulasidasa proved that Sri Rama can be worshipped through various approaches, and wanted to make Ramabhakti accessible to all (1977:151).

Indeed, Tulasidasa has portrayed a picture of surrender to Sri Rama which appeals to the afflicted Jiva. Individual souls caught up in samsara and the binding karma can easily find solace and reassurance in surrender to the lotus feet of the Lord. When the Jiva stands before the

lord, Ahalya's moving words become very meaningful :  
(Balkanda : chanda after doha 210)

**mai nari apavana prabhu jaga pavana ravana ripu jana sukhadayi,  
rajiva vilocana bhava bhaya mocana pahi pahi saranahin ayi.  
jehi pada surasarita parama punita pragata bhai siva sisa  
dhari,  
soi pada pankaja jehi pujata aja mama sira dhareu kripala  
hari**

Not only the contrite Ahalya, but also Rishi Atri salutes  
Sri Rama as Bhaktavatsala, and Sutiksanaji (Aranya.  
9.18) insisted on seeing the Cosmic form in Sri Rama.

**bhupa rupa taba rama durava, hridaya caturabhuja rupa dikhava.**  
The Divine fulfils the innermost wishes of his devotees. Sri Rama  
enabled Sutiksanaji to perceive His Cosmic Form in his heart.

Tulasidasa's Ramabhakti or worship of Sri Rama as Brahman, the  
immanent and transcendent, brought bhakti to the door of every Hindu  
of medieval India. This bhakti taught extreme respect for the Sruti,  
Smriti, Agamas, Puranas and Sastras. It also taught that God is Rama.

Hindus in South Africa inherited Ramabhakti from their forefathers who  
came as indentured labourers in the 19th century, carrying their  
Ramacaritamanasa as the only scripture. This Ramabhakti enabled the  
Hindus in South Africa to know God as Sri Rama who is Lord of the  
universe; it enabled them to understand that the soul is eternal while the  
body is not, and that a life of devotion, discipline, compassion, diligence  
and honesty will bring them to the shores of the Ocean of Milk  
(Ksirasagara) where the Lord abides eternally in his Cosmic form.  
Naidoo (T. Naidoo - The Hindu way-Ramakrishna Centre of South  
Africa, Durban) explains that the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa,

had as one of its goals the spread of Vedantic and other religious ideals in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna (P.82). Naidoo lists among the objectives of the Divine Life Society the work of the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy, Rishikesh. The Divine Life Society of South Africa attempts to fulfil these goals.

The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa and the Divine Life Society of South Africa are two of the earlier Neo-Vedantic or Neo-Hindu institutions in South Africa. Today we also have the ISKCON, Satya Sai Organisation, various Vedanta and Sanatana Dharma Sabhas and Satsangs and the Chinmaya Mission. All these institutions preach and practise the Vedantic philosophy and Sanatana Dharma as recorded in the Vedas, Upanisads, Gita, Ramayana, Srimad Bhagavatam etc. The reconciliation of reason and faith, philosophy and religion, into a harmonious system of belief and worship found in the Tulasi Ramayana finds resonance in all Hindu institutions. Hindus, especially Hindi speaking South Africans, thus revere the Ramacaritamanasa and find themselves to be Ramabhaktas without effort.

Shukla's research (1989) elicited some interesting responses from the South African Hindus regarding the Ramacaritamanasa. 77,3% of respondents to a questionnaire survey stated that the Ramacaritamanasa has the true approach to God, and Sri Rama is an incarnation of God. 83,8% of respondents indicated that "it is possible and necessary for God to incarnate." (Shukla 1989 : 295). One respondent stated that Rama is God and that "He is all-pervading and His Absoluteness is always intact, for God is God and has powers immeasurable." (Shukla 1989 : 295).

From amongst a "Vaishnavite", "Arya Samajist", a "Vedantist" and "Sanatanist", only the Arya Samajist stated that the Ramacaritamanasa does not subscribe fully to the Vedas, in the context of avatars, for which there is no authority in the Vedas. (Shukla 1989 : 296)

Bearing in mind that Goswami Tulasidasa believes worship of Saguna Brahman is more difficult, "**nirguna rupa sulabha ati, saguna jana nahi koi**" (Uttarakanda 73B), it is interesting to note that 63,2% of the respondents indicated that they comprehended God as personal; 22,7% as both personal and impersonal and 12,4% as impersonal.

Shukla (1989 : 308) contends on the basis of her survey that :-

It is clear that while some comprehend God to be Impersonal yet they find the personal form more appealing, 'since the formless cannot be understood by the mind which is limited in nature'.

Goswami Tulasidasa's Ramacaritamanasa has thus wielded tremendous influence on the lives of Hindus in South Africa, and interest in the philosophy of the Ramacaritamanasa is growing. The following words of Sankaracarya of Puri coincide with the attitudes and beliefs of South African Hindus :-

Bhagavan Sri Rama, dear son of Kausalya and Dasaratha is the Chaste, Immanent and Transcendental Brahman, and He is the Supremely Adorable Lord of the Sanatana-dharmi Hindus (Kalyan 46 - Ramanka- 12).

Goswami Tulasidasa assimilated the knowledge of Brahman from all authentic sources **AND** something from some other source (**Kvacidanyato'pi**) which gave shape to the Ramcaritamanasa. In view of the foregoing Tulasidasaji may yet be acknowledged as the founder of a new Sastra, **RAMABHAKTI** for the welfare of the world.

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**THE SAPTA-SINDHU REVISITED**

by J G Desai

The following abbreviations are used in the Article:

Indus Valley Civilisation : IVC

South Asia : SA

Rg-Veda : RV

Indo-European : IE

Aryan Invasion Theory : AIT

Sapta-Sindhu : SS

**ABSTRACT**

This article attempts to examine the question of the origin and nature of the IVC in the light of recent archaeological discoveries in South Asia (the north-west part of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent). Moreover, it discusses the relation between the IVC and that of the RV. Incidentally, issues regarding the IE homeland problem and the AIT also feature in the discussion.

**THE COLONIAL ERA**

The terms Aryan and Dravidian in this article do not intend to convey racist overtones. Firstly both groups are racially classified as Caucasian. Moreover, for the RV "Aryan" though it has ethnic connotations means noble, usually in a cultural, rather than a racial sense. Unfortunately since the 19th century racism entered the consciousness of the West as an extension of an exaggerated sense of its own superiority, given its colonial success. It is this sense the West projected to its study of Indian history and culture by sharply drawing the division between Aryan and Dravidian.<sup>1</sup>

Dwelling upon the natural accident of pigmentation Western nations pronounced the Aryans as intruders in India such as they themselves were. This helped to salve their political conscience. The perception entered the history books ever since. However, the mischief was wrought as early as the 16th century by Jesuit priests as part of their conversion attempts of a heathen India. Many scholars today reject the AIT as a myth and a species of deliberate disinformation, promoted in



the era of European Imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

The theory employed by the British as part of their divide and rule strategy did not disappear with their rule for it still has a wide currency in the West and India. The fact of its adherence by most Indian scholars show how they are only the intellectual heirs of their western counterparts. The idea itself was totally unknown in the Indian tradition.<sup>3</sup>

Gautier rightly warns that since "We are constantly looking at things and events through a prism...fashioned by centuries of western thinking, we will not understand rightly the world and India."<sup>4</sup>

Even if Gautier exaggerates - for surely not all scholars show bias - yet there is some truth in his words. For example J Hawkes views the achievements of IVC in such terms as: "Uniform and uninventive" and pervaded by a "deadly blank monotony." More tellingly she writes: "Archaeologists do not often allow themselves value judgements, yet Stuart Piggott wrote 'I can only say that there is something about the [Indus] civilization that I find repellent.'"<sup>5</sup>

It is then not surprising that these archaeologists and their colleague, Sir M Wheeler, conclude that Mesopotamian influences were at work in the Indus development and that Aryans were invaders. For Wheeler proof of Aryan invasions lay in some unburied human bones<sup>6</sup> found in Mohenjo-Daro, a theory of such historical moment that astonishingly went unchallenged till quite recently.

### **IVC ORIGINS**

Any discussion of SA's ancient IVC invariably embraces the vexed question of its origins. As the scene of the largest urban civilisation in the ancient world the IVC is a subject of dispute between those scholars who hold that it was founded by Dravidian people and others who claim an Aryan origin for it. This in turn introduces the as yet unresolved issue of the original homeland of these two important ethnic entities. One school regards both as being native to India, while the other places them somewhere beyond her borders. Moreover, the Aryan question

itself is a complex one as it draws in the related and disputed issue regarding the ultimate location of the IES of Eurasia.

The Indian branch is the Aryan,<sup>7</sup> an appellation the Iranians too had used for themselves. Ever since the West discovered the Sanskrit language and the Vedas, (before its discovery of the IVC) the idea of the IE homeland was born. These people, scattered across Eurasia, are thought to have inherited their culture - social, political, religious, linguistic - and their race from some common source called Proto Indo-European. The identity between race and language is much disputed for the obvious reason that language transcends the racial divide. Yet the point is that it must begin with a specific ethnic group or race, however diluted its blood subsequently becomes through miscegenation.<sup>8</sup>

Many locations within Asia and Europe have been suggested for the IE URHEIMAT but only one or two have been accepted with any degree of consensus. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the different theories connected with the problem, nor is it necessary. What it seeks to do is to argue the case for S A as the most likely earliest home of the IEs.

This is not so outlandish as it might seem, for it is the old Indian theory, which is now steadily gaining western support. In the Indian list the prominent names are those K Munshi, G Jha, Trivedi, A C Das, Sri Aurobindo, and B Prakash. Western scholars include the likes of K Kostermeyer, F Gautier, K Elst, Pargiter, J C Shaffer and D Frawley.

In order to see whether the Dravidians and the Aryans were autochthonous to India, and whether both or either were responsible for the birth of IVC, it is necessary to examine some of the main features of this civilisation.

At the outset it must be emphasized that the S.S. region of the RV is almost an exact geographical fit with the IVC region. This significantly enhances the view that seeks to identify Aryan culture with that of the Indus-Sarasvati, whose existence archaeology recently made known.

So there is good reason to justify the extrapolation of the literary evidence to match archeological records. There is also another side to this theme. As it stands there is no other earlier literary record depicting the above regions in any Dravidian language.

Incidentally, it is to be noted that besides the Iranian Zend Avesta, there is no other extant ancient literary record of any IES who have ever claimed that the lands they inhabited were theirs by right of blood or origin. The Avesta does mention the SS region as Aryan land, but only as part of a wider territory that the Iranians called their home. But as the Avesta is centuries posterior to the R.V., it records only nostalgic memories of the SS lands they once occupied and then moved away from.<sup>9</sup>

### **AUTHORS OF THE INDUS CIVILISATION : J P MALLORY'S THEORY:**

J P Mallory in his - In search of the Indo-Europeans<sup>10</sup> - holds that the Aryans invaded India centuries after the IVC attained maturity. An examination of his views will be undertaken to see whether they are adequate to the facts. Mallory argues that the Dravidian languages were once located throughout the sub-continent but were engulfed by the Indo-Aryans, leaving a few remnants as for example, in Brahui to the west of the Indus. The upshot of his argument is that the IVC was probably Dravidian in origin. Another likely candidate for him is Elamite, a language said to be related to the Dravidian and that both belong to what D McAlpin designates as Proto-Elamo-Dravidian, which once had held sway over southern Iran, whence around the fifth millennium BC, its speakers moved across the Indus and introduced early village farming economies which in turn "formed the foundation of the Indus civilization."<sup>11</sup>

### **CULTURE CONTRASTS**

For Mallory the R.V. depicts a culture that is "illiterate, non-urban, non-maritime, a cattle-based economy" and a political administration of a warrior aristocracy that did not reach beyond the regnal powers of a king "whose primary function seems to be concerned with warfare and ritual".<sup>12</sup>

Like many other Indologists, he points to the Arya-Dasa conflict and argues, on the basis of such references in the R.V. as "dark-skinned" and "nose-less", that these are "clear pejoratives" the Aryans used to describe their Dravidian enemies. Shattering their cities and storming their citadels the Aryans had carried the day due to their military skill and use of horses and chariots, which were then unknown in the IVC.<sup>13</sup>

### **INDUS VALLEY : IT'S EXTENT**

Before examining Mallory's hypothesis it is instructive to describe the extent of the Indus civilisation, for it has a bearing on his views. It stretched north to the Himalayas from the lower Indus and turned east towards Delhi. From there it followed the course of the now dry river bed of the ancient Saraswati to the Arabian Sea. From Saurashtra it ran all along the western coast more than 800 miles to Bombay. The whole area of some 1920 kilometres from west to east and 1120 from north to south, was the most extensive urban complex in the ancient world.

If the Dravidians were the authors of the IVC then it is strange that it did not encompass to the south, as archaeological record should have proven. Besides, as A D Pusalker says:

"So far...as the funeral customs are concerned it is impossible to ascribe the Indus Valley culture to the Dravidians, among whom burial was the prevalent form of interring the dead."<sup>14</sup>

As to the ascription of the Indus culture to the Brahuis, V Rangacharya<sup>15</sup> states that they are "ethnically very different from the Dravidians" a view with which A D Pusalker fully agrees. The latter holds that though they spoke a Dravidian language the Brahuis are of Turko-Iranian origin and that there is no definite evidence that they were the creators of the civilisation. However, the most serious objection, says B Prakash, is that there is no chronological fit.

"We know that", he writes, "in the Kusana period South Indian regiments were posted on the northern frontiers of the empire... It is quite likely that, a group of them settled in Baluchistan and gave their language to the Brahuis."<sup>16</sup>

Moreover S P Tolstev mentions that coins with a variant of the svastika struck on them were introduced in the Brahui region by five Andhra kings, after the eclipse of Kusana power.<sup>17</sup> Thus it seems that Mallory is out of step with the time frame in question. Similarly the question of the Aryans dislocating the Dravidians from their northern seats does not at all arise.

### **PROTO-ELAMITE DRAVIDIAN HYPOTHESIS**

Again, Mallory's thesis that Proto-Elamite-Dravidians were the precursors of the ICV is problematical. It is merely speculative, for the facts of the situation hardly warrant its conclusions. But Mallory at one stroke makes out that both Dravidians and Aryans were intruders. This further means that two of India's great cultural enterprises, creations of these two ethnic entities, were alien in important respects.

His views raise complex and contradictory issues. By evincing sympathy for the Dravidian connection with the Elamite he proposes the Elamo-Dravidian basis for the Indus culture. It is, "an hypothesis", he states, "far more probable than Colin Renfrew's recent suggestion that the IVC was Indo-Aryan and that it was Indo-Europeans who introduced the farming economy to this region".<sup>18</sup>

Why Mallory is unhappy with Renfrew's hypothesis is readily intelligible. For him the Indo-Aryans had arrived in India only around 1500 BC, a thousand years after the mature Harappan period. But for Renfrew they are migrants from Anatolia or West Asia (Turkey), an area he believes to be the URHEIMAT of IES. They had reached the Indus before 6000 BC.<sup>19</sup> It is notable that a scholar as prominent as Renfrew can argue for the Aryan presence so early in India, but the part of his thesis that makes them immigrant is not acceptable as will soon become apparent.

### **THE "IDEA" OF CIVILISATION**

The model of migrations from west of the Indus was also attractive to the distinguished archaeologists, Sir M Wheeler and H D Sankalia. The latter, a former student of Wheeler was for long in substantial agreement with the views of his mentor. However, on account of the

rapidly changing nature of the archaeological picture of the IV., Sankalia soon began to part company with Wheeler. Sankalia is fully aware of the need for revision: "keeping an eye on the sherds as they occur every minute".<sup>20</sup>

While believing the Mesopotamian essay in civilisation preceded that of the Indus by nearly 2000 years, Wheeler, unlike Mallory, hesitates to claim Mesopotamian migrants actually created the IVC.<sup>21</sup>

"But", he says, "it can be at least averred that, however translated the idea of civilization came to the Indus from the Euphrates and the Tigris, and gave the Harappans their initial direction or at least informed their purpose".<sup>22</sup>

However in his assessment of the respective merits of the two cultures Wheeler overlooks several aspects that can be differently interpreted. Though conceding the balance of trade between them stood in India's favour, he says that it was only with regard to such trifles as "seals and other knick-knacks" and not in more substantial goods as ivory, timber, or cotton.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, observes Rangacharya, "One argument in favour of the Indian origin of Sumerian culture is the availability of many of the materials found in Mesopotamia only in India and not elsewhere".<sup>24</sup>

He adds that several materials were in the form of finished products: cotton, textiles, decorated carnelian beads and lapis lazuli. He mentions that the by-word for cotton was Sindhu by which term it was also known to the Babylonians and the later Greeks, and that the art of weaving was first known to the "Sindhu men". To these he adds the emphasis that, given the high quality of workmanship especially of the painted pottery, Sumerian culture was indebted to the Sindhu and not the other way around.

It is instructive in this connection to quote the French historian, J Pirenne: "The basins of the Indus and the Saraswati represent an area

of civilization far more extensive than that of the Nile Valley or Mesopotamia. Its peak was about 2900 BC, when it extended widely towards Baluchistan. The towns of the Indus seem more advanced, therefore more ancient. Perhaps the Mesopotamian cities were born out of contact with the Indus; tradition indeed relates that civilization was brought to the land of Sumeria by a man-fish from the Persian Gulf."<sup>25</sup>

E Tomlin echoes Pirenne's view: "This places Mohenjo-Daro at the head of all the civilizations of the world."<sup>26</sup> Pirenne's remark about the Sumerian tradition is highly significant and should be given the weight it deserves. Why Mallory, Wheeler and some others should ignore it is rather baffling. However, Frawley referring to the Sumerian tradition writes:

"They also had an eastern holy land called Dilmun... to which they attributed their origins, and with whom the Sumerians traded throughout their history. Some archaeologists have identified Dilmun with the island of Bahrein...others (S N Kramer) with India."<sup>27</sup>

Frawley adds:<sup>28</sup> "While the Egyptians and Sumerians...look to many civilizations before and around them, it is ludicrous to say they invented civilization."

### **THE MEHRGARH DISCOVERY**

Due to significant findings in Mehrgarh near the Bolan Pass in the Kachi plain and in Kashmir, where civilisation rose as early as 7000BC led Sankalia to argue for a cultural continuity from then to mature IVC, thus ruling out alien intrusion:

"Some fundamental aspects of material culture existed between 7000 and 3500 BC in the Kachi Plain. What was needed was some efficient organizer who would utilize all these and build a city like Harappa or Mohenjodaro and spread its influence far and wide. Where was this organizer born - in Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab or Afghanistan or in the Sarasvati valley"?<sup>29</sup>

Among the finds in the period were mud brick structures, impressions

of cultivated barley. wild and domesticated animal bones, microliths, human skeletons, polished stone axes and vessels. cotton seeds. smelted copper, ornaments of turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian. Most interesting was the presence of cakes of red ochre often associated with IE funeral rites.

Two features may be noted here. Given the early time frame it is impossible that foreigners initiated this culture already so advanced. Wheeler's "idea" of civilisation travelling from Mesopotamia to India pertains to a period millennia later. Sankalia's striking reference to the "organizer" of the IVC alludes to no area outside the former integrated Indian sub-continent including Afghanistan, a region also intimately known to the R.V.

### **THE ARYAN QUESTION**

More striking still is his endorsement of the view of A V Pandya who, Sankalia says "really turned the tables."<sup>30</sup> Sankalia adds:

"He [Pandya] commendably opined that the Aryans developed the spoked wheel chariot in India, and it is they that had gone to western Asia. Thus the Kassites, Hyksos and the Mittani were Aryans! Of course, this was the old, orthodox Indian view, but now it has been bolstered up with archaeological evidence. Thus the Aryan question has a re-orientation, and we must again reopen the tome of authorship of the Iron-Age in India!"<sup>31</sup>

Pandya's views are based on new evidence concerning the presence of the horse. For many, including Mallory, the identity of the Indus people hangs on the question of the presence or absence of the horse. For them the "horse culture" was unknown or little known to the Harappans. However, Pandya points to its existence in Baluchistan, in the north-west frontier province, figurines of saddled horses, in Mohenjodaro, a terracotta horse head and horse bones, in Saurashtra horse figurines and paintings and in Kutch remains of horses.

D Agrawal too points to horse remains throughout the SS region. Adding the opinion of S R Rao, "the world-renowned archaeologist"



that these are from "mature and late Harappan" levels, he says: "This simply debunks the non-Aryan nature of the habitants of the Indus Valley."<sup>32</sup>

Interesting also in this regard are "the terracotta hubbed wheels, one of them painted, and a cart frame" and grey pottery ware among finds in Domeli, near Beas, Punjab discovered by B Singh Nijjar. Y D Sharma ascribing them to (6000-4500 BC),<sup>33</sup> states that "Domeli must rank as the first known neolithic site in north India, barring Kashmir."<sup>34</sup>

### **INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT**

The neolithic sites in Mehrgarh, Kashmir and Domeli reveal the genius of Indian culture in all its developmental sequences. They have revolutionised recent concepts of the transition from the food-gathering to the food-producing stage. For G Mohapatra the "neolithic industry" was a southward extension from Kashmir into the Punjab and not a "peninsular penetration."<sup>35</sup> J G Shaffer sums up the situation well: "Current data do not support the existence of an Indo-Aryan or European invasion...Instead, it is possible to document archaeologically indigenous cultural development from prehistoric to historic periods. The early Vedic literature describes not invasion but a fundamental restructuring of indigenous society."<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps, in view of the latest evidence it is not unreasonable to accept Shaffer's and Frawley's date of 6000 BC<sup>37</sup> for the early Vedic age. Frawley considers both archaeological sources and astronomical references in the R.V. to arrive at his conclusion.

The IVC is only the third phase of evolvement of indigenous roots since, as Sankalia says: "Dr Mughal has found 24 Hakra assemblage sites (3500 BC). Thus Hakra or the Vedic Sarasvati culture would be the earliest in N.W. India!"<sup>38</sup>

Sankalia adds that the IVC "which was already staggering by any standard, has now been said to extend up to the southern bank of the Oxus on the frontiers of Iran and the USSR."<sup>39</sup>

Frawley<sup>40</sup> too says that there were cultural links between India, Afghanistan and S Turkemania in ancient central Asia, and that Soviet archaeology confirms "unmistakable traces of Indian influence in Turkemania." In other words the flow of ideas was from the IVC outward to regions ethnologically IE, a circumstance that is the reverse of Mallory's<sup>41</sup> idea of IE intrusions into N W India across the Afghan "trip-line" (c. 1500 BC). Even if one concedes Mallory's thesis, identity of IE and IVC cultures is what would be expected and not the sharp contrast between them he insists on. For Agrawal 80% of the 250 excavated sites are concentrated along the dessicated Sarasvati and not the Indus. That the Sarasvati, (so highly eulogised in the RV), was once a mighty river flowing from the Himalayas to the Arabian sea is confirmed by geological research.<sup>42</sup> The American satellite Landsat pictures show that it dried up by 1800 BC. Since the R.V. mentions thriving settlements along both its banks means that the Aryans were in occupation since hoary antiquity and so could not be the 1500 BC invaders as Mallory and others claim.

Agrawal makes out that the "calamity of the drying up of the Sarasvati", concomitant with periodic droughts and floods in the Indus plains, and "not any invasion" was what led to the evacuation of the settlements by the Aryans and to their "massive outflow into Iran and even towards Europe."<sup>43</sup> Such is also the view of F Gautier<sup>44</sup> who believes with the Belgian sociologist K Elst that the Aryans

"migrated outwards, to Iran, then to Turkestan, and hence to Europe;....rather than the Indo-Iranians on their way from S Russia to Iran and partly to India, these may as well be the Hittites, Kassites or Mitanni, on their way from India, via the Aral Lake area, to Anatolia, or Mesopotamia, where they show up in subsequent centuries."

Espousing a similar view the American anthropologists J G Shaffer and Diane Lichtenstein<sup>45</sup> in a joint paper at Shimla in July this year propose that radical shifts in Indological paradigms are necessary and the "Invasion theory" must be dropped since it is coloured by European ethnocentric and racial bias. The probability for establishing the "Aryan" claim on a sounder footing increases when the following corroborative testimony is considered.

### **MARITIME CIVILISATION**

F A Steel rightly finds the currency of the idea of the Aryans as no more than nomadic pastorilists, unfamiliar with sea and ships, a complete mystery.<sup>46</sup> The R.V. describes the sea and ocean with words such as samudra, salila (salty depths), arna, purisha etc. A number of texts refer to river and ocean navigation. In R.V. (1.116.5) a ship with 100 oars is mentioned.

### **MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY**

Indologists who seek support for the antiquity of Aryan culture look to two types of evidence, one based on the "King Lists" in the Vedas, Puranas and epics, the other on archaeological finds on land and sea.

Taking his clues from the Mahabharata's "faithful recording of the flooding of Dwarka by the sea", S R Rao and his team of marine archaeologists discovered the submerged city in 1988.<sup>47</sup> From thermoluminescent tests on pottery - other finds are sculptures, seals, copper coins, anchors, stone fortifications, one wall of which is 550 meters long<sup>48</sup> (the largest ancient marine structure)<sup>49</sup> - Rao ascribed 1500 BC to Sri Krsna's western outpost. In nearby Bet Dwarka Rao found a kalasa (votive jar), dated 1700-1600 BC by him. On it are inscribed 7 letters in a script midway between the Indus and the Brahmi, deciphered by him as: "Mahi Kutcha Shah Pa (Sea-Lord protect) - a term said to be used in the Mahabharata."<sup>50</sup>

These important finds have revolutionised the present view of Indian history. Firstly the 1500 BC date for Krsna's Dwarka shows that the so-called Aryan invasion - for which not the least bit of archaeological or literary proof exists - was a non-event. It is strange that Mallory writing in 1991, did not avail himself of so important a discovery as Dwarka in 1988 by a fellow archaeologist.

Secondly, the 7 Brahmi letters show the evolution of the Indus script around 1700 BC, coinciding with the period of Lothal the other major seaport in Gujarat. This discredits Mallory's charge of Aryan illiteracy. Rao's finds affirm the "antiquity of the Vedas and the Aryan nature of the Indus culture."<sup>51</sup>

Thirdly, pictographic conch (sankha) seals used for commercial and security purposes, were also found by Rao in Dwarka. A Mahabharata text mentions that Krsna ordered all citizens to wear seals (mudra) "as a mark of identification" in Dwarka. Discovered too were several submerged old sites in Somnath and Bet-Dwarka of the "pre-Mahabharata (before 1500 BC) period."<sup>52</sup>

### **THE TRINITARIAN CULTURAL CONCEPT**

The idea of the trinitarian nature of divinity depicted as a motif on Indus seals including that of Pasupati-Siva prototype is not alien to the R.V. as B Prakash shows.<sup>53</sup> Some examples are the three-headed god Trita, son of Tvastr (R.V. X.99.6) and Visvarupa (II.11.19). Tvastr as the creator is synonymous with Prajapati (X.82.2). There are other examples as well.<sup>54</sup>

One seal of a three-headed creature was found in Bet-Dwarka also. For Prakash, viewing things in triads is organic to the Vedic cultural ethos: the three Vedas; the triadic classification of the gods; the three fires; the triadic idea of nature, gods and life paralleled in the social structure of priests, warriors and husbandmen.<sup>55</sup>

In other ways too Prakash (and also Frawley among others) attempts to link the Vedic ethos with that represented on Indus seals.<sup>56</sup> There is high probability that such attempts are justified, given the proviso that they complement other evidences from Sanskrit texts and what is dug up by the archaeologist's spade.

### **CITIES**

It is curious that the Sanskritist M Witzel, despite his knowledge of recent developments in South Asian archaeology, can still speak of Indo-Aryan immigration, dismissing the view that "denies any immigration" with the words "currently fashionable". He dispenses with the question of Aryan autochthony by asserting that "as the R.V. does not speak of cities but only of ruins,...we may suppose that the Indo-Aryans...trickled in, tribe by tribe, and clan by clan, after 1900 BC."<sup>57</sup>

In fact the R.V. does speak of cities; some examples are: seven cities (vii.18.13), ninety-nine (viii.93.2), 100 stone cities (II.14.6).<sup>58</sup> For H D Trivedi the "massive forts and big cities like Lancashire as Marshall calls it" revealed in the IVC sites represent the high point of R.V. culture whose beginnings he suggests go back to a period prior to 3000 BC.<sup>59</sup>

### **DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD**

That Vedic and Indus peoples shared similar funerary rites is confirmed by post-mortem relics in IVC sites. While cremation was the usual method,<sup>60</sup> burials were also in vogue, practices mentioned in Vedic texts, and known generally among IES. These were complete, fractional and post-cremation burials. At times whole bodies were interred with "grave furniture" - pots, beads, bits of ivory or other objects of interest to the deceased.

In fractional burials bone fragments and ashes, put in small pots which in turn being placed in large urns, were mixed with animal bones, and buried near houses,<sup>61</sup> the ceramics were painted with animal, fish and other designs.<sup>62</sup>

### **TEMPLES AND ALTARS**

Vedic religion knew no temples but fire altars. The IVC sites confirm this position: absence of temples and presence of numerous fire altars, found also in Gujarat and Rajasthan. "As fire altars are the most typical feature of Vedic culture, such finds associate the Vedic with Harappan culture from the beginning."<sup>63</sup>

### **THE SVASTIKA**

Unfortunately Hitler's Nazi Party ruthlessly used the svastika, as the symbol of a ruthless bid for political power thus giving it a vicious image - an image this ancient sacred Aryan symbol hardly deserves. That it was found in large numbers in sites in the Indus and Kathiawad regions,<sup>64</sup> is proof of the Aryan identity of its users. It had made its way from India to West Asia, Egypt, Crete, Troy,<sup>65</sup> Greece<sup>66</sup> and Scandanavia.<sup>67</sup> In short, it was common to Eurasian IES.

### **R.V.'S SILENCE ON ARYAN INVASIONS**

The mere fact that the R.V. has no mention of the Aryans entering the Sapta-Sindhu (S.S.) area from any outside region is highly significant. It is hardly likely that they would lose all memory of their supposed prior home. Rather, the Rsis regarded S.S. "as their original home (devakrita-yoni or devanirmita-desa). Migrating peoples look back to the land of their origin for centuries."<sup>68</sup> The ancient Iranians, Egyptians, Sumerians provide illustrative examples.<sup>69</sup>

### **CONCLUSION**

Thus, in the light of the foregoing discussion the Aryan invasion theory can no longer be sustained. Rather, it is reasonable to hold that it was the Aryans who migrated from India to the various regions of Eurasia from pre-historic times.

### **THE LATER WEST ASIAN EXPANSIONS**

The Aryan expansions in regions west of the Indus coincide with the high point of the IVC. On the basis of Indus artefacts found during the 3rd millennium B C and later in W. Asia (Turkey), Mesopotamia, and Crete, R N Dandekar<sup>70</sup> maintains that, since the movement of goods and religious ideas, especially those associated with the Mother Goddess, was mainly from India to these areas, Indian influence there was not inconsiderable. However, he does not believe that Indian migrants were the culture-bearers to these regions. What is significant here is that it is during this same period and subsequently, that people of Indo-European stock suddenly announce their presence in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, a fact that surprised the West in 1915,<sup>71</sup> especially since they bore cultural and linguistic affinities mainly with the Aryans of India.

These facts led to divergences of opinion about the exact direction from which the IES came. Those upholding the theory of AIT in 1500BC reject any claim that India is the eventual source. Others such as M Winternitz, Jacobi, Hillebrandt and Pargiter believe that the migrations were from India much before 1500BC.<sup>72</sup> In their solution of the problem the first group of thinkers make out that a proto-Indo-Iranian continuum had split from the IES on the S.E. shores of the Caspian sea sometime in the 3rd millennium BC. Later it further split into the

### Proto-Aryan and Proto-Iranian groups.

While one part of the proto-Aryans scattered themselves in the Fertile Crescent from 2200BC to 1400BC. the other part, migrating with the Iranians, eventually settled in India, leaving their confreres in Persia before the latter had adopted the Zoroastrian faith around 600 BC.<sup>73</sup>

It is on the basis of this hypothesis that the protagonists of Aryan invasions into India seek to explain the similarities between the Indic elements in the Fertile Crescent and India. However the similarities are so striking that they cannot be so easily explained away on the basis of a cultural and linguistic development, so remarkably close to that found in the R.V. texts, that is said to have occurred sometime in the 3rd millennium in a hypothetical region outside India. It is remarkable that with the sole exception of the R.V. as earlier noted, nowhere else in the entire Eurasian continent exists any extant literary record of all those institutions and structures, secular and religious, usually associated with all IES. Moreover, the Sanskrit language itself has attained levels of sophistication that have no parallels with other Indo-European tongues. For example the remark by W Jones,<sup>74</sup> founder of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1796, about Sanskrit being "more perfect, more copious and more exquisitely refined" than Greek and Latin is well known.

The Aryan tribes in question in W. Asia are the Hittites (Khattas), Mitannis, Hyksos and the Kassites. Of the affinities between these tribes and the R.V. Aryans important are those represented by the culture of horse breeding and training, chariotry and religion. A brief examination of the above culture markers will show that there could be no question of their Vedic-India origin.

For instance, in a famous bilateral treaty 1400 BC between the Hittite king, Sippuliliamus and Dasarata, his Mittani counterpart, the latter solemnly invokes names of deities transparently similar to those of the R.V. texts: Mitra (Vedic Mitra), Aruna (Varuna), Indara (Indra) and Nasattiya (Nasatya).<sup>75</sup>

Again, Kikkuli, a Mittani, wrote a manual on horse training and

chariotry for the Hittite King, in which the numerals aika (eka), tera (tri), panza (panca), Satta (Sapta), Na (Nava) used in association with the number of turns vartana (Vartana), his horses made, clearly reflect Vedic affinities. Besides, words to describe the colour of horses babru (babhru: brown) parita (palita. pale grey) pinkara (pingala. pink. reddish) and the use of the term marya for warrior being the same for the Mittanis and the Vedic Aryans, constitute further proof of Indian origins.<sup>76</sup>

R N Dandekar,<sup>77</sup> who has his own views on the subject of Indo-European origins, can yet say: "The Mittanni tribes call themselves Harris, that is, Aryas...Their pig-tail, their religious symbols of SVASTIKA and inverted triangles, and their funeral customs clearly betray their IE - or, to be more precise, Aryan - origin".

It is noteworthy the above peculiarities are also shared by the Indus people which help to confirm their identification with the Aryans. The Hittites, whose Western Asian empire lasted some 600 years and who defeated the Egyptians under Ramesses II in the Battle of Kadesh (1286BC) also left a socio-religious legacy akin to the Vedic. They "probably had provinces in Africa, and even in Europe as far west as Italy."<sup>78</sup>

Whatever the nature of their European connection, some aspects of their civilisation such as the use of chariotry in warfare and cremation rites are remarkably similar to those of the Indians, Greeks, Trojans and Romans.<sup>79</sup>

For O.R. Gurney the Hittite art of government shows "evidence of a highly developed political conscience unique in the ancient world." According to A Kalyanaraman<sup>80</sup> many of the Hittite place names among them Assuwa (Asia of the Romans) Katpatuka (Greek Cappadocia), Samutra, Hayasa, Iswara and rivers such as Sehiriya, Murasandhya and Varuntha (Greek Orantes) bore Sanskrit labels. Also their earlier kings styled themselves Great Kings (Sarvabhoma) and used the title Tabbana (Sanskrit Tapanana) to signify their solar dynasty. Moreover "The Kheta kings also used the titles "hero" (Vikrama) and "Beloved



of the Gods (Devanampriya) as done generally in India. A dead king was always described as "having joined the gods", a phrase familiar to the Indians."

Remarking that the Hittite deities are often associated with animals in quite Indian fashion, H R Hall adds that it "may be a feature borrowed from the Aryan religion." Gurney<sup>81</sup> who was directly involved in archaeological research of the Hittites and the Mittanis says of the latter's introduction of chariotry:

"It created a revolution in the nature of warfare: hence forward speed was to be determining factor in the battle."

For him there is no doubt that the Mittanis hailed from India:

"Now we know...that the rulers of Mitanni worshipped Indo-Aryan deities...and their personal names betray a similar origin. Hence we must conclude that this Aryan clan, moving westwards, brought with them their special knowledge of horse-breeding, and that it was from them that the art was learnt by the peoples of Western Asia. It is significant that the names of Indian deities are found to form an element in the names of the Kassite rulers of Babylonia."<sup>82</sup>

Among the names of the Mittani rulers are Prassastar, Rtasmarā, Sangkshattri, Mathiraja, Viryasura, Purusha, Sataraja, Subandhu and Indrota. These leave no doubt as to their Indian origin.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps Celtic Ariovistus, and Old Germanic Ariobindus - names of chiefs - betray a similar Aryan heritage.<sup>84</sup> There is the correspondence between Germanic Mannus the "progenitor of mankind" and Vedic Manu. Also "Aryaman, a deification of the concept of Aryan-hood, may share a Celtic cognate with the Gaulish Ario-manus and Old Irish Airem."<sup>85</sup>

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