SAMVIDYA

ओम् भूर्भुवः स्वः ।
तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गोदेवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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CONTENTS

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THE SPIRITUAL IDEALISM OF RADHAKRISHNAN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO VEDANTA

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INTRODUCTION

It was during the nineteenth century that the attempt to reform Indian society, particularly the Hindu, began in earnest. Thanks are due chiefly to the pioneering spirit of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, hailed as the maker of modern India. He was followed by Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswathi and later in the twentieth century by Tagore, Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi and Radhakrishnan.

Despite their attempts, however there was much to be desired in terms of necessary reform. For many of the fundamental cultural values whose transmission had ensured the continuity of civilisation in India's historical past had all but disappeared. Rank superstition and moral degradation persisted even around 1926 when, for instance, at Oxford University Radhakrishnan was to say:

> "In the name of toleration we have carefully protected superstitious rites and customs. Even those who have a clear perception of religious values indulge in practices which are inconsistent with their professions on the comfortable assumption that superiority should not breed want of sympathy for those who are not up to the mark."[12]

Philosophy was virtually non-existent and was galvanised only through the British connection. As events were to prove, the British Raj, before whom Indian society lay politically prostrate, proved to be one of mixed blessings.

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In the last decades of the nineteenth century it was Swami Vivekananda, who clearly perceived that nothing short of a systematic overhaul of the anomalies in Indian culture would help resolve the social malaise.

His attempts were rooted chiefly in the philosophico -religious tradition of Advaita and his impact on the country was far greater than that of Roy.

Vivekananda's sentiment was shared by Radhakrishnan who acknowledged the former's influence over him.[3]

Radhakrishnan, basing himself on Advaita idealism, and drawing freely upon the philosophical idealism of the West as well as the primary spiritual inheritance of all traditions, like his illustrious predecessor was to strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts and minds of many in India and the West.

As a philosopher of religion he tackled such issues as religious faith, the relation between reason and faith, and concluded that mystical experience is the only logical counterpart of the faith in an ultimate spiritual destiny of man.
Also for him religion is not an intellectual assent to dogma nor is the interest of philosophy served by a mere rational theorization. If philosophy seeks the truth then a philosopher should want to know the truth he seeks. The value of philosophy lies in inner penetration, what Radhakrishnan calls "the exhibition of insights."

Radhakrishnan championed the cause of the Advaita Vedānta tradition since he believed that it has the necessary provision for the human longing for unitive experience, the immersion of the self into reality, thus quelling the disquiet caused by the clinging to the idea of a separate self. For instance:

> "In his theory of mokṣa", he states, "Rāmānuja does not do justice to the mystics who...hunger for becoming one with the supreme reality, [yearning] to burst through the barriers

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> of personality and merge...in the life and essence of the universe."[4]

Radhakrishnan has written copiously on both Indian and Western philosophy and religion but Indian thought looms larger in his works. However, he has studiously avoided any real reference to Islam. In all probability the presence of a large Muslim community in India must have rendered discussion on Islam a most sensitive issue. Probably he felt that Muslims would not take kindly to a Hindu's appraisal of their faith. For one who always sought universal harmony he felt it was the better part of wisdom to let well alone, after all, the Hindu and Muslim communities were engaged together in a life and death struggle against their common oppressor for over three decades till 1947.

THE OPEN-MINDEDNESS OF THE WEST

The liberal traditions of the West were another matter. Their rich philosophical legacy, quite independent of dogmatic theology and the scientific temper of the natural and social sciences, gave Radhakrishnan ample scope to manoeuvre his interpretations of the Western cultural ethos.[5] Besides, Western culture had itself become self-critical and the soul-searching had already grown apace, enough for some Western thinkers and many of the laity to look beyond their own cultural boundaries.[6] However in their appraisal of Indian culture, many in the West were not always sympathetic.

On the balance, he defended the best aspects of culture in the West and in India, and vehemently criticised the representatives of those vested interests in both, who were for him inimical to the humanitarian and spiritual goals and unity of mankind. Smarting at the comment of an unkind critic who stated that "India alone can save the world from disaster" he replied:

> "In my writings my main contention has been to make out that there is one perennial and universal philosophy which

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> is found in all lands and cultures, in the seers of the Upaniṣads and the Buddha, Plato and Plotinus, in Hillel and Philo, Jesus and Paul and the medieval mystics of Islam. It is this spirit that binds continents and unites the ages that can save us from the meaninglessness of the present situation and not any local variant of it which we find in the Indian tradition. It is absurd to speak of any Indian monopolies of philosophic wisdom."[7]

He is right when he denies that India holds an absolute monopoly of philosophic wisdom. Again, he is right when he says that mysticism in religion is evidenced in Christianity and Islam as well, for sainthood is a universal category. However, Radhakrishnan hardly disguises the fact that for him the essential orientation of Indian thought is nothing if not spiritual and rational and, more to the point, that, therefore it is superior to other cultures'.[8]

RADHAKRISHNAN'S LIFE

Radhakrishnan was born of Brahmin parents in 1888 near Madras. He had three daughters and a son. His interest in books grew from his childhood days and he himself was to write and lecture prolifically for over half a century.[9] He received his education in Christian missionary schools and colleges. He reminisces:

> "At an impressionable period of my life, I became familiar not only with the teaching of the New Testament, but also with the criticisms levelled by Christian missionaries on Hindu beliefs and practices. My pride as a Hindu roused by the enterprise of Swami Vivekananda was deeply hurt by the treatment accorded to Hinduism in missionary institutions."[10]

That missionary gentlemen helped mould his early career is borne out again in

> "My teachers in Christian missionary institutions... restored

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> for me the primordial situation in which all philosophy is born. They were teachers of philosophy, commentators, interpreters, apologists for the Christian way of thought and life, but were not in the strict sense of the term, seekers of truth."[11]

Here Radhakrishnan makes clear the cleavage between the Hindu and Christian views of religion. That religious experience is at the centre of Hindu doctrine and indeed that he himself had some share in it, is stated by him thus:

> "I cannot account for the fact that from the time I knew myself I have had firm faith in the reality of an unseen world behind the flux of phenomena, a world which we apprehend not with the senses."[12]

Writing about his commentaries on the Upaniṣads, the Gītā and the Brahma Sūtra he says: "my views are based on experience, authority and reflection."[13]

He gave up his teaching, begun at the age of twenty-one only when he became Vice President of India in 1952.[14]

It has been given to very few to make a singular mark in the sphere of philosophy and as a philosopher in the world of politics. Radhakrishnan held this unique position. However, his political career came only after India's independence. His participation in the freedom struggle did not reflect the active manner of politicians or freedom fighters, but he did voice his objections against the intransigence of his country's imperialistic masters through the press and academic forums.[15] His seven years service to UNESCO earned him its presidentship in 1952. He was ambassador to Moscow, Vice-President and President during Nehru's Prime Ministership. But he is best known as one of the greatest philosophers of religion of the twentieth century. Professor H J Muirhead describing him as a mediator between East and West adds:

> "He has the rare distinction of being equally versed in the

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> great European and the not less great Asiatic tradition which may be said to hold the solution between them of the spiritual wisdom of the world, and of thus speaking as philosophical bilinguilist upon it."[16]

It is plain from his works that he feels that the balance of "spiritual wisdom" is tipped in India's favour.[17]

While Gandhi was emblazoning the non-violent revolutionary trail in India Radhakrishnan was carrying the battle of ideas to the West. While Gandhi was struggling against the repressive forces of British colonialism and attempting to reform Indian society, Radhakrishnan was promoting the interests of philosophical idealism and mystical religion in Western academic forums.

The West duly recognised Radhakrishnan's talents by proffering him a teaching post at Oxford in 1936,

> "The...appointment of Sir S Radhakrishnan", wrote Paul Brunton, "to the newly founded... Chair of Eastern Philosophy at Oxford...stands in symbolic relation to our time as illustrating a trend which is creeping...across the Western world. Out of the once-slumbering land of India there comes this gifted man to teach its one time conquerors the ancient lore and wisdom of his own people."[18]

ŚAṄKARA AND RADHAKRISHNAN

There are essential metaphysical similarities in the systems of Śaṅkara and Radhakrishnan who are separated by some twelve centuries.

Ontologically their conceptions of the Absolute as the indeterminate, ineffable, impersonal reality, one without a second, and the relation between it and the space - time manifold with God midway between the two are strikingly similar. The theory of māyā to account for the

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lapse of pure Being, Brahman, into the phenomenal realm is the same in both. However, they differ widely in the manner of presentation of their points of emphasis as aspects of their philosophical world-views are different and not because their metaphysical frameworks are different.

In his time it was a matter of urgency with Śaṅkara that the transcendence of Brahman be saved and be made safe from the polemics of a whole host of divergent ontological claims. These claims purported either that a unitary pure spiritual Being did not exist or if it did it shared its reality with an equally real world. There was the claim also that spirit was more than one, with countless spirit selves inhabiting as many bodies or dwelling in inorganic matter as well.[19]

RADHAKRISHNAN AND THE MODERN PERIOD

Radhakrishnan like some of his illustrious Indian contemporaries, Tagore, Aurobindo, Gandhi and Nehru, belonged to a different order of events. He had lived during and after the two World Wars. The forces that had overtaken India were themselves global in character. Originating in Europe they had increasingly spread their influence world-wide. The forces were political, economic, scientific and cultural.

Radhakrishnan felt that while negative developments resulted through them there were also positive aspects to them which needed to be carefully nurtured and supported by the true spirit of philosophy and religion.[20] In philosophy he was opposed to those trends of it which made for increasing secularism.[21] In religion he distinguished two main tendencies which he calls the credal but dogmatic, and the credal but open or experiential.[22]
The following few instances give some idea of how he felt about some historical and cultural trends in the 1920's and the 1930's (a period which saw some of his most forceful convictions put forth in

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speeches and writings).

> "The west is passing through a new Renaissance due to the sudden entry into its consciousness of a whole new world of ideas...For the first time in the history of mankind, the consciousness of the unity of the world has dawned on us."[23]

> "And yet the sense that mankind must become a community", he continues, "is still a casual whim, a vague aspiration, not generally accepted as a conscious ideal or an urgent practical necessity moving us to feel the dignity of a common citizenship and the call of a common duty."[24]

Radhakrishnan notes that the sixth century B.C., the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages, and thence to modern times were periods of intense cultural changes.

> "None of these", he continues, "is comparable to the present tension and anxiety which are world wide in character and extend to every aspect of human life. We seem to feel that the end of one period of civilization is slowly drawing into sight."[25]

Radhakrishnan, quoting Professor E W Beatty, approves of his analysis of the causes of the first War.

> "The war which ended the greatest period of human progress came from our failure to control our worship of the material by loftier standards. Do not tell me that it was no more than the outcome of German greed of conquest; of British imperialism, of French militarism; or of capitalist lust of profits. Britain gave the world order and material civilisation. Germany and France adorned the world with art and music, enriched it with science and with letters. The war profits of capitalists were an incident - not the cause of the war. We must look deeper. The madness that plunged the world into the bloodshed and horror of the great war was a defect of the soul - not of the mind."[26]

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For Radhakrishnan the malady of mankind is "due to divisions in the human soul."[27]

> Furthermore his analysis of the modern crisis is that it is characterised by a fundamental agnosticism, anarchic individualism and material views of life.[28] He avers that the corrective lies in accepting that ethics must be rooted in "the universal nature of things."[29] That is, ethics ought to be grounded in metaphysics "in a philosophical conception of the relation between human conduct and ultimate reality...If we believe absurdities, we shall commit atrocities."[30]
>
> He takes issue with secular humanism, scientific materialism and "mystical nationalism" because the ethics they espouse "encourages a cynical subservience to nature and historical process."[31]
>
> As secularist philosophies of life they exalt the "self-conscious intellect, with its clear analysis and limited aims."[32] Because they deny the values of the transcendent and reject as spurious the intuitions of mysticism, they represent truncated views of the universe and man.
>
> "Faith in conceptual reason is the logical counterpart of the egoism which makes the selfish ego the deadliest foe of the soul."[33]

Radhakrishnan's conviction is that the values of true humanism are really spiritual ones. Thus he states that:

> "man stands before the shrine of his own mystery. He enters it the moment he becomes aware of his own eternity. Apart from eternity there is nothing that can, strictly speaking, be called human."[34]

In the emerging world order the Indian approach to the problem of

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the integration of personality can help negotiate the many difficulties, referred to above by Radhakrishnan in his inaugural address at Oxford, three years before the second War.

METAPHYSICS : THE ROLE OF ŚRUTI

Radhakrishnan is a Vedāntic traditionalist since the basis of his philosophical idealism derives both from the triple canon of the Vedānta as well as from the Advaita of Śaṅkara. His apologetic stance however is tempered by a strong critical outlook that is reflected throughout his philosophy, even in his interpretation of the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad-gītā and the Brahma-sūtra. For instance he says:

> "It is my endeavour to present a reasoned faith which deals justly with the old Indian tradition and the demands of modern thought."[35]

The difference between Śaṅkara and Radhakrishnan is that for Śaṅkara there can be no intuitive knowledge of Brahman unaided by prior faith in śruti; while for Radhakrishnan.

> "The Vedas contain truths which man could by the exercise of his own faculties discover, though it is to our advantage that they are revealed."[36]

For Śaṅkara the mahāvākyas, the great Upaniṣadic utterances, are an indispensable aid in the mystic process which should accompany the intellectual reflection on the distinction between the unreal and the real but for Radhakrishnan the formulas are sufficient though not necessary. This is a vital distinction inasmuch as it enables Radhakrishnan to enlarge the scope for universal mysticism, with which his writings and speeches are so replete. Thus this catholic outlook finds in his philosophy of religion a legitimate place for the claims of non-Vedāntin and non-Indian traditions of mysticism.

Radhakrishnan is in the "true line of descent", says D S Sarma,

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"from the ancient Hindu philosophers." However,

> "The only difference is that, while the ancient philosophers took their stand on what they termed scriptural revelation, the modern philosopher takes his stand on the religious experience of the saints, sages, and mystics belonging to various traditions all over the world.[37]

For Radhakrishnan the Upaniṣads are śruti or revealed literature and as such they are a part of the Veda. He has every confidence that the spiritual experiences recorded in the Upaniṣads are genuine discoveries of the truth of man and the world. The following are main arguments for the stand he takes to justify their authenticity and authority. Radhakrishnan is never in doubt that mysticism (often enough called religion by him) is a universal phenomenon and so a genuine possibility. This conviction is translated into a personal appeal to audiences everywhere to study the phenomenon in the light of their own powers of understanding. They may assess for themselves whether there is anything in it that is worthy of their attention and if convinced to practise it. His chief arguments, though based mainly on rational grounds, are not without the secondary support of inspired emotion that he states exists in mystical literature itself. This element of enthousiasmos, so full of resident power and spiritual permanence, he believes, is characteristic of not only mystical texts but religious texts in general. For him religious texts are often mixed up with mythology which however does not detract from the main metaphysical interest. For example, with regard to the Upaniṣads he says:

> "We must make a distinction between the message of the Upaniṣads and their mythology. The latter is liable to correction by advances in science."[38]

For Radhakrishnan, the Upaniṣads are the utterances of the sages who speak out of the fullness of their illumined experience.

"They are not reached by ordinary perception, inference or reflection, but seen by the seers...The sages are men of 'direct'

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vision...and the records of their experiences are the facts to be considered by any philosophy of religion."

For the Upaniṣadic seers truth is what is revealed in a "state of inspiration."

> "Truth is impersonal, apauruṣeya and eternal, nitya. Inspiration is a joint activity, of which man's contemplation and God's revelation are two sides...The dual significance of revelation, its subjective and objective character, is suggested here."[39]

HINDUISM AND VEDIC AUTHORITY

Radhakrishnan says that for the Hindu the quality of life is raised when life itself is raised to the divine plane. Religion for the Hindu is the "inward life of spirit."[40] The Hindu looks back to the Veda as the repository of wisdom and is the "name for the highest spiritual truth of which the human mind is capable."[41] Logical reasoning or systematic philosophy by themselves did not result in the experience of the truth but spiritual intuition, dṛṣṭi did. The seers envisioned the eternal truths by raising their life-spirit to the plane of the universal spirit. "When the Vedas are regarded as the highest authority, all that is meant is that the most exacting of all authorities is the authority of facts."[42]

THEORY OF THE WORLD

Radhakrishnan rejects Rāmānuja's formulation of the theory of the world and man. For Rāmānuja the world and souls are already a given as they are comprehended in the one Absolute, a "concrete organic whole", all of whose parts and elements "exist in and through a supreme principle which embodies itself in them."[43] Radhakrishnan criticises this view:

> "The world is not merely a viśeṣaṇa but has to do with the

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> nature of the supreme as well. It is the manifestation of the inner determination of the real. The admission of individual souls as coeternal with Brahman constitutes a limit. The infinitude of Brahman is compromised by the unconditioned infinitude of its constituent factors...An eternal relation between (Brahman and the souls), whether essential or accidental, will be an inexplicable mystery."[44]

For Radhakrishnan "the crux of all monism is the relation of the finite to the infinite. A system of finite reals cannot itself be infinite."[45] So Radhakrishnan takes up the question of the world's relation to the Absolute. Saying that the world's nature is contingent he asks:

> "Why does the world exist at all? To say that it is a mystery is perhaps true, but it can hardly be called an answer. No theory can be logically satisfactory since the question itself is not logically framed...We are using temporal terms with reference to an order which is essentially non-temporal."

He adds:

> "Time was with creation, and so the question of 'before' has no meaning. As to how the primal reality...can yet be the source and fount of all empirical being, we can only say that it is a mystery, māyā. If we still raise the question, our answers are bound to be riddled with difficulties."[46] Radhakrishnan does raise the question and on two fronts, with two perspectives in mind, the ontological and the ethical.

THE ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Radhakrishnan says that to raise the point of the why and the how is "utter nonsense", because logic which belongs to the realm of the finite, wishes but fails to know the purpose of the infinite. The

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question assumes that the unlimited manifests itself in the limited but this cannot be since the "unlimited would itself become limited." There can be no lapse of the perfect into the empirical as this is to contradict its absoluteness. "No lapse can come to a perfect being. No darkness can dwell in perfect light."[47]

In this attitude Radhakrishnan follows Śaṅkara, pointing out the logical indemonstrability of the relation between the One and the many. And this is one of the connotations of the term māyā. The other connotation of māyā for Radhakrishnan is to accept it as the principle of finitisation.

> "Through the exercise of this negative principle, the immutable seems to be spread out in the moving many... Māyā lets loose the Universal becoming. The real represents all that is positive in becoming. The things of the world ever struggle to shake off their individuality."[48]

Individuals do in fact reach back into pure being once māyā is overcome.

> "Māyā is prior to our intellect and independent of it. It is verily the generator of things and intellects, the immense potentiality of the whole world."[49]

Next Radhakrishnan states that just as becoming is a lapse from being, so is avidyā or ignorance a fall from vidyā or knowledge. Knowledge in the end triumphs.

> "To know the truth, to apprehend reality, we have to get rid of avidyā and its intellectual moulds which all crack the moment we try to force reality into them."[50]

THE ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Radhakrishnan finds it difficult to hold with Plato that creation is necessary because

> "God was not jealous and He wished to share His goodness

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> with others...Is the creation different from perfection or not? If it is not we have no creation but only repetition. If it is, in what sense is it so? Is it good or bad? If it is bad, then perfection has produced something imperfect. If it is good, then it is not new, for perfection by definition includes all that is good."[51]

Radhakrishnan's answer to the problem of good and evil is related to that of the process of becoming itself, for if there were not the world the problem would not arise. Radhakrishnan is persuaded by Śaṅkara's remorseless logic that Brahman as sole reality by virtue of its fullness of being, intelligence and bliss is sufficient by itself to have given rise to the universe. That is, no extraneous assistance and materials are necessary for the act of creation.

Radhakrishnan, though ceaselessly defending the merit of Śaṅkara's metaphysics for its provision of the extra-mental reality of the world yet was not fully satisfied.

> "Although Radhakrishnan is a follower of Śaṅkara, he does not hold strictly with the latter that the world is neither real nor unreal", writes Ruth Reyna. "He regards the world as a combination of Being and Non-Being, sat and asat, rather than neither being nor Non-Being as most Advaitins would hold."[52]

Radhakrishnan rests his metaphysical position on the two different accounts of ultimate reality, the impersonal and the personal, that he finds in the Upaniṣads. He confesses, moreover, that he cannot decide whether it is Śaṅkara's or Rāmānuja's views on the Absolute that are the 'final teaching of the parent gospel."[53] He declares:

> "The only intelligible reconciliation between two such apparently discordant notes seems to be through the device of a duality of standpoints."[54]

He finds that on the intuition of reality there is "nothing but the Absolute, and the world is only the absolute"; so the problem of

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relating both does not arise. But from the human end, through the logical categories, "we tend to view the absolute as a whole which binds together the different elements in it."[55]

In effect he marries the two concepts of the "Supreme as the Immutable and the Unthinkable" and of the Supreme as "Lord of the universe."[56] Radhakrishnan emphasized the divine immanence. For Śaṅkara the world and man are accidental appearances but for Radhakrishnan they are less real than the Absolute.[57] The latter brings the ineffable reality nearer imagination and sensibilities of man by playing down the featureless negative abstractions of some Upaniṣads and Śaṅkara. The danger in the negative descriptions lies in the tendency to reduce the ultimate to "bare existence which is absolute vacuity."[58]

So he draws attention to the fact that the "Transcendent is incomprehensible not because it is empty but because it is full (pūrṇam)."[59] Not only is it the source of beings, the intellectual principle, the perceiving mind, life and body but indwells them all.[60] When man regards the spiritual principle, the ātman within him, he regards it as his own innermost self and not the "wholly other". Therefore he states that "it is wrong to regard human nature as its very self when it is least inspired and not its true self when it is most."[61]

Human thought, will and love however much they are mixed up with duality, tension and strain, falling therefore short of the "fullness of the divine", are representations in time-space of the Supreme, whose nature is reality (sat), awareness (cit) and freedom (ānanda). "Being, truth and freedom are distinguished in the divine but not divided."[62]

As man is caught up in his earthly adventures he yet feels, though only vaguely and dimly, the divine presence. If that were not so we would not be able to say even that it is 'wholly other'. "The consubtantiabity of the spirit in man and God is the conviction fundamental to all spiritual wisdom."[63]

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BRAHMAN AND ĪŚVARA

Like Śaṅkara Radhakrishnan recognizes that Brahman is the sole cause of the world, both material and efficient. If there were a second ultimate category

> "it would limit the nature of Brahman, but if no second is posited, the explanation of the world becomes difficult. The only way is through the recognition of a saguṇa Brahman or changing Brahman, an Īśvara. The primal unity goes out of itself and produces a manifestation relatively independent of it. The pure, Absolute becomes the personal Lord, the principle of being in the universe binding all things to each other in binding them to himself."[64]

This view is based on Śaṅkara's ontology. Radhakrishnan approaches the problem of the world also from an ethical viewpoint. Mystics perceive harmony and order in the universe and are themselves made whole, freed from the fragmentary nature of their existence. The Upaniṣadic mystics, Eckhart and George Fox "ask us to learn to see all things in the universal spirit."

Radhakrishnan goes on to state that the pragmatically inclined dismiss spiritual experience as a "mere dream" and seek solace in practical life, "so deep seems to be the division between them." The thoughtful, he says, who have faith in the universe construct through intellect an organic vision of things. While this is good utter conviction comes only via mystical experience when the world of ordinary experience is seen as a "feeble representation of the perfect world."[65]

For Radhakrishnan Īśvara is the Absolute confronting the principle of asat, non-being, that is gestated from it (the process being a mystery). He explains asat in the following way.

> "When non-being or asat is said to be the root of existence,

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> asat does not mean absolute non-existence but only prior or antecedent non-existence or potential existence. The world is non-existence before its production."[66]

When the force of asat opposes Brahman Īśvara is the result. Īśvara himself is a self-conscious individual and what he is conscious of is the mental and vital self of man (manas and prāṇa) and the totality of such selves is Hiraṇyagarbha. The latter is the cosmic intelligence, the first born son of God, Īśvara, "having for his vehicle the totality of subtle bodies."[67] From out this cosmic intelligence there is the translation or evolution of five gross physical elements which enter into the structure of the universe. This is called virāṭ, the cosmos. Human bodies as well as bodies of living creatures are formed from virāṭ.

The silent witness of the entire process is Brahman. It is called Brahman also when it contemplates the cosmos and, ātman, when it contemplates the subtle bodies of creatures. If the cosmos is intelligent ordering, by the push of spirit, is it pre-determined, programmed to operate in clockwork precision? Radhakrishnan answers this question in the negative. The naturalistic theory of evolution is unacceptable. Matter, life, mind, intelligence each act on the other but do not derive from each other. Matter does not produce life but the evolution of life is produced "by the working of a new life-principle which uses the conditions of matter for the production of life."[68]

> "Life is not the mechanical resultant of the antecedent co-ordination of material forces, but it is what is now called an emergent."[69]

As the result cannot be anticipated "there is an element of the incalculable." Life organises itself in matter which obviously proves a reciprocal relationship between them. In a sense matter aspires for life. Life in turn aspires to be instinct with mind, which organises itself with living matter. Finally "intelligence qualifies the mental living creature."[70]

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Radhakrishnan goes on to state that nature works according to its fundamental intention because it is essentially the instrument of the Supreme Being. That meaningless chance is ruled out is shown by the fact that the theory of evolution espoused by science takes into account the principle of the availability of proper conditions, which suggests purpose.

> "By interpreting the fragmentary relics of far remote times science tells us how this earth...was gradually adapted to be a place where life could develop,...and animal consciousness arose...until man with self-conscious reason appeared on the scene."[71]

The presence of "spiritual men like the Buddha, Socrates, Jesus make out that man has to be transcended by God-man."[72]

There is a gradual evolution of matter, life, mind and intelligence forces. The novelty is in the arrangement which cannot be attributed to the life-less material principle.

> "The explanation of a thing is to be sought in what is above it in the scale of existence and value and not below it."[73]

The onward mobility is possible because of inter-reciprocal conditions within the empirical series, all of which provide the form for the spirit to actualise its purpose.

> "The eternal is the origin of the actual and its nisus to improvement. To think of it as utterly transcendent or as a future possibility is to miss its incidence in the actual. We cannot miss the primordiality of the Supreme."[74]

Radhakrishnan says that if the "world is a cosmos and not an amorphous uncertainty it is due to the oversight of God." [75] That the world has meaning is because of its rootedness in spirit. Creation represents the descent of the divine and finally moves upward towards the divine. Both movements are the free expression of the Absolute spirit.

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THE THEORY OF AVATĀRA

In his endorsement of the theory of divine incarnation on earth as expressed in the Gītā, Radhakrishnan accepts that God shows a serious interest in His creation. He also points out that there is another kind of significance that is attached to the doctrine as well. That is he says that besides God's descent there is the other "stress on the eternal avatāra, the God in man, the Divine consciousness always present in the human being."

> "The two views reflect the transcendent and the immanent aspects of the Divine and are not to be regarded as incompatible with each other. The teacher who is interested in the spiritual illumination of the human race, speaks from the depths of the Divine in him."[76]

That Radhakrishnan, himself, interested in the spiritual welfare of mankind, specifically uses terms like "world fellowship",[77] saints as "the forerunners of the human race, and the kingdom of spirit."[78] He reinforces the Hindu position with regard to the concept of avatāra as a recurring occurrence.

> "The idea of one unique revelation is hardly consistent with our present views of the universe. It is inconceivable that the Supreme is concerned only with one part of one of the smallest of planets."[79]

The metaphysical distinction between ordinary individuals and that of God's incarnation lies in the fact that God is self-conscious being, while individuals represent a veiled manifestation being shrouded in ignorance.

There is philosophical justification for the incarnation principle.

> "If the Infinite God is manifested in finite existence throughout time, then Its special manifestation at one given moment and through the assumption of one single human nature is but the free fulfilment of that same movement by which the Divine plenitude freely fulfils itself and inclines

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> towards the finite. It does not raise any fresh problem apart from that of creation. If a human organism can be made in the image of God, if new patterns can be woven into the stuff of repetitive energy, if eternity can be incorporated in these ways into succession, then the Divine Reality can express His absolute mode of being in and through a completely human organism."[80]

The Gītā, however, whose metaphysics is based on Upaniṣadic thought, (the Upaniṣads themselves do not espouse such a doctrine) have added this novelty. That this addition is not really arbitrary or an expedient measure to enhance the interests of theism is the conviction of Radhakrishnan when he says that the "teacher speaks from the Divine in him." The strong reason for the necessity of the avatāra episodes in Radhakrishnan's view is:

> "God has granted us free will. Whenever by the abuse of freedom unrighteousness increases and the world gets stuck in a rut, He creates Himself to lift the world from out of its rut and set it on new tracks."[81]

RADHAKRISHNAN'S IDEALIST VIEW OF LIFE

Radhakrishnan as an idealist espoused values that transcended those of a mere empirical practicality. This is not to say that for him idealistic values spurn earthly values, but they contain the latter at first, only to finally yield their place when the supreme value, moksa, is attained. It is not an instance of a concession to earthly morality, rather his whole approach to life and living is an integrationist one. His philosophy embraces the concept of integral experience within which pragmatism has its character reappraised and reaffirmed in the light of a new perspective of a spiritual vision of things.

> "Life is a supreme good and offers the possibility of happiness to every one"; but to be truly happy man is to live for the "eternal values of spirit, truth, and goodness",

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> and not selfishly for that would be to "miscarry the purpose of creation."[82]

His idealism, then, tends towards an ultimate spiritual direction and leads to his fundamental position of philosophy of religion.

> "Human history is not a series of secular happenings. Those who look at it from the outside are carried away by the wars and battles, the economic disorders and the political upheavals, but below in the depths is to be found the truly majestic drama, the tension between the limited effort of man and the sovereign purpose of the universe."[83]

It is this sovereign purpose that he means by an idealist view of life. The last five words are in fact the title of his lectures given at the University of Manchester (1929-1930).

Radhakrishnan defines idealism as the essential principle involved in the question "what is the idea"? which has reference to meaning and purpose. He states:

> "An idealist view finds that the universe has meaning, has value. This idea or value is the operative creative force. Ideal values are the dynamic forces, the driving power of the universe. The world is intelligible only as a system of ends."[84]

The idealist view has many metaphysical presuppositions but they are products of the same spirit and has had a continuous history.

> "The fountain - heads of the Vedas, including the Upaniṣads, in the East and Socrates and Plato in the West, set forth this creed in broad and flexible terms."[85]

The highest value is inseparable from the truly real, the Absolute.

Radhakrishnan finds that in the schools of idealism an ultimate connection of value and reality is maintained.

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The clue to Radhakrishnan's philosophy of religion is in his definition of idealism which concerns the ultimate nature of reality and its relation to man. It is man's response to the ultimate, however expressed, that is important. There is the way of philosophy which with its scientific spirit probes into the nature of things; but this is true only of those philosophies that are transcendentally motivated and this does not mean that they are necessarily liberation-oriented. Obviously for Radhakrishnan such an attitude in philosophy stops short of the mokṣa ideal of India but the philosophical endeavour itself is not superfluous, for he says:

> "The impulse that compels us to raise the question of the true, the divine, is itself divine.[86]

For him philosophy must search the truth which is universal. Like science the truth it seeks transcends cultural and geographical limits.[87] When philosophy is not moved to find out the secret springs of being then it has abdicated its true function. This kind of philosophy is infected by the negativity of scientific self-sufficiency and logical empiricism:

> "We pretend that the world we comprehend in sterilised sobriety is the only world there is. Religion is being slowly edged out of existence."[88]

For Radhakrishnan philosophy of religion attempts a reasoned solution of the religious problem. Just as science studies the facts of the world in an impartial manner so philosophy of religion must build a theory of religion from the data of religious tradition and experience.

Radhakrishnan distinguishes between imagination of God and the genuine experience of God. The former concept is on the same order with speculative theology since they share the idea of God which is subjectively conceptualised but not experienced.[89] (He uses

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the words God and Absolute to suit different contexts; they are either identified at times or distinguished). Both concepts cannot serve as illustrations of philosophy of religion, nor also can dogmatic theology. He gives the following definition:

> "Philosophy of religion as distinct from dogmatic theology refuses to accept any restricted basis but takes its stand on experience as wide as human nature itself. It rejects the high a priori road of speculative theology and the apologetic method of dogmatic theology and adopts a scientific view of religious experience and examines with detachment and impartiality the spiritual inheritance of men of all creeds and of none. Such an examination of the claims and contents of religious consciousness...has in it the promise of a spiritual idealism which is opposed to the disintegrating forces of scientific naturalism on the one hand and religious dogmatism on the other."[90]

Under religious dogmatism he includes both the Indian (but qualifiedly) and the Prophetic Semitic traditions. Both varieties are religions of revelation inasmuch as the religious content is first revealed and then reported and passed on as a tradition with a "halo of sanctity" attached to it.

It becomes obligatory for the traditionalist theologian to defend the revealed content or dogma. He has "freedom only within limits but he should always confirm the dogmas."[91] The traditionalist does not therefore form a view of the spiritual reality or truth without reference to scripture. If scripture speaks of the Absolute or God then truth is the Absolute or God; if scripture is silent on the nature of the transcendent then truth is said to be indescribable, (the burden of the Upanisads); or the truth is nirvāṇa. He distinguishes between two kinds of religious traditions. One of them he calls variously the prophetic, historical, credal or closed which emphasize the object. The other he describes as "open religion" (a concept of H Bergson), mystical, experiential.[92]

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For the purpose of philosophy of religion both types furnish data which are examined for the nature of their contents. All religious experiences are authentic though there are qualitative differences among them, just as in art there is the difference between "Beethoven and a brass-voiced beggar, Shakespeare and a clever undergraduate versifier."[93]

THE MYSTICAL TRADITION

Radhakrishnan's idealistic world-view which is fundamental to his philosophy of religion has been elaborately treated when he constantly emphasizes the mystical heritage of humanity. Many of his essential views in this regard have already figured in the article thus far.

Spatial constraints allow merely a cursory examination of his main views on the mystical tradition, which runs like a scarlet thread throughout his writings.

For him "all religions owe their inspiration to the personal insights of their prophet founders."[94] This statement reveals that the Vedic seers, the Buddha, Moses, Jeremiah and Jesus are all prophets.[95] For Radhakrishnan if the prophetic truths are inspired it is because they issue from spiritual intuition or mystical experience. The prophet is the seer who is able to discern the eternal truths by focusing intensely on the ultimate reality whether conceived as the indeterminate Absolute or as God as perfect personality. Even the Buddha, states Radhakrishnan, bears witness to the ineffable Absolute. The Buddha's abstraction of nirvāṇa is a philosophical interpretation conceived in negative terms; but the primary fact is the spiritual consciousness. The special dogmatic sense in which the respective acolytes or the theologian-defenders of non-Hindu faiths understand their own traditions is thus denied.

The authenticity of the mystical contents of the Upaniṣads he does

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not doubt for other religious traditions also speak of similar experiences. In fact he avows that the Upaniṣadic revelations, because they "start from and return to an experimental basis as wide as human nature itself", have a universality of outlook which can serve as the standard formula for mystical religion. His hand is further strengthened, he believes, by the fact that mysticism, which for him is the only valid criterion for religious experience, is found reported in all religions, including the mystery religions and in philosophical literature such as that of the early Greek world.

When he blurs the distinctions between the Semitic and other religions his aim is to promote the spiritual interests of humanity. By this he means that man is quite capable of having mystical experience but the Semitic legacies prevent him from having it.[96] Besides, each of them claim the truth and offer a specific way of salvation which only increases the spirit of competitiveness and enmity.[97]

Again even within the "closed" religions there is evidence of mysticism.

For Radhakrishnan man can only be really free when experiencing the transcendent.

> "His evolution is a constant self-transcending until he reaches his potential and ultimate nature which the appearances of life conceal or inadequately express. We are not, through this process, abolishing our individuality but transforming it into a conscious term of the universal being, an utterance of the transcendent divine. The instinctive and the intellectual both attain their fruition in the spiritual personality."[98]

When man passes from his freedom to choose good or evil to the higher freedom he can burst the circle of nature.[99]

Ceṣṭa or effort alters the flow of karma either within saṁsāra or from

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it and daiva or fate is the divine power that modifies the work and disposes of its fruits in the shape of act and its reward. The control of rajas and tamas by sattva leads eventually to freedom from nature which does not absolutely determine. Karma is a condition, not a destiny. The individual soul which is in nature yet being Para Prakṛti (higher nature) can rise above apara Prakṛti (lower nature).[100]

The effort is in the longing for perfection, in withdrawing the soul from outward events and concentrating inwardly. "There breaks upon man an experience, secret, strange and wondrous, which quickens within him, lays hold on him, and becomes his very being."[101]

The Liberated become centres of action; they teach others the way to perfection.[102]

Radhakrishnan gives the example of Socrates who is made by Plato to say that he is "divinely appointed" to teach. In fact he gives several examples from all traditions. The redeemed have work to do as long as there are other souls still in ignorance.

When all the souls are liberated the cosmic scheme ceases. Since the Absolute is infinite there are other infinite possibilities for a fresh creation, not necessarily like the present one.

CONCLUSION

Though the forces of economics and politics, and science and technology have brought distant countries together yet Radhakrishnan holds that attempts to achieve human unity through external means will prove abortive because they fail to engender genuine feelings of love and charity to all.

It is only a sound philosophy of religion which holds mystical experience and the moral endeavour that leads up to it that can give

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back to mankind its soul.[103] This soul is rapidly dissolving in a world disintegrating in the wake of increasing militarism because of man's "worship of abstractions of race, nation, empire."[104]

Radhakrishnan proposes that if East and West are to have a meaningful relationship then the best of what both have to offer should become the common inheritance of all peoples.

> "The fundamental insights of Eastern religions...The contributions of ancient Greece, of the Roman Empire, of Renaissance Italy...are a part of the heritage of humanity. In the life of mind and spirit we cannot afford to display a mood of provincialism."[105]

NOTES

The following works of Radhakrishnan are abbreviated as indicated:

Radhakrishnan Reader	R R
Eastern Religions and Western Thought	E R
An Idealist View of Life	I D
The Bhagavad-gītā	B G R
The Principal Upaniṣads	P U
Indian Philosophy Vol I	I P I
Indian Philosophy Vol II	I P II

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1 R R, p 143.
2 R R, p 143.
3 ibid, p 4.
4 I P II, p 711.
5 Radhakrishnan Centenary Volume, pp 206-7.
6 I D, p 82.
7 op cit. p 197.
8 R R, p 134.
9 op cit.
10 R R, p 4.
11 ibid, p 21.
12 ibid, p 3.
13 ibid, p 173.
14 Radhakrishnan, A Biography, p 250.
15 ibid, p 32.
16 R R, p 21.
17 E R., pp 115-250.
18 P Brunton, Indian Philosophy and Modern Culture, p 7.
19 R R, p 620.
20 ibid, p 19.
21 I D, p 52.
22 E R, p 63; p 21.
23 ibid, p 115.
24 ibid, p 2.
25 ibid, p 2.
26 S Radhakrishnan, East and West, pp 11-12.
27 E R, p 2.
28 E R, p 48.
29 E R, p 82.
30 E R, p 80.
31 E R, p 80.
32 E R, p 25.
33 E R, p 25.

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34 E R, p 81.
35 R R, p 271.
36 I P II, p 518.
37 Sarma D S, Hinduism Through the Ages, p 233.
38 P U, p 22.
39 ibid, p 23.
40 I D, p 89.
41 ibid, p 89.
42 ibid, p 90.
43 I P II, p 716.
44 ibid.
45 ibid, p 715.
46 E R, p 90.
47 I P I, p 34.
48 ibid, p 35.
49 ibid.
50 ibid, p 36.
51 E R, p 90.
52 Reyna, R, The Concept of Maya, p 52.
53 I P I, p 675.
54 ibid.
55 ibid.
56 B G R, p 23.
57 E R, p 128.
58 I D, p 102, p 106.
59 E R, p 128.
60 P U, p 59, p 450.
61 I D, p 106.
62 ibid, p 102.
63 I D, p 103.
64 I P II, pp 555-6.
65 I D, p 110.
66 P U, p 448.
67 P U, p 58.
68 ibid.

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69 ibid.
70 ibid.
71 ibid.
72 ibid.
73 ibid.
74 ibid.
75 B G R, p 35.
76 B G R, p 34.
77 E R p 57.
78 ibid.
79 B G R, p 34.
80 ibid.
81 ibid.
82 E R, p 46.
83 ibid. p 1.
84 I D, p 15.
85 ibid, p 16.
86 E R, p 22.
87 R R, p 269.
88 ibid. p 95.
89 I D, p 86.
90 I D, p 87.
91 ibid.
92 E R, p 21, p 63.
93 I D, p 183, E R p 64.
94 I D, p 89.
95 ibid, p 89.
96 E R, pp 8; 59; I D 79-82.
97 E R, p 287.
98 ibid, p 37.
99 B G R, p 47.
100 ibid, p 48.
101 E R, p 22.
102 I D, p 112-115.
103 I D, p 87.

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104 E R, p 113.
105 ibid, viii preface.

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THE IMPACT OF MITRA AND VARUṆA ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ŚŪNYATĀ IN BUDDHISM

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Recent published work in Western post-structuralist theory (Coward 1990, Taylor 1993) has argued that links can be mae between the notion of śūnyatā as expressed by certain Mahāyāna scholars, such as Nāgārjuna, with Western post-structuralism. These books and articles argue that Buddhist philosophy and, in particular, the notion of impermanence and insubstantiality, as established by the Buddha and developed by philosophers such as Nāgārjuna and Keiji Nishitani with use of the notion of sunyata, argue points very similar to post-structuralist concepts such as difference and intertextuality. Coward for instance, argues that both Nāgārjuna and Derrida could be seen to utilise language in order to realise the interdependence and non-essential character of discrete units of reality (Coward 1990, 144).

I maintain that comparisons like these made by Western scholars are exciting in that they do allude to elements of parity, I will argue, however, that it is dangerous to compare terms such as sunyata without setting them firmly within their original context. The problem with applying a cross-cultural comparison to Indian philosophy is that it underplays the importance of history and tradition. For example, sunyata is predominantly a Buddhist term that developed significance in the Northern School. In order to properly understand the term one needs to view it within the Indian world-view from which it emerged. The understanding of voidness or Śūnyatā, I maintain, can be traced

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back to the Vedic gods Mitra and Varuṇa. I suggest that the Buddha's criticism of Vedic culture was social and political, but his philosophy was always deeply connected to the Vedic world-view even though his teaching was grounded in an insubstantial view of reality which contrasts with substantialistic Vedic knowledge. In this light I will suggest that P T Raju (1985) is right when he calls Buddhism a protestant form of Vedic religion. He draws attention to the fact that the emergence of Buddhism, like Jainism, was a movement or sect within the same Ārya Dharma religion, thus emphasising the indelible Āryan influence on the non-Vedic Indian philosophical system (147 : 1985). It is also interesting to note that it was Brahma, the prominent Hindu god, who convinced Shukyamuni to take his message to the world. These instances reveal the complex relationship which early Buddhism had with Vedic belief.

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory, which is developed on the lines of Frueds concept of the unconscious, can assist in understanding this dynamic in Buddhism at that time. He identifies two forces in the hermeneutical process, the first tends to gravitate towards the archaic or the past while the other moves towards the apocalyptic or the future. The archaic element represents the repressed unconscious forces which disrupt the conscious mind's attempts to construct a coherent and dominant ideology with the result of rendering its veneer of rationality full of gaps and lacunae (Ricoeur 1974 : 177 & 118). If this Freudian framework is translated into the Buddha's context, more clarity can be obtained in understanding his rejection of Vedic religion while his discourse still reflects traces vedic philosophy.

These persistent influences from the past were compounded by the crisis after his death that Buddhism found itself in since there was a vacuum at the head of the movement which had the effect of gradually re-Hinduising the religion (Jennings 1948). Similarly Vedic philosophy, I aver, can be detected in

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way of understanding psychology and reality wherein there is a silent inexpressible realm and a cognitive realm. This psychological formulation found in both the Vedic hymns and Nāgārjuna's Mādyamika philosophy suggests that both portray an indelibly Indian way of seeing reality.

In 1948 Jennings showed how Buddhism became gradually re-Hinduised after the death of the Buddha by becoming influenced by orthodox philosophies like Vaiśeṣheka and Sāṁkya, particularly in the Abhidharma (1948 : lx-lxiv). I will argue that what Jennings delineated about early Buddhism with regard to Hinduism can in a similar manner, be shown in the Northern School. I do not, however, suggest a process of re-Hinduization but rather forward the concept of a heterotopic Indian landscape where contesting Buddhist and Hindu philosophies existed in the same Indian epistemological setting.

Heterotopia is a term that Michel Foucault (1958) developed to describe the complex and spectural nature of knowledge and accounts for the fact that it is very difficult to systematise units of knowledge into near categories. He writes that heterotopias "are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter and tangle common names (1985 : xvii-xviii)". He contrasts heterotopia with utopia which he characterises as an "untroubled, honomegous, fantastic landscape." (1985 : xviii)

Recently Buddhologists have employed this concept (Cohen 1995, Eckel 1992). Cohen maintains that the distinction between Hinayana and Mahayana communities between 462 and 480 CE, in Ajanta, India, is difficult to maintain because remnants of their cave dwellings depict both Hinayāna and Mahāyāna icons. He argues that these categories are sustained by academics but as he shows the degree of 'see page'[1] between categories makes them difficult to sustain. Eckle (1992) also uses the concept of

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heterotopia to describe the paradoxical relationship Buddhist relics convey in that they simultaneously suggest the Buddha's presence and absence. This difficulty in identifying the meaning of Buddhists relics, although rather awkwardly in Eckle's own admission, encapsulates the tension inherent in the Foucauldian term (1992 : 63).

In the same way, I argue, that it is difficult to draw neat conceptual distinctions between Vedic and Buddhist philosophies. A useful term which captures the Indian view which I am attempting to capture is milieu because its loose demarcation allows for 'seepage' between categories. So by extracting a term like sunyata from its own heterotopic milieu and comparing it to modern French philosophy, the danger is that subtleties of meaning could be lost because certain atypical but necessary relationships would not be depicted.

It is, therefore, my contention that the study of Buddhism has to be historical and contextual. In this regard I find Gadamer's hermeneutical theory very useful (1975). He utilizes the theory of the hermeneutic circle, as devised by Heidegger, who maintains that reading always occurs within a region between previous interpenetrations and in the reader's historical moment, to attempt to re-historicize interpretation. My point is, therefore, not that one should not make comparisons between Western philosophy and Eastern thought, but rather that interpretation must carry with it the element of tradition and history.

Gadamer makes the point that the act of interpreting takes place between the two poles of the reader's expectation of tradition when confronting the text and the subject's entrapment within time (1975 : 236-237). Hermeneutics is, according to him, the attempt to harmonize the present with the past (1975 : 26). But it is a mistake to ignore the fact that we are always in a tradition (1975 : 259). The important feature for me here is that the hermeneutic process occurs within an intermediary area between

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the past and the present (1975 : 263). This stands in contrast to Foucault's (1992) writings on tradition, which argue for an ideological position, where tradition relates to the powers which it serves and the hermeneutical consensus. For Foucault, "true historic thought must take account of its own historicity" (1992 : 267), thereby emphasising the ideological powers that construct historical narratives. The tendency to suspect the integrity of tradition in Foucault (for example), I maintain, tends to vitiate the importance of history even though this was not what Foucault had at all intended. Indeed, the disregarding of tradition, I believe, has led to an historical tendency in deconstructive theorist such as Taylor (1993). In his book Nots, Taylor makes reference to Nagarjuna while describing Keiji Nishitani's circuminsession theory, by arguing that Nishitani "reads Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world through Nagarjuna's notion of co-dependent origination" (1992 : 66). The problem with such a statement is that it establishes a connection between twentieth-century Zen with second century Mādhyamika when there is no evidence, if we agree with Robert Thurman, for such a connection (in Unno 1989 : xx). Such a statement not only suggests poor research but also homogenises the understanding of sunyata, whereas, in fact, Nishitani and Nāgārjuna have very different sense of the notion. For Nāgārjuna, śūnyatā is a method which ensures that concepts and phenomena are not perceived as containing 'own-being'. For Nishitani, on the other hand, sunyata is an absolute (for Nāgārjuna is must be relative) because it is śūnyatā or pure being that the self returns to in its own home-ground (1982 : 248).

I propose that understanding śūnyatā, therefore, requires an understanding of the intellectual milieu from which it emerged. This includes seminal Mahāyānic texts such as The Heart Sūtra and mūlamādyamikakārikā, but in addition, I maintain, the Rig Veda needs to be considered. More specifically, the Mitra and Varuṇa hymns. In order to show the possible importance of tradition on a term like śūnyatā, I will offer one interpretation of

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the Vedic gods Mitra and Varuṇa by Sri Aurobindo (1993) to suggest the importance of a contextually based understanding of śūnyatā.[2] Although the election of Aurobindo's interpretation of these Hymns may appear to be a curious choice given his own agenda being one of substantiating his own mystical metaphysical system, his analysis of these hymns is strongly influenced by Swami Dayananda Saraswati's translation and commentary of the Rig Veda.

Dayananda's interprets the Rig Veda monotheistically. According to him the Vedic gods are workings of the same deity. This interpretation is in opposition to, what Aurobindo refers to as 'European scholars', I suspect he is implying people like Alfred Hillebrandt (Hillebrandt : 1981) and two Indian approaches emanating from Sāyaṇa and Yāska. These opposing interpretations to Aurobindo's have a common theme that Vedic religion was naturalistic and indeed barbaric, presumable because it included the slaying of animals in its sacrificial practices (Aurobindo 1972 : 1-26).

By contrast, Aurobindo interprets the language of the Rig Veda to operate with a "multi-significance of roots' (1972 : 29). Root sounds of words are created by the nervous system as reactions to experiences. These roots sounds are non-conceptual and relate to similar experiences which correspond to families to families of stimuli. Words may, therefore, refer to different objects of experience which are linked to four cosmic divisions or vyāhriti, so that words refer simultaneously to four different levels of cosmic orders. The Vedas follow a rigid symbolic structure of four cosmic division or vyāhritis - earth, middle region, heaven and the greater Heaven. The latter world is crucial to our discussion as it implies wideness, vastness or vast Truth (bṛhad ṛtam). So for instance, the word ghṛta meaning clarified butter is consistently used in connection with references to thought and mind (1972 : 41). In order to understand such relationship the root sound must be understood to convey a particular and not a

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concept.

The particular hymn of interest in this paper is Rig Veda 1.2. According to Aurobindo the psychological interpretation of Vedic hymns requires that the psychological functions for each of the god's remains coherent through out the hymn (1972 : 31). Following the first hymn the focus shifts from agni to the four gods Indra, Väyu, Mitra and Varuṇa. These four gods are paired as follows; Indra- Väyu and Mitra - Varuṇa. These two pairs are linked because they function respectively as units. Their role is to clear away obstacles and to establish psychological spaciousness. Both are names for the sun and perform different functions pertaining to the sun, Mitra is the heat which evaporates away the obstacles and makes way for the spaciousness of Varuṇa (Trikha 1981 : 41). Sri Aurobindo has interpreted these gods as veiled psychological knowledge concealed by "material figures and symbols" (1993 : 6). The gods Mitra and Varuṇa, according to Sri Aurobindo, are therefore, psychological conditions. They are connected to other symbolised psychological co-ordinates like; ṛtam, bṛhat and urukshaya krau. Bṛhat means wide and vast and is either used to describe the world or the place of Truth -consciousness or ṛtam (Dayananda Sarawati 1974 : v.8). Bṛhat, in other words, is the home of Truth. Rtam is the vision or revelation gained in the state of Truth-consciousness (Aurobindo 1993 : 66). In this psychological region of vastness (urukshya) Mitra and Varuṇa can operate at a very subtle but powerful level of discernment, according to Aurobindo, which is known as Dakshiṇa (v.9). Mitra and Varuṇa, therefore, function to develop an unobstructed mind and then to bring to maturity the ability to think in this state of consciousness.

Knowledge occurs, however, on two tiers. There is a sphere of intellect and thought power which was represented by the gods Indra and Vāyu, and a sphere of vastness which was represented by Mitra and Varuṇa. These four gods are interdependent and

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represent the workings of Truth in the human mind and temperament (1993 : 69). Dhi or the body's intelligence, following Aurobindo, needs to be perfected by Indra and Väyu (v 6), while Dakshiṇa needs to be perfect by Mitra and Varuṇa. Mitra-Varuṇa and Indra-Vāyu are all dependent on each other and "represent the workings of the human mind and temperament" (1993 : 69). The bodies intelligence (dhi) has to be purified in order for it to commune with Truth-Consciousness. Mitra and Varuṇa's invocation allows for the development of "richly luminous thought" (1993 : 70). Other words used in this connection are ghṛta (v. 7), often seen in association with manas, with its root 'ghri' which conveys the idea of strong brightness, heat, summer, bright thick liquid or clarified butter (1993 : 70). The combination of the terms dhīyam ghṛtacim therefore implies intellect full of rich and bright mental activity (1993 : 71).

It is Mitra and Varuṇa who accomplish this state of the intellect which is distinguished by purified judgement. These two gods act to overcome confusion of Truth and overcome influences which impede the development of Truth. The two have different qualities. Varuṇa is characterised by wideness whereas Mitra is the power of light. These two gods working together rid the mind of discord and establish a strong and luminous intellect. This progress enables ṛtam or Truth-Consciousness to work as an agent in the human mentality (1993 : 71). The process of ṛtavṛdha which means touching, teaching or 'growing into contact with' the Truth, implies that mental consciousness comes into contact with and possession of Truth-Consciousness (v.8). Mitra and Varuṇa then draw the intellect into the vastness of the rtam and itself becomes vast and free from limitation. Discernment here works for the good of truth and the work of Indra and Vāyu can be accomplished (1933 : 72).

Nāgārjuna's philosophy also establishes a two-tiered psychological structure consisting of qualities that resemble vastness and intellect. Nāgārjuna's Vedic education which

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would have included Nyāya, Sāṅkya and Vaiśeṣika may influence him in this regard.

Nāgārjuna makes śūnyatā central to his philosophy and demotes sabda to the status of that which must be overcome in that clinging (prapañca) is the root cause of ignorance. However, Nāgārjuna utilises language to illustrate its own ultimately futile purpose. For him, knowledge is not reached with the intellect but rather by transcending it. His path was that of the Prajñāpāramitā and he wrote the Mūlamādhyamika Kārikā to expound its basic teachings (Ramanan 1978 : 25). The central teaching of the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras is that 'the determinate is itself the unconditioned reality" (Ramanan 1978 : 30). This implies two things; first that in Reality there is no division between conditioned (name and form) and unconditioned. And second, accordingly the skill of living is not to cling to the conditioned nor the unconditioned (1978 : 31). These two aspects are centred around the notion of śūnyatā which gives the insight necessary to overcome clinging. So, while it is crucial to be able to discern between Ultimate Truth and conditionedness, for Nāgārjuna, conditioned existence is only accurately conceivable at the level of unconditioned reality because only from this perspective can the insubstantial character of phenomena be seen (Ramanan 1978 : 43). In Chapter 24 : v 9 & 10 of the Mūlamādyamika Nāgārjuna states that:

> Those who do not understand
> The distinction drawn between these two truths
> Do not understand
> The Buddha's profound truth.
>
> Without a foundation in the conventional truth.
> The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
> Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
> Liberations not achieved (Garfield trans. 1995 : 298).

In other words the paramārtha-satya is only attainable via the

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route of samvṛti-satya and vyāvāhāra-satya (Garfield 1995 : 297).

Similar concerns are evident in Vedic religion, notably the experience of spaciousness, as a psychological state of mind, which can be brought into close relation with thought. Surely śūnyatā, as Nāgārjuna conceived it, could be seen as a methodology aimed at breaking down any psychological essentializing between categories of knowledge and allowing the conditioned and the unconditioned to be brought together and, therefore, provide the same function as the two paired Vedic gods; Mitra-Varuṇa and Indra-Vāyu.

My argument must be inferential because Nāgārjuna pays homage to the Buddha at the beginning of the Mūla Mādhyamikakārikā and not the Vedas. However, the Buddha never rejected the fundamentals of Vedic religion; his rejection was predominantly social and political. For example, he abjured the caste system and the privileged status of the priests with regard to knowledge of the Vedas slavish grip to ritual. In this sense he was a man of his time. The creators of the Upaniṣads were also members of the Kshatriya caste who were rejecting the privileged position of the Brahmins. The Buddha still interprets reality from within the concepts derived from the Vedic religion; karma, the cyclic view of life, the necessity of liberation from this worldly life, ignorance and knowledge being respectively the categories which entrap and free people. The Buddha does re-interpret these categories, but he is still part of his tradition. Similarly, Nāgārjuna utilizes the same categories of knowledge and ignorance, liberation and entrapment. This is not to deny these categories are re-interpreted by Nāgārjuna who argues that ignorance is merely conventional knowledge which in itself is useful, but must not be confused with the Absolute Truth. Indeed ignorance is precisely that confusion between the two categories of knowledge.

It is my contention, therefore, that a similar notion to śūnyatā,

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which describes a psychological state where the two structures of knowing - unconditioned and conditioned - are brought together but not confused for each other, can be found in Vedic hymns of Mitra and Varuṇa. This would suggest the necessity for a far more complex understanding of the relationship between Vedic knowledge and Buddhist tradition. I am suggestion that although Buddhism is critical of Vedic social practices and cultural relation to knowledge, the actual philosophy is not in this sense distinct. The mental practice aimed at experiencing emptiness in the Northern School is also often described in terms such as, openness and spaciousness.

This is evident in The Heart Sūtra and its various commentaries. For example, Geshe Kelang Gyatso, in his commentary (1989) makes a distinction between produced and unproduced space. Produced space is visible space whereas unproduced space is a negative phenomenon which indicates the lack of an obstruction, such as own-being (1989:38-39). Nāgārjuna's Mādyamika philosophy in many respects is an expansion of the main points contained in the Heart Sūtra which articulates the seminal idea "form is emptiness and emptiness is form".

When assessing Nāgārjuna's philosophy in the light of Vedic philosophy, certain striking similarities can be seen. Foremost among these is the setting of a two-tiered philosophy of reality. In the Vedas the paired gods Mitra-Varuṇa and Indra-Vāyu set up the tiered psychological states of ultimate Truth and intellectual Truth. In the same vein Nāgārjuna also sets up the same categories of ultimate Truth and conventional Truth. What is even more interesting is that both philosophies make the ultimate point that the two Truths are, if not identical, reside in close proximity to each other. In the hymns of the two paired gods Mitra-Varuṇa and Indra-Vāyu, the understanding is that when thought occurs at the level of ṛtam it becomes brilliantly clear and takes on the quality of Truth-Consciousness. Similarly for Nāgārjuna, conventional Truth is not separate from Ultimate

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Truth. Śūnyatā allows the two conditions of knowledge to reside together without privileging either of them.

Bearing these striking similarities in mind, it seems to indicate that there is some evidence to suggest that Buddhist and Hindu concepts cannot be clearly distinguished from each other. It is in the light of these findings that I propose the use of a heterotopic landscape rather than a neat utopian one to help navigate Indological systems of thought. In the heterotopia relations between concepts take on a very complex nature and give the lie to decontextualised philosophical comparisons.

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NOTES

1. I am grateful to Professor Marleen Barr for introducing me to this term. The noun, I think, successfully characterises the sense which Foucault is attempting to convey in the concept heterotopia.

2. I would like to thank Dr Edward Antonio for assisting in the subtleties of my argument at this point.

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A POLYMETHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SACRED IN POPULAR HINDU TRADITION

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SECTION I

This paper proffers a methodological discussion based on the experience of the Sacred by the rural people in India. It attempts to take into account various methodological approaches through which the experience of the Sacred could be studied. The discussion shows on the one hand the possibility of developing several theories o religious experience, and on the other hand, shows that no single theory could comprehensively express the religious experience of the believer. The reason is simple—that while the believer uses direct speech, a scholar reporting on the religious experience of a believer can at best use only an indirect speech, unless the scholar herself is also a believer and participant in that tradition. In other words while a scholar need not necessarily be an insider of a given tradition the believer need not be a scholar as well which seems to be the case invariably.

Thus it needs to be recognized that there are two levels of looking at a given religious tradition viz. the level of the believer/insider which tends to be subjective; and the level of the scholar which tends to be more objective. More often than not, there is a wide gap between the subjective account of the insider and the objective account of the scholar. A sensitive and empathetic scholar needs to bring the subject and the objective elements as closely as possible, although a complete merger of

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the two is never possible and as a matter of good methodological principle it is not proper to merge them together. Such an attempt not only leads to wrong identification of one with the other but distortion of one by the other. This means that while there is a need for the scholar to get in touch with the subjective level of the believer, at the same time the scholar should be able to transcend the subjective level of the believer so that the danger of onesidedness and bias could be avoided, not to speak of the bias of the scholar herself.

In other words, the scholar has a two fold responsibility viz., to be able to grasp and understand with empathy and to be able to intellectually communicate to the other scholars. Keeping in mind this two-foldness of the scholar's job, I present a brief analysis of the religious experience of the rural people of India through various approaches in the field of religious studies. This I propose to do by analysing the approaches of a representative group of scholars and offer my own evaluation of their methods and finally in a sketchy way attempt to propose an inclusive methodology to the study of religious experience. By inclusive I mean making use of every possible method. Before I indulge myself in such a discussion let me briefly outline the religious experience of the rural people themselves in their attempt understand and grasp the mystery of the Sacred.

SECTION II

The rural Hindus believe in what is described as the 'Sacred' as manifested through many things both animate and inanimate. There is in fact no limitation to any particular medium. The sacred is not only 'out there' as numinous but also experienced as inherent in the worshipper— a sort of a mystical experience, not quite like that of the mystics but a person who experiences the Sacred for a given period of time within herself and behaves

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as if she is no less than the Sacred itself. People even go to the extent of offering worship to the person herself. In other words, at that moment the sacred is identified with the person in whom it is present. The person is seen not merely.as an agent through whom.the sacred is mediated, but the person becomes an object of worship at that moment. People will be seen prostrating and bowing in front of the person to worship the Sacred. To illustrate this let me narrate a local myth of Tirupati—

> Rajeswari, a brahmin girl of Tirupati, was seen by a young non-caste boy who was overcome by her beauty, fell in love with her, and determined to marry her by some means. Disguising himself as a brahmin he found employment in her house, gained the confidence and support of her parents and eventually married her. The bride soon discovered that she had bee deceived and since she possessed divine power, transformed herself into Vikruthirupa (frightening form) and expressed her rage by beheading her deceitful husband. Recognising the presence of the divine, the deceased husband's relatives came to her and after bowing in worship, prayed that she would grant moksha to her former husband who had suffered enough for his deceit by his painful death. She accepted their worship and granted their request saying that since she had been his wife and since she was indeed a pativrata, the ideal wife, whenever worship would be offered to her, it should first be offered to her dead husband who would be known as Potaraju.[1]

It may be noticed in the myth described above that the relatives of the deceased husband "came to her and bowing in worship, prayed that she would grant moksha to her former husband..." The people had no difficulty in seeing the human person, in the present case the widow of the deceased, as the embodiment of the Sacred even to the extent of identifying her with the Sacred.

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The human form does not seem to stand in the way of their experiencing the sacred. In another place a 'copper vessel' was seen as the embodiment of the Sacred and people offer worship to it.

During the religious festivals and celebrations myths of this nature are told so that the people enter into that experience of the Sacred and the Sacred becomes a reality in their own lives. In so far as a myth is the basis for the religious experience of the people it must be taken seriously by the student of religion. A myth cannot be explained away by natural laws. Myths have a built in structure to incorporate a religious truth so powerfully that the message is communicated to the believer with tremendous personal touch. For the believer it is a real experience of the Sacred.

What is striking in the perception of the Sacred by rural Hindus is the aspect of "numinous" that the sacred is out there frightening to approach but yet, as Otto points out, they are powerfully drawn towards it. Once drawn towards it they are powerfully gripped by a feeling of creatureliness, and nothingness as if they are totally empty. This feeling of emptiness leads them to fully depend on the Sacred in every walk of life— for rains, for successful harvest, for protection from disease and so on.

Thus, the Sacred that is experienced by the rural Hindus combines not only Otto's "numinous" aspect but also the "feeling of dependence" of Schleirmacher.

SECTION III

Having briefly described the experience of the Sacred by rural Hindus let me proceed to explore the possibilities of developing a theory or theories of approaching the religious phenomenon. My discussion here is primarily centred around the religious experience communicated through myths of the rural .Hindus in

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India.

Many approaches have been adopted to study the myths. Freud, for instance, looked at the religious myths from his psycho-analytical approach which has been found to have negative impact on the very religious aspect of people. However, Freud's analysis of myths was based on inadequate and limited anthropological data which is certainly outdated Freud was wrong to use myths of an alien culture to study the personality of people of his own culture.

Somewhat closer to Freud's approach was that of C.J.Jung. For him myths are primarily "psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul"[2] The mythological process of nature are not allegorical in meaning but "rather they are symbolic expressions of inner unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection".[3]

What Freud and Jung ignore is the fact that the myths are primarily religious in their nature and convey specific meaning to the religious person. It is not that the person projects his inner psychological categories through them, but rather myths symbolize a worldview in which the religious person lives and that worldview, as Eliade shows in his Myth of the Eternal Return, is real for that person. In other words when we approach the myths regarding the religious experience of a people we are not simply reading some interesting fables and stories of ordinary kind but rather through them we are approaching what is real to those people.

While Freud and Jung were concerned with the "unconscious" of people and used myth primarily as a category that reveals the unconscious human beings, in a similar fashion Levi-Strauss through his structural method used myth as a category to analyse and see how myths operate in human mind. He says,

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> Mythological analysis has not, and cannot have, as its aim to show how men think.... I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact.[4]

Never the less, Levi-Strauss took the interpretation of myth seriously. Not that Freud and Jung did not take myth seriously, but in the case of Levi-Strauss, he attempted to understand the human mind. For him myth is a mode of symbolic communication. He says,

> I believe that mythology, more than anything else, makes possible to illustrate such objectified thought and to provide empirical proof of its reality.[5]

In other words what he was interested in was to study the social structure and social relations. Myths provided him with models of relations.

Then, Eliade also looks at myths in various cultures primarily to understand the meaning of those myths. He draws upon both Dumezil's comparative method to Indo-European mythologies,and Levi-.Strauss' structural method. But what Eliade was primarily seeking to understand was the archaic man's religious world view. Mythic world was the real world for the archaic man. So the archaic man from time to time enters the "real" world by re-enacting the myths. Eliade suggests that by continuous return to the beginning of time (in illo tempore) i.e the mythical time, the archaic man attempts to escape from history. Eliade further suggests that it is not only the archaic man but even the modern man often lives in his mythical world. Eliade says,

> But we hesitate to say that mythical thought has been abolished. As we shall see, it managed to survive through radically (if not perfectly) camouflaged. And

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> the astonishing fact is that more than anywherelse, it survives in historiography.[6]

In an attempt to understand the archaic man's world view Eliade sees myths of various cultures in certain common structures. Although his approach cannot be fully regarded as that of a phenomenologist, it is clear from his writings that he certainly made use of some phenomenological principles. About the religious phenomenon he says,

> What is involved is not a veneration of the stone itself, a cult of the tree itself. The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are not worshipped precisely because they were hierophanies, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the sacred, the *ganz andere*.[7]

Although Eliade looks for meaning in myths, he dilutes their meaning and significance when he places them in certain common structures. What he was actually trying to get at is an understanding of the archaic man's worldview rather than the meaning of an individual myth in its own particular context. Myths convey in a powerful way the religious experience of people in their particular cultural situation. By taking them out of their context and comparing them with other similar myths one does not get anywhere nearer than to say that such and such myths could be categorized with such and such labels. A historian of religion takes each tradition individually and in its particular context. One cannot simply capture the depth of meaning of religious experience of a people by descriptions of a random samples and comparing them with each other.

The phenomenologists beginning with Chantepie de la Sausseye and then Brede Kristensen and then Van der Leeuw have given much importance to the essences of religious phenomena. The phenomenological principles like "epoche", "eidos" and

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"interpolation" are of great value to the historian of religions. But the problem with their principle of "clarification" is that they tend to see religious phenomena in certain common structures. Van der Leeuw suggests,

> ...all that belongs to the same order must be united, while what is different in type must be separated.[8]

This way of separation of elements in a given phenomenon can only lead to typology and not to any clearer and satisfactory understanding of the religious experience of the people. It is like a biologist studying cells under a microscope to see the cell structures and how various structures are formed in different combinations of cells. A historian of religion is not interested in such an enterprise.

This typological approach of phenomenologists is criticized by C.J Bleeker as being static. Geo Windengren comments,

> Given the impossibility of illustrating a religious phenomenon by presenting a full-scale inventory of all the historic contexts of various religions where the phenomenon in question is found the scholar has to be content with some representative illustrations. A critical observer has called this method a collecting of a lot of impressionistic pictures and sketches.[9]

If phenomenology is content with giving us only some "impressionistic pictures" as it were, the historian of religion is the last one to be satisfied with it because she looks at the religious experience of people whether conveyed through myths or symbols as dynamic. It is a profound experience in which people are involved and their involvement is far more crucial to the historian of religions.

Although hermeneutists did not primarily concern themselves with the interpretation of myths, their approach seems to be of

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some relevance to the historian of religions. Notwithstanding the fact that Habermas was critical of Gadamer's claim to the universality of hermeneutics, it seems sensible to see linguisticality encompassing all human experience. Gadamer says,

> The universal phenomenon of human linguisticality also unfolds in other dimensions than those which would appear to be directly concerned with the hermeneutical problem, for hermeneutics reaches into all the contexts that determine and condition the linguisticality of the human experience of the world.[10]

By taking hermeneutics beyond hermeneutical problem itself, I wish to relate it to the interpretation of myths whether communicated orally or in the written for.m because in both cases what is involved is language. If hermeneutical task takes into account the metalanguage, it could also be applied to the metaphorical and symbolic language of myths. What we have in myths is the religious experience of people which goes beyond the limits of any human language. Therefore the hermeneutical reflection should take in.to account the mythic language as well.

Both Gadamer and Habermas seem to agree that prejudgments and prejudices cannot be avoided in the process of interpretation. In interpreting religious experience of people it may be true as well. In other words, the hermeneutic reflection takes into account the horizon of the interpreter as well as the horizon of that which is being interpreted. The word "prejudice" can be misleading since in the current usage of the word in English has a pejorative connotation. But the German word *vorurteile* means more in the sense of prior understanding or pre-judgment. Habermas in his foot note in his *A Review of Gadamer's Truth and Method* explains better the term as is rightly used by Gadamer himself. He points out that,

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> A *vorturteile* is literally a prejudgment; as Gadamer uses the term, its meaning corresponds more closely to the etymological meaning of prejudice (Latin prae+judicum) than to current usage. The accent here, as in the case of the other key hermeneutical concepts compounded from *vor*, is on this prefix. (e.g *vorverständnis* - "prior understanding;"...). This is meant to bring out the fact that the interpreter's own language, practice, form of life, etc, are preconditions for understanding.[11]

Thus the hermeneutical understanding takes into account the entire horizon of the interpreter as his precondition to his understanding of the tradition of the past. Gadamer says that one cannot transpose oneself into a historical situation without carrying ones own historical situation with oneself. He says,

> For what does it mean to"transpose oneself"? Certainly not simply to disregard oneself. Of course, this is necessary in so far as one must really keep the other situation before one's eyes. But one must bring oneself into this other situation. Only that consummates the meaning of "transposing oneself"....Such self-transposition is neither the unpathetic projection of one individuality into another nor the subjection of the other to one's own particularity but that of the other is overcome. The concept of horizon presents itself here because it expresses the superior farsightedness that the one who is understanding must possess. To acquire a horizon means that the one learns to see beyond the near and the all-too near not in order to overlook it but in order better to see it in a larger whole and with a more accurate sense of its proportions.[12]

The concept of "horizon" of Gadamer may be of significant

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value in interpreting the historical traditions based on texts. Although Gadamer extends the limits of language to the whole "being" i.e to the whole sphere of existence (he says, "Sein, das Verstanden werden kann? ist Sprache,"—Being,that can be understood is language.)[13] he seems to be so concerned with "self understanding." That is, he seems to be giving greater significance to the interpreter's horizon than to the horizon of the object of interpretation itself. If the interpreter and the object of interpretation are from the same historical complex, it is legitimate to proceed from one's own horizon since.the interpreter and the object of interpretation are linked by a common historical tradition. The reason why Gadamer seems to take the interpreter's own horizon and tradition as so important is because of the fact that he is operating within his own German historical tradition. However, Habermas by his emphasis on interpretation by "reflection" denies the authoritative role of tradition in interpretation.

But when one attempts to interpret something that is not of her own historical complex, one's own horizon and tradition cannot be of help but rather it can be of a great hindrance in understanding the other. This aspect is very crucial in understanding religious experience of people of different cultures through myths and symbols which are not part of one's own historical tradition but distanced by time and space historically, culturally, and ethnographically. The historian of religions faces the problem of understanding precisely here, that is, in understanding the religious experience of people who are not of her own historical tradition but are separated by cultural, religious and social conditions. In such a situation the historian of religions has to take into consideration primarily the historical tradition of the people whom she wants to understand rather than imposing her own historical tradition on the object of interpretation. For the historian of religion it is not simply "self understanding" as it is for the hermeneutists but it is both understanding of the other people's religious experience as well

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as her own. In the process of understanding religious experience of people it is the understanding of the other that takes precedence over one's own self understanding. It is the understanding of the other that leads to self understanding.

SECTION IV

Let me now proceed to attempt to develop a possible approach that a historian of religions can take in understanding and interpreting the religious experience of people communicated through myths and symbols. In order to do this let me once again go back to the myth that I have narrated at the beginning of this essay.

What we have in the above myth is a description of the Sacred manifested in the form of a person. The person through whom the sacred is manifested is not merely a human being but is depicted as someone extraordinary. The per son is no less than a hierophany who has evoked nothing less than worship in the people who encounter her. The fact of a profound and intense religious experience of the people cannot be denied. The scholar approaching such hierophanies cannot simply raise questions of how true and factual it is that the person is really the Sacred power. Questions of this nature become invalid here simply because we are dealing with a different kind of experience. We are looking at people at a different level of experience which can not be subjected to the definitions within the boundaries of natural sciences. One can get into all sorts of psychological questions but a historian of religions is not concerned with such psychological questions. Even. if she asks such questions of psychological nature, they are certainly not of the kind of questions asked by Freud and Jung.

While approaching the myths of people, the historian of religions should take into consideration the fact that she is trying to

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understand through myths a profound religious experience of people, what Otto calls "mysterium tremendum". It involves the whole worldview of those people in their particularity. The idiosyncrasies of those people should be borne in mind. The recognition of the particularities of the mythic experience of rural Hindus calls for exercising epoche and suspension of one's own worldview for a while and attempt to enter the religious world of those people. In so doing one needs to understand what it is to be a rural Indian, the range of their beliefs and practices, their way of perceiving things, their habits, rituals and everything that makes a rural Hindu. In order to do this one has to use the principles of phenomenology, viz. 'epoche' and 'interpolation'. The historian of religions must, while distancing her own categories and worldviews, empathetically enter into the experience of the people whom she wants to understand. For phenomenologists there may not be anything "behind the phenomenon" as such as Van der Leeuw suggests[14] but for the historian of religions there is certainly more than what appears to be.

The historian of religions wants to get as close as possible to the centre of the religious world of people. Nevertheless, in so doing she seeks the help of the phenomenologist. Van der Leeuw rightly remarks that

> ...the phenomenology of religion is not the history of religion. History, certainly, cannot utter one word without adopting some phenomenological viewpoint.... The historian and phenomenologist, therefore, work in the closest possible association; they are indeed in the majority of cases combined in the person of a single investigator.[15]

The historian of religion is also indebted to the principles of hermeneutists. If hermeneutics is understanding something, historian takes it very seriously for she wishes to understand the

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religious experience of the whole existence of the people. However, the historian does not take 'self-understanding' as a motive to understand the other as it is the case with the hermeneutists. It may be the case that in the process of understanding the religious experience of others through their mythic language there is also a consequential process of self-understanding taking place. But that is certainly not the reason why a historian of religions indulges herself in the attempt to understand the religious experience of others. Her primary concern is to empathetically gain an understanding as authentic as possible and describe it in the best way that is acceptable to both the believers and to the scholarly community. The task of the historian of religions may be closer to the task of an ideal artist who paints a picture not for the sake of reading into it something of his own views or to please the views of others but for the sake of its own authenticity. It is the fullest possible meaning of the religious experience of people that the historian attempts to gain.

As in the case of rural Hindus where written records and texts are not available, the historian of religions needs to use different kind of hermeneutical principles. The meaning of the language that is used by the rural Hindus is not obvious in itself. There is more than what they appear to be saying. What is involved in their language is the whole of their religious experience with the sacred. Further, the historian cannot simply limit herself to the linguistic expressions but rather she must also take into account as to what they do, what they think of certain things, their attitudes, their lifestyle, their beliefs, habits, their relationships and so on. In other words, the historian of religions looks for every possible thing that manifests the religious experience. In the process she uses her keen observation and empathy so as to get as close as possible to their religious worldview.

One problem that confronts the historian of religions in the process of investigating into the religious experience of rural

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Hindus is that since she has to depend heavily on oral traditions and observations in direct encounters, there is the possibility of differing accounts of the same practice, sometimes even conflicting accounts of the same experience, or variations of the same events. Thus the historian of religion.has a difficult task of carefully sifting the accounts that she receives. In order to do this she cannot depend on external categories, but rather internally compare and establish the authenticity of people and their accounts. That means the historian must discover the internal norms and categories to evaluate the authenticity of accounts that reach her. Although one can never be absolute about those norms, it is possible to approximate to the real experience of people by being an "empathetic participant observer".

In other words, the historian must have a genuine feeling of empathy for the people and for everything that goes on in their horizon. Secondly, she must become a participant in the whole worldview of the people and their experience. Thirdly, in her empathetic participation, she makes a distinction to herself that she is not only a participant but also an observer. This threefold responsibility is crucial to the historian of religions. It is only then myths of the rural Hindus can be meaningful. This means, as W.C.Smith suggests the historian must adopt a "humane" approach since in the ultimate analysis she is dealing with people in their own particular religiosity.

In dealing with the religious experience of the rural Hindus, the historian does not stand alone. She draws her material from the social and cultural anthropologists and sociologists as they are seen as allied disciplines and not treated as strangers. However, in drawing upon the materials of the social anthropologists and sociologists, the historian of religions evaluates their material against the principles of her own discipline. She is not simply interested in social relations and social structures, but she sees everything in the context of their religious cosmos.

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Further, the historian has the responsibility to the subjective and objective elements in the religious experience of the rural Hindus. The myths, rituals and other religious activities of the rural Hindus may ostensibly appear to be trivial and naive to an outside spectator. Since the rural folk traditions of the Hindus are not based on the so called classical Hindu traditions, there is always a tendency for an outsider to by pass the religious significance of the activities of the rural people. The social anthropologists' description of the folk traditions as"little" as opposed to the so called "greater" traditions (classical Hindu traditions) perhaps rests upon the above mistaken tendency. The historian, on the other hand, avoids such purely objective categories which tend to reduce the meaning and significance of those folk traditions.

The historian of religions in attempting to understand and describe the folk traditions of the Hindus takes the subjective element more seriously. She is, first of all, concerned with understanding the traditions the way the practitioners understand. She looks for .meanings that they attribute to the things. She attempts to enter into the world in which they live. Ninian Smart rightly suggests,

> Indeed, if we are to search properly we must be able to put aside our own presuppositions and our own judgments about truth. and value. We must try to enter into the lives of others and see the world from their point of view.[16]

What is suggested here is a humane approach in which people are seen as important in their religiousness. The categories and concepts that a scholar might use to describe their religious experience are only to serve the purpose of coherently communicating that very experience. They are not absolute nor are they exhaustive. By avoiding narrow definitions of the categories, the historian of religions attempts to narrow down the

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hiatus between the pure objectivity of the categories and pure subjectivity of the believers' experience.

Although people are taken in their idiosyncrasies and in their subjective experience, unlike W.C.Smith's "personalist" approach which tends to be more subjective, what I suggest here is a concern for both the believer's subjective experience as well as for the scholar's responsibility to understand and communicate. This is to recognize, as Donald Wiebe perhaps better puts it, that

> ... the detailed objectivity, or better, inter subjectivity, that characterizes the other sciences does not involve an abandonment of all commitment but rather only a rejection of ultimate commitment in the sense of a position adopted uncritically and never again opened up to further evaluation or assessment.[17]

The scholar is certainly not interested in becoming a convert to the believer's experience but has a genuine concern to understand the believer's experience.

This leads us to a further question whether it is possible to develop a theory or theories in the study of religions. The historian of religions certainly avoids all theorising that narrows down the scope of understanding human experience. In this sense she is not bound to any pure sociological, psychological, anthropological, or even phenomenological theories. Certainly, the experience of the rural Hindus cannot be defined within any of the given theoretical framework because of the very nature of their fluidity and variety. But in so far as the nature of the investigation is concerned the historian needs to use the field methods that are similar to the other social sciences. However, her methods are not narrowly defined to arrive at certain specific results as it is the case with the other social sciences. In other words, the historian does not set her goals before beginning the investigation but rather allows greater flexibility in the methods

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and approach as the information emerges. The profundity of human experience cannot be investigated into with any "result oriented" approach or method. Never the less, the historian of religions uses certain, what I wish to call, "proviso-theoretical interpretation" in order to coherently describe religious experience in the context of academic research. I am convinced that religious experience is "cognitively" available to the academic scholar. Even if there is nothing in common between the scholar and the believer, there is at least one thing in which both commonly share viz., "humanity." But I am also struck by the fact that in so far as the believer and the scholar are two separate individuals located in their own worldviews, the religious experience of the believer is not only in some measure accessible to the scholar but also elusively out there. It is precisely in recognition of the nature of religious experience being out there that the historian approaches her object of study not with arrogance that she could grasp it, rather, with humility recognizes her own limits in approaching it. Thus, even if she provides a theoretical framework to the information that she receives, it is only provisional and open to further research and understanding. In so far as there is a need for the scholar to share her research with the scholarly community she may be justified in providing a theoretical framework to her research and understanding of the religious experience of people. But in developing such a theory the scholar uses more of an inclusive and open approach so that there is the recognition that there is always more to grasp than what one has been possible. Donald Wiebe rightly proposes, in his attempt to bridge the gap between those who argue in favour of objective theories and those who oppose any form of theory in the study of religions, by suggesting,

> If religion is so to speak 'cognitively available' to the academic community — as even the work of the historian and phenomenologist indicate that it is— it is in principle capable of interpretation. And it is only natural that there

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> should be such an impetus to proceed toward greater systematization in the study of religions, as in other scientific disciplines, by bringing under a general law or theory the classifications, typologies and other ad hoc generalizations of that of which we are already aware but also provides a guide to further research.[18]

Thus, in conclusion it may be proffered for consideration that in view of the fact that the rural Hindu traditions involve, unlike classical Hinduism a greater dependency on the oral traditions and the experiences of people, any methodological approaches that are adopted need to be more inclusive than being exclusive so as to arrive, as much as possible, at a proper and fuller understanding of people's experiences. This also involves that any theories that emerge can only be seen as provisional steps towards greater and richer understanding of their religious traditions.

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2 C.J.Jung. *Archetypes and Collective Unconscious*, p. 6
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4 Claude Levi-Strauss. *The Raw and the Cooked.* Tr. by John & Doreen Weightman. New York: Harper & Row Publications, 1964, p. 11
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[7] Mircea Eliade. *Sacred and Profane*. Tr. by Willard R. Trask. Harcount Brace Tovanovich, Inc., 1959, p. 11f

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[12] Ibid., p. 288

[13] Ibid., p. 450, also see p. 432

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND HINDUISM

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This paper asserts that the conventional claim of Hindu orthodoxy that the notion of hierarchical caste structures, with their absolute denial of vertical social mobility, and the consequent relegation of vast millions of individuals to a second-class citizenship, is a notion that is contradicted by the most central features of Hindu thought and culture. In the first section of the paper it is asserted that the pure spiritual tradition of Hinduism, represented in the briefest compass by the term Transcendent Spiritual Unity (the TSU principle), which is in fact the source and foundation from which flow all the religious values of inter-personal love and fellowship, can easily be seen, on simple inferential grounds, to be supportive of the modern concept of Human Rights and all that it entails.

The basic premises of the paper's thesis, as concerning text interpretation, the TSU principle and the issue of anthropomorphism, are developed in the first section. It is shown that the method of mystic and symbolic interpretation of the sacred Hindu texts (chiefly the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā) yields the most consistently acceptable results. And this is illustrated by special reference to the Puruṣa Sūkta hymn of the Ṛg Veda. The overarching presence of the Supreme Godhead as the ground and source of the various deities is shown to be a logical corollary of the TSU principle. It is contended that, since all creatures have equally originated from the One Godhead, social equality among all persons must be seen to be a fundamental religious proposition in Hinduism.

In section two the conventional system of caste hierarchy is analysed and shown to be a spurious and misguided version of the most fundamental spiritual tradition of Hinduism. The concept of Human Rights is discussed against the background of the rather turbulent

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*Hindu socio-religious developments down to modern days. Section three concludes the paper with a brief presentation of the ancient concept of **brāhmaṇatva** as opposed to brahminism. The concept of **brāhmaṇatva** is revealed as carrying the full meaning of the TSU principle in its application in the field of socio-religious life and ethics.*

SECTION ONE
TEXT INTERPRETATION, TSU PRINCIPLE AND ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Hinduism has been regularly understood as a complex of religion and philosophy based essentially on tradition. It would not be far wrong to describe it as the primordial spiritual tradition, for, as far back in time as we can see from our present situation, the roots of present-day Hinduism seem to stand out as a mystical tradition lost in the mists of times past. The mystical approach to the Hindu tradition has been extolled by a good many scholars as a window offering satisfying insights into the soul of this tradition, especially in terms of philosophical and spiritual values.

As a mystical tradition Hinduism utilises several concepts and symbols, some of the more important of which are *ṛta, yajña, satya, and dharma.* All of these have been subjected to varied interpretations during the course of the historical development of Hinduism. We may observe that it is likely that these interpretations have not been unrelated, in some measure, to the stresses and strains and varied practical requirements of Hindu society in its evolution. For that reason also they may justifiably be seen to be linked to the concept of human rights as we understand these today. To sum up the impressive array of mystical and symbolic approaches to the Hindu tradition, we may say that the Hindu tradition is a tradition grounded in a profound sense of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity, or the TSU principle. Against all interpretations with a naturalistic bent, the TSU principle can arguably be said to consummate the traditional Hindu approach to the meaning of its own tradition.

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Traditional scholars would mostly find themselves in agreement with the view that the TSU principle obtains consistently through the ancient Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā, and continues through the later historical period down to the present day. Many such scholars, being themselves within the tradition, would probably speak of such consistency with some pride and a sense of achievement.

If we focus on such an assertion of the continuity of the Hindu tradition down to modern days, we have to note, firstly, that the Hindu tradition is necessarily a spiritual tradition (being emphasised by designating it as the tradition of Transcendent Spiritual Unity), and secondly, that it presents itself (at least in the minds of its advocates) as a complete and universal tradition, not requiring to be added to once it has unfolded its historical expression in the sacred texts up to and including the Bhagavad Gītā.

This means that the Hindu tradition is presented as a cosmically complete tradition, taking up the social and historical aspects of human life to the level of fulfilment and perfection in a holistic spiritual unity. The holistic, cosmic and spiritual dimensions of the Hindu tradition have been recognized by many scholars as being definitive of this tradition. Saran tells us:

> *"In virtue of its universality and completeness, the Hindu tradition provides*
> *for man a whole way of life grounded in a theory of cosmic history, worked out in all necessary detail. A 'sacred' science of society and history thus becomes a necessary aspect of the Hindu tradition."*[1]

The Hindu tradition is thus a tradition that affirms a unity that is not confined to the transcendent dimension alone (as transcendence is normally understood), but extends itself to the social and historical realms as well. This is spiritual transcendence, which is cosmically inclusive. The unity operates at every conceivable level of existence

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and reality. The sacred texts have it that the concepts of *rta* and *satya* are inextricably bound up with the unfolding of history. The Veda discloses that *ṛta* (the principle of all-pervading will or immanent love) and *satya* (the principle of the fundamental truth of existence) operate as a single unifying principle and pour forth their own being in the unfolding of history[2] underlining our argument that humanity, society and history are in some ways expressions of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity.

It should be noted that the spiritual and the social are normally understood to be operating in their own independent spheres. In the Hindu tradition the two are seen to be linked together as means to ends. That is, the spiritual mode of the tradition is the primary or the independent mode, while the socio-religious mode is the dependent mode, thus defining an asymmetrical relationship between the two modes of the tradition.[3] The purpose of history and social life serves the primary spiritual end of realising one's identity with God (whose full meaning is the meaning of Transcendent Spiritual Unity, so far as the Hindu tradition is concerned). The goal of all life and history is emancipation from the false ego that has somehow thrown a warp over the understanding of each individual. Yet, so far as practical life is concerned, each person needs to participate fully in society, performing his obligations meticulously, in order to achieve the goal of realising his identity with God. To escape from the necessary performance of such social obligations requires that the individual be extraordinarily developed along the spiritual dimension, so that he may withdraw himself into the depths of his own spiritual being and contemplate privately, and thus consummate, his relationship with God. The Hindu tradition appears to support such a dichotomy between the spirituo-cosmic and socio-religious modes of life,[4] though objections to ascribing such meanings to the dichotomy are also available within the tradition.[5]

Saran holds that for the vast majority of members of society the socio-religious mode offers the only hope of achieving the spiritual end of life. He says:

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> *"Thus the asocial, personal, spiritual-intellectual mode of Hinduism being available only to extremely few people, it remains true to say that for the vast majority of Hindus the disintegration of the religio-social mode means the absence of all opportunity for an authentic (normal) life."*
> *"The distinction between the two modes of the Hindu tradition .... is not new; but it has often been misunderstood. In the first place, it is not an evolutionary or developmental distinction. ..... Secondly, they are not equivalent modes: the one cannot replace the other."* [6]

From the above we see that Saran is quite convinced that the Hindu is bound by the web of all the caste restrictions traditionally imposed upon him (in the sense of his following the religio-social mode), and that, so long as he remains a Hindu, no other way to salvation is open to him except through following the injunctions pertaining to his caste station. Saran holds that the two modes of the Hindu tradition outlined by him, that is, the cosmic-spiritual mode and the social-historical mode, are in an organic relationship of a precise and inviolable type.

It is easy to agree with Saran in his analysis of the status quo of Hindu metaphysics and social theory as these have obtained in most periods of Hindu history. But it is very difficult to agree with him on his interpretation of the fundamental Hindu concepts as these have been understood by scholars and sages representing higher Hindu thought. Saran pays no attention to the social and historical exigencies that shaped the development of Hindu socio-religious norms, despite protests from various quarters. He totally ignores the purely human element of self-interest in the development of the hierarchical caste structures, such element being independent of specifically Hindu metaphysical concepts, since caste-type divisions have developed in most other societies of the world. In India, through some unfortunate though understandable turn of events,[7] a social structure that was convenient to the elite ruling class came to be tied down to metaphysical and spiritual concepts by clever interpretations. But these are mere interpretations, and that they are

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in patent violation of the fundamental spiritual concepts of Hinduism has been noted by many scholars.[8] It is difficult to understand why Saran chooses to ignore a significant part of the events of Hindu history from the time of the Vedic age,[9] and some of the most significant principles of spiritual life as embodied in the Hindu sacred texts.[10]

There cannot be any denial of the fact in the Hindu tradition the socio-religious conduct of members of the tradition have a distinct spiritual end. There is also no denying the fact that the social ordering of members of the tradition according to the principles of caste has been in existence since quite ancient times, as the Chāndogya Upaniṣad shows.[11] As Post has clearly shown, an elaboration of the principles of caste structures is evident first in the texts of the Dharmasütras,[12] which pass on their lore to the Dharmaśāstras, which in turn point to the Veda as the source and foundation of all social ordering, which is thus a circular process,[13] and really futile when we consider that the Veda discloses nothing with regard to caste structures apart from the mere naming of the castes and their mysterious origin from the being of the Godhead.

It should be noted that an appeal to the Veda is, for all practical purposes, an appeal to God to sanction the motivation behind the appeal. It is probably true that most human beings have a deep need for God to speak to them. Some rare passages and interpretations of the Veda are available in which God appears to speak in the first person.[14] This line of enquiry, if followed consistently, would lead to an anthropomorphic conception of the Divine Power somewhat akin to that available in Islam and Old Testament Christianity. It does not seem plausible that interpretations of the Veda in such terms are valid. The most popular and philosophical hymns of the Veda, such as the Nāsadīya Sūkta and the Puruṣa Sūkta, significantly refer to the Godhead in the third person, which is compatible with philosophy and metaphysics. Even in the hymns connected with Indra, in which the deity is brought very close to his devotees and spoken of as coming down to earth to fight battles on behalf of them, and to engage in

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boisterous activities together with them, the third person is used for the Divine Power.

The closeness and intimacy of God to His devotee is nowhere seen so vividly as in the supplications of Vasiṣṭha to Varuṇa. Vasiṣṭha cries out in the words:

> "But now what has become of this our friendship,
> When lovingly we walked together erstwhile?
> When, sovereign Varuṇa, to thy lofty palace,
> Thy thousand-gated house I had admittance?" (RV 7.88.5)

and again:

> "Set us free from the misdeeds of our fathers,
> From those that we ourselves have perpetrated;
> Like cattle-thief, O King, like calf rope-fastened,
> So set thou free Vasistha from thy fetter." (RV 7.86.5)

Anthropomorphism in the Veda is confined to the level of the gods, the deities that mostly represent the divine attributes of the Supreme Godhead, the deities that are often the archetypal symbols of the cosmic divine activity. Though it is a fact that many of the Vedic deities are raised to the level of Godhead, a feature that has been noticed as henotheism, even this does not relate anthropomorphic ideas to the highest Divine Power.

We should be careful to distinguish between two types of anthropomorphism available in the religious traditions of the world. The one type is that in which the highest Divine Power directly participates in the historical process, and makes His intentions known through His directly spoken word. This type of anthropomorphism is characteristic of Islam and OT Christianity, and is clearly seen in texts like: "I am the Lord thy God", and "You shall have no graven images before you" etc. In communicating his intentions directly thus, the highest Divine Power defines itself as a type of personality, akin to human beings. Such a personality has value, to be sure, in that it is capable of being

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responsive to the needs of creatures. Yet it can also be whimsical, phlegmatic and overbearing, much like a human potentate. This form of anthropomorphic deity is necessarily distinct from creatures and creation. The world is his malleable product, which when it proves intransigent to his wishes, can easily bring forth his wrath and anger.

The alternative variety of anthropomorphism is the Vedic theme seen in the presentation of the multifarious deities of the Veda. The anthropomorphism of the many gods is the symbolic expression of the spiritual experiences of the great Rsis. The endless descriptions of the exploits of Indra-deva, of the activities of Agni-deva, even the apparent malevolence of a Rudra-deva, does not do violence to the somewhat impersonal Divine Reality which ever remains in the background. The Veda is a stranger to direct action by the Divine Power in the arena of history.

Vedic anthropomorphism is an anthropomorphism at a secondary level, not at the level of the highest Godhead. It is for this reason that, in spite of the hectic and ceaseless activities of the many gods and goddesses of the Veda, Vedic anthropomorphism is compatible with the philosophy and metaphysics of the Advaita doctrine of the ultimate and total oneness of all things; Vedic ideas of the activities of the gods do not frustrate the claims of philosophy. On the contrary, they harmonise with and explain themselves in terms of the fundamental ideas of the advaitic world-view. In so saying we are not reading Advaita into the Vedas; rather, the Veda suggests distinctly advaitic ideas and concepts.

To illustrate secondary level anthropomorphism, we may look at the text of the Puruṣa Sūkta. At the same time we may also gain an insight into how a severely negative aspect of Hindu orthodoxy needs to come to terms with a true and spiritual conception of God as revealed in the hymn. We deal with an aspect of the caste issue. In the Ṛg Veda we read that from the Universal Person issued the Brāhmaṇa (from the mouth), the Rājanya (from the arms), the Vaiśya (from the thighs) and the Śūdra (from the feet).[15] The

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conception is clearly anthropomorphic, yet it cannot apply to God in the sense of fixed qualities of personality.

Regarding the caste structure of society, if we presume, on the strength of this hymn, that caste is based on birth (which would be an extrapolation and an extravagant interpretation of the actual hymn), we shall then be constrained to admit that the Śūdras are an integral part of the being of God, in a very real and physical sense. The Śūdras would be revered as the very foundation of human society, and the foundation of God Himself (in the mythological sense in which God is presented in the Puruṣa Sūkta hymn of the Ṛg Veda). We shall also be constrained to admit that, so far as the hymn is concerned, there is no indication of the lowly status usually accorded to Śūdras; on the contrary, they are raised to the holiness of the actual body of God.

It is interesting to speculate that, in the post-Vedic period, when castes had become rigid, and the bhakti doctrines began to flower, love and devotion to God became universally symbolised in terms of the worship of the holy feet of God. So we read in the Kevaṭa Prasanga of the Tulsi Ramayana that the washing and ceremonial worship of the feet of Śrī Rāma leads to salvation.[16] Following this belief, Hindu orthodoxy, led by the Smārta Brahmins generally and the Śaṅkaracaryas of the five major pithas, who are deeply aware of the Puruṣa Sūkta, should, following the logic of the sacred texts themselves, develop the tradition of encouraging the Śūdras to enter their homes and temples, and should worship the Śūdras with ārati, snāna, vastra, yajñopavīta, etc. since the Śūdras would be, in physical fact, the actual feet of God. And that, according to the highest Śruti! But, it is sad to reflect that, for untold centuries, the practices of the ruling castes have maintained a tragic reversal of the Hindu doctrine set out in the Puruṣa Sūkta. For the sake of appropriating privileges for themselves, the upper castes adopted a literal interpretation of the Puruṣa Sūkta when it suited them, and a symbolic interpretation at other times! And, so far from considering the Śūdras the worshippable Holy Feet of God, the Brahmins as a class established themselves as Bhūdevāḥ - the very gods on earth!

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It would be difficult to find a more glaring contradiction of the Śruti in ethical practice.

If a literal interpretation were to be accepted, the Śūdras would have to be worshipped, just as idols are worshipped in the temples. If a symbolic interpretation were accepted, there would be no room for privileges or distinctions based on birth. Obviously the Puruṣa Sūkta is a symbolic expression, inspired in the heart of the Ṛṣi, indicating the general relationship between God and the world. A symbolic interpretation would give a truly spiritual meaning to the hymn, and this would harmonise it with the rest of the Veda. It would also be consistent with the principle of Transcendent Spiritual Unity, which we have maintained is the underlying mystical theme of the Vedic tradition. Hindu orthodoxy is a complex system operating on several levels.

It is vital to note that, if the text were to be literally interpreted, the body of God analogy would make human society into an integral unity, with only functional divisions operating within society, and not divisions based on birth. The body analogy indicates clearly blood ties among allmembers of humanity. For, on the basis of the hymn itself, it would be absurd to postulate that the blood flowing from the feet region would, say, upon reaching the area of the knees, turn around and flow back to the knees! So also, the blood of the head, in a single physical body, cannot turn around at the neck region and flow upward again without being purified in the heart, the one heart that operates for all the limbs of the body. Nor would the blood from the arms turn back at the shoulders and return unpurified to their extremities. A literal reading of the text cannot sustain rigid caste divisions, inasmuch as God is presented in the hymn as Unity. A symbolic and mystic interpretation of the hymn, on the other hand, also cannot sustain rigid caste divisions, but would leave human beings to their own devices to structure society without violating the harmonious unity of the whole, and without denying the right of all members of society to claim a single paternity in God, the source and origin of all. The Puruṣa Sūkta hymn thus breathes the spirit of democracy, while a system of caste

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divisions based on birth directly contradicts the meaning of the hymn, both at the physical and the symbolic levels of interpretation.

Any academic and objective treatment of ancient scriptures must involve an analysis of the texts in their consistent meanings, together with an instinctive conviction of what is truly divine and holy on the one hand, and what is contaminated by human fallibility on the other. So far as the Śruti is concerned, it is to be noted that more scholars are now turning to the method of symbolic interpretation as the one that yields the best results. In our view, a truly spiritual text will yield the best results when subjected to a symbolic and mystic interpretation, when these are systematically applied. And this is because spiritual reality is accessible only in mystic experience. Any other method of acquiring divine knowledge would lead to anthropomorphic conceptions at the primary level of the idea of Godhead, with its attendant difficulties.

The method of mystic and symbolic interpretation of any spiritual text is partly dictated by our a-priori understanding of the concept of God, and partly by the contents of the texts themselves. But we can safely declare that a text that does not yield satisfactory results in this way, while it may satisfy the religious aspirations of some people, such a text cannot present us with any meaningful concept of God. And there are sufficient indications that lead us to accept the belief that the Veda is pre-eminently a spiritual text giving us consistent insights into the nature of God.

Following this method we do not discount the possibility of historical material in the Veda, nor do we deny the wealth of mythology we are obviously confronted with. What is important is that it all has a meaning relating to the Divine Reality of which all things are in some ways a manifestation.

It has been suggested that the Veda is called Śruti in consequence of its being conveyed through the spoken word, from teacher to disciple, in successive generations. This is an unfortunate misapplication of the term Śruti, for it would drag the Veda down

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to the level of common knowledge and empty it of all spiritual meaning. Surely, the term Sruti should refer to the very origin of spiritual knowledge, whose source is God Himself! Yet, we cannot say that God communicated this knowledge to the Rsis, as this would subject the Supreme Godhead to a philosophically crippling anthropomorphism. God would then be acting in history (while yet retaining the pedestal of absoluteness), and He would Himself become an event in the historical process - a contradiction in terms! The metaphysics of such a scheme would entail grave difficulties when it becomes necessary to place the notion of God outside the framework of space-time. The Hindu concept of God would then become embroiled in all the difficulties entailed by the Semitic concepts of God and revelation. As already shown, the Vedic tolerance of anthropomorphism obtains only at the secondary level of symbolic conceptualization, and not at the primary level of the Absolute Godhead.

Therefore, and consonant with out instinct for what is truly spiritual, the term Śruti is a spiritual term with strictly spiritual connotations. It can refer only to direct and personal spiritual experiences, originally vouchsafed to the great Ṛṣis of the Saṁhitās. Such intuitive experiences of spiritual reality are revealed again to the Ṛṣis of the Upaniṣads, and we meet with them in an overwhelming form in the Bhagavad Gītā, in which God reveals Himself as the Absolute operating at the level of empirical reality. While the Saṁhitās have their unique presentation of the Divine Knowledge, and the Upaniṣads their emphasis on the Ātman-Brahman relationship, the Bhagavad Gītā discloses a strong theistic current which is harmonious with the total Vedic tradition of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity. We may therefore say that the development of the Hindu religio-philosophical tradition defines itself in terms of the TSU principle.

The Gītā operates its theism along a dimension that secures the best elements of the early Vedic conceptions and binds it to the central thought of the Upaniṣads. While the Saṁhitās show the repeated manifestations of the Divine Energy in the world, while they

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portray, however much in terms of archetypal symbols, the divine activity at the cosmic level, the Upanisads declare the manifestation of the Godhead in every individual soul and the essential oneness of them. The Gītā, assuming the Ātman-Brahman relationship of the Upaniṣads, fulfils the many suggestions and promptings of the Saṁhitās that the Divine Power shows positive concern for the welfare of humanity and reaches out to help struggling souls in their time of need. This is the earliest direct disclosure of the tradition of avatāras or incarnations, with Kṛṣṇa as the basis and foundation of them all.

The Gītā is an Upaniṣad not only by virtue of its formal structure. It is an Upaniṣad because it gives us the highest spiritual truth in the most majestic terms. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Godhead who manifests through the distorting medium of māyā in the space-time world, though the distortion is for ordinary mortals only, and does not apply to God. Since Kṛṣṇa says that He is the Supreme Godhead we ought to accept His word for it, unless we have cogent reasons for rejecting such a proposition. Radhakrishnan, though generally disfavouring a direct commitment to the incarnation hypothesis, nevertheless makes the very significant remark that the manifestation of God as an avatāra does not pose any problem different from the problem of creation itself.

And yet, there need not be any sectarian bias in our acceptance of Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Godhead. As Kṛṣṇa Himself declares in the text, it is only by totally surrendering to Him that a person can know Him in reality and in Truth. Again, He declares to Arjuna that the physical senses cannot perceive Him in reality, but only thorough the Divine Eye He may be communed with. And again, He says that fools deride Him as having come into manifestation, not knowing His highest state as the Supreme Godhead (the Absolute Brahman).

God's manifestations can be many, while the Godhead remains one, even as the Vedic deities are many while they are all manifestations of the One Divine Power. Though the Vedic deities operate at the

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symbolic and mystic level, the principle of operation is not different in the Gītā, which is the culmination of the great Vedic tradition. In the text of the Gītā Kṛṣṇa is identified with both Śiva and with Viṣṇu, as well as with the Mother-Goddess concept. Our view is that the Gītā, even in its theistic acceptance, need not be seen in terms of theistic prejudices.

We have to address the problem that Hindu orthodoxy at the level of academic scholarship, and as represented mainly by the Advaita school of thinkers, has regularly prevented the theism of the Gītā from having its full sway over the Hindu religious consciousness. We cite the Advaita school, because, since the time of Ādi Śaṁkarācārya, this school has been the champion of orthodoxy both in the matter of social ethics and in the field of theological interpretation. In terms of international scholarship, there is an influential band of thinkers, both Hindu and non-Hindu, who support the advaitic formulations against the stand of theism.

The fact must be recognised that there is no rational justification for undervaluing the world and our normal roles in it. It is only a metaphysical dogma to say that because Brahman is the Ultimate Reality, empirical existence deserves less consideration than Brahman. The view has been sponsored by advaitic thinkers that Brahman can have no real relationship with the world, since it is by definition relationless (*amātra*); and that if we perceive a relationship, it can only be a nominal one since empirical existence is some kind of indefinable illusion. Such thinkers have maintained that therefore Kṛṣṇa cannot be directly the manifestation of Brahman, but only of Īśvara the Creator-God operating at the level of a lower-order reality. And advaitic teaching has therefore been supportive of the jñāna approach to salvation, playing down and undervaluing bhakti or devotion to God conceived in personal terms.

SECTION TWO
HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE TSU PRINCIPLE

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It is important to realise the significance of the above type of premises as they affect the issue of Human Rights. For, by so dichotomising the realms of the transcendent Godhead and the empirical field of human social concerns, a blanket of "gnostic" secrecy was thrown over the holy lore of the Veda, so that only the privileged could have access to it. And the brahmins as conventionally understood, having been born from the "head" (or so they believed literally) of the Supreme Puruṣa, conceitedly took themselves to be the sole proprietors of the salvific knowledge of the Veda. It is easy to see that, from premises such as these, there followed the monstrous socio-religious error of largely Advaita-sponsored orthodoxy, in matters of social ethics, resulting in a rigid and unholy caste hierarchy.

Not only the knowledge of the Veda, but also the means leading to the knowledge of the Veda, came to be appropriated by the brahmins. This meant that the traditional path of jñāna, which includes access to the Veda, came to be considered the exclusive preserve of the brahmin caste. If the brahmins relented, however, they could condescend to allow such access to the kṣatriya caste. And, if they could be persuaded to relent further, they might condescend to allow such access to the vaiśya caste as well. But the vast and teeming millions of śūdras, and the pañcamas (those outside the pale of caste altogether, including what are known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes) - these have been systematically debarred from direct access to the Holy Veda for untold centuries. It is difficult to understand why, if the kṣatriyas and the vaiśyas could sometimes be awarded the right of access to the Veda, the śūdras could not also be awarded the same right. The entire system is plainly a matter of unspiritual human prejudices.

We may approach the matter from another angle pertaining to the logic of access to the scriptures. In theory, the śūdras are said to be free to have access to all the texts besides the Veda, and therefore the privileges of study of the immense range of holy texts which fall in the category of secondary scriptures. These include the sūtra texts of the darśanas or the philosophical schools, the study of

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Sanskrit, study of the Purāṇas, the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, etc.

But this access is available to the śūdras only in theory. In practice, the disenfranchised masses of these nominal Hindus were deprived of their rights of entry into the schools which were invariably set up with state funds. Except for extremely rare cases occurring in the bhakti movements, no śūdra ever became a noteworthy reciter or exponent of the Mahābhārata or the Rāmāyaṇa or the Bhāgavatam. By various techniques and devices, such as the bar on inter-caste dining, by forcibly settling the śūdras only on the outskirts of the villages, and by restraining them from using the same civic facilities (such as bathing and washing), as the upper castes, so far were the śūdras from attaining any worthwhile educational level in the traditional lore, that they were, on the contrary, made to feel unworthy and inferior in every respect, and were relegated to the category of the dregs of society. For countless centuries, the children of the śūdras were never given equal opportunities with the children of the privileged classes for attaining higher educational levels in the secular or religious fields, nor in the field of commerce, nor in the field of public administration.

Thus, the protest and excuse that some privileged class academics are seen to make, that the śūdras were quite free to study the vast mass of the secondary sacred literature, turns out on examination to be rather hollow and hypocritical. From the point of view of the moral requirements of a religious life, such a claim must be considered even wickedly hollow. From the point of view of the concept of Human Rights, the bar on the study of the Vedas imposed specifically on the śūdras, and extended to the kṣatriyas and the vaiśyas, has to be considered totally unacceptable. Such a bar is also totally unacceptable in terms of the pure spiritual tradition of Hinduism, that is, in terms of the principle of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity.

It requires little acumen to realise that the ground and basis of the entire system of the Hindu caste structure is two-fold. One is the

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rule of endogamy, or the bar on inter-caste marriages. This stricture is the Hindu version of the infamous Immorality Act of South Africa's apartheid government. Just as the South African government could not uphold democracy and the Immorality Act at the same time, since the one contradicted the other, so also the essentially democratic spirit of Hindu religion and philosophy was contradicted by the racist and chauvinist programmes of the elite ruling classes (that is, by the brahmin caste which also managed to get the support of the governing caste of kṣatriyas, who in turn imposed the caste restrictions upon the under-privileged and disadvantaged masses). It is, of course, equally true that a democratic system of human rights cannot permit any form of compulsion either, in the matter of marriage or other social and personal arrangements.

The other aspect of the basis of the caste system is the principle of "job reservation" imposed by the privileged classes - again a feature identical with the racist regime of the old apartheid government of South Africa. On this basis only those persons born into "brahmin" families could follow the vocation of a brahmin, that is, a priest of God. Generally, only privileged class children could get jobs which are considered respectable and which are highly regarded from cultural and social points of view. Though this system is full of obvious anomalies, contradictions and absurdities, it was perpetuated by the sheer strength and systematic power assumed by the brahmins and propped up by the kṣatriya rulers. Again we have to note that, though the spiritual tradition of Hinduism is seriously violated by these caste strictures, and though we may justifiably declare that there is no caste system in Hinduism when it is understood as a pure spiritual system, these anomalies have been current almost intact to the present day.

We also have to note that, as a result of caste structures having been formulated early in the historical development of Hinduism, they appear to have support in many texts, such as the Dharmasūtras and the Dharmaśāstras, which have become the basis for what is known as Hindu law in the conventional sense. Referring to the caste-

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oriented structural basis of Hindu social law as conflicting with the universally accepted principles of the concept of human rights, Tilak says:

> *"The Declaration (of Human Rights) refers to human rights in terms of a claim and entitlement that others must recognize and respect. This means that customs, tradition, and usages must be replaced by civil law as the sole and exclusive source and protector of rights. To that extent they pose serious problems for their acceptance in non-Western countries such as India, which have a tradition of distinct political cultures and lifestyles of their own."*[17]

Tilak further says that "the rhetoric of human rights, divorced as it is from economic and material development and accountability, sounds hollow and shallow to the hungry millions in the developing countries", and refers to the draft text of "A Hindu Declaration of Universal Human Rights" prepared by Prof. GC Pande and Prof. Arvind Sharma as "a welcome departure" deserving "careful scrutiny".[18] In the absence of having had the opportunity to peruse that document, we cannot fully assess the ideas presented by the author, except to say, with reference to the earlier quoted paragraph, that we have grave apprehensions about his reference to "non-Western countries such as India, which have a tradition of distinct political cultures and lifestyles of their own" with the operative presumption that therefore modern concepts of democratic lifestyles and civil rights should not be made to apply there. The paper enters upon an analysis of the Mīmāṁsā theory of Dharma and the concept of *prāyaścitta*, but which do not touch upon our present concerns in this paper.

We have to insist that democratic political and social theory places the individual, as an individual, in a situation of equal worth with every other individual, with all individuals having inherent and equal rights. We have to maintain that, on the basis of the fundamental premises of the great tradition of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity characterising the Hindu tradition in all phases of its development,

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however subdued this tradition might have been due to overriding group interests, the modern concepts of human rights and civil liberties are germane to Hindu religion and philosophy. Tilak also appears to support this view, when he says:

> *Secular and humanist rhetoric in modern Hindu discourse on human rights emerged in the 19th century with Ram Mohun Roy. In this century Dr. Radhakrishnan advanced the claim for Hindu humanism in Eastern Religions and Western Thought (1959).*[19]

However, in commenting on Gandhi's ideas of penance and *prāyaścitta*, Tilak commends Gandhi's saintly attitude to personal suffering for the sake of others' misdemeanors, and suggests immediately thereafter that

> *What is needed is a Gandhian reinterpretation of the Declaration (of Human Rights) to give Humphrey's vision a practical shape.* [20]

In this regard it is necessary to bear in mind that Gandhi was a strong supporter of the traditional varṇa system of caste hierarchy, insisting that vocations must be pursued only on the basis of birth (and therefore not on the basis of training and merit). Though Gandhi, like a true saint, was vehement in his opposition to untouchability, and to the assumption of attitudes of superiority or inferiority due to caste positions, his insistence on imposing his brand of morality on all persons (at least on all Hindus) did serious violence to the very root of the principles governing the concept of Human Rights. The Bodhisattva principle cannot be imposed upon others; it has to be a purely private and personal undertaking, even it be for the sake of another. While Gandhi's motives were laudable, they were misdirected and were bound to be counter-productive, as it is virtually impossible that a person compelled to perform menial tasks all his life long would not feel demeaned before another performing tasks considered socially more acceptable and more dignified. Too many examples come to mind to prove

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this point, including the attitudes (and sufferings) inevitably developed among growing children. It is far removed from democracy to operate a system which imposes a selective morality which gives rise to all manner violations to one's pride, dignity and self-respect. It is simply impossible to develop an egalitarian society when distinctions, and privileges, and social positions, are based on birth.

The fact of the matter, which need to be understood at all times, is that equality, like liberty and fraternity, though they may sound political, are in reality spiritual concepts which require unfailing legal support. Spiritual and religious persons need to support these concepts with the zeal of crusaders, Like Lord Kṛṣṇa, Lord Buddha, Lord Jesus, the Prophet Mohamed and Guru Nanak, to name the most outstanding figures in the religious history of humanity. We cannot have one rule for one nation or group of people, and another rule for others. Such a procedure would not only produce a stunted and stultified society, as Hindu society has unfortunately been all these long years, but it would also be a flagrant violation of the TSU principle. We have seen above that such a violation is clearly inconsistent with the concepts and ideas presented in the Puruṣa Sūkta hymn of the Ṛg Veda.

Taking an objective stance, we have to note that Hindu society has only nominally been inclusive of the more than three hundred million sudras and other depressed classes in India. If these people could have given expression to their feelings in a truly independent fashion they would surely have rejected membership of Hindu society out of hand. That they have been docile and conforming shows the severity of traditional conditioning they have suffered these long centuries. At present, among the educated members of this very large disadvantaged sector of the Indian people there are genuine signs of organised revolt against traditional Hindu society. There is a strong developing perception among these people that they are not Hindu, and that they do not wish to be labelled Hindu.[21] The present writer feels that the proponents of this view are not always accurate or fair in their assessment of Hindu cultural

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concepts, nor in their assessment of the facts of Hindu history. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that it took so many centuries for such a perception to surface and find dignified expression, which is due to the systematic power wielded by the privileged castes, despite the fundamental and truly spiritual notions inherent in the Hindu tradition.

Maintaining academic objectivity, we have to offer the critique that in spite of the French Revolution, in spite of the American War of Independence, in spite of the Second World War with the issue of racism central to it, of the thousands of Hindu scholars and academics who have benefitted from Western education, hardly any have taken up the task of ridding Hindu society of the scourge of racism - for that is what privileges based on birth precisely is. Since almost all the early Indian academics and scholars have been upper caste Hindus, their silence about the caste distinctions was easily interpreted as hypocrisy.[22]

It must be noted that the great Svāmī Vivekananda's eloquence against caste privileges and caste exclusiveness was exemplary, as have been the speeches and writings of Radhakrishnan, the modern sage. But Hindu scholars do not seem to have significantly followed in the footsteps of these valuable and inspiring mentors. One modern monk, apparently belonging to the Vivekananda tradition, and writing a booklet under the title "Science and Human Values,"[23] disappointingly leaves out any mention of the need to eradicate caste exclusiveness and privileges based on birth, factors which have riddled India with thousands of endogamous groups, rendering Hindu society a non-homogeneous community lacking a sense of internal fellowship or spontaneous inter-personal goodwill. Any person in a position of social or religious leadership cannot justifiably ignore offering some sort of direction on the matter of caste distinctions, the more so in a treatise, however short, on human values in present-day society. The figure of just one modern critic of the caste system, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who is said to have led five million socially underprivileged Hindus out of Hinduism into the Buddhist fold, would make a discussion of caste

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imperative in any monograph dealing with human values. With regard to the impressive socio-political movement that bears the name of Ambedkar, Prasad writes:

> *Ambedkarism is an antidote to all casteist creeds, especially to brahmanism ..... The Ambedkarian has detached himself from society and schools which propagate casteism and insulate the depressed classes from reaping the fruit of social justice and democracy. The heroes of the Ambedkarians would rather drop out of Hinduism and discard their faith than have to accept an oppressive cult.*[24]

As we have asserted earlier, the speculative origin of the castes as superior or inferior is untenable on sociological and historical grounds. Caste is a system that has been engineered by human beings and can also be re-structured by intelligent human beings to weed out its more baneful features. It is a mechanical social arrangement designed to protect the privileges enjoyed by some against others. As Prasad also asserts, objective scholarship cannot countenance such an absurd fiction:

> *On reading these Brahmanic speculations on the origin of the four Varnas and particularly of the Shudras one is very much reminded of the words of Prof. Max Muller (who wrote that:) All these speculations are really the twaddles of idiots and ravings of madmen and as such they are of no use to the student of history who is in search of a natural explanation of a human problem.*[25]

In spite of the traditional theory of the miraculous origin of caste divisions, the truth is that no serious thinker in India or elsewhere has really accepted such a theory. As Max Muller said, the student of history has to look for a natural (and therefore reasonable) explanation of what is a problem of human social structuring.[26] Except for the Puruṣa Sūkta hymn, which we have noted gives a symbolic and mystical account of the origins of caste, the Veda is

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silent on the issue. The appeals by the Dharmasūtras and the Dharmaśāstras to Vedic authority must therefore be seen to be the perpetuation of a convenient fiction to support the system supported by those who can materially benefit from it.

It is important to note that the references to caste in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad are not in the form of revelation or *anubhava,* but in the form of comment and observation. They cannot be taken on a par with the *mahāvākyas* and other truly spiritual concepts. In any case, as we have maintained earlier, the central Hindu tradition does not require that every word in the sacred texts needs to be taken in the sense of the esoteric Veda. An ancient adage tells us: "Like oil in the sesamum seed, the essence of the Vedic lore is inherent in every part of the Veda." We have to draw out the essence and leave behind the husk.[27] Another adage reveals that "that which is Veda in the Veda is alone the Veda" - implying that the traditional sacred text can contain expressions that need not be taken as the esoteric or genuine Veda.

SECTION THREE
BRĀHMAṆATVA VS. BRĀHMINISM

The fundamental spiritual tradition of India, represented by the TSU principle, cannot tolerate injustices and violations of the law of love. The ideal of *brāhmaṇatva* is an expression of this spiritual tradition, for it throws open the doors of learning to all, and stands for the spiritual hopes and social aspirations of all people equally and without prejudice. The ideal of *brāhmaṇatva* stands for the essential spiritual qualities that ought to characterise a brāhmin, which are holiness, truth, love and charity. He who claims to be a brāhmin also claims to possess *brāhmaṇatva,* and he is necessarily a champion of the democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. It is incumbent upon him to constantly agitate for the equal rights of all persons in all spheres of human activity. The Hindu spiritual tradition demands such action from all Hindus. For otherwise, the spiritual principle of **oneness** would suffer very serious violation. In order to uphold the principle of spiritual oneness specifically at

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the mundane material level we have the legend that the great Ādi Śaṅkarācārya bowed before the caṇḍāla and accepted him as his guru!

The ideal of *brāhmaṇatva* holds great promise for the future direction of Hinduism, for it discounts birth situations totally and focuses solely on the spiritual worth of each person. *Brāhmaṇatva* shows clearly that a *brāhmin* cannot be born; he must be made. A *brāhmin* is made by his own efforts, and his making can be enhanced by a helpful spiritual and educational environment.

The ideal of *brāhmaṇatva* has nothing to do with the decadent caste practices that go by the name of brāhminism, because *brāhmaṇatva*, by its very definition of spiritual worth, contradicts distinctions based on birth. The legend of the great Ṛṣi Viśvāmitra aspiring to raise himself, by his own efforts, to the level of a *brahmarṣi* provides a dramatic lesson in support of the ideal of *brāhmaṇatva*. That most of the early Hindu teachers and wielders of social power did not themselves benefit from such valuable lessons and did not promote equality and love among the masses, but instead were keen only to protect their exclusive caste privileges, resulted sadly in the warped interpretations foisted upon some of our best spiritual concepts. *Brāhmaṇatva* is one such vital spiritual concept, which militates against privileges based on birth.

Brāhmaṇatva is breeding, not birth. It is a holy blend of character, learning and proficiency in the performance of rituals (when applied to a person who chooses to be a *brāhmin*). However, the term *brāhmaṇatva* may be extrapolated from the physical or material situation of socio-religious concerns and elevated to its own inherent meaning of the eligibility for nearness or oneness with God. *Brāhmaṇatva* must characterise a true *brāhmin*, who is a priest of God, and who enacts the love of God in respect of all persons. Since such a true *brāhmin* (that is, one who possesses *brāhmaṇatva*) necessarily irradiates the love of God, he cannot reject others without rejecting and destroying his own *brāhmaṇatva*.

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Since brāhminism has developed in history in the fashion of creating for itself its own undemocratic and racist tradition of an endogamous system of privileges based on birth, we may say with complete justification that brāhminism has placed itself in a position of mutual opposition to the ideal of *brāhmaṇatva*. Those within the conservative tradition of brāhminism have been under the illusion that *brāhmaṇatva* is their exclusive prerogative. But a little reflection reveals the really unspiritual nature of such a claim, and therefore the disservice that brāhminism has done to the cause of Hinduism.

Brāhmaṇatva is a concept with purely spiritual connotations. It is wide in its sympathy and open in its acceptance of every member of society. Because it is in a direct relationship of expression of the fundamental unity of all things. It deliberately emphasises the centrality of the pure spiritual concept of Brahman, based as it is on the grammatical root *bṛh*, to grow freely and infinitely (that is, without let or hindrance). Its affinity with democratic ideas and ideals becomes patent the moment we reflect on its root meaning. Of course such spiritual import is really also a vital part of the meaning of the term *brāhmin*, which denotes one who acts in the name of the Divine Unity of God (*brahman*, which is a seminal term for the Transcendent Spiritual Unity). And such a *brāhmin* is necessarily a priest, who, through his learning and proficiency in the rituals, actively promotes the full democratic implications of the TSU principle at the level of social ethics.

In such a spiritual and ethical sense we may accept the term *brāhmin* to stand for a priest of God, but we cannot accept the term in the conventionally corrupt sense of a person being endowed with qualities by virtue of birth.

Such a purified sense of the term *brāhmin* cannot be related to the idea of brāhminism, which, due to the absurd claims of the caste-brāhmins and their denial of the status of equality to the vast masses of the underprivileged people, has historically come to be categorised as unholy, unspiritual and irreligious. It should be noted

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that the blame for this state of affairs lies squarely upon the conventional brāhmins, those who claim special privileges for themselves, and upon no one else.

Thus, brāhminism, which is the conventional culture of caste-prejudices and the systematic appropriation of privileges undertaken by the socially advantaged castes over thousands of years in India, becomes the very antithesis of the term *brāhmaṇatva*. Yet both terms originate from the same grammatical root *bṛh*, denoting the spiritual power to grow and develop freely, lodged in the heart of every creature. It is the more remarkable that, in its greed for personal gain and aggrandizement, a whole class of people, over such a long period, can so distort and corrupt a term that is so full of spiritual promise.

Brāhminism confines, smothers and stultifies, while *brāhmaṇatva* spiritualises life and gives freedom. Brāhminism shackles the mind, stifles the spirit, mechanises life and dehumanises the personality, while *brāhmaṇatva* frees the mind and invests human life with the spirit of love and kindness. Brāhminism sows suspicion and distrust, which lead to hatred and violence, while *brāhmaṇatva* creates an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill, which lead to harmonious inter-personal relations and universal peace. Brāhminism is fascist, intolerant, oppressive and racist, while *brāhmaṇatva* is open, democratic, tolerant and freedom-loving. Brāhminism divides, while *brāhmaṇatva* unites.

The narrow-minded perpetrators of brāhminism have not only done a disservice to Hinduism, but they have also deeply violated the sensitivity of the spiritual culture of the world. There can be no excuse for this crime for damaging our spiritual tradition on the part of those most fitted to know better, on the part of those who ought to have been acting in the holy name of God who loves all persons equally as His children.

Taking into account the inescapable historical facts, which show that the spiritual foundations of Hinduism have been systematically

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sabotaged, there are indeed no grounds for excuses, but only for contrition, and penance. And the penance has to be, of necessity, in the form of enacting the values inherent in the concept of ***brāhmaṇatva.*** This would naturally entail promoting all those social values whose base lie in the principle of Transcendent Spiritual Unity. The programme of penance would require a sustained emphasis on extending equality at every level of social and religious life to all those who call themselves Hindus of any denomination whatever.

If this is done in a spirit of commitment and sincerity, we shall once again witness the flowering of Hindu culture in truly religious and spiritual terms, which are love and compassion, truth and justice. We shall once again witness the promotion of a humane and spiritual system of social ethics. We shall once again witness, in daily practice, the operation of democracy and equality in every sphere of life. And once again Hinduism shall breathe the true spirit of Human Rights. For these flow quite naturally and harmoniously from the concept of *brāhmaṇatva,* which is a particular manifestation of the TSU principle.

Sometimes the view is expressed by Hindu academics and Hindu leaders that the privileged castes ought to bear a "penitent consciousness" regarding the abuses heaped upon the culturally disenfranchised masses. This paper directs specifically that a mere penitent consciousness, while it may be relevant and helpful as a beginning, cannot be sufficient. Human Rights need to be enacted in all their fullness, so that democratic values will be seen to be enhanced at every level of social, educational and religious life.

We maintain that it is incumbent upon all Hindu scholars and leaders to promulgate the logical corollaries of the love of God and to ensure their operation in Hindu society at every level. This alone can vindicate the TSU principle, which stresses the unmitigated spiritual right of every individual to the full status of equality with every other individual.

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Such an enactment of the penitent consciousness will of its own accord raise the concepts of *brāhmin* and *brāhmaṇatva* to their proper level of dignity consonant with the TSU principle and consonant with all the requirements of the concept of Human Rights. To attain this level of dignity, and to infuse it with the spirit of *brāhmaṇatva*, the term *brāhmin* should be applied to a person, not by birth, but by worth. Consistent with the spiritual meaning of the Puruṣa Sūkta hymn of the Ṛg Veda, the term *brāhmin* is really a title conferred upon any individual by virtue of character and training. Such training may be undertaken by universities, colleges and other competent teaching institutions. A *brāhmin* shall then be truly a priest of God, acting in His name and to serve His purpose on earth. The term *brāhmin* shall then take its rightful place as a general spiritual term covering all other titles such as *guru, ācārya, paṇḍit*, etc., provided these entail ministering to the spiritual needs of persons and the performance of rituals, and are not confined only to teaching duties.

It may be observed that it is not necessary to attend to other vocations in the conventional caste hierarchy because these will adjust themselves once the position and significance of the term *brāhmin* has been made consistent with the social and religious corollaries of the TSU principle. As noted earlier, due to personal greed and self-aggrandisement, the caste brāhmins in the early history of Hinduism had appropriated to themselves many privileges which they claimed to be entitled to by birth. The caste brahmins of the present day are not directly putting forth such a claim, though their silence may indicate a tacit (and perhaps convenient?) acceptance of brāhminism and all that it entails. However, this feature of early Hindu social history has been the major cause of the confusion in understanding spiritual values and the consequent decadence of the Hindu social fabric. Correcting this major issue will therefore correct all other anomalies.

The true spirit of a truly spiritually religion cannot tolerate a system which divides people into narrow groups and which breeds suspicion and ill-will among them. From an ethical and socio-religious point

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of view, we may say that the spirit of a spiritual religion is seen to be adumbrated in the modern Declaration of Human Rights, though necessarily couched in political and legal terms. As we have said already, the concept of equality is a spiritual concept. It is therefore easy to see that the notion of Human Rights flow easily and freely from the fundamental principle of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity, which, we have maintained, is the one binding principle of the Hindu religious tradition from ancient to modern times. Rightly understood, it secures human rights for all members of the human family.

The Veda teaches that anyone who has faith in the gods and in the Supreme Brahman whose symbols the gods are, carries with him always the spirit of *Yajña* or the holy sacrifice. Each person, endowed with faith *(śraddhā)* is thus an embodiment of the sacrifice, which an expression of the *Ṛta* principle of universal harmony and immanent love.[28] As a conclusion, we may refer to the ancient concept of Ṛta, which is in turn the embodiment of the Transcendent Spiritual Unity, and we quote from Crawford to elucidate this very meaningful concept in the present context:

> *The basic message of Hindu ethics, rooted in the ancient idea of Ṛta, is that harmony is already here; that we do not have to create it - only discover it! Since Brahman and nature are one, we must see the Supreme Being in the whole world and the whole world in Him!*[29]

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   Of Ramanuja says that the great saint, though sympathetic withy the position of the sudras and conscious of their human rights, was unable to openly accord them those rights due to the pressures of the social strictures prevalent then.

9. A well-known legend says that the Vedic sage Viśvāmitra, though born as a warrior, wished to become a priestly sage (brahmarṣi) as this was rated a higher spiritual status, and, undertaking severe prayerful austerities, eventually achieved his ambition

   Of high fame also is the story of Karṇa, considered by many to the true hero of the epic Mahābhārata. Karṇa, though the son of a charioteer, escelled in archery, but was prevented from challenging Arjuna in a contest due to the former's low birth.

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However, Duryodhana raised Karna's status by anointing him as royalty, and gave him a modest kingdom to rule, thereby enabling him to enter a contest against Arjuna.

10. Lord Kṛṣṇa, though born in a traditional warrior family, undertakes not to take up arms in the great war of the Mahābhārata; instead he gives holy discourse which would traditionally be considered the prerogative of those born in brahmin families, thus refuting caste privileges based on birth.

In His teachings in the Bhagavad Gītā also, Kṛṣṇa defines caste as dependent on character and actions, significantly omitting the factor of birth. Kṛṣṇa's exhortations to Arjuna to fight because he is a kṣatriya is based on the fact that Arjuna has already been trained as a warrior and had accepted himself as a warrior throughout his career. Thus, having for all practical purposes made his choice of career, he is seen to be honour-bound by the rules of his vocation.

Earlier in the Bhagavad Gītā also (see Gita 1. 41-47), when Arjuna persists in accosting Kṛṣṇa with the spectre of the results of the internecine war as leading to unthinkable chaos and admixture of castes (*varṇa sankara*), Kṛṣṇa totally ignores the issue of caste admixture and upholds the primacy of doing what is right, the implicaton being that caste purity can be sacrificed but morally right action has to be followed at all times. Further on in the text, Kṛṣṇa's adducing reasons for Arjuna to undertake action because he is a warrior may be seen as convenient to the traditional views of caste distinctions (and indeed has been cited as such), but such arguments are not inimical to our thesis in this paper, for nowhere does Kṛṣṇa urge Arjuna to action merely because of his birth situation.

11. Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5. 3-5.

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GANDHI'S SATYĀGRAHA AS DEPICTED IN HINDĪ LITERATURE

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The absolute power attributed to Truth, as postulated by Mahatma Gandhi, is the affirmation of the Hindu heritage which prescribes the moral or Dharmic path towards spiritual liberation. The Vedic dictum "Satyameva Jayate Naanritam", Truth alone triumphs and not untruth, forms the point of departure for a discussion of Satyāgraha, particularly since Gandhiji and the Vedas are at one with the concept that Truth and God are synonymous, "Truth is God (Gandhi 1952:3). It will further be discerned that Satyāgraha has been depicted in literature preceding the dawn of the Hindī language. The Rāmāyaṇa of Valmīki (and all other versions since) is pre-eminently a celebration of the satyāgraha espoused by Rāma, which prompted him to undertake fourteen years of rigorous banishment for upholding Truth; the Mahābhārat is likewise an attempt to portray the struggle for the victory of Truth. A great figure of ancient Indian history King Harishchandra is eulogized for his submission to slavery to uphold Truth. Gandhiji did not invent Satyagraha : for him "Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills" (Gandhi 1952:3). He perfected the notion, shaping it into an instrument of total moral, spiritual, social and national regeneration, on such a massive scale that perhaps, if attaining the freedom of India from British rule had not become the prime goal of

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Satyāgraha, thus dissipating much of its pressure, then Satyāgraha might have achieved remarkable results in the transformation of humanity, something which Gandhiji envisaged as the end product of Satyagraha.

Gandhiji's views on mother tongue education are well known. He further promoted the idea of a national language to foster national integration and pride, as well as to induce detachment from the colonial subservience to English. Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1875) had already, as a writer promoting the liberation of India from British hegemony, articulated the idea of resistance to colonialism in a subtle, if not subdued manner by portraying this resistance as "His Majesty's Opposition"; (Varma 1987:460) and pronouncing that "The very basis of all progress is the progress of one's own language; without this progress the pangs of the heart will not cease".

Gandhiji thus reiterated the call for political freedom and linguistic solidarity. His choice of Hindī as the language of India brought him into closer contact and collaboration with writers of Hindī literature on his final return to India. Gandhi actively promoted Hindī, establishing Rāshtrabhāsha Prachār Samiti, Wardha, 1937, in the north and Dakshin Bhārat Hindī Prachār Sabha, Madras, 1927 in the South. His association with Hindi literary figures was strengthened when he was elected President of the Hind Sāhitya Sammelan (Hindī Literature Academy) in 1918. Concurrently with these efforts of Gandhiji, nationalistic literatures affirming the Gandhian principles of ahiṁsā and satyāgraha were

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produced in the various other languages of India. However, it fell to the fortunate lot of Hindī to especially promote Gandhiji's ideals and receive his patronage.

Gandhiji's own satyāgraha in South African has been described by Bhawani Dayal, an ardent Gandhian associate and advocate of Hindi. Bhavani Dayal (1947:156-158) shows in his "Pravasī Kī Ātmakathā" (Autobiography of an Immigrant) how Gandhiji applied Satyāgraha to transform Mir Alam from a hostile opponent of Gandhi's conciliatory attitude into a friend and better human being by refusing to charge him for assault when Mir Alam broke his head for agreeing to be finger-printed for the Asiatic Registration Certificate. Bhawani Dayal (1947:157) reports Gandhiji as saying to the investigating police officers : " Those brothers of ours believed that I was in the wrong, therefore they considered it appropriate to teach me a lesson. I have no wish to prosecute them or have them punished; I shall therefore not give evidence against them". Bhawani Dayal's faith in Gandhiji was strengthened when Mir Alam came along the next day to beg for Gandhiji's forgiveness for the attack, and Gandhiji embraced Mir Alam and forgave him.

Hindī writers who faithfully portrayed Gandhiji's satyagraha as a total strategy of transformation of the Indian people, and thereby the nature of the British and their Indian supporters, wrote their literature out of conviction for the Gandhian method. If anger and indignation were evoked in their writings it was against

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the circumstances that dehumanised people; or against the people's indolent submission to these circumstances. An ardent Satyagrahi and renowned poet and politician Balkrishna Sharma Naveen must have shocked India with his poem Joothe Patte (Dirty Plates), portraying the humiliating act of the beggar who pounced on the discarded food plate, outside a roadside eatery to lick at the remaining morsels (perhaps in competition with a dog or other beggars). To Naveen this was the ultimate degradation of a human being. His poem on this scene expresses the impotent rage of the observer, directed at man who is supposed to be "the Lord of the universe". Navin's contempt seeks to evoke the pride and sense of dignity of the Indian people who surrendered their humanity to circumstances. He exhorts downtrodden man to apply his spiritual and physical powers to overcome his position. Gandhi's views on human dignity are fully voiced here.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was drawn to the figure of Śrī Rāma in his childhood, although his perceptions regarding Śrī Rāma underwent change during the course of his life. Gandhiji's allegiance and reverence for Rāma, however, did not change. Rāma became to him the Transcendental Brahman, the Redeemer of the fallen (Patita Pāvana). This explains why Gandhiji attracted the great Rāma-Bhakta, Satyāgrahi and poet Maithilīsharan Gupta into his circle. Maithilīsharan Gupta who outlived Gandhiji, was honoured as the National Poet, appointed twice to the Rājya Sabhā (upper House of Parliament). Gandhiji presided over his 50th birthday celebration in 1936. Gupta is in that category

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of Hindī writers who had conviction in Gandhiji Satyāgraha, and its multifaceted approach to the upliftment of the Indian masses. He tried to achieve this in "Bhārat Bhāratī". "Bhārat Bhāratī" (1912) portraying "the country's degradation, the shattering of its old value systems, the prevalence of ignorance, disease and superstition, of a country enslaved and exploited and going on rudderless was read by hundreds and thousands of people" (Madan Gopal 1987:6).

Guptaji combines the ideals of equality of men and women, non-violence, freedom and truth in "Saket", written in 1932 when the Satyāgraha movement was at its peak. In this work Gupta reflects Gandhi's ideals of ahiṁsā and Rāmrājya; using the Rāmāyaṇa legend as the base, Gupta wove Gandhi's ideals into the story, so that Rāma is shown lecturing Lakshmana about ahiṁsā. Further, Rāma's mission on this earth is "To spell out Aryan ideals, to prove to the people the worthlessness of greed, ... to revolutionize and to bring peace and happiness" (Madan Gopal 1987:10).

Dramatist and poet Jayashankar Prasad made his contribution to Hindī literature and the Satyagraha movement through his masterful pen, writing in a language that immediately touched the hearts and minds of readers. Prasad chose India's glorious past as a basis of national re-construction and moral resurgence. In his play "Chandragupta", Prasad portrays patriotism in Chandra- gupta and the true Brāhman in Chanakya. Chanakya or Kauṭilya dominates the play as the epitome of dispassionate Brāhmanhood, exhorting his followers

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to cast aside prejudices of narrow nationalism, caste-adherence, selfish motivation and inaction in the interest of the motherland. He is a kingmaker, but has no desire to be king. He rejects base human passions that degrade mankind; and stands for the sublime truths of Hinduism - sacrifice, non-covetousness and renunciation. Similar sentiments and characteristics are dominant in the play "Skandagupta" in which prince Skandagupta, the crown Prince, shows no zeal in succession to the throne, leaving his half brother and step mother to pursue power, while he dedicates himself to the protection of the country. Mindful of the corrupting effects of power, Prince Skandagupta wishes to remain a soldier of the nation, protecting all its citizens from dangers external and internal. Skandagupta readily sacrifices his personal wishes and desires for peace and security in the land.

Jayashankar Prasad's epic "Kāmāyani" recounting the Deluge and the survival of Manu is a multifaceted gem. It thrust Prasad into the literary limelight, also enabling his message for his country men to gain prominence. "Kamayani" recounts the re-establishment of civilization by Manu after the Deluge and the repetition of the errors that had destroyed the previous civilization. Prasad's lines below convey his perception of the present era :-

> "This new human society preoccupied with dualities, creates new castes and classes
> Shaping problems unknown, creating its own destruction
> Tumult and strife unending, crush unity, increasing differences

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producing not the desired object, but only sorrow and regret.
(Jayashankar Prasad : "Kāmāyani" Canto 9. Verse 15).

These lines apply equally to the new society created by Manu and to the India of Prasad and Gandhi. The remedy according to Prasad is the ideal of Samarasata - equanimity, harmony, or Gandhiji's Ahimsa and Satyagraha.

Satyāgraha as a fundamental principle of human conduct demands complete adherence to Truth in every aspect of life. The writers mentioned above have portrayed various aspects of this, with differing degrees of emphasis and clarity. However, no single writer succeeded in capturing Gandhiji's comprehensive definition of Satyāgraha, to the extent that Munshi Premchand did. If Gandhi was the champion of the concept of Satyāgraha and of Hindi as a national language, Premchand was the "King of Novelists", and "Soldier of the Pen". Having conducted his own struggles against social and economic evils under British rule, Premchand was well equipped to promote the message of Gandhiji to the Indian people and the world. Premchand laid bare in his works the evils that had become inherent in Indian society, as well as the wickedness of the system that enslaved millions of Indians. It was his mission and passion to purge these corruptions from Indian society, to enable an ennobled human society to emerge. Premchand provided through

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his pen an instrument of critical self-examination, just as Gandhiji was attempting to cleanse the body politic to make it worthy of Swaraj.

Satyāgraha was a total strategy for the cleansing or purification of India from the excrescences of centuries of injustice, ignorance, oppression, exploitation, superstition and indolence. Premchand as well as Gandhiji were aware that the mere departure of the colonial rulers would not make India a better place, or inspire the Indian people to cherish freedom, and pursue social justice, peace and harmony for all.

As a novelist Premchand found scope in his literary vehicle to examine, dissect and expose the evils and the hypocrisies that were destroying the moral fabric of society. In his "Sevā Sadan". Premchand focused on the hardships of women's lives often exacerbated by the lust and inhumanity of men. The writer has signalled the importance of education which would give women self-sufficiency and protect them from falling prey to men of doubtful integrity.

"Rangabhūmi" (The stage) is that Novel of Munshi Premchand which comes closest to portraying Gandhiji himself in its ideals as well as its hero "Surdas". Gandhi's ideals of village industries, land trusteeship, communal peace and self-sufficiency and moral regeneration find full expression in "Rangabhumi". Surdas is a blind beggar - blind perhaps because he can therefore view everybody as equals; a beggar to portray the state of the nation or perhaps aparigraha, non-

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covetousness. Sūrdās's wealth is in his character and determination to serve the cause of truth. He opposes the sale of land in his village, including his own, to industrialist John Sevak, because industrialization would destroy the moral and social values of the people. Prostitution, alcoholism and social degeneration would ensue. The construction of a cigarette factory was in any case not in the interest of the people. The capitalists' enticement of employment and improvement in living standards could not outweigh the damage to the community. Surdas is faced with opposition from people amongst his fellow villagers, and the might of the British Raj together with its Indian supporters. He stands his ground, winning the grudging admiration of the British Resident Mr Clark, as well as Raja Mahendra Singh the Municipal Administrator, who relied on British support to buy the adoration of the people. Surdas was not impressed by any of Mahendra Singh's or John Sevak's inducements. His own little tract of land had become the bone of contention. He explicitly states that he is merely a trustee of his forefathers, and of the people vis-a-vis the land, and cannot alienate it. This land serves as common pasture for the animals of the villagers, and he had also desired to erect a temple on it for public use. He cannot reconcile himself to the construction of a factory on this piece of land.

Sūrdās turned out to be a very determined, unyielding follower of the truth as he saw it. Knowing that he was not committing any wrong thereby, he gave refuge to a woman Subhagī who was being abused by her husband. Firm in his own moral rectitude, and believing that he

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must protect those who come to seek refuge, Sūrdās withstands accusations of impropriety. This novel, written in 1925 represents the peak of Premchand's preoccupation with Gandhiji's ideology of Satyagraha. He cast Sūrdās in the mould of Gandhiji - in the social, economic, moral and political dimensions. However, as a literary writer he owed it to society to record also the truths on the ground - ie. that not all people could be Sūrdās or Gandhi. Ultimately Surdas is shot while leading a march, and succumbs to his wounds. The death of Sūrdās casts a gloom over the community, bringing to mind Nehru's words almost twenty years later following the assassination of Gandhiji; viz "The light has gone out of our lives". The tragedy of Sūrdās's life highlighted the evils lurking in society, amongst the poor and meek as much as the mighty and the rich. Truth will triumph, but not yet. Therefore Raja Mahendra Singh, in a bout of frustration at Surdas for destroying his credibility, with his satyagraha, rides out at night to the statue erected in honour of Surdas, and strikes it down. Surdas's statue tumbles, but it also kills Mahendra Singh. Gandhiji is supposed to have forgiven Nathuram Godse, although posterity does not : Surdas bore no personal ill-will for Raja Mahendra Singh, yet his capricious deed, his attempt to "kill" once again a man already dead, brought about his own end.

The symbolic demise of Satyāgraha and Gandhi in the person of Sūrdās did not deter Premchand from continuing the fight against social decadence. In most of his novels Premchand had posed problems and suggested the remedies for them, which were

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predominantly Gandhian in conception and method. Initially Premchand subscribed to a social revolution inspired by Truth, Non-Violence and Love, but it would seem that his faith in Gandhian ideals faltered towards the end of his life. It is probably on account of this that later works such as "Nirmalā" and "Godān", while posing the burning questions of the time, do not point towards Gandhian idealistic solutions (Sitaram 1977: 23). Thus in "Nirmalā", a novel based on the abhorrent dowry system and resultant incompatible marriages, two evils which constitute a blot on Indian Society, Premchand describes the soul-destroying effects of these vexing problems. Nirmalā stoically accepts her fate as the wife of an old man. Perhaps society becomes too complacent if it is not required to think of the injustices of its traditions and usages, hence Premchand leaves the reader to think of the solutions.

Another evil of Indian society, which afflicted the broad spectrum of Indians described as the middle-class, was its abject enslavement to material things. Premchand's novel "Gaban" depicts Jalapa as a woman passionately fond of jewellery, and her husband Ramanath, as a typical middle class Indian who panders to her while concealing his true financial status. Ramanath is a weak man who becomes a pawn in the hands of the British authorities, ready to bear "false" witness against freedom fighters Dinesh and his associates. The ultimate degradation of any human being is bearing false testimony against compatriots who are fighting for the freedom and dignity of all. Premchand's characters show remarkable transformation : jewellery loving Jalapa

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and woman of leisure Zohra, who was detailed by the British authorities to amuse Ramanath, rise above their weakness to save Ramanath from moral perdition. This transformation was inspired by the selfless sacrifice of the freedom fighters.

The uplifment of the masses, especially the untouchables or "Harijans" was a grand passion of Gandhiji. Premchand gives expression to this philosophy in "Karmabhumi" (1932). People of aste are enlisted into the cause of upliftment of the oppressed, the struggle between Indians themselves in this effort is no less than the country's struggle against the British colonial rulers. Indian society had to purge itself of prejudice against the so called untouchables or Harijans, reinstating them to position of dignity and equality. Premchand echoes Gandhiji's sentiments when the untouchables are exhorted to desist from doing those things which subject them to opprobrium and rejection. While granting that their occupations per se had the dignity of labour, their way of life, with regard to cleanliness, eating of the flesh of dead animals etc. stood in the way of their acceptance into mainstream society. If the temples of Hinduism were closed to them, it was partly for these reasons which engendered prejudice against them.

Finally in Godan (Gift of the Cow) Premchand depicts the rebelling youth in the form of Gobar, the son of traditionalist peasant Hori. Hori is the epitome of the Indian peasant, steeped in the values of the rural Indians, treating the Zamindar as God. Godan, described as the "Epic of rural Life", shows much that was wrong in the lives of India's 700 000 villages. It shows the

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disabilities of the young who are dissatisfied with the status quo in that they do not know how to present meaningful opposition. Gobar revolts against village customs, which succeeded in reducing his family from plenty to penury, from peasant-farmers to labourers. However, he has no guidance for a course of action, and Premchand leaves the big question mark -Whither from here?

It is noteworthy that Premchand died in 1936 soon after completing Godan, after presiding over the Progressive Writers Association Conference in Lucknow. The Satyagraha movement was in full cry, but Premchand seems to have expected too much too soon, or had the poet's grim vision of the future. He announced at the Lucknow Conference that idealism (including Gandhi's ideals) had nothing more to offer. In the political arena, the revolutionary movement was gaining ground. Had Satyagraha failed?

Premchand's perceptions were coloured by the course of events in the country; he could not forever write novels of hope and charity when India was burning. And he was not Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's satyāgraha remains perfectly valid, because its basis was spiritual and transcendental. Writers such as Premchand faithfully depicted it, but came short of repudiating its efficacy. The reason for the subsequent developments must be sought elsewhere.

India gained her independence very much as a result of Gandhiji's satyāgraha which was a phenomenon which

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the British rulers of India could not understand, although they even tried to use it against the Satyagrahis. Premchand's only literary work using the word Satyāgraha in the title - The short story "Satyagraha" shows how the British and their Indian associates employ the gluttonous Pandit Moteram Shastri to undertake Satyāgraha, a fast unto death, to counter a threatened strike and boycott against the visit of the viceroy to Banaras. This boycott was engineered by the Congress Resistance. This satirical story shows that Satyāgraha by an unfit person, for an ignoble cause, is no Satyagraha, and is bound to fail. Premchand and Gandhiji both respected goodness and high moral principles, wherever they were to be found. Another Premchand story "Namak Kā Darogā" depicts a faithful servant of the Raj, Vanshidhar resisting temptation in the form of large sums of money offered by Pandit Alopideen who broke the salt Laws. Even this instrument of British Law, because of his honesty and dedication to duty, is characterised as a satyagrahi. Perhaps the Freedom struggle required more people of character like that of the Namak Kā Darogā (Salt Inspector) and perhaps on both sides of the struggle.

Absolute, indivisible Truth is valid at all times and in all places. It is a perfect instrument; however, human society which has to apply and live by it, is as yet imperfect. There is crucial need to re-examine Gandhiji's philosophy and apply it with greater determination, for which there was perhaps insufficient scope in the period of the freedom struggle. Great Gandhian and associate of the Mahatma, Maithilīsharan Gupta, paying tribute to Gandhiji after his assassination

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expresses the feeling that Gandhiji's work is not yet complete as follows :-

The fruits of our deeds
Shall be tasted by one and all of us
Bapu, but you will once again
Have to come into our midst.

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