Nidān

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Criteria for Submission of Papers

Articles should relate to the study of any aspect of Hinduism. As such, the study of Hinduism is broadly conceived to include, not merely the traditionally recognized areas within the discipline, but includes contributions from scholars in other fields who seek to bring their particular worldviews and theories into dialogue with Hindu studies. Articles that explore issues of history, ecology, economics, politics, sociology, culture, education and psychology are welcomed.

Papers will be subject to valuation by referees drawn from a source of local and international scholars. Papers should be prefaced by an abstract of approximately 100 words, setting out the gist of the paper. The article itself should not exceed 6000 words.

Gender discrimination should be avoided, unless it is necessary for the sense intended.

Notes should be rendered at the end of the paper and not as footnotes.

The author's full name, address, qualifications and present position must be supplied on a separate page. Each paper must be accompanied by a signed declaration to the effect that the article is the original work of the author.

Articles must be submitted on a computer diskette using an IBM or Macintosh compatible word processing programme. Articles should be saved as a Word Document. In addition three printed double spaced copies of the paper must be supplied.

Note that the publication of articles cannot be guaranteed. Further, an article, which is accepted for publication, maybe held over for publication in a subsequent issue of the Journal.

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Preface

This volume of Nidān is a special one in the sense that this is
dedicated to the enormous contribution made by Prof. G.C.
Oosthuizen to the establishment and development of the study of
Hinduism at the University of Durban-Westville. As the
University of Durban-Westville merges with the University of
Natal from the beginning of 2004, this volume will be the last that
would be published in the name of the University of Durban-
Westville. It will continue its work in the new university, viz., the
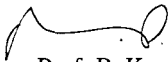University of KwaZulu Natal by promoting the study and
research of Hinduism.

Prof. Oosthuizen spent most of his academic career at UDW and
played a key role in the establishment of the Department of
Hindu Studies and Indian Philosophy. In the 70s and 80s while he
was still teaching at UDW, he in fact trained some of the earlier
staff that became employed in the department of Hindu Studies.
As the university in its old name and form winds up to become
part of the new university, it is only fitting to remember the
contributions of scholars like Prof. Oosthuizen to the study of
religion in general and Hinduism in particular. Through his
academic contribution and also through his personal contacts
with the local Hindu community, he became integral to the Hindu
studies and as such became a well respected person within the
community.

This volume, therefore, includes articles not only on some
important topics in Hinduism, but also more importantly on Hindu
Ethics. The new outlook of the journal will continue to focus
articles on Hindu themes and topics, but also will begin to reflect
on Hinduism in contemporary society in relation to other religious
communities and their traditions. As such it will attempt to
develop a more contemporary profile of Hinduism in the years to
come. More focus will be placed on South African aspects of
Hinduism.

This being the last of the volumes printed in the name of the
University of Durban-Westville, I wish to take a moment to take
note of the contribution that this journal has made to the study of
Hinduism in South Africa. For scholars of Hinduism in Southern

African region this is the only journal that has provided opportunities to publish their research. Many overseas scholars also published in this journal over the years. The journal not only served the academic community, but also has been a useful reader for the community on various themes and topics on Hinduism and as such it assisted in educating the community on their own traditions and practices and philosophies. I have been privileged to have been the editor of the journal since 1995/6 and will continue to strengthen the standards of the journal and increase its readership among scholars and lay people. Once again it has been a pleasure to have edited this journal in the name of the University of Durban-Westville and wish to take it to its rightful place in the new university. I am sure, it will continue to play a vital role in the study of Hinduism in the many years to come in South Africa. In closing this old chapter of this journal, I wish to record my sincere thanks to Prof. Oosthuizen once again for his contributions. I also very sincerely record my thanks to the editorial board members, both national and international and many scholars who have contributed to the volumes of the journal. In particular, I want thank Prof. Sitaram for his many directions that he gave to the development of this journal.

Sincerely

Prof. P. Kumar
Editor

Business suits and Priests : The Politics of Sacred Space

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Abstract

This paper will look at how literature, in this instance religious literature has been used as a mechanism to construct and claim ownership of a particular space that comes to be demarcated, and ritually sacralised as a temple space.

While offering worship in a temple may appear to be about purely religious issues, as being about one's personally defined relationship to one's individually conceived religious reality, we come to see that the shape and organisation of this relationship in the Indian context is in many senses constructed. This paper focuses on a medieval South Indian religious text called the Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam, and how this text is used as a literary device to organise and re-order the believer's religious understanding of the sacred space of the Meenakshi Temple at Madurai, hereafter referred to as the Temple.

This text declares that the god Siva promises to remain forever at this particular site of Madurai, perpetually available to his devotees. A temple is in turn built to house the deity. However, while the god is indeed available for worship to the people here, access to the god comes to be controlled by the caretakers ordained by the Hindu temple ritual texts in the shape of the priests of the temple. It is these priests who in reality have control of the sacred inner spaces of the temple where the iconographic representation of the deity is housed. This privileged access is in turn postured and perpetuated through the narratives of the Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam. The word Puranam means old story as opposed to history.

The Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam

Harman (1989: 24) maintains that the Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam (hereafter Puranam) is a "careful, systematic and passionate statement about the past of Madurai and of the deities residing here." However, the point is that the literary text is not so much a systematic statement as it is a systematic creation of Madurai's historical past through reference to a mythological past.

I found that the people I spoke to were not necessarily well versed with the actual text itself, and they were not able to tell me the several details surrounding the various myths. The stories, in whichever version and however sketchily known, had nevertheless taken keen hold of their religious imagination. One lay informant put it this way, "we walk the same ground as Siva did." This was a reference to the many mythic narratives showing him (the god Siva) as having walked the ground of Madurai. Another informant spoke of the 'fact' that the hills and rivers of Madurai were created by the god.

For the ritual specialist who officiates as a priest in the Temple, the Puranam then comes to be a used as textual vindication and authenticity of the sacredness of this temple site. Bhardwaj refers to various mythological narratives such as the Puranam as being the "legitimating device utilised by ritual specialists in order to popularise the allegedly ancient origins of a sacred place" (Bhardwaj 1973: 86). Bhardwaj writes that during his fieldwork in the city of Himachal Pradesh he came across some handbills published by the local priest in which the history of the place was described as having been established 50007 (!) years ago. This is an experience that I can well relate to. I came across a newsletter, published by the Madurai Temple committee and distributed by the priests, which claims the ancient and unique sacredness of Madurai. I would also frequently meet with the claims of the priests at the Temple as well as that of the lay devotees (in turn informed by the priest tradition) who would attest to the origins of Madurai in hyperbolic terms.

In Madurai, as in many other religious centres in India, it is fascinating to see that secular history and mythological

narratives appear to be inextricable intertwined in almost seamless continuity. Very often in the course of the interviews my informants, in their recounting of the history of the city would pass from actual events to events that were quite obviously (to me at least) mythological. History to the devotees of Madurai meant something very different to what one would normally regard as being truly historical, i.e., of being factual and objective. The Madurai myths recorded in the religious text had come to be perceived by both categories of readers, lay adherents as well as religious specialists or priests as a record of things that actually took place in time. Upon questioning, it was clear from the expressions on the lay informants' faces that they would not even dream of doubting the veracity of the stories. Indeed the physical topography of the city is understood as bearing reference to certain events in the text. Stories of hills and rivers being fashioned by the god appear to be visibly present to the believer. It appeared that the stories were self-evident as far as the devotees were concerned. Regarding this Harman writes:

> Devotees need only look around them for verification;
> they can enter the temple of Siva and Meenakshi and
> worship these deities there. They can climb the hills
> around Madurai created by Siva, and they can bathe in
> the Vaigai River, which Siva also created. Of course,
> other explanations for these things are possible, but
> they are not necessary. (Harman 1989: 25).

For the historian of religions the myth's validity is not necessarily reducible to purely it's historical value, or lack thereof. Hiltebeitel's response regarding the question of the historicity of myths points to the fact that the hermeneutic reading of the adherent differed dramatically from that of the scholar. Says Hiltebeitel:

> Although the literature does not in itself make any
> claim to being historical, being seen within the tradition,
> as being old stories rather than history, nowhere is it
> made explicit that the reader is to accept the
> mythological stories in any kind of allegorical or
> symbolic frame. (Internet indology subscription list,
> "indology@listserve.liv.ac.uk").

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Certainly for the people of Madurai the literature comes to be read and understood as historical and the characters as historical actors within the actual drama. As Hiltebeitel points out it is not made explicit that the reader accept any metaphoric reading. This literal reading in turn serves the priest at the temple and the tradition of Hindu temple worship.

As the chief protagonist in this so called historical drama, the god Siva, in the course of his mythological adventures, is said to have left his footprints on the landscape of Madurai. The Puranam describes the sixty-four games that the god has played in Madurai. According to the Temple priests one is thus able to see the evidence of the god at play in his playground on earth. In the case of the Madurai religious community mythology had come to be accepted as manifesting itself as part of the very geography of the landscape here. This sort of exegesis or literal reading implies the god's historical presence in the city of Madurai. This 'history' in turn holds up the temple and ritual tradition that asks that the god be housed in a temple space and offered ritual worship.

The text can thus be seen as a mechanism to locate and 'lock' the god Siva into this particular place. Siva comes to be seen by his devotees as Siva at Madurai. Space becomes divided and demarcated by virtue of what the literature proclaims as the god's presence in the city.

Space in the corpus of Tamil mythology in the Tamil land is consecrated and designated as being the province of the divine (Shulman 1985: 25). And while, as Shulman observes the Tamil land is crowded with sacred sites" (1985: 21) or spaces where the god can be understood as existing, the temple priests at Madurai are bent on promoting more intently, Madurai as sacred space.

My informants who were in this instance all priests of the Temple were keen to refer to the text and its declarations that, "it was a privilege to be born in Madurai", and even more fortunate than that was "the honour of dying in Madurai".[1] Again

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[1] Interview with Kumar Bhatta, a priest at Meenakshi Temple.

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it is the Madurai Puranam that acts as the reference point seen as extolling the virtue of this particular sacred space.

The God in the city of Madurai

The priests whose task in large part was to act as ritual specialists, spoke mainly in terms of Siva belonging (spatially) to Madurai. Performing as the ritual caretakers of the god at Madurai their allegiances were to the local god[2] and their focus was on the god's local dwelling place. The priests appeared to recognise the potency of the place or as they put it, "the power of the god" at particular places, in other words, places of fixed centres. They claimed that it was most important to receive the blessing and restorative power of the god at Madurai.

Hinduism is not a monolithic faith. It is rather a mosaic of many intersecting streams of thought and doctrinal strands, all existing in differing levels of tension with each other. Various essentialist thinkers, scholars as well as religious adherents have at times opted to conflate these various strands in an attempt to proffer a single faith that is defined by a dominant belief in a monotheistic God.

Hinduism however, comprises both singular as well as plural theological understandings of god. This is because Hinduism as a religion contains both theistic as well as non theistic philosophical traditions and contains the traditions of the pre-Aryan religion, the Aryan Vedic religion as well as the various indigenous or folk religious traditions. The word Hinduism itself is of fairly modern origin. The theistic tradition of offering worship in a temple itself dates back to early medieval times. Here a particular fixed space comes to be consecrated as sacred and becomes the designated site for a temple. The temple tradition claims that the god here (at that particular site) possesses great powers. In many instances, as was the case for Madurai, many temples are built in particular sites that mythological tradition claims as having been visited by a god, or having experienced a divine manifestation of some sort.

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[2] Interview s with the priests, Kumar Bhatta and Ashok Bhatta

According to Peterson (1991: 10) there are a total of eleven hymns sung to the local god Siva at Madurai. While the many hymns sung were in praise of Siva at his abode in a particular place, like Madurai, these are multiple spaces. This was quite simply because the (devotional) saints were intent on the promotion of the religious faith of Saivism over against the rival and the so-called heterodox faiths. Peterson (1991: 340-341) lists thirty-four different places where there are in excess of five hymns sung to Siva. These are all the presented by the tradition as the dwelling places of Siva.

These dwelling places need to be understood in the context of spatial claim. It was vital for the saints following largely monotheistic, devotional form of Hinduism to claim as many spaces as possible for their god because, as Peterson observes, the hagiographic accounts as well as some of the religious hymns, suggest that the saints had to compete with powerful rival Jain and Buddhist monks to gain and retain royal support for their religion (Petersen 1991: 10). The matter was one of gaining royal support that had to be claimed and retained in the face of religious competition, which was at the same time a competition over space. The saints have thus carved a religious landscape spanning the breadth of the Tamil land. The local initiated priests at the Temple on the other hand had very local religious allegiances.

Focusing solely on Siva at Madurai holds complex implications, as far as the priests are concerned. The point, crucial to the understanding of the dynamics of ritual allegiance is that the Saiva (followers of Siva) priests do not promote and serve the universal Siva or the Siva of the larger devotional Hindu tradition, but the (spatially) local Siva at a particular temple.

David Parkin in his book Sacred Void : Spatial Images of Work and Ritual Among the Giriama of Kenya, argues that talking about the sacred means thinking and talking about space. He adds:

> To some extent it is also vice versa: that when people speak and write about space, they tend to essentialise it in terms of places occupied by it; and that discussion of

> human spaces is likely, eventually to refer to a central point imbued with extra-human, or spiritual, significance (Parkin 1991: 2).

To the priests this central point was the spatial geography of Madurai. Essentialising a particular space, in this instance Madurai, as sacred, demarcates it and separates that space qualitatively from (all) the other spaces.

This qualitative demarcation is further echoed in the design of the ancient city with the city itself being modelled on the lines of the temple. The city, in terms of religious sentiment becomes a temple. In fact a direct parallel to the temple may be seen in the city of Madurai where the old inner city is designed as an echo of the temple structure. For in the centre stands the temple compound . And immediately around the temple are the three concentric square streets.

Here then was a city that came to be built around the Temple. A city that came to model itself on the design of the Temple. While the modern city of Madurai in its bid to contain the burgeoning number of residents has moved away from the structure, the ancient city still stands, as it has for the last several hundred years. It now forms the nucleus of the present city.

Indeed my introduction to Madurai was through the words of the conductor of the train I was on.

> [...] once you have set foot in the city you have set foot within the temple. The city limits are the temple gates (Naidu :1997).

It is the text of the Puranam that declares that Siva belongs to Madurai and as a place-history, constructs a mythological past for the god at this place. This perception is perpetuated by the priests of the Temple, and by the devotee who now understands this to mean that the god is her god at Madurai.

The god Siva or rather the iconic image is however, housed inside the walls of the inner sanctum of the temple and the

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initiated priests are the individuals vested with the ritual authority to touch and offer the prescribed worship to the god.

For the lay devotee of Siva there are limits to the access of these gods. The limits are imposed under threat of ritual pollution and in my interviews the priests never failed to point out that there was always the danger of the god removing his power from the image. Hence it is the Brahmin as temple priest, who in the final analysis, is in ritual control of the public worship offered to the sculpted image. It is only by his favour that the devotee can hope to attain self-realisation. Fuller states that the priests, whom the texts assert as being second to Siva only are allowed to perform the public worship (Fuller 1984: 29).

> Because Adisaivas [initiated in a particular ritual tradition] alone can perform Siva's public worship, the Meenakshi Temple priests naturally claim that Adisaivas are closest to the god .... (Fuller 1984: 28).

Spatially locating Siva in Madurai thus affords the priests at this particular place the ritual possession of the god.

Economics of Sacred Spaces

Sacred spaces are also big business. It is a distinct possibility that there were efforts on the part of various interested agents such as the priests and in some instances royal patrons to enhance the religious importance of sacred places. Bhardwaj suggests that the development of specific sacred places as economic enterprises is a legitimate hypothesis (Bhardwaj 1973: 5; also see Fuller 1984: 23-48).

For it must be remembered that although the rituals to be performed at any particular sacred site are already prescribed in the religious texts, these rituals have to be performed by the officiating priests at a particular place on behalf of the person. The texts are clear that the person cannot perform these rituals for himself and the services of the priests are needed. It follows that the officiating priests are then more than likely to acclaim the worth of the particular sacred space at which they are in ritual control (Bhardwaj 1973: 5).

It seems that both the priests as well as the Indian princes and kings had a vested interest in the sacred places. For land grants from the courts of the medieval Cola kings were often made to temples as endowments to provide recitations from the religious texts. Spencer is of the opinion that while grants of this nature were obviously meant to be a visible display of royal piety, it can also be understood to be read as an attempt to "utilise religious media for the simultaneous dissemination of political propaganda" (Spencer 1970: 243).

The princes appear to have received revenue from taxing the pilgrims as a way of exercising proprietary rights over the temples. Bhardwaj tells us that:

> The National Archives of India (New Delhi) contain several documents that establish the economic importance of certain sacred places to the princes in whose jurisdiction the places fell (Bhardwaj 1973: 73).

The control of the Madurai Temple much later also passed into the reins of the British Administrators. The collapse of the Indian principalities however did not detract from the income generated from the temples. According to the reports of American missionaries, in the mid-1830s the goddess Meenakshi in the Madurai temple alone is said to have "supported" 2000 people on annual revenues of 200 000 rupees (Newell 1988: 17). This would have in large part have been the result of the offerings of the pilgrims and the income generated from the massive festivals.

Up until the year 1863 district tax officials were said to have collected temple revenues from the cultivating tenants and transferred the monies to the temple treasuries. In addition the powerful landowners held ownership of land in the district of Madurai and would have exerted an influence on the city by their patronage of the temple (Newell 1988: 17).

Of course, with the advent of India's political independence from the British crown to an independent Indian government, meant that the priests were now in the employ of the government and its succeeding parties. At present the Temple is under the

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control of the Tamil Nadu government's Department of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments. The royal patronage would obviously have fallen away with the collapse of the Nayaka dynasty, and I'm not sure of the present influence and patronage of the wealthy landholders as I did not attempt any systematic research in this area. There is nevertheless clear evidence of a constantly generated source of income at the Madurai temple. For there is at present a small charge to enter the chamber directly outside the inner sanctum of each of the principal deities, Meenakshi and Sundaresvara. A portion of the value of these tickets is redeemable by the officiating priests at the Meenakshi Temple.

And aside from the money placed voluntarily on the tray that the priest brings to the devotee and on which the sacred light is held, is also the money via a system of ticket purchase rendered to the temple officials to be allowed the performance of various private worship that the devotee might wish. One also needs to remember that festivals, especially the Marriage festival at which many of my informants felt that I needed to be present, attracted several hundreds of thousands of people and understandably generated a large income for the temple. Large crowds of people attend the Temple on any given day aside from periodic celebrations of festivals. India is very much a country whose people's daily lives incorporate temple going as an everyday activity not merely restricted to days of special religious observances. Each visit to the inner sanctum demands a small charge. Although the charge is a nominal few rupees, the sheer magnitude of daily visitors swells the temple takings to appreciable amounts. The success of a sacred space, it would appear, can also be read in economic terms.

Summary : Owning Madurai

Madurai is perceived as the land that the god Siva has left his footprints because of the literary text, the Puranam that informs the devotee that Madurai is the dwelling place of the god. The text also introduces us to king Kulecekara who comes to consecrate the site as sacred. For the textual narrative reveals that the sacrality of Madurai is communicated to the king in a

dream. The king promptly consecrates the site by erecting a shrine (that is later to evolve into the main Temple).

The myth in the text informs us that this sacred space has been recognised. Madurai comes to represent and function as a definitive centre fixing the god's presence. Here we meet with the construction of the spatial idiom of centrality and immediacy that seeks to root the deity to Madurai. The literary text is used to organise the devotees' perception of the sacred site with the many descriptions of the god's divine acts at Madurai. The devotee in turn comes to recognise the topography of Madurai in terms of the god's sacred games played out in this city.

However, while the god Siva, according to the text, is available to the people of Madurai, access to the god and his concentrated power comes to be controlled by the ordained priests of the temple, who in reality have control of the sacred inner spaces within the temple.

Traditionally, the Brahmins as an elite category are meant to manage the cultural norms through their control of religion and culture (Mandelbaum 1970: 23). This kind of control or possession of ritual space on the part of the priests at the Madurai Temple thus works as a tool for the perpetuation of that particular faith and ritual tradition. Space then belongs not so much to the god Siva, in as much as it belongs in a sense to the priest-sponsors. A kind of religious syllogism comes into play here; if the sacred land belongs to Siva, in other words is in the control of the god as the text expounds, and if the priests at the Temple are in charge of the god, it follows that they are also in effect in charge of the sacred space.

For the ordinary devotee herself has the right to only two things in the context of worship at the Temple, the right to the sight of the deity, and the right to the blessing of the god. The rights of the Temple priests, in addition to the former two rights of the devotee are also the several rights regarding the deity itself, such as the right to touch and offer rituals to the image and the historical land rights. This land right, although fallen away now, was granted traditionally by the ancient kings, and was in fact

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> [...] contingent upon the relationship between king and
> deity that could only be properly established by the
> insertion of the priests into the network of exchanges
> (Fuller 1984: 104).

The authority of the ritual specialists is thus intimately bound
with the idea that the importance of ritual is in mediating the
relations between the devotee and the deity (Bell 1992: 24).
Without these Brahmin specialists, the devotees' relationship
with the deities is declared (by the priest) as inadequate.

The ritual sponsors, that is to say the priests have thus a vested
interest in organising the devotees' perception of a particular
space (like Madurai), as sacred, as opposed to (another) space
that is not. They accomplish this with the telling of the Puranam
narratives. their insertion into the relationship between the deities
and devotee as well as their own mystified relationship to these
deities is seen as crucial to the whole process and success of the
worship, and is represented as being made on behalf of the
devotee. The priests as the ritual specialists see and present
themselves as the most vital part of the devotee-god equation.

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Study of Diaspora Hinduism: Some Theoretical Issues

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Abstract

In this paper, I present Hindu materials drawn from the South African situation and contrast them with those of the classical Hindu materials and thereby I problematize our understanding of Hinduism. As far as the diasporic Hinduism is concerned there is no way one could understand it through Sanskrit based classical Hindu texts. In a sense, we have arrived at a point in our scholarship when we need to take a fresh look at our sources for Hinduism. My view is that a reasonable definition and understanding of Hinduism can only be arrived at through a coherent study of both the so called "classical" Sanskrit text-based traditions and the orally transmitted traditions of the Hindus.

Indian Immigrants in South Africa

The indentured Indians were shipped from two major ports—the Madras port which sent mainly Tamil and Telugu speaking people; and the Calcutta port which sent mainly Hindi speaking people. The passenger Indians or Traders largely came from Gujarat and Bombay. The ship lists from the Madras port for the initial period between 1860 and 1877 do not give us any details regarding the castes of Indians. Upto 1877 all Hindus coming from Madras were listed under the generic term "Gentoo."[1] Only from 1878 onwards did the ship lists from Madras contain details of castes. Therefore, it is not easy to find out exactly which caste groups came from South India during the early part of the immigration. However, it is unlikely that any so called higher caste members would have left India at that time for

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[1] Y. S. Meer makes a reference to the Indians coming to South Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from Bengal and Madras. They were brought as slaves to the Cape colony. However, no reliable source is cited. See Y. S. Meer., p. 4.

reasons of ritual purity. Most of the last names of the South Indian groups do indicate their caste background.

On the other hand the ship lists from the Calcutta port give details of caste. Both in the case of North Indian groups and the South Indian groups there seems to have been some mobility in terms of their caste background. Often the documents of individuals reflect caste names that do not match with their family names. For instance, in one of the documents a person is listed as belonging to Vanniya caste which is a non-brāhmanical caste. But the same person has a last name "Iyer" which is a specific brāhmanical caste name from South India. Such anamolies, however, need to be carefully investigated and studied by social scientists to see whether some individuals had claimed higher caste status by changing their last names, and for what reasons.[2] Such investigation would help us understand how social mobility might have occured among the South African Indians.[3]

Although linguistically speaking there are several groups, in general all North Indians share a similar cultural milieu while all South Indians share a similar cultural milieu. This trend may be identified in the observance of festivals.[4] One could notice

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[2] R.K. Jain, an anthropologist from the Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, suggested during my discussions with him that such acquisition of last names from Brāhmānical castes did occur in Malaysia and other places where Indians had settled. He thinks that such changes in the last names indicate that a person has taken on a priestly role in the community.

[3] For more caste details see S. Bhana. *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal 1860—1902 : A Study Based on Ships' Lists.* (New Delhi: Promila & Co., Publishers, 1991). Also see C.G. Henning. *The Indentured Indian in Natal 1860—1917.* (New Delhi: Promila & Co., Publishers, 1993), pp. 72—74 and 84—109.

[4] It is not so easy to neatly divide the Hindu community as North and South Indians on the basis of cultural variations, although such distinctions might explain some religious phenomena among them. In actual religious practice, however, the Telugus in certain instances seem to follow more closely the Hindi-speaking people, (e.g., in terms of their general tendency toward Vishnu worship) and in certain instances seem to follow more closely the Tamil traditions (e.g., Kāvaḍi, and fasting during Parattassi month). But culturally they are closer to the Tamils. This may be seen, for instance, in their festival celebrations (e.g., Divāli), and in their general tendency toward Vaishnava faith rather than Śaiva faith.

distinct South Indian and North Indian architectural styles in temple building. Mikula et al note those distinct architectural backgrounds.[5]

The present Hindu community in South Africa may be treated largely as belonging to four language groups.[6] These are: 1) Tamils, 2) Telugus, 3) Hindis and 4) Gujaratis.[7] There seems to be a greater awareness of their respective languages and traditions at the present time than it was during their initial period. And therefore the linguistic group identities seem to be becoming reified. Nowbath points out that at one time during the early days the North Indian groups were unaware of the fact that the Telugus and the Tamils were distinct groups in terms of their language and culture.[8]

Nevertheless, it must be noted that over the years there was a great deal of assimilation process between the Tamils and the Telugus, more from the side of the Telugus.[9] In other words, a great many Telugus appropriated the Tamil culture and tended to identify themselves with the Tamil society.

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[5] Paul Mikula et al. *Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa.* (Durban: Hindu Temple Publications, 1982).

[6] For the purposes of this study I am not dealing with the Muslim group but only the group that may be identified as Hindus.

[7] Although there were other linguistic groups (e.g., Malayālis, Marāthis) during the initial years of immigration, soon they lost their identity due to their negligible numbers.

[8] Ranji S. Nowbath, et al. (eds). *The Hindu Heritage in South Africa.* (Durban: The South African Hindu Mahā Sabha, 1960), p. 18.

[9] V. Prabhakaran has identified in her research the extent to which the Telugus have borrowed Tamil words in their common usage in South Africa. See V. Prabhakaran. "Tamil Lexical Borrowings in South African Telugu" in *South African Journal of Linguistics*, 1994:12:1, pp. 26—31. However, it must also be remembered that in the nineteenth century many of the Telugus came to South Africa from either the Tamil-speaking areas or from the boarders of Andhra and Tamil-speaking regions. Thus the Tamil influence on the Telugus, either language wise or culture wise, seem to pre-date their settlement in South Africa.

Syncretistic Nature of Hindu Temples

Although the Natal government instructed their agents not to send Brāhmins, as Brain points out, between 1860 and 1911 a small number of Brāhmins did eventually come to South Africa,[10] and most of them seem to have been from north India. Brain further points out that in 1890 a priest from Ladysmith applied for land to build a temple for the railway workers.[11] In 1904 one Chottey Singh, a 'Brāhmin' priest was released from indenture in order to allow him to function as a priest at the Depot Road Temple. Brain further notes that on Sundays workers used to meet to discuss their problems and it is possible, he suggests, that those evenings were used for worship as well.[12]

Temples began to appear within a few years of the arrival of the Indians. As indentured Indians became free they moved to the outskirts of the villages and established their settlements. At the same time they also seem to have made provision for relatively small shrines built with wattle and daub. Brain makes reference to the establishment of a small Indian village near Ottawa (outside of Durban) by 1869.[13] Some of the earliest temples built in Durban area date back to 1864. The following are the temples built between 1864 and 1885—Umzinto temple (1864), Umbilo temple (1869), Isipingo temple (1870), Mount Edgecombe temple (1875) Tongaat temple (1880), and Umgeni Road temple (1885).[14] In the midlands region temples were built between 1880 and 1885 because of the railway workers there.[15]

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[10] See J.B.Brain. "Religion, Missionaries and Indentured Indians." in *Essays on Indentured Indians in Natal.* Edited by Surendra Bhana. (Leeds, UK.: Peepal Tree Press, 1991), p. 211. However, the only class of Brāhmins who seem to have come to South Africa are the 'Maharaj', a subcaste of the larger Brāhmin group. The Maharaj Brāhmins are traditionally cooks who prepared food offered at rituals.

[11] *Loc. cit.*

[12] *Loc. cit.*

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 212

[14] *Loc. cit.*

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Brain points out that by 1880s both the Tamil and the Telugu communties began to set up small schools to teach Tamil and Telugu and to give their children religious education. In fact, as early as the 1870s efforts were made to build temples and teach vernacular languages to their children in an effort to maintain their culture. In one of the documents collected by the Coolie Commission in 1872, there is a reference made to a temple built at Riet Valley. The report dated June 26, 1872 was made by one C. Behrens, Esq. He mentions, "The Coolies at Riet Valley call the manager their father; and have built a Hindoo temple, where they celebrate their own feast days."[16] Another report filed on June 23, 1872 by one Rangasammy, also shows that there were requests for permission to build temples and holidays for celebrating their festivals.[17] Only after 1893 the Hindi schools began to appear i.e., when the Natal government provided Indians with primary education. Religious education became part of the school curriculum.[18] These early temples and schools seem to have become centers of religious and cultural activities. Reading of the scriptures, story telling and staging religious dramas became the activities of such centers where people could meet for social and religious activities. These centers seem to have provided the much needed sense of belonging as members of one Hindu community. After the nineteenth century, the Hindu temples were built mainly by the professional builders from India.

The Hindu temples of South Africa reflect a wide variety of traditions. From an architectural point of view there are two types of temples, namely, the South Indian style and the North Indian style. Among the older ones, most Natal temples reflect the dominant South Indian style. In general the South Indian and North Indian styles are distinguished by the shrine (*cella*), the tower (*śikhara*) and the flag post (*koḍi*). According to Mikula, major design criteria for a South Indian style building are the following: "orientation (generally east-west), the square plan form of the shrine (*cella*), the axial alignment of an external altar

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16 Y. S. Meer. *Op. cit.* p. 141.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

18 See Brain (1991). *Op. cit.*, p. 213.

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and the stylized flagpole (*koḍi*)."[19]   The North Indian style (known as the Nagara style) temples are marked by much more plain and simple designs. Some of the basic elements include:

> the freestanding, single *cella* and the emphasis on verticality in the design. The same east-west orientation applied, but much emphasis was placed on the idea of circumambulation for which purpose some hardened walkway or in later versions, a veranda was provided. No lineal external alters and *koḍi* poles were provided at all. In later versions under the influence of the Islamic, Victorian, and Edwardian architectural styles a curious hybrid form of temple developed which nevertheless retained its Hindu quality.[20]

Although the above characteristic features are more applicable to the temples in India, one does find both the northern and the southern stylistic distinctions in South Africa as well. The older South Indian temples have been built in typical South Indian style. But in more recent temples one finds a mixture of both elements. Commenting on the later temples Mikula, et al point out that

> North Indian temple builders, with their basic understanding of the Nagara style, were constructing South Indian temples and vice versa. Elements such as the circumambulatory passage around the *cella*, the emphasis on the vertical line and blind arches were introduced into Dravidian temples. Southern deities dressed in *Gujarati* dress adorned the buildings and Islamic domes appeared over shrines. North Indian temples, already heavily influenced by western architecture, received external altars and *koḍi* poles often making it difficult to distinguish one from the other.[21]

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19 Mikula, et al. *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

20 *Loc. cit.*

21 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

What is interesting, however, is that most of the devotees and the trustees of the temples are not aware of these distinctions. Often designs have been copied without regard to its particular architectural details.

From a religious point of view broadly speaking, there are three types of temples in South Africa: the Śaiva temples, Vishnu temples and Amman (Mother/Goddess) temples or Śakti temples. Often all these various types are set in one single temple complex. However, there seems to be a structural pattern that can be seen in the way the various types are combined. Usually in each temple complex, there is a dominant deity and the peripheral deities. The dominant deity occupies the sanctum sanctorum, whereas the peripheral deities are located in individual shrines separately. For instance, if the dominant deity is Śiva, the other deities related to him would be placed in the shrines that are in closer proximity, and the idols of other distantly related deities (e. g., Vishnu, Lakshmi) are placed in shrines that are a little farther away. In some smaller temples there are no separate shrines for the peripheral deities. Those idols are placed around the dominant deity. The most universal deity in all temples, whether Śaiva temples or Vishnu temples, is Gaṇeśa or Vināyaka (also known as Vighneśvara)and Śri Lakshmi.22

One of the striking features of the South African Hindu temples is the mixing of the brāhmānical and the non-brāmānical deities. In the temples in India, the non-brāhmānical Goddesses (e. g., Draupadi Amman and Māriamman) are not part of the brāhmānical temples. In the South African context, the non-brāhmānical Amman (Goddess) temples are built next to the brāhmānical temples within the same complex. However, a careful observation of the general pattern of the temple complexes reveals an interesting structure. Where the

22 Gaṇeśa is associated with the removal of hurdles in life (his name, Vighneśvara, indicates the same — *vighna* means hurdle, *Īśvara* means lord, thus Vighneśvara means the lord over hurdles. Hindus believe that worshipping Gaṇeśa as the lord over hurdles is essential before worshipping any deity. He is believed to place obstacles if he is not worshipped before the other deities. Proper worship of Gaṇeśa will result in the removal of all difficulties.

brāhmānical temples and the non-brāhmānical temples are combined in one complex, the brāhmānical temples take the central position, whereas the Amman temples are located in the periphery of the complex, usually on the right hand side (e. g., Umgeni temple complex in Durban, and Sivasubramaniar (Śiva-Subrahmaṇya) and Māriamman temple complex in Pietermaritzburg).

One of my informants suggested that one reason why the various types of Hindu tradition are combined in one single complex is that the indentured laborers attempted to achieve consensus and unity within the Indian community by catering to all the various backgrounds of people, especially in the religious sphere. Another informant suggested that the iconography and the rituals in many brāhmānical temples do not match. In other words, it is suggested that although the iconography seems brāhmānical, the worship pattern, the ceremonies, the festivals, etc., do not always reflect the brāhmānical tradition, but rather a mixture of brāhmānical and non-brāhmānical aspects. For instance, on any festival occasion, rituals are performed not only to the main deity concerned but also to the peripheral deities. Even when the festival belongs to the brāhmānical tradition, the non-brāhmānical Goddesses are also worshipped and *vice versa*.

Localising Hindu Rituals

Worship patterns in South African Hindu temples are largely a mixture of brāhmānical and non-brāhmānical aspects. They reflect the social reality within the Hindu fold. The earlier worship patterns in South Africa were clearly dominated by the non-brāhmānical aspects. It is only in the last two decades or so the temple worship patterns are becoming brāhminized. As pointed out earlier, one way it is done is by bringing Brāhmin priests from Srilanka. Since 1993 the diplomatic ties are open between India and South Africa, and now there are attempts to bring priests from India. To understand the worship pattern in the Hindu temples, we need to recognize that the individual sectarian patterns are not clearly visible. In other words, all temples, whether, Śaiva, Vaishnava, or other have a similar worship pattern.

Most of the Śaiva temples in South Africa were built by the South Indian immigrants. This is evidenced by their architectural design (the *gopura* type), the observance of rituals, the language used in the ritual context, the priesthood, and the general linguistic background of the worshippers at the temples.[23] As pointed out elsewhere, the builders who were associated with the Śaiva temples of the nineteenth century and twentieth century were mostly from the South Indian background (e. g., Kistappa Reddy, and Alaga Pillay).[24]

Śaiva temples include, temples dedicated to the worship of the following deities: Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Subrahmaṇya (Murugan). The other deities associated with them are Pārvatī (Śiva's consort), Valli and Devayāni (consorts of Subrahmaṇya). Gaṇeśa stands alone as he is considered a celibate. Almost all Śaiva temples that I visited have shrines for the images of Vishnu, Lakshmī and Śakti or Amman.[25]

The present worship pattern in the Śaiva temples follow more or less closely the South Indian Śaiva Āgama worship. This is mainly because of the presence of the Srilankan priests who are trained in those traditions. The older worship pattern seems to be simple, and mainly involved Tamil prayers and singing hymns from the Tevāram. The priest was an elder of the community who mainly depended on the oral tradition.

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[23] Although almost all Hindu temples today draw Hindus of all linguistic backgrounds, my reference here is to the dominant presence. For instance, at the Cato Manor temple and Umgeni temple I have noticed that not only the temple officials, and priests, even the devotees also are predominantly Tamil-speaking south Indians. In both these temples, the priests are Tamil-speaking Srilankans, most members of the committees are south Indians (either Telugu or Tamil), the language used in rituals is Tamil, though Sanskrit *mantras* are also recited.

[24] Kumar 2000: 1ff.

[25] In the Gaṇeśa temple at Mt Edgecombe, Vishnu is seated on the southern side of the *gopuram*, in the Śrī Subrahmaṇya Ālayam of Verulam Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara (manifestation of Vishnu) has a shrine on the eastern side within the main temple hall, in the Śiva-Subrahmaṇya and Māriamman temple (PMB) there is a separate shrine for Vishnu on the eastern side.

One of the unique practices in the South African temples is that the worship of the Navagrahas (nine deities associated with the nine planets) forms an essential part of the total ritual. Without circumambulating the nine deities (Navagrahas) the Hindu worship is not complete. In other words, Hindu temple worship begins with the worship of Gaṇeśa and ends with the worship of the nine deities (Navagrahas). The worship of the nine deities is also known in South Africa as "bad luck prayers." While Gaṇeśa is believed to remove all obstacles, the nine deities remove all bad luck.

Another interesting feature of the worship in the South African Hindu temples is the presence of a "banyan tree" (Indian fig tree) which is considered sacred. In South Africa, it is often known as the "marriage tree." The newly married couple go round the tree and pray for children. Women who could not conceive also circumambulate the tree in the hope of having children.

As Hindus settled in South Africa and continued their religious activities, it soon became apparent to them that some of their religious practices and customs needed modifications to suit the new place of their existence. One of the changes that has taken place is in the area of the religious calendar. The South African Hindus have most of their religious ceremonies and festivals celebrated either on a Sunday or a Saturday for the sake of the convenience of the people. There is a general religious calendar that mentions uniform auspicious times and inauspicious times. They do not, however, specify the exact time as they do in India. For instance, the calendar in South Africa (incidentally most of them are supplied from India for their use) provides a general guideline and not specific time, (e.g., on Sunday between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p. m. it is auspicious time, and between 4:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. it is inauspicious time. It is generally taken as the same for all Sundays. But in India, orthodox Hindus look at each day and consider which is auspicious time and inauspicious time.

Priests without Caste

For an understanding of worship patterns in South African Hindu temples, it is important to understand the priesthood of the

temples also. When one refers to the title "Brāhmin" in the South African context it must be kept in mind that one is not necessarily referring to the caste called "Brāhmin," but rather to the function of the priest. Thus, a Brāhmin in South Africa is someone who performs the role of a priest either in the temple, or at home in the context of religious ceremonies, such as marriage, funeral, etc. This distinction is important because it distinguishes the Hindu priesthood in South Africa from the Hindu priesthood in India. In India, the Hindu priesthood is vested exclusively in the hands of the Brāhmins, except the Goddess worship of the non-brāhmanical background, which often allows female priesthood mostly from the non-brāhmanical groups. Tantric worship also allows non-brāhmanical priesthood, and female priesthood. The Hindu priesthood in South Africa is drawn from a highly differentiated groupings from among the non-Brāhmin Hindu community.

Politics of Priesthood

Currently in South Africa, there are two schools of thought among the Hindus regarding the priests coming from India or Srilanka. There are those who feel that the only way to properly re-establish Hindu rituals and perform them meaningfully is to bring priests from either India or Srilanka. They are worried about the lack of proper knowledge of ritual procedures, the accompanying *mantras*, etc., among the priests in South Africa. Some Hindus certainly feel that bringing priests from India or Srilanka is not always a viable option. It is such Hindus who constitute the second school of thought. The Hindus that came to South Africa belong to the nineteenth century milieu of India, and brought with them traditions that existed mainly outside the brāhmanical practice. As a result, they developed a distinct, non-brāhmanical practice in South Africa. Whatever brāhmanical elements that they had brought were drawn mainly from what they saw during the nineteenth century. They made not only a mixture of the brāhmanical and non-brāhmanical traditions, but also an syncretic mixture of traditions from various linguistic groups. As such, the Hindi speaking, the Telugu speaking and the Tamil speaking indentured laborers, living side by side, exchanged their local customs and practices and developed a unique blend of Hindu religious practice. This was facilitated by

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the fact that the early indentured laborers were bent on preserving what little they had brought with them by mutually assimilating each other's customs and practices, instead of being exclusivistic. The indentured laborers, coming from various linguistic backgrounds, and living in an alien land among alien people, had one thing in common, that is their being Hindu. They realised that the only way they could preserve their Hindu culture was to consciously assimilate each other's Hindu practices. So they celebrated each other's local festivals and participated in each other's local ceremonies. Thus for instance, today Kāvaḍi is not an exclusively Tamil Hindu ritual but is practiced by many Hindi speakers and others.

This unique blend of non-brāhmānical and brāhmānical aspects on the one hand, and the various local customs and practices of different linguistic groups on the other, is beginning to be at stake. Some Hindus see the introduction of Brāhmin priests from the outside as detrimental to the existing practices of South African Hindus. Besides, some feel that the introduction of a "Brāhmin" as priest is to reintroduce an element of caste structure into the South African Hindu society. Some social scientists, such as, Hilda Kuper argue that caste within the Hindu community in South Africa is virtually non-existent[26]. Although

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26 See Hilda Kuper. *Indian People in Natal.* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal University Press, 1960). It must be noted, however, that Kuper's observations do not seem to reflect all sections of the Hindu community in South Africa. Among the Gujaratis, there seems to be a definite caste consciousness. For instance, the Cape Town Gujaratis have two Vishnu temples, one for the Mochis (Shoemakers) and another for the Patels (business class). Among the Hindi-speaking Hindus also there is some caste consciousness, especially among those who have their last names with Singh, and Mahārāj. Although Mahārāj community belong to the Brāhmin caste, they form the lower strata within the Brāhmin caste and perform the functions of cooking at the Hindu ceremonies, such as, weddings, etc. But in South Africa, they have taken up, in some cases, the priesthood in Hindu temples, and as such consider themselves higher than the rest of the Hindus.

While these caste groupings are visible within each linguistic community in various degrees, the South African Hindus in general tend to claim that caste is not an important factor any more in their social relations. As I shall show in the last section on "Perceptions and Attitudes of Hindus in South Africa," majority of the Hindus (80% male and 79% female) across

the introduction of the Brāhmin as a priest in South Africa so far has not made any significant difference in the Hindu society in terms of caste change, some Hindu members seem to be concerned about the long term effects of such practice. Perhaps, their fears are not totally unfounded. For in the long run, the existing unique practices of the South African Hindus are bound to be modified by the "properly" trained Brāhmin priests. Nevertheless, the South African Hindus will continue to develop a type of Hinduism that is perhaps unique to them.

Study of Diaspora Hinduism: Problem of Sources and Method

In the following discussion, I shall deal with the problem of sources and method in the academic study of Hinduism. Diaspora Hinduism, as exemplified in the experience of South African Hindus, has preserved a whole variety of traditions that flourished in India and continue to do so even now. And these include not only Brahmanical but a whole range of non-Brahmanical traditions which either became integrated into the Brahmanical culture or remain on the fringes of the Brahmanically dominant Hinduism. Traditional approaches based on ancient Sanskrit texts has presented to us mainly the picture of the Brahmanical side but grossly neglected the enormously rich tradition of the non-Brahmanical Hindus. It is in the countries where Indians settled in the mid nineteenth century where this rich heritage of the Hindus is still visible. Studying diaspora Hinduism thus problematizes our understanding of Hinduism as a whole. In other words, the methods and the sources that are used to study Hinduism are called into question for the following reasons: (a) diaspora Hinduism as illustrated from the South African experience is neither wholly Brahmanical nor Sanskrit based. It is based on a variety of non-Brahmanical and non-Sanskritic traditions which flourished for centuries in the rural areas of India. (b) diaspora Hinduism is not based on written texts per se, but on orally transmitted traditions drawn from legends, story-telling and folklore. Often even written text based (I make a distinction between written text and the oral text, both being considered as text in post modernist discourse) religious stories are primarily transmitted through orality which gave

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the board claimed that caste is no longer a factor among the Hindus.

scope to people to modify, innovate and recreate traditions which suited them most in the distant lands away from the mother India. If this is the case, what then are the sources and how do we study diaspora Hinduism in particular and Hinduism in general. This is the two-fold question that I shall attempt to answer in this paper. In other words, the diaspora Hinduism forces us to look at sources that are beyond the written word and methods that are beyond philology. Here we are not simply translating and reconstructing the meaning of the written texts, but a whole range of stories, legends, and myths via orality and rituals, dances, performing arts, temples, architecture, and symbols which form the rich text that needs to be interpreted. Thus, the traditional methods which are bound by the search for objectivity fail to comprehend the meaning of this rather elusive text. Therefore, I suggest a methodology which includes ethnology, archeology, history, and anthropology. Essentially, it is a polymethodological approach that I propose in this paper. My paper is divided into the following parts: fist I shall present the problems in the past constructions of Hinduism and show the inadequacies in of both existing methods and sources in not being able to take into account the variety of non-Brahmanical Hinduism; secondly, I shall outline some of the main features of diaspora Hinduism as practised in South Africa; and thirdly I shall identify the sources and methods that would enable us to read and interpret a text that is much bigger and richer than the written text. The general argument is presented within the post-modernist discourse of text that goes beyond the bounds of the objective text.

Recent scholars have questioned the artificial distinctions, such as great traditions and little traditions, established in the study of religions (e.g., Thomas A. Tweed. "An American Pioneer in the Study of Religion: Hanna Adams (1755-1830) in her *Dictionary of All Religions*" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Vol. LX. No. 3. Fall 1992); others have questioned the construction of Hinduism through the works of early orientalists (e.g., David L. Haberman. "On Trial: The Love of the Sixteen Thousand Gopees," in *History of Religions*, vol. 33, No. 1, August 1993, pp. 44-70.). This trend seems nothing unique to the study of religion. Disciplines such as Art History, History, and social sciences are facing this cricism. For instance, Gary

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Michael Tartakov identifies the problems involved in the "'orcintalizing' of Indian art history."[27]

A cursory look at any text book on introduction to Hinduism reveals that the text based Sanskritic tradition has by and large informed our understanding of what Hinduism is. It, in fact, presents an idealized picture of Hinduism that doesn't seem to exist on the ground. (e.g., T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism*.).[28] The cultural and religious history of India has been written mainly from the standpoint of literate Sankritic culture. For instance, the Gupta period has been treated as the golden age of Hinduism because of the patronage accorded to the BrŸhmanical tradition by the Gupta kings. The social divisions have also been constructed in accordance with the Sanskritic culture. The entire Hindu population has been subsumed under four categories with a clearly structured hierarchy. But the evidence on the ground does not quite reflect the four classical divisions of the Hindu society. Firstly, the hierarchical relationship between the ruling class and the priests is not clear as to who is above and who is below in the order. Secondly, the case of the third order (Vaishyas) is dubious because many social groups have moved into the third group over a long period of time and claimed higher ritual status (e.g., the Komatis (trader community) in the Andhra region are said to have originated from the Madiga (one of the so called outcastes) which is presently listed as untouchables. Thirdly, the vast majority of Hindus who are subsumed under the fourth category are a highly differentiated group and there is no homogeneity among them. Some of them have been rulers (e.g., Reddy of Andhra, Vellala of Tamilnadu). Fourthly, in many parts of India

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[27] Gary Michael Tartakov, "Changing Views of India's Art History" in *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*. Edited by Catherine B. Asher & Thomas R. Metcalf. (New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., 1994, pp. 15-36.

[28] In a recent article, Murray Jardine pointed out the dangers of falling into the trap of objectivism/relativism mode of discourse by relying only on the written word. The author emphasizes the need to take oral traditions seriously in an attempt to escape objectivist discourse. See Murray Jardine "Sight, Sound, and Epistemology: the Experiential Sources of Ethical Concepts" in *Journal of the Americal Academy of Religion*, Vol. LXIV, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp.1-25.

there is an absence of the group that is often described as Kshatriya. Fifthly, one has to undestand that India presents a highly diverse cultural regions, and the social and cultural aspects of each region are unque and often have no parallels. Thus even to divide India into Sanskritic North and Dravidian South is also problematic for the difference in cultural traditions goes beyond the bipolar division of India. Thus, what the text books present as Hindu society is often not seen on the ground. It is the ideal or rather the abstraction from the written texts that we as intellectuals have constructed. The early orientalists, being classicists in their own training, naturally took to the Sanskrtic intellectual tradition and assumed it as the whole story of Hinduism. And those who dabbled with the non-Sanskritic traditions were dubbed as "anthropologists" and what they studied was considered the "little" tradition. Writing about how Indian art history was orientalized Tartakov says "The first histories of India's art, written in the middle and later part of the 19th century, were dominated by an interest in race and its putatively negative effect upon Indian character, social life, and material production."[29] There was an effort by the European scholars to create an India which is far removed from its reality. And this was mainly due to Enlightenment bias. Tartakov says,

> Oriental scholars from A.Dow and R Orme to J.Z. Holwell, Sir William Jones, and H.Colebrooke set themselves the task of comprehending India's history and its classical languages. Their views of India—shaped not only by Enlightenment curiosity, but also by the assumptions of the Brahmin pandits with whom they worked—began the process of formulating what was to become the Orientalist canon. In its earliest phases this was almost entirely textual. The newly mastered Sanskrit texts were seen as describing an India that had in antiquity possessed a great civilization and a "golden" age. Since then, however, these Oriental scholars maintained that India had stagnated and its artistic work declined as the pristine purities of its early Vedic and Buddhist faith had become contaminated by idolatry of medieval Hinduism."[30]

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[29] Tartakov. *Op.cit.*, p.21.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

No wonder, as David L. Haberman points out, the Vallabhācārya sect in the 19th century was considered a "contemptible sect" not merely by western mind but also by the so called modern Hindus of the time because of the alleged "sexual activity" in the sect.[31] It is generally understood even today by the Hindus that the real Hinduism is in the philosophical texts which encourage asceticism and otherworldliness and not in the daily mundane rituals that an average Hindu performs on a daily basis.

In line with these new developments, this paper proposes to initiate a discussion on the sources for the study of Hinduism. In order to do that I shall introduce the materials on Hinduism in South Africa and contrast it with the classical Hindu materials. This paper argues that our understanding of Hinduism suffered from the lack of attention given to the so called "popular" traditions which are transmitted orally. And therefore, we have for so long tended to define Hinduism through the Sanskrit texts and paid passing attention to the diverse non-BrŸhmanical traditions that exist and still flourish in India. I argue that in the case of both India and South Africa, the majority of Hindus practice the so called "popular traditions" and the so called "classical traditions" are merely prevalent among the few elite pundits. It is against this background that I shall present the Hinduism practiced in South Africa and offer my comments as to how it impacts on the very sources for the study of Hinduism in general.

Hinduism as we see in South Africa goes back to the later half of the 19th century when the indentured Indians settled in Natal as part of the British Colonial policy to supply cheaper labor to the sugar cane planters in South Africa. In understanding the development of Hinduism in South Africa, one has to bear in mind that much of that Hinduism came not through the BrŸhmanical influence but through the non-BrŸhmin social groups.

The Hindu worldview of South Africa fits the nineteenth century India. That is to say, while many popular Hindu practices are

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31 David L. Haberman. "On Trial: The Love of the Sixteen Thousand Gopees," in *History of Religions*, vol. 33, No. 1, August 1993, pp. 44—70.

gradually diminishing in their significance in contemporary India, in South Africa they are maintained with a great deal of effort and zeal as a mark of their Indian identity and cultural pride. However, many of these practices have undergone significant modifications in order to make them meaningful within the context of South Africa. As a result of that transformation during a period of more than one hundred and thirty years, Hinduism in South Africa developed a unique tradition of its own. Since 1947, there were no diplomatic ties between India and South Africa and this factor contributed to the isolation of Hindus from their motherland. Since 1991/92 there have been cultural exchanges between the two countries and this resulted in the visits of many cultural leaders and priests from India who began to attempt to "correct" some of the practices of South African Hindus mainly from the standpoint of the BrŸhmanical tradition. This has created confusion among many Hindus in South Africa. Some feel that the South African tradition is unique and must be kept as it is, and others feel that some of the practices must be "corrected" by the experts from India. This paper looks at the issues involved in this present conflict and explores some of the dynamics involved in the development of a religious tradition. It also looks at the interpretive processes which are adopted to make the tradition orthopractic and authoritative. The broader issue that this paper raises is whether our understanding of Hinduism should exclusively depend on classical texts available in Sanskrit and are disseminated through a particular social group, or as historians of religions should we also need to take into account the hitherto underestimated, understudied oral traditions which we tend to call "popular."

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Social Transformation in The Ramacharitamanasa

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Abstract

This paper will examine the Rama ethos as applied to the
downtrodden and neglected sectors of society.   It will be
demonstrated that Tulasidasa used the Divine Figure of Sri Rama
to effect social transformation and construct new paradigms in a
positive, pro-active manner. One of the ways employed by him
was to see God in everything (Siya Ramamaya saba jaga jani) in
order to change people's attitudes towards one another. He thus
succeeded in elevating all regardless of birth, social and
economic status or domicile, to the same level through devotion
to Sri Rama (Kaha Raghupati sunu bhamini bata, manau ek
bhagati kara nata). The Ramacaritamanasa permeated all parts
of society and its influence persisted through the centuries.
Today humanity everywhere finds guidance and solace from this
immortal work.

Tulasidasa observed the state of his society before writing the
Ramacaritamanasa.   The people's outcry for peace, tolerance,
justice and social reconstruction led him to formulate the Rama
Ethos as the panacea for India's ills. Tulasidasa lived in a period
of social, political and religious turmoil when Hindus were
powerless in their own country. Tulasidasa saw the Rama ethos,
especially Rama Bhakti as the means to empowerment in all
aspects of life and he thus crafted the Ramacaritamanasa as a
blueprint of social, political and religious reconstruction and
reconciliation.

> Though our age has largely ceased to understand the
> meaning of religion, it is still in desperate need of that
> which religion alone can give. The recognition of a
> Transcendent Supreme, the freedom of the human
> individual as a manifestation of the Supreme and the
> unity of mankind as the goal of history are the

foundations of the major religions (Radhakrishnan 1956:204).

This observation serves as an appropriate point of departure in determining how Tulasidasa envisioned social transformation during his time and its relevance in the 21st century. Individuals who constitute society have strayed from their intrinsic qualities of goodness and godliness and have become burdens to themselves and the communities they live in. We live in times of tension and danger and it is easy to see that man has forgotten his relationship with God, himself, his fellow man and the rest of creation.

One of the most depraved criminal types of conduct gaining ascendancy today is rape committed on females of all ages. The editorial of Post (3-5 September 2003: 12) captures this scourge aptly:

Even places of worship are not spared defilement by these godless thugs. Victims lured or forcibly taken to such cursed places would most likely become fair game for 'beasts' crazed with drugs and alcohol. Apart from criminals, family friends have also been known to commit rapes.

The Editor suggests ways of countering this type of behaviour:

There is, therefore, urgent need for moral regeneration in our society, to ensure that we inculcate honourable conduct towards the opposite sex. Schools, but more so families, have a huge role to play in this regard, so that the moral fibre of their members is strengthened.

Goswami Tulasidasa addressed this issue in the Ramacaritamanasa in the context of Vali's transgressions.

In more recent times Gandhiji preached human love and unity to solve problems:

Gandhiji had

> [p]rotested against exploitation of Nature by man, and of man by man, and of woman by man, against domination of the coloured races by the White, and even had started the satyagraha in South Africa against Racial segregation and colour prejudice and Conflict...as he had no hesitation to launch a movement in India against the injustice of Untouchability. His Faith and Inspiration was the same 'WE ARE ONE'. We are all children of God (Vaswani in VKP1993:129).

"The demand to change society so that men's lives may be made rich, free and happy is a logical corollary of the religious principle that we are all the children of God" (Radhakrishnan 1956:55). Therefore the saints and sages of India declared vasudhaiva kutumbakam 'The world is one family'. For only when human beings practise virtue and live with one another as friends will there be an opportunity for creating a harmonious society, like ramarajya (Utopian society) of Tulasidasa. Based on a similar principle South Africans are called upon to practise Ubuntu, humanism, to help engender harmony and goodwill amongst all people. Furthermore, we have a popular slogan - Simunye meaning 'We Are One' which is also aimed at political and social redress. In eighteenth century Europe there was a call for

> Reorganisation of society which would enable every man to live his own life in his own way provided he respected the rights of others to do likewise (Radhakrishnan 1956:55).

Thus, for centuries, in different corners of the globe there has been this great desire for a utopian society in which men would live in peace and harmony, free from oppression and depravity.

Tulasidasa was accurate when he wrote:

> *aise adhama manuja khala krtajuga treta nahi*
> *dvapara kachuka brnda bahu hoihahi kalijuga mahi*

> Such vile and wicked men are not to be found in the Satya or Tretayuga; a sprinkling of them will appear in

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the Dvapara, but in the Kaliyuga there will be swarms
of them (Rcm-Uttarakanda 40).

Tulasidasa paints a thought-provoking picture of the evil people,
and Sri Rama's words about the increase of evil through the
yugas, as well as the escalation of adharma in kaliyuga provide
compelling reason for a return to the moral and ethical life.

An important point that arises from the above is that the intensity
of evil that afflicts our own era, kaliyuga, is something not
experienced even in treta when Ravana and his demonic hordes
roamed the earth inflicting pain on the innocent. How much
greater need there is for the restoration of values that could bring
back the satyayuga! The evil doers of previous yugas finally
repented and were absolved of their sins. Kaliyuga presents a
sombre picture.

Hindus in sixteenth century India were powerless in their own
country under theocratic Muslim rule, and were excluded from
any form of benefits from the state. The atrocities that the
Hindus were subjected to were enormous. The Hindu masses
were left in total political and social devastation through constant
persecution and degradation. With regard to religion, the
theocratic, proselytizing Muslim regime ensured that

[...] there could be only one faith, one people and one
all over-riding authority. There could be no place for
non-believers or infidels (Luniya 1978:98-99).

Tulasidasa lived in a period of social, political and religious
oppression in India. Recognizing the potential of the Ramayana
and Rama as its central figure for transforming Indian society, he
appropriated Vaishnava Bhakti which was further defined into
Rama Bhakti, and crafted the Ramacaritamanasa as a blueprint
of social, political and religious reconstruction and reconciliation.
He perceived the possibility of a noble, just society under God;
and his inner self found expression in creating the ideal of Rama
and Ramrajya for the deliverance of his countrymen.

Social changes brought about by historical and political
developments, the rise of caste and class and concomitant

conflicts, and religious/interdenominational conflicts dictated the need for change. Whilst Goswami Tulasidasa was able to respond to the foregoing in his Ramacaritamanasa, not all scholars concur on his contribution to social development. It was Father Bulcke's view that

> Tulasidasa was not a social or political reformer and never intended to advocate changes in the political or social structure of his time (Bulcke 1989: 73).

However, it is my contention that Tulasidasa was too profound a poet not to envision socio-political change. I believe that he was the most astute and discerning reformer of his time. A scholar, poet and saint of his calibre who travelled the country extensively and witnessed first hand, the despair and dejection of the masses, could hardly expect to effect peace, change and revitalisation of the human spirit without socio-political reform. Tulasidasa provided humanity with the most efficacious remedy to redress the problems of his time—Ramanama. But, simply advocating Ramanama alone for the liberation of the soul and as the panacea for India's ills was far too idealistic a goal in the circumstances especially when the zest for life was ebbing away. What was needed was mobilization out of their predicament through inner transformation.

Tulasidasa used the Divine Figure of Sri Rama to influence social transformation. He proclaimed:

> *jaba jaba hoi dharam kai hani, badhahi asur adham-abhimani*
> *karahi aniti jai nahi barani, sidahi bipra dhenu sura dharani*
> *taba taba prabhu dhari bibidh sarira, harahi krpanidhi sajjan pira*

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

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The lapse of dharma in Tulasidasa's time was visible all round. The Gita's projection of divine intervention becomes in Tulasidasa an expression of rampant evil and turmoil. His second line (above) - badhahi asur adham-abhimani, followed by —*karahi aniti jai nahi barani*—enlarges this feeling of impending violent destruction of the moral order, resulting in harm to bipra, dhenu, sura, dharani - the vipras or learned persons, the cow (representing the most beneficial part of the animal kingdom), the gods (as worshipped in the devout communities) and the earth as an ecological entity. The moral laws that maintain Rta (the natural order) would collapse and society, as the structure which supports and empowers individuals towards transcendence to Brahman (immortality) would no longer be able to provide its members support and guidance.

Flowing from the great concern for the continuation of society as a haven for mankind's happiness and ultimate deliverance, Tulasidasa developed a model or vision for society that transcended the stereotyped structures of caste duties (varna), of stages of spiritual evolution (ashramas) and located his ideal human being in the righteous, just, compassionate, discriminating and benign "Santa" or God-loving person. His "Santa" is not a cave dwelling sage or royal-hermit (like Janaka) but the ordinary person whose actions, thoughts and aspirations are firmly embedded in the attributes of a Santa, or Sadhu. The Santa is described by Tulasidasa as the man of total discrimination, capable of separating the good from the bad; which are found in creation. He says

> *Jada cetana guna dosamaya biswa kinha kartar*
> *Santa hamsa guna gahahi paya parihari bari bikar*

> God has created the universe consisting of things animate and inanimate and endowed it with virtues and defects; the saint, like a swan, extracts the milk of goodness and rejects the worthless water. (Balakanda 6).

Tulasidasa had sufficient knowledge of and regard for the harmonious development of society, and therefore placed a

heavy burden of responsibility on the ruler who could create the ideal society or Ramrajya as is evident in the following:

Mukhiya mukha so cahiye khan pan kahu eka
Palai posai sakala anga Tulasi sahita bibeka

A chief should be like the mouth, which alone does all the eating and drinking, yet maintains and nourishes all the other limbs with discretion (Ayodhyakanda - 315).

The sole requirement is distribution with Viveka - the judicious, rational apportionment of resources to all sectors of society. Tulasidasa does describe his Ramrajya (Uttarkanda) as one in which all the persons in the State observed varnashrama dharma, but it is submitted that this concept is in keeping with the ideal of svadharma (one's own duty) as a means to social harmony. Svadharma as an ideal of life can best be practised in Ramrajya. Thus the superstructure of the state, based on the loftiest ideals of people-centred governance, is conducive to; or even prerequisite for a harmonious social development in the world.

Ramchandra Shukla (1968 : 134) refers approvingly to Tulasidasa's visions of society. Some critics reject this appraisal of the Ramacaritamanasa by Shukla, as the support of Hindu orthodoxy by an orthodox 20th century scholar. Instead, this group of critics focuses on some specific lines of the text, disregarding the context, and flagellate Tulasidasa for being anti-female, caste ridden and antisocial.

If one has to re-examine Father Bulcke's comment on Tulasidasa mentioned earlier, one will tend to disagree with the first part yet support the second. Tulasidasa was a great reformer but it was not his priority to advocate changes in the social and political structure of his time. For example, the caste system, especially Brahmanism was too deeply entrenched in Hindu society. To annihilate the system at once would be foolish as the Brahmans were infact the source of religio-philosophical knowledge. So they were a necessary "evil" until the masses had other means to acquiring religious knowledge. It had to be a gradual process of reform. Today while Brahmanism does not

enjoy the same pristine glory, the respect and reverence for the true Brahman has not diminished. Tulasidasa initiated transformation through love of Sri Rama and His creation and not through antagonising anybody, especially not the Brahman.

Tulasidasa attempted social change without social disruption. His subtle stance was intended to impact on the individual rather than on a prevailing system. He enjoined people to realize their own strengths, their sense of self-worth, dignity and confidence through self-development. The Ramacaritamanasa played a significant didactic role in this respect.

Tulasidasa attempted the almost impossible task of educating millions through Rama Bhakti which is the theme of the Ramacaritamanasa. Much to the chagrin of the brahmans he wrote the Ramacaritamanasa in the language of the people, the majority of whom belonged to the "lower" castes. This must be seen as Tulasidasa's first attempt at defying the strictures of the caste system, incurring the wrath of those who arrogantly believed that knowledge of God and the path to Godhead was their exclusive preserve. Non-entry into temples cannot deny one access to God, Who is omnipresent; this is the unwritten message of Tulasidasa to the masses, for he says

Siya Ramamaya saba jaga jani

The entire universe is Rama and Sita

To Tulasidasa the entire world is a temple, and those brahmans who keep away sudras from temples are fools.

A further examination of the Ramacaritamanasa text involving Sri Rama's conduct towards Guha, Kevat and Sabari leaves the reader with no doubt about Tulasidasa's view on caste. Tulasidasa has often been accused by critics of upholding and even supporting the caste system when he refers to the brahmans as "gods on earth" (bhusura) and the sudra as contemptible; they therefore reject Ramchandra Shukla's appraisal of Tulasidasa. However, I feel that Tulasidasa simply portrayed the prevailing situation, or labelled certain attributes on the ascending and descending arms of the "Santa" scale. The

"Santa" is beyond these complexes of inferiority or superiority. This is abundantly clear in the Sabari episode which not only throws light on Tulasidasa's views on caste but also on his views on the status of women. Sabari was a simple forest dweller who served her guru loyally, and devoutly awaited the advent of Sri Rama. In her simple heart she could find no better way of expressing her love, adoration and even awe, than humbling herself through expressions of her lowly station. Sabari says to Sri Rama

> *Kehi bidhi astuti karau tumhari, adham jati mai jadamati bhari*
> *Adham se adham adham ati nari, tinha maha mai matimand aghari*

> How can I extol You, lowest in descent and the dullest of wit as I am? A woman is the lowest of those who rank as the lowest of the low. Of women again I am the most dull-headed, O Destroyer of sins (Aranyakanda 34, 1-2).

Sri Rama then comfortingly tells Sabari

> *Kaha Raghupati sunu bhamini bata, manau ek bhagati kara nata*
> *Jati pati kul dharma badai, dhan bala parijan guna caturai*
> *Bhagati hina nara sohayi kaisa, binu jala barida dekhiya jaisa*

> Listen, O Good Lady, to my words, I recognize no other kinship except that of devotion. Despite caste, kinship, lineage, piety, reputation, wealth, physical strength, numerical strength of his family, accomplishments and ability, a man lacking in devotion is of no more worth than a cloud without water (Aranyakanda 34, 2-3).

This declaration of Sri Rama to Sabari, who considers herself "low" by caste and "low" because she is a woman, banishes all

notions of superiority of human beings through race, caste, class or gender.

The attribute of devotion, or attainment of the status of a Santa, is all that is required to become one in and through God. This also means love and devotion to Sri Rama Who is the embodiment of everything in the universe. It can by no means be claimed that Tulasidasa put words of self-denigration in Sabari's mouth, thus alienating millions of Rama Bhaktas of both sexes. He was unifying these millions by transcending the caste system through bhakti, and the gender divide through equality. Sri Rama's words are Tulasidasa's words: Sabari's words are those of the ignorant; be they "brahman" or "sudra".

Having addressed the fundamental questions of caste and gender through Sabari, Tulasidasa decided to include inert nature also within his broad vision. The episode of the ocean king, Sagar, which was meant to point out the folly of the Jada, the intellectually stultified, lent itself to the greatest controversy surrounding Tulasidasa. Tulasidasa has been vehemently accused of denigrating women (as well as so called sudras and rustics), when he says through the words of Sagar

> *Dhol gawar sudra pasu nari, sakal tadana ke adhikari*

> A drum, a rustic, a beast and a woman, all these deserve beating (Sundarakanda 58, 3).

There are critics who defend Tulasidasa saying that the meaning of "tadna" is not only "to beat" but also "to understand". However, it should be remembered that these are the words of Sagar who presents the views of 16th century Indian society on the status of women and oppressed groups. By Tulasidasa's time the erstwhile exalted position of Indian women had deteriorated to such an extent that women themselves, like Sabari, believed that they were "low" in status. The Sabari episode clearly demonstrates Tulasidasa's views on the status of women and gender equality. Sagar merely explains his tardiness, pleading for understanding (tadna), not beating.

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The plight of the Hindus under foreign rule as well as of oppressed groups like the "lower castes", and "women" during Tulasidasa's time finds a parallel in present day South Africa. Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane makes a plea to the South African community in a news paper article "Let us be committed to true reconciliation" in the following:

> [....] the guiding principle of the transformation of our society from apartheid to democracy is the notion of restorative justice. It requires a critical look at our past and a frank self-examination and acknowledgement of our knowing or unknowing complicity in the evils of the past. This is quite different from the present tendency to deny and point fingers at others. This self-appraisal must be done with a view to restoration, reparation and reconstruction, which is the opposite of retributive justice with its destructive elements of vengeance, demonising and escalating hatred.... Each one of us has intrinsic worth and dignity and is valuable in the eyes of the Almighty. (Daily News 21 Sept.2000:18).

Hence a call for transformation of society by people from all races and religions is in consonance with what Tulasidasa had envisioned centuries ago. Like Tulasidasa said we need self-examination to correct our negative qualities, so that we become morally and ethically upright and act "Santa-like" to contribute towards realizing a harmonious, happy society.

In the entire Ramacaritamanasa Tulasidasa's views on any matter must be judged in the light of Sri Rama's conduct, behaviour and comments in that situation. Just as Sri Rama did not spare the lives of Ravana or Vali, He did not spare the life of Tadaka although she was a woman; with this very same sense of equality He awarded Moksha to deserving and devout "Santa-like" men and women, irrespective of caste and gender. Wherever Sri Rama conquered evil, be it in Kishkindha or Lanka, He re-established a dharmik or "Santa-like" society and restored it to its "Santa-like" custodians. It is abundantly clear that Sri Rama is both "Santa" and "God"; this is one's true nature, says Tulasidasa, as each one of us is a spark of the Divine (Ishvara Amsha Jiva Avinashi) and this must manifest in society. Thus

Tulasidasa's vision of society is one of just and devout people living in harmony. The present era is gravely in need of such a society.

The santa is the embodiment of the moral and ethical qualities pre-requisite for the deliverance of the world from the adversities of kaliyuga. Sri Rama's use of the analogy of the sandal tree (santa) and axe (asanta) gives a dramatic insight into the difference between the saint and the unsaintly. The sandal tree undergoes all the assaults of the axe (representing the unsaintly). Yet the sandal tree's only reaction is to exude more fragrance! Rambachan comments on this as follows:

> Our commitment to our ideals is tested truly when it is confronted by circumstances which challenge our wisdom and goodness. The sandal tree, in the example of Rama, never wavers from its nature. It continues to exude its fragrance and the axe, which destroys it, comes away saturated with its odour. Even the cruelty of the axe cannot provoke or bring about a change in its nature (Rambachan 1994 : 31-32).

The above observation emphasizes the power of goodness, and the need to be firmly committed to the dharmik way.

And what better example of a Santa that Tulasidasa could have put before the dejected masses than Sri Rama Himself? Yes, Sri Rama is Supreme Brahman to him, Sri Rama as the Lord incarnate is also imbued with divinity but Sri Rama operates on a human level. This depiction of Sri Rama is perhaps the key to Tulasidasa's success.

Tulasidasa, thus, presents a powerful message that holds true for all ages - if each member of society was Santa-like, Ramarajya could be a reality. Through his description of the santa and asanta Tulasidasa makes clear his lofty and beneficial ethical views which constitute the criteria for right and wrong, good and bad, particularly with regard to human conduct. Tulasidasa does not prescribe the impossible or the unattainable. In the light of this, one finds the following statement of Prof. Vijayendra Snatak very appropriate:

Tulasidasa had to reconcile various social values and ethical norms. His vision was centered on that point which reconciles disintegrated and scattered elements in society. Consequently, whatever he presented through literature was accepted. From the point of view of societal welfare, his views were received beyond the bounds of space and time (Snatak 1996 : 125).

Hence, Tulasidasa's method of social transformation in the Ramcaritamanasa is perhaps what today's society most needs. The only way that humanity can exist in peace and progress, is by elevating itself i.e. our goals must be based on moral and ethical values that must not be compromised in any circumstances.

Radhakrishnan wrote:

> We live in an age of tension, danger and opportunity. We are aware of our insufficiencies, and can remove them if we have the vision to see the goal and the courage to work for it (1956:205).

The Santa is concerned with the welfare of others and contributes positively towards making this world a better place or Ramarajya. We must acknowledge that while Tulasidasa's Ramarajya is often criticised as being too idealistic and therefore impossible to attain, it is really what we hanker after. Every individual is potentially a Santa; our work now is to realize that potential. For "the tragedy of humanity lies in the fact that we know the truth". Our redemption lies in giving effect to this knowledge.

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Tulasidasa and Hanuman

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Abstract

It is an established fact that Hanuman is a devotee par excellence of Sri Rama and a paragon of all virtues. Likewise Goswami Tulasidasa is a devotee of Sri Rama who aspired to find acceptance by the Lord. Tulasidasa extols the character and role of Hanuman in the service of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. In the Hanuman Chalisa he recounts all Hanuman's major feats and his equation to his dear brother Bharata. Tulasidasa's own personal life was that of a human being of the world, drawn to the compelling attraction of Sri Rama as Supreme Lord and fountain of Dharma. He sees Hanuman as being totally immersed in Sri Rama, whereas he is still earth-bound. Hanuman becomes his ideal, and Tulasidasa gradually loosens earthly ties, the strongest of which is marriage. Hanuman is famed for his celibacy, and exhibits all the moral and ethical qualities advocated in Hindu ethics. It is indeed noteworthy that the Ramayana requires the same standards of conduct from all beings, including what it declares as monkeys, bears, demons etc. This paper attempts to highlight Tulasidasa's insights into Hanuman as an ethical being and devotee of Rama. That he saw it fit that Hanuman should be Sri Rama's intermediary in the matter of conjugal feelings explains Tulasidasa's understanding and appreciation of Hanuman's role and his place in the divine circle of Sri Rama. This paper will attempt to elucidate the foregoing with some detail from the Ramacaritamanasa.

Goswami Tulasidasa became a Kathakar (exponent of story of Sri Rama) long before he wrote the Ramacaritamanasa. A highly intelligent student of Sesha Sanathan, Tulasidasa attained wide fame for his Ramakathas, and he wrote the Ramacaritamanasa as the crowning glory of his career, during which he developed from pandit and intellectual to a Rama-bhakta.

One may construct a framework for the discussion of the topic by selecting some dicta about the main figures of the Ramayana as well as Tulasidasa himself. This will help to understand why he portrayed Hanuman as he did in his Ramacaritamanasa.

Vasishta makes the following observation about Sri Rama, in order to curtail debate about Rama's proceeding into exile from Chitrakut:

Satyasandh palaka srutisetu, Rama janamu jagamangala hetu.

Sri Rama is dedicated to the truth, and is the protector of the Vedas. He is born for the welfare of the world (RCM Ayodhyakanda 253.3).

This clearly indicates that Sri Rama's advent was for the benefit of the world, including humans, devas, animals, plants and the environment. The spread of Ramarajya was characterized by these ideals: love, peace, harmony, morality and integrity.

Secondly the Divine Mother Sita is introduced thus by Tulasidasa in his Ramacaritamanasa:

Janaka Suta jagajanani janaki, atisaya priya karunanidhana ki.

Janaka's daughter Janaki, the mother of the Universe, is excessively beloved of the Lord (RCM Balakanda 17.4).

This excessive love of the Lord is described in Sundarakanda. It is human as well as transcendental, something which Tulasidasa struggled to achieve in his own life. His earthly love and love for Sri Rama became ONE through his yearning for Sri Rama's grace, assisted by his supplications to Sri Hanumanji.

Sri Rama's devotee Hanumanji is described thus by Tulasidasa in the Hanuman Chalisa Chaupai 7:

Vidyavana guni ati catura, ramakaja karibe ko atura.

Hanuman is well versed in all the sciences and full of virtues. He is ever ready to fulfil Sri Rama's missions.

Indeed, all Hanuman's abilities were exclusively applied to the Lord's work. Tulasidasa portrays himself as a humble supplicant at Sri Rama's door:

Mo sama dina na dina hita tumha samana raghubira

There is none so miserable as I, and none, O Raghubira, so gracious to the miserable as you (RCM Uttarakanda 130 K).

He continues that Sri Rama must always appeal to him just as the female appeals to the lascivious and wealth to the acquisitive person. These closing lines of the Ramacaritamanasa convey Goswami Tulasidasa's final understanding of Prema - love that transcends the material world. His mission was the upliftment of society, and his Ramacaritamanasa constantly reminds us of the dualities of existence and the path of bliss. For this reason modern scholars have called him Loka Nayaka (world statesman), and the Ramacaritamanasa is described as replete with lessons that lead to the welfare of the world, *loka mangala* (Shukla 1968:137).

Tulasidasa became an ardent devotee of Hanuman before writing the Ramacaritamanasa. Hanumanji was a hero, role model, protector, friend and guide to the blessed feet of Sri Rama. Hanuman is fervently desired as a guru by Tulasidasa:

Jai jai jai hanuman gosai, krpa karahu gurudeva ki nai

Victory to Sri Hanuman; may you be gracious to me as a true guru (Hanuman Chalisa 37).

Tulasidasa's attraction towards Hanuman is to be seen in the context of Hanuman's relationship with Sri Rama. Endowed with all powers and virtues, and a total brahmachari (celibate), Hanuman has no other raison d'etre in this world except serving Sri Rama. Tulasidasa also wishes to become such a devotee, and struggles with his human failings, entreating Hanumanji's help, so that he could gain admission into the Lord's proximity. His battle for this state of bliss is characterized by scholars as Rama versus Kama (Divine versus material) (Raghava 1982:65). Tulasidasa had to wait until he sublimated his human

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love before he could love Rama exclusively, just as Hanumanji does. Hanuman's overpowering presence in the Ramacaritamanasa attests to the notion that the Sri Rama Katha can never be complete without Hanuman. Goswami Tulasidasa revels in Hanuman's exploits and his devotion to Sri Rama, and probably envies him too. His words:

Tuma mama priya Bharata sama bhai

You are as dear to me as my brother Bharata (Hanuman Chalisa 17)

and Sri Rama's assurance to Hanuman when they recognized each other

Sunu kapi jiya manasi jani una, tai mama priya lachimana te duna.

Listen, monkey, he said "be not depressed at heart, you are twice as dear to me as Lakshmana (RCM Kishkindhakanda 2.7)

convey his own aspirations. Indeed, Tulasidasa so fervently desired the Lord's grace that he portrayed himself as a young ascetic poet eager to meet Sri Rama in the forest before he arrived at Valmiki's ashram.

Tehi avasara eka tapasu ava, tejapunja laghu bayasu suhava.

At that moment there arrived an ascetic, an embodiment of spiritual glow, young in years and charming in appearance (RCM Ayodhyakanda 109.7).

Whilst some authorities feel that Tulasidasa was referring to Hanuman, the description is more reflective of Tulasidasa himself. There was no need for Tulasidasa to introduce Hanuman as a poet in this episode: Hanuman is always very close to Sri Rama, wherever He may be.

Hanuman was, indeed, described as a scholarly person when he first met Sri Rama. He shed off his disguise upon recognizing the Lord, for whom he had been hankering for aeons of time. Sri

Rama's acceptance of Hanuman as His dear devotee follows upon Hanuman's recognition of the Lord. Rambachan (1990 : 8) points out that "Hanuman's recognition of Rama as Lord was undoubtedly the fruit of an entire life of spiritual discipline and orientation towards God". Hanuman gradually moves away from being Sugriva's Counsellor, towards becoming Sri Rama's exclusive servant. He even expresses his concern that Sugriva has forgotten about his duty towards Sri Rama:

Iha pavana suta hrdayam bicara, ramakaju sugriva bisara

There (Kishkindha) Hanuman, son of the Wind, thought to himself "Sugriva has forgotten the task entrusted to him by Rama (RCM Kishkindhakanda 18.1).

This line shows the clear distinction between Hanuman and Sugriva (and all the other Vanaras), with regard to devotion, dedication and solicitousness towards Rama's work.

Hanuman's powers and prowess became fully efficacious after the meeting with Sri Rama. Tulasidasa identifies fully with the Hanuman we see in Sundarakanda. He extols Hanumanji's devotion in the invocation of Sundarakanda with the words

Raghupati priya bhaktam vata jatam namami

I make obeisance to the song of the Wind God, and dear devotee of the Lord of the Raghus.

Tulasidasa believed, and Sri Rama knew, that Hanuman would find Sita and convey the Lord's message. Sri Rama entrusted his ring to Hanuman in this knowledge. Sri Rama is shown by Tulasidasa merely telling Hanuman

Bahu prakara sitahi samujhaehiu, kahi bala biraha begi tumha ayehu

Do what you can to comfort Sita; tell her of my might and the agony I endure in her absence and return with all speed. (RCM Kishkindhakanda 22.11).

Yet Hanuman, succeeding in finding Sita, conveys the deepest human feelings and emotions to Sita, and is overcome by her suffering and despair. His mandate from the Lord uppermost in his mind, Hanuman restrains himself during Ravana's reprehensible propositions to Sita.

When Hanumanji reveals himself to Sita, he comforts and reassures her that Sri Rama loves her twice as much as she loves him. To a devotee like Hanuman, or aspirant like Tulasidasa, Sri Rama would always be the first - even amongst equals.

Hanumanji conveys Sri Rama's genuine love for Sita, devoid of carnality or hypocrisy - human love without human lust. Hanuman, a born celibate, becomes the vehicle of human emotions - but these emotions, purged of worldly grossness are the true characteristics of the Divine Love, and it is the perfect devotee Hanuman who could comprehend and convey them. Goswami Tulasidasa shows through Hanuman that he intellectually understood what the Satya Prema was, but frailty of flesh kept him from attaining it until late in life. Hanuman thus remained a beacon of hope, and guide.

While writing the Asoka Vatika episode, Tulasidasa could not have failed to think of his own life - he was advancing in age, separated from the devout and pure Ratnavali and yet not accepted by Sri Rama. Through Hanuman's transmission of the message of pangs of separation, Tulasidasa begins to realize that Sri Rama's love is both that of God and devotee and husband and wife - sublime, blissful and liberating. To the uninitiated, such love could even be a mystery, as Sri Rama says to Sita:

Tatva prema kara mama aru tora, janata priya eku manu mora

The essence of such love as yours and mine, beloved, is known to none but my own soul (RCM Sundarakanda 14.6).

Much the same could be said of what Tulasidasa tried to convey to Ratnavali, who supposedly represented an impediment to Tulasidasa's spiritual progress. However, Ratnavali had no such problem - her love for Tulasidasa was akin to Mother Sita's love

for Sri Rama. Tulasidasa realized his error through the grace of God and after emulating Hanumanji's ascetism and celibacy. Indeed, acclaimed writer Amritlal Nagar says that Tulasi based his portrayal of Sri Rama's emotions on Ratnavali. In Manas Ka Hansa (1985:27) Tulasidasa tells Ratnavali:

Tunhare viraha aur prem ke udgar itne shuddha the ki ve rama ke udgar bankar janaki mata ke prati arpita ho gaye.

The outpourings of your pangs of separation and love were so sublime that they became Sri Rama's own outpourings and were offered to Mother Sita

Sri Hanumanji was Tulasidasa's guru, guide and protector in every vicissitude. His depictions of Hanuman as Sri Rama's devotee made millions of people devotees of Hanuman. Hanumanji, intermediary between man and God, protects Sri Rama's Dharma in this world, on the basis of righteousness, compassion, justice and Godliness. Tulasidasa through his Ramacaritamanasa has aided the process of making every sentient being an instrument of the Divine.

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THE HINDU VIEW OF THE NATURAL WORLD

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Abstract

Hinduism with its environmentally sensitive outlook, is in a strong position to provide one of the measures that could help fulfill this need. For this reason in this article the Hindu perspective regarding the natural world will be discussed.

Introduction: the state of the planet

The Green movement and other environmental pressure groups, the United Nations World-Wide Fund for Nature and World Resources Institute, have been vigorously campaigning against the destruction of plant and animal life and pollution of the environment. They have been joined by worried scientists, religious leaders and philosophers who have raised the problem at political and corporate level.

Though there is a general public awareness of the dangers of global climate change many of the human activities that contributed to the crisis still continue. Of immediate concern is that it causes pollution of earth, water and air. Greenhouse gas emissions causing global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer are most serious threats to the global ecosystem. The health and life of plant, animal and man are at stake. Industry and big business, to satisfy the demand for goods by the consumer society which they helped to create, have a major share in the exploitation of limited resources and in pollution.

At the heart of the problem is the anthropocentric attitude greatly accentuated in modern times. It represents an ethics of man versus nature and not man in nature, as if they were metaphysically different.

The modern secular world-view to which the scientific and industrial revolutions made significant contributions also strengthened the anthropocentric ethic. Science was a major cause

for the undermining of religious values when it slowly edged God out of the natural world (Patrick Rivers 1988:120).

On the other hand, the Indian religious tradition including Hinduism has shown great respect for nature. For Hindu thought man is endowed with a consciousness that exceeds that in other species. Yet Hinduism did not develop an anthropocentric ethic since it views man as an integral part of an organic whole. For Hinduism natural forces are regarded as sacred. Earth itself is personified as the Divine Mother and the universe is conceived as a manifestation of God (G Marten 2001:128-129).

The present need is for humanity to alter its bias of mind, to change the anthropocentric consciousness to one that sees man within the organic whole of nature.

Some current problems

The anthropocentric attitude to nature represents an ethic of domination, or hubris, where nature is seen merely as a means to serve human ends. It encourages a cynical sense of mastery over the non-human world. Economic progress entails exploitation of natural resources. It also entails the displacement and at times the genocide of people who own them. The tragic situation in the Brazilian rain forests is but one example.

The history of the European colonial empires is another example. Colonialism introduced "a culture which saw 'development' and 'progress' in terms of technological mastery over nature"(Peter Marshall 1992:341).The colonial legacy is a significant factor in the unequal distribution of wealth between developed and developing countries today.

Today crime, disease, poverty, breakdown in family relationships and neurotic anxieties are reflected in the social malaise especially in urban areas. Some scholars believe that the malaise can be traced to humanity's alienation from nature, alienation leads to an inauthentic, fragmentary and artificial existence(M.L. Kumari 1998: vi). Many today, says R.S. Gottlieb, respond "to the perils and pains of existence" by turning away from mainstream religion and culture in the western world. "The cry of the heart has gone out to god and

goddess, to totem animals and sacred mountains," (Gottlieb 1999: 149).

Mysticism

Indian mysticism, Hindu and Buddhist, is an alternative that appeals to many people in the west. For instance the new ecology movements, especially the deep and spiritual ecology varieties, derive some of their inspiration from Eastern mystical religion.

> Urban intellects previously dedicated to the self-consciousness of power over planet open themselves to a person in planet consciousness. This avenue draws them down a Buddhist or Hinduist pathless path by which self can be integrated into the Great Self (Carolyn Merchant 1992: 86-87).

The alternative the Indian tradition offers lies in its religious world views where the mystical or spiritual orientation is prominent.

Hindu metaphysics: its holistic approach

Hinduism's approach to life and nature is holistic. Human life like that of plant and animal life forms part of the web of existence. "Man was looked upon as part of nature, says Karan Singh, linked by the indissoluble spiritual and psychological bonds to the elements around him" (Singh: 117).

According to Hindu metaphysics the whole of nature is permeated by the divine presence which in theistic literature is called Ishvara. In the Rig Veda there are polytheistic as well as theistic conceptions of ultimate reality. The Upanishads conceive the Supreme as the absolute Brahman. They also have the view that

> He is the Lord of the universe and their "theistic emphasis becomes prominent in the Shvetashvatara Up." 'He who is one and without any colour (visible form),by the manifold wielding of his power, ordains many colours(forms)with a concealed purpose...He is the God. May he endow us with an understanding which leads to good actions' (Radhakrishnan 1989:23).

There is also the view of the Absolute as the inner controller:

> He who dwells in the earth, who is other than the earth, whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, who controls the earth from within, he is your self, the inner controller, the immortal. (Radhakrishnan 1974:225).

In the Bhagavad Gita there is a conception of ultimate reality as the indeterminate Imperishable as well as of it as God as Supreme and perfect personality. God in order to set the world back onto the right track of Dharma or moral principles from which humanity had strayed assumes physical incarnation. The *avatara* is interested in establishing the principle of *lokasamgraha*, or the welfare of the whole universal order. Hence the essential metaphysical texts of Hinduism emphasise a spiritual view of the world of space and time.

Hindu metaphysics: its holistic approach

Hinduism's approach to life and nature is holistic. Human life like that of plant and animal life forms part of the web of existence. Together with the material elements human and non human species are indissolubly linked in an organic whole. The whole of nature is permeated by the divine presence which in theistic literature is called Isvara, God. In the monistic tradition of the Upanishads, which the Advaita Vedanta follows, ultimate reality is conceived as the spiritual absolute, called Brahman. Hence a spiritual metaphysical view results. The whole phenomenal series from the elements to living beings is grounded in a metaphysical transcendent and immanent reality.

The Indus Valley civilization

Any survey of ancient Indian history is incomplete without reference to the Indus valley civilization. In extent of territory it was the largest in the ancient world and included the land of seven rivers of north-west India described in the Rg-Veda. The Indus valley with its hundreds of urban sites had a thriving commerce and was linked to the outside world through trade. Thus its commitment to practical life was unquestionable. In terms of city planning it had well appointed roads and a network of drainage systems, with many

of its houses being built of burnt bricks. This presupposes scientific knowledge. For V.G. Childe the Indus civilization "represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment" (Chakrabarty 1995:14).

At the same time the religion of the Indus people reflected a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural order. Archaeological remains show that it had the cult of the Mother Goddess, worship of male deities as also of mythical animals. A remarkable figure of a male God seated in a posture of yogic meditation is surrounded by elephant, rhinoceros, tiger, buffalo and deer. Other male deities are associated with plants and snakes. Amongst figurines of goddesses is that of a nude female figure turned upside down with a plant issuing from her womb (Pusalker 1971:190). Thus it seems that there had been a smooth adjustment between the worshipers of masculine and feminine deities. And obviously there was no conflict or tension between this worldly and other worldly interests. Secular and spiritual values were harmonised.

Hindu mythology

A similar organic relationship between humanity and nature prevails throughout the history of Hinduism's scriptural tradition as mirrored in the Vedas, epics and Puranas. In Hindu mythology and iconography, there is a close relationship between the various deities, and their animal or bird mounts. Each divinity is associated with a particular animal or bird, and this lends a special dimension to the animal kingdom"(Singh 118).

For example in Hindu mythology Vishnu incarnates as a fish, tortoise and boar to save the world whenever it was tormented by demons. The gods are associated with some animal or other. The mouse is the vehicle. Ganapati himself is a composite being, part man and part elephant. Shiva who receives the holy Ganga on his head has a snake circling his neck, and the bull sits beside him. And it is well known that Krishna, the teacher of the Bhagavad-gita, in his youthful days is depicted as a cowherd.

In the Hitopadesha and Panchatantra the beast fable is the medium of instruction in practical wisdom, politics and morals. In religious

and poetical literature the natural landscape forms an important background .For instance much of the Ramayana narrative takes place in a jungle setting.

The vedic world view

In the world-view of the Rg-Veda the gods are not depicted as full - blown personalities like the later Puranic Gods. They preside over natural forces or "form their very essence...the characters they display are mostly but expressions of the powers of nature." (Dasgupta 1969:16). The composers of the Vedas acted towards the natural world according to their conception of it. For example the rishis in their worship of the Gods—Indra, Agni, Varuna, Dyaus-Prthivi etc. were actually adoring the godly essence of the natural elements over whom the gods presided.

Ethics

The Vedic people stood in awe and wonder at the inexhaustible mystery of creation. They revered the natural order and displayed virtues of modesty, humility and sense of gratitude to it.
In the Atharva Veda sensitivity to nature is well brought out:

> O earth! wherever I am compelled to create cavities, may they all be filled up again soon. May I not inflict any injury on your bosom...may that land ever flow with nourishing milk for me, as a mother caring for her child. (Ramaswamy 1988:24).

In the same hymn there is the following:

> Earth, in which lie the sea, the river and other waters, in which food and cornfields have come to be, in which all that breathes and all that moves, may she confer on us the finest of her yield...Earth, my mother, set me securely with bliss in full accord with heaven.

They also asked the gods for earthly boons. There is the petition to Indra for instance: "grant us, O Indra, a good mind, wealth, a healthy body, persuasive speech and happy days."

The Rg-Veda has also aesthetic and poetic appeal as can be seen in several hymns. Of special interest is the praise of Ushas, described by the poet as daughter of heaven.

> Like a fair maiden comes Ushas, gladdening (all), she comes awakening four-footed beasts, and makes the birds rise into the air...the breath and life of the whole world is in you...O resplendent one with towering chariot...O bestower of various gifts. (Ghosh 1971:346).

Both religious devotion and the ethics of life-affirmation are here expressed jointly. The reference to the chariot, perhaps with spoked-wheels, shows an advance in technology. Horse-driven chariots are often mentioned in Vedic texts.

Amongst texts that are redolent with ecological significance reference may be made to the following:

> Truth, formidable moral order, vow, penance, spiritual knowledge, sacrifice, these sustain the Earth. The Earth whom the Gods guard at all times--may she yield us the things sweet and lovable. May that Earth give strength and long life. May that Goddess bestow riches with a kindly mind." Atharva Veda xii.i (W.J. Jackson 1988:29).

The law of rita

What also helped strengthen the bond between man and nature was the discovery of the law of rita in Rg-Vedic metaphysics. The law regulated cosmic events in terms of rhythmic order. The principle of rita was a conception that went beyond the gods even, since the Vedic pantheon was itself subject to it. Varuna was but the guardian of the law. In the Gita Krishna assumes this function of guardianship.

The law of karma and rebirth

The natural processes such as the succession of day and night, of the seasons, the birth, death and regeneration of plant and animal life manifested the workings of the law of rta. Dharma as the moral law is the counterpart of rta. Acting according to what is right and

true is *dharma*. Its corollary, the theory of karma and rebirth, denoting the cause and effect relations at the human level expressed the idea that the universe was lawful as well as just to the core.

The theories of *rta* and *karma* probably encouraged the sense of responsibility that human beings ought to have towards non-human creatures. One of the duties of human beings is to fulfill the debt they owe to nature and animals. The idea of the relatedness of all beings is brought out in the Gita. Both human and non human living beings are possessed of souls and bodies derived from Prakrti. And Prakrti has its source in God. God both transcends nature and is immanent in it. God constitutes the essence of things. He is the taste in the waters, the light in the moon and the sun, the pure fragrance in earth and the eternal seed in all existences (Radhakrishnan 1989:217).

The Gita teaches that divinity exists everywhere because "sages see with an equal eye, a learned and humble brahmin, a cow, an elephant or even a dog or an outcaste. "This means that inwardly all beings are united spiritually, though their bodies are shaped differently. It is in the light of this that the doctrine of rebirth "does not place an unbridgeable gulf between humans and other animals," writes Peter Marshall.

> Depending on their conduct or karma, men and animals can go up or down the chain of being in the cycle of rebirth (samsara) until they achieve release (moksha) when the wheel of existence comes to an end. (Marshall 1992:25).

For the Chandogya Upanishad those human beings whose conduct is evil will be reborn into animal bodies such as that of a dog or a pig. (1959:270).

Vegetarianism

The aversion many people feel towards violent behaviour in any form led, among other things, to the formulation of the ideal of vegetarianism. Ahimsa or the principle of non-violence meant not only non-injury to living beings but also respect for them. The

tradition that pre-eminently emphasised *ahimsa* was not Hinduism but Buddhism and especially Jainism. The latter two were opposed to the practice of animal sacrifices sanctioned in the Vedas, chiefly in the Brahmanas. The ritual slaughter of animals, however sought to be justified and sanctified in terms of the Yajna religion, was repugnant to Jainism and Buddhism.

That Hindu India has always largely been a non-vegetarian country -- even though the cow symbolised universal sympathy for all dumb animals -- shows that generally there was no ethical objection to a flesh food diet. Many modern brahmins in Bengal partake of meat. Sri Ramakrishna, himself a great mystic and Brahmin ate meat, suggesting that there was no moral or spiritual demerit involved in the practice. His example is followed by the Ramakrishna order today.

However most of the modern Hindu movements, notably the Hare Krishna, the Swami Narayan and the Radha Swami Satsang believe that meat-eating violates ethical principles and meaterians have much to fear from the returns of the law of karma.

Again the warrior aristocracy of the *kshatriya* class and the *sudra* class, were non-vegetarians. The kshatriyas hunted for sport and pleasure. When Sita in the Ramayana told Rama to kill a deer for its beautiful pelt exemplifies this practice.

Modern india

Modern India like the rest of the world is also facing serious environmental and ecological challenges. In terms of economic development India has made impressive strides considering that a few decades ago it was under British colonial rule. India has both first and third world conditions reflected in the bullock cart and in technology including the nuclear.

Sustainable development in India has to be seen in the context of a high density population which puts pressure on food, land and water resources. Forest areas are diminishing fast with consequent loss of plant and wild life. Pollution is also a major problem. For example "the perennial rivers of India have become perhaps the most grossly abused national resource." (J. K. Bajaj

1996:216).Significantly, even the Ganges no less sacred today to Hindus than in the ancient past suffers from severe pollution.

However in keeping with her ancient tradition of reverence for nature India has produced pressure groups which seek to address the environmental problems created by industry and commerce. They have the sympathetic ear of government and business but the problem largely remains. There is also a slow revival of Mahatma Gandhi's Swadeshi principle, which "far from being a fossilissed view, has emerged on the centre stage of national debate"(S. Gurumurthy 1996: Xi).It is interesting that ecological pressure groups in the West were "inspired by the Gandhian philosophy of non violence and the concept of civil disobedience" in their sit-ins and protest marches against harmful environmental practices of multi nationals (Carolyn Merchant 1992:179).

The Chipko (tree-hugging) movement of Garhwal in India is an example of the international eco-feminsm movement which believes that ecological and some other problems are related to the male dominance in society. ÒChipko...has its historical roots in ancient Indian cultures that worshipped tree goddesses, sacred trees as images of the cosmos and sacred forests and groves. The earliest woman-led tree-embracing movements are three hundred years old. (Merchant 1992:202).

Their ecological practices were revived in the 1970's and it is interesting that their principles are "similar to those of the emerging science of agro forestry, now being taught in western universities." (Merchant 1992:202).

Conclusion

Hinduism may not have evolved ecology understood as a science in the modern sense but the essential spirit of ecology had been anticipated in Hinduism. The assumptions of ecology "resonate with the much older metaphysical beliefs of...Taoism...Hinduism". (Merchant 1992:100). However in modern times the Hindus have not been faithful to their tradition as the environmental problem in India is a major challenge. But the past is never quite dead in India. The promotion of a new awareness of the danger to nature is already underway.

Globally too the awareness is growing and measures are being taken to halt the tragedy. Though these are not adequate to the task at least they are steps in the right direction. But if a concerted effort is to be made to help rescue a dying planet a much more friendly approach to the environment and commitment to the goal of sustainable development is required. The world's religions can greatly assist in this process because their world views provide a source of meaning to the process of life. Their moral codes are guidelines about right and wrong and proper rules of conduct. Above all religions emphasise spiritual values as against self-centred narrow materialistic interests.

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HINDU ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES: ABORTION

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A Preliminary Note on Ethics

We are all familiar with the words ṃmorals ṃ and ṃethicsṅ. Few of us however appear to be aware that these concepts can be and have indeed been studied systematically enough to be designated subjects as scientifically valid as physics and chemistry may be. Hindu thinkers have given much thought to matters of correct human behaviour because such matters require very serious attention for the purpose of propriety of duty and moral correctness in scientifically ordered ways. These have prompted Hindu thinkers to establish schools of thought to promote moral correctness and appropriateness of behaviour at the highest level of cultural insight. Ethical theories have been propounded by the greatest thinkers for very special reasons. While it may be true that many of the thoughts expressed on moral theories have led some people to conclude that excessively fastidious demands on moral standards are unnecessary others would argue to more serious purpose that perceptions on the highest moral concepts have great value even if only at a purely intellectual level. However discussions on moral standards have spiritual implications and for this reason their importance assumes unequivocal relevance.

In the Hindu tradition the words ṃkarmaṅ and ṃdharmaṅ take on very special meaning. Karma refers to actions of our conscious wills for which we are directly responsible.

Dharma is appropriate action performed in terms of obligatory religious duty. Ethics is the study of what is correct or good in conduct. Much of Hindu ethical theory is rooted in the metaphysical ideas that arise from the search for God undertaken since the times when the Vedas, the nascent repositories of Hindu culture, first came into existence. Dharmic laws on morality are ethical laws that were first conceived when the implications of consciously willed activity first became

known. The highest knowledge, or those steps which lead to the attainment of such knowledge, is what our Rishis sought to discover. It is up to us to appreciate that such responsibilities exist, hence the insistence not only on religious conformity but more appropriately an ethical outlook on life. Attainment depends among others on ethical correctness, which in a very real sense makes practice precede theory. Knowledge of the human person per se in all his or her integrated wholeness is what obliges us to correctness of understanding and behaviour. Such knowledge leads to the ultimate goal of Spiritual Illumination. There are numerous systematic treatises dealing with the theory of ethics and morals as such. Unfortunately much of this material, which is scattered throughout Sanskrit metaphysical writings, pertains primarily to the ultimate goal of human life and does not make much allowance for secular behaviour. High moral standards nevertheless apply with extreme fastidiousness and care even in everyday conduct. Most Hindu ethical laws have their origins in such works as the Dharma Sutras and the Dharma Shastras which have their sources in the Vedas.

Following on these scriptural texts are numerous works that may be described as works on ethical, cultural, social and political life. One such work is Thirukural. There are several others. There is no exact Sanskrit equivalent for the word methicsñ. Dharma, its nearest equivalent, has a very wide connotation which often overlaps into religion and even social law, and requires from human behaviour the promotion of happiness, both secular and cultural.

Dharma and Abortion

Abortion is the unplanned expulsion of the living fetus from the womb of the mother, which cannot survive outside it. Abortion is more correctly the expulsion of the fertilized ovum or embryo from the womb during the first three months of pregnancy. Termination of pregnancy between the third and sixth months is called miscarriage and expulsion between the sixth and ninth months is premature delivery whether the infant is born alive or not. There is no specific Hindu directive devoted to the problem of abortion, as it did not occupy the minds of Hindu ethicists of earlier times. Although not a new problem, addressing its

implications appears to be of very recent concern, if statistics on the incidence of abortion are to be taken seriously. Human sexuality has been a subject of discussion for many thousands of years because it draws reference to the intimate relations between men and women that have been a fact of life since the first people, whoever they may have been, walked the face of the earth. Ethical rules can only be formulated when we take a comprehensive view of human nature and more specifically the human personality as part of such nature. This takes into account human actions on many levels of existence. While some ethical rules can be formulated for general, secular life, it is the religious codes on human relations that receive more specific consideration. The purpose of ethical law is the provision of guidelines that make healthy human relations possible. Abortion is a human problem that affects all human beings in one way or another. Many books have been written on it because of the extremely delicate nature of the issues the subject invokes. A Hindu perspective on it cannt seriously differ very much from other religious viewpoints. Radhakrishnan says that Hinduism does not believe in any permanent feud between the human world of natural desires and social aims on the one side and the spiritual life with its disciplines on the other. The subject of sexual relations takes account of general rules that form the basis of such relations. Sexual relations in a religious context take on more specific significance. Monks and nuns in some religious orders, we are sometimes reminded, are precluded by religious vows from any form of indulgence.

The basis of all discussions on the subject of sexual relations and related problems takes account of the fact that sexual relations have been a fact of life for all people since the first humans walked the face of the earth. This brings us most unfortunately to the serious problem of abortion. It has become in recent years the most talked about subject in the field of ethics because abortion is the most frequently performed surgery in many countries in the world. Only people with physical or mental disabilities are precluded from such experience. Because a very big percentage of pregnancies are unplanned and therefore unexpected many end in abortion. This situation is not to be tolerated without serious religious discussion. The subject of sexual relations when viewed in a religious context takes

account of the general ethical rules that form the foundation of
such relations. However sex has its value for human society. It is
good and pleasant if viewed in the context of healthy, respectful
behaviour between persons. So every pair of persons involved in
sexual relations has the responsibility of adhering to cultural rules
that have been formulated for the purpose of establishing the
precise mores that should apply in the exercise of the right to
indulge in such relations.

Sex is a healthy experience and yet carries many pitfalls. It is the
understanding of these pitfalls that enforce the need to consider
the circumstances under which indulgence in sexual relations
can be ethically allowed. The promotion of the highest moral,
ethical and cultural principles that such indulgences should allow
and should therefore be adhered to usually form the basis of
most discussions on the subject. If stringent rules are to apply
for the promotion of these ethical rules then it stands to reason
that the rules that govern moral behaviour are to be clearly
understood. Sexual relations result in the birth of a child or
children. And even though children are a God given gift to all the
peoples of the earth irrespective of race or religion their entry
into our world is best conducted under the strictest moral and
ethical codes. So there are circumstances that allow for the
relations between men and women that result in the birth of
children and Hindu culture requires that the circumstances that
allow for such divinely ordained gifts have to be very clearly
understood. These circumstances, which call for the preservation
of the highest moral principles to obtain when bringing children
into this world, need to be very clearly apprehended.

Sex, as has been stated earlier, is a healthy, happy experience
and Hindu religious law has determined that indulgence is
legitimized only by cultural norms. The terms achara (well being)
and vinaya (rule) reflect the moral standards that apply to
behaviour in social life. They therefore reflect the highest
standards of moral values that should be adhered to and signify
respect for custom, law and usage in religious life and cover
most ethical virtues. These include socially accepted rules as
well as those made obligatory by Holy Scripture. We are by now
aware that ethics is the study of what is right or good in conduct.
These words imply that a standard has to be set by which

human conduct can be judged. The terms achara and vinaya draw attention to the rules that enforce goodness in conduct as a value worthy of attainment. Our actions may be judged then to be right or wrong when referred to a rule or law. They are then characterized as good or bad in relation to a specific end. Individual acts of goodness add to the sum total of onens moral worth and are described as possessing punya or merit. Hindu ethical laws have been formulated for the precise reason that all human behaviour must be circumscribed by cultural norms that have their roots not merely in adequately described morality but more particularly in the highest values of religious attainment. Such acts are favorable factors in determining karma and the subsequent effects of it in our lives. So while one may argue for the preservation of healthy, happy, tolerant relations between persons censurable sentiments are expressed when behaviour contrary to accepted norms are seen to prevail.

Karma and Abortion

Any discussion on abortion should take into account the circumstances under which women fall pregnant and the reasons for which abortion is requested. Abortion may well be therapeutic. Therapeutic or surgical termination of pregnancy by a doctor can be done for the purpose of saving a womanns health and life. Medical opinion in all such instances is vitally necessary and medical opinion may well accord with religious opinion on the matter. Abortion may be accidental. Falling or injuring the abdomen in any way may necessitate abortion if sanctioned by medical opinion. Spontaneous abortion has its own causes and circumstances vary from case to case. Spontaneous abortion is necessitated by internal abnormality rather than outside interference, accidental or otherwise. It is unlikely that abortion of these kinds would invoke karmic repercussions. Open-mindedness in Hindu thinking reverts to the view that not all abortions can be considered sinful despite the explicit laws on ahimsa that have prevailed for many millennia.

It is however induced abortion that claims serious ethical attention and religious warnings need to be heeded. The highest moral standards are proffered for their spiritual values. Using chemical or physical means to induce abortion is dangerous both

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to the mother and the child. This action is frowned upon because it does not necessarily result in the termination of the unwanted condition. But this is done under the strictest care of the physician and followed by careful nursing and rest to avoid ill effects. Artificial abortion is abortion induced by artificial means through external interference. Sometimes too by internally administered means. The basic question that concerns us here is to know definitively whether Hindu teachers condone induced abortion. In the absence of solicited opinions it may be surmised that most people in the Hindu community regard abortion as a social evil. Sometimes more open views are sustained to take account of any special circumstances that may exist. Hindu religious perspectives on the subject are not easily canvassed or formulated because the subject does not lend itself to easy resolution. There are no specific teachings on abortion in Hinduism. We are nevertheless guided by certain principles that govern resort to such action. The primary responsibility of Hindus when confronted with ethical problems is to ascertain what prescriptive guidelines have been provided by scriptural authority however general these might be. Attitudes to authority however vary resulting in revolutionary changes in attitude to sexual morality, feminism and dramatic innovations in sexual or reproductive technologies.

Apart from the various schools of philosophy and their influence in Indian life there are variations in perceptions that arise from Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava theologies. It is best however to divide the Hindu community worldwide into two broad categories. On the one hand many defend very strongly anti-abortion stances based on the view that the fetus has a right to life. In western society they have come to be known as Prolife advocates. Others however regard every womanns right to her own private decision however disagreeable this may be. These have come to be known as Prochoice advocates for whom the ideal would be for every woman concerned to take her own decision after proper consultation with medical authorities and adequate spiritual counseling. It is sometimes argued that women are governed by their own specific legal and moral rights to personal decision when directly confronted with a problem of this nature. This is of paramount importance because the final decision rests with the affected mother even though her decision

may not necessarily be correct in all situations. The freedom to choose abortion is an expression of the human, personal right, of an individual to do so. Hinduism however while acknowledging this right would also suggest that Hindu ethical law is in a position of some authority to offer guidelines to assist when having to take such decisions. Whether or not to have an abortion is not a decision that is taken lightly. While acknowledging that abortion can sometimes be viewed as a healthy and perhaps even a necessary decision this paper strongly opines that the ethical norms that prevail in all of Hindu law have so prevailed for many centuries and are not easily violated. So while Hindu Dharma may well be sympathetic to any opinions that may be expressed in particular circumstances it is always recommended that only the wisest spiritually ordained counsel in each case must ultimately prevail. That abortion may sometimes be morally justified or condoned is acceptable in Hindu law. It is however not a decision for any lay person to take more especially when authoritative, religious opinion is available.

Much uncertainty and tension prevail over abortion and its implications for human society. It obviously must be of deep concern in the Hindu community as well. Every aborted child is a child whose life has been brought to an untimely end. Abortion therefore means the termination of the life of a human being. Statistics indicate that many peoplens lives are terminated through abortion. It is perfectly understandable therefore that many may appear uncertain, doubtful and afraid because of the very nature of the problem and its extreme importance to all of human society. The abortion debate commands unrestricted, open, serious and above all intelligent consideration. Like with so many issues in life there are arguments both for and against the exercise and these need to be seriously weighed. What are referred to as prolife arguments take into account the value and rights of unborn babies. Such arguments are not without merit. But some may argue that the prochoice position is equally valid. Prolife arguments aver that human life no matter at what stage of development has a right to life. Prochoice arguments are based on the fact that the pregnancies that help to bring babies into existence are either unplanned or for any number of reasons

unwanted. All seriously devised arguments need to be free of bias or any form of prejudice, religious or otherwise.

Perhaps the most important point that prolifers often make is that there is enough scientific evidence to prove that human life is human life even at the point of conception. Prolifers take seriously the development of the unborn child. While all their arguments may be both scientifically and even religiously valid it could be argued that the prochoice position too has a validity of some merit. No Hindu ever takes recourse to any arguments about the ţwill of Godd because no Hindu in the world knows what the ţwill of Godd is. No Hindu in the world knows God and much less ṃHis willṅ. The final decision should be left to people in reasonably informed positions to make suggestions that emanate from compassionate consideration. Abortion is not murder and is not necessarily always evil. It is, as has already been implied, justifiable sometimes as a lesser evil and it may sometimes even be viewed as the most responsible option available. Every woman affected carries the responsibility of making her own decision, even if she is a member of a large family. Every woman is therefore confronted with the problem of giving serious consideration to the moral and legal implications of her decision. Support for the right of a woman to choose an abortion does not in itself imply moral approval. Every case then has needless to say to be judged on its own merits. Hindu temples have the fundamental responsibility of guiding congregants and adherents in the Hindu faith to alleviate underlying causes of the problems and to suggest any alternatives to abortion that there may be. The primary responsibility of the Hindu temple and the priest associated with it is to suggest the best alternative to abortion in every instance by emphasizing the need to respect human life in every way. The Bhagavad Gita has clearly defined prescriptions on ahimsa (non-violence) and the rules that govern the principles of non-violence are based on a philosophy of profound insight. However violation of the rule must be allowed under very seriously considered circumstances. So intentional abortion without recourse to scriptural, religious and even legal opinion is never to be condoned because it is morally justified in special instances. Abortion can be the unintended result of moral action. Sometimes a hysterectomy becomes necessary when for

example a cancerous growth needs to be removed. If however a fetus needs to be removed in order to save the life of the mother precisely the same moral standards apply when the motherńs life needs to be terminated to save the fetus. Most Hindus would presumably argue that the life of the mother is more important than the life of the baby in which case the motherńs safety is given priority. This however does not apply in every instance.

The Older Abortion Laws in South Africa.

The Abortion and Sterilisation Act (Act 2 of 1975) has ensured that women have the right to privacy and dignity No person was ever allowed to procure an abortion other than in accordance with the provision of this Act. Some of the circumstances that allow for the procurement of abortions are:

Those that enable procurement by a medical practitioner where the continued pregnancy endangers the life of the woman concerned or constitutes a serious threat to her physical health. However two other medical practitioners are required to certify in writing that, in their opinion the continued pregnancy so endangers the life of the woman concerned or so constitutes a serious threat to her physical health that abortion is necessary to ensure her physical health and safety.

Where the continued pregnancy constitutes a serious threat to the mental health of the woman concerned and two other medical practitioners certify in writing that, in their opinion, the continued pregnancy creates the danger of permanent damage to the womanńs mental health.

Where serious risk exists that the child to be born will suffer from a physical or mental defect of such a nature that will be irreparably and seriously handicapped, and two medical practitioners certify in writing that, in their opinion, there exist serious risks, an abortion may be procured.

Where the fetus is conceived in consequence of unlawful carnal intercourse or rape. Two medical practitioners have to certify in writing, after interrogation of the woman concerned, that in their

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opinion the pregnancy is due to the alleged unlawful, carnal intercourse. A womanñs choice of abortion must be respected.

The New Abortion Law

South Africañs abortion law, known as the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act, came into effect on the 1 February 1997. The law makes it possible for women to procure legal abortions. It permits women to have abortions during their first trimenster without the need of approval from doctors, psychiatrists or magistrates. Minors are counseled to notify their parents or guardians if they wish. Victims of rape or incest are not required to provide any documentation in order to get an abortion. In addition women between 13 and 20 weeks of gestation can only get an abortion if a medical person says that the pregnancy threatens the mental or physical health of the woman or fetus if the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest or if it affects the womanñs socioeconomic situation. After the twentieth week, abortion is only permitted if a doctor or trained midwife finds that continuation of the pregnancy would threaten the health of the woman or cause severe handicap to the fetus.

Abortions are now performed legally in South Africa. The South African Parliament has passed legislation legalizing most abortions. We are aware that in this age of technological advance modern science has brought into existence artificial means of regulating conception. We are however aware of the circumstances that necessitate resort to abortion. Greater numbers of Hindu men and women are receiving the benefits of modern education. We thereby become aware of the dangers of artificial methods of contraception and the potential health risks these carry. The use of the pill was regarded as an texcitingd development in modern life but it did not take long for many to realise just how shortsighted this was. Illegal abortions are performed in many countries and sometimes reach massive proportions. The dangers women face when having to endure the unseemly act of abortion are incalculable. They are often victimized by those who perform surgical abortions illegally and often unnecessarily. This may cause both physical and mental danger to the woman and could prove fatal, as it often does. This often causes untold hardship even for members of her

family. No Hindu person has the right to support these actions, as these are instances of extremely irresponsible behaviour and seriously conflict with Hindu moral standards. More responsible behaviour is seriously called for and many are the responsibilities that are carried by Hindu institutions to ensure that these are met. Illegal abortions performed by unskilled abortionists are to be totally condemned. Every single instance of an abortion carries an abiding moral responsibility. So religiously authorized abortions are performed under the most stringent conditions with uncompromisingly strict rules applied under very strict supervision. Every Hindu carries the responsibility of mature, intelligent and above all responsible behaviour. The growth in scientific knowledge assists religious leaders to make informed decisions and assist in the formulation of responsible behaviour in every instance. The greatest responsibility for all concerned in the abortion debate is to ensure that moral and ethical standards are never compromised. It is the preservation of moral conduct that ensures that social life adheres to the high moral principles that should obtain. So discussions that call into question the reasonableness of participation can only be enhanced when questions are faced with high integrity.

Many questions are asked about the safety of patients and people confronted with abortion need to consider whether those performing such operations are sufficiently qualified to do so. The procedure at any gestational age is not simple and only the best-qualified people should be asked to perform the service. Special techniques now exist to accurately diagnose the presence and age of the fetus. Whether these facilities will be available at every clinic or hospital is not known. Consent is currently required for a minor to undergo evacuation of the uterus following incomplete miscarriage. The Act provides for conscientious objection on the part of any who do not wish to participate in pregnancy termination. People in the Hindu community are reminded that the Government has not ascertained whether or not there are sufficient numbers of well-trained personnel at hospitals willing to conduct abortions. There may well be a very large number of conscientious objectors in the country whose unwillingness to participate in abortions could make abortions very difficult to procure. Medical science has to take recourse to the advantages now available through advanced

knowledge to assist every mother to a healthy moral and physical life and to ensure that every baby born is blessed with good health and is given every assistance to advance to moral and cultural greatness.

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Hindu Moral Implications of Genetic Engineering in a Plural Society

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Abstract

Modern man is threatened by a world created by himself. He is faced with the conversion of the mind to naturalism, a dogmatic secularism and an opposition to a belief in the transcendent. He has advanced into science and technology and in the process has separated himself from the Divine. Today the whole modern world reveal the crises brought about by living in a society which is determined by scientific concepts. Today due to science advancement, our health and individualism is under scrutiny. The modern foods that we now consume are no longer the conventional products but are manipulated into modified foods (GM) by a process called genetic engineering (GE) technique that would have serious moral implications. A Nobel laureate Biologist, George Wald stated ' the biggest break in nature that has occurred in human history'. He continues to state that the present potent technology is more powerful than nuclear technology.

Introduction

Human health is directly dependent on a thriving natural environment. Equally, the earth's environment is totally dependent on the health of other species and plants. Dr John Fagan, an international authority of GM organism and biolife stated that everything is connected in nature and any change in one thing has a chain reaction.

GE technique, is actually a process of great concern to humanity. This technology is taking mankind into realms that belong to God and to God alone and no one should tamper 'this switch of life' as it would result in the increase of certain diseases and contribute to new ones. The morality of scientists at this point is to go ahead and learn all they can about nature

though this ambitious tampering with the building blocks of creation is a dilemma that science would have to face. The essence of human life lies within the human mind, not within inert molecules of DNA. Human mind should be viewed as part of God's domain on faith and not science (Silver 1998: 276).

It is in this perspective that this paper would examine the moral implications of genetic engineering in a plural society. In order to take one through the moral implications it would be wise to very briefly examine the concept of genetic engineering.

All living things contain genes. We inherit from them from our parents. Genes are the 'blueprint' which carry the information for protein for human development. Genetic engineering is an umbrella term which cover a wide range of ways of changing the genetic material- DNA code- in a living organism. This code contains all the information, stored in a long chain chemical molecule, which determines the nature of the organism -whether it is an amoeba, a tree, a cow or human being. Genetic modification is done in the laboratory by cutting, joining and transferring genes from organism to another that is unrelated. It is possible to isolate and transfer different characteristics between unrelated species. For example, the introduction of an 'anti-freeze' gene from an arctic fish into tomatoes or strawberries to make them resistant to frost. In fact some crops have been genetically modified to make them resistant to weed killers and even insecticide. We are seeing the emergence of long-life tomatoes, potatoes and maize that are gene manipulated to resist pesticides, diseases and pests. Animals can also be 'engineered'. A pig was modified with a human gene to make it grow faster and leaner.

Defects of individual genes can cause a malfunction in the metabolism of the body, and are the root causes of many 'genetic' diseases. Genes have several functions each, not one. Genetic engineers have assumed that each gene has one function only, and this has formed the basis of genetic engineering to date. The recent discovery that humans have only c 30 000 genes to produce over 250 000 proteins in the human body has destroyed this assumption. Genes do not operate in isolation but interact with each other. Little is known

about this. All genes are present in every cell of the organism but they do not function the whole time or in every cell.

Why should it be a problem for humanity ?

Hindu philosophers are of the opinion that this universe is created by God and belongs to God. Because God created them, animals have intrinsic value. They exist first of all in relation to God, before any considerations of their value and use to humans. God gives humans a special duty both to develop the natural world and take care of its biolife. It is a problem because to change a single gene would be attempting to change God's best design, upsetting the wisdom inherent in the natural order by humans who do not know the full extent of the unprecedented changes they were making. According to Fagan, GE has the potential to cause massive social, economic and environmental effects worldwide. Its effects on human health are unknown, unpredictable and unsafe on humanity. Before one examine the moral implications it is necessary to briefly view the concept of life and its purpose.

The concept of life has a plethora of meanings. Life is sacred and dear and none may tinker with it (Ghosh, 1989:22; Singh, 1982:76). Chinmayananda (1984:19) refers to life as a series of continuous and unbroken experiences in the material and spiritual world. It has a fundamental value and is to be protected and lived with dignity and comfort (Coward, 1989:72). It is in pursuit of liberation and Mahatma Gandhi (Schweitzer, 1951:237) refers to life as the primary goal of redemption (moksha). Similarly Raychoudhry (1978:159) views life as a long pilgrimage extending beyond death : as humans we should endeavour to perform our duties (dharma) so that we may attain final liberation. According to Vedavyas (1975:131) Hinduism is an art of living life oriented more towards the evolutionary goals set for mankind by nature than for any temporary benefits. He further states that it is not the product of culture that is profit-oriented or benefit oriented to the individual. Therefore to injure or terminate life has moral implications in any society.

Under normal circumstances an individual growth is influenced by a natural process in which one carries its dharma and karma.

Thus one has, through his own actions, carries these tenets for one's own salvation. Unfortunately the introduction of GE has altered that natural evolutionary process. Our Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita (4.7) points out thus :

> Whenever there is a decay of Dharma and rise of adharma, then I embody Myself, O Bharata.

The meaning of this verse is that dharma is karma that is conducive to growth and progress and when that process is intercepted then disorder manifests itself. Purgation is an unfailing process of Nature. The cleansing takes place at all levels in various ways.

It inhibits the natural evolution process in humans thus influencing the karmic cycle of 'you reap what you sow'. The natural process of death for example could be influenced by modified foods. Thus vegetarian, halaal, kosher and other rights may also be infringed. There is no guarantee that vegetarian foods are free from GE products.

The process of reincarnation is influenced by the introduction of these products. You are what you eat and this can influence our natural evolutionary process and may contribute to deficiencies that may hinder your karmic cycle.

South Africa's National Protein Company (Sunday Tribune, 14/03/99) which supplies soya products to a large section of food manufacturers cannot say with certain how much of soya products imported are genetically engineered. Soya is used in the manufacture of many processed meat products, cereals, as well as many vegetarian foods. Soya is also used in the manufacture of infant formulas, bread, biscuits and pizzas. Soya beans grown in North America was modified with genetic material from a virus and a petunia linked to a bacterial gene, which has made the soya plant resistant to a weedkiller called Roundup.

Furthermore this technology would also impact on our physiology and its metabolism. The way GM foods are approved is not sufficient to protect human or animal health. A report called 'The

Great Food Gamble' shows that current procedures are unlikely to pick up unexpected health effects, such as toxins or allergens that may be created by GM foods. This problem is compounded by future GM foods which are likely to use complicated modifications.

Batalion had identified 50 harmful effects of GM foods and I shall briefly list a few examples.

a) Deaths are recorded
b) allergic reactions
c) cancer and other degenerative ailments
d) viral and bacterial illness
e) antibiotic threats from plants and animals
d) resurgence of infectious diseases
e) immune deficiencies because of lower nutrition
f) birth defects and shorter life span
g) human and animal abuses

Traditional plants used for herbal medicine will not have the desired effects in modern times due to genetic mutation.

In terms of this technology one can predict with a reasonable accuracy what the future would hold for our civilization. GE technology would contribute to the development of two types of mankind - natural and genrich humans. The genrich humans will undoubtedly disadvantage the natural humans in specific discipline such as sports and education. Perhaps this technology may influence racial difference. While racial differences may pale away, another difference may appear that is sharp and defined. It is the difference between the genetically enhanced and those who are not. GE is often called Terminator Technology where seeds become sterile thus affecting other seeds/plants. GE entrenches dependence and indebtedness on developing countries for profits. It is laudable to learn about nature but to restructure nature is not part of the bargain.

According to Dr Shiva (The Mercury, 01/08/2000) it is a myth that GM food would solve the hunger problems of Africa and the Third World. We human may want to improve the world through many types of technologies but to restructure the genetic

blueprints of plants and animals is so unprecedented and so invasive of the realm of the creator and potentially irreversible that it warrants caution and restraint. God's designs should be viewed with reverence and respect.

Finally, let us not allow unselfishness to control the immediate self-interest that harms others and still keep us in bondage eternally.

Let me conclude for the future with three observations.

Firstly, Sian Griffiths, an editor on Predictions (Sunday Tribune Perspective, 07/11/1999) observed that " there's a sense that we'll be struggling all the time, trying to do new things, but with a sense of disaster looming".

Secondly, the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (Daily News, 18/06/2002) stated that biotechnology will bring unprecedented advances in human and animal health, agriculture and food production, manufacturing and sustainable environmental management.

Thirdly, an Indian Newspaper, the Graphic (31/10/1975) stated that science has placed vast power in the hands of man and there is an imminent danger that such a technology could destroy the entire human race/civilization.

Conclusion

It would become apparent that humanity had lost a battle of equanimity with science and technology. Our lives are increasingly being governed by science that is on the ascendancy and religion is laughed at and morality outdated. We are in the most decisive moments in history and in Hindu thought it is referred to as the Kali Yuga era where immoral activities would ascend with impunity. As long as there is dependency there will be bondage particularly by the developed nations. Such bondage could undermine global food security.

It must be cautioned that modern technology cannot create what millions of years of evolution have produced. You eat now and

pay later with devastating consequences. The consequences
cannot be determined is a short space of time but would take 40
to 50 years to establish any acceptable data. This artificial
creation of life may spell the irreversible damage to the
biosphere making genetic pollution even a greater threat to the
planet than nuclear or petrochemical pollution.

The Isopanishad declared that man needs spiritual knowledge
(vidya) as well as worldly knowledge (avidya) for a happy and
balanced life but not governed by materialism.

In conclusion l reminisce a Shakespearian quotation :

We smell a rat
We see it floating in the AIR
We MUST nip it in the bud.

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